

In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in January highlighted misrepresented historic events, analyzed shortcomings of the Democratic Party, and remembered Robert Parry's legacy.

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["Missing the Trump Team's Misconduct"](#) by J.P. Sottile., Jan. 9, 2018

["Pesticide Use Threatens Health in California"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Jan. 10, 2018

["Trump Lashes Pakistan over Afghan War"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Jan. 11, 2018

["The FBI Hand Behind Russia-gate"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jan. 11, 2018

["Haiti and America's Historic Debt"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 12, 2018

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["Trump Ends Protections for El Salvador"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Jan. 18, 2018

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["'The Post' and the Pentagon Papers"](#) by James DiEugenio, Jan. 22, 2018

["Foxes in Charge of Intelligence Hen House"](#) by Ray McGovern, Jan. 22, 2018

["A National Defense Strategy of Sowing Global Chaos"](#) by Nicolas J.S. Davies, Jan. 23, 2018

["George W. Bush: Dupe or Deceiver?"](#) by Robert Parry, Jan. 23, 2018

["Tom Perez, the Democratic Party's Grim Metaphor"](#) by Norman Solomon, Jan. 25, 2018

["The Struggle Against Honduras' Stolen Election"](#) by Dennis J. Bernstein, Jan. 26, 2018

["Unpacking the Shadowy Outfit Behind 2017's Biggest Fake News Story"](#) by George Eliason, Jan. 28, 2018

[“Robert Parry’s Legacy and the Future of Consortiumnews”](#) by Nat Parry, Jan. 28, 2018

[“Assault on the Embassy: The Tet Offensive Fifty Years Later”](#) by Don North, Jan. 30, 2018

[“Will Congress Face Down the Deep State?”](#) by Ray McGovern, Jan. 30, 2018

[“Treasury’s ‘Kremlin Report’ Seen as Targeting Russian Economy”](#) by Gilbert Doctorow, Jan. 31, 2018

[“Mass Surveillance and the Memory Hole”](#) by Ted Snider, Jan. 31, 2018

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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.

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's Seven Forbidden Words

In a homage to George Orwell's Newspeak, the Trump administration has compiled a

list of words that are banned from use in budget requests, reports Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

There is a scene in George Orwell's famous dystopian novel *1984*, where the protagonist, Winston Smith, is having a conversation with a philologist by the name of Syme. Syme is involved in a government effort to restructure the language spoken by the novel's upper classes, those who have power or work for the ruling party. The language is called "Newspeak." Syme's job is to get rid of dangerous words. Here is how he describes his task: "We're destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. ... The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought. In the end we shall make thoughtcrime [having unorthodox thoughts] literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it."

Now let's shift to another scene, not a literary or fictional scene, but a probable real life one.

Sometime in the month of December 2017, somewhere in the bowels of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in Washington, D.C., a high-level appointee of the Trump administration moved to take ideological control of the agency's budget-writing process. This official presented a directive to the agency's departments, such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), listing seven words that *were not to be used* in budget preparation. If they were, they would be flagged and the document sent back for "correction." The seven "forbidden" words are: "vulnerable," "entitlement," "diversity," "transgender," "fetus," "evidence-based" and "science-based."

The higher-ups at the HHS have insisted that there is no "ban" in place. Departments like the CDC can still do research in areas to which these unwelcome key words relate. But this disclaimer is misleading. To do the research you need money, and the money comes from the budget. The "discouragement" of key words is meant to marginalize their related research agendas. If fully effective, this attempt at censorship – for that is what it is – could contribute to undermining several generations of cultural progress, and challenge the "science-based" methodology that serves as a foundation for the modern world.

We already know that President Trump has no time for facts that differ from his personal worldview. That is why the U.S. is not part of the "science-based" treaty to slow down global warming. We also already know that he does not think minorities (both racial/ethnic and sexual) deserve protection under the law. These and other prejudices, worn so publicly by the president of the United

States, have let loose a revolt of religious and social reactionaries, perhaps numerically represented by the 33% of Americans who approve of Trump's performance. These folks would take the country back to a time of discrimination, segregation, and scientific know-nothingness. And for Trump these folks are the only ones who really count. He has recently declared that unfavorable polls are "fake news." This is Trump "making America great again."

It appears that one way Trump and his allies think this can be done is by censoring the language used by the people in power and those who work for them. As the computer engineer and writer Jem Berkes points out in reference to 1984, "the ultimate aim of Newspeak is to enclose people in an orthodox pseudo-reality and isolate them from the real world." Sounds a lot like what is happening at HHS.

Can Censorship Work?

Can this work? It probably already has among the roughly one-third of adult Americans who are sympathetic to Mr. Trump's ultimate aims. These include many Christian fundamentalists and various racist conservative sects, the Alt-Right and Fox TV talking heads. Among those who are of the opposite point of view, both cultural and political progressives, there is no chance that this proposed "orthodoxy" will go unchallenged. Many of this latter group are old enough to remember what the president's "great America" once looked like – for instance, what life was like before the civil rights acts. And many of those who can see through Trump's double-talk, of whatever age, have an instinctive preference for equality, fairness and clear thinking.

However, between these two opposing groups lies the insulated masses – the millions who pay little attention to politics and know little of the importance of science. These folks, focused on their day-to-day concerns, are essentially isolated in their localness. They have no sense of what is presently at stake, and therefore find it difficult to think critically about the Trump agenda. For this group, skewing language may well result in skewing their worldview. It is probably from the thinking of this segment of the population that Trump and his agents want to ultimately eliminate the values represented by the "seven forbidden words" and all that they mean for social policy.

Thus, the end game is to have no more thinking of society and its problems in terms of a citizen diversity, minority vulnerability, or entitlement based on proven need. For instance, citizens are not to think that sexual minorities are in need of legal protections. Indeed, the country's LGBT population turns out to have less right to protection than an unborn fetus. In addition, citizens are to no longer pay heed to evidence-based and science-based arguments when they may call into question the practices of alleged societal customs.

Donald Trump's Use of Language

You might find the scenario laid out above farfetched. Yet it correlates well with the way Donald Trump uses language, as well as his devaluing of any objective standard for truth. Thus, President Trump's persistent combination of gross exaggeration and "alternative facts" gives many of his public statements an Orwellian odor.

In his ghost-written book *The Art of the Deal*, Trump is quoted as stating that "if you tell people a lie three times, they will believe anything." No doubt he has told himself this more than three times, for he now seems to live his public life by this tenet. There are fantastic and untrue self-aggrandizing claims such as, because of the changes Trump is initiating, "our children will grow up in a nation of miracles," and "we have done more in five months than practically any president in history."

There are also fantastic and untrue negative claims such as some 3 million votes were cast illegally in the presidential election – all of them apparently for Hillary Clinton- and "[President] Obama founded ISIS, literally." *According to the Washington Post's* Fact Check project, "President Trump has made 1,318 false or misleading claims over [his first] 263 days [in office]. Many of these claims are repeated over and over again – significantly more than three times.

Turning Back the Clock

Forbidding specific terminology from the budget language of HHS departments constitutes one avenue of attack against those who refuse to believe Trump's innumerable lies. You might not believe his fantasies, but you are not to use "evidence-based" counter-arguments if you operate within the executive branch bureaucracies he ultimately controls.

Of course, the implicit censorship inherent in ideology has always played a role in U.S. politics. And the ultra-conservative ideology behind the "seven forbidden words" gambit has been around for a long time. It dominated economic policy until the New Deal and social policy until the Civil Rights Movement. By modern standards it brought disaster in both realms. So why would anyone want it back? Maybe because the aims of greater economic and racial/ethnic equality make some white citizens feel disempowered and uncomfortable. One way to address that discomfort is to turn the clock back. To do this, you just restructure reality by labeling those parts that you don't like as "fake." Trump does this almost daily.

The strategy of eliminating the official use of words like "diversity," "vulnerable," "entitlement," "transgender," "evidence-based," "science-based,"

and “fetus” is part of this effort to turn the clock back. Maybe then, so the story goes, with no words to express these concepts, the uncritical minds of our time will be – as Syme the philologist predicts – unable to think unorthodox thoughts.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

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.

Trump's Nihilism on Healthcare

Petulant bombast is a dangerous approach to governance – what the Founders associated with the British crown – but now President Trump has brought that style to U.S. policymaking on healthcare, as Michael Winship observes.

By Michael Winship

A couple of things observed after successful surgery and a week in the hospital: For reasons seemingly unrelated to your operation, you will find bits of surgical tape attached to odd parts of your body for days after your return home. While confined to your hospital bed, you will hear and say the words "urine" and "urinate" more than you have in your entire previous life.

Most important, time and again you will be amazed and comforted by the dedication, competence and patience of virtually every doctor, nurse, nursing assistant, physical therapist and cleaner you meet – especially the nurses and nursing assistants, who clearly are in charge of the joint.

Which is why it's so infuriating to compare the true public service of these men and women to the man who is supposed to be our public-servant-in-chief – he who insists on trying to torpedo Obamacare and on running our country and government into the ground by fomenting policies fueled not by duty or patriotism but by incompetence, ego and petty vindictiveness.

It's a given that our health care system, one-sixth of our nation's economy, is a nightmare. And that despite my encomiums of praise for the medical profession stated above, there also are stinkers out there quick to abuse the system and make a big fast buck, especially in the pharmaceutical and health insurance industries.

Yet while Obamacare is a deeply flawed program – ultimately, single-payer is the way we must go or face economic and social ruin – it still has been a step in the right direction (“the end of the beginning of the reform we need,” in the words of advocate Wendell Potter), and could in some ways be patched until we yield to the obvious and make universal health care a right for every one of us.

But no. Dear Leader, frustrated by the Republican congressional majority's repeated inability to repeal and replace Obamacare, decided to take matters into his own hands and issue executive orders that make a mockery of medicine's guiding principle: First, do no harm. And all to take revenge on his predecessor, whose name he believes must be expunged and thrown down the memory hole.

One executive order allowed cheaper policies but fewer protections and benefits. The other cut subsidies to health insurers that help cover the costs of medical insurance for low-income individuals and families, resulting in projected premium increases of up to 25 percent by 2020 and, according to the Congressional Budget Office, costing the government \$194 billion over the next 10 years. Genius.

Helping Nobody

As Sarah Kliff at Vox observed, “This is a policy that helps nobody and hurts millions.”

But at his Monday Cabinet meeting, Trump brayed, “Obamacare is finished. It's dead. It's gone. You shouldn't even mention it. It's gone. There is no such thing as Obamacare anymore.

Yet like so much of Trump's bragging, it wasn't so. Or so we thought. Democratic Sen. Patty Murray and Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander came forward with a bipartisan compromise that restores the subsidies for a couple of years but also yields to conservatives and gives states more leeway in regulating health plans. Trump seemed to say he supported it. And then he didn't. What's more, many conservatives, especially in the House, are opposed. So... more mayhem.

All of this is reflective of what commentator Andrew Sullivan calls "nihilist, mindless reactionism." The President, Sullivan writes, is "a reactionary fantasist, whose policies stir the emotions but are stalled in the headwinds of reality. He can't abolish Obamacare because huge majorities prefer it to any Republican alternative, so he is sabotaging it."

On the campaign trail, Trump bragged how he would immediately "terminate" Obamacare and replace it with something "really, really great that works." But if for some reason you don't know by now, he's all radio talk show bombast and no substance. To fix our health care system requires hard work, study and a solid determination to create something that serves the collective need and protects each of us at our most vulnerable. There's no evidence of that hard work happening in the White House or on Capitol Hill.

As I'm recovering from my time under the knife, I've been reading *Keeping On Keeping On*, the latest volume of diaries and other ephemera from the English playwright and essayist Alan Bennett. Now in his 80s, one of his *bête noires* is conservative attacks on Britain's National Health Service.

"The word patient means a sufferer," Bennett writes, "and when someone comes to the doctor they are coming not because they want to buy something but because they want help. Structure and restructure the Health Service how you will doctors are not shopkeepers, patients are not customers and medicine is not a product."

A hospital stay has a way of making you focus and realize things about yourself and the structures that keep us alive and well. Proper medical care for all should be a boon to our society, a miracle of public policy that sustains and protects. Mindless cant and empty braggadocio are not policy. They're a disease that threaten the health of the nation. And Mr. Trump, you're the Typhoid Mary spreading the contagion.

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Human Anxiety in Late-Stage Capitalism

Superficial explanations for today's social anxiety and political discontent miss the underlying reality: the crisis of late-stage capitalism in its frantic death throes, explains poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

A number of recent press articles, including an over 8,000-word feature piece in The New York Times have asked, to quote the Times' headline, "Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?"

Although the question was proffered, the reporters and editors responsible for the articles remain resolutely obtuse to the obvious: The bughouse crazy environment of late-stage capitalist culture evokes classic fight-or-flight responses attendant to episodes of severe anxiety and panic attacks.

The word panic has its derivation in reference to Pan, the Greek god of wilderness and wildness, of the animal body encoded within human beings and its attendant animalistic imperatives. To wit, deracinate an animal from its natural habitat and it will evince, on an instinctual basis, a fight-or-flight response.

If caged, the unfortunate creature will pace the confines of its imprisonment, chew and tear at its fur and flesh, become irritable, enervated, languish and even die from the deprivation of the environment it was born to inhabit. A caged animal, even if the unfortunate creature endures captivity, is not the entity nature conceived; the living being has been reduced to A Thing That Waits For Lunch.

Human beings, animals that we are, respond in a similar fashion. Experiencing anxiety is among the ways our innate animal spirits react to the capitalist cage. Inundate a teenager with the soul-defying criteria of the corporate/consumer state, with its overbearing, pre-careerist pressures, its paucity of communal eros, its demands, overt and implicit, to conform to a shallow, manic, nebulously defined yet oppressive societal order, and insist that those who cannot adapt, much less excel, are "losers" who are fated to become "basement dwellers" in their parents' homes or, for those who lack the privilege, be cast into homelessness, then the minds of the young or old alike are apt to be inundated with feelings of angst and dread.

Worse, if teenagers are culturally conditioned to believe said feelings and responses are exclusively experienced by weaklings, parasites, and losers then their suffering might fester to the point of emotional paralysis and suicidal

inclinations.

No Real Remedies

What does the capitalist state offer as remedy? Obscenely profitable, corporately manufactured and widely prescribed psychoactive medications. Treatment, which, at best, merely masks symptoms and bestows the illusion of recovery.

As R. D. Laing observed: "What we call 'normal' is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being."

In short, it is insanity to be expected to adapt to socially acceptable insanity. Yet we are pressured to adapt to, thus internalize odious, groupthink concepts and tenets. To cite one such groupthink example: homelessness is natural to the human condition and is a communally acceptable situation.

Closer to fact: The problem of homelessness is the result of a societal-wide perception problem – the phenomenon is the very emblem of the scrambling, twisting, dissociating, and displacing of perception that capitalist propagandists specialize in. Homelessness would be considered a relic of a barbaric past if this very simple principle was applied: Having access to permanent shelter is a human right and not a privilege.

What kind of a vile, vicious people would deny that simple proposition? Those conditioned by a lingering Puritan/Calvinist mindset to believe: Punishment for resisting the usurpation of the fleeting hours of one's finite life must be severe. If the over-class can no longer get away with, as was once common practice in the Puritan/Calvinist tradition, public floggings to whip the labor force into line, then those who will not or cannot comply will be cast onto the cold, unforgiving concrete of a soulless cityscape.

It comes down to this, societies that are ridden with vast wealth inequity, due to the machinations of a rapacious over-class, create the obscenity known as homelessness. Moreover, the situation is only one of the numerous obscenities inherent to state capitalism. Obscenities that include, events that are dominating the present news cycle, e.g., the predations of a lecherous movie mogul, to the sub-cretinous doings and pronouncements of a Chief of State who is a bloated, bloviating, two-legged toxic waste dump.

Trump, No Aberration

How is it then, liberals fail to grasp the fact that the Trump presidency is not an aberration; rather, his ascension to power should be regarded as being among

the high probability variables of late-stage capitalism and empire building? The psychopathic, tangerine-tinged clown Trump is the embodiment of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, a development that is concomitant to over-expanded empires. Thus he will continue to flounce deeper into the quagmire of crash-engendering, economic legerdemain and perpetual war.

Empires are death cults, and death cults, on a subliminal basis, long for their own demise. Paradoxically, the collective mindset of imperium, even as it thrusts across the expanse of the world, renders itself insular, cut off from culturally enhancing novelty, as all the while, the homeland descends into a psychical swamp of churning madness.

A draining of the swamp of the collective mind cannot come to pass, for the swamp and citizenry are one. Withal, the likes of leaders such as Trump rise from and are made manifest by the morass of the culture itself. In a swamp, the gospel of rebirth and redemption is heard in the song of humus. New life rises from its compost.

In the presence of Trump's debased mind and tombified carcass, one is privy to arias of rot. While Hillary Clinton's monotonous tempo was the dirge of a taxidermist – cold, desiccated of heart, and devoid of life's numinous spark – Trump's voice carries the depraved cacophony of a Célinean fool's parade ... its trajectory trudging towards the end of empire.

As liberals new BFFL (Best Friend for Life) George W. Bush might ask, "Is our liberals learning."

In a word, no. For example, the collective psyche of U.S. culture as been enflamed by the revelations that actresses were coerced into sexual encounters with a movie mogul whose power in the industry was only matched, even enhanced, by his sadistic nature. The staff of his company assisted, was complicit in, or remained silent about his lechery, as did the whole of the movie industry and the entertainment press. All as NFL athletes are being threatened with expulsion from the League if they kneel during the national anthem.

The Great Unspoken

Yet the great unspoken remains: The enabling of and submission to the degradation, exploitation and tyranny, and the lack of resistance thereof share a common and singular factor: The careerism of all concerned. The cultural milieu concomitant to capitalism is at the rotten root and noxious blossoming of

the situation.



Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 cinematic barnburner "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" should be required viewing for those unaware or in denial of the acuity of the film's theme i.e., becoming enmeshed within the psychological landscape of dominance, degradation, and submission inherent to and inseparable from capitalist/consumer culture will cause one to become party to societal sanctioned prostitution. When life is negotiated within a collective value system that devalues and deadens the individual's inner life thus warps every human transaction, anomie descends, the worst among a people ascend to positions of power.

"Panic is the sudden realization that everything around you is alive." – William S. Burroughs, from Ghost of Chance

When friends visited me in New York, where I lived for decades, I would take them on walking tours through the city. We would cross the Westside Highway and stroll the pedestrian walk along the Hudson River, or cross the East River by walking across the Brooklyn Bridge.

The effect of these excursions on people was often profound ... the combined elements of the elemental beauty of the rivers and vastness of the city's architecture and scope, clamor, and the dense interweaving of traditional ethnic customs and ad hoc social codes of New Yorkers often would heighten the visitors' senses and open them to larger, more intricate awareness of themselves and extant reality ... the freeways of the contemporary mind (conditioned to be constantly engaged in manic motion, with one's mind either frenzied by an obsession with performing (ultimately futile) maneuvers directed to saving time – or stalled at a frustration inducing standstill) were replaced by the exigencies of life at street level, i.e., novel situations that had to be

apprehended and negotiated.

The possibilities of life seemed greater. The crimped eros of insular suburban thought became loosened before the city's intricacies and expansiveness. Although: Not all, or even a scant few, New Yorkers can maintain the state of being. Few of us can live by Rilke's resolve to "make every moment holy." Life, in the city, becomes grotesquely distorted ... High rents, inflicted by hyper-gentrification, in combination with the deification of success and its cult of careerism overwhelm one's psyche ... There is so far to fall.

Angst (the word originally can be traced to the ancient Greek deity Ananke, the immovable by prayer and offering bitch Goddess of Necessity and the root word of anxiety) clamps down one's sense of awareness. Ananke dominates the lives of the non-privileged citizenry while Narcissus, Trump's, the Clintons', et.al. and their financial and cultural elitists' patron God rules the day. The pantheon of possibility has been decimated, a cultural cleansing has been perpetrated, by the egoist caprice of the beneficiaries of the late capitalist dictatorship of money.

Hence, we arrive at the primal wisdom tacitly conveyed by anxiety-borne states of fight or flight. Due to the reality that capitalism, on both an individual and collective basis, drives individuals into madness, all as the system destroys forest and field, ocean and sea and the soul-scape of all who live under its rapacious dominion, our plight comes down to this: We either struggle and strive, by and any and all means, to end the system – or it will end us.

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In Case You Missed...

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The Push for a Medicare-for-All Plan

America's complex and inefficient healthcare system ends up being both very expensive and limited in its coverage, a problem that Sen. Bernie Sanders is targeting in his Medicare-for-all plan, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Sen. Bernie Sanders has unveiled a new single-payer healthcare plan which would provide all Americans with government-sponsored health coverage. Sanders's plan, supported by some 16 Democrats in the Senate, calls for an overhaul of the healthcare system with what would essentially be a tweaked and revitalized version of Medicare-for-all.

"Today we say that a function of a rational healthcare system is to provide quality care to all in a cost-effective way," declared Sanders, an independent from Vermont, "and not to continue a system which allows insurance companies and drug companies to make hundreds of billions in profits each year and makes healthcare industry CEO's extremely wealthy."

Flanked by supporting senators in making his Wednesday announcement, Sanders also noted that a Medicare-for-all program would end “the complexity of a system which adds enormous stress at a time when people need it the least.”

I spoke on Sept. 13 to Russell Mokhiber, founder of The Corporate Crime Reporter and of [SinglePayerAction.org](https://www.singlepayeraction.org). Mokhiber has long been an advocate of the single-payer option. He is also someone who watches closely the deadly nature of corporate greed.

Dennis Bernstein: Please give us your initial reaction. Bernie has a number of senators who say they believe in single-payer. Several presidential hopefuls are among those who jumped on the Sanders Single-Payer bandwagon. You think their playing early presidential politics with single-payer, or are they true believers? Do they support Sander’s vision?

Russell Mokhiber: That is what they are saying, and it is obviously because of the grassroots prairie fire that has been lit by single-payer activists over the years. It is truly out of our hands now.

Usually when you go to these meetings with your member of congress, the single-payer activists would be the only ones raising the issue. Now we are standing in line screaming at our congress people, demanding it, because the situation on the ground has become so bad.

Nine years ago, when the insurance industry-written Obamacare was introduced, there were 23 people testifying. They refused to listen to any of us who wanted to put single-payer on the table. In fact, they had us arrested. Six months ago, Bernie’s healthcare person told us that there wasn’t going to be a single-payer bill because they didn’t want to risk a Democratic Senate in 2018 and they thought that single-payer would hurt them. But once they saw the grassroots pressure, they totally flipped. Just a month ago, Bernie had in this bill co-pays and deductibles.

So this is all about the grassroots pressure. Obviously it has now become a hot political issue. Someone like Kamala Harris would never have touched this just a couple weeks ago. Senator Richard Blumenthal from the insurance state of Connecticut has signed on!

Do we believe that they will push single-payer if we take our foot off the gas? No. We believe the Democratic Party is structurally incapable of being a people’s party. The only way they are going to respond is if the people keep their foot on the gas. This seems very similar to California in 2006 when the Democrats passed single-payer in California knowing that Governor Schwarzenegger was going to veto it.

We are very encouraged by this response but we really want to see this happen, not just political posturing. We are concerned that the Democrats will use this to gain power and then push it aside for something like a public option or to secure the position of the insurance industry in the current system.

I was at a conference this week called by Cornel West and the Green Party to address the fact that the Democratic Party is structurally incapable of being a people's party. My colleague Bruce Dixon at Black Agenda Report said a few years ago that Bernie is like a sheepdog into the Democratic Party. He is shepherding the left back into the party. My hope is that, if this is what is going on, at least we will get out of it single-payer for all Americans.

DB: Russell, just take a moment to describe what you see as the difference between Obamacare and a single-payer system.

RM: Obamacare was written by insurance industry lobbyists to preserve the position of the insurance industry within the system. This meant that we would continue to have 30 million Americans uninsured, as we have right now, that most people who have insurance are underinsured, they still go bankrupt even with insurance, that thousands of people die every year because of lack of health insurance.

The only way to change the situation is to pursue a single-payer system, meaning you get rid of all the private insurance payers and you have just one: Medicare for all with no co-pays and no deductibles. When every American is born, he or she gets a birth certificate and a Medicare card. You are covered through the tax system.

So yes, we are going to be taxed, but the amount we pay in taxes will be significantly less than the amount we currently pay in premiums, deductibles and co-pays. That money that we save by getting rid of all the administrative waste will ensure that everyone is covered, state of the art.

The amazing thing about this press conference today wasn't what the senators were saying. For the most part, they were just posturing, maybe with the exception of Bernie. It was the people who spoke before the senators.

A doctor from Canada testified that 97% of Canadians love their single-payer system. She described how, when she was pregnant, there were no bills, no co-payments. There was a businessman from Pennsylvania who started a group of businesses for single-payer, because the reality is that businesses are going crazy trying to cover all their employees and many employees are afraid to leave their jobs because then they will lose their insurance.

It is no longer linked to employment, you are covered from cradle to grave, you

have your choice of doctor and hospital. When you need medical care, you go to the best place in your area, there is no in-network or out-of-network.

DB: That is essentially what it breaks down to for most civilized countries—or even not so civilized countries—in this world. How do you explain that the two Democratic leaders—Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi—are mum on single-payer, or worse?

RM: I think it is part of the feud within the Democratic Party. Coincidentally, Hillary is traveling the country right now with her new book, *What Happened*. She is obviously very critical of Bernie Sanders and what he did during the election.

There is a battle going on right now for the soul of the Democratic Party. I am very concerned about the single-payer movement because the Democrats appear to be using this to take the Senate in 2018 and the White House and then back off on single-payer.

DB: This industry is not going to go down easy. They spend a great deal of money to keep this system in place. These Congresspeople aren't just voting their consciences here.

RM: The great thing about single payer is that it will drop the cost of healthcare because a single-payer is going to refuse to pay these exorbitant rates for pharmaceuticals, they are going to insist on paying what the rest of the world pays.

The medical industrial complex is in it for a bottom line profit motive. Twenty years ago in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, a surgeon wrote that medical care is very similar to any other good in America: doctors provide it and you buy it.

So there is a debate now about whether healthcare should be considered a commodity or a right. The Democrats are now getting the message that it is a human right and that the people are demanding it. But as you point out, very powerful forces are bent on defeating it.

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.

Farmworkers Protest EPA's Pesticide Ruling

As part of President Trump's campaign against President Obama's environmental regulations, Trump's EPA has rejected a proposed rule banning a brain-damaging pesticide, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The decision by President Trump's Environmental Protection Agency to rebuff the advice of its own scientists to ban the brain-damaging pesticide chlorpyrifos has prompted protests from California's farm worker communities, now demanding an immediate statewide ban of the dangerous chemical.

A delegation delivered more than 167,000 petition signatures along with a letter signed by 75 organizations representing hundreds of thousands of Californians. The petition was also co-signed by Care2, Center for Biological Diversity, Center for Environmental Health, Center for Food Safety, Courage Campaign, CREDO, Friends of the Earth, and Pesticide Action Network.

EPA scientists have documented that chlorpyrifos can cause serious and profound neurological and respiratory damage, as well as developmental delays, autism and IQ loss for children – even in very small doses, say the activists.

They maintain that the use of chlorpyrifos is particularly problematic in California, “where more than one million pounds of the neurotoxic organophosphate pesticide are used each year, much of it in close proximity to schools and residences. Accounting for roughly 10% of the nationwide total, this chemical is applied on dozens of crops in the state. In the Monterey Bay Area, chlorpyrifos is most heavily used on wine grapes, Brussels sprouts, and apple orchards. In 2016, the air monitor at the Salinas Airport registered average air levels of chlorpyrifos three times higher than the EPA's target risk level.”

According to Californians for Pesticide Reform (CPR), a statewide coalition of more than 190 organizations, “after years of stalling, EPA was set to implement a ban on chlorpyrifos use on food crops in March. But under intense pressure from Dow Chemical, the largest manufacturer of the neurotoxic pesticide, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt reversed the agency's plan and announced he was allowing continued agricultural use of chlorpyrifos.”

The group's statement went on to say “just last November, the EPA announced that it intended to revoke all food tolerances of chlorpyrifos, calling exposure to any amount unsafe. Underscoring the importance of this proposed ban, the agency

cited the serious dangers of chlorpyrifos exposure and added that young children risk exposure from food residues alone that are 14,000 percent higher than the level EPA currently believes is safe.”

I spoke with Lucia Calderon, an organizer with Safe Ag Safe Schools and Californians for Pesticide Reform, about the battle against chlorpyrifos.

Dennis Bernstein: Tell us exactly what it is – what’s the chemistry we’re talking about here? And then we’ll talk about how dangerous it is.

Lucia Calderon: Chlorpyrifos is an organophosphate insecticide, and its main action is to harm the brains of the insects that the agricultural industry is trying to kill. And, incidentally, it has been shown to really, really harm brains, especially children’s developing brains.

DB: Children’s developing brains – say a little bit more about that. Are there cases? Are there studies being conducted now? Are there examples of kids being hurt? What can you say about that?

LC: Yeah, well this is a really historical issue. Chlorpyrifos was actually banned for residential use. It started being phased out in 2000, because of its proven association with developmental harm. And UC Berkeley and Columbia University both had big parts in these studies. In 2000 the science was known that chlorpyrifos was extremely harmful to developing brains and bodies, and it was banned for residential use.

But nowadays it is not banned for agricultural use, and it’s still being used in our fields, especially in California fields. We account for a fifth of the entire nation’s use of this chemical pesticide. And so, what we’re looking at is science that has been established, and is continuing to come out, showing these really detrimental effects of this chemical. And there is complete inaction on the federal level.

DB: So the EPA was set to pass a ban on this, right? Until the new folks came in?

LC: Yes, exactly. The EPA was set on a deadline to revoke the tolerances of this chemical on March 31, 2017, and just a couple of days before that date our new EPA administrator, Scott Pruitt, reversed that ban. So what we’re doing now is going to the State of California. As a big user of chlorpyrifos, we are demanding that the State of California impose a ban on this chemical. And, as I mentioned the science before, a lot of it is coming out of California. We have the UC Berkeley CHAMACOS study, which stands for the Center for Health of Mother and Children of the Salinas Valley, right where Safe Ag Safe Schools is located. That study has been going on for almost 20 years, showing the connections

between prenatal organophosphate chlorpyrifos exposure and lowering IQ, and respiratory issues as well.

DB: Tell us a little bit about who's involved. Your group is working with the Pesticide Action Network: are there community groups or teachers involved? How are you bringing in the families?

LC: Californians for Pesticide Reform is a statewide coalition, and Safe Ag Safe Schools is only one of the organizations involved. And we represent the communities of the front line. We are from the affected communities, and we all get to come together through this statewide coalition, and then demand improvements and better protections for people living on the front lines of pesticide exposure – those working in the fields and living and attending school very close to the fields.

DB: Are there still problems in terms of schools? Does that come into it?

LC: Yes, definitely. And even regarding chlorpyrifos, we have a city in Monterey County, Greenfield, and two schools there – the middle school and the high school – rank 9th and 4th in the state for chlorpyrifos use within a quarter of a mile. We're seeing issues with chlorpyrifos being applied around schools and we're also just seeing issues with pesticide use in general around schools.

The most recent action we've had on that was establishing buffer zones around schools where pesticides could not be applied. We have been demanding for years a full mile buffer zone at all times around schools, where pesticides cannot be applied. And what we got were quarter mile buffer zones for parts of the day – from 6am to 6pm Monday through Friday. So we're still fighting on that front as well. Right now we're really trying to get chlorpyrifos banned, because it's one of the nastiest chemicals out there.

DB: This is incredibly important because it affects children and their ability to learn. I understand that some of this, depending upon how you're doused with this, could cause permanent damage, particularly in pregnant women and young, formative kids.

LC: Yes, one of the reasons that the federal EPA was going to ban the chemical was that the U.S. EPA found that for pregnant women and developing babies and for some children just the amount of chlorpyrifos they were consuming on food as food residue was way too high. The reason that the EPA was banning it was not only for food residues, but for how much is in the air. There's also no safe amount of chlorpyrifos in drinking water, and it has contaminated a lot of our water supplies as well. So the danger is on all fronts, but especially for women of childbearing age and young children.

DB: And I'm gonna spell that because the name is a little bit unclear: it's c-h-l-o-r-p-y-r-i-f-o-s – that's the brain-harming chemistry that we're talking about?

LC: Exactly, and it is produced by Dow AgroSciences.

DB: Dow?

LC: Yes, Dow Chemical. The CEO of Dow Chemical [Andrew Liveris] is the head of the American Manufacturing Council. Dow Chemical contributed a million dollars to Trump's inauguration dinner. We're now hearing reports that Scott Pruitt met with Dow right before he decided to reverse the ban of chlorpyrifos. So they're a really big actor in this fight right now.

DB: Yeah, and they certainly have the reputation, shall we say, for doing terrible things to people. We thank you for this important information.

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.

Holding onto Nuclear Weapons

Despite longstanding promises to work toward nuclear disarmament, the nuclear states continue their hostility toward abandoning these existentially dangerous weapons, Dr. Ira Helfand tells Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

For months now there has been a frustrating hunt for "collusion" between the Trump administration and Russia, but there is one clear example of collusion – along with the other half dozen or so nuclear weapons states – in opposing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Passed on July 7 by 122 nations at the United Nations, the ban states in part that each cosigner "undertakes never under any circumstances to develop, test, produce, manufacture, or otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices."

Following the signing of the treaty at the U.N., I spoke to Dr. Ira Helfand, past president of Physicians for Social Responsibility and currently co-president of that group's global federation, International Physicians for the

Prevention of Nuclear War. The group received the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize for their work in the field of nuclear disarmament.

“Two things were most notable in the overwhelming vote for this treaty,” Dr. Helfand said. “One was the urgency felt by the representatives of 122 countries who voted for it. The other was the rather crude and revealing statement put out by the ‘P3’ – the U.S., Britain and France,” said Dr. Helfand, that “they intend to maintain their policy of mutually assured destruction forever, even though they are legally required to negotiate the elimination of their nuclear arsenals under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.”

Dennis Bernstein: First of all, say something about the treaty – how important it is, what exactly it’s meant to do.

Ira Helfand: Well this treaty is an attempt by the non-nuclear weapon states around the world to tell the nuclear-armed states that they’ve got to stop behaving the way they have been. The nuclear-armed states are, for the most part, committed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to undertaking good faith negotiations to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. And they’re not doing it, they haven’t been doing it and they don’t appear to have any intention to do it. And the non-nuclear weapon states have lost patience, essentially, and have said, “Look, your nuclear weapons are posing an existential threat to our citizens as well as your own, and you need to start living up to your obligations to protect the world from the terrible consequences of nuclear weapons.”

The treaty does not in and of itself create a situation where these weapons are going to be dismantled. It does provide a very strong weapon, I think, for people to use to put pressure on the nuclear-armed states to do what they’re supposed to do, and to actually abolish their weapons.

DB: And it’s really important that it be the possession, right?

IH: Absolutely, this is not a treaty about use. That is also included, but this goes far beyond that. This treaty says that the mere possession of nuclear weapons constitutes an existential threat to human survival and cannot be tolerated, that we need to get rid of these things, to dismantle them and make sure that they’re never built again.

DB: All right, give us your assessment: how dangerous is our world today? Are we at Cuban Missile Crisis Two? How would you assess that?

IH: I don’t think we’re quite to the Cuban Missile Crisis, but we’re pretty close. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has us at two and a half minutes to midnight, where midnight is the end of the world. Certainly we’re at the most

dangerous moment since the early 1980s. There is increasing tension between the United States and Russia, with potential flashpoints in Syria and Ukraine. There's increased tension between the United States and China, with a potential flashpoint in the South China Sea. There's the situation which everyone is following, with North Korea vs. the rest of the world. There's the ongoing fighting between India and Pakistan, which is almost daily, on their border in Kashmir. These countries now have between them some 260 nuclear warheads. So we're in a very, very dangerous moment.

And in addition to these geopolitical potential flashpoints, there's the ongoing danger of an accidental nuclear war, or a terrorist-triggered nuclear war. We know of six or seven instances since the 1960s, where either Moscow or Washington actually began the preparation of launching nuclear weapons, in the mistaken belief that the other side had already done so. And that potential for an accident – an unintended nuclear war – remains with us today, and will, until these weapons are eliminated. So it's an extremely dangerous time, and we really need to be paying more attention to this danger than we are, frankly.

DB: Who are the nuclear powers?

IH: The United States and Russia have between them about 90-95% of the world's nuclear weapons. And then after that, France, China, the U.K., India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel. And it's not just the P3 – the U.S., France and the U.K. – that have refused to sign it – all of those countries have refused to sign it.

DB: [...] These are very frightening times. It's really troubling to see that not only do these nuclear powers reject the agreement, they do it with vigor, and some swagger, as if the other solution – mutually assured destruction – is a good one!

IH: Well I think that was what was particularly striking about the statement that the U.S., the U. K. and France – the so-called P3 – issued on Friday. In the past, the nuclear weapons states at least had the political sense to couch their opposition to this treaty in terms of, "Well, we share your vision of getting rid of nuclear weapons, but the time isn't right, and so this treaty isn't the best tactic."

In the statement that was released on Friday, the United States, Britain and France said, "We will never sign this treaty. We will never eliminate our nuclear weapons." And it was a very bald statement, which has always been the truth, but was really quite a departure from their normal diplomatic attempts to cover up what they're doing. And it was quite striking in that way.

DB: You know, people go on about Donald Trump – and there's a lot to go on about

– but these western progressive nations are still talking insanely in 2017. They're as crazy as any of the politicians who are on the scene now, and this decision demonstrates it.

IH: I think that's true. You know, we've argued for a long time that nuclear weapons are so destructive, and the chance of their use is so great, that no one should ever have possession of them. I think the "Trump Factor" is a real phenomenon. This is the first time that a large arsenal of a major nuclear power has been in the control of someone who is judged by the security experts in his own party to lack the judgment, the temperament and the knowledge base to command a nuclear arsenal. And there are implications in that – not the least, if it happens once, it can happen again.

DB: But you know what, I have to just say something about all the politicians... I'm no defender of Trump, but before that with Hillary Clinton and her policy – in terms of foreign policy – Syria was a no-fly zone. That's a road to World War 3 – that's insane!

All these politicians are willing to talk in the context of everything being on the table – you know that phrase, everything's always on the table with these folks. [...] I've never trusted the CIA. And all those folks advising Trump, they've got some serious problems. A bunch of them have been liars. They've been bugging all of us. I mean there's a lot to question across the board, and that to me is what makes nuclear weapons extremely troubling in the hands of all these folks.

IH: Oh, there's some truth to that. Nobody should have their finger on the button. The solution is not to get Donald Trump's finger off the button, it's to get rid of the button altogether. Having said that, there is something different about having Donald Trump in charge of the nuclear arsenal, and we cannot turn our backs on that fact.

DB: [...] What do you suggest? What do you think people can do about this? What are the realities in terms of what you would recommend if people are interested in standing up and making a difference?

IH: Well, a couple of intermediate steps. First of all, there's legislation before Congress introduced by Senator Markey and Congressman Lieu, that requires that Congress give prior authorization before nuclear weapons can be used. This is exactly as it should be. The Constitution says only Congress can declare war. Certainly only Congress should be able to declare a nuclear war. And this is a useful, small step in the right direction. That legislation should be passed.

Secondly, we should be demanding that the United States take its nuclear weapons

off its hair-trigger alert. There's no excuse for maintaining these arsenals in a configuration where they can be launched in 15 minutes. It merely creates an increased danger that there will be an accidental or unauthorized use. It's not necessary to blow up the world in 15 minutes' time. If we decide that that's what we're going to do, we can do it in 24 hours. So the weapons should be taken off this hair-trigger alert.

But more fundamentally, we need to be demanding that the United States completely change its nuclear policy: stop insisting that we're going to maintain a nuclear arsenal as a way of protecting our security, and acknowledge that, in fact, nuclear weapons are the greatest threat to our security, and that what we need to do is aggressively pursue, in agreement with the other nuclear weapon states, to eliminate all of these weapons.

Now, we may not be successful in this effort, we may not be able to get other countries to join with us, but we need to try. And the United States has not been trying. In fact it's been doing just the opposite: it's been planning to spend a trillion dollars to make heinous nuclear arsenals over decades to come. And that has to change.

It is urgently in the interest of U.S. national security, as well as the security of everybody on the planet, that we actively pursue the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons – not just at the rhetorical level like President Obama did, but really in our actual policy. And that we seek to begin negotiations with the other nuclear weapons states, for a treaty amongst them that provides a specific timetable, and enforcement and verification measures, so that we can, with confidence, eliminate all the nuclear weapons that are being held. And this can be done, the only thing that is lacking is the political will to do it.

DB: Before we say goodbye, can you give us maybe a doctor's perspective on this? You know, you take an oath to save lives – how do you come at this from that perspective?

IH: Well, I think Physicians for Social Responsibility views nuclear weapons as primarily a public health problem. They are the greatest threat to public health that's ever existed, and we see this as an extension of our responsibility as physicians to protect our patients. We talk to our patients about why they shouldn't drink excessively, why they shouldn't smoke at all, why they should watch their weight and so on. We also need to talk to them about other threats to their health, and this is the greatest threat of all.

And that's really been the motivation, I think, for the physicians' movement – to bring this message of grave danger to our patients, in the hopes that we'll

be able to mobilize them to take the necessary political action to force our government to get rid of these weapons once and for all.

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.
