

California Dems Withhold Endorsement of Sen. Feinstein

California Democrats did not endorse longstanding Senator Dianne Feinstein for the upcoming primary election, setting the stage for a tough campaign against challengers such as California Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin de León, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

It is no secret that the second most powerful politician in the State of California, Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin de León, is gearing up for a knock-down, drag-out primary fight with California's senior Senator, Dianne Feinstein. Many feel it's time for a changing of the guard and time for a person of color to represent the white minority state of California.

This passed weekend, California democrats refused to endorse Senator Feinstein, in a major rebuke of California's senior senator, opening the door wide for de León to run.

According to the Sacramento Bee, "As a child, de León spent time on both sides of the border, in Tijuana, Baja California, and Logan Heights in San Diego and identifies strongly with Mexican culture, though he doesn't know where his grandparents are from."

Senator de León recently led a coalition to sponsor legislation "that addresses lapses in our justice and labor systems creating serious challenges for the California's immigrant community, including stronger wage theft laws, securing u-visas from law enforcement, and providing healthcare for undocumented children."

Before joining the Legislature, de León taught citizenship courses to immigrants. When he was sworn in as the 47th president pro tem of the California Senate in 2014, he became the first Latino to hold the position in more than a century.

Bernstein spoke to Kevin de León on February 14, 2018.

Dennis Bernstein: With everyone watching Washington and wondering whether humane immigration reform can be passed, what are you expecting from Congress?

Kevin de León: These are very difficult times for many of us. As a nation, we are grappling with the resurgence of ugly, hateful ideologies, including white supremacy, spewing from the highest levels of our federal government. We are

confronting something we have never had to come to terms with before in our political history.

At the same time, I have never been more proud to be a Californian. In November 2016, Californians rejected the politics fueled by resentment and bigotry. The DACA issue is very dear to my heart. In California, we have the vast majority of DACA beneficiaries, the vast majority of Dreamers, and we have the vast majority of beneficiaries of the TPS [Temporary Protected Status] program, primarily from El Salvador. We are also home to the majority of immigrants in the nation, both those who became naturalized US citizens and those who have yet to normalize their status because of the dysfunction in Washington, D.C.

In this context, the DACA program is really a low-hanging fruit. Both Democrats, as well as Republicans among the national electorate, strongly support the Dreamers and DACA. Why the issue should seem so complex is beyond me, except that there is political gamesmanship being played and the DACA beneficiaries have been taken as hostages. I hope that a common sense settlement can be reached to give these young men and women the protections they deserve. We need sensible comprehensive immigration reform for the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants across the nation.

DB: What is your response then you hear that we have to do something about the problem of “chain migration”?

KdL: For me, “chain migration” is another word for family reunification. The thesis behind the new term is quite pernicious. Quite frankly, many of my close family members would not have been eligible to enter this country had there been a so-called “chain migration” clause in the country’s immigration policy. If we’d had an immigration policy that was exclusively merit-based, I would never have become the leader of the California State Senate.

DB: In a press release toward the end of January you expressed your concern that Homeland Security was threatening to go after public officials if they continued to give their support to sanctuary cities. Do you really think ICE will be out arresting officials like you?

KdL: These are extraordinary threats meant to intimidate and silence political opponents. But threatening to weaponize federal agencies against Californians and their elected representatives will only strengthen our resolve.

DB: I’d like to change the subject for a moment. This concerns the economy and the environment. As you know, the Trumpites are gung-ho about offshore drilling. This is a huge issue in the context of global warming and is pitting California against the rest of the country.

KdL: California is blessed with an incomparably beautiful and pristine coastline and we want to keep it that way for future generations. In California we have some of the most progressive climate change policies in the entire world. By the year 2030, we will be generating half of our electricity from renewable sources: wind, solar and geothermal. We are investing in rooftop solar power in low-income communities. We are looking for ways to provide electric vehicles to communities at the lowest economic strata. We are doing this intentionally to make sure that we democratize our climate change benefits and offer relief to those communities that suffer disproportionately from the devastations of carbon dioxide and other emissions.

We are witnessing an administration that is trying to unilaterally, through executive action, unwind all of our progressive policies in a state like California. We have created 500,000 jobs in the clean energy space alone. That means there are ten times more clean energy jobs now in California than there are coal jobs in all of America! No doubt about it, there is a battle brewing between Washington and California, and not just around the issue of immigration.

DB: We are seeing now the roll-out of the recreational marijuana industry, which is looking to become a huge cash crop. What role do you see marijuana playing in the future of California?

KdL: Recreational use of cannabis is now the law of the land in California. It has the overwhelming support of the people. It is the responsibility of state and local government to roll out a regulatory framework that is responsible and fiscally prudent. But it is now the law in California, and any threats from the Department of Justice—and specifically from Jeff Sessions, who has his mind fixated on a certain era in American history—will be met with legal resistance.

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.

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Honduras Nearing Ten Years of Stolen Elections, Neo-Colonial Rule

Despite an organized and active grassroots movement, Honduran politics have been repeatedly steamrolled by the self-interests of international ruling elites, as journalist and filmmaker Jesse Freeston explained to Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

For weeks following its stolen election, the corrupt right-wing, neo-fascist government of Juan Orlando Hernández’s in Honduras has been terrorizing its people. Street protests and spontaneous blockades have been met by extreme violence. Dozens have already died on the frontlines and many more have been arrested and brutalized in detention, while often being held incommunicado.

I spoke to Jesse Freeston, who has been based in Honduras for the last eight years working as a video-journalist and documentary filmmaker, ever since the US supported/Hillary Clinton sustained 2009 coup d’état that purged the duly elected president, Manuel Zelaya. Freeston, who has reported for the Real News Network and Democracy Now en Español, is the producer of the feature documentary [“Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley.”](#)

Freeston reports that, among other crimes against the people, “this regime has: stolen an election; ignored calls from the Organization of American States to hold a new election; passed a law prohibiting the prosecution of all former and current members of Congress in the midst of a series of massive corruption scandals [and has] appointed a new national police chief who has clear evidence

against him of drug trafficking...”

I spoke to Freeston on February 7.

Dennis Bernstein: We continue our drumbeat coverage of Honduras and the recent stolen election there, an attempt to suppress the will of the people who, by all accounts, want to have a more progressive government. It has been a very violent situation since the election. We are hearing that dozens of people have been killed and that the atrocities being perpetrated by the government have resulted in a nightmare. Could you put this in the context of the last two recent election cycles in Honduras?

Jesse Freeston: On June 28, 2009, there was a vote on a non-binding resolution put forward by President Manuel Zelaya, who had taken up the call of various indigenous groups in the country to rewrite the constitution. When people went out to vote on that day, the military staged a coup d’etat and Zelaya wound up in Costa Rica.

This led to the most organized national resistance movement Honduras has ever seen. Assemblies were held, which brought together all these people who stood to gain from a new constitution. Just about every sector of the society were represented, except perhaps the oligarchy.

This led to the formation of the Libre Party, which participated in the 2013 elections [with Manuel Zelaya’s wife, Xiomara Castro, running as the party’s presidential candidate]. The election was officially won by Juan Orlando Hernandez but there was massive fraud. The November, 2017 elections were even more of a farce.

Despite all that, when the electoral tribunal released its first results, the Oppositional Alliance were up by 5% with 60% of the votes counted. One of the magistrates on the tribunal described it at the time as an “irreversible trend.”

Then, counting stopped for over a day when the computer system supposedly crashed. When it was back up again, the tendency had completely flipped and Hernandez ended up winning by one percentage point.

This led to another massive uprising. On one day of action there were 48 blockades of highways and major boulevards in the country. During the last two months, this has been happening a couple times a week.

Even international observers such as the European Union Commission and the Organization of American States—who have been discredited here after turning their back many times in the last eight years to the crimes of this regime—even they have said that they have to redo the election or there has to be a recount.

Nevertheless, the members of those organizations, like Canada, like the United States and the countries of the European Union, went ahead and validated the election.

DB: We have heard that activists and members of the resistance have been arrested.

JF: Yes, there are dozens of political prisoners behind bars right now. One of the most worrying cases is that of Edwin Espinal. He is someone who has consistently paid a price for his resistance against the ongoing coup d'état.

In September of 2009, Edwin Espinal's wife died from tear gas inhalation after taking part in several protests. A week later, Edwin was at a small neighborhood protest after which he was arrested for kidnapping because he took a child with him on his motorcycle when he was fleeing the tear gas. The mother of the child went over and over to the police station to explain that she had pleaded with Edwin to take her kid with him. Another time he was jailed for car theft for driving a friend's car.

The first thing that the newly-formed military-trained urban police force did was raid Espinal's house, claiming they had proof that he was a drug trafficker. The police falsely accused him of being involved in the Marriot Hotel fire and right now he is in a maximum security prison on that charge. Journalists and human rights workers are not allowed in to talk to him, his family have not been allowed to see him. This is the first time since the 1980's that a civilian will be tried inside a military base.

DB: How would you describe the US role in this situation? We know that Hillary Clinton played a key role in sustaining the coup in 2009.

JF: I think that informed people in Honduras realize that changes in political leadership in the US don't make much difference in how Honduras is treated. Decisions are made here at the US Embassy and ambassadors act as de-facto rulers here, as shadow presidents.

The one constant here is the massive military funding from the US. Since the coup, the Honduran military has received more direct funding from the US than any other country in the Americas, despite the fact that they have not been involved in a single military conflict or been threatened with one.

The military is purely used against people inside the country. Although the United States is by far the largest funder of the Honduran military, other countries are also involved because humanitarian and other aid is typically diverted to the military.

DB: You said that there is a continuity between the last administration's policy toward Honduras and the Trump administration's policy. In terms of so-called US interests, the real problem is that we push a program of "free trade" and we insist on having our military bases there. So we have every reason to sustain the government as long as it provides us with an opportunity to police the region. Could you talk about the geopolitical part of this?

JF: I think the more a country depends on its natural resources, the more everything comes down to who controls the land. In 1961, [John F.] Kennedy launched a program called The Alliance for Progress, which was billed as a kind of Marshall Plan for Latin America. It was a response to the Cuban revolution and an attempt to ward off similar revolutions across Latin America.

We were going to give billions of dollars to countries in Latin America if they promised to undertake land reform, if the oligarchy agreed to give up a portion of their land. When Johnson replaced Kennedy there was much less priority assigned to this program. Nonetheless, the Honduran government had to pass a number of land reform laws to receive the money, but none of those laws were ever implemented.

If the US intends to keep its business interests here alive—the sweatshop sector as well as bananas and palm oil—and for Canada, gold mining primarily—they need to maintain their alliance with this land-holding oligarchy. It is this alliance that the resistance is asking the countries of the North and the West to break.

With eight and a half years of organizing experience, the people of Honduras could put together a government so fast it would make your head spin. This movement is very organized. They know who to trust, they know who can provide intellectual support, they know who can run the economy. They are just waiting for the international community to change its alliances.

DB: So will the resistance to the Hernandez regime go on?

JF: The Oppositional Alliance has decided to wage a "peaceful insurrection," something they are entitled to do under the Honduran constitution, which states that no one owes obedience to a government which takes power by force. The numbers now at the protests have been considerably less than in the past two months, particularly since the inauguration on January 27.

It is hard to predict what will happen but the vast majority of the population do not want this regime. There is a massive corruption scandal developing and we will see what happens with that. Students are planning a strike for next month. But we will have to wait to see what kinds of ideas are going to be put

forward in Honduras.

People are looking at Honduras as a laboratory for the ultra-right of the world. Fortunately, there is a well-organized movement here that will be rising up again and again. It is up to those of us in the international community to put pressure on those who claim to represent us to change their allegiances.

DB: Would you say that this is a movement inspired by young people in the country?

JF: Yes, and that is the key to understanding this new law that the National Party is trying to pass which would regulate social media. It has to do with this young generation that has grown up in this period following the coup.

Someone like Zelaya doesn't necessarily reach them. This new law the government is trying to pass would give them the right to criminalize anyone posting anything they deem "hateful" on social media. And this is a government that labels "racist" people who are defending rivers from dams being built.

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Migration Reform from a Native American Perspective

Congress has agreed to a temporary funding measure to end the government shutdown, but there is still no guarantee for bipartisan immigration reform. Native American activist Bill Means discussed the issue of humane reform with Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

Following a brief government shutdown over the weekend, House Democrats conceded to fund the government until February 8. The deal came after congressional Republicans agreed to fund the Children's Health Insurance Programs for six years and promised a discussion on DACA. But many viewed this concession as a betrayal by the Democrats, who have not been guaranteed any reasonable action on immigration reform in return for re-opening the government.

In the following freewheeling discussion, I spoke with Bill Means about the quest for truly humane immigration reform in the context of the current Trump

crackdown on so-called illegal aliens. Means also addressed the nature of immigration and forced migration as a result of highly destructive U.S. free trade policies.

We also discussed the recent decision by a federal court to dismiss charges against renegade ranchers in Nevada, while still holding under lock and key protesters who stood bravely against the pipeline at Standing Rock.

Bill Means is co-founder of the American Indian Movement and also sits on the board of the International Indian Treaty Council. I spoke to Means on January 23rd, 2018.

Dennis Bernstein: We have now seen the weak-kneed, spineless Democrats take a half-assed stand and capitulate to the Republicans, and we find ourselves again at the mercy of right-wing extremists in terms of so-called immigration reform.

Bill Means: Real immigration reform is being opposed by all these white males, all of whom were immigrants as little as two or three generations ago. They act as if they were indigenous peoples themselves!

It is disgraceful that we are treating in this manner people who are contributing greatly to the well-being of American society at all levels. It is pretty audacious for this Congress to make deals on behalf of the so-called immigrants.

We call them "migrants" because they have a right to be here as our friends and relatives to the south. Most of these people are Indian descendants. They probably have more Indian blood than a lot of Indians alive today in America.

It used to be that if you had one-quarter Indian blood you were an Indian, according to the U.S. government. A lot of these people should be allowed in based on their Indian heritage, if nothing else, or there should be some sort of path to citizenship for them. There has been some talk among tribal governments giving amnesty to these migrants on their reservations so that they wouldn't have to leave the country and could seek, in this way, a path to citizenship.

DB: Let's talk about this concept of "border security." We know that there are many tribes that live on both sides of the border who are being devastated by these border policies. We are hearing that we can't have a deal without there being a wall.

BM: There has been a wall for many years, a partial one. In some parts there are mountains and canyons that would make a wall almost impossible to erect. But a wall was something that was tried in Berlin, has been tried in Palestine. All it does is divide people from their relatives.

In the south of Arizona and New Mexico we have about twelve tribes living on or near the border. Their people travel back and forth every day, either for employment or for social services like medical care. Many of these people are already known by border control and the department of immigration. This wall has been going up for many years.

We had a conference in Arizona in 2004 and at that time the border was still open, at least in the Indian areas. Then came law enforcement of all kinds: border patrol, U.S. marshals, FBI, National Guard. They all moved in to predominantly Indian territory and began to set up their operations, disrupting the everyday life of our communities and desecrating many of our sacred sites.

We have seen a diminishment of many of the rights that people had prior to this wall going up. The human rights of these Indian people are being violated, whether they consider themselves Indian or not. They still have the right to migrate to other countries.

When the Europeans were coming, they had signs all over Europe which said, "Free land! Come to America! Be part of the Homesteading!" But they didn't mention that this was already Indian land. Now that they are here, they look on Hispanic people as aliens, as a detriment to American society.

They have built prisons to hold the children of immigrants once they have separated them from their parents. And all of these human rights violations are documented by sanctuary groups as well as the Indian tribes directly affected by this military occupation on the U.S./Mexico border.

DB: Our vice president is right now in Jerusalem congratulating Netanyahu on plans to move the U.S. embassy there. For the Palestinians, it is like an endgame in the nature of ethnic cleansing. It seems to parallel the government policy toward indigenous communities in the United States.

BM: We have always been allies with the Palestinian people. The Palestinian is the Indian, and vice versa. We have a common history in terms of the human rights violations, the robbing of our lands when they are protected by various treaties and agreements and human rights standards. In Palestine, people can be uprooted at any time, even though they have lived there for generations! It is very close to the Indian struggle, which continues today.

DB: It was no surprise that one of Trump's first actions after taking office was to try to remove the opposition at Standing Rock and open up the pipelines, endangering the sources of water.

BM: "Water is life" has become an international cry. You cannot drink oil. Now people figure that even if the water is polluted they can go to Walmart and pick

up a case of bottled water. Well, soon it will all be polluted by petroleum and there is no filtering that out.

Oil pipelines are running rampant. In financial periodicals they are talking about investing in petroleum pipelines instead of investing in oil development. There are thousands of new permits being issued in every state.

And it is the oil executives who are making the decisions on behalf of the government. They are on a full-scale operation to exploit every mineral they can. They have even begun to open up protected lands and monuments. But when they start to endanger the water, it is time for all people to come together in opposition.

You have to understand that all pipelines leak eventually. It is unnatural to put a pipe in the ground and expect it to last. Mother Earth is moving all the time. When oil leaks, it doesn't go anywhere but into the earth and then into the water. You cannot do any recovery for water pollution by oil.

They say modern technology can provide warnings, but it never does. We just experienced a huge spill in northeast South Dakota that they claimed at first was 200,000 barrels but which turned out to be 800,000 barrels. And they spilled before anyone knew it, until a farmer discovered a lake of oil in his field.

These modern technologies are a myth. There is no way to protect the environment, especially when it comes to water.

DB: We just saw that the "vigilantes" who destroyed indigenous, so-called government property and took over buildings have now been set free by a federal judge, whereas there are still resisters at Standing Rock in jail facing time.

BM: There has always been a dual standard of justice in this country. When these armed cowboys took over a national park in the Northwest, [they were acquitted of the charges]. When we, on the other hand, act peacefully at Standing Rock, we had over 500 charged with various felonies. Some were charged with a felony for even traveling to Standing Rock!

This is an absolute violation of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples signed at the United Nations by President Obama in 2007. These standards have been set but no one is following them. American law treats Indians and protesters one way and white people another way. The dual standard of justice is alive and well in the US courts.

DB: Speaking of justice, in Arizona we have the pardoned former sheriff Joe Arpaio now running for public office.

BM: That is about standard operating procedure in this country. Here is a guy who violated a federal judge's court order, told him to go to hell publicly. He would have been jailed because of his attitude, his violation of the law and his refusal to accept responsibility. The president pardons him and now he has the audacity to run for public office. And he may be elected, because Arizona has been a racist state for many years.

The reason Arpaio was able to get reelected time after time is that he represented a racist standard not only against migrants but also against American Indians. The state of Arizona has the largest Indian population in America. He went on violating the human rights of these populations and no one did anything about it. This is the standard of human rights in America.

DB: We are now seeing expanded raids and mayors in sanctuary cities under threat of arrest. Do you think they will be coming on to reservations to arrest people?

BM: I am sure that if the opportunity arises they won't hesitate to, although they may find themselves in their own courts, because we have a legal relationship with the United States that no one else has. We have a certain sovereignty whereby we can invite people in and allow them to live in our territory. It will involve complicated legal maneuvering for the immigration people to enter our reservations. No doubt they will try but we will fight them all the way in the courts and there will be public resistance.

DB: Would you like to give a shout out to Leonard Peltier, the longest serving political prisoner in the United States?

BM: Leonard has been in prison for over 41 years now. We are trying to get him moved closer to home where he can get more visitors. They have taken him as far as possible from his home in North Dakota to Florida, so that his relatives and supporters and advisers have to travel all that way and pay all the expenses just to provide him with the access to the legal system that every prisoner is entitled to.

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Pesticide Use Threatens Health in

California

President Trump boasts about all the regulations that he has eliminated but he never mentions the important good that many of these rules were doing, as Dennis J Bernstein explains.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The battle to protect farmworkers and their families from dangerous pesticides has been going on for decades. But it has always been an uphill struggle because of the power and the money behind the mammoth petrochemical industry. In 2017, farmworkers, their families continued to be exposed to toxic sprays that drift into school zones and other populated areas.

While there have been some improvements and restrictions at the California state level, experts and activists in the field say not nearly enough is being done. And compounding the problem, EPA Director Scott Pruitt took swift action against new regulations that were about to be put into place under President Obama

Dr. Ann Lopez, Director of the Center for Farmworker Families, based in Felton, California, has taught courses in biology, environmental science, ecology and botany in the biology department at San José City College for many years. She is an independent researcher whose research addresses the human side of the binational migration circuit from the subsistence and small producer farms of west central Mexico to employment in California's corporate agribusiness.

Dr. Lopez has worked with over 33 farmworker families in the Salinas and Pajaro valleys. She has also studied 22 of their family farms in the west central Mexico countryside, and has received recognition and awards for her work.

Dr. Lopez, author of *The Farmworkers Journey*, was awarded the Human Agenda Ecological Sustainability Award in 2014 and the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc. awarded her with the Community Game Changer Award in 2015.

I spoke to Dr. Lopez on Dec. 27, 2017 at her office in Felton, California.

Dennis Bernstein: We know that the struggle against pesticide use continues.

For so many years the farmworkers have been on the front line. What can we say at this point about these dangerous pesticides that are poisoning so many farmworkers and their families?

Ann Lopez: There has been some progress, especially pertaining to chlorpyrifos, a developmental neurotoxin. But we still have a long way to go.

I am very concerned about Roundup (glyphosate), which has been determined to be

a Proposition 65 carcinogen. Monsanto does not have to label it as a carcinogen until well into 2018, which means that anyone who buys it thinking it is safe literally risks his or her life. Just mere exposure puts you at high risk, particularly for non-Hodgkin lymphoma and a variety of other horrible diseases, including blood cancers.

I personally know of three people who have died as a result of exposure, they believed, to Roundup. Yet this is sold in any hardware store as if it were nothing harmful. It speaks to the neoliberal economy, where profits are much more important than people or the environment.

Dennis Bernstein: There have been struggles around other chemicals and concern about spraying near schools.

Ann Lopez: Fortunately, the Pajaro Valley school district has gotten rid of Roundup spraying. This is one of my lead concerns because the entire public is put at risk with this and most people are unaware that this chemical can kill them!

Chlorpyrifos is a developmental neurotoxin derived from a nerve gas used in World War II which is primarily active on the brain and spinal cords of young children. This chemical was banned for residential use in 2000 but is still used in agriculture. So that is the front line for struggle today.

I have a PhD in environmental science and I have never read of a worse case of environmental racism than what I have studied in the Salinas Valley. First of all, organophosphates are very detrimental to developing fetuses. UC Berkeley scientists did a seventeen-year study of mothers and children in the Salinas Valley and found a direct correlation between a pregnant woman's exposure to organophosphates and resulting brain damage to the child. For every 522 pounds of exposure within a kilometer of where the mother resides, the child, by the time it reaches age seven, will have lost 2.2 points of IQ.

If you go online, you can see where the spraying occurs. There are whole residential areas filled with people where this concentration occurs continuously. Once these children grow up, they are intellectually deficient. They go to schools surrounding these fields where they use this developmental neurotoxin chlorpyrifos as an insecticide. Chlorpyrifos is drift-prone so once it is sprayed it moves through the air and into the classrooms, and it interferes with normal development of the brain and spinal cord.

So these children are impacted on two fronts, prenatally and then during their primary school years. The vast majority of these children, something like 90%, are Latino. I find it hard to believe that this would ever go on in a white

neighborhood. It would simply not be tolerated.

Prior to the Trump administration, the EPA banned chlorpyrifos nationwide and then Scott Pruitt, the new director, had a conversation with DOW executives and reversed the ban. So right now we are trying to get it banned at least in the state of California.

A couple months ago, we went to the EPA office and met with one of their committees, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. DOW executives gave their position and then those of us who came from all over the state to address this issue gave our statement, and they voted 8-2 in our favor. This means that chlorpyrifos is now listed as a Prop. 65 developmental neurotoxin, so we at least have that labeling on the containers.

But this past year has been a travesty for farmworkers. Thirty-four workers in Bakersfield were hospitalized because of exposure to chlorpyrifos and then another 17 in central California.

Dennis Bernstein: This can involve a whole series of treatments and then you have to worry about the long-term damage.

Ann Lopez: Absolutely, there is the issue of chronic exposure.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you describe the suffering that's involved? What are the symptoms like?

Ann Lopez: They become very weak, very nauseous, some even collapse out in the fields. The ones I worry about most are the children, who face permanent brain and spinal cord damage. I have studied farmworker issues for many years now and every parent I have spoken with wanted their children educated and to have a better life out of farm work. What are the chances for children to succeed academically and move on when their brains don't develop normally? We have a program called Safe Ag Safe Schools and we are partnered with Californians for Pesticide Reform.

Dennis Bernstein: These pesticides were created by companies that began working for the US defense industries making toxins to kill people. What we are seeing here is an attempt to mainstream the industry into everyday life.

Ann Lopez: Whenever I meet with Mark Weller, Co-Director at Californians for Pesticide Reform, I ask him, "Has World War II ended yet?" We are still using these horrific chemicals and continue to spray million of pounds of this poison all over the planet, all in the name of profit.

We had a press conference in Salinas on March 31, 2017 and I remember asking at

the end of my talk, “Are your profits really worth the compromised brains of our children?” You can ask the same thing about the biosphere, and so on. At what point do we stop destroying the very planet that supports our existence?

These chemicals play a crucial role in all this. I don’t think there is any excuse for using them. Studies have long shown that if we converted to an all-organic, regenerative agriculture tomorrow, we could feed every human being on the planet and mitigate climate change by 30-40 percent.

So the question becomes, why aren’t we doing that? The only reason is to keep these outdated industries in operation which are basically destroying the planet and all of its life-forms. Personally, I find it unethical and reprehensible, and it can only happen when the public is kept uninformed.

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Remaining Peaceful Was Their Choice

Despite early efforts at peaceful protest, Yemeni civilians face the reality of another year of devastating warfare inflicted by Saudi- and U.S.-led forces, as Kathy Kelly describes.

By Kathy Kelly

People living now in Yemen’s third largest city, Taiz, have endured unimaginable circumstances for the past three years. Civilians fear to go outside lest they be shot by a sniper or step on a land mine. Both sides of a worsening civil war use Howitzers, Kaytushas, mortars and other missiles to shell the city.

Residents say no neighborhood is safer than another, and human rights groups report appalling violations, including torture of captives. On Dec. 26th, 2017, a Saudi-led coalition bomber killed between 20 and 50 people in a crowded marketplace.

Before the civil war developed, the city was regarded as the official cultural capital of Yemen, a place where authors and academics, artists and poets chose to live. Taiz was home to a vibrant, creative youth movement during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. Young men and women organized massive, yet peaceful demonstrations to protest the enrichment of entrenched elites as ordinary people struggled to survive.

Peaceful Protest

The young people were exposing the roots of one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world today. They were sounding an alarm about the receding water tables which made wells ever harder to dig and were crippling the agricultural economy. They were similarly distressed over unemployment. When starving farmers and shepherds moved to cities, the young people could see how the increased population would overstress already inadequate systems for sewage, sanitation and health care delivery. They protested their government's cancellation of fuel subsidies and the skyrocketing prices which resulted. They clamored for a refocus on policy away from wealthy elites and toward creation of jobs for high school and university graduates.

Despite their misery, they steadfastly opted for unarmed, nonviolent struggle.

Dr. Sheila Carapico, an historian who has closely followed Yemen's modern history, noted the slogans adopted by demonstrators in Taiz and in Sana'a, in 2011: 'Remaining Peaceful Is Our Choice,' and 'Peaceful, Peaceful, No to Civil War.'

Carapico adds that some called Taiz the epicenter of the popular uprising. "The city's relatively educated cosmopolitan student body entertained demonstration participants with music, skits, caricatures, graffiti, banners and other artistic embellishments. Throngs were photographed: men and women together; men and women separately, all unarmed."

In December of 2011, 150,000 people walked nearly 200 kilometers from Taiz to Sana'a, promoting their call for peaceful change. Among them were tribal people who worked on ranches and farms. They seldom left home without their rifles, but had chosen to set aside their weapons and join the peaceful march.

Yet, those who ruled Yemen for over thirty years, in collusion with Saudi Arabia's neighboring monarchy which fiercely opposed democratic movements anywhere near its borders, negotiated a political arrangement meant to co-opt dissent while resolutely excluding a vast majority of Yemenis from influence on policy. They ignored demands for changes that might be felt by ordinary Yemenis and facilitated instead a leadership swap, replacing the dictatorial President Ali Abdullah Saleh with Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, his vice-president, as an unelected president of Yemen.

The U.S. and neighboring petro-monarchies backed the powerful elites. At a time when Yemenis desperately needed funding to meet the needs of starving millions, they ignored the pleas of peaceful youths calling for demilitarized change, and poured funding into "security spending" – a misleading notion which referred to

further military buildup, including the arming of client dictators against their own populations.

And then the nonviolent options were over, and civil war began.

The Nightmare of War

Now, the nightmare of famine and disease those peaceful youths anticipated has become a horrid reality, and their city of Taiz is transformed into a battlefield.

What could we wish for Taiz? Surely, we wouldn't wish the terror plague of aerial bombardment to cause death, mutilation, destruction and multiple traumas. We wouldn't wish for shifting battle lines to stretch across the city and the rubble in its blood-marked streets. I think most people in the U.S. wouldn't wish such horror on any community and wouldn't want people in Taiz to be singled out for further suffering.

We could instead build massive campaigns demanding a U.S. call for a permanent ceasefire and an end of all weapon sales to any of the warring parties. But, if the U.S. continues to equip the Saudi-led coalition, selling bombs to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and refueling Saudi bombers in midair so they can continue their deadly sorties, people in Taiz and throughout Yemen will continue to suffer.

The beleaguered people in Taiz will anticipate, every day, the sickening thud, ear-splitting blast or thunderous explosion that could tear apart the body of a loved one, or a neighbor, or a neighbors' child; or turn their homes to masses of rubble, and alter their lives forever or end their lives before the day is through.

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The Strangelovian Russia-gate Myth

The Strangelovian palaver of Russia-gate is embraced by many liberals as some totem to ward off the vile Donald Trump, but this dishonest process only furthers the cause of American Empire and risks global destruction, says poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

The effects of humankind created climate chaos are proving to be more devastating than even the grimmest predictions. Today's wealth inequity is worse than in the Gilded Age. Around the world, the U.S. empire wages perpetual war, hot and cold, overt and covert, including military brinksmanship with the nuclear power, the Russian Federation.

Speaking of the latter, the U.S. media retails a storyline that would be considered risible if it was not so dangerously inflammatory i.e., L'affaire du Russia-gate, wherein, according to the lurid tale, the sinister Vladimir Putin, applying techniques from the Russian handbook for international intrigue, *Rasputin Mind Control For Dummies*, has wrested control of the U.S. Executive Branch of government and bends its policies to his diabolical will.

Ridiculous, huh? Yet the mainstream press promulgates and a large section of the general public believes what is clearly a reality-bereft tale, as all the while, ignoring circumstances crucial for their own economic well-being; their safety, insofar as a catastrophic nuclear exchange; and the steps required to maintain the ecological criteria crucial for allowing the continued viability of human beings on planet earth.

A socio-cultural-political structure is in place wherein the individual is bombarded, to the point of psychical saturation, with self-serving, elitist manufactured media content. Decades back, news and entertainment merged thus freedom of choice amounts to psychical wanderings in a wilderness of empty, consumer cravings and unquenchable longings. Moreover, personas are forged upon the simulacrum smithy of pop/consumer culture, in which, image is reality, salesmanship trumps (yes, Trumps) substance. Among the repercussions: A reality television con man gains the cultural capital to mount a successful bid for the U.S. presidency.

Trump's ascendancy should not come as a shock. Nor should desperate Democrats' embrace of Russia-gate/The Russians Are Coming mythos. In essence, U.S. citizens/consumers are the most successfully psychologically colonized people on planet earth. In the realm of the political, Democratic and Republican partisans alike, on cue, are prone to parrot the self-serving lies of their party's cynical elite, who, it is evident, by the utter disregard they hold towards the prerogatives of their constituency, view the influence-bereft hoi polloi with abiding disdain ... that is, in the rare event they regard them at all.

The crucial question is: Whose and what agenda does the Russia-gate yarn serve? The answer is hidden in plain sight: the profiteers of U.S. economic and militarist hegemony. The demonization and diminution of Russian power and influence is essential in order to maintain and expand U.S. dominance and the attendant maintenance and expansion of the already obscene wealth of

capitalism's ruling elite.

While It might seem we are mired in an (un-drainable) swamp of complexity, in reality, the political landscape is a bone-dry wasteland, wrought by a single factor – the addictive nature of greed.

Moreover, the reality of Beginning Stage Human Extinction crouches just beyond the line of the horizon. All signs auger, we lost souls of the Anthropocene must alter our course. Yet, we, stranded in the mind-parching wasteland of late-stage capitalism, collectively, continue to stagger, mesmerized, towards mass media mirages leading us further and further into the hostile-to-life terrain.

Yet the wasteland's Establishment media outlets are doing a dead-on, although straight faced, impression, right out of Stanley Kubrick's satirical film of Cold War era madness, "Dr. Strangelove, "of Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper's roiling with paranoia ranting about a Russian "conspiracy to sap and impurify all of our precious bodily fluids."

Hyperbolic? Take at perusal at the cover story of the Washington Establishment mouthpiece Newsweek, headlined: "PUTIN IS PREPARING FOR WORLD WAR III – IS TRUMP?"

A sphincter-clinching tale of woe and warning promulgated by the same governmental entities and their corporate media stenographers who waxed apocalyptic about Iraq possessing weapon's of mass destruction; that an immediate NATO bombing campaign must be launched against the government of Muammar Gaddafi or else a mass slaughter of the innocent would be imminent; and regime change in Syria must proceed because Assad is gassing his own people.

Just what sort of an embittered cynic would call into question the credibility of and mistrust the motives of such paragons of probity? Yet, somehow, in regard to Russia-gate, liberals display scant-to-zip skepticism towards the stories peddled by this unelected, unaccountable clutch of hyper-authoritarian prevaricators. In fact, they are, in a cringe-worthy spectacle, allowing themselves to be played like Dollar Store kazoos.

Terror of Tweet-Town

Although, I get it. The tangerine-tinged Terror Of Tweet-town represents a hideous affront to common sense and common decency. But the same applies to his antagonists in the anti-democratic institutions of the U.S. National Security State and Intelligence Community. While the mission statements of the bureaucracies in question declare they exists to protect the nation from all manner of threats to the safety of the citizenry, a study of their history and present-day operations reveals, their modus operandi serves to ensure obscene

amounts of wealth continue sluicing into the already bloated coffers of the profiteers of global-wide operations of capitalist plunder.

I understand the desperate need for hope. To crave the quality is inherently human. Even to the point of being whipped into a tizzy by the Russia-gate imbroglio. Yet: All and all, an obsessive focus on Trump, the Orange Scylla, buffets one into the maw of the Washington Establishment's Charybdis.

Again, I understand the sense of desperation: Trump's smug, bloated face, the grandiose squawk of his voice, and his crass, mean-spirited, petty-minded pronouncements and middle-school bully taunts deserve to be resoundingly rebuked. His hubristic posturing simply begs for comeuppance. One is prone to grow plangent with magical thinking. One longs to witness the bully smirk smacked from his face as he is dispatched in disgrace, Richard Nixon-style, to his parvenu palace at Mar a Lago.

But the effect of banishing Nixon was cosmetic. The accepted Watergate storyline, of probing, political inquest and Constitutional redemption, served as a palliative administered to the U.S. public in the rare case the slumbering masses might have desired to delve deeper into the heart of darkness of U.S. empire thus might begin to question the mythos of American Exceptionalism and doubt the uplifting denouement cobbled onto the scandal by the political and media elite, e.g., the system of checks and balances functioned as the nation's Founders intended. Granted, the system did work as designed, only not in the cliched manner portrayed by its apologists; it worked in the manner in which it was rigged, to wit, to preserve the secrets of state. The long national nightmare was far from over. In fact, it has been normalized.

When the unthinkable becomes quotidian, by means of the normalization and systemic codification of crimes against the greater good of humanity, there is a good chance the dynamics of empire-building are in play. Empires are not only inherently entropic but they are anathema to the democratic processes crucial to maintaining a republic.

The vast amounts of wealth acquired by means of plunder render a nation's elite not only craven with cupidity but prone to become so dismally shortsighted, even, judging by the evidence of their reckless actions and crackbrain casuistry, bughouse mad. The present U.S. nuclear saber-rattling at North Korea and the economic aggression and militarist posturing deployed against the Russian Federation are proof of the declaration. A military empire's unchecked, monomaniacal, more often than not self-destructive, impulse for domination are monstrous traits. The death and carnage strewn in the wake of the imperial monster's presence in Libya and Syria illustrate a grim testament to the fact.

History reveals, overreach and the passage of time renders the aspirations of imperium a nimbus of dust; its grandiose pronouncements a cacophony of strutting clowns; its belief in its inviolable nature and its trumpeted tales of vaunted exceptionalism the stuff of asylum-dweller gibbering. On the contrary, a sense of perspective imparts the knowledge, late empire is a fool's inferno played out on a landscape ridden with exponentially increasing decay.

The storylines of the beneficiaries and operatives of vast systems of runaway power concoct are, more often than not, self-justifying fictions. Cover stories and flat-out prevarications, rolled out for the purpose of hiding the prevailing order's actions and motives, come to dominate the socio-cultural-political sphere. Views running counter to reigning narratives are apt to be marginalized and/or met with scorn, rage and revulsion. A dangerous one-sidedness prevails.

Analogous to the laws governing thermodynamic equilibrium, when a governor (or speed limiter or controller) switch has been rendered inoperative, a state of thermic runaway comes into play. We are talking the stuff of runaway trains, flaming out super novae, nervous breakdowns, and overreaching empires. By suppressing countervailing views, empires create chaos and carnage and will, in the end, meet their demise by self-annihilation. The rage for total dominance and attendant overreach of capitalist/U.S. militarist hegemony has wrought the phenomenon on a global-wide basis.

The governor switch within the greed and power crazed minds of the corporate, military, and governing elite, by all indications, is inoperable. Impervious to the consequences of their recklessness, ranting about Russians, they careen through the Anthropocene. At present, the whole of humankind is held in the thrall of a trajectory of doom. Yet their power is hinged on the ability to dominate the storyline. Withal, complicity translates to destiny usurped. Conversely, the first measure towards a restoration of equilibrium is to call out a lie.

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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 communiqué 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 aisle 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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The Ongoing Misery of Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Maria, which hit the U.S. territory on Sept. 20, remains slow and spotty with continued power outages, unsafe water and school closings, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

It's been nearly seven weeks since Hurricane Maria shredded the island of Puerto Rico and, still, conditions for millions of Puerto Ricans remain grim and barely livable. Thousands are still stuck in shelters, while many others remain in their homes with limited access to electricity and clean water.

Last Thursday, large swaths of San Juan were again without power and those without their own independent generators were thrown into darkness with little support. Once again, heavy rains flooded out the streets of San Juan, creating the conditions for various water-borne diseases like cholera to proliferate.

I spoke with attorney and human rights activist Judith Berkan about conditions on the Island, even as federal troops prepare to leave the struggling U.S. territory.

Dennis Bernstein: Tell us about your day today.

Judith Berkan: I had two court hearings and in the middle of the first one, which was in the federal court, we became aware that there had been a major blackout throughout the north coast of Puerto Rico. This one is supposed to last between twelve and eighteen hours. The system gets overloaded and then it goes out again.

Tuesday night there were incredible storms here in Puerto Rico. Because we don't have electricity, the pumps to drain water from the drains are not functioning. One of the attorneys at the first hearing had actually been pulled out of her car during the awful rains. In the afternoon, after getting out of my first court hearing, I called the court regarding my second hearing, which is an injunction to try to save people's wages during the hurricane aftermath.

When we got there, we had five minutes of generator power to be able to reschedule the hearing.

There are a lot of labor issues going on. People are losing their jobs, businesses are closing, people are not getting paid for days they work. Some businesses have paid their workers even if they could not come in, but those are exceptional cases.

There has been an inaccurate counting of deaths. The official number is 55 right now but every day you hear of situations where people are dying and whether they are attributed to the storm or not is a matter of great controversy. So many health and mental health issues are connected to the storm. The nursing homes are without air conditioning. There are four confirmed deaths from leptospirosis but we suspect there are a lot more.

Dennis Bernstein: The Army or the National Guard announced today that they are going to be removing one-third or one-half their forces because "they have other jobs to do." I guess they are not done, though, are they?

Judith Berkan: No, not at all. I can't say there have been no improvements since September 20. There is less debris around the streets. We are now at 42% of generator capacity. You get power for a time, then it goes away again. So there is no predictability in our lives. Today the entire San Juan area was out and, from what I understand, the entire north coast. And this is fifty days after the hurricane. And remember that about ten days before Maria we had hurricane Irma, which knocked out the electricity to a good portion of the

country. So there have been a lot of people who have not had electricity since Labor Day.

Dennis Bernstein: I assume that people on the outer islands are in even worse shape.

Judith Berkan: It's a lot worse and delivering supplies is a lot worse. We also have very mountainous terrain in the middle of the main island and there are still barrios there which have not seen a single government official or even private institutions.

Dennis Bernstein: We also know that there is quite a substantial exodus from the island, people heading to Florida and New York.

Judith Berkan: Yes, about 100,000 people have already gone to Florida, out of a population of 3.5 million. Today FEMA said they would be giving passage to people to stay in hotels outside of Puerto Rico. A lot of our hotels were destroyed and the others are filled with military personnel and FEMA people, etc. So far only 300 families have accepted the offer. About 25% of people are still without water.

The school situation is devastating. There have been some very arbitrary decisions as to which schools will open and which will not. We fear that it has to do with preexisting plans to privatize the school system. Schools with very strong community bases have been excluded from this reopening process.

Yesterday there were arrests of nineteen teachers from the teachers' union who were protesting at the superintendent's office. I don't know what has happened with their charges.

Dennis Bernstein: A lot of people are out of work now.

Judith Berkan: Old San Juan has been dark. It has something like 900 to 1,000 businesses, which are almost all locally owned. Yesterday it was announced that one of the major music clubs is closing. There are major factories and major shopping centers which have not reopened. Meanwhile, we all have more expenses than we used to have, because everything is getting more and more expensive and the Jones Act was suspended for only ten days.

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.
