

★ ★ US ELECTION SPECIAL ISSUE ★ ★

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THE VOTE THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR



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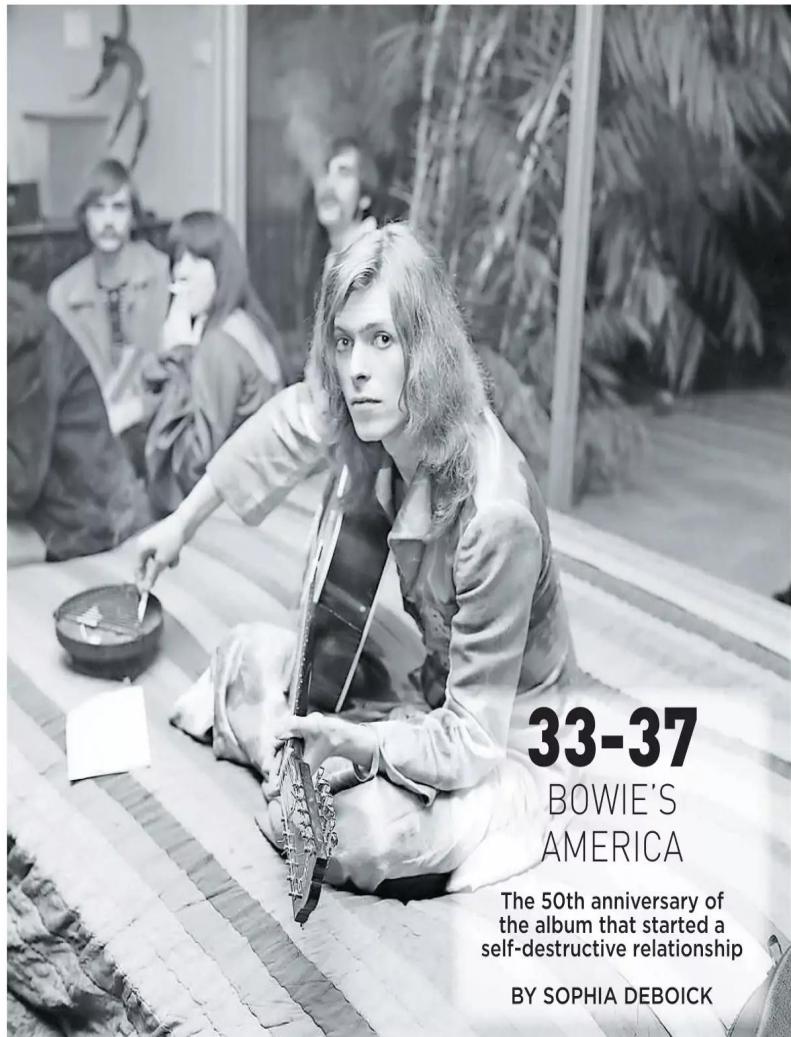
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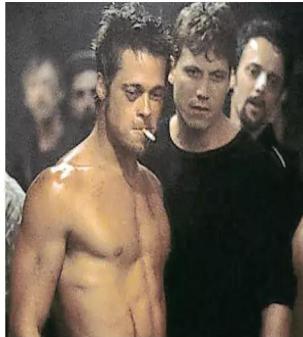
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## US ELECTION 2020



# World waits for step in the right direction

The consensus is in: there is something like an 85% to 90% chance that Democratic candidate Joe Biden will win the presidential election next week and begin the countdown to his inauguration in January 2021.

But if people have strong feelings about that prospect, they're probably not about Biden himself.

Despite Republicans' best efforts to spin scandals around the business dealings of his son Hunter, or paint the former vice president as in hock to the left fringe of his party, Americans by and large don't have too much negative to say about Biden – as his favourability numbers show. They might not be as effusive and enthusiastic in their support as they were for his former boss Barack Obama, when he first ran for the same job, but they don't particularly hate him either – a rare trait for a politician in a country as polarised as the US has become.

No, the strong feelings being generated about the 2020 presidential race – in the USA and across the world – stem from the man Biden is running against: president Donald Trump.



### JAMES BALL'S DECONSTRUCTED



In a single term, Trump has smashed almost every political norm, mired himself in numerous corruption investigations, ran a chaotic and almost comically inept administration – and appointed three people to the Supreme Court, and hundreds to the federal bench, a legacy that will last at least a generation.

Trump has come to define the entirety of US politics, and so inevitably the entirety of the 2020 election race. The ballot, at least at the top of the ticket, might as well be 'for Trump' or 'not Trump', which is surely part of Biden's appeal. If an election is about stopping your opponent, a relatively bland candidate is an asset in this endeavour.

However, when the election is over, someone has to govern for the next presidential term, and in the world where that's Joe Biden, we've spent almost no

time thinking about what that might actually mean for the USA – and for the world. Given that even with its somewhat diminished status in recent years the US is still the world's leading superpower, that's a strange place to be.

It's certainly the case that Biden would not be able to undo all the damage of the Trump presidency overnight. No candidate possibly could. But at a minimum, there are lots of simple ways in which Biden would at least right the ship.

Perhaps the most immediately damaging, if least visible, aspects of the Trump administration is its sheer incompetence. Largely through inattention and indifference, Trump left hundreds and then thousands of key vacancies unfilled, or filled on an acting basis by woefully under-qualified cronies.

This left the State Department little

more than a shell of itself, set back efforts to control nuclear and chemical weapon decommissioning around the world from the Department of Energy, and hollowed-out the federal government in numerous other ways. Simply by appointing even basically competent professionals to these types of roles, Biden will rebuild some of the damage caused over the last four years.

That won't be enough for anyone. But it's not at all clear Biden can do much more. The first potential barrier in his way is simply the House and the Senate. The Republican party of 2020 is the party of Trump, more extreme than the Tea Party before it. Should Biden win power, it will do everything in its power to block his every move and make America ungovernable for him.

At present, the House is held by Democrats and this would serve in Biden's favour – and it seems likely that if Biden took the presidency, Democrats would almost certainly hold the House. That's one barrier down, but the more serious one is the Senate.

Senators serve six-year terms, elected in thirds every two years – meaning one

in three Senate seats are up for grabs in 2020. To gain even basic control of the Senate, Democrats would need to take at least three of the 35 seats on offer, which is regarded by many political observers as a tough but not impossible challenge.

If Republicans hold the Senate, Biden's hopes of passing virtually any major legislation of note head to zero. So too would any prospect of making any particularly controversial appointments, over which the Senate has a veto. Biden could find his hands bound from day one of his presidency, as Obama's were from 2010 onwards – but to an even greater extreme.

Even assuming Biden had a Democrat-controlled House and Senate, people shouldn't expect a transformative agenda. Traditionally, Biden was known as something of a centrist Democrat, quite distinct from the liberal warriors represented by Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders. He does not support Medicare For All, he rejected the Green New Deal, and similar proposals that play well with the party's grassroots.

That's not to say Biden wouldn't try to strengthen Obamacare, fund welfare to a greater extent, and pass green bills – but he wouldn't be trying the radical measures some on his left flank would hope for.

Those across the world pinning their hopes on a Biden presidency changing everything would likely be disappointed, too. Biden would be unlikely to be dramatically friendlier to Europe than Trump, though might reinstate regular Nato and EU cooperation – to the relief of many.

Any rebuilding of the international order could be a jumping point for better things, though: we need to work together to tackle the climate crisis, prevent future pandemics, and to do something for millions of refugees across the planet. A Biden presidency could begin that work, while scaling back Trump's constant flirtation with international强men.

He certainly wouldn't be a saviour of Brexit for either faction – the UK would likely drop down his priority list, with a trade deal remaining vanishingly unlikely (and still including the big agri measures so opposed under Trump's proposals). The USA's international priorities just don't feature the 'Special Relationship' nearly so highly as we here might hope. Biden and Democratic support for Ireland means the US would be unlikely to intervene in a no-deal, and its priorities make any significant intervention in any direction vastly unlikely – but this would remain true under Trump. Neither president would save nor stall Brexit.

On a broader level, Biden alone could not hope to rebuild what Trump has broken. He will face a hostile federal judicial bench – and Supreme Court – ready to strike down anything ambitious he passes. He will face a bitterly divided and potentially violent public. And he will face a US body politics with its every norm and standard of decency smashed.

Political standards – like public trust – take decades to build and weeks to shatter. Joe Biden risks becoming president of the ashes left behind by Donald Trump's four-year conflagration.

But everything has to start somewhere, and doing so from four years of Trump is better than from eight. Next week, we might start to see the first evidence of green shoots emerging from the burned-out wasteland.

NOT TRUMP: Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden arrives in Detroit for a day of campaigning in Michigan, a state won by Donald Trump in 2016 by less than 11,000 votes

Photo: Getty Images

## Bonnie Greer



In the United States, the various voting demographics are labelled in terms that most British citizens, and just about anyone else, might find offensive. So, there are 'white suburban women with college degrees', and their opposite number: 'white suburban women without college degrees'.

These two categories deserted the Republican Party in droves during the mid-term elections of 2018 and gave the House of Representatives to the Democrats in the biggest Republican rout since Watergate. The polls suggest they are going to stick with the Dems next week and could put Joe Biden in the White House.

Back in 2016, those voters had taken a bet with the GOP – probably because they couldn't contemplate four years of Hillary Clinton. They decided to take a chance on 'the Donald', the bombastic, iconoclastic and kinda funny guy they had seen on telly and in the news for three decades. After all, as Trump often said to them: what did they have to lose?

By 2018, this demographic knew the answer to that question. And, tired of seeing immigrant kids crying for their mothers, worried about turning on the television in front of their own children because the president might be on and who knew what would come out of his mouth, and just plain exhausted by the chaos of the Trump Administration, they voted for the Dems.

After all, by then the conservatives among them had gotten the judiciary that they wanted: Trump farmed that out to the Federalist Society, which had spent the better part of 50 years compiling a wish-list of judicial right-wingers and helped vet the president's court nominees. These candidates will serve decades on the bench, changing US jurisprudence and turning it decisively rightward.

Plus, in this election, Kamala Harris seems to go down well for those demographics, because she kind of looks like an upmarket suburban mom. Those voters can see her make the school run, then head for her late morning pilates class. And she was the attorney general of California – and therefore what the progressives derisively call a 'cop', because it was her job to get people sentenced to the industrial complex-gulag that is the American federal penal system.

Right now, it seems, those groups – white suburban women, with

# Tempting Trump's tribes to switch sides

and without college degrees – are no longer MAGA people, at least not in the numbers they once were. Rural women, on the other hand – and they are mostly white – have tended to remain Trump supporters.

And then there is another demographic: white men without a college degree. This group saw Trump as their Messiah, the guy who said what they always wanted to say but didn't have enough cash to do so.

He was the guy who got all of the beautiful girls; who descended a golden escalator in his own New York skyscraper to announce that he was going to run for president and make America great again.

It was Donald John Trump, son of a real estate mogul, brought up in the biggest house on his street in Queens, in whom they had found a voice. This may sound weird to class-bound Britain, but the things is Trump had grievances. Trump had a chip on his shoulder from enduring all of those snooty Manhattanites who wiped Queens off the bottom of their shoe. So Trump knew those white men without a college degree and they believed in him.

In the Rust Belt of the Upper Midwest – Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania – where Hillary Clinton messed up by insinuating that she would take away coal and steel – these people's livelihoods – they voted for Trump in 2016. They showed up for him.

And when the angel of death caught the wind and flew high above the land, earlier this year, those voters did not 'mask up', because Trump had suggested that to do so was somehow unmanly. The WMWCD stayed MAGA.

But something has gone badly wrong. The pandemic has caused

many in this group to lose their jobs, sometimes lose family members and friends.

Now, in this election cycle, another voice has found a connection with them – the deep, sonorous voice of the actor Sam Elliott, who has made two powerful campaign adverts in support of Joe Biden. His movies are not ones I tend to go see. They are movies for men – lost men, men seeking redemption, doomed men, funny men, wise men. Guys. American guys. I give him full marks for marrying Katharine Ross, the actor who was an icon of my generation – the woman who hung out with Butch Cassidy And the Sundance Kid, who was a Stepford Wife and who ran away with Dustin Hoffman at the end of *The Graduate*.

Elliott's voice, his Western, golden tones, are pure American. So who better to help Biden to appeal to WMWCD? The actor provided the voice-over for an official advert for the Democrat candidate, entitled *Go From There*, which aired during the baseball World Series game one match-up between the LA Dodgers and the Tampa Bay Rays.

Over a pared-down piano rendition of *The Star-Spangled Banner*, Elliott implores WMWCD to just start off assuming that everyone loves America. And then "go from there". He appeals for decency, a "fresh start", "dignity".

His second ad, for the Lincoln Project – a group of anti-Trump Republicans – makes an even more direct appeal to WMWCD. Entitled, simply, *Men*, the commercial tells them they must own up to their mistake of electing Trump in 2016 and that they should correct it, like their fathers would have done, by supporting his opponent this time around.

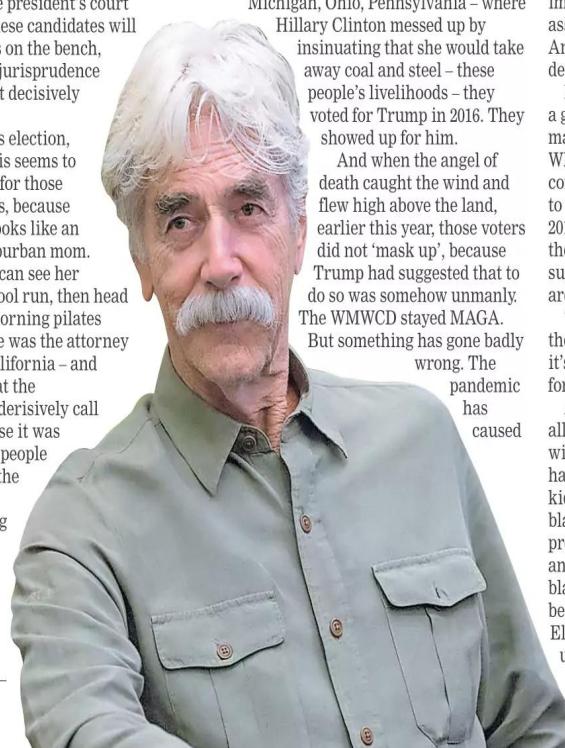
"We may have thought we were doing the right thing in 2016," Elliott says. "But it's clear this isn't the America we voted for. We made a mistake."

And in that "we", he gathers together all of the guys willing to listen and willing to acknowledge that the times have changed. That even their wives and kids had changed. That they had elected a black man with a strange name to be president of the United States – twice – and that there was a possibility that a black woman with a strange name might be vice president this time around. Sam Elliott told them that it was time to understand the times. Be in them,

because the times needed them, needed what they knew and could contribute. Only time will tell if WMWCD listened. Or if it is too late.

BIDEN BACKER: Hollywood actor Sam Elliott

Photo: Rick Kern/ Getty Images



## US ELECTION 2020

If you're looking to kill time while waiting for America's big decision, our fun

# ELECTION 2020 BINGO CARD

## REPUBLICAN CARD

GUN-TOTING VOTER OUTSIDE POLLING STATION	'ORANGE LIVES MATTER' SIGN	PUNDIT SEEMINGLY STILL IN FULL HALLOWEEN COSTUME TURNS OUT TO BE KELLYANNE CONWAY, DRESSED NORMALLY	"TOO CLOSE TO CALL"	MELANIA TRUMP SEEN LOOKING SAD; A SURE SIGN TRUMP IS WINNING
FLAG-BASED CLOTHING	PUNDIT WITH TOUCHSCREEN	MEDIA DENIGRATED	OVEREXCITED RUDY GIULIANI SEEN REPEATEDLY TUCKING HIS SHIRT IN	"I VOTED" STICKER
FARAGE LOOKING HAPPY	"SHY TRUMPERS"		"UNPRECEDENTED!"	TRUMP WINS; "EMIGRATING TO CANADA" BECOMES TOP GOOGLE SEARCH IN USA
SOMEONE IN TEARS	"FOUR MORE YEARS!"	POLLSTERS DENIGRATED	BIDEN CONCESSION SPEECH TURNS OUT TO BE RIPPED OFF FROM NEIL KINNOCK'S IN 1992	TRUMP DANCES
LIBERAL ELITE DENIGRATED	BIDEN BLAMES DEFEAT ON HIS YOUTH AND INEXPERIENCE	IVANKA TRUMP SAYS SHE'LL RUN IN 2024	"LET'S MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, AGAIN!"	PRIVATE JET PACKED WITH CHLORINATED CHICKEN FLIES OFF TO BRITAIN

## US ELECTION 2020

game will tick (or rather, cross) all the boxes. Your caller: STEVE ANGLESEY

# ELECTION 2020 BINGO CARD

## DEMOCRAT CARD

LONG QUEUE OUTSIDE POLLING STATION	REPUBLICAN HOPES FADE AS TRUMP SPENDS ELECTION NIGHT TWEETING "THE APPRENTICE WILL BE BACK IN 2021!"	ELECTORAL COLLEGE EXPLAINED AT LENGTH	'BLACK LIVES MATTER' SIGN	PUNDIT WITH HOLOGRAM
FEARS THAT TRUMP WON'T ACCEPT THE RESULT AS HE ORDERS MEXICAN WALL DISMANTLED AND REASSEMBLED AROUND THE WHITE HOUSE	FARAGE LOOKING UNHAPPY	"LET'S WAIT UNTIL ALL THE VOTES ARE COUNTED"	"YOUTH SURGE"	TENS OF MILLION OF VOTES BEHIND, TRUMP SAYS HIS CAMPAIGN IS "ROUNDING THE TURN"
"NO MORE YEARS!"	TRUMP SAYS COVID MEANS HE MUST SELF-ISOLATE IN THE WHITE HOUSE FOR 1,460 MORE DAYS		BIDEN PASSES THE MAGIC 270 ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES; FOX NEWS DECLARES TRUMP AS THE WINNER	TRUMP TWEETS: "RIGGED! SAD!"
"I GRACEFULLY CONCEDE TO THAT LOSER SLEEPY JOE, THE WORST CANDIDATE EVER"	WEEPING MAN IN MAGA HAT	POLLSTERS HAILED	HUNTER BIDEN SPOTTED CROONING "I'M SINGING IN UKRAINE"	MANY, MANY BALLOONS
"LOCK HIM UP!"	"I LOST BETTER AND BIGGER THAN ANYONE ELSE! PERIOD!"	TRUMP AWARDS PRESIDENTIAL PARDON TO HIMSELF	"LET'S MAKE AMERICA HEAL AGAIN!"	PRIVATE JET CARRYING MELANIA TRUMP FLIES OFF TO FREEDOM

## US ELECTION 2020

The key to understanding Trump's presidency is grasping the way he built it on the support of America's Evangelicals. They now hold his fate in their hands. RIKHA SHARMA RANI reports



# KEEPING THE FAITH?

**SYMBOLISM:**  
Donald Trump holds a Bible while visiting St John's Church across from the White House after the area was cleared of people protesting the death of George Floyd June 1, 2020 in Washington DC  
Photo Getty Images

On a Monday afternoon in June, Donald Trump stood holding a bible in front of St John's Episcopal Church in Washington DC. He turned it over to look at the spine – seemingly checking to see that it was right side up – before awkwardly holding it up in the air.

"Is that *your* bible?" a reporter called out. "It's a bible," the president responded.

The evening before, as anger mounted over the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police, looters had set fire to the basement of the church's parish house. Flanked by his daughter Ivanka, several cabinet members, a coterie of secret service agents, and a uniformed military general, Trump made the four-minute walk from the White House to the boarded-up church.

Moments earlier, National Guard troops had used pepper spray and rubber bullets to clear the president's path of protesters. Press secretary Kayleigh McEnany compared the visit to Winston Churchill's walks through London during the Second World War, saying it was "powerful and important to send a message that the rioters, the looters, the anarchists, they will not prevail – that burning churches are not what America is about." In an interview with Fox News afterwards, Trump claimed that "most religious leaders loved it."

But not all religious people did.

"Trump putting his hand on the Bible and doing things that would seem to endear himself to Christians and other groups, I think it's pandering," said Sandy, a 43-year-old Evangelical voter from New Hampshire who did not want to be identified by his full name while discussing politics. "I don't like it. I wish we didn't have it." He's not even sure the president is a believer. "I wouldn't pretend to know what's inside his heart on that," he said. "But it certainly doesn't appear genuine."

And yet, there is no question in Sandy's mind about who he will vote for. "I'm planning to vote for Trump for the president," he said.

What voters like Sandy do in the upcoming US election will help determine whether Donald Trump will

win a second term or whether the most controversial presidency in modern American history will come to an end.

In 2016, 81% of White Evangelical voters cast their ballots for the twice-divorced real estate tycoon who has been accused of sexual assault by more than a dozen women and allegedly had an extramarital affair with a porn star. Former Trump aides have said he views Evangelicals as easy targets to be "schmoozed, conned, or bought off". But that depiction belies a more complicated reality. Far from being duped or played by Trump, many Evangelicals are clear-eyed about the president's moral shortcomings – and they're voting for him anyway. This strange, symbiotic relationship is a product of the dynamics at play among American Evangelicals, and it helps explain both the way Trump has governed and how he is fighting this election.

The battle for Evangelical hearts and minds is broadly taking place on two fronts: the president's character, and his record. Trump is arguably losing on the former but winning on the latter. "I'm happy with a lot of what's happened in terms of policy," said Sandy, a self-described libertarian-leaning conservative who voted for Trump in 2016. He thinks Trump should be "more careful about the way he spoke" but likes the president's stances on trade, foreign policy, immigration and abortion.

"I would say Donald Trump in a million years doesn't reflect my moral values. But that's not what I'm doing in the voting booth. I'm looking for policies that will be enacted to move this country in a better direction."

Evangelicals make up roughly a quarter of the US population, or about 80 million people. Of them, 76% are white, 6% are black, and 11% are Latino, and political preferences are strongly divided along racial lines. Nearly half of white Evangelicals identify as Republican versus only 5% and 19% of blacks and Hispanics, respectively. Fully 70% of black Evangelicals identify as Democrats.

The states with the highest percentage of Evangelicals are reliably Republican: West Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas,



Tennessee. But even in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin – swing states Trump won by razor thin margins – the population of white Evangelicals is about 15%, enough to make the difference in an electoral college in which what matters is the number of states a candidate wins, not the overall number of votes (Trump lost the popular vote to Hillary Clinton in 2016).

To the casual observer, support for the president by anyone who purports to follow Jesus is unfathomable.

Understanding that dynamic means delving into the history of Evangelical politics over the last few decades, a period of time during which Evangelicals suffered a string of defeats in the courts.

In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled that prayer in public schools was unconstitutional, the first shot in what would become a protracted culture war. In 1973, the Court established the constitutional right to abortion.

Around this time, some high-profile church leaders and their followers began to flex their political muscle.

Evangelicals helped propel Ronald Reagan – who, like Trump, recognised the untapped political power of religious voters – to a landslide victory over Jimmy Carter in 1980.

But the march toward more progressive social policy went on, culminating in the legalisation of gay marriage in 2015. For Evangelicals, all of this signalled the decline of Christian values, a fear compounded by rapidly changing demographics, the 9/11 terror attacks, the decimation of blue-collar work, and an increasingly partisan media environment, which served to heighten Evangelicals' sense of being under siege.

Then, along came Trump.

When Donald Trump arrived on the scene, he tapped into the grievances that had been simmering within the Evangelical community for years. He campaigned on a wish list of Evangelical priorities that included restricting abortion, strengthening religious freedom, and strengthening America's alliance with Israel. "This will be so great for religion," he proclaimed.

And for many Evangelicals, it has

been. Three days after being inaugurated as president, he signed an executive order reinstating and dramatically expanding the Mexico City Policy (referred to by advocates of abortion access as "the global gag rule"), which cuts foreign assistance to organisations providing abortion.

To head up the Department of Health and Human Services, he picked abortion opponent Alex Azar, who promptly established a Conscience and Religious Freedom Division and chose an anti-abortion lawyer to run it. The division, which was set up to "enforce laws and regulations that protect conscience and prohibit coercion on issues such as abortion and assisted suicide (among others)," introduced a rule that would have allowed healthcare workers not directly involved in the provision of medical care to deny services based on conscience – an anti-abortion ambulance driver could legally refuse to transport a woman seeking to end an ectopic pregnancy on the basis of his faith, for example. The rule was voided by a judge before it could go into effect, but not before the administration had signalled a willingness to take extreme measures to restrict abortion access.

In January, Trump delighted abortion opponents by becoming the first sitting US president to attend the March for Life rally, an annual gathering of anti-abortion activists, proclaiming, to wild applause, that "Unborn children have never had a stronger defender in the White House"

He has appointed three conservative justices to the Supreme Court who, with the exception of Neil Gorsuch, have publicly opposed abortion, a remaking of the court that could chip away at abortion access, if not overturn *Roe v. Wade* entirely.

In 2018, Trump fulfilled another campaign promise by moving the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. "That's for the Evangelicals," he said at the time. For many Christians, the move is a prerequisite to a particular Evangelical interpretation of the end times. By recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital,

Trump effectively sided with Israel in its decades-long conflict with Palestine, which matters to Evangelicals who believe Jesus will one day return to Israel to establish a new messianic kingdom. Past presidents, including Bill Clinton, George W Bush, and Barack Obama, have made similar promises but never followed through for fear of adding fuel to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a boon to Evangelicals who oppose LGBTQ rights, the Trump administration has denied permission for US embassies overseas to fly the pride flag.

Trump has also made the fight against human trafficking a feature of his presidency, linking the problem to illegal immigration at the US border. Human trafficking, and especially sex trafficking, is a major issue on the religious right, in part because it is seen as a violation of female chastity and is often linked to the production of pornography. In 2018, Trump signed a bill giving prosecutors greater legal powers to go after websites that host advertisements for sex work. He has also increased funding to organisations combatting sex trafficking, many of which are faith-based, and in October announced the creation of a new Center for Countering Human Trafficking within the Department of Homeland Security.

These and other policy decisions have made Trump a hero for many on the religious right, who see the president as a bold leader who acts on his promises. But his appeal to Evangelical voters goes beyond policymaking. Trump has empowered Evangelicals who feel they are being silenced by the progressive left. "What you see right now is, if I bring something up that concerns me or that I have a problem with, there is an X immediately put on me as some kind of zealot," said Tony Suarez, a pastor from Tennessee and member of the president's evangelical advisory board. "But if the LGBTQ community brings it up, another liberal entity brings it up, there's almost like an automatic acceptance."

For Evangelical voters, Trump's unfiltered bombast has been a kind of



PRAYERS ANSWERED: Religious leaders pray alongside Donald Trump at the King Jesus International Ministry in Miami  
Photo: Scott McIntyre/The Washington Post via Getty Images



BELIEF: People pray before Donald Trump speaks at an 'Evangelicals for Trump' campaign rally at the King Jesus International Ministry in Miami

Photo: Getty Images



unmuzzling. Evangelical leaders now not only have the president's ear, they have been appointed to positions in the highest echelons of government, right up to his vice president, Mike Pence. Trump regularly invites Evangelical leaders into the Oval Office to discuss policy matters (and, on at least one occasion, they have also prayed over him). "The access has been unprecedented," Suarez said.

While there's little doubt that Trump will win the majority of white Evangelical votes in November, there are signs that his support may be slipping. As of October 2020, 78% of registered white Evangelical voters said they would vote for the president, a three percentage point drop from 2016.

Trump's bungled handling of the coronavirus pandemic has likely dampened his support – just under half of American Evangelicals are over the age of 50 and at greater risk of serious illness if they contract the virus.

Even a small drop in support could make a difference. In 2016, Trump won slightly more support from white Evangelicals than did John McCain in 2008 (73%) and Mitt Romney in 2012 (79%). That strong showing may have made the difference in key swing states. There are roughly two million Evangelical adults in Michigan and in Pennsylvania, states Trump won by the smallest of margins: 11,000 and 44,000 votes, respectively. To win a second term, Trump will likely need a similarly strong showing among Evangelical voters.

For some Evangelicals, though, Trump's lack of decorum is hard to overcome. "Some people would argue that that person's character can be separated from their policies," said Renee, a 63-year-old Evangelical voter from Kentucky who did not want to be identified by her full name for fear of professional repercussions. "I agree with that to some extent. But, ideally, I want the person who's sitting in the Oval Office to be someone who treats other people with respect... I'm just constantly dismayed by the conduct of the president."

Still, she can't bring herself to vote for Biden because of what she views as an extreme stance on abortion and a lack of commitment to religious liberty. "Those are things that would make it very difficult for me – really impossible – to vote for their ticket," said Renee, who did not vote for Trump in 2016. She is considering 'writing in' a candidate this November (in the US system, voters are allowed to write a name on their ballot in lieu of choosing between the official candidates, even if the person named doesn't exist or isn't running for office).

Four years ago, Democrats were accused of not fighting hard enough to win voters like Renee. This time, they, and others who oppose Donald Trump, are keen not to make the same mistake again.

Jerushah Duford is the granddaughter of the late founder of modern Evangelicalism Billy Graham. For most of her life, she was a Republican. But in October, she urged her fellow Evangelicals to vote for Joe Biden, saying she doesn't need a saviour in the White House because, "We have a saviour". (That would be Jesus Christ).

Duford was joined by more than 1,600 faith leaders who also endorsed the former vice president. A coalition of anti-Trump Republicans and faith organisations, including the Lincoln Project, Vote Common Good, and Faith 2020, have also coalesced around Biden. The group, which has been producing a series of hard-hitting videos critical of the president, is touring the country with one goal in mind: siphon voters of faith away from Trump. "In every sense of the word, [Trump] is the opposite of Christ," said Darrell Johnson, a 63-year-old, pro-life Evangelical and former lifelong Republican from Los Angeles who lives with his wife in the Philippines. "I lived my life for Christ for decades and this is the result?" he said. "I feel very alienated from other 'brothers.'" Johnson now

## US ELECTION 2020

# This is no normal election.. how to watch the big vote

**STEVE ANGLESEY with the timetable for events**

**next Tuesday night**

**and Wednesday**

**morning**



Britons have got used to waking up the morning after the US elections and knowing right away whether to happily spring out of bed for the TV remote or groan and pull the covers back over their eyes. The last three elections have been all over by breakfast time in the UK, and in 2004 – though he didn't admit it until much later in the day – we all knew John Kerry was toast while we were eating ours.

This convenient timing is helped by the early district-by-district tallies that emerge even when voting has yet to close, and still further by the fact that unlike our 10pm deadlines, polls have closed in 40 of the 50 states, plus Washington DC, by 9pm Eastern Standard Time. But this time, that's where the good news ends.

Though national and state polls point to a convincing Joe Biden win, complications arising from early voting by post and in-person mean even that scenario may not be confirmed until much later than normal. More than 70 million Americans have voted early – there were 130 million total votes in 2016 – but while some states will count early votes before on-the-day polling even opens, others won't start until it closes completely. Some will give the results of early voting first, some will do it last.

Some swing states – the key marginals – allow ballots to arrive late, most notably Ohio (by November 13, 10 days after the election).

All this is fertile ground for cock-ups – in 2000, TV networks called Florida for Al Gore around 1am UK time on election night; the crucial state and the presidency were eventually confirmed to have been won by George Bush five weeks later – as well as Trumpian conspiracy theories about stolen votes and rigged wins.

With eight days to go, the president was tweeting about non-existent “big problems and discrepancies with mail-in ballots all over the USA” and the need to “have (a) final total on November 3rd”.

The twin threats of mistakes and dangerous misinformation look certain to make US pollsters even more queasy about racing to predict who has captured key states and the White House itself. Here is what to watch for through the night and the next day...

**11pm UK (6pm EST in the USA )** ITV's optimistically-titled election night coverage *Trump Vs Biden: The Results* begins, with Tom Bradby hosting. But even projected results are over an hour away...

**11.30pm UK (6.30pm EST)** The BBC's election night programming starts, with Katy Kay and Andrew Neil on BBC One, the BBC News Channel and the iPlayer.

**Midnight UK (7pm EST)** Polls close in swing state Georgia (with 16 votes in the electoral college; 270 are needed to win), South Carolina (leaning Trump in recent polls), Virginia and Vermont



► From page 9

considers himself an independent and has already cast an absentee ballot for Biden.

Michelle Ferrigno Warren, an Evangelical Democrat from Colorado who grew up Republican but recently ran for Congress as a Democrat, is also voting for Biden. “There is a legitimate Republican ideology about limited government, the way we view economics, taxes, etc.,” she said. “But Trump doesn't represent any of that... He's overtly going out and mocking people who are weak, mocking people who are poor, acting like people owe him. And that is completely antithetical to, not just the theology of an Evangelical, but anybody who believes in God.”

A handful of polls have shown that at least some Evangelical voters are listening. A poll conducted by Vote Common Good of Catholic and Evangelical voters in swing states (Florida, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin), found an 11-point swing from Trump to Biden, who

is Catholic, as compared to 2016. “President Trump's perceived lack of kindness is in fact driving faith voters away in large enough numbers to potentially affect the outcome of the election,” said co-founder and executive director of Vote Common Good Doug Pagitt, who added “We'll see to it that it does.”

That prospect has the Trump campaign worried. The president and his surrogates have ramped up their charm offensive toward Christian voters, making more frequent nods to religion in the lead up to the election. In addition to the visit to St John's Church, Trump was featured in a video while receiving treatment for Covid-19 in which he said: “We have things happening that look like they're miracles coming down from God.” Trump is not known for using religious vernacular, so the words were almost certainly included as an appeal to Evangelicals.

The appeals have also been more explicit. Last week, the president's son, Eric Trump, hosted a rally dubbed “Evangelicals for Trump: Praise, Prayer, and Patriotism.” He was not subtle. “God

is on our side on this one,” the younger Trump said, telling the crowd (with no apparent irony) that we need “more people reading the bible” and that Democrats were “the party of the atheists.”

It's hard to overestimate the importance of Evangelicals to Trump's political designs or the deliberateness with which he has carried out their agenda during his first term in office. While Trump's presidency has often been fitful and unfocused, his overtures toward Evangelicals have been remarkably consistent.

With calculated precision, Trump has made himself an avatar of the Evangelical cause, enacting their agenda with mechanical efficiency while repeatedly deploying the rhetoric and symbolism of religion.

Counterintuitively, these overtures often collide with the more distasteful elements of Trump's base, which exist adjacent to – and even overlap with – church communities. Warren believes that modern Evangelicalism is bound together by “a parasite of white supremacy”, a problem that has been

written about extensively. It was so widespread that, in 2016, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Evangelical protestant group in the US called on its members to stop displaying the confederate flag, which is widely considered a racist symbol.

That could help explain why Trump's racist dog whistles have done little to damage his white Evangelical support. In the wake of the death of a protester in Charlottesville at the hands of a neo-Nazi, Trump said “there were some very fine people on both sides.” He has also repeatedly refused to denounce the ‘Proud Boys’, a white supremacist group that, in the first presidential debate, he told to “stand back and stand by”.

In a recent town hall, the president also refused to condemn the right-wing conspiracy group known as Q-Anon, which emerged in 2017 and has been peddling the baseless theory, flourishing in some Evangelical circles, that progressives are part of a deep state, Satan-worshipping cabal of paedophiles. In the group's rendering, Trump is held up as a saviour.

(both solid Biden). We'd normally start seeing the US networks 'call' the projected winners of states from now on, but this time they might hold back because of the postal voting factor.

**12.30am UK (7.30pm EST)** Polls close in Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia, all solid Trump states. More interesting are North Carolina (15 votes, Republican in 2012 and 2016 but leaning Biden and tipped to produce a result fairly quickly because the state has okayed early counting) and bellwether state Ohio (18 votes, not picked a loser in a presidential election since 1960, slightly leaning Trump).

**1am UK (8pm EST)** Polls close in the Republican strongholds of Alabama, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee, while Biden will be confident of taking Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois (20 votes), Rhode Island, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Washington DC, as well as a share of Maine, which splits its electoral college votes. The big prizes which also close now are both leaning to Biden. Florida is worth 29 votes and we could get a quickish call because of early counting. Pennsylvania is a must-win for Biden and worth 20 votes, but there's no early counting and it may turn out to be the one we're all waiting for at the end of the night...

**1.30am UK (8.30pm EST)** The polls close in Arkansas – once Clinton country; now solid Trump. But more exciting things are coming...

**2am UK (9pm EST)** Polling is over in Kansas, Louisiana, North and South Dakota and Wyoming, all Trump bastions. Nebraska closes too and splits its votes, but they will all go to Trump. No more voting in Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, New York (29 votes), New Mexico and Wisconsin, which should all be Biden's. The ones to watch are Arizona (leaning Biden) and Texas (a massive 38 votes and has seen huge early voting, but Biden's final debate

talk of phasing out oil may have cost him any slender chance of an upset). In a normal election, you'd expect the noise around Ohio and Florida to be increasing around now... but this is not a normal election.

**3am UK (10pm EST)** That's it for voting in the swing state of Iowa, which normally goes Democrat but which Trump won bigly last time. He holds a slight edge now. Montana and Utah are almost certain Trump wins too, but Biden has big hopes for Nevada, which has picked the winner in nine of the last 10 elections.

**4am UK (11pm EST)** It's over in California, with its huge 55 votes, Oregon, Washington (all solid Biden) and Idaho (solid Trump). In a cut-and-dried race, this is when you would expect the US networks to start calling the final result, as happened with Barack Obama in 2008.

**5am UK (Midnight EST)** No more voting in Hawaii, which will be declared for Biden soon afterwards.

**6am UK (1am EST)** Polls close in Trump stronghold Alaska and voting in the 202 US election is over. By 6.30am last time out it was clear that he would win the presidency. Meanwhile, ITV's election coverage ends and is replaced by recovering Trump fan Piers Morgan and *Good Morning Britain*.

**1pm UK (8am EST)** The BBC's coverage finally ends – a mammoth effort but possibly wise. It took John Kerry until 4pm UK time to concede in 2004.

**December 14** The date when Electoral College voters meet to ratify the result. Not tempting fate, but it took until December 12 for George W Bush to be declared president-elect in 2000.

**January 20, 2021** The new president is inaugurated. Will the future be bright? Or will it be orange?

"What I do hear about it is they are strongly against paedophilia, and I agree with that," the president said." (A cynical view of Trump's anti-trafficking fervour is that he is playing to the conspiracy theory, which has flourished in some religious circles and been egged on by his eldest son).

It's unclear how much of any of this will make a difference in November. Nationally, the majority of white Evangelicals (and perhaps an increasing number of Latino Evangelicals) appear willing to tolerate the president's behaviour in order to advance a particular brand of Christianity. But American elections are decided at the state level, and even a small drop in Trump's Evangelical support in individual states could hand the presidency to Biden. It's also not a foregone conclusion that, should Trump win a second term, he would double down on the Make Evangelicals Feel Great Again agenda that has defined his first. With nothing more to gain and no reelection prospects, it's possible that Trump's transactional approach to politics would lead him to turn his focus

elsewhere (to setting up his post-presidential business interests, for example).

Even supporters like Sandy have doubts about the earnestness of Trump's religious convictions." It's guesswork no matter who I'm looking at," he said. Since he can't be sure, he said his "back-up plan" is to vote for the candidate who best reflects the policies he believes in.

"If I could be absolutely certain about someone's convictions... that would absolutely affect my vote," Sandy said. "I just don't think I can with anybody."

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**Tortoise**

**PIVOTAL MOMENT:**  
People wait in line outside a Masonic temple in Brooklyn as early voting begins on October 24 in New York City

Photo: Spencer Platt/Getty Images



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## AGENDA

# Carving up incompetence



## MICHAEL WHITE ON THE WEEK GOVERNMENT'S OWN GOALS GAVE US FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As Britain's future trade talks with the EU 27 edge towards what we hope will be some sort of amicable resolution, at home Boris Johnson grapples over free school meals with a 22-year-old footballer who didn't win the Eton-and-Oxford Lottery. It made me think of a long-dead trades union activist whom I admired. Moderate but meticulous, unflashily determined, Mick was the antithesis of the noisy militants who – so I noticed in my 20s – were often happier to settle for a good headline than to devil away at the negotiating substance.

Beneath the laughter, Mick was a bit of a puritan, a thoughtful and erudite working class Londoner, who disliked swearing but did detail. How he would have despised the over-entitled, none-too-fastidious public schoolboys who have managed to scramble back to power after a 40-year exclusion by voters. Manchester United's modest Marcus Rashford and his practical efforts to feed hungry children – as he once was himself – would have been much more to Mick's taste.

Food fights prompt faint memories of James Gillray's immortal 1805 cartoon, *The Plumb-pudding in danger*. It's the one that portrays William Pitt the Younger and the newly-self-crowned Emperor Napoleon, both in military plumage and carving up the globe like a Christmas pud. Johnson is no Pitt, whose relentless hard work – prime minister for most of his adult life – had worn him into an early grave by 45. It is the age at which Napoleon met his Waterloo and Boris his Waterloo Station as new London mayor.

EU trade negotiator, Michel Barnier, is no Bonaparte either. But he comes to the trade carve-up meticulously prepared and – doubtless to his great relief – seems to have been given more latitude for negotiating compromises by his elected masters on the European Council. Patience, attention to detail and timing, these are the crucial ingredients of a successful outcome – as they probably are of goal-scoring in Premier League football. A dash of flamboyance often helps things along. But Angela Merkel can't have everything.

Alas, poor Boris. In a generation of dull politicians, flamboyance is his unique selling point and it's not enough. As public affection wanes and trust diminishes in the Boris brand, Manchester United striker Rashford – 23 on Saturday – seems to be carving the largest slice in 2020's Christmas Pudding Fight. The PM talks tough and ostensibly refuses to back down in the face of a backbench, even ministerial revolt, but his "no children to go hungry this winter" pledge sounds like surrender by other means. Good.

It need not have been like this if his Brexit-compliant cabinet had more experience, more political nous, a greater willingness to tell the boss what he might not want to hear. Occasional squeals

emerge from the cabinet table, followed by tabloid-briefed retribution. Messrs Gove, Sunak and Hancock demonstrate some independence while Gavin Wilkinson leaks to pin the tabloid blame for school meals failure on the Treasury. Bad move, Gav.

The country pays a price for the poor quality of our current politics, style as well as substance. Honest citizens can disagree over Manchester metro-mayor, Andy Burnham's stand-off with Whitehall over the exact amount of central government grant that the region should get to compensate for tier three restrictions. Was Burnham just grandstanding for political gain when he could have settled for the proffered £60 million, asked some?

Fair enough, though I disagree. As Britain's second city – Birmingham has under-performed in recent decades – Manchester had a decent case. Burnham was making a wider point about better consultation and the vulnerability of some communities – low wage and frontline workers – to the economic and medical consequences of second wave Covid. We don't have to believe the "King of the North" froth (though Keir Starmer must have clocked it) to agree that Manchester's Burnham – like Manchester's Rashford – has been winning the PR battle.

Greater Manchester MP, Sir Graham Brady, the Tory backbench shop steward, was on the local team, and mid-week Red Wall Tories – who don't have much experience to sustain them – banged out a warning letter to Number 10 about the widening north-south divide, "levelling up" ambitions cruelly exposed by the pandemic. "Where's the clear road map out?" they asked, as morale and compliance sagged and embattled hospital staff sounded very tired. Do you know anyone who now understands the lockdown rules?



Such dramas are taking place all over Europe this autumn, each country revealing its distinctive regional and cultural contours. Among northern England's complainants was Jake Berry, MP for Rossendale and Darwen – near the centre of the tier three vortex – Berry was an important and early Boris-for-PM organiser, an ex-'Northern Powerhouse' minister whose loyalty has carelessly not been rewarded. In this resentful climate voters remember that, as an inattentive *Spectator* editor, Boris once sanctioned a wounding attack on Liverpool.

So damage is being done by sloppy politics. How can it not be when local boy Burnham amplifies the divisive refrain that the south is being selfishly callous to the needs of the formerly industrial north? Unlike many in those lazy BBC

vox pop interviews – so much easier than proper analysis – I don't think it's deliberate. As an economic migrant from Cornwall I blame ignorance, reinforced by indifference. Look how much harm ignorance has done to Ireland down the centuries – still is doing in those EU trade talks – and how Scotland's anger is vigorously being channelled into separatism.

Cornwall has long had a separatist movement, Wales too, of course. Do we really want indie Manchester? No, we want proper and inclusive leadership which consults and listens outside the Golden Triangle formed by Eton, Oxford and West London. Restauranteur and government 'food tsar' Henry Dimbleby is Eton-and-Oxford media dynast too, but seems to be in touch and on top of the detail too.

Holiday clubs which provide support and educational activity – as well as nutritious food – to the neediest kids is better than extra money for universal credit claimants. Dimbleby cogently argues from home in Hackney. Across London in Johnson's Hillingdon constituency – inside that Golden Triangle between the M4 and M40, as his old seat in Henley was – local food bank volunteers ask "Where's Boris?"

Which leads me back to the government's Internal Market Bill (IMB), this week going through its detailed committee stage in the Lords. That's right, it's the one which only breaks an international treaty in a "specific and limited" way if Number 10 does not get what it wants from Barnier. The Frenchman's decision to stay in London for talks this week – instead of returning to a Covid-smitten Brussels (he has already had Covid-19 once) – was taken as a sign of progress by the clutching-at-straws lobby, though the pandemic-obsessed media has paid scant attention to this rival scourge.

Let us emulate most of Fleet Street and tiptoe past the negotiations in this week's column, pausing only to wish them well in making the best of a bad job. In comparing their Lordships' performance to the craven Commons majority, let us for the moment also park the legislation's proposed illegality. Instead let's focus on its domestic impact, economic and legal, but also constitutional.

What I had not fully grasped when we first discussed the bombshell bill here (TNE #211) was the existence of a post-Brexit procedure called the 'common frameworks' committee. It was devised to smooth the repatriation of 154 trade and related commercial regulations and standards which were deemed to intersect between the UK and the three devolved nations. They had all been handled at EU level since Britain joined the then-common market in 1973 when there was no devolution.

Some powers over agriculture, the environment, justice, energy and – 38 of them – transport (etc) were deemed suitable to be reserved to the UK government, others designated to the devolved administrations while others were open to negotiation. Though Whitehall only wanted to devolve 40 of them, according to an excellent paper on the Institute for Government website, talks were going well amid mutual goodwill and cooperation on all sides, despite the four nations each having different parties in charge.



Then came the IMB, ostensibly to protect the UK's internal market cohesion from mischievous and malign "maximalist" pressure by EU negotiators bent on dividing Northern Ireland from mainland Britain via the Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP) which Boris Johnson hailed as "fantastic" barely a year ago. To all but the most diehard Brexit loyalists – who didn't include Lords Michael Howard and Norman Lamont on this occasion – its real purpose was to scare the EU 27 into making concessions to a Britain prepared to risk a no-deal outcome.

But it was done without prior consultation with the devolved governments who have a right (Holyrood has already voted to do so) to withhold their consent, or with the judges and wider legal profession. Lord Judge, a former Lord Chief Justice, reminded peers as much during last week's second reading debate – when 100 members, mostly hostile to the IMB, spoke in grave and anxious terms. What they described was a twofold domestic threat, one to extend the executive power of government to use secondary legislation – ministerial statutory instruments (SIs) to amend primary legislation (bills) – on an unprecedented scale.

The other fear is that the measure amounts to a power grab by Whitehall in the name of protecting an internal market which has always enjoyed a degree of 'managed divergence'. Scottish home-building regulation reflects the colder climate of Orkney against Surrey. Welsh plastic bag laws and Scottish smoking bans were pioneering divergence. The Cameron government supported Scotland's alcohol minimum unit pricing reform in the European Court of Justice (ECJ). Scottish law, education and religious settlement still reflect the compromises of the 1707 Act of Union.



Is all this threatened? Is the common framework process now redundant? Lord Callanan, the junior business minister



who introduced the measure, told peers it is not. On regulation, as on state aid and 'structural funds' – the EU's regional policies will now be called the 'shared prosperity fund' – ministers promise "a much more collaborative approach" towards devolved and local authorities. "Ask Andy Burnham," a naughty peer might well have shouted, but the upper house retains pre-Twitter habits of courtesy. For his part, Callanan raised the improbable spectre of Welsh lamb being unable to be sold in Scotland.

Callanan is a Geordie project engineer who got an early taste for politics, a councillor and jobbing MEP until he lost his seat in 2014. To colleagues' astonishment, he did not even mention the illegalities in clauses 44-45 and 47. Nick True, a veteran Tory peer whom I both like and respect, did not do much better in his winding up speech. Disappointingly, True took the (untrue?) party line. The offending clauses are a "contingent and potential power" only, ones would be only be deployed – subject to a vote of MPs (ho, ho) – if EU bad faith forces ministers to choose between the rule of law and the integrity of the UK, True insisted.

Faced with such a choice, the German constitutional court in Karlsruhe would do much the same. So would the ECJ to

advance the *acquis communautaire*, said the bill's more sophisticated supporters, correctly so. I do not include those among Lord Matt Ridley's dozen pro-Brexit, anti-lockdown peers, whom we teased here two weeks ago. Lord Lamont excepted, most had only platitude to contribute, but took their chance to reproach Archbishop Welby for sticking his nose into the row. Welby argued that upholding the law is a cornerstone of Christian morality. How dare he!



Thatcher cabinet veterans, Lords Peter Lilley and Michael Forsyth (poll tax champion!), were unapologetic in justifying Team Johnson's action as a response to the EU negotiating in bad faith. Lord Gavin Barwell, Theresa May's chief of staff, was not alone in retaliating: the EU feels the same about us. Team Barnier had told May to her face that it wasn't that they mistrust her, but that she wasn't going to last much longer, he recalled. They feared whoever came after her in Number 10. Long memories in Brussels remember Bent Bananas Boris of the *Daily Telegraph*.

Inevitably most lordly firepower was on the anti-bill side and duly registered

its disdain by passing (395 votes to 169) Lord Judge's reproachable amendment regretting the legal breach. Peers do not reject second readings which carry election manifesto endorsement. Only one speech I spotted urged them to refuse formal third reading consent if the NIP clauses remain in the bill – because Johnson needs the bill by December 31 for his ploy to work at all. "On this occasion the power is in their Lordships hands," said no less a figure than Lord Butler of Brockwell.

Being a former cabinet secretary makes him almost as grand as the Archbishop, alas no politician. Outright revolt is not going to happen, but Butler's argument that the rule of law and the constitution matter more is strong stuff from a pillar of the establishment. A chap called Lord Clarke of Nottingham was also among the scornful, baffled majority, but he turns out to be Ken Clarke in his new billet, so we'd expect it of him.

A law-breaking blot on Britain's reputation, it addresses an unlikely hypothetical threat in the Irish Sea without resolving it. It threatens both the Irish peace and – in Scotland – the very Union it purports to defend. What's there to applaud? "A half decent diplomat"

could sort out the practical border problems in an hour, boasted Lord Charlie Falconer, Tony Blair's redoubtable Lord Chancellor. More than half-decent, Lord John Kerr, ex-FCO head, called the whole shambles a bad case of "buyer's remorse" by Boris, repudiating a triumph he had so recently proclaimed. Ministers had brought it all on themselves.

All the same I was struck by the short contribution from worldly historian, Robert Skidelsky. The biographer of JM Keynes, he quoted the great economist saying "I want lawyers to help me act legally to go on doing sensible things in unforeseen conditions". The bill's justification may be weak, its motives questionable, Lord Skidelsky suggested. But the critical variable lies in its consequences: will Britain's breach of international law prove damaging or will it lead to a pragmatic deal as the EU backs off?

To soon to say, he concluded. But this is an introverted country, one where a centralising leader cynically takes further constitutional power to himself – a blond Henry VIII – and Moody's credit rating agency further downgrades Britain without eliciting much of a shrug. We are already on a slippery slope.

## AGENDA

# The West is wounded in the fight for free speech

Self-censorship, cancel culture, terrorism, fake news... the threat to freedom of expression has changed, says JOHN KAMPFNER. And we are not yet in a good position to defend it



What do the beheading of a teacher in France, the suspension of a digital portal in Belarus and tweets about postal ballots in the US elections have in common?

They are all different ways in which freedom of expression is being abused. The issue is sometimes seen as ephemeral, but it shouldn't be. It is one of the most fundamental freedoms of all; it is more in peril now than it has ever been; it is under attack on a number of fronts. And it has become far more complicated to navigate.

The gruesome murder of Samuel Paty outside a school near Paris brought to the fore the collision between the right to discuss issues, no matter how sensitive, and the 'right' to take offence (which may exist in the mind but not in law). President Emmanuel Macron has seized on the horror to reassert the importance of *laïcité*, which decrees that all public spaces in France should be free of religion.

The second assault is the most tried and tested – violence or coercion by the state against reporters or anyone seeking

to uncover inconvenient truths. These methods have traditionally been the preserve of dictatorships, but in these confusing populist times the lines between authoritarian regimes and so-called democracies are blurred.

The organisation Article-19 reported recently that more than half the global population is living in a country where free speech is in crisis. "We have seen a deterioration of the right to speak, to know and to be heard over the years, but 2019 created a perfect storm, with the confluence of protests, internet shutdowns and the increased attacks on journalists and human rights offenders," it said. At the end of last year 250 journalists were languishing in prison. In the course of 2019, 57 journalists had been killed, with an impunity rate of around 90% (in other words, the perpetrators got away with it). Its annual ratings put China, India, Turkey, Russia, Bangladesh and Iran at the bottom.

Belarus, with its violent suppression of protest, arrests and harassment of locally-based reporters and ban on

foreign correspondents, is hurtling down the ladder. Far more effective, and far harder to counter are the non-violent exertions of power – the take-down of independent media online using tech, legal or financial means.

By far the most dangerous of all the various assaults on freedom of expression is misinformation, and its more intentional sister, disinformation taking place right in the heart of the Western world.

The corrosion began before Donald J Trump arrived at the White House but over the past four years it has become embedded as one of the main tools of government. The United States, author Emily Bazelon writes in the *New York Times Magazine*, "is drowning in lies". Aka fake news.

The authoritarian right around the world has taken its cue from Trump, although the disease is not the preserve of one political viewpoint. Some just do it better than others. During the presidential election campaign, the Republican camp elided fact with

fiction, inventing and distorting with alacrity.

If its main goal doesn't work, to change a voter's mind, there is still the chance that the individual will succumb to despondency. "The spewing of falsehoods isn't meant to win any battle of ideas," Bazelon writes. "Its goal is to prevent the actual from being fought, by causing us simply to give up." That means finding every way possible to dissuade anyone not in Trump's base from voting.

Apart from the Republican party, the other beneficiary are the online platforms, notably Facebook and Twitter, whose business model requires keeping users engaged. The more outrageous the comment, the greater the number of clicks. Anything goes, pretty much. In spite of their professions to be monitoring malicious or false content, they have proven time and again that they have no interest in upholding democratic norms.

A decade ago I was running another freedom of expression group, Index on Censorship. We played a major role in

**FREEDOM FIGHT:** Crowds in Paris pay tribute to teacher Samuel Paty, who was murdered for showing cartoons relating to the *Charlie Hebdo* controversy in a lesson on free speech

Photo: Getty Images



disapprove. At least as salient is a line from a famous Supreme Court ruling in 1927 by judge Louis Brandeis. "If there be time to expose through discussion the falsehood and fallacies, to avert the evil by the processes of education, the remedy to be applied is more speech, not enforced silence," he said. In other words, good will always out.

A century on, much as we might wish it, does this remedy still hold true? The problem has gone far beyond the issues of state power. No two people, it seems, can agree on what freedom of expression entails any more, or where its boundaries lie.

To go back to the French case: the murder was an act of revenge, or 'punishment', against Paty for showing pupils in his class the cartoons relating to the *Charlie Hebdo* controversy. He was telling the class about the ethical issues that stemmed from the attack by Islamist gunmen on the satirical magazine after it published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. He didn't self-censor. He showed them one of the illustrations.

Macron has pledged "concrete action", vowing that "fear will change sides". But many in France's Muslim communities, while condemning outright the slaying of the teacher, do not accept the principles of state secularism that the president was promising to defend.

This broader clash dates back to the *fatwa* issued by Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie in 1989 for publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Then came the murder of the Dutch director Theo van Gogh in 2004 and the Danish cartoon affair the year after.

These were the headline moments. But disputes such as this are going on all the time, mercifully very few of them leading to violence.

The fury of the liberal left, now disparaged as the 'woke' brigade, is also based in a requirement to redraw the boundaries of what is deemed 'acceptable' or 'appropriate' speech, leading to self-questioning or self-censorship (depending on your point of view) among journalists, authors, artists across the world.

American columnist Bret Stephens has recently written of a "default to a middle position" that presupposes causing offence as the flip side of terrorist violence. "It reintroduces a concept of blasphemy into the liberal social order," he argues. It gives the prospectively insulted a de facto veto over what other people might say. It accustoms the public to an ever-narrower range of permissible speech and acceptable thought." He concludes: "It is as deadly an enemy of writing as has ever been devised."

Terrorism; state repression; manipulation of the truth; cancel culture. These are just a few of the disparate challenges to freedom of expression. My boundaries too have changed. I am more sensitive to sensitivities. I self-censor far more than I used to. Am I right to do so?

I search for trustworthy information and think I know where to find it, but I have nagging doubts. In this madness, there is a small amount of consolation. The problem will not disappear if Trump is evicted shortly from the White House. But it is hard to imagine the problem can get any worse.

If public life rediscovers some good old-fashioned civility and reliability, perhaps the search can begin for a new consensus around freedom of expression in this fraught digital age.

changing the UK's libel laws for the better, at least slightly. We highlighted abuses around the world. It was easier then. The issues were more black or white.

I was an uncompromising advocate for the freest interpretation of free speech. I struggled to comprehend other approaches. I remember giving the keynote speech at Amnesty's UK annual general meeting. I challenged those assembled to agree that free speech was as important a right as any of the others they were fighting for.

Many of the employees were not convinced. I wrote at the time: "Many people, particularly on the left, find it hard to disentangle a liberal society from an open society." I now realise that they had more of a point than I saw at the time. Is unbridled freedom of speech always the friend of liberal democracy?

I took my cues from the American First Amendment and the famous quotations of yesteryear. Most people can remember Voltaire and the defending to my death of your right to say something about which

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@thattimwalker

## Chilling news for Telegraph bosses

 In another momentous week, the story of how a group of researchers from Cambridge University had found that cold-water bathing may protect the brain from dementia slipped the minds of most of the national editors soon enough.

Not, however, on the *Daily Telegraph*, where it was deemed to be of the greatest importance by the editor **Chris Evans**. The story made the front page and health journalist **Maria Lally** was enlisted to write a prominent piece for the comment section in which she extolled the merits of this spartan practice. She said that **Hippocrates** was all for a dip in icy cold water. Victorian doctors had prescribed it for everything from bruising to hysteria and it could also be useful in treating depression and insomnia and boosting the immune system.

**Sir David** and **Sir Frederick Barclay**, pictured, always profess to have no say in what appears in the *Telegraph*, but it so happens they have themselves long been keen proponents of cold water bathing. The octogenarian identical twins attribute their own virility and mental agility to immersing themselves (separately) in icy water daily. They believe in the ritual so passionately they have even funded a cohort study into it at a London teaching hospital.

I am told the brothers did not fund this latest research – it was backed by the UK Dementia Research Institute and Medical Research Council – but a spokesman for **Sir Frederick** says he still believes his daily icy bath "keeps his mind alert and sharp". **Sir David** sadly doesn't talk to me any more.

Cold water bathing is also said to be good for the circulation, but whether it will help the *Daily Telegraph*'s remains to be seen. One year on from the **Barclays**' announcement that the title was up for sale, there are apparently no takers.

## Falling out

 Relations between **Lord Rothermere** and **Boris Johnson** are close to breaking point. The *Daily Mail* owner has let it be known that he wants all his staff back at their work stations, suited and booted, at his Kensington head office and is leading by example. He is concerned about how Johnson's handling of the coronavirus is impacting on his businesses, not least his events and exhibitions arm and the *Metro* titles,



 Jennifer Arcuri, pictured, disclosed to an unstartled world the other day that she had indeed had a sexual relationship with Boris Johnson.

I ask her whether she believes Johnson, given all the emotional baggage that he carries, including his troubled relationship with his father and the way he has treated the women in his life, is a fit and proper person to be prime minister. "That's an excellent question," she says, tantalisingly, but refuses to elaborate.

If Johnson thinks he's now heard the last from Arcuri, I fancy he is very much mistaken.

## Mayfair mob

 The journalist **Simon Heffer**'s name figured in one of the emails that **Brittany Kaiser**, the former Cambridge Analytica employee who appeared in Netflix's *The Great Hack*, has handed over to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport committee. It dates back to November 2015 when Heffer was among the attendees at an early Brexit campaign dinner at the private members' club 5 Hertford Street in Mayfair. Other guests included **Nigel Farage** and the **Barclays**. **Lord Deedes**, the *Telegraph*'s most celebrated

columnist, would not have been surprised by this gathering ill met by moonlight. In his authorised biography of Deedes, **Stephen Robinson** said that he considered Heffer's to be "the voice of a raucous, populist brand of Conservatism that was alien to the *Telegraph*'s culture and anathema to his own One Nation sympathies". Deedes didn't care for the direction the **Barclays** wanted to take the paper and he never forgave them for putting "a stinking mob" in charge of it.

## Johnson's judge

 Jennifer Arcuri, pictured, disclosed to an unstartled world the other day that she had indeed had a sexual relationship with Boris Johnson.

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# Meals row shows MPs need lessons in real life

As many politicians once again demonstrate that they are out of touch with ordinary people by voting against providing free school meals in holidays, is now the time to suggest that all politicians should undertake a series of 'internships' to build their knowledge and experience before they vote on matters that affect the public?

My proposal would be for each and every politician to undertake one week of 'work experience' each year during one of their recesses, where they would step outside of the Westminster bubble and back into real life. There would be a wide range of experiences across all sectors – working in a primary school, following a GP, living on benefits, working on a farm or in a small business, preferably alongside their constituents in their local community.

Further, by the time they get to be ministers one might hope that they have built a portfolio of experience relevant to their ministerial responsibilities, so that an education minister, might have worked in a school, shadowed a head teacher or studied with a 16- or 17-year-old; or a health minister might have worked in A&E, shadowed a nurse or seen how a person copes with chronic illness or disability.

I think people would welcome the opportunity to show politicians what 'real life' is like and I don't think it would be difficult or costly to organise. In subsequent elections, voters would be able to judge the candidates on their willingness to understand their own lives.

**Nick Roberts**  
Selly Oak

We hear a lot about children going hungry, but why is this happening when the government says that most state benefit claimants are already working?

The problem is simply that for years, the wages of retail employees, adult care workers and catering staff etc have increasingly fallen below the increases of others. Employees in the big retail stores are often forced to work most Saturdays, Sundays, bank holidays and many evenings, yet often for the national minimum wage for weekdays.

Creating a graded percentage increase for all Saturday, Sunday and bank holiday work with the going rate being +50% for Saturdays and double time for Sundays and bank holidays would lift thousands of the poorest workers out of poverty and above the benefits limit.

This would save the state indirectly subsidising multi-millionaire bosses. That makes common sense but that is lacking in modern Britain.

**Rev. Geoffrey Squire.**  
Youthlink (England & Wales)  
Barnstaple

One of Marcus Rashford's skills, shared by most top sports stars, is an ability to

## Animal readers of THE NEW EUROPEAN



Readers Ed and Trish Reid write: "Here is Max, poring over his *TNE* at home in Wrexham."

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mind that we cannot win, it will be another heroic British failure! Knowing Johnson, which way will he turn?

**Paul Graham**

## Raw deal

Steve Richards is right in "Stress of our own making" (*TNE* #216). The Vote Leave kamikaze generals have fashioned this trade deal brinkmanship in their own false image of this country's exceptionalism and how we as a nation show all the other countries how it is done. There was no pragmatism or even sanity displayed when this government refused to extend the transition arrangement in the midst of a deadly pandemic.

I expect there will be some kind of deal cobbled together because the EU does need one as well, but at what price to our reputation as a sensible country which led by good faith, fairness and a self-knowledge that we make mistakes, but more importantly learn from them.

Although if the grand finale is a dire no-deal, what's the betting this will be dressed up in the emperor's new clothes of a stupendous achievement?

**Judith A. Daniels**  
Cobholm

## Last battle

Michael White misses the point by mocking no-deal as a "Narnia Deal" ("Wardrobe malfunction", *TNE* #216).

Yes, Brexit always was a fantasy Ponzi scheme, but the Tory party have bet their family fortune on it, and turning back now would not be easy for Johnson, even if he tried.

For five years he has been making contradictory promises, hoping something would turn up 'on the night'. He now faces an awkward dilemma and has to jump one way or the other.

To get a deal now, Johnson would have to backtrack on the Internal Market Bill, and make humiliating compromises on fish, state aid and judicial arbitration. In return the UK gets a deal in which we pay tariffs on WTO terms, and co-operate with the EU on the multitude of specialist regulations that have been negotiated in the last nine months.

This deal would trigger a revolt of Tory backbenchers, or else raise the spectre of Farage returning with a resurrected Brexit Party, shouting betrayal.

On the other path, no-deal means the UK effectively declares UDI, rejects the Withdrawal Agreement and Irish protocol, and enters into a legal, trade and diplomatic dispute with our neighbours, all the minor agreements are suspended, no-one knows what the rules are, trade grinds to a halt, and we face a fishing stand-off in the Channel. All this will be blamed on the foreigners; the *Express* will be rousing the masses to resist the invading hordes, and Johnson will get his chance to be the great 'war leader'. Never

Steve Richards' depiction of Boris Johnson's delusional world, where imperial Britain still stands at the centre of some surreal world, can be the only rational explanation for the bouts of increasing policy insanity that has gripped his government as the final phase of our Brexit transition rapidly approaches.

Treating our closest European partners with a level of scorn and contempt more reminiscent of the diplomatic bullying of 19th century Raj governors than 21st century diplomacy is only matched by the indifference shown to the other leaders of our home nations and the mayors of our great northern cities over Covid restrictions, financial support and food aid to our poorest children.

Yet the remarkable restraint shown by the EU27 member states in the face of broken treaty promises and open hostility is now being exhausted to breaking point, as are relations between the UK home nations and Downing Street. Will humility eventually prevail? Unlikely.

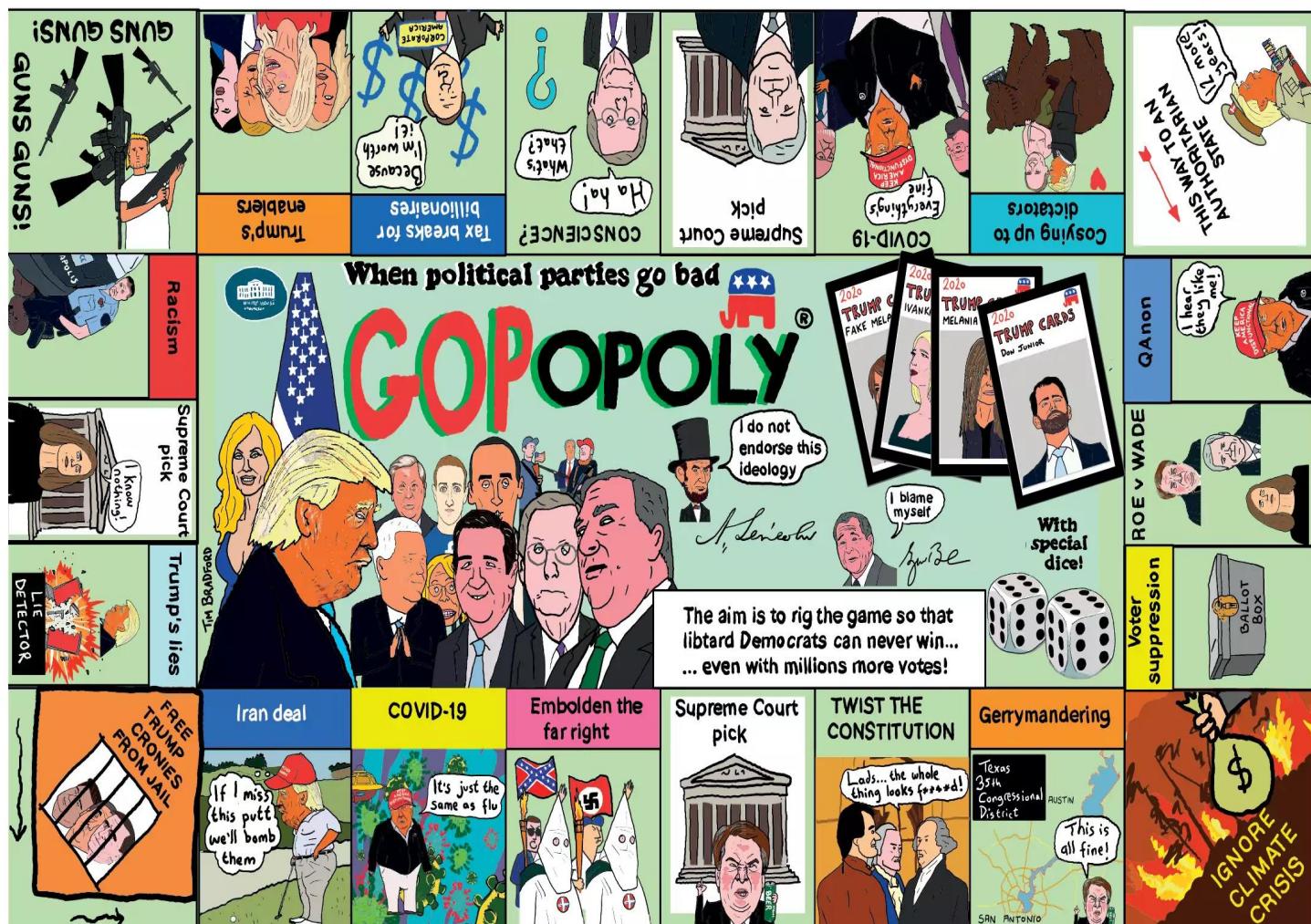
**Paul Dolan**  
Northwich

The EU demands a formal deal with the UK not just because "the British government is not trusted", as Steve Richards puts it, but because the EU is based on a rule of law. Everything the EU does must have a legal basis.

For example, Chapter 14 of the 2014 Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU and its member countries sets

**Anne Green**

## AGENDA



down a procedure for settling disputes. There is no suggestion that the Ukrainian government is not trusted.

Phil Jones  
High Wycombe

## Red wedding

John Cornell asked if readers would welcome a Leave voter into the family (Letters, TNE #216). My short answer is "no". However, my longer answer would be that the anger, chaos and division which have scarred our country since the referendum were not inevitable.

The dereliction of duty by David Cameron in not having any plan for a potential Leave win has led to the rise to power of the right wing of his party and the malign and vindictive government we are burdened with now.

I would never have been happy to leave the EU, but a less damaging 'soft Brexit' was once possible. At this remove from the vote, the prospective new family member's attitude to the last four years and the current government would actually be more critical.

Amanda Counsell  
Burgess Hill

## Nat fair

In "How Covid catalysed Wales", (TNE #216) we have yet another example of you printing a friendly article about rising nationalist parties within the UK. Why is a paper which ostensibly supports internationalism printing supportive

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pieces about nationalism? Nationalism is basically predicated on the notion of superiority to the 'other', always a dangerous attitude

Robert Llewellyn  
Milton Keynes

## Mobbed up

Reading Felia Allum's article "Why Covid is like the Mafia" (TNE #216), I was struck by the similarity to Johnson's government too. "Mafias are also interested in political power because that's where the big money lies."

Andrew Smith  
Southampton

## Joy ride

Reading Alastair Campbell's account of his trip to Freiburg ("Decency now in the ascendancy", TNE # 216) to check its green credentials reminded me of when I was there as a foreign language assistant in 1986/87. Even then the town seemed at the forefront of embracing its environmental concerns.

The monthly bus ticket was called an *Umweltschutz Monatskarte*, which translates as an 'environmental protection monthly card'. A clumsy translation perhaps, however, the intention was clear that 20 people travelling on one bus was preferable to 20 cars travelling into town.

David Lippatt  
Doune

## Big words

Steve Anglesey, while mentioning Steve Baker (TNE # 216), says "Could this be a ruse so Jacob Rees-Mogg can say 'antidisestablishmentarianism' in the Commons, and then grin like he's nanny's special boy?"

Mr Mogg, being an old fogey pedant, much like myself, would say "antidisestablishmentarianism", if only in an effort to (Canutely) turn back the tsunami of Americanisms polluting the English language! Maybe your Mr Trudgill could mediate the matter...

Joe Henderson  
Bere Regis

## Trudgill corner

My knowledge of the geography of Caledonia is not quite as bad as Donald Nichol from Galashiels suggests (Letters TNE #216). Hadrian's Wall really did, as I wrote, mark the northern limit of the Roman Empire - for something like 300 years.

The later more northerly and soon abandoned Antonine Wall which, I would like to assure him, I have actually visited, marked the northern limit for less than 20 years.

Peter Trudgill  
Norwich

## AGENDA

► From page 17

Can Peter Trudgill shed any light on moves to preserve the Swabian language (as opposed to the Swabian dialect spoken in Baden-Wuerttemberg and other parts of south-west Germany)?

Swabia was an important political entity in the middle ages, and extended from what is now Baden-Wuerttemberg into western Bavaria, Austria and Switzerland. It had its own political and administrative system and a distinct language.

According to Helmut, a friend who is a Swabian speaker, the language is close to extinction with maybe just a few hundred speakers left, mostly of a very advanced age.

There is a song – *Auf der Schwaebischen Eisenbahn*, to give it its mainstream German title – which gives an insight into the dialect. Google “Willi Reichert” to find the lyrics.

Does Peter know of any efforts to record and preserve Swabian? If you have come across the dialect, you will know some of the difficulties of understanding it.

My experience of listening to Helmut speaking the language is that it takes that degree of difficulty to a whole new level. However, that should not mean it is simply allowed to die out.

Phil Green

## Orange crush

It's hard to get the combined plodding momentum of the British media out of the middle lane – especially when that lane is so worn it has become a deep trench, but now is the time.

In a week Trump will be ousted and the US clear-up begins. At that point both the UK's Covid mess-ups and Brexit nonsense slip to 'has been' on the list of Britain's celebrity problems.

When the US goes back to the real world we're out here on our own...

Amanda Baker  
Edinburgh

If this really is the end for you know who – and at time of writing the polls suggest it is – then there is one thing I'll be glad to see the back of: Lee Greenwood's catchy but awful song *God Bless the USA*, aka 'I'm Proud to Be an American', which has become Trump's signature song. A ballad that best captures the United States most of us want to believe in is *The House I Live In* aka 'That's America to me'. It is most readily associated with Frank Sinatra and is featured in an eponymous Sinatra short film warning about the dangers of anti-Semitism that won a special Oscar in 1946.

Sinatra appears to have been a lifelong anti-racist. In 1958 he wrote in *Ebony Magazine*: "A friend to me has no race, no class and belongs to no minority. My friendships are formed out of affection, mutual respect and a feeling of having something in common. These are eternal values that cannot be classified."

Another top tune about the so-called 'American Dream' is *One Time, One Night* by one of the USA's greatest rock bands – East LA's Los Lobos. Perhaps Biden and Harris could adopt it as their anthem of a post-Trump USA.

Will Goble  
Rayleigh



TORTURED: Lawrence Olivier speaks with the skull of "Yorick"

Photo: Getty Images

## Bard egg?

Shakespeare did not write to be misunderstood ("Unmasking the Bard's greatest villain", *TNE* #216). If he had wished Hamlet to be seen as a villain, he would have made this as clear as he does with his well-known villains, even when their degree of villainy may be disputed.

What he does make clear is that Hamlet, in common with European culture of his time, is in a dilemma, with his options split between two codes; the code of honour or Christian teaching.

The former would dictate that Hamlet must avenge his father, the latter that revenge can never be right. By various means, the play explores this dilemma, reaching the conclusion that deliberate, cold-blooded revenge can never be justified from a Christian standpoint.

Hamlet's father is avenged but not by Hamlet; his murderer is "hoist with his own petard", dying as a result of his own plotting. Hamlet's delay is the result of his not wishing to imperil his own soul, at the same time bitterly criticising himself for cowardice.

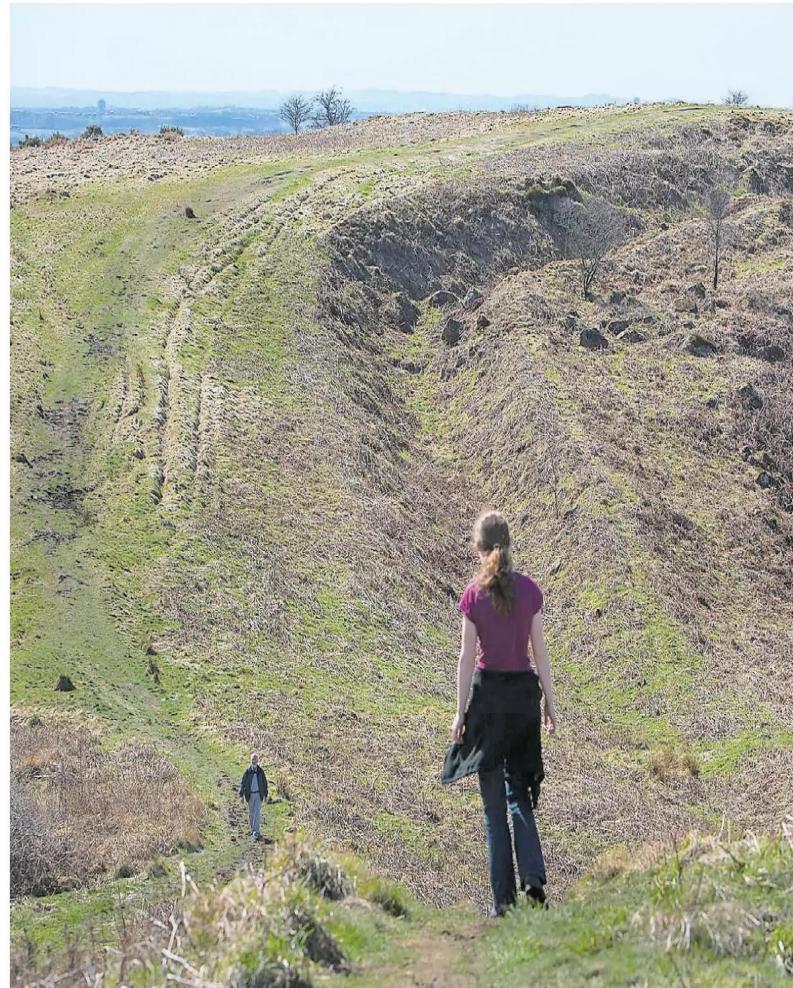
He will kill Polonius by accident, and see Ophelia driven to madness and death because her lover has killed her father. The code of honour would then oblige her to see her father avenged.

Hamlet does send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, but only by self-defence and as he says, they "made love to this employment". By Act 5, Hamlet awaits the judgement of God in a state of Christian resignation; "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow".

Ann Dowling  
Stretford

## Lock down

The Covid-19 tier rules remind me of Boris Johnson's hair. It flip-flops all over the place, looks messy and keeps being



adjusted as the wind changes.

Tony Howarth  
London SW3

## Rightmare

The collapse of Boris Johnson's political and personal credibility is creating a vacuum on the right of politics, where a large portion of the electorate settled after the last election.

Clearly, new leadership on the right will not come from Farage, himself too shallowly self-indulgent like Johnson. And Starmer's too narrowly legalistic approach, demonstrated by his avoidance of grasping the nettle of Brexit, will not win over the masses.

Economists are predicting more than four million unemployed or more into the new year, a betrayal of the nationalist beast that Johnson and Gove unleashed with their cheery 'Get Brexit Done' optimism only 10 months ago.

Has that created room further to the right for the anger of the betrayed to pour into?

If not a louche Farage to lead them on the streets, who? Yaxley-Lennon, aka Tommy Robinson, has had minuscule impact and, significantly, he is from the south.

It is the north where unemployment, betrayal and anger are likely to build up most. Look perhaps, for a charismatic figure from the north of the River Trent, focussed on campaigns on the street, as well as working the political machine, anti-European, protecting "our waters", anti-foreigner of all sorts, anti-rich privilege, yet covertly funded by the

wealthy from home and abroad.

He (probably male and white) is not visible yet, but the climate may be changing in his favour, unless as powerful an antidote comes from the left of centre. Some of us looked briefly to Corbyn to fill this space, but his indecisiveness and inability to build a coalition against the Johnson-Gove Project, betrayed that too.

There is not time to wait for reform of the electoral voting system or other technicalities; the time for confrontation of the failure of the Tories' Brexit/Covid mismanagement is on us now.

Chris Clode  
Wrexham

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BORDER DISPUTE: A woman walks along the ditch of the Croy Hill section of the Antonine Wall. The Antonine Wall, built on the orders of Emperor Antoninus Pius in AD142, when completed, formed the most north-westerly frontier of the former Roman Empire. The Wall, which comprised of approximately 19 forts and 9 fortlets, was manned for a generation before being abandoned by the Empire



## AGENDA

# How to pay for the pandemic

**The chancellor is borrowing and borrowing to combat the pandemic. Perhaps he should delay paying the bill, writes BRONWEN MADDOX**



The clash between the mayor of Greater Manchester and the chancellor of the Exchequer was the first significant political contest of the age of coronavirus.

For the seven long months since the pandemic took hold in Britain, politicians of both main parties have been dancing around each other – with Labour incredulous at the parade of government missteps but mostly unwilling to undermine the bipartisan consensus.

Now – much more significant than Labour leader Keir Starmer's demand for a "circuit-breaker" national lockdown – we had a disagreement of substance between the centre and a key region that will determine the nation's financial response to the crisis and its finances for many decades to come.

On one side, Andy Burnham, for Greater Manchester, demanded more government support – equal to the 80% of wages offered in the initial furlough scheme – for those unable to work because of the proposed tightening of restrictions in his area. On the other, Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, said the country could not afford it.

The chancellor has been prepared to spend a lot, first because of the "levelling up" agenda and then because of the virus, but has emphasised that fiscal prudence should be a concern. Earlier this month, he set out what it is to be a Conservative in the time of coronavirus at the Tories' virtual party conference, saying that the vast sums borrowed by government would have to be paid back eventually. The Labour opposition might be casual about the national finances, he argued, but the country could not afford to be.

"How, though, will it be paid down?" is one legitimate question. "Who by?" a more pointed version. But perhaps the best thing to ask is whether the debt really needs energetic and immediate attention at all.

Nobody can deny that the sums are huge. The independent Office for Budget Responsibility, which has taken a comparatively upbeat view of the likely economic bounce back, reckoned – before the apparent 'second wave' of the virus

broke – that the government's rescue package would cost in the region of £300 billion this year; around 15% of national income. More pessimistic projections put the price tag at £500bn.

These are by far the biggest such sums for peacetime in the modern era; comparably astounding spikes in government spending have tended to be the product of war.

Getting the support in place as quickly as possible was the government's initial priority, rather than the cost itself. It is quite an achievement that the furlough scheme and other major financial assistance programmes were implemented so quickly.

For all the mess of exam results and of Test and Trace, and the slow pace with which business loans were processed by the banks, the speed with which the government managed to get cash into people's hands is – considered in the round – perhaps its greatest achievement of the crisis.

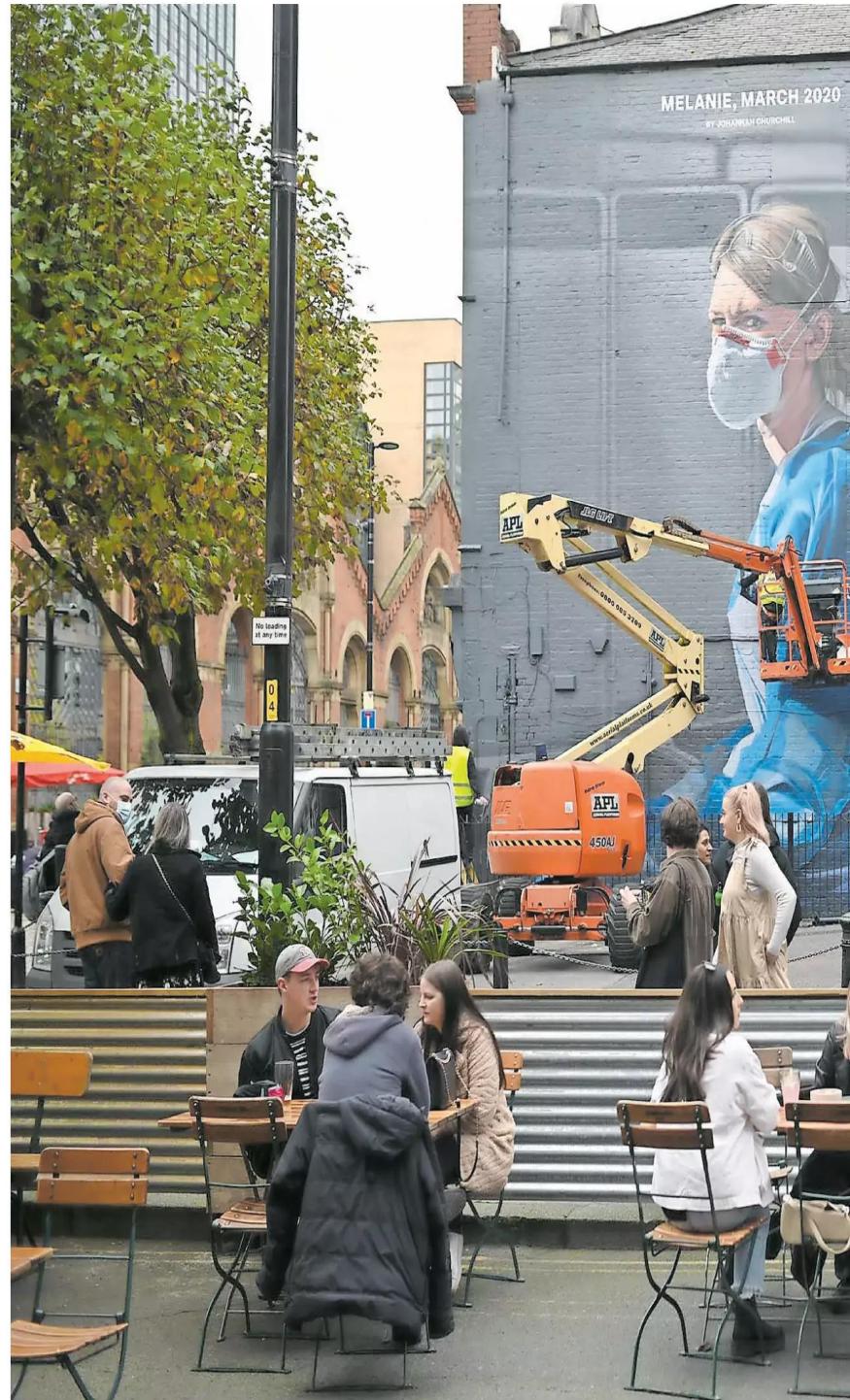
That speed points not just to systems long in place (HMRC and the Department of Work and Pensions had details of people's bank accounts already in their records), but also to years of investment in digital improvements, such as the infrastructure that makes possible the much-maligned Universal Credit.

In practice, the options available to the government in handling this debt are limited. They include another severe round of public spending cuts (for which there is absolutely no public or parliamentary appetite); big tax rises (ditto); economic growth (always the ideal, but hard to depend upon in the circumstances); inflation (attractive in many ways, but not an immediate prospect and hazardous for obvious reasons).

The final option is inelegant: namely, to choose a little bit of all of these remedies, and to add a very long delay to the recipe. Whatever Sunak says now, the politics of the case point to this combination of fiscal eclecticism and strategic postponement.

Start with public spending cuts. After a decade of austerity following the 2008 financial crisis, there is no public appetite for more of the same. The parliamentary Conservative Party feels that way, too: David Davis, former secretary of state for exiting the European Union, has called the idea "bonkers".

No matter that 'austerity' was never as austere as George Osborne, the former chancellor, implied at the time. It did still deprive the state of meaningful chunks of cash. At first, many of the cuts were relatively easy, and public service standards were more or less upheld while budgets were trimmed. But eventually the quality and breadth of provision suffered.



**BATTLEGROUND:** People enjoy a socially-distanced drink in Manchester as an artist creates a mural of an NHS worker. The city saw the first real political battle of the pandemic crisis as mayor Andy Burnham demanded more support for people unable to work due to tightening virus restrictions

Photo: Getty Images

That was particularly true of local authorities, responsible for social care, whose budgets were gutted. The effect was to limit dramatically the ability of care homes to respond to the coronavirus. Waste had been cut out, but so too had resilience or spare capacity; a shortfall that has recently been exposed in our hospitals.

Yet even the savings of the past decade would not have been enough to contain the deficit – the amount by which government spending exceeds its revenues – for long. Demography was already making fiscal conservatism obsolete.

Well before the virus hit, the growing cost of increased life expectancy was set to make the deficit expand dramatically. The rising bill for healthcare, dementia care and pensions was on course to squeeze out other public spending or

force increased borrowing, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies has consistently pointed out.

If public spending cuts will not do the trick, what about tax rises? Sunak has indicated several times that such hikes cannot be ruled out – saying as much when forced to postpone the Budget that he had planned for November, and again at the Conservative Party conference.

Which taxes, and on whom? The panel Sunak had commissioned on capital gains tax will report back soon. Many expect it to recommend taxing capital gains at the same rate as income tax, hitting higher-rate taxpayers. The Treasury is also looking into reducing the pension benefits for higher-rate taxpayers, and (yet again) into the controversial question of inheritance tax.

Even so, there is general agreement



that raising such taxes would not raise anything like enough money. They tend to bring in a comparatively small share of overall tax revenues, far smaller than the 'big three' of income tax, national insurance and VAT. And the Conservative manifesto vowed not to increase this ring-fenced trio, while also committing the government to maintaining the expensive 'triple lock' on pensions.

At the party conference, the chancellor managed to dodge the question of whether he would break either of these manifesto promises. It is conceivable that he will do so when he does finally stand up to deliver his Budget in the spring – but certain that he would face huge opposition from those within his party who fear such measures would jeopardise growth when it is most needed.

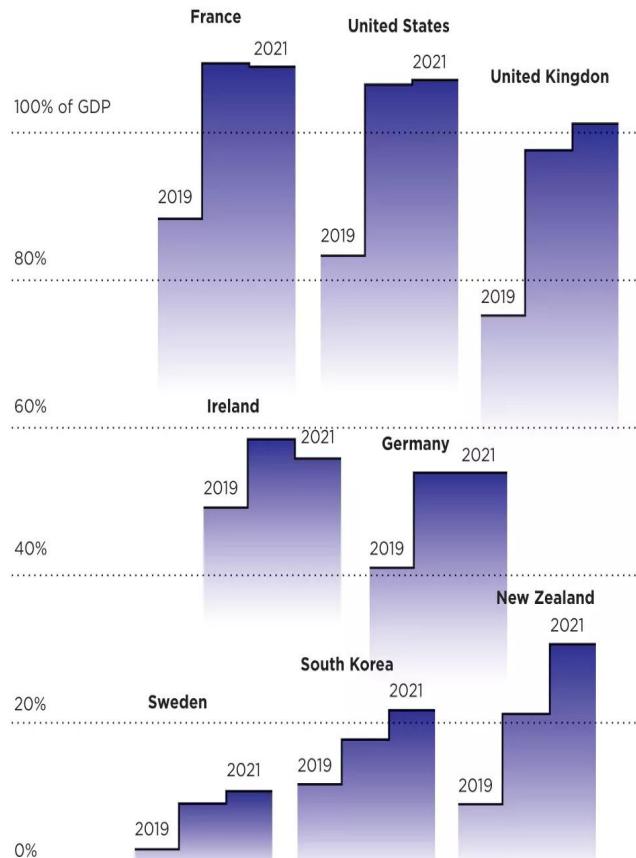
So if spending cuts and tax rises are inadequate, what about growth and

innovation? Preserving jobs that are thought to be viable once the crisis has passed – and trying to retain at least splinters of the agenda for 'levelling up' the country – has clearly been the government's preferred answer to the problem.

But while the government is still imposing restrictions on social behaviour to curb the virus, it is hard to project what growth might eventually be, and when. And it's even harder to anticipate which types of businesses will survive and thrive into the future, and where they will congregate.

It's also doubtful whether this emergency will provoke a wave of innovation in the way that wars have done in the past. True, the digital revolution will continue to bring value for money, not least as more people work from home. But it is all too easy to

## Public debt is rising across the board



misconstrue this process of change – already well under way – as an economic silver bullet when it is no such thing.

Of course, there will be some areas of actual innovation: vaccine development and scientific collaboration, as research teams across the world work to complete their own pharmaceutical Manhattan Project. But, important as they are, these are isolated instances, rather than a flourishing of animal spirits in society as a whole. Against them, we must weigh the cost of a year's badly disrupted education for many schoolchildren, not something that is likely to yield a burst of creativity and wealth generation.

Some have wondered whether a dose of inflation would be the best way to begin reducing the cost of the borrowing that has been accrued. Historically, that is indeed one way that countries have solved the problem of national debts that otherwise looked unmanageable – and government strategists acknowledge it has attractions. But there is not much sign of this happening at the moment. And, as anyone with memories of the 1970s will warn you, the collateral damage of inflation is often appalling.

Given the limited contribution that each of these approaches is likely to be able to make, the option attracting more attention – even in the parliamentary Conservative Party – is to accept that the debt will not be brought down by much for decades, or even to argue that it does not need to be paid down at all. Advocates of this position argue pragmatically that the markets are not rattled by the present level of debt, that the interest rate the UK is having to pay is extremely low, and that

the priority is to spend to get the economy moving.

When one surveys the fiscal and political landscape with any candour, it would be astonishing if this approach, or something close to it, didn't, in the end, prevail. It would not be surprising if the answer ended up being: a handful of tax rises, a bit of inflation, doing everything possible to nurture growth – all while not actually making a sustained or strategic effort to pay down the debt for a very long time.

Yet Sunak is not admitting this yet, and certainly not during his spat with Burnham over whether the country can – or cannot – afford to pay 80% of the wages of those told not to work.

Let us see whether the chancellor relents. Otherwise, out of concern for repairing the national finances, he may be premature or – worse – unnecessarily prudent, fighting a battle that neither his party nor Britain's international lenders are calling on him to fight.

■ Bronwen Maddox is director of the Institute for Government

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## AGENDA

# Euronews:

### FRANCE MULLS NEW MEASURES AS CORONAVIRUS CASES SOAR

France's government has been holding emergency meetings and warning of possible new lockdowns, as hospitals fill up with new Covid patients and doctors plead for back-up. Emmanuel Macron convened top ministers and prime minister Jean Castex met with politicians, unions and business lobbies as the government weighs its next steps in the fight against surging infections. Among possible new measures for the hardest-hit areas are lengthening existing curfews, full confinement on weekends or all week, and closing non-essential businesses. Doctors describe growing pressure on emergency services and intensive care wards, where Covid patients now take up 54% of beds nationwide. France is now reporting more than 350 new cases per 100,000 people each week, and nearly 18% of its widespread tests are now coming back positive.

### VIOLENT PROTESTS IN ITALY OVER NEW COVID CRACKDOWN

Protesters turned out by the hundreds in Turin, Milan and other Italian cities to vent their anger, sometimes violently, at the latest pandemic restrictions. In Turin, some demonstrators broke off from a peaceful protest, smashing store windows on a shopping street, setting off smoke bombs and hurling bottles at police in a main city square where the Piedmont regional government is headquartered. Some 300 taxis peacefully lined up in neat rows to draw attention to their economic losses from the implosion of tourism and disappearance of workers from the city centre. Triggering the violence in Turin were a group of 'ultra' football fans, according to local reports. In Milan, police used tear gas to scatter protesters. The protests began shortly after the national government's order took effect requiring bars, cafes and restaurants to close their doors at 6pm for the next 30 days.

### SPAIN DECLARES NEW NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY

The Spanish government has declared a new national state of emergency that includes an overnight curfew aimed at avoiding a repeat of the near collapse of the country's hospitals. The restriction on free movement on the streets between 11pm and 6am allows exceptions for commuting, buying medicine and caring for elderly and young family members. The curfew is likely to remain in place for six months. The leaders of Spain's 17 regions and two autonomous cities will have the authority to set different hours for the restrictions, close regional borders to travel, and limit gatherings to six people who do not live together.

### ANOTHER ARTWORK DAMAGED ON BERLIN'S MUSEUM ISLAND

A piece of art has been vandalised at one of Berlin's most famous museums only days after authorities revealed that more than 60 other artworks on the city's Museum Island were smeared with an oily liquid. A huge granite bowl in front of the Altes Museum was smeared with a mystery substance. Museum Island is in the heart of Berlin and one of its main tourist attractions. It was not immediately clear if the bowl was smeared with the same oily liquid as the other art pieces that were damaged early this month. The other vandalism occurred on October 3. The motive remains a mystery and there appears to be no thematic link between the targeted works.

# Orbán has eyes on a Brexit opportunity

**When it comes to Brexit, Hungary does not have as much skin in the game as other European nations. But, as BALAZS SZENT-IVANYI explains, it is proving a useful rhetorical tool for its increasingly autocratic prime minister**



Like many other EU member states, Hungary saw Brexit as a pivotal event in the course of European integration. However, the Hungarian government has engaged very little with the Brexit process itself, and only focused on a limited set of issues.

Following the 2016 referendum, the Hungarian government emphasised how much it regretted the result, but also that it respected the decision of the British people. During the years since then, Hungarian officials have at times expressed various expectations towards the Brexit process, focusing on what outcomes would be desirable from Hungary's perspective.

However, it is difficult to argue that Brexit figured highly on the government's agenda, or that the Hungarian public was particularly interested in it. The main issue which mattered for Hungary was the rights of the Hungarian community living in the UK, estimated to be between 100,000 and 250,000 people. Hungary's main goal was to ensure that their rights were not harmed.

This question was settled in the Withdrawal Agreement between the UK and EU in November 2018, and Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán triumphantly reported that the agreement achieves the Hungarian government's "main goal" of protecting the rights of Hungarians in the UK.

However, the government has been slightly ambivalent in its approach to this issue. Due to severe labour shortages in Hungary (at least before the pandemic hit), and the government's highly publicised resistance to immigration, Brexit has been seen as an opportunity to convince Hungarians living in Britain to 'return home'.

Significant wage increases in Hungary after 2015 have also made returning more attractive, and there is some evidence of increasing numbers of Hungarians leaving the UK, although exact data is hard to come by. Hungary's relatively better management of the Covid-19 pandemic may have increased these numbers even further.

Hungary showed very little interest in Brexit beyond citizen's rights, and the negotiations between the EU and the UK



RHETORIC: Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán

Photo: Getty Images

on the future trading relationship hardly figured in the political discourses in 2020. Some vague statements were made by politicians on how any future trade deal needs to be "fair", or "deep and comprehensive", giving the UK a significant degree of access to the EU market. However, Hungary made little visible attempt to influence the EU's negotiation mandate, and has generally been happy to defer to member states with larger stakes in the process.

The UK is not an insignificant trade partner for Hungary, but neither is it among the most important ones: according to World Bank data for 2018, the UK was the eighth largest export market for Hungary, and the 13th largest import source.

Although the UK is more important for Hungary in terms of trade in services, Hungary's economic relations are mainly with Germany and its neighbours. Furthermore, much of merchandise and services trade happens within multinational corporate value chains. These will adapt to the post-Brexit trade regime, as it will no longer be feasible to carry out certain corporate activities in the UK. These activities will be moved to other countries, and thus the overall volume of Hungary's trade may not actually be impacted much.

Going beyond the official government positions (or lack of them), it is insightful to examine how the increasingly autocratic Viktor Orbán has related to Brexit.

His thinking places a large emphasis on national sovereignty and views integration between nation states as a dead end. His nationalism is heavily conservative and is pitted against liberal cosmopolitanism.

Orbán has framed Hungary's place in the world as a constant struggle against malicious forces, which have included liberals, the EU, civil society organizations, 'illegal' migrants, and billionaire philanthropist George Soros.

Since the 2015 European refugee crisis, he and his government have peddled a conspiracy theory on how Soros and the EU's liberal elite orchestrated the arrival

of migrants to the EU, with the goal of grinding down European nation states and the Christian values they were founded upon.

Brexit has frequently been used in Orbán's rhetoric to support this world view, especially regarding how the EU aims to erode nation states. In his view, Brexit is a clear symptom of the EU's dysfunctionality.

Brexit has happened because the EU did not respect national sovereignty, including the right of countries to determine who crosses their borders. Orbán has said on numerous occasions that the British have correctly noticed that things are not going well in the EU, and did not want a part of it.

In September 2020, he called Brexit the "brave decision" of the British people, and a sign of their greatness. He also expressed his regret that Hungary cannot follow the UK's lead, given its much closer economic integration with the EU.

An interesting contradiction in this narrative comes from how Orbán is hostile towards 'migrants' coming to the EU, but is generally supportive of free movement within it. He has tried to put the blame on the former for Brexit, while it is apparent that the influx of workers from Eastern Europe, including Hungarians, has probably played a much more significant role in the UK's decision to leave the EU.

Finally, it is important to note that the sympathy Orbán has towards Brexit is mainly for domestic consumption, and serves to strengthen his narrative about standing up to the EU. It should not be seen as a willingness to actually support the UK in its negotiations with the EU, potentially breaking the unity of the EU's stance. Orbán is fully aware of Hungary's economic interests, which lie in a maintaining close ties with Germany and ensuring that funds from the EU continue to flow. Brexit is a useful rhetorical device, nothing more.

■ Dr Balazs Szent-Ivanyi, a senior lecturer in politics and international relations at Aston University, wrote this article for UK in a Changing Europe

# EXPERTISE



# TRUST IN JUSTICE

**PAUL KNOTT** on the resilience and revival of the principal of international justice, the optimistic, liberal idea that refuses to die



**E**thnic nationalist regimes acquire power by convincing enough of their citizens to blame 'other' groups of people for their country's problems. Such governments often culminate in murder, mayhem and genocide. The precedents from history provide plenty of reasons to fear where the current resurgence of aggressive populists around the world could lead.

More hopefully, and less noisily, an opposing ideal is also enjoying a renaissance.

International justice seeks to counter humanity's most violent impulses. Its modern incarnation was devised to prosecute Nazi war criminals in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Seventy years on from the Nuremberg Trials, the advocates of international law are still persevering, despite the eternally daunting challenges the system continues to face.

Recent decades have seen figures such as the former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic and his blood-stained

henchmen Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic brought before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for the grotesque crimes they committed during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

They were joined by some of the perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide at the parallel International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

**ATROCITIES:** The coffins of victims of Rwanda's 1994 genocide before a mass burial at the Nyanya Genocide Memorial in Kigali in 2019

Photo: Getty Images

## EXPERTISE



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**WARLORD:**  
1 Charles Taylor, centre, leader of the rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia helps carry one of his injured fighters during the First Liberian Civil War, 1990

2 Taylor, who was Liberia's president from 1997 to 2003, in court at the Hague where he was sentenced to 50 years in prison

3 81 coffins containing newly-discovered remains of 84,437 victims of Rwanda's 1994 genocide are laid to rest in a ceremony at the Nyanza Genocide Memorial in Kigali, 2019

Photos: Getty Images

► From page 23

Perhaps most successfully of all, the former dictator of Liberia, Charles Taylor, who was the individual most responsible for the appalling atrocities that took place in his country and neighbouring Sierra Leone during the 1990s, was sentenced to 50 years in prison by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Bringing those criminals before this series of ad-hoc tribunals was, however, a frustratingly slow and painstaking process. It was patchy too, with some of the worst culprits continuing to evade justice.

In an attempt to improve and entrench the system, a majority of the international community was inspired to set-up a permanent International Criminal Court (the ICC) in 2002 to investigate and prosecute war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity wherever they occurred.

While the establishment of the ICC has reduced the need to create a separate tribunal for every outbreak of atrocities (which is a good thing in an increasingly polarised world that currently struggles to agree about any collective course of action), it still faces many of the same challenges its forerunners did.

The difficulties include gathering evidence, protecting witnesses,

arresting the indicted and getting them to court. This is far from easy when the international courts have no police or enforcement mechanism of their own and the perpetrators control the crime scene or are protected by their supporters. These problems are compounded by the refusal of some of the most powerful nations on earth, such as China and the United States, to participate in the ICC out of fear that it could be used against them.

Nonetheless, international justice for crimes against humanity is the bold, optimistic, liberal idea that refuses to die. Twenty-eight cases have been brought before the ICC and it has 17 people in detention. It is currently pursuing 13 full investigations and nine preliminary examinations of alleged crimes in places as diverse as Myanmar, Sudan, Afghanistan and Georgia.

The ICC's ongoing examination of possible war crimes committed by UK citizens in Iraq and by Russia in Ukraine exemplifies it and other courts' growing fearlessness in pursuing justice, regardless of pressure from highly influential countries.

To the intense annoyance of the White House, which was on the eve of hosting a visit by them, the special prosecutor appointed to investigate crimes committed during the Kosovo conflict dramatically indicted Kosovan president Hashim Thaci and speaker of parliament Kadri Veseli in June. The duo are charged with being "criminally responsible" for the murder of almost 100 people during their time as commanders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

Equally encouragingly, more countries are engaging enthusiastically with international



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justice and even using their own courts to prosecute crimes against humanity, regardless of where they were committed.

After years of foot-dragging, France finally found and arrested earlier this year one of the alleged ringleaders of the Rwandan genocide, Félicien Kabuga, who had been living discretely near Paris. He will now stand trial at the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT) in Arusha, Tanzania, the permanent successor court to the ICTR.

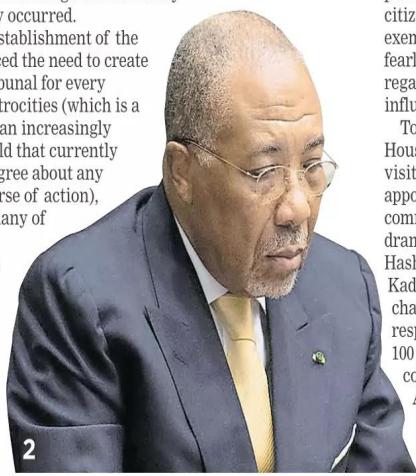
And perhaps most poetically of all from a historical perspective, Germany has begun trials of two Syrians caught on its territory who are accused of committing torture and crimes against humanity on behalf of the Assad dictatorship.

For all the ups and downs of pursuing the world's worst criminals, it should always be remembered that an imperfect

international legal process is far better than none at all. By its very existence and implementation, international law offers hope to the victims and sends a message to persecuted people that their oppressors are not untouchable or all-powerful.

The more success the international courts have, the more they will deter potential perpetrators. Even those who have already committed appalling crimes and are currently evading capture have their freedom of movement curtailed for fear of arrest and must constantly look over their shoulders. However inadequate this may be, it is a form of punishment in itself.

Keeping the dream of international law alive offers millions of people hope for a better future during these dark times. As Martin Luther King famously said, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice".



2

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## EXPERTISE

# PLACE IN NEED

The EU has been so successful in its original aim that is now suffering from a dangerous lack of direction, says **SIMON ANHOLT**. This can be simply addressed



Over the years I've encountered many parts of the 'international system': the United Nations and its family of organisations, the World Trade Organisation, Nato, all kinds of NGOs and think-tanks, charities and foundations, and regional blocs including the European Union, CARICOM in the Caribbean, MERCOSUR in Latin America, and ASEAN in East Asia. These organisations represent humanity's current efforts to guide and strengthen the international community and further the goals of shared progress, shared responsibility, equal opportunity, peace and prosperity for all.

For historical reasons there is still a significant structural and ideological bias in the international system towards what is loosely (and confusingly) called "the West" or sometimes "the North", but as we gradually drift towards a more multipolar world, this bias appears to be diminishing. This process, at least in the immediate term, tends to create more confusion and the potential for more conflict rather than greater clarity and inclusiveness, but humanity is a complex organism and cannot readjust without turbulence.

The fundamental paradox of narrow interests versus collective interests will never go away as long as there are humans on the earth, and it will never stop producing turbulence: the question is how well and how wisely we manage that turbulence.

So, what of humanity's various attempts so far to collectivise our efforts, and really make the world work? The EU stands as the first, and so far the only moment in history when a large number of sovereign states have found the maturity and wisdom to cede a tiny part of their precious sovereignty for the common good.

Of course the EU is far from perfect – it's organised by human beings after all – but as a first shot at truly wide-scale cooperation and collaboration it's a pretty good start. However, I should add here that I don't see the EU as a

step towards some kind of one-world government: that has always seemed to me like a very bad idea.

In my experience, government is effective in direct proportion to its closeness to the governed, so the idea of an authority in Brussels or New York or anywhere else wielding jurisdiction over people living on the other side of the planet sounds like a recipe for chaos and discontent at best, and tyranny at worst.

In my view, government should be even more local than it currently is in our world of nation states, not less so: when I observe an administration in, say, Mexico City, attempting to govern a nation of 120 million people, even via a federal system, it stretches the boundaries of what can properly be called government.

I've seen government work best and most efficiently, effectively and responsively in populations of less than two or three million. The EU is a union of states and cities and regions, not a superstate, and should remain so.

Today, the EU is challenged by a distinctly 21st century problem: it has a problem of identity. Many European citizens, according to the EU's own research, feel distant from its institutions and feel no very strong loyalty to the concept: and without the support of its populations of course the EU cannot survive. The EU itself often puts this problem down to its own inability to communicate its benefits adequately to its own citizens but I don't really buy this idea – and what's more, I don't like the idea of

Brussels spending European taxpayers' money on selling itself to them more effectively, were that even possible. That sounds suspiciously like propaganda.

No, the EU's problem is not that it doesn't brag enough about its successes: the problem is that it is no longer quite sure what it's for, and that uncertainty is contagious. The EU is suffering from a loss of a core defining purpose because it has been so successful at fulfilling its original one: to spread and perpetuate peace and prosperity in Europe. And yet the irony is that in the age of grand challenges, finding a suitable replacement 'mission' should be easy: Europe is spoilt for choice.

It just doesn't seem to realise that unless it identifies and crystallises and rallies around a clear purpose, it might well continue to be a useful bureaucratic machine but it will never touch people's hearts.

The identity issue is a knotty one. For decades, the governments of EU member states have blamed Brussels



# OF A PURPOSE

MISSION POSSIBLE:  
In need of new  
direction. What  
now for the goals  
of the European  
Parliament, pictured  
during a session in  
Strasbourg?

Photo: Getty Images



alongside practical considerations and politics, without appearing to preach morality or impose values.

And a moral issue it certainly is. At heart, the decision whether to accept migrants of various kinds surely boils down to a simple question of comparing your discomfort with theirs: indeed, it's a basic human obligation for us always to measure our own comfort against that of other people.

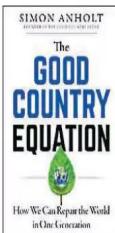
If we can reduce somebody else's severe discomfort by undergoing some mild discomfort ourselves, then we have a clear duty to do so. At present, many of us in the 'developed' world are getting the equation seriously wrong: we are refusing to undergo even very mild and temporary discomfort in exchange not merely for the comfort but for the actual survival of many thousands of others.

Some of us aren't even refusing to undergo actual discomfort: we're refusing to contemplate a rather vague notion of possible social change ("I don't like the idea that my local shops might become different"). We shouldn't over-complicate this: it's a moral failure, pure and simple, and we in Europe are put to shame by countries like Jordan and Turkey which take in hundreds if not thousands of times more refugees than we do in the West.

Fear of change is understandable but not excusable in the present circumstance. Today, we are clearly in a crisis situation, not unlike a world war (the trickle of migrants to Europe we've experienced in recent years is the merest aperitif for the hundreds of millions that climate change is about to unleash): and in such situations, we have no choice but to re-evaluate that equation of discomfort. Luckily, our sacrifice diminishes in proportion to the number of us that are making it: if 10 people suffer discomfort for the benefit of one refugee, their discomfort will be very mild indeed. In Europe at the moment, we outnumber the refugees and migrants by seven hundred to one: so, if everyone plays a part, our actual sacrifice will be negligible, but its effect will be profound.

■ Simon Anholt is an independent policy adviser; he has worked with the presidents and prime ministers of more than 50 countries

■ This article is an excerpt from his book *The Good Country Equation*, published by Berrett-Koehler



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When it was first released, the book and film struck a chord with the left. Now, the work is championed by the right. **NATHAN**

**O'HAGAN** explains why it has become a central text of the culture wars



When it was published in 1996, Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club* wasn't a huge commercial success, despite a largely enthusiastic critical response, but it instantly developed a strong cult following, resonating particularly with disaffected young men who, up until that point, didn't see their experience and vacillations represented well in contemporary literature.

"Bookstores were full of books like *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Divine Secrets Of The Ya-Ya Sisterhood* and *How To Make An American Quilt*," the author, wrote in the notes for the 2004 edition of the novel. "These were all novels that presented a social model for women to be together. But there was no novel that presented a new social model for men to share their lives."

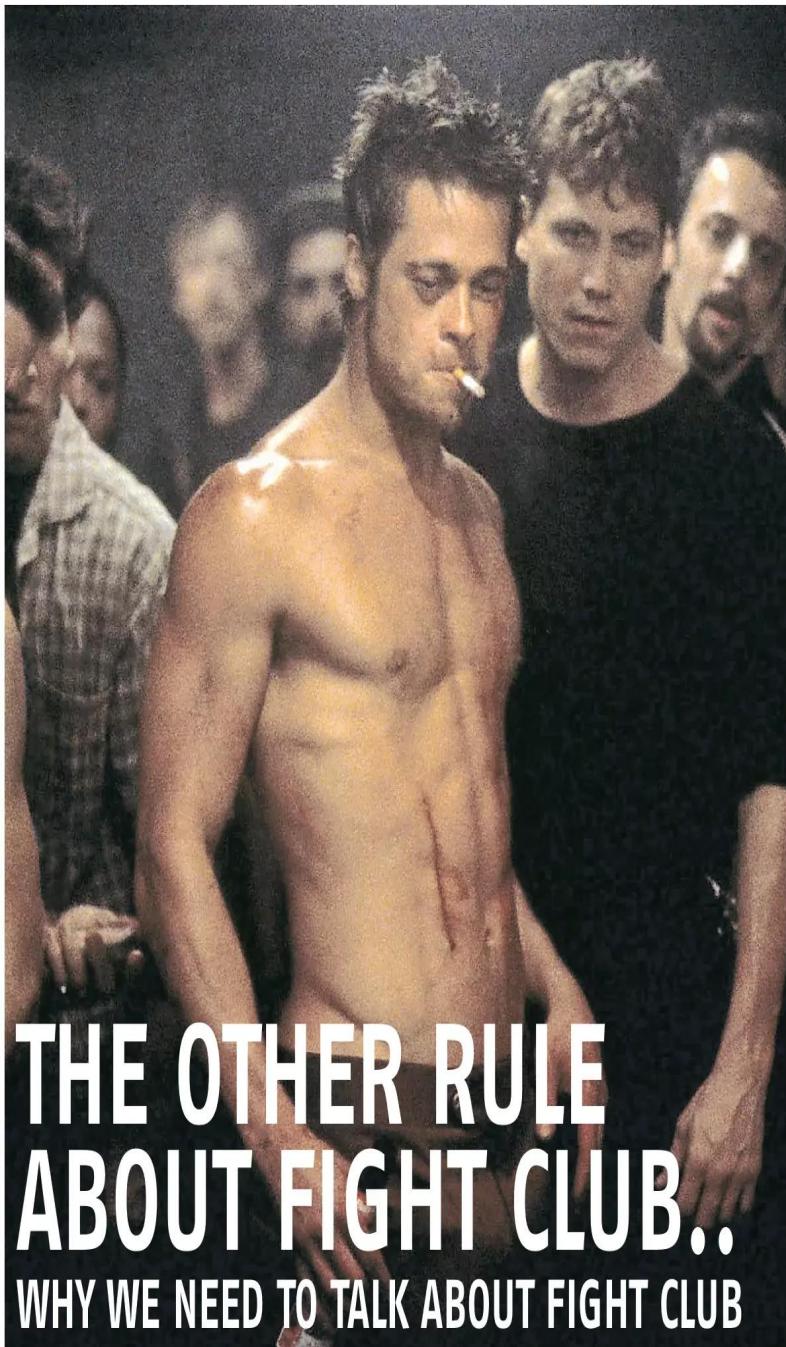
In 1999, the film adaptation of *Fight Club* was released, since when the book and film have become truly intertwined, two parts of one whole in a way that few book/film pairs have. While arguing that any film adaptation is better than the source novel is sacrilegious in most people's eyes, few can deny that David Fincher's adaptation gave new life and reach to the novel. It is impossible to talk about one without the other. A strong literary cult following would not have made it the zeitgeist-defining work it is; it needed the film to do that.

As with the novel, the film was not a commercial hit upon release, and divided even the relatively small audiences that saw it, as well as critics. Fox 2000 Pictures hurriedly ended its cinema release, believing they had an expensive misfire on their hands, and wanting to sweep it under the carpet as quickly as possible.

It was only when the film was released on DVD that it began to capture people's imagination more widely. It's hard to imagine a major studio picture, with a budget in the region of \$60m and a star of the stature of Brad Pitt, relying on word of mouth and DVD sales to become a hit, but that's largely what happened with *Fight Club*. Within a couple of years of its home release, it had gone from being a moderate commercial failure, to being arguably the defining movie of the era.

Phrases from the film gradually entered the common cultural lexicon, particularly the first two of the club's eight rules, both of which are "you do not talk about *Fight Club*".

Interpretations of the themes of the work were overwhelmingly left-leaning. The idea of the destruction of the banking system, reducing everyone back to zero, in particular, struck a chord with the left and anarchists, as did the main characters breaking into a liposuction clinic to steal fat in order to make



## THE OTHER RULE ABOUT FIGHT CLUB... WHY WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT FIGHT CLUB

expensive soap, which they would then sell back to the same privileged women who were pursuing an unrealistic ideal foisted upon them by the same advertising standards that the men of *Fight Club* were now rejecting in throwing off the shackles of a post-industrial consumerist society.

Above all else, the central theme of *Fight Club* was read as an anti-capitalist one.

Under and behind and inside the prevailing interpretations, however, something else was growing. Just as it was hard to read or watch *Fight Club* in the late 1990s and not view it as vaguely left-wing, to revisit either through a 2020 lens, it's equally hard not to come away with a very different reading.

There is a strong undercurrent of misogyny that, while it didn't go unnoticed at the time, seems more glaring now.

Though certainly not without female fans, it was an undeniably masculine work, with only one significant female character, Marla Singer, played by Helena

CULTURAL BATTLEGROUND: Brad Pitt stars in *Fight Club*. The film has been revered as a cult classic by both left and right

Photo: Contributed

Bonham Carter in the film. The central conceit of men, and only men, gathering together in dingy basements to beat the s\*\*t out of each other is a behaviour that the term 'toxic masculinity' could have been coined to describe.

The most irrefutable way in which *Fight Club* has established itself as part of right-wing culture is surely the term "snowflake".

The immortal lines "you are not a beautiful and unique snowflake, you are the all-singing, all dancing crap of the world. You're the same decaying organic matter as everything else" is one that clearly lent itself well to summing up the right's view of liberals as delicate little beings whose sensibilities just can't stomach how the world really is.

Several years on from the term's initial adoption, it is now thrown around so often, especially on social media, where it is used to disparage anyone who dares to so much as object to use of racist or sexist language, that it has just about lost all its power as a term of derision.

Perhaps the most toxic adoption of the work, though, is by 'incels' – or 'involuntary celibates' – an online subculture who define themselves as unable to find a romantic or sexual partner despite desiring one. For this, they blame women, as well as more confident, desirable men – 'Chads'. Incels occupy a particularly dark corner of the internet, primarily on sites like Reddit and 4chan.

For these men, Tyler Durden – Brad Pitt's character – seems to represent some form of ideal. He's a confident, sexually attractive and capable alpha-male, who takes and does what he wants, regardless of societal expectations. He treats Marla with contempt, using her for sex and then rejecting her emotionally.

The incels see themselves represented in the inadequate The Narrator – played by Edward Norton – and Tyler is who they aspire to be. The fact that Durden is merely a manifestation of The Narrator's fractured psyche, and that he is only left with any chance of hope when he 'kills' Durden seems largely lost on them.

As well as the incels, the alt-right also revere Durden. His attempts to reassert some form of masculinity in the face of evolving gender roles resonates with them, as does his willingness to use violence to achieve his aims. Regardless of any arguable difference in motivation, seeing America's streets afire with protests and armed militias, with groups like Proud Boys gaining prominence, has some echoes of Project Mayhem, the cult-like organisation created by Durden to bring down civilisation.

To these people, Durden is their boy.

It's probably worth wondering where the author himself stands on this. Is Palahniuk left wing, right, or neither? He has generally been non-committal in interviews since Trump's election to the presidency. He has stated that he simply doesn't recognise the idea of toxic masculinity, while the coining of the term 'snowflake' is something he takes credit for and an apparent pride in (although the use of the word as a derogatory term in American politics dates back as far as abolition) suggesting that liberals are indeed too easily offended, especially young liberals.

This certainly isn't enough to define someone as being right-wing necessarily, and it's hard to argue against the idea that some are too ready to take offence. Palahniuk has made it clear that he believes the problem is with the left, and not the right, so his view of modern liberals at least chimes with those of the people who have taken his novel onboard as their own sacred text.

But, while it's worth asking where the author himself stands, it's also worth asking, does it really matter? When groups attach their own meaning to a work, the intentions of the artist become almost irrelevant. And even if Palahniuk's intentions were in any way left wing, one suspects the alt-right would take a perverse pleasure in having taken his work as their own.

*Fight Club* now occupies a strange space as a sort of hipster 1984. Orwell's classic is another that is fought over by the left and the right, each claiming it as their own. Like 1984, *Fight Club* will continue to be argued over by all sides of the political spectrum and, regardless of the author's affiliations or intentions, looks set to remain a central text in the modern culture war.

## EXPERTISE



# ASIA'S NEW AXIS

## WHAT THE NEW IRAN-CHINA ALLIANCE MEANS FOR US ALL

While the world has been distracted by other issues, relations between Beijing and Tehran have become closer than ever – with major implications for the rest of the globe.

**JONATHAN FRYER**  
reports



With European media attention largely focussed on Covid, Brexit and Donald Trump's chances of re-election, a major geopolitical realignment has gone largely unnoticed. But it has the potential to affect security in the Persian Gulf and beyond for decades to come.

Over the summer, the Iranian government revealed that it had negotiated a 25-year 'Comprehensive Partnership' with China, now awaiting parliamentary approval in Tehran. According to a leaked copy of the 18-page agreement, the two countries have signed up to unprecedented levels of economic, technological and military cooperation involving hundreds of billions of dollars of Chinese money.

While Trump and his secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, have been busy exerting "maximum pressure" on Iran through sanctions, the Iranians have looked elsewhere for political and economic support.

They had hoped European powers would do more to stand up to Washington in their desire to save the 2015 nuclear deal, but the flow of trade with, and investment from, Europe has been disappointing, so Iran has turned to China instead.

It was the virulently anti-American Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who first proposed what he called a "pivot to the East" during his presidency (from 2005 to 2013). But the idea was really kick-started by China's president Xi Jinping on a visit to Tehran in 2016.

He had identified Iran as a key piece in the jigsaw that is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure

HOSTILE: A mural painted on a building in Tehran

Photo: Fatemeh Bahrami/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

development project that is opening up new markets to Chinese goods, expanding China's political influence and giving it access to valuable natural resources.

In the case of Iran, the main resource in question is oil, for which China – the world's largest oil importer – has an insatiable appetite. Under the new Comprehensive Partnership agreement, China will secure a reliable supply from Iran, probably at a favourable discount, until nearly the middle of the century.

The Chinese will meanwhile invest in improving Iran's oil facilities while also helping the country develop its nuclear energy capacity and upgrading industrial sites.

In return, Iran will open its domestic market up to even more imports of Chinese consumer goods than at present and will award China the contracts to develop Iran's 5G telecommunications technology. Several Western countries have baulked at the prospect of giving Huawei, in particular, too large a footprint, but Iran apparently has no such qualms.

China will also invest in improving Iran's railway network, roads, airports and seaports and will develop three free trade zones, at Abadan, Maku and on the island of Kish. The Makran coastline of Iranian Baluchistan is targeted for massive redevelopment, including new tourism infrastructure. The Chinese are all in favour of developing tourist resorts where they become the major, or sometimes only, visitors, as anyone in Cambodia will tell you.

Some of Iran's neighbours will understandably be concerned by this planned resurgence of the country's economic power, not least Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain which, together with Egypt, form the Arab Quartet of countries that have been trying to keep Iran in check. However, it is China's plans for military cooperation with Tehran that will really set alarm bells ringing, not only regionally but globally.

This military cooperation is planned to include not just joint development of defence industries but also intelligence sharing and even joint military manoeuvres.

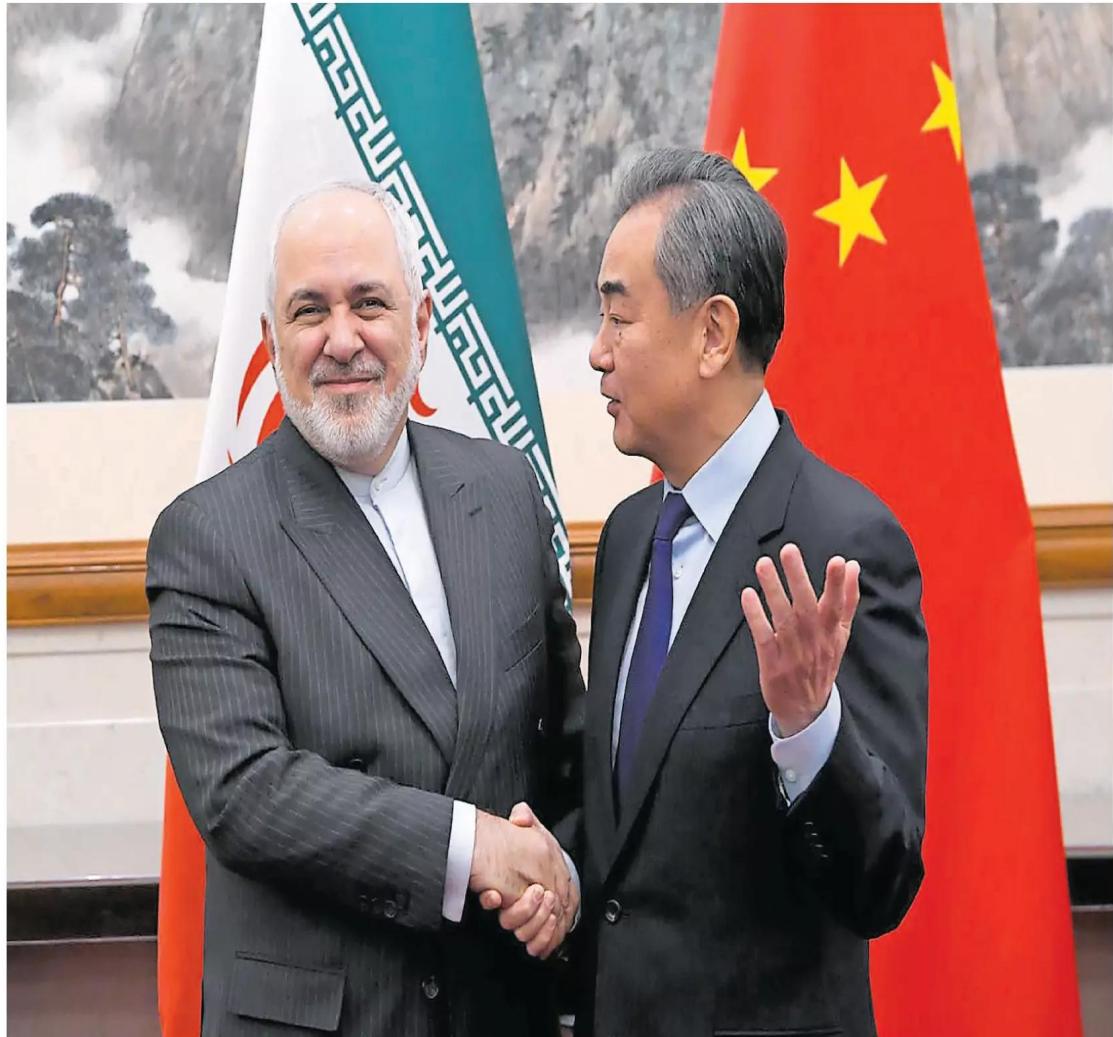
Iran already carries out coordinated military operations with Russia, notably in Syria, but the potential with China is so much greater, especially at sea. Moreover, China is not going to bow to the Trump administration's maximum pressure strategy, no matter how loudly Pompeo or any successor as Secretary of State may shout about it.

All this is happening in the context of growing tensions between the United States and China, which some analysts now identify as a nascent Cold War Mark II. If that is indeed the case, then Iran is currently pitching its tent firmly within the Chinese camp.

Iran will thereby benefit from reducing its political isolation, while China will be delighted to have this heavyweight support in challenging US hegemony.

European capitals, including London, will watch this with dismay. But Tehran has largely given up taking Europe seriously, despite Britain, France and Germany all standing firm in their determination to save the Iran nuclear deal and in rejecting Washington's attempt to institute the so-called 'snapback' mechanism on sanctions, on the grounds that the US walked away from the deal.

Similarly, Washington has been



pressing for the arms embargo against Iran that is due to expire in October to be extended. This move failed at the UN Security Council recently. China and Russia did not even have to use their veto – as they might well have been tempted to do – as all the other members of the Council, except the Dominican Republic, abstained, thereby ensuring the measure did not pass. That included all the Europeans currently on there – Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and the United Kingdom – but the Iranians were annoyed that none of these voted against. As far as the Tehran was concerned this was further proof that when push comes to shove, the EU and Britain will do nothing to really stand up against the United States.

In addition to implementing UN sanctions operational since 2006, relating to Iran's uranium enrichment, the EU imposed a number of additional sanctions covering trade in various goods, including arms and dual-use goods, a prohibition on the import of energy and petrochemical products, the freezing of bank assets and banning Iranian cargo planes carrying certain goods from using airports in the EU.

Since then, some of those restrictions were eased, but there are still enough in place for the Iranian government to say to Europe, "with friends like you, who needs enemies?"

So for the Iranians the hunt has been on to identify what it sees as true friends. communist China and the Islamic Republic of Iran are at first sight not the most obvious of political bedfellows,

UNLIKELY FRIENDS: China's foreign minister Wang Yi, right, greets Iran counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif during a meeting in Beijing

Photo: Noel Celis - Pool/Getty Images

though there is an element of what Winston Churchill referred to as "the enemy of my enemy is my friend".

The United States is still the Great Satan in the Iranian government's eyes and there has been no let-up in the anti-American rhetoric in Tehran. But there is something even stronger than anti-Americanism binding China and Iran together: an outright rejection of liberal democracy and Western notions of human rights.

This mutual adherence to authoritarianism is so strong that both sides are prepared to ignore the most glaring inconsistency in their new friendship pact: the significance of religion. Iran is still a theocratic state in which people's everyday lives are ruled by a particular interpretation of Islam. That is as unpalatable to the Chinese government as communism is to its Iranian counterpart. Yet each is prepared to turn a blind eye to the fundamentals of the other's political and social system.

This even extends to Iranian silence over the gross violations of the rights of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. A prominent former member of the Iranian *Majlis* or parliament, Ali Motahari, recently tweeted that it was embarrassing that Iran had not spoken out about the matter, implying that this was because of the need for Chinese economic support.

However, this triggered a storm of adverse reaction from people close to the country's religious leadership who argued that the Chinese government was

correct to suppress what it called the hardline Wahabi Takfiri brand of Islam promoted by Saudi Arabia which had 'infected' Xinjiang.

Among ordinary Iranians, though, there is greater ambivalence towards China than the forthcoming 25-year Comprehensive Partnership would suggest, not only because of Xinjiang.

Many traders in Tehran's Bazaar – historically an important player in the country's power politics – are worried by the prospect of Chinese goods swamping the market and undercutting local produce. An even greater bone of contention is the issue of Covid-19.

Although the authorities in Tehran have not echoed Trump's habit of referring to the coronavirus as the 'Chinese virus', many Iranians blame closer ties with China for the severity of the pandemic in the country, which has suffered particularly badly.

Officially there have been almost 400,000 cases in Iran and 23,000 deaths, though some opposition sources claim the true figures are significantly higher.

Despite doubts in sections of the Iranian population about the wisdom of cosying up too close to Beijing, the government line is clear. As the preamble to the leaked Comprehensive Partnership text says, "Two ancient Asian cultures, two partners in the sectors of trade, economy, politics, culture and security with a similar outlook and many mutual bilateral and multilateral interests will consider one another strategic partners."

The world will have to come to terms with that.

## EXPERTISE



# ALTRUISM TRUMPS CYNICISM

I do realise that I've been talking about America a lot just recently (and that this paper is called *The New European*) but I feel I should cast at least a nervous nod across the pond this week as this will be the last column of mine to see daylight before election day in the US.

You'll notice I didn't say 'before the election'; early voting has already begun in earnest and with a far higher turnout than in previous years... I also didn't say before the *end* of the election, as that for all that voting will cease on Tuesday November 3, the result is unlikely to be definitively known for a while thereafter, even if there's an obvious leader emerging.

It's been apparent for months now that Donald Trump, rather than bother trying to win this election, had decided to spend most of this year pre-emptively grumping about the "unfairness" of the (as yet unknown) result, with a view to disputing it and ultimately throwing it up to the Supreme Court, fully one third of which now consists of justices who, by happy coincidence, owe him their job (and with all three of these appointments having been highly questionable in their own special ways).

It's all but statistically impossible for Trump to win the popular vote; it's highly unlikely that, Bush vs Gore-style count shenanigans notwithstanding, he can squeeze the electoral college vote. But will he, nonetheless, still be in office at the end of January? Anybody's guess.

One particular "unfairness" against which the president has been railing is the media's failure to fixate upon the story, widely dismissed (not least by his own intelligence agencies) as a Russian disinformation campaign, that Joe Biden in some way abused his office, when serving as vice president, to enrich his son Hunter.

Seeing Trump's indignation at the way

## Mitch Benn

Comedian,  
Musician,  
Writer



reporters and interviewers refuse to obsess about the Biden "revelation" and choose instead to bore him with tiresome quibbles about the 225,000 American lives lost to the coronavirus. I myself had a bit of an epiphany: I think Trump believes it. Because why wouldn't he?

As has been made grotesquely apparent by his own conduct and pronouncements as president, Trump seems incapable of imagining that someone would seek public office for any other reason than to turn it to their own advantage. Of course he believes that Biden used the vice presidency to enrich his family because why else would someone bother being vice president?

Cynicism dismisses altruism because cynicism can't comprehend altruism.

We've seen another glaring example of this on our own shores this last week, as the task of ensuring that the children of poor families don't go hungry – over the 'festive' period this time – has once again fallen, for reasons which will one day no doubt have future historians scratching holes into their heads, to a 22-year-old footballer.

Our Conservative government and its apologists in the media seemed genuinely surprised to discover that Marcus Rashford is still here – that he's determined to pursue his quest to find food for the hungry – despite having been awarded an MBE for his efforts last time around.

**IGNORANT INDIGNATION:**  
Donald Trump believes his own 'revelation' about Joe Biden - because he fails to understand altruism

Photo:Getty Images

Leaving aside the bizarre irony of an administration approving an award to someone for thwarting its own policy before then resuming that policy, I wonder if there has been confusion and a little indignation that the young upstart hadn't been sufficiently mollified by a decent PR spike and a decent-sized gong. Surely he didn't actually... care?

I've written at length about how our current 'government' is nothing of the sort; that it's a communications team in search of a government, that it has no interest in anything more than winning the news cycle for the next 24 hours, that it's permanently stuck in campaign mode despite there being nothing left to campaign for and that its every decision is governed by PR considerations rather than any notion of consequence.

Well with all that in mind, oh boy did they ever fail to read the room on this one. Their decision to 'poor us' the issue by harping on about what Angela Rayner may or may not have muttered on the floor of the House served only to underline to many people that, in her discourteous language, she was venting very understandable frustration.

Voting to deny food to poor children is one thing; voting to deny food to poor children and then playing the victim because you got called names for it is so incredibly tone-deaf as to make Florence Foster Jenkins sound like a tuning fork.

This would be true even if the whingeing were not coming from people who literally dine at the public's expense (the bars and restaurants in the Houses of Parliament are effectively state-subsidised, with estimates putting the figure at about £57,000 a week).

If nothing else, the response to Marcus Rashford's reinvigorated campaign gives me hope that people really are more fundamentally decent than our leaders are, or believe us to be.

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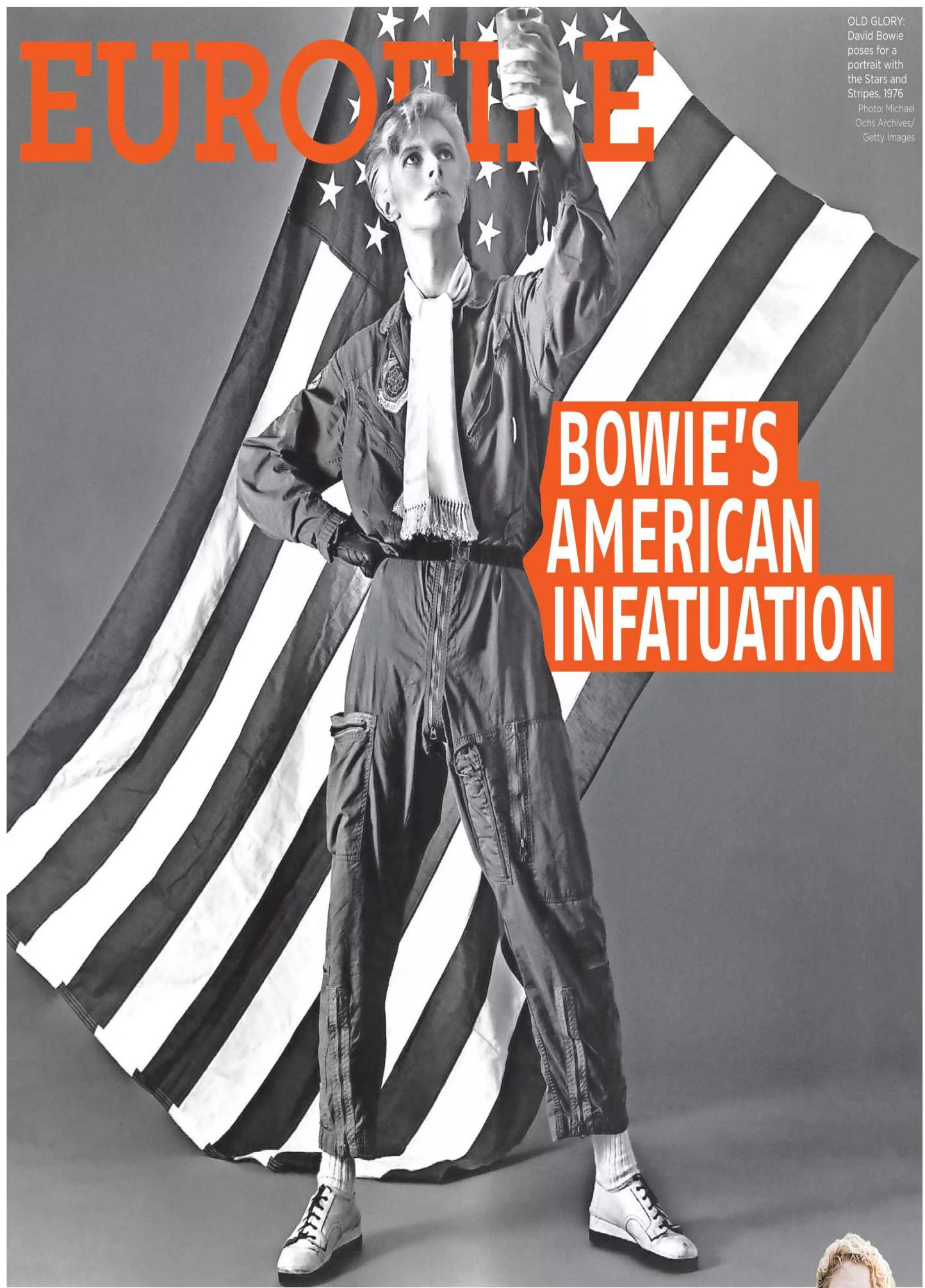
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# EUROPE

BOWIE'S  
AMERICAN  
INFATUATION

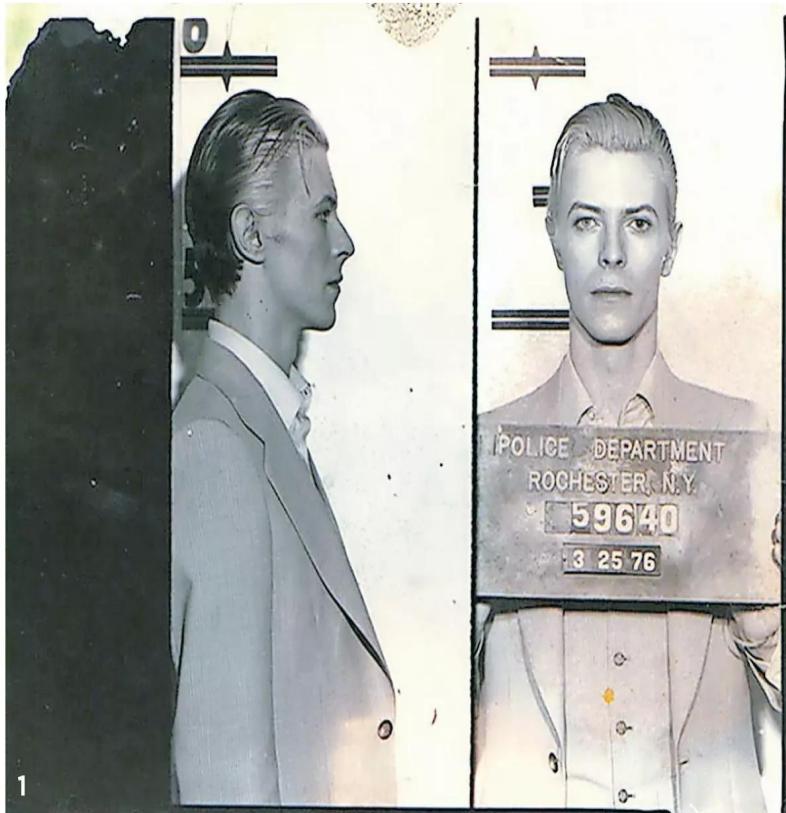
OLD GLORY:  
David Bowie  
poses for a  
portrait with  
the Stars and  
Stripes, 1976  
Photo: Michael  
Ochs Archives/  
Getty Images



**SOPHIA DEBOICK** ON THE FASCINATING STORY OF THE STAR'S OFTEN SELF-DESTRUCTIVE OBSESSION WITH THE US, 50 YEARS AFTER THE RELEASE OF THE FOREBODING ALBUM WHICH MARKED ITS BEGINNING



## EUROFILE MUSIC



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**D**avid Jones was hardly the only baby boomer to adore all things American. The schoolboy was one of millions who had come through austerity Britain to find rock 'n' roll arrive just in time for their teens. For Jones, America meant a ready-made dream of glamour, exoticism and decadence, sustained by listening to Little Richard records, following American football, and reading Jack Kerouac in his tiny bedroom of his parents' terraced house in suburban Bromley.

But Jones was one of the few of his generation to make that dream reality. Pictures of the 16-year-old in his first band, the Konrads, toting a saxophone and with an immaculate DA hairdo, mark the Alpha point of a lifelong musical love affair with America. As David Bowie – a

name inspired by the intense Americans of the 1960 film *The Alamo*, where Richard Widmark played Texan rebel Jim Bowie – he would explore the American mythos again and again throughout his half a century-long career. But he would also almost be killed by his first-hand experience of that country, suffering personal breakdown in step with its national crisis.

Bowie's first substantial artistic confrontation of America as an idea came on *The Man Who Sold the World*, made before he had ever set foot in the States, and whose 50th anniversary of release comes just the day after the 2020 US election. With its exploration of madness, violence and dystopia, it is an album that speaks to the Trumpian nightmare.

Bowie had been around the music

**AMERICAN DREAM:**  
1 David Bowie's police mugshot following his arrest in New York. Photo: Getty Images

2 Bowie in Los Angeles while recording *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (1976)

Photo: Brad Elterman/  
FilmMagic



industry block a few times by 1970. His time as a Soho mod and then a hash-fuelled hippy had resulted in two albums and no hits, but then 1969's *Space Oddity* got to No.5 and won an Ivor Novello. Its success had allowed the 23-year-old to rent a Victorian pile in Beckenham called Haddon Hall where he established a commune-like atmosphere with his new wife, Angie, and assorted acquaintances.

While things looked rosy in his personal life, Bowie's faith in his career was wavering. His next single had sunk without trace and the band he put together with bassist and producer Tony Visconti, guitarist Mick Ronson and drummer Mick Woodmansey had bombed live (Bowie's very first onstage character, 'Rainbowman', had proved unsuccessful). He approached making his third album in

the summer of 1970 in a state of creative lethargy, handing Visconti and Ronson chord changes and working titles for the songs and then retreating to his state of domestic bliss.

But putting the record in the hands of Visconti and Ronson revolutionised Bowie's sound, and the mod-rock-meets-music-hall and folk rock of his previous efforts were junked in favour of the lead-heavy sounds of Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. Ronson, imitating Cream and The Jimi Hendrix Experience, laced the record with abundant filthy feedback and string-melting solos ("You believed every note had been wrenched from his soul," Bowie later said), while Visconti's bass was frantic and dominantly high in the mix.

But if the sound was not Bowie's vision,



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the lyrics unmistakably were. Despite, according to Tony Visconti's autobiography, being dashed off between sessions of "billing and cooing" with Angie and trips to antique shops to unearth knick-knacks for Haddon Hall, the stories told on *The Man Who Sold the World* proved that Bowie's imagination had hardly been dulled by domesticity, and the tenor of the times coloured the record.

America had taken a dark turn by 1970. The shiny, hopeful nation of the 1950s – at least as it had appeared in the British popular imagination – had spiralled into chaos as the country was bruised by Vietnam and rocked by civil unrest at home. Even the hope of creating an alternative society had died as the counterculture once represented by Woodstock instead became symbolised by

Charles Manson. Bowie's American influences too turned darker, from the heroin-induced alienation of the Velvet Underground to Stanley Kubrick's stark futuristic visions.

Even before *The Man Who Sold the World*, Bowie had been inspired by dystopian images of America. The rendering of human loneliness in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) resulted in *Space Oddity* (1969), ultimately a tale of American hubris as Major Tom spirals off into space and certain doom. *We Are Hungry Men* from Bowie's 1967 debut LP had taken its basic scenario from the New York-set 1966 science fiction novel *Make Room! Make Room!* – an overpopulated nation adopts 'mass abortion', infanticide, rationing oxygen and, finally, cannibalism as policy.

DYSTOPIAN INSPIRATION:  
3 David Bowie jams at a party at lawyer Paul Figen's Los Angeles house in January 1971

Photo: Earl Leaf/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

4 Bowie on stage in New York, 1970

Photo: Art Zelin/Getty Images

But on *The Man Who Sold the World* Bowie's engagement with the American dream-turned-dystopia was extensive, and writer on Bowie Chris O'Leary has said it was as if "He knew what was coming: neo-fascism, nuclear war, authoritarian cults of personality, decadence, civilization's end".

The first side of *The Man Who Sold the World* was thoroughly unsettling, opening with the eight-minute long descent into a homoerotic Dantean hell, *The Width of a Circle*, followed by the deeply personal portrait of lunacy, *All the Madmen*. Bowie's attempt to exorcise his fear of inheriting the mental ill health that had plagued his mother's side of the family, the song's "mansions cold and grey" referenced the Victorian Cane Hill Asylum in Croydon where Bowie's

schizophrenic half-brother Terry was a patient. The creepy innocence of *After All*, meanwhile, dealt with the puncturing of the dreams of the flower children: "The thought just occurred, we're nobody's children."

But on side two, the feverishness was ramped up as a violent, apocalyptic America came into view and ideas of the country as benevolent global policeman and the world's saviour were subverted. *Running Gun Blues* was a horrific tale of a Vietnam vet gone rogue, alluding to the 1968 My Lai massacre, Bowie chirpily singing "I'll slash them cold, I'll kill them dead/ I'll slice them till they're running red". *Saviour Machine* was a science

## EUROFILE MUSIC

► From page 35

fiction tale of "President Joe" coming up with a "scheme for a saviour machine" which brings peace and plenty before things go awry. The loss of free will, a crisis of democracy and a betrayal of political leadership were all at stake.

As *The Man Who Sold the World* drew to a close, the title track's disorientating opening riff was a sign that such linear narrative was about to be abandoned. Obliquely concerned with an encounter with another self, existential dread and possible pasts and futures, the song has been called an "anxious grapple with the elusiveness of identity" by Bowieologist Nicholas Pegg. The final track, *The Supermen*, was Wagnerian in its scale and Nietzschean in its theme. Bowie would later call it "pre-fascist" in its glorification of an immortal master race.

On the LP's US release in November 1970 *Rolling Stone* called it "an experience that is as intriguing as it is chilling, but only to the listener sufficiently together to withstand its schizophrenia", while the *Los Angeles Free Press* described it as "What happens to a flower-child when all of the world around him is going slightly crazy and power struggles are taking over everything".

When Bowie finally went to America in early 1971, going to Greenwich Village and being shown round fashionable LA by nightclub owner and tastemaker Rodney Bingenheimer, he caused a stir by wearing a "man's dress" by London designer Mr Fish and telling reporters about his previous life as "a shaven-headed transvestite". He returned home to promptly complain to *Disc & Music Echo* about how unappreciated he was in the UK, saying "In fact, the only thing that gave me faith again was being asked to go across to America. If I'm into making it in records, I'll have to go and live there".

In the event, 'making it in records' seemed a distant prospect as the album sold fewer than 1,500 copies in the US and, despite attracting attention when it was released in the UK in April 1971 for its cover showing a highly androgynous Bowie lying languidly on a chaise longue in the living room at Haddon Hall wearing another Mr Fish dress, *The Man Who Sold the World* "sold like hotcakes in Beckenham, and nowhere else", as he later put it.

The effect of that US trip on Bowie's psyche was no more beneficial than it was on his sales. Bowie would later say of *Quicksand* from his next LP, 1971's *Hunky Dory*, "The chain reaction of moving around throughout the bliss and then the calamity of America produced this epic of confusion", the song suggesting the encounter with America had resulted in defeatism ("I ain't got the power anymore") and nihilism ("Knowledge comes with death's release"). Bowie's identity crisis, as explored in the title track of *The Man Who Sold the World*, had only been exacerbated.

Three years later, having painted vivid dystopian scenes on *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972) and *Aladdin Sane* (1973), and then taken the idea to its full conclusion by setting Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* amid "sterile skyscrapers", elevators, boardwalks, and hamburgers on 1974's *Diamond Dogs*, Bowie was in the middle of his epic US-only tour for that album.





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Filmed for the BBC's *Cracked Actor* documentary at this time, Bowie confided "I hated it when I first came here" but added "It filled a vast expanse of my imagination... It just supplied a need in me, America. It became a myth land for me. I think every kid goes through it eventually, but I just got onto it earlier".

But this place of David Jones' childhood dreams was consuming David Bowie. A move to New York in late 1974 and then to Los Angeles would lead to a complete loss of self. In the grip of a galloping cocaine addiction, an obsession with the totalitarian and the satanic came to dominate a paranoid mind. The Aryan superman character of the Thin White Duke and the occult references of *Station to Station* (1976) were followed by an arrest in New York for drug possession, remarks about the benefits of having a fascist leader and the virtues of Hitler as a "media artist", and the famous Victoria Station incident when Bowie was caught in a pose that looked like a Nazi salute.

In retrospect, Bowie would see the atmosphere in LA as a large contributor to his breakdown, telling the *NME* in 1980 "the f\*\*\*ing place should be wiped off the face of the earth".

Bowie's relationship with America would later change profoundly. After cleaning up in Berlin and becoming a Swiss tax exile, he moved back to New York in the early 1990s, making it the home of his new family and finding both

a restorative anonymity and creative inspiration there. He put together a band of native New Yorkers who he worked with for the next 20 years and his last creative projects, the *Blackstar* LP, recorded with a local jazz quintet, and the *Lazarus* musical staged at the New York Theatre Workshop, could only have come out of Manhattan.

Back in the summer of 1974, the day after work had begun on *Young Americans* – Bowie's most earnestly American LP, as he co-opted Philadelphia soul and started dressing like a Lower East Side gangster – Richard Nixon resigned in ignominy. Bowie namechecked him on the LP's irony-laced title track, while *Somebody Up There Likes Me* painted a picture of an ultimate leader with "his eye on your soul, his hand on your heart", who can "sell you anything". Trust in the American values that the presidency was meant to embody was in crisis, and Bowie's personal disintegration coincided with this disillusionment – no longer was America the dreamland of the post-war generation, but edging towards the nightmare of *The Man Who Sold the World*. When Trump took the oath of office, a year almost to the day after Bowie's death, it was another moment when what America means fundamentally shifted. What has come after has again taken the country further towards dystopia. What comes next could mirror Bowie's own redemption and discovery of a different America.

CRACKING ACTOR:  
1 David Bowie performs on The Dick Cavett Show, 1974

Photo: Ann Limongello/Walt Disney Television via Getty Images

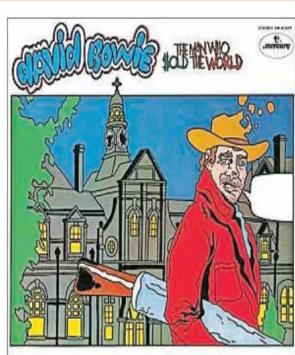
2 Bowie at his home at Haddon Hall, Beckenham, 1971

Photo: Getty Images

## TALE OF TWO COVERS



The original 1970 US release of *The Man Who Sold the World* featured a cartoon-like drawing of a cowboy in front of the Cane Hill asylum in Croydon, where Bowie's half brother had been a patient. It was drawn by the singer's friend, artist Michael J Weller – who knew another patient there – after Bowie asked him to create a design that would capture the album's foreboding tone. Weller used a photograph of John Wayne to draw the cowboy figure. A speech bubble was added to have the line "roll up your sleeves and show us your arms" – a pun on record players,



guns, and drug use – but Mercury apparently found the idea too risqué and the balloon was left blank. Bowie was enthusiastic about the finished design, but later reconsidered and a photoshoot was organised in the Haddon Hall living room, with the singer in his "man's dress". In the US, Mercury rejected the photo and released the album with Weller's design as its cover, much to the displeasure of Bowie. In 1972, he said Weller's design was "horrible" but reappraised it in 1999, saying he "actually thought the cartoon cover was really cool".

## EUROFILE CINEMA



# BLACKFACE BLITZED

Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* was a box office bomb on its release. **RICHARD LUCK** says this is definitely the right moment for a reappraisal



ACID SATIRE:  
1 Tommy Davidson, left, and Savion Glover as Sleep'n Eat and Mantan in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000)

Photo: Getty Images

In the wake of his long overdue Oscar win for the *BlacKkKlansman* screenplay and the success of his recent Netflix outing *Da 5 Bloods*, it's easy to forget that Spike Lee hasn't always been in vogue. In the late 1990s, the much-feted director of *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Jungle Fever* (1991) was experiencing something of a creative slump.

Perhaps exhausted after finally bringing his epic *Malcolm X* (1992) to the big screen, Lee's movies were either ill-conceived – phone sex comedy *Girl 6* (1996) – underappreciated – his stunning adaptation of the novel *Clockers* (1995) – or misunderstood.

Always a ballsy filmmaker, Spike's determination to make movies about the Million Man March (1996's *Get on the Bus*) and David Berkowitz's 1970s New York murder spree (1999's *Summer of Sam*) ought to have been rewarded with more than just lukewarm reviews and public outcry.

A die-hard Knicks fan who's enjoyed a successful commercial relationship with Michael Jordan, it must also have broken

Lee's heart when his 1998 basketball movie *He Got Game* fouled out at the box office.

No matter the indifference, Spike Lee kept on working. Indeed, as synonymous as he's become with controversy, the writer-director-producer deserves far more recognition for his work ethic.

In addition to shooting six features between *Malcolm X* and the new millennium, the latter half of the 1990s saw him create the Oscar-nominated documentary *4 Little Girls* (1997), produce his cousin Malcolm's rom-com *The Best Man* (1999) and shoot any number of music videos and commercials.

Come the year 1999, Lee's willingness to try new things saw him make the stand-up concert movie *The Original Kings of Comedy*. Featuring Cedric The Entertainer and Bernie Mac, the picture was quite the financial success. The same couldn't be said of the other film Lee made that year.

Twenty years on, however, *The Original Kings of Comedy* feels like a relic from a more innocent age. On the other hand, *Bamboozled* feels so relevant,

you could be forgiven for thinking Spike Lee had cooked it up during lockdown.

Written, produced and directed by Spike, *Bamboozled* kicks off with the Webster's Dictionary's definition of satire. Its intentions clear, the film proceeds to tell the story of Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans), a Harvard-educated television producer who's having a tough time getting his work to air.

Arguably too smart for the job he's been assigned to, Delacroix hits upon a scheme similar to the one Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder conjure up in *The Producers*. For while quitting will see the network sue Pierre, things will be very different if he can get the station to fire him. With this in mind, he approaches his boss with the most outlandish concept imaginable, a modern-day minstrel show.

A tasteless notion made more tasteless still by Delacroix's insistence that those wearing blackface ought themselves to be black, Pierre is confident he'll be free of the station in next to no time.

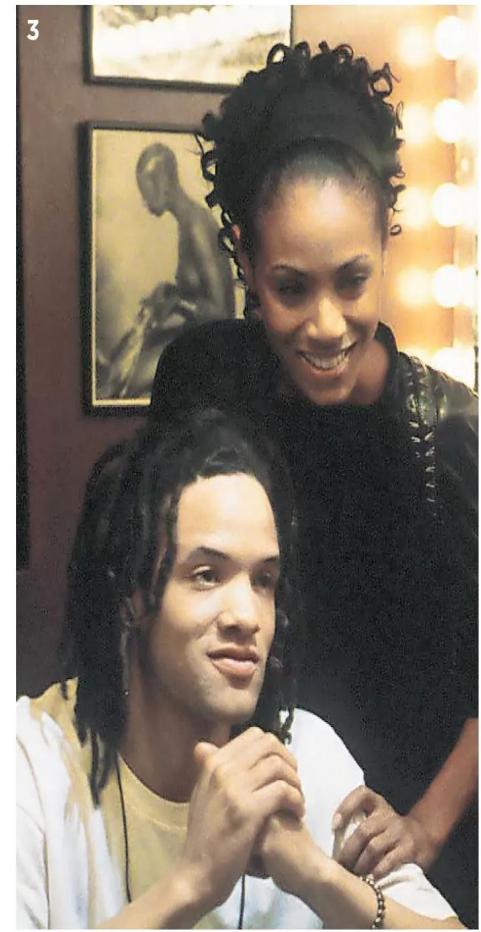
However, he's reckoned without Thomas Dunwitty (Michael Rapaport),

the station chief who seems to think his black wife and mixed-race kids give him licence to crack every and any racist joke.

Dunwitty hears Pierre's pitch for *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show* and green lights the project on the spot. Pierre and his principled PA Sloane Hopkins (Jada Pinkett Smith) must now hope that their pilot episode upsets as many people as it ought to do...

Those who have seen the aforementioned Mel Brooks masterpiece will have a good idea of what happens next. However, pretty much everything else about *Bamboozled* is far from predictable. For example, who could've foreseen that *Tonight Show* house band The Roots would show-up portraying the Mantan house band, The Alabama Porch Monkeys? Or that Sloane's brother Julius (Yasiin Bey, aka the artist formerly known as Mos Def) and his militant rap band The Mau-Maus would so take against Pierre's show that they kidnap one of its stars?

Speaking of stars, Savion Glover and Tommy Davidson are quite excellent as



Manray and Womack, the homeless street performers Delacroix hires to star in his show. Reborn as Mantan and Sleep'n Eat, the pair revel in their initial success, only for the nature of the show and the nature of showbusiness to sour their act and their friendship.

The price of fame, the worth of a man's soul, the stain of racism upon America's past and present - *Bamboozled* is a message movie with so much to say, it's remarkable that Hollywood should have invested in it.

Truth be told, New Line Pictures didn't invest much into *Bamboozled*. With just \$10 million to work with, Lee had to call in plenty of favours to bring his vision to the screen. In addition to Wayans, Pinkett Smith and Rapaport agreeing to work for a fraction of their usual asking price, Lee also called on Mira Sorvino and Alec Baldwin to cameo as themselves. Come the day of the shoot, Baldwin slept through his alarm, leaving a panicked Lee to ring around to see what other name actors were in New York and ready to work. A bleary-eyed Matthew Modine arrived on the set shortly thereafter.

Lee was also helped out by his willingness to embrace new technology. In opting to shoot *Bamboozled* on 15 Sony digital cameras using Mini DV digital video, the director not only saved himself a fortune on film stock but was also able to shoot each scene simultaneously from multiple positions, so cutting out the need for countless camera set-ups. Had he employed more traditional means, it might have taken Lee 90+ days to shoot *Bamboozled*. Instead, he had the film in the can within six weeks.

Shot in the autumn of 1999, it opened in America a year later. In promoting his film, Lee was quick to site Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd* as a key influence - he

enjoyed a long-standing friendship with the writer Budd Schulberg - while also tipping his Kangol to *The Producers* and Sidney Lumet's *Network*.

As for the purpose of his film, Lee told PBS's Charlie Rose that "[*Bamboozled*]'s about the history of Hollywood and television's misrepresentations of people of colour.

"It shows that those images [of minstrelsy] affect everybody and they're still with us. And I think it also shows that nowadays in the 21st century, you don't actually have to wear blackface to be in a minstrel act."

In fleshing out this last point, Lee remarked: "There are a lot of TV programmes that are modern-day minstrel shows. I think some forms of the genre gangsta rap... if you look at some of those videos, that's a form of modern-day minstrel show."

Not unsurprisingly, these comments weren't terribly well received. Jamie Foxx went so far as to say: "With the most respect I can give him, I think Spike needs to back off a little. He's getting to the point where nobody cares because he talks about [race] so much, that now he's just become the angry black man."

Lee responded by saying that Foxx's words were themselves a response to Lee's comments about modern-day minstrelsy. "I think he took it personal."

Hurt feelings couldn't account for the savage reviews *Bamboozled* received. Flick through the clippings and you'll find repeated use of terms like "heavy-handed", "unsubtle" and "unfocused". Add this coverage to the disappointment cinemagoers experienced when they discovered *Bamboozled* wasn't your typical Damon Wayans comedy and it was the sorry truth that, by the time the film opened in the UK in the April of

2001, it had long since vanished from American movie theatres.

And that, you could be forgiven for thinking, might have been the end of that.

However, just as the issues of blackface and modern-day minstrelsy have refused to go away, so *Bamboozled* has continued to occupy a place in the popular imagination. A picture that lost upwards of \$7 million at the box office slowly developed a priceless cult following.

Look at any list of 'the greatest movies you've never seen' and you can be sure *Bamboozled* will be pretty near the top. And this year, Lee's movie was granted the ultimate in art house recognition, admittance to the prestigious Criterion DVD/Blu-ray Collection.

Alas, there's no getting away from the fact that *Bamboozled*'s reputation is at least in part linked to the baffling fact that blackface is still a part of modern-day life - streaming services have recently ditched blackface episodes of *Scrubs*, *30 Rock* and *Little Britain*. Oh, and if you're wondering what Lee's position is on people 'blacking up' for Halloween, it's unequivocal - "NO!! NO!! NO!! NO!!"

As for how *Bamboozled* stands up, it's a measure of its quality that its actually enhanced by its flaws. In transferring the digital footage to film, Lee wound up with an extraordinarily ugly-looking film. But what else should a film about blackface be but unspeakably ugly? (The Mantan footage, on the other hand, is shot on film and is beautiful and hideous in equal measure.) *Bamboozled* is an ugly-sounding film, too, peppered with f-bombs and n-words which seem legitimate given the subject at hand.

More contentious - and something of a constant throughout the director's earlier films - is Lee's depiction of Jewish

CHARACTERS. Sure, Michael Rapaport's exec bares more than a passing resemblance to Lee's long-time foe Quentin Tarantino, but he also brings to mind Harvey Weinstein and any number of Jewish entertainment power brokers. This using of one stereotype to criticise the stereotyping of others is quite the thing in 2020 - type 'anti-Semitism' and 'Nick Cannon' into Google and you're in for quite the wild ride.

Such behaviour tells us a lot about America, mind you. After all, the US is a nation convinced that the answer to its gun problem is more guns. By this fractured logic, it stands to reason that the answer to racism is more racism. And from the ridiculous to the sublime, for while much about *Bamboozled* is excellent - the Terrence Blanchard score, the supporting performances of Pinkett Smith and Paul Mooney, Davidson and Glover's resistibly irresistible double-act - it's the film's final three-and-a-half minutes that elevate it to something approaching greatness.

Compiled by Lee and researcher Judy Aley, *Bamboozled* concludes with a potted history of blackface on film. We see white actors made up as slaves in DW Griffiths' *The Birth of a Nation*; we watch Judy Garland, Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor performing minstrel standards in full costume; we endure excerpts from classics like *Duel in the Sun* and *Gone with the Wind*, showing stereotyped portrayals of black characters; and we watch clip after clip from cartoons and children's film TV series featuring - as Lee described them to Charlie Rose - "watermelon-smiling picaninnies".

It's a sequence Spike Lee considers his most powerful piece of film-making. That it hasn't proven to be the last word on blackface is truly bamboozling.

## EUROFILE MUSIC

# Maastricht

## A CITY IN MUSIC



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### NEW EUROPEAN: MAASTRICHT

Featuring:

#### Song of the Second Moon

Kid Baltan

#### Vibration

Tom Dissevelt

#### Waarom Fluister Ik Je Naam Nog

Benny Neyman

#### Ode to Maastricht

André Rieu

**SOPHIA DEBOICK** on a modern musical phenomenon, and his creative hometown



**M**aastricht is a name that looms large in the history of the European Union. As the place of the EU's birth with the 1992 Treaty it is forever associated with grey diplomacy and has been a four-letter word in the mouths of Eurosceptics. But this pretty city of rich history, with winding streets set behind 17th century fortifications, has rather more to it.

Of Roman foundation, Maastricht became an important religious centre as the burial place of fourth century bishop Saint Servatius, and was later at the heart of the Carolingian Empire, and this capital of Limburg – the most southern Dutch province, which protrudes into Belgium – boasts strong French and German cultural influences. Inundated with refugees in the early part of the Second World War, the city's labyrinthine marlstone mines and caves provided shelter during the Nazi bombardment of the Battle of Maastricht. Maastricht shielded a large number of Jewish families during the war and was the first Dutch city to be liberated by the Allies.

But for all this history, Maastricht's music has been notable for looking forward, producing sounds that anticipated the future of the medium, even if more recently it has embraced nostalgia and looked backwards to a largely false past.

Dick Raaijmakers was born in Maastricht in 1930 and pursued his early interest in music in the midst of war, playing piano and, crucially, building radios. Despite formal piano training after the war, Raaijmakers became more and more interested in the intersection of music and technology as technological innovation became framed as the vehicle of all mankind's hopes in the 1950s.

In 1954 Raaijmakers took a job on the Philips radio assembly line in Eindhoven to gain experience with electronics. He ended up changing musical history.

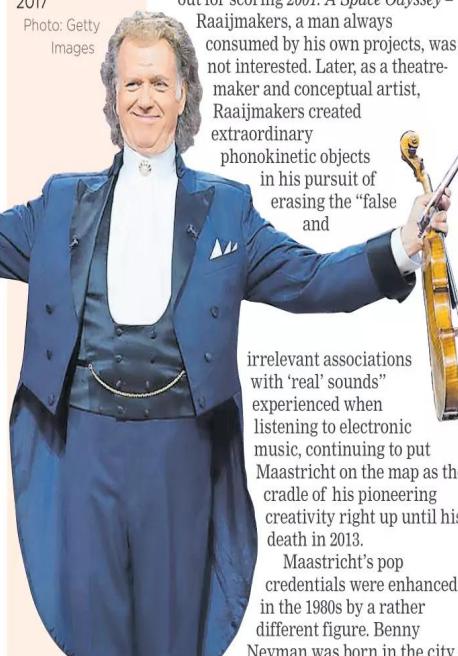
Promoted to Philips' Natuurkundig Laboratorium ('physics laboratory' – known as NatLab), Raaijmakers became assistant to Dutch composers Henk Badings and Tom Dissevelt. Both were carrying out some of the earliest experiments in making electronic music, but it would be Raaijmakers who would attempt the first electronically-made popular music, using the pseudonym Kid Baltan ('NatLab Dik' backwards).

The launch of Sputnik 1 – a 'second moon' – in the autumn of 1957 proved the inspiration Raaijmakers needed and the instrumental *Song of the Second Moon* has been called the world's first electronic pop song. Full of the wooshes of space flight and random beeps that sounded like a distant world trying to make contact, it also had memorable melodies and structures traceable to contemporary Latin and jazz.



LARGER THAN  
LIFE: André Rieu  
performs in Paris,  
2017

Photo: Getty  
Images



Raaijmakers was still at the cutting edge 10 years on from *Song of the Second Moon*, as Stanley Kubrick sounded him out for scoring *2001: A Space Odyssey* – Raaijmakers, a man always consumed by his own projects, was not interested. Later, as a theatre-maker and conceptual artist, Raaijmakers created extraordinary phonokinetic objects in his pursuit of erasing the 'false and

irrelevant associations with 'real sounds' experienced when listening to electronic music, continuing to put Maastricht on the map as the cradle of his pioneering creativity right up until his death in 2013.

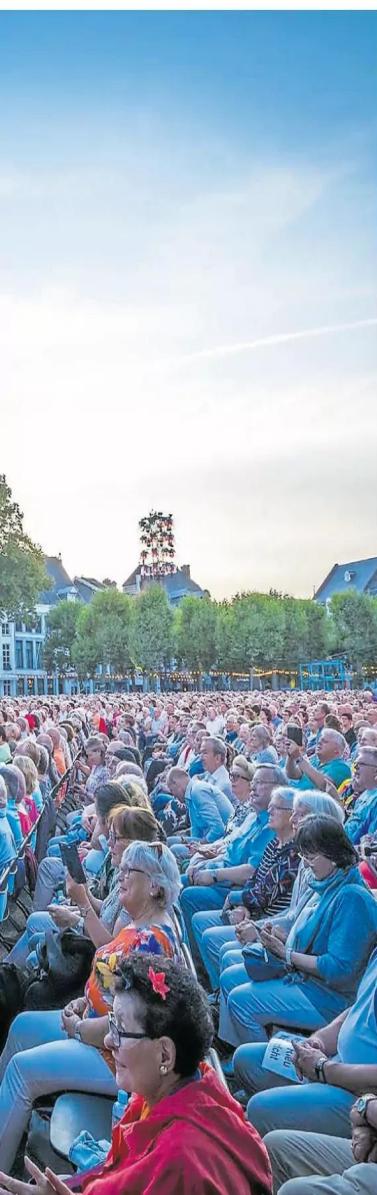
Maastricht's pop credentials were enhanced in the 1980s by a rather different figure. Benny Neyman was born in the city

in 1951 as the son of a miner in the Limburg coalfields, but ploughed his own furrow by making Dutch-language pop music which drew more on the tradition of Francophone *chanson* than the *levenslied* ('life song') Dutch variant of *schlager*. His greatest hit, however, was distinctly un-Dutch in its feel.

*Waarom Fluister Ik Je Naam Nog* ('Why Do I Still Whisper Your Name'), from 1985, was originally sung by Hellenic pop singer Bessy Argyraki and Neyman's version retained its trilling bouzouki strings reminiscent of a Greek taverna. It was No.1 in the Netherlands for 11 consecutive weeks, becoming a classic of Dutch pop. Covering songs gleaned from across Europe but with self-penned Dutch lyrics became Neyman's modus operandi for the whole of his professional life.

His career had a surprising longevity given that he never had another major hit after *Waarom Fluister Ik Je Naam Nog*, his devoted, overwhelmingly female fanbase attending his endless tours in their droves. His charismatic stage presence was partly responsible for that, but Neyman put his success down to having "always remained myself", and that was true in more ways than one.

From the start, Neyman was always open about his sexuality and his 25-year relationship with his husband Hans van



## HOMETOWN HYMN

In 2002 Maastricht officially adopted a city anthem. *Mestreechs Volksleed* is taken from the 1910 comic opera *Trijn de Begijn* by Maastricht-born composer Alphonse Olterdissen, whose statue stands on the city's Grote Looiersstraat. The song's lyrics are in the Maastrichtian variant of the Limburgish dialect and is a favourite at André Rieu's Maastricht concerts.

Johann Strauss Orchestra perform, as well as touring globally, Rieu is both Maastricht's major export and a classical music phenomenon unrivalled in the world today.

The son of the conductor of the Maastricht Symphony Orchestra and educated at the Maastricht Conservatoire, the septuagenarian Rieu, totting a 1667 Stradivarius and with long hair, cravat and tails, is a larger than life figure. His slightly madcap air – he has insisted he wants to perform at the North Pole and on the Moon and that his heart beats in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time – is enhanced by him living in a castle of 13th century origin in southern Maastricht.

In an age where touring revenues often outstrip those from music sales, Rieu is king, routinely making eight-figure sums from his tours. A successful touring act for nearly a decade before his orchestra, founded in Maastricht 1987, ever put a record out, in 2009 Rieu was the sixth highest-grossing touring act in the world, outstripping Billy Joel, Elton John, Tina Turner and Coldplay.

The draw is not hard to understand. Rieu and his anachronistically-costumed musicians (the women wear huge pastel-coloured dresses in the 19th century Viennese style) play not just the waltz but a programme that draws on the 'greatest hits' of opera and also includes pop songs and pieces from musicals. Comedy is central to the shows, the visual jokes and slapstick transcending language barriers just as much as the music does, and audience participation is positively encouraged.

Highly camp and strongly invested in a populist sense of old-time charm, Rieu's performances have left 'serious' classical musical fans aghast, but he has carved out a new market by bringing classical performance to millions who would otherwise find it inaccessible or off-puttingly formal. Not for nothing has the *New York Times* called Rieu "the maestro of the masses".

While coronavirus has temporarily stymied Rieu's march across the globe and saw his usual Maastricht summer concerts cancelled, he already had another well-established income stream. Rieu has repeatedly broken box office records with cinema screenings of his concerts, garnering some \$60 million in ticket sales, and August's compilation film *André Rieu's Magical Maastricht: Together in Music* saw Rieu's status as a pioneer of event cinema consolidated.

Through this bringing together of live performance and cinema, as much as through his tours, Rieu has brought Maastricht to international prominence. Next year's summer concerts – the comeback after corona – are likely to be the greatest celebration of Maastricht and music yet seen.

PHENOMENON:  
Crowds at  
Maastricht-born  
violinist André  
Rieu's 100th  
concert in the  
city's Vrijthof  
square, 2019

Photo: Getty  
Images

## STAR TURNS BY TIM WALKER



# BOND STAR HAUNTED BY SCHOOL TRAGEDY

In the age of the coronavirus, it's perhaps as well not to dwell too much on six degrees of separation, the idea that all people on average are six – or fewer – social connections away from each other. Still, I was struck by how true this was just over a decade ago when I found myself chatting to Sir Sean Connery about various allegations that his former wife Diane Cilento had made about him in an interview. In his typically trenchant way, the former James Bond star had memorably described her to me as an "insane woman" who was "prepared to stoop to the level of the gutter" in her attempts to tarnish him.

The star-cross'd lovers had a son together in Jason, and, in the midst of our conversation, he mentioned Millfield – the school in Somerset where he had briefly sent the future actor – and he said it was a "rubbish" place and that he'd bitterly regretted the decision to send him there. It so happened I had been at the school at the same time as Jason and I knew what had caused him to say this.

Jason had walked into a changing room and found a 13-year-old boy had hanged himself. He'd tried to save him, but it was too late. The boy had been badly bullied and had been informed that day that he'd be staying on at the school during the summer holidays with one of those who was victimising him. The tragedy caused Connery to remove Jason from the school and send him instead to Gordonstoun. Connery was still – just as much as I am – haunted by what happened.

The tragic boy had started at the school at the same time as me, and in the same house, and my parents had withdrawn me from the school, too, as a result. That shared experience created an unexpected bond between Connery and me. I don't know the truth of the allegations Cilento had made about him, but it was clear that, despite his tough guy reputation, Connery had a deep sense of right and wrong. He spoke movingly about how, all those years on, he still felt "furious" about what had happened, that he believed the school had failed in its duty to the dead boy and his parents and how he could not bear to imagine the pain his death had caused his family.

I'd originally got to know Connery through his French-Moroccan wife Micheline Roquebrune, who I had interviewed years earlier about her career as a painter. It always seemed to me they were a couple strangely unchanged by wealth and success: she was inclined to tease Connery – which he took in good part – and certainly he never

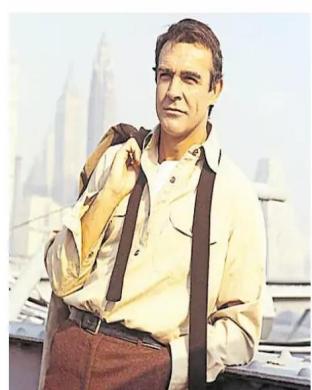
regarded being a film star as a proper job for a grown man.

He related how, when he had returned to his native Edinburgh after making his name in acting, the driver of his taxi had been struck by how he knew the names of all the streets. Connery had laconically replied that he used to deliver milk in the city. The strangely unworldly driver asked him what he did for a living and Connery had replied: "That's not so easy to answer."

The actor's real passions had always been off-screen – his family, golf and Scottish independence, among them. He had long been a member and supporter of the Scottish National Party, and this, I discovered, had made for a complicated relationship with Rupert Murdoch, whose family also originated from north of the border. Initially dubious about independence for Scotland, Murdoch has in recent years apparently been coming round to the idea.

Connery, who was making *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* for Murdoch's 20th Century Fox when we'd once chatted, may well have been instrumental in bringing the media tycoon round to the idea. He admitted they'd talked about it. Interestingly, when the *News of the World* was later embroiled in the phone-hacking scandal, Connery let it be known that he had no interest in seeking any kind of redress from Murdoch's now-defunct tabloid.

Connery announced his retirement in 2006 and resisted attempts to appear in one last Indiana Jones film for a humongous sum of money. I know, too, that Sir Roger Moore tried to persuade him to get together with all the other living James Bond stars for a film that would have served as a homage to the franchise, but Connery was having none of it. He said retirement was just proving to be "too much damned fun".



TRENCHANT:  
Sean Connery,  
1968

Photo: Getty  
Images

## EUROFILE BOOKS

# A LONG GONE SIGN OF OUR TIMES

Last week something happened that felt like a communication from a different age: I was asked to appear at a literary festival. It's not until next year and "obviously a lot of the details are TBC depending on what the government guidelines will be etc", but it was definitely an invitation to appear at a book festival. In front of people. Actual people.

One of the perks of having a book out is the opportunity to leave the house and mingle with other human beings at events. It's a chance to meet readers and hopefully win new ones, not to mention hear authors you admire speaking about books you like as well as just generally hanging around with nice people. Literary festivals and similar events often remind me why I spend months shut away, drowning in anxiety and self-doubt and typing blearily in the bluey-white glow of a computer screen: the direct connection it forges with people who love reading and love books.

Some festivals have made huge efforts to take their events online with some degree of success but the coronavirus has squashed entirely the traditional circuit of literary gatherings which are, for some members of this solitary profession, the only things stopping us going feral. Indeed, if I've been up against a book deadline I sometimes spend the first day at a festival pointing and grunting at things I haven't seen for a while – trees, shoes, cutlery – and hoping I've managed to at least pick most of the chewed animal bones out of my naval-length beard. Thinking about it, if the event next spring does go ahead in something like a conventional form it'll be the first time I'll have worn clothes with buttons in nearly a year.

The prospect of standing up in front of a room full of people and talking for 45 minutes plus questions is a little alarming right now. I think the most I've said in one go since lockdown is "whose turn is it to cook tonight?" which, while it might solicit some tasty responses from a festival audience, not to mention possible dinner invitations, is a tricky thing to stretch to a full three-quarters of an hour. But hey, let's cross that bridge when we come to it, because I am also informed by the organisers that if the event isn't held remotely there will be the opportunity for book signings afterwards, my favourite bit of the whole process.

There are two types of book signing. One is a 'stock signing', where someone from the publisher takes you by the elbow and escorts you around bookshops to sign copies of your book (on one occasion I got distracted chattering to the bookseller and ended up signing not just my own book but three copies of the Second World War history title that lay underneath mine on the table we were using).

Occasionally you'll be taken to a distribution centre on a remote industrial estate to sign copies before they go out to the shops. I did 2,000 in one sitting once,

**CHARLIE CONNELLY** on the perils and pitfalls of a much-missed fixture of the literary scene... the book signing



which nearly killed me. Like an idiot I decided I'd make the extra effort to add "Best wishes" to each one, so that was 8,000 words, handwritten, in one go, in a windowless room with nothing but boxes of books stacked floor to ceiling and some biscuits for company.

Easily the best kind of signings are the ones you do for people, in person. The first I ever did was alongside a very posh novelist in a very posh hotel after an event at which we'd been the guest speakers. A long line of eager readers queued at her table while I twiddled my pen and regarded the empty space in front of mine. Opening the first book placed in front of her, she turned to me and asked, loudly, in front of a long queue of her fans, "do you have to do many of these ghastly events too?"

When she went on to tell me that the hotel, by far the poshest I'd ever been in, was "an absolutely ghastly place", I realised we might have had different standards in quite a lot of things, not least what might be considered ghastly. She wasn't my least favourite co-signee though. I once did a lunchtime event with Michael Winner who as we sat together at the signing table afterwards completely blanked me and ignored all my attempts to make smalltalk. Several people had fallen asleep during his speech though, so I had that to enjoy at least.

Fortunately, negative experiences have been very rare. I've only ever had one total no-show, for example, when for some reason I was parked in the bookshop at Aberdeen airport for an hour with a pile of my books on a table. Just one person approached me during the entirety of that hour, which was a very long hour, and that was to ask if I knew where the car park payment machines were, which I didn't.

In general, however, book signings are a very pleasant experience and I miss them. The set up is a little strange; you're usually sitting behind a table like Dominic Cummings in the Downing Street garden to receive one-by-one a string of people who are in the main pleased to see you, like a monarch dishing out alms. It's a situation you have to work very hard to mess up: all you have to worry about is spelling names correctly. I'm extra cautious about this and will usually check even the simplest of names, which can leave people walking away thinking it weird that I can write a whole book apparently without being able to spell 'Dave'.



**PERSONAL CONNECTION:**  
J. K. Rowling signs copies of her *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* at New York's Carnegie Hall in 2007

Photo: Getty Images

Caution is definitely the best policy, though. I often think of Monica Dickens, who at a signing in Australia once inscribed a book placed in front of her to 'Emma Chisett' when the person was actually enquiring what the book cost.

Sometimes the requested dedications are quite specific, like the man who'd had an argument with his girlfriend and was buying her my new one as a making-up present, meaning there is a book out there somewhere inscribed, "To Claire, I'm really, really sorry about last night, Charlie Connolly", but generally the dedicatee's name and 'best wishes' are all that's required. Even I, an idiot, can usually cope with that.

Famous authors have had far worse experiences than me. Jonathan Coe was signing his new book once when a woman picked up a copy, read his potted biography inside the back flap and asked if it was his only claim to fame. When he replied that it was she snorted, put the book down on the table and walked off without another word. *Fight Club* author Chuck Palahniuk tells of a signing he once did in Austin, Texas, when a man in the queue buttonholed a member of the bookshop staff and demanded, "Why should I wait in this long line to get my books signed by that dickwad?", while Tony Blair managed to close down most of central Dublin in 2010 for the – as it



turned out – only signing of his memoir *A Journey*, held at the flagship Eason shop on O'Connell Street. Eggs and shoes were thrown, there were scuffles outside between demonstrators and gardai and one book buyer attempted a citizen's arrest for war crimes. I think I'll settle for being blanketed by Michael Winner, to be honest. Sometimes being a nobody has definite advantages.

Selling books in great numbers can lead to long queues. The children's author Jacqueline Wilson is believed to hold the record for the longest book signing: an eight-hour marathon at a bookshop in Bournemouth in 2004 that an estimated 3,000 book lovers left clutching

signed copies. Some booksellers are still in awe of Margaret Thatcher, who when signing copies of her memoir at Harrods in 1994 got through 950 book buyers in two-and-a-half hours. That works out at a shade under ten seconds per customer, a briskness of signature and interaction apparently unparalleled.

These records are destined to remain unchallenged any time soon. While online events have become more widespread, and publishers and authors imaginative and original in their approaches to making them work, actual signings, in person at least, are logically challenging.

In the mid-2000s Margaret Atwood

## FIVE GREAT BOOKS OUT THIS WEEK

### THAT OLD COUNTRY MUSIC

**Kevin Barry**

**(Canongate, £14.99)**

Barry's most recent novel *Night Boat to Tangier*, about two old Irish gangsters looking back on their lives as they await the vessel of the title, was longlisted for the Booker and showcased his extraordinary prose and gift for storytelling to its highest degree. In this, his third collection of short stories, he takes the social temperature of his native Ireland with a cast of unforgettable characters permanently on the cusp of love and catastrophe.

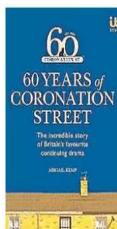


### 60 YEARS OF CORONATION STREET

**Abigail Kemp**

**(Hamlyn, £20)**

There are very few iron horses of British broadcasting left today but this year *Coronation Street* sails onward into its seventh decade and shows no sign of stopping any time soon. This exhaustive history takes the reader year by year through the story of Weatherfield as well as providing insights into the characters and how the show is put together.



### THE SICILIAN METHOD

**Andrea Camilleri**

**(Mantle, £16.99)**

Thanks to television adaptations screened by BBC4, Camilleri's Sicilian detective Inspector Montalbano has become a much-loved crime solver in Britain and the good news is that



came up with a device called the LongPen, which allowed writers to appear at signings remotely. The author chatted on a video screen and could sign books by writing on a tablet, the signature and dedication appearing simultaneously on the book, wherever it was in the world, thanks to a robot arm. The idea came to Atwood, she said, "in Denver at four in the morning on the paperback tour for *Oryx and Crake* after I'd flown in from Japan, already did two events, one on the west coast and one in Denver, and had to get up very early the next day to take a plane to Salt Lake City, and the same day take a plane to Boston".

The LongPen was an initial success and enjoyed an unusual endorsement from Conrad Black, who was able to sign copies of his biography *The Invincible Quest: The Life of Richard Milhous Nixon* at bookshops all over the world despite being unable to leave his Florida home due to bail restrictions imposed by the fraud charges that were hanging over him at the time. Little seems to have been heard of the LongPen since around 2006, however. I've checked and it is still around, making it slightly surprising

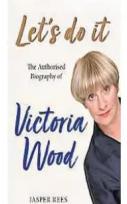
reader converts won't go short of books. This is the 26th novel in the Montalbano series and here the inspector investigates the discovery of two bodies, one of them a noted acting coach renowned for his harsh treatment of students. How are the two corpses related?

### LET'S DO IT: THE AUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY OF VICTORIA WOOD

**Jasper Rees**

**(Trapeze, £20)**

Victoria Wood is often referred to as a national treasure, but in



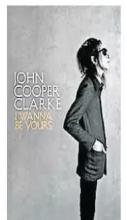
a sense that demeans the streak of genius that thrummed through the sketches, songs and series she created. Quietly subversive, verbally inventive and employing often overlooked cultural reference points recognisable to all, Wood was a genuinely unique writer and performer. Written with the approval of family and friends this is a biography more than worthy of its much-missed subject.

### I WANNA BE YOURS

**John Cooper Clarke**

**(Picador, £20)**

Another inventive wordsmith from the north west but in direct contrast to Victoria Wood, John Cooper Clarke has been a staple of the post-punk and performance poetry scenes since the 1970s. Stick thin with that candy-floss-in-a-gale hair and dark glasses, he's documented society in free verse for four decades and now tells his story in prose. Long-awaited, and worth the wait.



that it doesn't appear to be enjoying a golden age during the coronavirus.

Perhaps people, writer and reader, just miss that simple interaction over the signing table. When I go to a book event it's usually the queuing and getting my book signed that I remember more than anything the author has said during the previous hour. It gives you a sense of personal connection, a brief but meaningful intimacy that buying a stock-signed copy in a shop or a book signed via a robot arm and a video screen can't reproduce.

For an author it brings affirmation, a pride that people are prepared not only to buy your book but stand patiently in a queue to have you write your name in it too. It's a lovely situation to be in and thankfully not one that puts me in danger of getting carried away with myself thanks to the time there were two copies of a book of mine on eBay, one signed, one not. The unsigned copy was going for £8.99. The signed version was up for – wait for it – 99 pence. When your signature's worth minus eight quid there's no danger of a book signing stoking a rampaging ego anytime soon.

## EUROFILE POEM AND PUZZLES

# a poem for europe



**CHRISTOPHER HOPKINS'** poetry has appeared in *Morning Star*, *14 Magazine* (Vanguard Readings), *Cortland Review* and *Rust + Moth*. His three chapbooks have been published by Clare Songbird's Publishing House, New York.  
<http://hopkinspoetry.simpl.com>

### I CALLED THEM WILD GEESE

but they were not,  
 by the light of the sunstone dye,  
 above the ladder web field,  
 as the fire was leaving.  
 A star forced its white touch  
 upon the body of sky,  
 they made their way,  
 their white bellies showing.

I called them wild geese,  
 but they were not,  
 as the wide eye made our time so visible,  
 in a blind eye of the blood sap star.  
 The bird's rushed lullaby tongue  
 sung its black notes, its white,  
 sung temperate,  
 to a paper print of the moon.  
 Their easing skein of beauty.

I called them wild geese,  
 but they were not,  
 when the silence broke  
 to the language of a peat black wing,  
 a spirit word, an unstressed amen.  
 They translate the ore-water  
 to a gracefulness of downing,  
 with a god of the broken heart  
 on its burning edge, spirit red,  
 as the wing bone caught the fire.

A poem for Europe is edited by Briony Bax, Poetry Editor.  
 Submit your poems to [poetryeditor@theneweuropean.co.uk](mailto:poetryeditor@theneweuropean.co.uk)

## AMBIT



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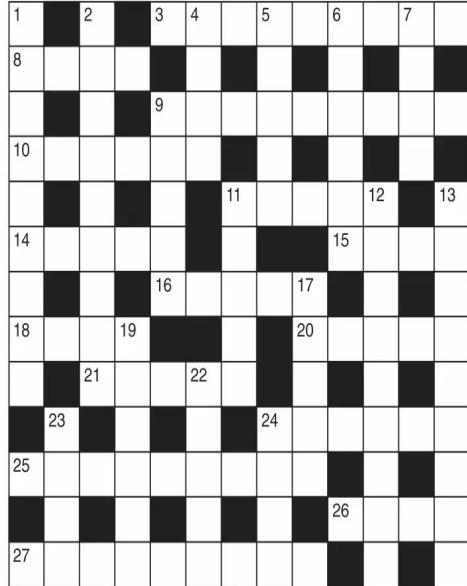
### Cryptic 1

#### Across

- Repair a big town? What falsehood (9)
- A means to a bite, perhaps (4)
- Circumference as measured by fairy instrument? (9)
- It enables the performer to give a double act (6)
- Carries animals (5)
- When multiplication is indicated? (5)
- Appear to catch sight of a thousand (4)
- Points about 59 back in banishment (5)
- Above all, it contains meat (4)
- The visitor loses it (5)
- Do they prove shoemakers have endurance? (5)
- Scoffs at fat-headed boors (6)
- I rave about neckwear of different sorts (9)
- Release not charged (4)
- Harmful step I took wrongly at fasting time (9)

#### Down

- The aim I have is to be impartial (9)
- A bit of a bite not taken all at once? (9)
- Sword held by some peers (4)
- A stroke for the motorist? (5)
- Hip hip hooray for the drinker? (6)
- Millstones round one's neck? (4)
- The ropes as known by novelists, for example (5)
- Composer in a happy state (5)
- It enables one to get the right angle on things (9)
- I am urged to have a favourable view (9)
- Bad things about broken lives (5)
- A trial resulting in the rope (6)
- A small drink mostly ale, that's all (5)
- Plucky enough to be hunted? (4)
- Some infernal plant (4)



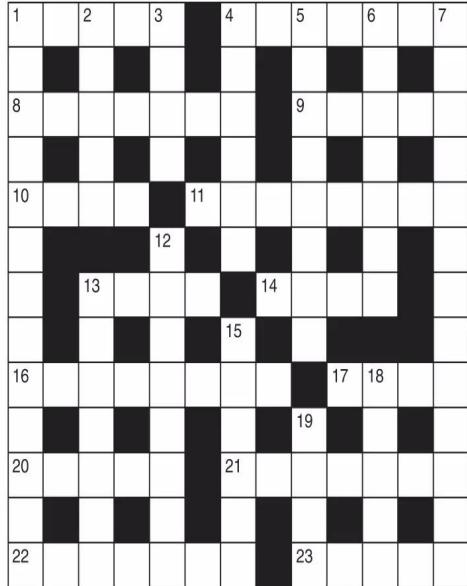
### Cryptic 2

#### Across

- Endowed with enthusiasm, but sacked (5)
- Foreign money required for a sea trip (7)
- Well-disciplined medical attendant (7)
- Torpedoed, but don't let go, we hear (5)
- 10 & 23 Across. Variety of clothes to be of use to the carpenter (4,5)
- More exalted lake (8)
- Sums up little ones (4)
- See 18 Down.
- Devoid of opinions – don't watch television so much! (8)
- Feel regret after tea? That's correct (4)
- For which coaches are needed to give instruction! (5)
- Do a meal in a trendy style? (1,2,4)
- By the end of November, any red variety of fox (7)
- See 10 Across.

#### Down

- Member of the electorate on a sea voyage? (8,5)
- & 13 Down. But the doctor wouldn't prescribe listening to the wireless for this treatment! (12)
- It's dreadful in the crowd – I retreated (4)
- Salary's raised – settles the bill (4,2)
- Sportsmen will distort the tales (8)
- Everything in neckwear matches (7)
- Some stamina needed for the trial (9,4)
- Some of the fatal antagonists for one thwarted by golden apples (8)
- See 2 Down.
- See 18 Down.
- Down, 15 Down & 14 Across. American state anarchists are fowl creatures? (5,6,4)
- It's used in oriental cosmetics (4)



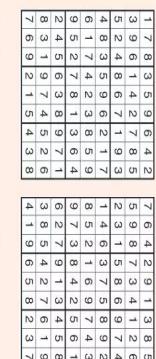
### Numberfit solutions



Hard 1



Medium 1



Hard 2

Medium 2

### Crossword solutions

Cryptic 1

**Across:** 3 Mendacity; 8 Bait; 9 Perimeter; 10 Encore; 11 Bears; 14 Times; 15 Seem; 16 Exile; 18 Veal; 20 Visor; 21 Lasts; 24 Flouts; 25 Varieties; 26 Free; 27 Pestilent; 28 Down: 1 Objective; 2 Piecemeal; 4 Eps; 5 Drive; 6 Cheers; 7 Ties; 9 Prose; 10 Bliss; 12 Sesquiat; 13 Impressed; 17 Evils; 19 Larvat; 22 Total; 23 Game; 24 Fern.

## Sudoku – medium 1

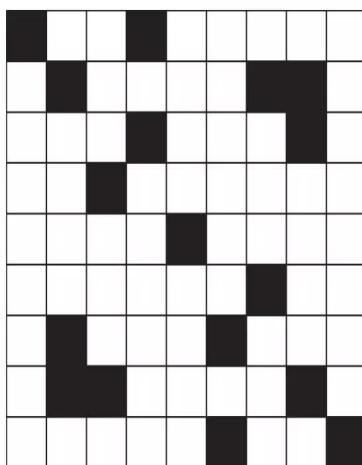
1	7			6	2
3	6	1	2		
2		8			3
8	3	9		1	
	4	3			
5		8	3	6	
2			8	7	
	9	4	5	6	
7	9			3	8

## Sudoku – hard 1

	5	6			1
2	4				
6	1	8			
4	8	1	7		
	4	5			
5	7	4	6		
	8	1	2		
		9	7		
6		4	5		

## Numberfit

Fit the listed numbers into each grid.



## Numberfit 1

**2 digits:** 22 - 24 - 26 - 28  
**3 digits:** 243 - 253 - 322 - 332 - 345 - 825 - 832 - 842  
**4 digits:** 3244 - 3342 - 3422 - 4342 - 4422 - 5423 - 5432 - 6542  
**5 digits:** 52342 - 56782  
**6 digits:** 222437 - 245567 - 724435 - 725458  
**8 digits:** 23452456 - 23242345

## Sudoku – medium 2

6		9		8	
5		7	4		6
	1	8	9		
4	3	5		9	
8	2			7	3
7	8	2		6	
	7	1	4		
3	4	7			9
1	5			3	

## Sudoku – hard 2

8			6	9	
	6	4			
6	9				3
6	2	7			
4	1	5		2	
	2	7	1		
4		1			8
	6	7			
5	9		3		

## Numberfit 2

**2 digits:** 23 - 24 - 29 - 34 - 64 - 74  
**3 digits:** 288 - 399 - 438 - 488 - 494 - 828 - 829 - 992  
**4 digits:** 1884 - 3239 - 4388 - 4826 - 8388 - 9354  
**5 digits:** 54932 - 98925  
**6 digits:** 259130 - 299843 - 394893 - 408684 - 623462 - 648433  
**8 digits:** 33322375 - 54828493

## CONTINENT WITH NO LANGUAGE

## PETER TRUDGILL

on Antarctica, and its most famous story



**A**ntarctica has been called "the continent without language". True languages are spoken only by human beings, and although there are many visiting scientists and support workers in Antarctica these days, this is a modern situation: the continent has never had indigenous languages because it has never had an indigenous human population.

When I was at school, we all learnt about the glorious British failure of the Scott expedition to the South Pole. A party consisting of Robert Scott and four others from his 60-strong team arrived at the South Pole on the January 17, 1912, only to discover that a Norwegian expedition led by Roald Amundsen had beaten them to it by over a month, arriving on December 14. In anticipation of Scott's arrival, and in case the Norwegians did not make it back alive, Amundsen had left a tent at the Pole with a letter in it. Amundsen had written it in his very individualistic polar-explorer kind of Dano-Norwegian, but it was addressed, in English, to "HM King of Norway".

The Scott expedition's tragedy was that, not only did they fail to become the first humans to reach the South Pole, as they had aspired to be, but all five of them died on their ghastly 900-mile trek on foot back towards their base.

All of us schoolchildren knew about this tragedy, but we were never told what happened afterwards. In fact, the news of the Norwegian success reached Norway immediately after Amundsen's vessel arrived in Tasmania in March 1912. But the much more sombre news about the fate of the Scott expedition was not made known until February 1913, when the British expedition vessel arrived in New Zealand after a long delay while members of the team searched for and found the remains of their dead colleagues. A memorial service was held in St Paul's Cathedral, attended by the King, with a crowd of 10,000 standing outside.

In Norway there had been much rejoicing about Amundsen's success, but when the fate of the Scott expedition became known, the Norwegians reacted in a wonderfully Norwegian way. Writing recently in the Norwegian weekly *Dag og Tid*, Morten Søberg related that the speaker of the Norwegian parliament, the Storting, made a speech commemorating the five valiant fallen "sons of Britain", while the members of parliament all stood in their honour. It was agreed that a message of condolence should be sent to Westminster. The content was very moving, though it is a

testament to the problems of translation and communication that when the telegram arrived in London, it stated that the Norwegian nation had been "deeply snored" by the tragedy.

The speaker of the House of Commons, James Lowther, sent a reply of thanks, lauding the great feats of exploration and the pioneering arctic research carried out by Norwegians. This was read out in the Storting on February 17, 1913, having been translated – not into the Dano-Norwegian used by Amundsen but into the other, more de-danicised, form of Norwegian, Nynorsk, 'new Norwegian'.

It is sad to report that Roald Amundsen later also died tragically. In 1928, he was lost in a plane crash on a mission to locate and rescue a team who had been exploring the Arctic in an airship which had itself crashed.

We do not know if Scott had any reservations about the possible humiliation of acting as Amundsen's postman, but the letter to the Norwegian King which had been left in the tent at the South Pole was actually picked up by Scott's party, and was then found by the team who discovered their bodies.

Back in the Norwegian capital Kristiania (now Oslo), the letter was handed to the (originally Danish) King Haakon and his (originally British) Queen Maud in May 1913, two years and three months after Scott, Wilson, Bowers, Evans and Oates had, with sinking hearts, found the tent at the South Pole which signalled their failure.



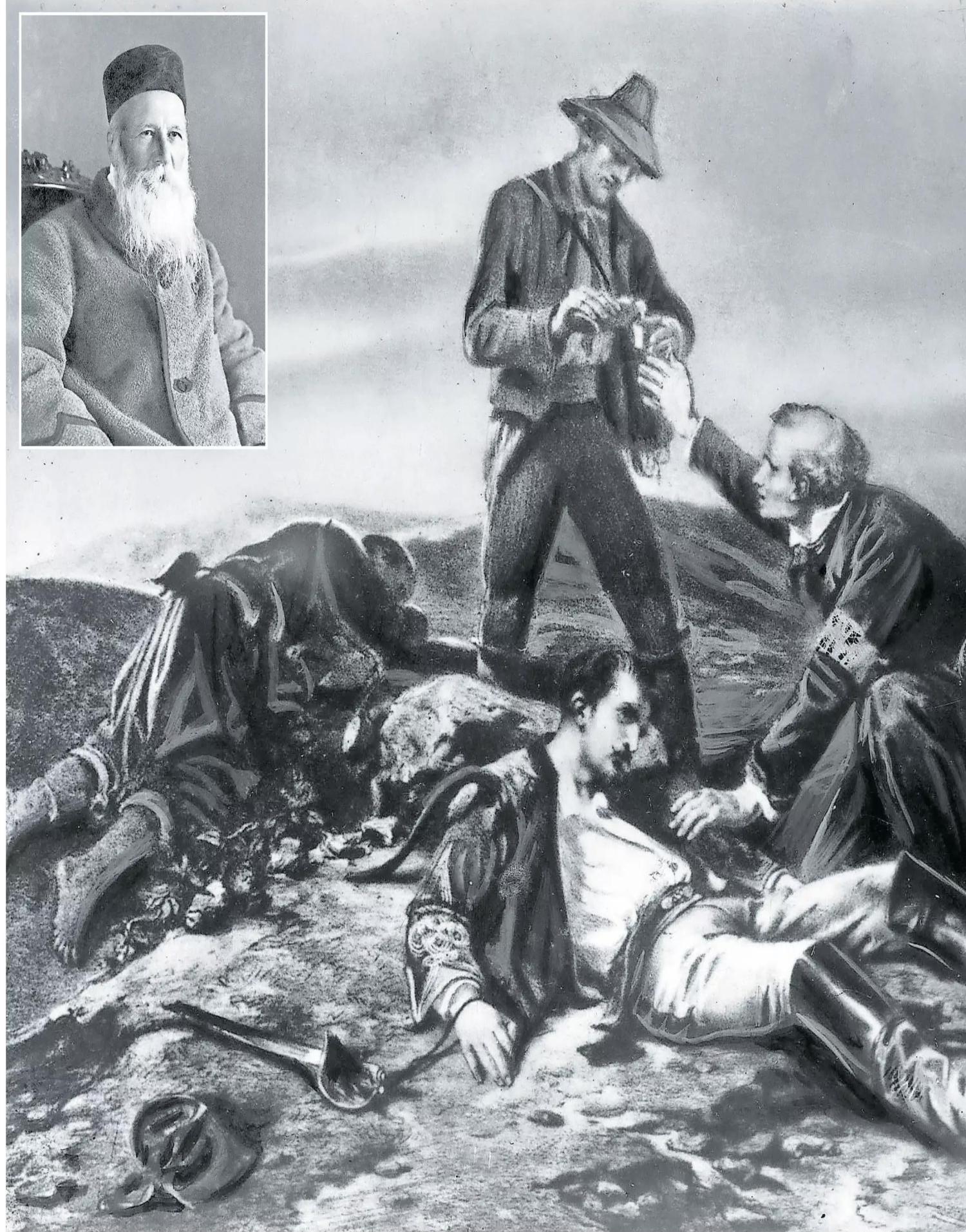
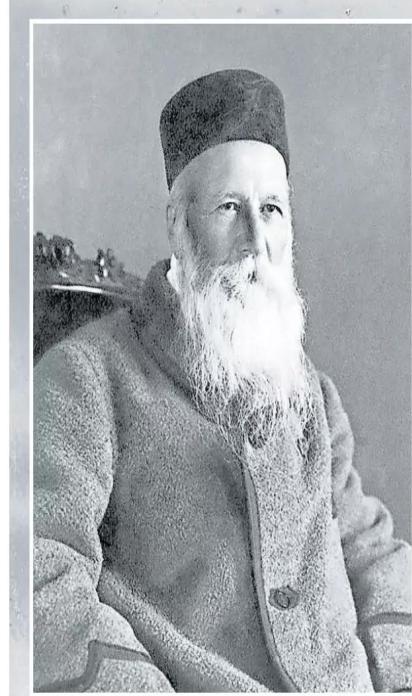
HEROIC FAILURE: Captain Scott's ship, the Terra Nova, entering the pack ice of the South Polar regions (1936). From *Shipping Wonders of the World*

Photo: The Print Collector/Getty Images

## NORWEGIAN

Norwegian has two variants. When Norway separated from Denmark in 1814, two different plans were proposed for the development of a Norwegian written language to replace Danish. One modified Danish towards the speech of upper-class Norwegians, hence "Dano-Norwegian", now Bokmål. The other developed a new standard based on Norwegian dialects, now called Nynorsk.

## EUROFILE GREAT LIVES



HUMANITARIAN: *Der Samariter von Solferino* depicts Henry Dunant's work tending the wounded from the Battle of Solferino in 1859. Dunant, inset, was inspired by what he witnessed to set in train the efforts that led to the signing of the Geneva Convention and the creation of the Red Cross

Photos: Getty Images / Bettmann Archive

## GREAT EUROPEAN LIVES

### BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

# #170 HENRY DUNANT

MAY 8, 1828 – OCTOBER 30, 1910

In 1859 Henry Dunant was in a state of excitement. A decade earlier the 31-year-old Swiss had completed his education with modest results and joined a bank, apparently destined for an unspectacular career in currency exchange before an 1853 business trip to North Africa opened up opportunities he'd never imagined. By the end of the decade Dunant had secured investment from friends and contacts in his native Geneva and founded his own company growing corn and trading it internationally from a large tract of land he'd secured in French-occupied Algeria. It was, he was certain, a licence to print money and he and his investors would be made for life. The problem was the project had ground to a halt over a rights dispute concerning access to the site's water supply. Alarmed at the prospect of this golden opportunity being strangled by 19th century imperial bureaucracy, Dunant decided the best and swiftest solution to the impasse was to go straight to the top and appeal in person to the French Emperor Napoleon III.

In the early summer of 1859 Napoleon III was in Lombardy overseeing French participation in what became the Second Italian War of Independence, assisting the Piedmontese in their efforts to drive Austrian forces out of northern Italy. At the end of June the emperor had established temporary headquarters just outside Solferino, south of Lake Garda, preparing for a potentially decisive battle. Henry Dunant set out from Geneva to find him.

On June 24 an estimated 250,000 troops faced each other in sweltering heat at the Battle of Solferino. A massive Franco-Piedmontese onslaught forced the Austrians back and, despite a gallant counter-attack late in the day in the midst of an almighty thunderstorm, led to a convincing victory at the cost of 40,000 lives on both sides, one of the bloodiest battles ever fought in Europe at the time.

Dunant, still brimming with excitement at the prospect of his Algerian fortune, arrived at the nearby town of Castiglione just as the battle ended, descending from his carriage among hundreds of wounded and battle-dazed. All thoughts of finding the emperor vanished as a horrified Dunant made his way to the church determined to help. Inside he found a hellish scene: soldiers laid out on floors, pews and on top of tombs, blood everywhere and the agonised screams of the wounded echoing around the eaves. The smell, an overpowering mixture of stale sweat, excrement and infection, almost sent Dunant reeling back into the town square but, despite having no medical training, he set to work cleaning wounds, wrapping bandages around bloody limbs and talking

soothingly to soldiers who were no more than boys, crying out for their mothers. He saw some terrible things.

"There is an unfortunate man a part of whose face – the nose, lips and chin – have been cut away by the stroke of a sword," he wrote. "Incapable of speech, half blind, he makes signs with his hands, and by that heartrending pantomime, accompanied by guttural sounds, draws attention to himself. I give him a drink by dropping gently on his blood-covered face a little pure water." Dunant stayed up all night. Daybreak brought more evidence of the scale of the carnage. "Bodies of men and horses covered the battlefield," he wrote. "Corpses were strewn over roads, ditches, ravines, hedges and fields; the approaches to Solferino were literally thick with the dead. Anyone crossing the vast theatre of the previous day's fighting could see at every step, in the midst of chaotic disorder, despair unspeakable and misery of every kind." Dunant soon found himself coordinating the treatment of the wounded, enlisting the help of local people to carry injured soldiers to makeshift field hospitals regardless of whose uniform they wore. The powers of persuasion he'd intended to use on Napoleon III were instead used on the French top brass to release captured Austrian medics and surgeons to help the relief operation.

June 24, 1859, and its aftermath changed Henry Dunant forever. He returned to Geneva traumatised. Whenever he tried to concentrate on his Algerian problem he just heard the cries of the injured and dying all over again.

So, he began to write. He wrote down everything he'd witnessed, hoping to do justice to the men he'd assisted and the men he was too late to assist. As he wrote he felt increasingly at a loss to explain why it had fallen to him, a businessman with no connection to the conflict, to coordinate the treatment and care of the wounded. An idea began to form in his mind for an international organisation that would tend to those wounded in battle, an organisation entirely neutral and respected as such by all sides in every conflict across the globe.

"All that is necessary," he wrote, "is a little goodwill on the part of some honourable and persevering persons."

In 1863 he published *Un Souvenir de Solferino, 'A Memory of Solferino'*, an account of his experiences and a manifesto for a pan-national humanitarian organisation to save lives on the world's battlefields, no matter their nationality, no matter their cause. Published initially at Dunant's own expense the book caused a sensation and prompted an international conference in Geneva.

Thanks in the main to intensive lobbying

by Dunant, representatives from 16 nations attended a three-day event organised by the Swiss government leading to the signing of the first Geneva Convention in 1864, guaranteeing the humane treatment of combatants wounded in battle and recognising a neutral organisation permitted to care for them whose personnel would be recognisable by their insignia – a red cross on a white background.

In the meantime, Dunant had spent so much time and money on his extraordinary humanitarian efforts that his neglected business in Algeria inevitably suffered. In 1867 he was declared bankrupt and so many investors lost money that he was effectively shunned by Geneva society, forcing him into a peripatetic life of penury. Dunant lived for periods in towns and cities across Europe from London to Cyprus, so poor he often had to sleep on the streets, until in 1887 he arrived, exhausted and in poor health, at the Swiss village of Heiden. He would never leave. As far as the world was concerned, while the organisation he founded went from strength to strength Henry Dunant had disappeared.

In 1890 a Heiden schoolteacher named Wilhelm Sonderegger heard from his pupils about the kindly old man with the black cap and long white beard who said he had started the Red Cross. Sonderegger did his best to alert the organisation to the circumstances of their founder and helped Dunant begin writing again, but it wasn't until a chance 1895 encounter in a Heiden park with a journalist named Georg Baumberger that something approaching the public rehabilitation of Henry Dunant began. Baumberger's piece for a regional Swiss newspaper was picked up by other publications across Europe and led to philanthropic donations that lent Dunant a small measure of financial security.

By then in poor health, Dunant was living in room 12 of the Heiden cottage hospital. It was there he began to receive letters from around the world praising and thanking him for his pioneering humanitarian work. There was even the occasional admiring visitor, and it was there in 1901 that Dunant received news he was to be awarded the first Nobel Prize for Peace, jointly with the French pacifist Frédéric Passy.

"There is no man who more deserves this honour, for it was you, 40 years ago, who set on foot the international organisation for the relief of the wounded on the battlefield," read the citation. "Without you, the Red Cross, the supreme humanitarian achievement of the 19th century, would probably have never been undertaken."

Dunant, after so long in the wilderness, must have had mixed feelings hearing such platitudes. He was old, still heavily in debt and in declining physical and mental health. He spent none of the prize money and none of the donations he received beyond covering his living expenses. When he died in 1910 at the age of 82 he was buried without ceremony, as per his wishes, "like a dog". For all the good he'd done, the lives he'd saved, he could never stop hearing the agonised cries of the soldiers of Solferino. He was no better than them and deserved no better grave than them. "Do not look for his name in the biographical dictionaries or lists of illustrious contemporaries," wrote essayist Jules Claretie of Dunant's Nobel award. "He has killed no-one, insulted no-one, injured no-one, hated no-one. Gently and silently he has upset the world, softened war and accomplished a work of immense pity."

# WILL SELF

The brilliant neurologist-cum-writer Oliver Sacks wrote a book called *Musicophilia* in which he explored his own great passion for music through the lens of scientific detachment. The work is full of delights – not least Sacks's unpicking of the troubling phenomenon of the 'earworm', or tune we cannot purge from our brains. The explanation? Invariably these are fragmented because we have indeed heard only the fragment, and our mind/brain labours to make good the deficiency – to 'play it' until the end. It's not far from this realisation, to the chilling recognition that in the Age of Muzack earworms must, perforce, proliferate hideously: a writhing mass of never to be concluded versions of pop standards. Yes, like country music versions of Zeno's paradoxes, we may sing along as much as we may, but we'll never get to touch the green, green grass of home.

At least, this was the situation before the pandemic, when we divagated heedlessly from one recessed speaker to the next, en route to the chiller cabinet with the guacamole in it. Nowadays, with our time spent in these sorts of spaces – lobbies, shopping centres and malls, airports – much circumscribed, earworms are also under threat, as is more finished and achieved music. Sacks also wrote of a musician who suffered an insult to his mind/brain that effectively 'unmusicked' him – deprived him of any capacity of enjoy melody, harmony, rhythm and coloratura.

This would be an horrific state of being at an individual level – yet how much worse at a collective one. The philosopher, Schopenhauer, argued that music was the supreme art because it bypassed the intellect altogether and connected psyches at the level of pure emotion; and the evidence of this is all around us, from the teary faces of veterans at the Cenotaph when the *Last Post* is played, to the corybantic excesses of the young (and not so young) as, fuelled by booze and drugs, they respond viscerally to repetitive beats.

**S**trange to relate, once upon a time I was in synch' with them – but by my mid-thirties I found such wanton jiggling altogether unseemly. Amplified electric guitars were the next to go: their demented skirl used to energise me as much as any other accomplished air-player; but in my early forties I realised I was finding the volume at live gigs insupportable, while sitting around listening to the recorded raucousness became so painful an exercise in nostalgia that I began to wish fervently – rather than merely hope – to die before I got much older.

I was saved by horsehair and catgut: classical music offered me huge new soundscapes of great beauty, artistry and intense feeling – while concerts were exercises in compelling schadenfreude, since often I was the only person in the audience whose natural hair colour wasn't grey, white or silver. I would also argue – with anyone who I could compel to listen – that classical ensembles could rock 'n' roll with the best of the band. Talk about heritage acts – try listening to Beethoven's *Overture to Egmont* with volume cranked right up: I challenge you not to be absurdly, romantically – nay, insanely inspired.



## Multicultural Man .. on moving on from music



SOUNDSCAPE: Italian opera stars Erika Grimaldi, Daniela Barcellona, Francesco Meli and Michele Pertusi join the London Symphony Orchestra in a performance of the Verdi Requiem at London's Barbican Centre, 2016

Photo: Amy T. Zielinski/Redferns

For a while I zealously attended concerts, collected recordings, and even learned to distinguish between the identically plummy-voiced presenters on Radio 3, all of whom seemed to be called Sara. But about four years ago I realised that even this last redoubt of sound was under attack by... silence. I stopped playing music while I did routine desk work (I've never listened to it while writing seriously – it disrupts the rhythms of prose with its own), cooking and other domestic tasks. I no longer played it on the rare occasions that I drove. And I confess, I no longer took much of an interest in what was happening in the 'world of music' at all.

All of this made me feel almost guilty when the pandemic struck and lights were switched off at clubs, pubs and concert halls the length and breadth of the land. Was this, I wondered, a strange case of morphic resonance retroacting into the past? Had my preternaturally sensitive ears perhaps anticipated the gathering soundlessness – much as an audience senses it, and so falls suddenly silent – thereby enacting a sort of front-guard action so as to protect me from the sadness and disillusionment so many others have experienced, deprived of their musical balms and stimulants?

**I**t hardly seemed likely – and yet unmusicked I very definitely am. And then the answer came to me: Schopenhauer was indeed right – and we crave music to facilitate emotional connection generally when we don't feel it in particular. Music may be the food of love – but once it's been well nourished it's served its purpose. There's this, and there's also a peculiarity of my immortal beloved: she's preternaturally sensitive to sound of all sorts, such that the airiest of Satie piano airs is to her as the most bombastic and overblown of marches played on a giant pipe organ. So it is we repose in our own *sans souci... sans souci*.

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