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EDITORIAL

LEMMINGS TO THE POLLS

A recent editorial in this journal described the present process as the 'next General Irrelevance'. Nothing has happened to alter that view, or was ever likely to happen.

This charade is truly appalling ... little more than the constant choreographed parroting of a few hackneyed cliches. It frets endlessly as to how the NHS and other public services are to be run ... a debate which has been going on for 40 years with no end in sight. One day we will send a delegation to Switzerland to find out how one of the best education systems is run without a Ministry of Education; how one of the best health services is run without a Ministry of Health, and how what is almost certainly the best public transport system in the world is run without a Ministry of Transport.

This incessant fretting about the organisation of public services is symptomatic of how little is still actually controlled by Westminster. Much of that is likely to disappear with TTIP. What will we have left to argue about next time? Of course we have long ceded the right to negotiate trade matters to Brussels. Even if we had a government which was not wedded to the neo-liberal principles underlying TTIP, we would have no control in the matter anyway.

The three 'main' protagonists are, in any event, firmly wedded to the neo-liberal ideology, and offer no more than slightly different variants of the same basic themes. Shorn of their mass memberships these parties survive as little more than shell entities financed by oligarchs.

The Greens hate neo-liberal globalisation but love Europe. This despite TTIP, Austerity and the treatment of Greece and other peripheral states, the military meddling in the Balkans and Ukraine, the EU's hankering to become a military power in its own right, the absurdity of the CAP and fish discards, endless fraud, its inability for nearly two decades to produce audited accounts, its secret policy making ... the list is a long one. Again and again the EU demonstrates an extraordinary capacity to completely paralyse the critical faculties of many intelligent people and inspire them to heights of cognitive dissonance never previously attempted in human history.

On the other hand UKIP hates the EU whilst loving neo-liberal globalisation.

So far, neither of these parties has listened to those dissident voices in their own ranks who are pointing out the neo-liberal globalisation and the EU are both very much foals of the same mare.

Meanwhile those who look to the SNP as providing some sort of northern bastion against neo-liberalism are going to be sadly disappointed once the euphoria has subsided.

Of monetary reform, civil liberty, personal privacy ... so important at a time when we are all being progressively reduced to walking barcodes ... and genuine local empowerment, nothing.

It is a sorry spectacle. It plumbs the depths of dumb. It is all an insult to the intelligence of a mouse.

If we had a properly organised democratic resistance there would be several million spoilt ballots in May. That would speak a thousand times louder than a handful of placard wavers and pea whistler blowers in Parliament Square. The challenge to put such a resistance together still remains.

LEMMINGS TO THE REGISTER

There are issues which never go away, no matter how much we, the Great Unwashed, reject them. These include, nuclear power, water fluoridation, genetically modified crops, European 'integration', smart meters, institutional mergers into ever bigger and more faceless institutions ... the list goes on.

The oligarchs have decided that this is what we are going to have, and that is that. If we do not eat the whole meal at a sitting, then it will have to be cut into small slices and fed to us a spoonful at a time. After all, we are only ignorant peasants, incapable of managing our own affairs.

So it is with Identity Cards. That a national ID system would be back in some form was as inevitable as the cycle of the seasons.

The cleverest government wheeze for some years is to get rid of the card bit and to make the electoral register the basis for a national ID system. So successful is this wheeze that it has got large numbers of people who, only a few years ago, were fulminating against ID cards, clamouring to register and to persuade others to do so.

In all these things there has to be a pretext. The way in which pretexts are generated is well practised and highly formulaic. There is a huge industry devoted to it. Take some very minor, notional or non-existent 'problem', blow it up beyond all proportion and then construct an enormous regulatory over-reaction.

Usually this regulatory over-reaction will be costly, ineffective, often counter-productive and riddled with iatrogenic consequences. Never mind that, the iatrogenic

consequences will serve as further pretexts for introducing further complexity in the future. As a means of expanding bureaucratic empires, feathering institutional nests, and promoting endless product lines, this approach has served very well indeed.

In this case the pretext is the 'prevention of electoral fraud'. Before the law regarding postal and proxy ballots was changed to facilitate fraud, this problem was all but non-existent. During the 20th century convictions for electoral fraud, certainly on this side of the Irish Sea, could be counted on the fingers.

Under the new arrangement of 'individual registration' we are required to submit dates of birth and National Insurance Numbers, matters which are frankly no business of a local authority. Significantly these are the key initial elements in the compiling of a national identity register.

Now we must wait for the 'mission creep' to see what else gets ... CRB's, employment history, family and marital details, academic and medical records and so forth ... get bolted on to the register. This will, naturally, happen a little bit at a time.

I, for one, will be joining the seven million others who are not on that register.

Frank Taylor

THE BOARD OF HSBC SHOULD BE ARRESTED AND THE BANK TAKEN INTO PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

John Wight; Huffington Post; via James Robertson's Newsletter

The enduring truth of Bertolt Brecht's aphorism that it is a far greater crime to own a bank than to rob one has never been more evident in the wake of the scandal involving HSBC. Its involvement in helping some very rich account holders evade tax, money laundering, and the extent to which both the current and previous government have enabled the rich to get away with 'it' all these years while treating the poor as fair game for exemplary punishment and persecution has exposed the corruption and venality that has poisoned the nation's democracy.

The sheer scale of tax evasion on the part of the rich in the UK is staggering. A report compiled last year on behalf of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), which represents staff at HMRC, calculated that in 2014 more than £80 billion was lost to the Exchequer as a result of tax evasion in 2014. Tax avoidance, meanwhile, which unlike tax evasion is legal, if not moral, costs the Exchequer around £25 billion each year. At the other end of the social spectrum benefit fraud costs just over £1 billion each year, yet considering the resources applied to detecting and prosecuting the latter compared to the former, you would automatically think that those figures were reversed.

Even when tax evaders have been caught the revelation that HMRC has been doing its utmost to avoid prosecuting them illustrates the fact that we have a two-tier system of justice when it comes to defrauding the taxpayer. Those found guilty of benefit fraud are maligned, shamed, and demonised while their rich counterparts are allowed to avoid the inconvenience of prosecution and court in return for an undisclosed pay-off to make the problem disappear.

Underpinning this issue and scandal is of course class. The top execs within HSBC and other major British banks and corporations go to the same private schools and are products of the same cultural, social, and economic values as most of those who occupy the green benches in the Commons. In fact, given the way that cabinet ministers and former prime ministers end up entering corporate boardrooms at the end of their parliamentary careers, the UK's political system

has been reduced to nothing more than a transmission belt onto a lucrative career as a non executive director in a corporate boardroom somewhere. Some take advantage of the opportunities to cash in more than others. Tony Blair, for example, has morphed into a veritable Crassus since leaving office, and shows no evidence of letting up anytime soon when it comes to filling his boots.

It is a scandal on top of a scandal, which more than bringing our democracy into disrepute exposes it as a sham, with the conflict of interest that lies at its heart a festering sore that has gone untreated for far too long.

We have in Britain a government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich, the consequences of which are tangible. With the advent of the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, caused by the greed and recklessness of the banks, the government has effected the transference of wealth from the poor to the rich under the rubric of austerity, a process measured in food banks, payday loans, benefit sanctions, the bedroom tax, and zero hours contracts at one end of the social and economic spectrum, alongside an increase in the wealth of the country's 1000 richest people over the same period.

Further and even more damning evidence of the extent to which the rich are 'getting away with it' is provided by the fact that despite the mammoth difference in cost to the UK taxpayer the resources that have been deployed to crack down on benefit fraud are exponentially more than tax evasion.

In a just society, given the nature of this scandal, the board of HSBC would be placed under arrest and the bank taken into public ownership. Unfortunately, in 2015 we don't live in a just society.

We live in Britain.

ANARCHIST ECONOMICS COMPARED AND CONTRASTED: ANARCHO- CAPITALISM VS ANARCHO- SYNDICALISM/COMMUNISM

Keith Preston; Libertarian Alliance Blog

(Hopefully this item will provoke both thought and research. It is also noteworthy for highlighting the central ... perhaps even the only question of political economy ... 'who decides' and for a rare nod in the direction of the politics of institutional scale - Ed)

“The Market for Liberty” by Morris and Linda Tannehill was published in 1969, and was one of the first books to really provide a fine-tuned description of how an anarcho-capitalist economy might work. It continues to be perhaps the most detailed of any work describing anarcho-capitalism in practice. Excerpts from the book are available online from the Mises Institute. The book was also recently translated into Spanish by Jorge Trucco. This is a video of Trucco giving a talk about “The Market for Liberty”:

It's interesting to compare the anarcho-capitalism of “The Market for Liberty” with the anarcho-communism/anarcho-syndicalism of Diego Abad de Santillan. “After the Revolution” by Santillan is one of the most comprehensive descriptions of anarcho-syndicalism in practice that has ever been written, and Santillan was the leading economic theorist of the Spanish Revolution in 1936. The entire text of “After the Revolution” is available online from the Anarchist Library website.

Of course, there are plenty of middle of the road approaches to anarchist economics beyond the

hard-core anarcho-capitalism of thinkers like Murray Rothbard, David Friedman and the Tannehills, or the hard-core anarcho-communism or anarcho-syndicalism of the Spanish anarchists. There is mutualism, Georgism/geoism, the decentralism of Ralph Borsodi, various theories of market socialism, co-operative economics, distributism and much else as even a cursory look at the Wikipedia entries on Anarchist economics and libertarian socialism will reveal. While I have my disagreements with fellows like Kevin Carson and Shawn Wilbur, these guys deserve a tremendous amount of credit and respect for their efforts to publicize and elaborate on alternative economic perspectives.

The big question that arises from an examination of these ideas is which set of economic values are most compatible with an anti-authoritarian society. For myself, the answer to the question more or less amounts to “I don’t know.” There are difficulties associated with many of the schools of libertarian or decentralist economics, ranging from their practical feasibility to their ability to prevent re-concentrations of power. Critics of anarcho-capitalism will argue that anarcho-capitalism in practice could just as easily become a system where company towns and agricultural plantations are owned and controlled by an oligarchy that is protected by mercenary armies in a way that amounts to an industrial serfdom. And it is not uncommon to see some “right-wing libertarians” praising fascist Singapore (where chewing gum is illegal) or the fiefdom of Dubai (where they still have debtors’ prisons). However, it is also easy to imagine the syndicalist model developed by Santillan developing into a statist bureaucracy over time (see Bryan Caplan’s critique). This is why I tend to lean towards some of the more middle of the road approaches beyond anarcho-capitalism or anarcho-communism.

Some years back I wrote an extensive essay outlining a general theory of political economy which argued that modern systems of state-corporate economics are neither “free market” nor “socialist” in nature, but instead represent a kind of “new manorialism” and oligarchical plutocracy. It was my one contribution to anarchist economic theory. However, while economic questions are certainly important, often vitally important, I tend to reject the economic determinism that is implicit in some models of anarchist and libertarian thought, whether of a Marxist, Austrian, or some other model. If I am any kind of determinist, I would be a political determinist in the vein of Machiavelli or Carl Schmitt. As Schmitt pointed out, the ultimate question in politics is “Who decides?” and ultimately fundamental decisions about who has rightful control over resources, how legitimate ownership is defined, what the rules of contract or exchange will be and how they will be enforced, what kind of medium of exchange will be used, etc. are made by those who have the power to make such decisions whether they are states, corporations, market enterprises, workers councils, communes, militias, common law courts, or whatever else. In other words, the political precedes the economic rather than vice versa.

Additionally, I tend to believe that anarchists could learn a great deal from the work of Max Weber, who argued that economic power is only one strand of power in society, along with political power, charismatic power, social power, and the like (other thinkers, ranging from Bertrand Russell to C. Wright Mills, have argued this as well). Weber further argued that economic systems are to a great degree an outgrowth of pre-existing cultural systems. For example, he argued that capitalism and the industrial revolution developed more easily in historically Protestant countries because capitalist development requires a certain break with feudal and other comparable pre-modern traditions, and that Protestant culture already had the experience of breaking with Catholic tradition and was therefore more amenable to economic, technological, and cultural innovation.

The insights of elite theory indicate that any kind of organization of any size will ultimately be an oligarchy. The key to restraining the power of oligarchy is scale. The smaller the scale of an organization or institution, the shorter the reach of its oligarchy will be. See the work of Kirk Sale and the late great Tom Naylor on this. Therefore, the key to controlling excesses of power is to cultivate small-scale institutions irrespective of their particular ideological foundations or structural specifics.

FRANCE MOVES TO MAKE 'CONSPIRACY THEORIES' ILLEGAL BY GOVERNMENT DECREE

*Thierry Meyssan; Voltaire Network; 21st Century Wire; via
Dave Barnby*

Political elites and super-bureaucrats are worried. It's becoming harder to control consensus reality. A history stitched together by lies and cover-ups, political assassinations, slight-of-hand false flag deceptions, secret societies, dual loyalties and stolen fortunes – this has been the exclusive privilege of organized crime and the ruling elite for centuries.

Putting aside history's 'big ticket' items though, the real reason for this authoritarian trend is much more fundamental. By knocking out their intellectual competition, political elites and their media moguls hope to minimalize, and thus eliminate any alternative analysis and opinion by applying the completely open-ended and arbitrary label of "extremist" to speech. They want to wind back the clock, where a pre-internet, monolithic corporate media cartel held a monopoly on ideas.

Although France has taken the lead in this inter-governmental effort, the preliminary assault began this past fall with British Prime Minister David Cameron publicly announcing on two separate occasions, that all of these so-called 'conspiracy theories' (anything which challenges the official orthodoxy) should be deemed as "extremist" and equivalent to "terrorist" and should be purged from society on the grounds of 'national security'. The first came with Cameron's warped speech at the UN, and afterwards, a similar charge was made by the UK leader against anyone who dares press the issue of institutional paedophilia and child abuse.

As yet, few are aware of how in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo shootings, French Prime Minister, Francois Hollande delivered an official declaration. However, Hollande takes it beyond the usual hyperbole and focuses on giving the state an administrative and legal foothold for policing both speech and thought crimes in France. If this can be accomplished in France, then a European roll-out would soon follow.

Ironically, in order to achieve this fascist leap forward, Hollande has equated "conspiracy theories" to Nazism, and is calling for government regulations to prevent any sharing or publishing of any views deemed as 'dangerous thought' by the state. Specifically, Hollande is citing "Anti-Semitism" and also anything which could inspire 'acts terrorism' – as the chief vehicles for what the state will be designating as 'dangerous thoughts'. With the thumb of Hebdo still pressing down, this may just sound like politics writ large by the French leader, but in reality it's full-blown fascism.

Worse yet, with all of the world leaders gathered together in Paris in January supposedly marching solidarity for 'free speech' and proudly chanting "Je Suis Charlie", that Hollande would use this as political cover to restrict free speech in Europe should shock even.

RINF reports how the new censorship regime has already been implemented this week:

"Earlier this week, the Interior Minister of France — with no court review or adversarial process — ordered five websites to not only be blocked in France, but that anyone who visits any of the sites get redirected to a scary looking government website."

While it could be argued that the four websites initially listed by the government for 'blocking' were exclusively for ISIS/ISIL-related activity and thus, should be kept hidden, the government has made no caveat in its reams of policy literature, other than some vague language as to what it defines as 'extremist', as to where this growing list will stop, or indeed, if it has any limits at all. Because this process is extrajudicial, then there will be no warning to gov't targets of this new regime. In fact, as RINF reports, this has already happened:

"In that first batch was a site called "islamic-news.info." The owner of that site not only notes that he was never first contacted to "remove" whatever material was deemed terrorist supporting (as required by the law), but that nothing in what he had posted was supporting terrorism."

Will French gov't censors also block this website – because it is challenging the government's new public filtering program? Are we entering a new intolerant, Chinese-style policing culture in Europe, and

throughout the west? Certainly they have the ability and the legal clearance to do just that right now.

Fear of losing control over manipulative narratives has always been a primary obsession with those in power, and clearly, based on what we've seen here – governments are making an aggressive move on free speech now. Skeptics will no doubt argue that this 21WIRE article itself constitutes a conspiracy theory. If that was the case, then why have western governments, particularly those in the US and Britain, already spent millions, if not billions in state funds in order to infiltrate, disrupt, and occupy forum websites, and social networking groups of so-called 'conspiracy theorist and even creating entirely new groups just to contradict them? Does that not already prove what the government modus operandi is?

As if that wasn't enough already, now France wants to take it to a whole new authoritarian level. It may sound ridiculous, but this is exactly what is taking place in government as we speak. History shows that once this new regime is in place, they will not relinquish any new powers of censorship, and so a long, intellectual dark age is certain to follow...

At the request of President François Hollande, the French Socialist Party has published a note on the international "conspiracy theorist" movement. His goal: to prepare new legislation prohibiting it to express itself.

In the US, the September 11, 2001 coup established a "permanent state of emergency" (Patriot Act), launching a series of imperial wars. Gradually, the European elites have aligned with their counterparts across the Atlantic. Everywhere, people are worried about being abandoned by their States and they question their institutions. Seeking to retain power, the elites are now ready to use force to gag their opposition.

The President of the French Republic, François Hollande, has assimilated what he calls "conspiracy theories" to Nazism and called to prevent their dissemination on the Internet and social networks. Thus he declared, on January 27, 2015 at the Shoah Memoria;, "[Anti-Semitism] maintains conspiracy theories that spread without limits. Conspiracy theories that have, in the past, led to the worst ... " [The] answer is to realize that conspiracy theories are disseminated through the Internet and social networks. Moreover, we must remember that it is words that have in the past prepared extermination. We need to act at the European level, and even internationally, so that a legal framework can be defined, and so that Internet platforms that manage social networks are held to account and that sanctions be imposed for failure to enforce". Several ministers also decried what they called conspiracy theorists as so many "fermenters of hate and disintegrators of society."

Knowing that President Hollande calls "conspiracy theory" the idea that States, whatever their regimes – including democracies – have a spontaneous tendency to act in their own interests and not in that of their constituents, we can conclude that he presented this confused amalgam to justify a possible censure of his opponents.

This interpretation is confirmed by the publication of a note entitled "Conspiracy theories, current status" by the Jean-Jaurès Foundation, a Socialist Party think tank of which Mr. Holland was the first secretary.

Let's leave aside the political relations of François Hollande, the Socialist Party, the Fondation Jean-Jaurès, its political radicalism Observatory and the author of the note and let's focus on its message and its ideological content.

Definition of "conspiracy theories"

The terms "conspiracy theories" and "conspiracy theorism" have developed in France in the wake of the publication of my book on US imperialism post-September 11, titled The Big Lie. At the time, we had trouble understanding what the terms meant because they referred to American political history. In the United States, are commonly called "conspiracy theorists" those according to whom President Kennedy had not been assassinated by one man but by many, forming a conspiracy (in the judicial sense). Over time, these expressions entered in the French language and have overlapped with memories of the 30s and the Second World War, those of the denunciation of the "Jewish conspiracy". These are therefore now polysemous, sometimes evoking the law of the state-State silence and, at other times, European anti-Semitism.

In its note, the Jean-Jaurès Foundation gives its own definition of conspiracy theorism. It is...

"an 'alternative' narrative that claims to significantly upset the knowledge we have of an event and therefore competes with the "version" which is commonly accepted, stigmatized as "official"

Observe that this definition does not apply solely to the delusions of the mentally ill. Thus, Socrates, through the myth of the cave, affirmed his challenge to the certainties of his time; Galileo with his heliocentric theory challenged the prevailing interpretation of the Bible of his time; etc.

For my part, and since they see me as the “pope of conspiracy theorists” or rather the “heretic” in the words of Italian philosopher Roberto Quaglia, I reaffirm my radical political commitment, in keeping with the French republican radicalism of Leon Bourgeois, Georges Clemenceau, Alain and Jean Moulin. For me, as for them, the state is a Leviathan which by nature abuses those it governs.

As a radical Republican, I am aware that the state is the enemy of the common good, of the Res Publica; which is why I wish not to abrogate it, but to tame it. The republican ideal is compatible with various political regimes-including monarchies, as was enacted by the authors of the Declaration of 1789. This opposition, which the current Socialist Party disputes, has so shaped our history as Philippe Pétain repealed the Republic to proclaim the “French State”. Immediately after his assuming presidential office, I denounced Hollande’s Petainism. Today, Mr. Hollande claims to be of the Republic to better fight it and this inversion of values plunges the country into confusion.

Who are the “conspiracy theorists“?

The “conspiracy theorists” are thus citizens who oppose the omnipotence of the State and who wish to place it under surveillance. The Jean-Jaurès Foundation describes them as follows:

“[It’s] a heterogeneous movement, heavily entangled with the Holocaust denial movement, and which combines admirers of Hugo Chavez and fans of Vladimir Putin. An underworld that consist of former left-wing activists or extreme leftists, former “malcontents”, sovereignists, revolutionary nationalists, ultra-nationalists, nostalgists of the Third Reich, anti-vaccination activists, supporters of drawing straws, September 11th revisionists, anti-Zionists, Afrocentricists, survivalists, followers of “alternative medicine”, agents of influence of the Iranian regime, Bacharists, Catholic or Islamic fundamentalists “.

One will note the amalgams and abuse of this description aiming to discredit those it designates.

Myths of the “conspiracy theorists“

The Jean-Jaurès Foundation continues its vilification by accusing “conspiracy theorists” of ignoring the realities of the world and naively believing hackneyed myths. Thus, they would believe in the “World Zionist plot”, the “illuminati conspiracy” and the “Rothschild myth” (p. 4). And to credit these three statements, it cites an example solely on the “Rothschild myth”: blogger Etienne Chouard – whose work is not simply about the Republic, but goes beyond to treat Democracy [9] – says the Pompidou-Rothschild 1973 law is the source of the debt of France. And the Foundation goes on to refute this assertion by quoting an article published by Libération...

LIES AND DECEPTIONS ON THE LEFT: THE POLITICS OF SELF DESTRUCTION; GREECE, FRANCE, BRAZIL

Prof. James Petras; Global Research

(My own experience of organisations which self define as 'left' confirms much of which is said here ... the presence of many people who yap on about 'democracy', 'localism', 'empowerment', and so forth, but who no more than tin-pot Lenins, using such talk as a means to conceal personal ambition.

The article's conclusion could have gone deeper. There is a real problem, even for the largest and seemingly most powerful countries, with the sheer scale of power and economic leverage commanded by the global oligarchy. There is a real problem with the propagandist division of national communities into a false and outdated left/right paradigms ... which the item exemplifies. Last but not least there is the Great Issue which dare not speak its name ... monetary reform ... without which many of the laudable objectives become unattainable - Ed)

Over the past year, what appeared as hopeful signs, that Left governments were emerging as powerful alternatives to right-wing pro-US regimes, is turning into a historic rout, which will relegate them to the dustbin of history for many years to come.

The rise and rapid decay of left-wing governments in France, Greece and Brazil is not the result of a military coup, nor is it due to the machinations of the CIA. The debacle of left governments is a result of deliberate political decisions, which break decisively with the progressive programs, promises and commitments that political leaders had made to the great mass of working and middle class voters who elected them.

Increasingly, the electorate views the leftist rulers as traitors, who betrayed their supporters at the beck and call of their most egregious class enemies: the bankers, the capitalists and the neo-liberal ideologues.

Left Governments Commit Suicide

The self-destruction of the Left is an unanticipated victory for the most retrograde neo-liberal political forces. These forces have sought to destroy the welfare system, impose their rule via non-elected officials, widen and deepen inequalities, undermine labor rights and privatize and denationalize the most lucrative sectors of the economy.

Three cases of Left regime betrayal serve to highlight this process: The French Socialist regime of President Francois Hollande governing in the second leading power in Europe (2012-2015); Syriza, the left regime in Greece elected on January 25, 2015, portrayed as a sterling proponent of an alternative policy to 'fiscal austerity'; and The Workers Party of Brazil, governing in the biggest Latin American country (2003-2015) and a leading member of the BRICS.

French 'Socialism': The Great Leap Backward

In his Presidential campaign, Francois Hollande promised to raise taxes on the rich up to 75%; lower the retirement age from 62 to 60 years; launch a massive public investment program to reduce unemployment; vastly increase public spending on education (hiring 60,000 new teachers), health and social housing; and withdraw French troops from Afghanistan as a first step toward reducing Paris' role as an imperialist collaborator.

From 2012, when he was elected, to the present (March 2015), Francois Hollande has betrayed each and every political commitment: Public investments did not materialize and unemployment increased to over 3 million. His newly appointed Economic Minister Emmanuel Macron, a former partner of Rothschild Bank, sharply reduced business taxes by 50 billion euros. His newly appointed Prime Minister Manuel Valls, a neo-liberal zealot, implemented major cuts in social programs, weakened government regulation of business and banking and eroded job security. Hollande appointed Laurence Boone from Bank of America as his top economic adviser.

The French 'Socialist President' sent troops to Mali, bombers to Libya, military advisers to the Ukraine junta and aided the so-called Syrian 'rebels' (mostly Jihadist mercenaries). He signed off on billion-euro military sales to the Saudi Arabian monarcho-dictatorship and reneged on a contracted sale of warships to Russia.

Hollande joined with Germany in demanding that the Greek government comply with full and prompt debt payments to private bankers and maintain its brutal 'austerity program'.

As a result of defrauding French voters, betraying labor and embracing bankers, big business and militarists, less than 19% of the electorate has a positive view of the 'socialist' government, placing it in third place among the major parties.. Hollande's pro-Israel policies and his hardline on US- Iranian peace negotiations, Minister Valls' Islamophobic raids in French Muslim suburbs and the support of military interventions against Islamic movements, have increasingly polarized French society and heightened ethno-religious violence in the country.

Greece: Syriza's Instant Transformation

From the moment in which Syriza won the Greek elections on January 25, 2015, to the middle of March, Alexis Tsipras, the Prime Minister and Yanis Varoufakis, his appointed Finance Minister, reneged in rapid order on every major and minor electoral program. They embraced the most retrograde measures, procedures and relations with the 'Troika', (the IMF, and European Commission at the European Central Bank), which Syriza had denounced in its Thessaloniki program a short time earlier.

Tsipras and Varoufakis repudiated the promise to reject the dictates of the 'Troika'. In other words, they have accepted colonial rule and continued vassalage. Typical of their demagoguery and deceit, they sought to cover up their submission to the universally hated 'Troika' by dubbing it 'the Institution' – fooling nobody but themselves– and becoming the butt of cynical cackles from their EU overseers.

During the campaign, Syriza had promised to write off all or most of the Greek debt. In government, Tsipras and Varoufakis immediately assured the Troika that they recognized and promised to meet all of their debt obligations. Syriza had promised to prioritize humanitarian spending over austerity – raising the minimum wage, rehiring public employees in health and education and raising pension payments. After two weeks of servile groveling, the 're-formed' Tsipras and Varoufakis prioritized austerity – making debt payments and 'postponing' even the most meagre anti-poverty spending. When the Troika lent the Syriza regime \$2 billion to feed hungry Greeks, Tsipras lauded his overseers and promised to submit a multi-billion euro list of regressive 'reforms'.

Syriza had promised to re-examine the previous rightwing regime's dubious privatization of lucrative public enterprises and to stop on-going and future privatizations. In government, Tsipras and Varoufakis quickly disavowed that promise. They approved past, present and future privatizations. In fact, they made overtures to procure new privatization 'partners', offering lucrative tax concessions in selling-out more public firms.

Syriza promised to tackle the depression level unemployment (26% national, 55% youth) via public spending and reduced debt payments. Tsipras and Varoufakis dutifully met debt payments and did not allocate any funds to create jobs! Not only did Syriza continue the policies of its rightwing predecessors, but also it did so in a ludicrous style and substance: adopting ridiculous public postures and demagogic inconsequential gestures:

One day Tsipras would lay a wreath at the gravesite of 200 Greek partisans murdered by the Nazis during WW II. The next day he would grovel before the German bankers and concede to their demands for budget austerity, withholding public funds from 2 million unemployed Greeks.

One afternoon, Finance Minister Varoufakis would pose for a photo spread for Paris Match depicting him, cocktail in hand, on his penthouse terrace overlooking the Acropolis; and several hours later he would claim to speak for the impoverished masses!

Betrayal, deceit and demagoguery all during the first two months in office, Syriza has established a record in its conversion from a leftist anti-austerity party to a conformist, servile vassal of the European Union.

Tsipras' call for Germany to pay reparations for damages to Greece during WW II –a long overdue and righteous demand– is another phony demagogic ploy designed to distract the impoverished Greeks from Tsipras and Varoufakis sellout to German contemporary austerity demands. A cynical European Union official tells the Financial Times(12/3/15, p. 6), "He's (Tsipras) giving them (Syriza militants) a bone to lick on". No one expects German leaders to alter their hardline because of past injustices, least of all because they come from interlocutors on bended knees. No one in the EU takes Tsipras demand at face value. They see it as more empty 'radical' rhetoric for domestic consumption.

Talking up 70-year German reparations avoids taking practical action today repudiating or reducing payments on illegitimate debt to German banks and repudiating Merkel's dictates. The transparent betrayal of their most basic commitments to the impoverished Greek people has already divided Syriza. Over 40% of the central committee, including the President of the Parliament, repudiated the Tsipras–Varoufakis agreements with the Troika.

The vast majority of Greeks, who voted for Syriza, expected some immediate relief and reforms. They are increasingly disenchanted. They did not expect Tsipras to appoint Yanis Varoufakis, a former economic adviser to the corrupt neo-liberal PASOK leader George Papandreou, as Finance Minister. Nor did many voters abandon PASOK, en masse, over the past five years, only to find the same kleptocrats and unscrupulous opportunists occupying top positions in Syriza, thanks to Alexis Tsipras index finger. Nor could the electorate expect any fight, resistance and willingness to break with the Troika from Tsipras' appointments of ex-pat Anglo-Greek professors. These armchair leftists ('Marxist seminarians') neither engaged in mass struggles nor suffered the consequences of the prolonged depression.

Syriza is a party led by affluent upwardly mobile professionals, academics and intellectuals. They rule over (but in the name of) the impoverished working and salaried lower middle class, but in the interests of the Greek, and especially, German bankers. They prioritize membership in the EU over an independent national economic policy. They abide by NATO, by backing the Kiev junta in the Ukraine, EU sanctions on Russia, NATO intervention in Syria/Iraq and maintain a loud silence on US military threats to Venezuela!

Brazil: Budget Cuts, Corruption and the Revolt of the Masses

Brazil's self-styled Workers Party government in power an unlucky 13 years, has been one of the most corruption-ridden regimes in Latin America. Backed by one of the major labor confederations, and several landless rural workers' organizations, and sharing power with center-left and center-right parties, it was able to attract tens of billions of dollars of foreign extractive, finance and agro-business capital. Thanks to a decade-long commodity boom in agro-mineral commodities, easy credit and low interest rates, it raised income, consumption and the minimum wage while multiplying profits for the economic elite.

Subsequent to the financial crises of 2009, and the decline of commodity prices, the economy stagnated, just as the new President Dilma Rousseff was elected. The Rousseff government, like her predecessor, Lula Da Silva, favored agro-business over the rural landless workers' demands for land reform. Her regime promoted the timber barons and soya growers encroaching on the Indian communities and the Amazon rain forest.

Elected to a second term, Rousseff faced a major political and economic crises: a deepening economic recession, a fiscal deficit, and the arrest and prosecution of scores of corrupt Workers' Party and allied congressional deputies and Petrobras oil executives.

Workers' Party leaders and the Party's campaign treasury received millions of dollars in kickbacks from construction companies securing contracts with the giant semi-public petroleum company. President Rousseff promised "to continue to support popular social programs", and "to root out corruption", during her election campaign. However, immediately after her election she embraced orthodox neo-liberal policies and appointed a cabinet of hard-right neo-liberals including Bradesco banker Joaquin Levy as Finance Minister. Levy proposed to reduce unemployment payments, pensions and public salaries. He argued for greater de-regulation of banks. He proposed to weaken job protection laws to attract capital. He sought to achieve a budget surplus and attract foreign investment at the expense of labour.

Rousseff, consistent with her embrace of neo-liberal orthodoxy, appointed Katia Abreu, a rightwing senator, a life-long leader of agro-business interests and sworn enemy of land reform, as the new Agricultural Minister. Crowned "Miss Deforestation" by Greenpeace, Senator Abreu was

vehemently opposed by the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) and the labor confederation to no avail. With Rousseff's total backing Abreu set out on a course of ending even the minimal land redistribution carried out in Rousseff's first term in office (establishing land settlements benefiting less than 10% of the landless squatters). Abreu endorsed regulations facilitating the expansion of genetically modified crops, and promises to forcefully evict Amazonian Indians occupying productive land in favor of large-scale agro-business corporations. Moreover, she promises to vigorously defend landlords from land occupations by landless rural workers.

Rousseff's incapacity and/or unwillingness to fire and prosecute the Workers Party Treasurer, involved in a decade long billion-dollar kickback and bribery scandal, deepened and widened mass opposition. On March 15, 2015 over a million Brazilians filled the streets across the country, led by rightist parties, but drawing support from the popular classes demanding immediate anti-corruption trials and stern sentences, and the revocation of Levy's cuts in social expenditures.

The counter demonstration in support of Rousseff by the CUT labor confederation and the MST drew one-tenth that number – about 100,000 participants. Rousseff responded by calling for 'dialogue' and claimed to be 'open to proposals' on the issue of corruption but explicitly rejected any changes in her regressive fiscal policies, neo-liberal cabinet appointments and her embrace of their agro-mineral agenda.

In less than two months, the Workers Party and its President has indelibly stained its leaders, policies and backers with the brush of corruption and socially regressive policies. Popular support has plummeted. The right wing is growing. Even the authoritarian, pro-military coup activists were present in the mass demonstrations, carrying signs calling for 'impeachment' and a return of military rule.

As in most of Latin America, the authoritarian right in Brazil is a growing force, positioning itself to take power as the center-left adopts a neo-liberal agenda throughout the region. Parties dubbed 'center-left', like the Broad Front in Uruguay, the pro-government Party for Victory in Argentina, are deepening their ties with agro-mineral corporate capitalism.

Uninformed claims by leftist US writers like Noam Chomsky that, "Latin America is the vanguard against neo-liberalism" is at best a decade late, and certainly misleading. They are deceived by populist policy pronouncements and refuse to acknowledge the decay of the center – left regimes and thus fail to recognize how their neoliberal political actions are fostering mass popular discontent. Regimes, which adopt regressive socio-economic policies, do not constitute a vanguard for social emancipation...

Conclusion

What accounts for these abrupt reversals and swiftly broken promises by recently elected supposedly 'left parties' in Europe and Latin America?

One has come to expect this kind of behavior in North America from the Obama Democrats or the New Democratic Party in Canada . . . But we were led to believe that in France, with its red republican traditions, a Socialist regime backed ('critically') by anti-capitalists leftists; would at least implement progressive social reforms. We were told by an army of progressive bloggers that Syriza, with its charismatic leader, and radical rhetoric, would at least fulfil its most elementary promises by lifting the yoke of Troikadomination and begin to end destitution and provide electricity to 300,000 candle-lit households. 'Progressives' had repeatedly told us that the Workers Party lifted 30 million out of poverty. They claimed that a former 'honest auto worker' (Lula Da Silva) would never allow the Workers Party to revert back to neo-liberal budget cuts and embrace its supposed 'class enemies'. US leftist professors refused to give credence to the crass billion-dollar robbery of the Brazilian National Treasury under two Workers' Party Presidents.

Several explanations for these political betrayals come to mind. First, despite their popular or 'workerist' claims, these parties were run by middle class lawyers, professionals and trade union

bureaucrats, who were organically disconnected from their mass base. During election campaigns, seeking votes, they briefly embraced workers and the poor, and then spent the rest of their time in pricey restaurants working out “deals” with bankers, business bribe granters and overseas investors to finance their next election, their children’s private school and their mistresses luxury apartments...

For a time, when the economy was booming, big corporate profits, payoffs and bribes went hand in hand with wage increases and poverty programs. But when the crisis broke, the ‘popular’ leaders doffed their Party hats and pronounced ‘fiscal austerity was inevitable’ while going with their begging cups before their international financial overlords.

In all these countries faced with difficult times, the middle class leaders of the Left feared the problem (capitalist crisis) and feared the real solution (radical transformation). Instead they turned to the ‘only solution’: they approached capitalist leaders and sought to convince business associations and, above all their financial overlords, that they were ‘serious and responsible politicians’, willing to forsake social agendas and embrace fiscal discipline. For domestic consumption, they cursed and threatened the elites, providing a little theater to entertain their plebian followers, before they capitulated!

None of the academics-turned-left-leaders have any deep and abiding links to the mass struggles. Their ‘activism’ involves reading papers at ‘social forums’, and giving papers at conferences on ‘emancipation and equality’. Political sellouts and fiscal austerity will not jeopardize their economic positions. If their Left parties are ousted by angry constituents and radical social movements, the left leaders pack their bags and return to comfortable tenured jobs or rejoin their law office. They do not have to worry about mass firings or reduced subsistence pensions. At their leisure they will find time to sit back and write another paper on the how the ‘crisis of capitalism’ undermined their well-intentioned social agenda or how they experienced the ‘crisis of the Left’.

Because of their disconnect from the suffering of the impoverished, unemployed voters, the middle class leftists in office are blind to the need to make a break with the system. In reality, they share the worldview of their supposedly conservative adversaries: they too believe that ‘it’s capitalism or chaos’. This borrowed cliché is passed off as a deep insight into the dilemmas of democratic socialists. The middle class leftist officials and advisers always use the alibi of ‘institutional constraints’. They ‘theorize’ their political impotence – they never recognize the power of organized class movements.

Their political cowardice is structural and leads to easy moral betrayals: they plead, ‘Crisis is not a time to tinker with the system’. For the middle class, ‘time’ becomes a political excuse. Middle class leaders of popular movements, without audacity or programs of struggle, always talk of change.... in the future...

Instead of mass struggle, they run to and fro, between the centers of financial power and their Central Committees, confusing ‘dialogues’ that end in submission, with consequential resistance. In the end the people will re-pay them turning their backs and rejecting their pleas to re-elect them ‘for another chance’.

There will not be another chance. This ‘Left’ will be discredited in the eyes of those whose trust they betrayed. The tragedy is that the entire left will be tarnished. Who can believe the fine words of ‘liberation’, ‘the will to hope’ and the ‘return of sovereignty’ after experiencing years of the opposite?

Left politics will be lost for an entire generation, at least in Brazil, France and Greece. The Right will ridicule the open zipper.

MOST REVERED CONSTITUTION

Kenn d'Oudney; Democracy Defined (excerpt)

Magna Carta is the foundational constitutional document for all the legitimate constitutions (U.S., Australian); and the most revered and famous constitution in the history of the world. This is because Magna Carta, 1215, prescribes and defines *judicium parium*, the Common Law Trial by Jury, for all causes (lawsuits), civil, criminal and fiscal.

Magna Carta was an act of restoration. Sovereignty, Pre-eminence and Primacy were restored to the People (definitive Democracy) by the act of restoring the supremacy of the People's Trial by Jury Courts; viz. Articles 24, 39, 40 and 61. Magna Carta was installed "in perpetuity" and "for ever" (viz. Preamble, and Articles 61 & 63) by our freemen, barons and churchmen, law-abiding citizens intent upon re-establishing Equal Justice, Liberty and the Rule of Law in an epoch of grievously illegitimate governance. These universal secular aspirations of civilised humans were achieved effectively and simply by the Great Charter's Restoration of the Supremacy of the People's Common Law Trial by Jury.

Here is impartial appraisal of Magna Carta and the Common Law Trial by Jury, and by implication, of the Australian and U.S Constitutions which also base their Justice System on Trial by Jury. Sir James Mackintosh, a Scot, says of Magna Carta,

"To have produced it, to have preserved it, to have matured it, constitute the immortal claim of England on the esteem of Mankind. Her Bacons and Shakespeares, her Miltons and Newtons, with all the truth which they have revealed, and all the generous virtues which they have inspired, are of inferior value when compared with the subjection of men and their rulers to the principles of justice; if, indeed, it be not more true that these mighty spirits could not have been formed except under equal laws, nor roused to full activity without the influence of that spirit which the Great Charter breathed over their forefathers."

Trial by Jury is an anti-racist, anti-sectarian, egalitarian measure, which militates on behalf of Good against Evil. Where properly practised, Trial by Jury envelops the entire adult population, cultivating and propagating those higher human concepts of natural justice, truth, social responsibility, liberty and equity, essential to civilisation, progress and the ongoing development of human cultures. *Demos-kratein*, *demokratia*, Democracy is definitively based on the Constitutional Common Law Trial by Jury Justice System, *sine qua non*. It installs the rôle of Juror as the citizen's most important secular adult duty; to decide authoritatively on the justice of the laws and the motives and acts of wayward government or citizens. of Hollande; the false humility of Rousseff; the hollow gestures of Tsipras and the clowning of Varoufakis.

The people will curse their memory and their betrayal of a noble cause.

... we are opposed around the world by a monolithic and ruthless conspiracy that relies on covert means for expanding its sphere of influence—on infiltration instead of invasion, on subversion instead of elections, on intimidation instead of free choice, on guerrillas by night instead of armies by day.

It is a system which has conscripted vast human and material resources into the building of a tightly knit, highly efficient machine that combines military, diplomatic, intelligence, economic, scientific and political operations. Its preparations are concealed, not published. Its mistakes are buried not headlined. Its dissenters are silenced, not praised. No expenditure is questioned, no rumor is printed, no secret is revealed.

— John F. Kennedy; via Zen Gardner

“ANTI-ISLAM” VERSUS “ISLAMOPHOBIA”. “CONSPIRACY” BEHIND THE WORD, TRIGGERING FEAR AND DANGER IN THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND

Farah Ghasemi; Global Research

(This item wanders somewhat from the normal RG subject matter. Amongst the cliches and platitudes commonly deployed is that opposition to, or dislike of some concept, can be characterised as a 'phobia' as in Islamophobia, homophobia, or 'xenophobia'.

A phobia is an irrational fear. Yet fear produces very specific symptoms. I do not like rice pudding. The sight and smell of the stuff induces nausea. But I am not frightened of rice pudding. I do not suffer raised systolic pressure, trauma nightmares, catatonic episodes, panic attacks, or fight-and-flight reactions when confronted with rice pudding.

The gamut of reasons why humans might not like something covers a vast spectrum. A real, as against this supposed ersatz 'phobia'. can produce reactions as strong as anaphylactic shock. To characterise all Anti reactions as fear-inspired reflects a brand of trite, risible, dumbed down rhetorical garbage in political and social debate.- Ed)

I am writing to explain about a conspiracy behind applying the word of Islamophobia instead of using Anti-Islam for any emplacements and stands against Muslims in the world. The impact of concepts of a word in the mind of individual and social is vital and it creates an image and thought which leads to a behaviour in a community accordingly. In etymology aspect, phobia means: “irrational fear, horror, aversion,” abstracted from compounds in -phobia, from Greek -phobia, from phobos “fear, panic fear, terror, outward show of fear; object of fear or terror,”. It became the common word for “fear” via the notion of “panic, fright” (compare phobein “put to flight, frighten”), from PIE root *bhēg- “to run.”

The Islam-phobia is chosen to describe of any actions or reactions (verbally or practically) including propaganda against Islam and Muslims in the world. While you study etymologically the prefix of Anti, you will find Anti is a word-forming element meaning “against, opposed to, opposite of, instead,” from Old French anti- and directly from Latin antiAnti-Semitic (also antisemitic) and anti-Semite (also antisemite) also are from 1881, like anti-Semitism they appear first in English in an article in the “Athenaeum” of Sept. 31, in reference to German literature. Thus any actions or reactions against Zionists will consider by Zionists and applied by media as Anti Semitism or Anti Judaism choosing the prefix of Anti on purpose and meaningfully.

To explain more about the term of “phobia”, it is first better to look at the psychological point of view : “Fear is a reaction to danger that involves both the mind and body. It can serve a protective purpose, signalling us of danger and preparing us to deal with it, or it can be disruptive.” To understand Fears, psychologists say:

“Fear is a built-in survival mechanism with which we are all equipped. Fear is a normal human emotional reaction. Even as babies, we possess the survival instincts necessary to respond when we sense danger. A fear reaction happens whenever we sense danger or when we are confronted with something new or unknown that seems potentially dangerous. Most people tend to avoid the things they feel afraid of. There are, of course, exceptions such as people who seek out the thrill of extreme sports because the rush of fear can be exciting. We all experience fear slightly differently and with more or less intensity. Some normal fears seem pretty much like a worry, or something you feel generally afraid of or uneasy about. However, at other times, fear comes as a sudden reaction to a sudden confrontation with danger.”

They also distinguish the difference between Fear and Anxiety and psychologists believe: Fear is a

reaction to an actual danger signal – it involves physical and mental tension that helps you spring into action to protect yourself from something that is happening. The body suddenly gears up into fight or flight mode when, for example, the car in front of you swerves and you just miss it. Once you know the danger has passed, the fear goes away.

The physical and mental tension of anxiety is very similar to fear but with one important difference. With anxiety, there isn't usually anything actually happening right then and there to trigger the feeling. The feeling is coming from the anticipation of future danger or something bad that could happen, but there is no danger happening now.

Understanding Phobias:

A phobia is an intense, unreasonable fear of situations, objects, activities, or persons where the fear is far out of proportion to the actual danger or harm that is possible. The fear and distress is so intense that the person will do whatever they can to avoid coming into contact with the object of their fear, and often spend time thinking about whether they're likely to encounter it in a given situation. In fact, if you have a phobia, you probably realize that your fear is unreasonable, yet you still can't control it. If you are exposed to the thing you're afraid of, you become overwhelmed with extreme feelings of anxiety, fear, and even panic. This experience is so unpleasant that you will go to great lengths to avoid the object or situation you fear.

Cause:

When someone develops a phobia, they quickly learn that they feel anxious when they are near the object or situation they fear – and that they feel relief when they avoid it. They learn that avoidance can reduce their anxiety (at least for the moment) and increase the likelihood that they will avoid the feared situation or object next time. The difficulty is that these avoidance behaviors have to keep increasing and happening even sooner to provide the same relief. Pretty soon, a person finds himself spending time worrying about the possibility of encountering the feared situation and avoiding anything that might bring him into contact with it. With a phobia, the pattern of anxiety, avoidance, and worry about the possibility of contact tends to grow bigger and interferes more with life over time.

http://www.psychologistanywhereanytime.com/phobias_psychologist_and_psychologists/psychologist_ears_and_phobias.htm

But having Anti behaviour such as antisocial behaviour is A pattern of behavior that is verbally or physically harmful to other people, animals, or property, including behavior that severely violates social expectations for a particular environment. Regardless of this possibility, these behaviors often lead to major difficulties in many life areas, including work and personal relationships and the disorder is often linked to criminal behavior.

http://psychology.about.com/od/psychiatricdisorders/a/dis_antisocial.htm

Therefore the phobia is talking about an unpleasant feeling in confrontation with a danger and Islamophobia holding the same meaning of danger and fear in unconscious mind although it is irrational but the outcome is a Fear causes by a fact called Islam. Whereas using "Anti" for anti-semitism indicating violence and crime against Jewish people (racism) which it generates a feeling to defend or help the victims.

Now who needs help and who are victims:

when Gazans are under siege and bombardment by Zionists,
Syrians are facing a civil war led by ISIS assisted by the US and Israel,
Muslims are shot at in the US,
Iranians are suffering from sanctions,
Yemenis , Iraqis, are the victims of airstrikes, and so on

"Are you the kind who sits at home and moans over the state of the world — but does nothing about it? Are you the kind who says that the future is predestined by something or other, something he can't quite name or explain and isn't very clear about, but the world is doomed to dictatorship and there's nothing anyone can do about it? Are you the kind who says that he wishes he could do something, he'd be so eager to do something — but what can one man do? Are you the kind who are so devoted to your own career, your family, your

home or your children that you will let the most unspeakable horrors be brought about to destroy your career, your family, your home and your children — because you are too busy now to prevent them?"

Ayn Rand; thanks to BCG Bulletin.

BIG BUSINESS “REGULATORS” AND THE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP (TTIP): OPENING THE FLOODGATES TO CORPORATE PLUNDER

Colin Todhunter; Global Research

Url of this article: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/big-business-regulators-and-the-transatlantic-trade-and-investment-partnership-ttip-opening-the-floodgates-to-to-corporate-plunder/5428021>

A new leak concerning the talks around the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) indicates that the floodgates could be opened even further for corporate influence. The leak has been analysed by the corporate watchdogs CEO and LobbyControl and shows that corporate influence on EU and US policies might dramatically increase via the chapter on so-called ‘regulatory cooperation’.

The leak of the EU draft negotiating proposal dated January 23rd makes unmistakably clear that the EU is seeking a very ambitious chapter that strengthens the role of business in future regulatory legislation possibly via a new institution, the Regulatory Cooperation Body (RCB). Its role would be to coordinate the process of regulatory coherence between the US and the EU and would effectively limit policy space and sideline the public and civil organisations.

Existing and future EU regulation would have to go through a series of investigations, dialogues and negotiations in this Council. This would move decisions on regulations into a technocratic sphere, away from democratic scrutiny. Also, there would be compulsory impact assessments for proposed regulation, which will be checked for their potential impact on trade. This would be ideal for big business lobbies: creating a firm brake on any new progressive regulation in the very first stage of decision-making. Kenneth Haar of CEO says:

“The proposal fulfills the ambitions of some of the biggest business lobby groups. It will provide them with a big tool box they can use to roll back regulation adopted in the public interest.”

A December 2014 version of the draft indicates that there were even ambitions to include the municipal level in the list of those who are to report on planned regulations that affect trade. Even though this has been taken out of the proposal now, it clearly shows that there are desires on the EU-side to subjugate social and environmental legislation at all levels to international trade.

Max Bank of LobbyControl says:

“Trade Commissioner Malmström has to step back on regulatory cooperation in TTIP. Like Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS), it strengthens big business and threatens democracy on both sides of the Atlantic.”

‘Regulatory co-operation’ is a ploy to open the door to massive influence by big business over future laws. The EC argues that its proposal for regulatory co-operation in TTIP is nothing more

than a rational dialogue, for example to avoid duplication of laws on both sides of the Atlantic, and that it would not restrict the ability of regulators and legislators to pursue public interest objectives.

However, there has always been a gap between the EC's documents for public consumption and the actual texts from the negotiations that have emerged via leaks. And the recent leaks of new proposals from December 2014 and January 2015 not only confirm the validity of the criticism but show that the EC's true negotiating position is even worse than critics imagined.

In late 2012, BusinessEurope and the US Chamber of Commerce had several meetings with the EU Commission to push their agenda. Regulatory cooperation is promoted as a solution to the problem that agreeing on harmonised standards or mutual recognition of standards can prove difficult in the short term. Consequently, on issues such as food standards, chemicals and financial regulation, because negotiators might not be able to strike a deal on common rules between the US and EU while the trade negotiations are under way, regulatory co-operation can provide a space for business groups and regulators to reach results to their liking after TTIP is agreed, in the long term and without much public scrutiny.

BusinessEurope and the US Chamber of Commerce presented the EC with a series of proposals in 2012, which would enable them – in their words – to “co-write regulation”.

Despite claims by the EC that there is no secrecy concerning the negotiations, the notes of European Commission meetings with business lobbyists released to Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) under the EU's freedom of information law some time back were heavily censored. The documents showed that the EC invited industry to submit wish lists for ‘regulatory barriers’ they would like removed during the negotiations. The documents showed clearly that removing differences in EU and US regulations is the key issue in the talks: in other words, a race to the bottom in setting the lowest barriers possible. It is therefore no surprise that the strong similarities between the EC's proposals and those of the industry lobbyists sparked a backlash against the onerous privileges being awarded to business groups

When the EC talks about the involvement of interest groups in regulatory issues, it uses the neutral term ‘stakeholder’. The overwhelming majority of lobbyists in Brussels represent business: ‘involving stakeholders’ is another expression for opening yet one more avenue for corporate lobbyists to influence policymaking. Past experiences of involvement of ‘stakeholders’ in ‘regulatory co-operation’ between the EU and the US have demonstrated that these procedures are easily open to big business and often closed to other interest groups.

The agenda of regulatory co-operation is first and foremost about promoting trade – not about securing consumer rights, public health, or any other public policy objective. And, as if to underline the stitch-up of the European public between officials and big business, the only way the public has access to what is really being negotiated is through leaked documents.

(Much of the text for the above was sourced from the Corporate Europe Observatory website. A more detailed explanation of the issues surrounding regulatory cooperation are discussed [here](#).)

THE TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP AND THE DEATH OF THE REPUBLIC

Ellen Brown, [Web of Debt](#); [Truthdig](#)

(Written in the American context, but TTP is the Pacific 'twin' of TTIP, and virtually every comment might apply to those EU/US negotiations. This item is interesting both for how national constitutions are being circumvented and destroyed, and providing some examples of how such trading policies are working and might work in practise - Ed)

The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government.
— Article IV, Section 4, US Constitution

A republican form of government is one in which power resides in elected officials representing the citizens, and government leaders exercise power according to the rule of law. In *The Federalist Papers*, James Madison defined a republic as “a government which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people”

On April 22, 2015, the Senate Finance Committee approved a bill to fast-track the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a massive trade agreement that would override our republican form of government and hand judicial and legislative authority to a foreign three-person panel of corporate lawyers. The secretive TPP is an agreement with Mexico, Canada, Japan, Singapore and seven other countries that affects 40% of global markets. Fast-track authority could now go to the full Senate for a vote as early as next week. Fast-track means Congress will be prohibited from amending the trade deal, which will be put to a simple up or down majority vote. Negotiating the TPP in secret and fast-tracking it through Congress is considered necessary to secure its passage, since if the public had time to review its onerous provisions, opposition would mount and defeat it.

Abdicating the Judicial Function to Corporate Lawyers

James Madison wrote in *The Federalist Papers*:

The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, . . . may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny. . . . “Were the power of judging joined with the legislative, the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control, for the judge would then be the legislator. . . .”

And that, from what we now know of the TPP’s secret provisions, will be its dire effect.

The most controversial provision of the TPP is the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) section, which strengthens existing ISDS procedures. ISDS first appeared in a bilateral trade agreement in 1959. According to *The Economist*, ISDS gives foreign firms a special right to apply to a secretive tribunal of highly paid corporate lawyers for compensation whenever the government passes a law to do things that hurt corporate profits — such things as discouraging smoking, protecting the environment or preventing a nuclear catastrophe.

Arbitrators are paid \$600-700 an hour, giving them little incentive to dismiss cases; and the secretive nature of the arbitration process and the lack of any requirement to consider precedent gives wide scope for creative judgments.

To date, the highest ISDS award has been for \$2.3 billion to Occidental Oil Company against the government of Ecuador over its termination of an oil-concession contract, this although the termination was apparently legal. Still in arbitration is a demand by Vattenfall, a Swedish utility that operates two nuclear plants in Germany, for compensation of €3.7 billion (\$4.7 billion) under the ISDS clause of a treaty on energy investments, after the German government decided to shut down its nuclear power industry following the Fukushima disaster in Japan in 2011.

Under the TPP, however, even larger judgments can be anticipated, since the sort of “investment” it protects includes not just “the commitment of capital or other resources” but “the expectation of gain or profit.” That means the rights of corporations in other countries extend not just to their factories and other “capital” but to the profits they expect to receive there.

In an article posted by Yves Smith, Joe Firestone poses some interesting hypotheticals:

Under the TPP, could the US government be sued and be held liable if it decided to stop issuing Treasury debt and financed deficit spending in some other way (perhaps by quantitative easing or by issuing trillion dollar coins)? Why not, since some private companies would lose profits as a result?

Under the TPP or the TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership under negotiation with the European Union), would the Federal Reserve be sued if it failed to bail out

banks that were too big to fail?

Firestone notes that under the Netherlands-Czech trade agreement, the Czech Republic was sued in an investor-state dispute for failing to bail out an insolvent bank in which the complainant had an interest. The investor company was awarded \$236 million in the dispute settlement. What might the damages be, asks Firestone, if the Fed decided to let the Bank of America fail, and a Saudi-based investment company decided to sue?

Abdicating the Legislative Function to Multinational Corporations

Just the threat of this sort of massive damage award could be enough to block prospective legislation. But the TPP goes further and takes on the legislative function directly, by forbidding specific forms of regulation. Public Citizen observes that the TPP would provide big banks with a backdoor means of watering down efforts to re-regulate Wall Street, after deregulation triggered the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression:

The TPP would forbid countries from banning particularly risky financial products, such as the toxic derivatives that led to the \$183 billion government bailout of AIG. It would prohibit policies to prevent banks from becoming “too big to fail,” and threaten the use of “firewalls” to prevent banks that keep our savings accounts from taking hedge-fund-style bets.

The TPP would also restrict capital controls, an essential policy tool to counter destabilizing flows of speculative money. . . . And the deal would prohibit taxes on Wall Street speculation, such as the proposed Robin Hood Tax that would generate billions of dollars’ worth of revenue for social, health, or environmental causes.

Clauses on dispute settlement in earlier free trade agreements have been invoked to challenge efforts to regulate big business. The fossil fuel industry is seeking to overturn Quebec’s ban on the ecologically destructive practice of fracking. Veolia, the French behemoth known for building a tram network to serve Israeli settlements in occupied East Jerusalem, is contesting increases in Egypt’s minimum wage. The tobacco maker Philip Morris is suing against anti-smoking initiatives in Uruguay and Australia.

The TPP would empower not just foreign manufacturers but foreign financial firms to attack financial policies in foreign tribunals, demanding taxpayer compensation for regulations that they claim frustrate their expectations and inhibit their profits.

Preempting Government Sovereignty

What is the justification for this encroachment on the sovereign rights of government? Allegedly, ISDS is necessary in order to increase foreign investment. But as noted in *The Economist*, investors can protect themselves by purchasing political-risk insurance. Moreover, Brazil continues to receive sizable foreign investment despite its long-standing refusal to sign any treaty with an ISDS mechanism. Other countries are beginning to follow Brazil’s lead.

In an April 22nd report from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, gains from multilateral trade liberalization were shown to be very small, equal to only about 0.014% of consumption, or about \$.43 per person per month. And that assumes that any benefits are distributed uniformly across the economic spectrum. In fact, transnational corporations get the bulk of the benefits, at the expense of most of the world’s population.

Something else besides attracting investment money and encouraging foreign trade seems to be going on. The TPP would destroy our republican form of government under the rule of law, by elevating the rights of investors – also called the rights of “capital” – above the rights of the citizens. That means that TPP is blatantly unconstitutional. But as Joe Firestone observes, neo-liberalism and corporate contributions seem to have blinded the deal’s proponents so much that they cannot see they are selling out the sovereignty of the United States to foreign and multinational corporations.

Ellen Brown is an attorney, founder of the Public Banking Institute, and author of twelve books including the

best-selling *Web of Debt*. Her latest book, *The Public Bank Solution*, explores successful public banking models historically and globally. Her 300+ blog articles are at EllenBrown.com.

EU CALLS FOR TRACKING COMPUTERS IN ALL VEHICLES TO MONITOR, REGULATE TRAVEL

L.J. Devon; Natural News; via Activist Post

(Another example in which the laudable objective ... in this instance energy saving ... acts as the Trojan Horse for the mass surveillance agenda. Here we are in the same territory as smart meters. - Ed)

The controlling surveillance state is deepening, prying further into people's lives like a chisel carving its way through skin and bone. Governments have become opportunistic control freaks, centralizing their micromanagement powers whenever possible. Now the European Union is rolling out plans to monitor travel on all European roads, tracking drivers' mileages and time traveled per vehicle. This controlling scheme is not for surveillance alone; it's essentially a plan to tax every driver for the for the distance they travel on European roads.

Could you imagine being taxed for every quarter-mile you drive?

A senior European politician is doing just that, calling on all European vehicles to be installed with road-pricing systems. This would include mandatory installation of a computer that would track how long one has driven on European roads and how far. This plan would serve as a built-in tax, harmonizing all road toll charges across the EU. The plan would end road-side tolls and replace them with time-tracking and/or distance-tracking toll micromanagement systems.

EU Transport Commissioner says computer system should regulate distance travelled

One of the plan's advocates, Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc, is also trying to make the computer system as efficient as possible. She said that the EU travel regulations will put "a burden on car drivers" while becoming an "obstacle to their mobility." Bulc is advocating for a plan that charges drivers per kilometer and not by time. Her plan also includes a way to limit the speed of cars to minimize fuel loss. Bulc doesn't want to encourage speeding drivers by pressuring them for every minute they are operating their vehicle. Instead, she thinks it's safer and more efficient to charge drivers by the mile. It doesn't matter which way she looks at it, the plan to install computers in all vehicles is a gross violation of property and privacy, and another way centralized government can micromanage the people and their finances. It doesn't matter where you come from -- everyone will only pay for the distance they have actually driven and it will be billed on a device throughout Europe. We're currently investigating just such an idea ... There are many options -- a fee could be obligatory but it's also possible to make it optional i.e. that countries decide themselves whether and on which roads they want to levy a road use charge based on kilometres driven."

The built in pay-by-the-mile scheme was slammed by UKIP transport spokesman Jill Seymour MEP. She said, "[L]ook how the EU overrides the democratic decision of the British people: an unelected Slovenian bureaucrat in Brussels announces in a German newspaper interview that she wants to force all British drivers to fit computers in their cars which will count every mile they drive. Britain will be forced into an EU-wide scheme in which Commissioner Bulc will force all drivers to pay for using our own roads, and the money will go straight to Brussels. This would be outrageous on three counts. First, it would be the imposition of a tax on tens of millions of UK citizens without the consent or control of parliament. Second, the money raised would not go to HM Treasury but to the bureaucrats in Brussels who would then undemocratically decide how the money would be spent on their own EU road schemes. Third, the idea that every British car would be fitted with a high-tech computer tracking every trip a driver makes is an invasion of privacy which we cannot tolerate."

<http://www.breitbart.com>

http://www.naturalnews.com/049021_vehicle_monitoring_tracking_computers_European_Union.html#ixzz3YVYH02Ro

HELLO BIOMETRICS: WINDOWS 10 TO ADD FACIAL RECOGNITION, IRIS SCANS AND FINGERPRINT READER

Nicholas West; Activist Post

After several years of consumer complaints, Microsoft Windows 10 has been getting a lot of attention as of late for many upgrades slated for their new version of the popular operating system. However, it appears that one feature being added to supposedly consumer-friendly applications is a suite of biometrics called Windows Hello and Windows Passport.

It's all a part of the move toward a full-fledged Smart World where YOU become the password in a matrix of online and real-world activity. Naturally, the fear of identity theft and cyber crime of all stripes has been the sales pitch to accept this new pervasive identity tech. Apple's Touch ID was introduced in iPhone 5 which employed a fingerprint scanner for phone locking as well as to make purchases in Apple stores. Yet, it didn't take long for this new ultra-security measure to be hacked. As Melissa Melton reported:

The new iPhone 5's fingerprint ID security feature lasted all of what amounts to not even five minutes in the tech world — Chaos Computer Club is already reporting that they were able to hack the new phone:

The biometrics hacking team of the Chaos Computer Club (CCC) has successfully bypassed the biometric security of Apple's TouchID using easy everyday means. A fingerprint of the phone user, photographed from a glass surface, was enough to create a fake finger that could unlock an iPhone 5s secured with TouchID. This demonstrates – again – that fingerprint biometrics is unsuitable as access control method and should be avoided ... At the 2012 Black Hat hackers conference, hackers were able to successfully demonstrate a program that could easily fool iris scan security systems using recreated irises from images stored in existing iris scan databases.

Hacking risks already have been exposed in smart vehicles, smart cars, and even smart weapons(!!), so this seems to be par for the course. Beyond the hacking risks, though, there is our lovely government, which continues to prove that it will do anything and everything to track our every move.

Online biometrics is a totalitarian dream of removing all anonymity during even the most casual computer interaction. We've already seen electronics warnings about keeping personal conversations quiet around smart TVs. What can we expect to happen when all of the items around us are connected to the Internet, and our bodies have become the sole password that connects us to the central database? It raises the spectre of simple monitoring of all health, consumer activity, environmental compliance, and pretty much every movement anywhere.

Nicholas West writes for Activist Post and Tech Swarm.

THE EU; A CORPORATIST RACKET

Dave Barnby; Reviewed by Frank Taylor

One of the greatest feats of cinema of all time was Fritz Laing's *Metropolis*. It depicts a future dystopia of humans reduced to ants against a backdrop of gigantic, overwhelming structures. It was very much a period piece when ideas of technological and institutional giantism began to gain prominence.

It is a common misconception that ideologies ... Capitalism, Liberalism, Marxism and so forth ... pursue mutually exclusive trajectories through history. Thus some would put our present predicament down to what is called 'cultural Marxism'. But we should cast that net wider, and also place alongside post-Marxists such as Gramsci and Weber (Marx wrote nothing on culture and had been dead a decade before Freud published his first paper) the likes of Marinetti, the Fordists, Dadaists, psychoanalysts; even tracing the roots of such thinking back to Hobbes and Calvin. We have a vision of human flesh made machine ... like Corbusier's *Machines for Living In* ... allied to the notion that ordinary folk are incapable of governing themselves and that government must be the exclusive preserve of a carefully selected elite.

Thus, far from remaining mutually exclusive, such influences cross-fertilise. Modern day corporatism is thus derived from a complex concatenation of influences, deviously and deceitfully presented as the prime engine of personal and economic liberty.

One of the great monuments of giantist thinking is the European Union. That is being taken as a template for further such initiatives around the world ... NAFTA, ASEAN, SEAC, the African Union. Orwell's nightmare vision of a small number of continental and sub-continental superstates in permanent, contrived war with one another is being constructed before our eyes.

Most politically educated people from across the spectrum will fulminate against the EU. From the absurdity of fish discards to austerity, from subsidies to tobacco and non-existent olive oil refineries to the farcical shifting parliament, from its military and political meddling in the Balkans, North Africa and the Ukraine and its hankerings to become a sovereign military power to the TTIP negotiations, from the corrupt waste of CAP to the incessant and heavily bureaucratic micro-meddling in every aspect of policy, from its long standing inability to produce audited accounts to the deceitful use of euphemism to describe its superstate aims, the EU will usually invoke anger and often apoplexy. We have an institution quite willing to destroy the economies of peripheral Europe rather than entertain any unthinkable act of secession.

Yet a number of those who so fulminate will, in the next breath, say what a wonderful entity the EU is. This institution has a remarkable and often overwhelming capacity to completely paralyse the critical faculties of many very intelligent people and inspire them to peaks of cognitive dissonance never previously attempted in human history.

One feature of the present election campaign is the absence, outside the political fringe, or any party offering a consistent critique of neo-liberal globalisation. The three 'main' parties are all firmly glued to this supranational agenda. Shorn of their mass memberships they are now little more than shell entities financed by oligarchs, in the interests of oligarchs. The SNP is also firmly in that camp, as will become more apparent once the northern euphoria has subsided.

As for the Greens they say they hate neo-liberal globalisation but love the EU, whilst UKIP hates the EU but loves neo-liberal globalisation. Neither seems to listen to those in their own ranks who rightfully aver that these are both foals of the same mare.

Dave Barnby is just one of those dissident voices within UKIP. He is a standing example of the manner in which the evolving insurgency cuts diametrically across orthodox notions of 'left' and 'right'. He is also from that now endangered species in this country ... a knowledgeable constitutionalist. Originally from the political centre/right, Dave Barnby has little to say on such subjects as corporatism, neo-liberalism, TTIP, civil liberty, privacy, democracy and localism which would offend any member of Occupy.

Many books on the subject of our accession to the EU ... such as the Booker/North volume *The Great Deception* ... whilst informative, are long and dense for the ordinary reader. Barnby's work is refreshingly brief, wastes no words, and gets right to the point on every page.

He opens by drawing on his constitutional knowledge to explain why the accession to the EU was, and remains, illegal. That remains an issue of might rather than right, as those who have sought to bring the architects of EU membership to book have discovered.

Much of the rest is an intriguing and sordid tale of how tiny numbers of powerful, well-connected people ... mostly unknowns acting very far from the public gaze ... are able to shape history. It is a case study as to how oligarchy operates.

Barnby outlines the post war origins of the European Project, which story includes a number of people and corporations with impeccable Nazi credentials. What is less generally known is the long-standing and deep involvement of the USA in promoting a single European state through its corporations, money and the involvement of the CIA. Indeed the European Movement, founded to promote that central aim, owes its existence to US government funding.

He describes the cunning backstairs processes by which overwhelming public opposition to the then Common Market, was turned around in a short space of time, and calls for a referendum was talked down. From covert slush funds, through the moving aside of anti-Common Market media figures, through thousands of supportive 'letters to the press' written not by members of the public but in Whitehall, to the stealing of Labour Party policy documents for £25,000 (multiply by 10-12 in today's money), and the possible subversion of the 1975 referendum with CIA assistance, the picture is very murky indeed. The sinister figure of one Norman Reddaway, a senior figure in British military intelligence, and an expert in propaganda, turns up again and again.

Indeed the title of this book could well be *A Spook's Guide on How to Manipulate, Subvert and Gerrymander Public Opinion*. In guile, money and resources, opponents of entry were hopelessly out-gunned from the start ... a lesson to latter-day lemmings who demand an EU 'referendum'.

The book also recalls the number of Labour politicians ... many now almost forgotten ,, who opposed entry; Peter Shore, Nigel Spearing, Michael Foot, Douglas Jay, Bert Oram, Tony Benn, Elwyn Jones. Some quotes from their speeches are worth citing:-

“we are to have imposed ... a constitution that we did not write or did not even help to write”

“ ... it is impossible to see the changes required in our English law as a result of the adoption of Community law ... “

“Millions of people ... will feel ... that legislation passed in this way, with no {public} consent, cannot command the consent of the country and would lack moral and constitutional validity.”

Barnby also reveals how the EU is itself part of a much bigger and grander scheme. The purpose of the Atlantic Union and the American Committee on United Europe, set up in 1951 was:-

“ ... that the integration of Europe politically and economically is a first and essential step ... {to} ... the extension of such integration to other members of the Atlantic Community such as Canada and the United States ... and that only with the inclusion of the United States can a union of democracies achieve a viable economy and defensive strength ... '

Now the Euro, the evolution of NATO from defensive alliance to supranational imperium, NAFTA, TTIP, and the capstone of a single European State ... 'fiscal integration' ... make sense when taken together. One at a time over the past forty or so years, the building blocs of Orwell's prophesied state of Oceania, have been hoisted into place.

It goes without saying that Bilderberg has been at the centre of this process since the very beginning. The roll call of well connected individuals and corporations is as lengthy as might be expected. Peter Mandelson, a man well know for the company he keeps should have the last word:-

“The age of true representative democracy is now coming to an end”

Welcome to the post-democratic age!

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR DIGITAL SECURITY

Rob Leslie & Goa Lobaugh; Thrive

In the era of the Global Domination Agenda, simply telling the truth and working honestly for freedom, health and justice is often criminalized, surveilled and suppressed. Even keeping personal information private from “total surveillance” is extremely challenging. We created most of the movie THRIVE over encrypted lines so that our efforts would not be interfered with by those who try to control others by suppressing truth.

People are often asking the Thrive team for advice on dealing with online security issues.

Our resident tech wizards offered to compile some useful tips to pass on to the network.

In today's world, digital information is pervasive. Nearly every detail about our lives and our communications is processed, transmitted, and stored digitally in some way. This is both a technical marvel that allows us to share knowledge and ideas in unprecedented ways across boundless distances, and also a challenge to us to ensure the privacy and integrity of the things we choose to share. As was stated in the movie *THRIVE*, and in a previous blog on surveillance, and as Edward Snowden's revelations confirmed, there are some people who want to have access to all our personal digital information and eavesdrop on all our conversations, and they have the resources and are willing to go to great lengths to do it. Ostensibly they want to do this so they can protect us from others who would harm us, but in doing so they also disrespect us by violating our privacy and in some cases violating the integrity of our communications without our permission.

In a thriving world, it is our responsibility to protect the privacy and integrity of our own digital information, just as we take steps to protect our physical property from thieves, vandals, or prying eyes. As with physical security, there are a variety of threats to our digital information, and accordingly a variety of tools we can use to mitigate those threats. Technology and policy are both moving targets, so it is important to stay vigilant in order to keep current with best practices. Below are some of the best practices we've found to secure our digital information.

Threats to Our Digital Information

In *THRIVE*, it was said that "every phone call and email we send is collected and archived, and can be inspected at any time." Snowden explained that this wholesale collection of information is not necessarily reviewed immediately or used to build dossiers on specific people, but rather is archived in long-term storage that can be queried at any time in the future. Snowden also showed a variety of the methods used to collect this information, from wiretapping various Internet connection points, to working directly with technology companies that have access to information, to interdicting the shipment of hardware and implanting custom software that will aid in the collection, and many others. While some of these methods are targeted at specific individuals or groups, others are not. The threats to our digital information, then, can vary depending on who has it, and how badly someone else wants to get it.

The fact that some technology companies are so easily willing to release the information entrusted to them shows us the value of choosing the companies we share our information with, reviewing the privacy policies of those companies, and of carefully selecting the information we ultimately share. This is of course easier said than done, and in many cases we simply want the service more than we want to hassle over finding an alternative, if there even is one. Clearly, few enjoy reading privacy policies or terms and conditions, even though they form an integral part of the agreement between you and the company providing you a service, and often reveal the level of respect you can expect the company to have for you and your personal information.

There are, of course, threats beyond these. Some people are interested in obtaining your personal information or intercepting your communications in order to contact and persuade you to buy their products, or to trick and defraud you. Other people are interested in gaining control over your computers and will attempt to spread malware (in the form of a computer virus or rootkit) so they can use your hardware and Internet connection for their own purposes, including sending spam, launching denial-of-service attacks against others, capturing keystrokes and passwords, mining or stealing bitcoin, collecting all of the personal information on your computer, or just trying to prevent you from copying a CD.

You may also have personal adversaries that are interested in you or your communications for some reason—maybe a competitor, a jealous lover, a paid troll, or a rogue

actor intent on sabotaging your inventions or perhaps just your point of view. There are many reasons to want to protect the privacy and integrity of your personal information. Even if you do not feel personally at risk, it is useful to recognize the levels of surveillance that are happening. The 2012 National Defense Authorization Act made it illegal and punishable by imprisonment with no access to legal defense to speak out against government policies, and recently a report funded by the Department of Homeland Security named sovereign individuals as the number one domestic threat in America. Awareness of this is an important step in taking responsibility to stop it.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there are threats to our digital information in the form of public policy decisions. Some people would like to make it illegal for anyone to use encryption, and fear a world in which encryption prevents them from accessing information they are not a party to. Others would like to force all companies to give up information about their users. Still others might try to use so-called “net neutrality” regulations as a Trojan horse to impose additional surveillance. Vigilance is essential to keep what little privacy we do have from disappearing completely.

Best Practices for Securing Digital Information

The good news is that there are concrete things we can still do to improve our personal digital security. The very things that threaten our digital information have also motivated privacy-conscious individuals and companies to differentiate themselves by developing and offering products and services with high standards for privacy and security. Organizations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Thrive, and people like Snowden, Laura Poitras, Glenn Greenwald, and Julian Assange as well as others have brought the issue into mainstream discussions where we have an opportunity to influence and shift belief systems toward a world in which no one’s privacy is violated against their will.

No solution is 100% guaranteed, and all require some work to employ. The first and easiest thing you can do is to be mindful of what you agree to, and the information you share in the first place. You may be surprised by the amount of privacy you agree to give up in exchange for the services some companies and apps offer to provide, and might want to seek alternatives when the terms feel unacceptable to you.

The next thing you can do is to use encryption wherever possible. Snowden informs us that when implemented and used properly, encryption can help secure information against practically all known forms of eavesdropping and tampering. That’s a big help, but also a big condition—encryption is fundamentally complex, and easy to get wrong. There is even speculation that some cryptographic algorithms may have been deliberately and surreptitiously weakened to reduce their effectiveness. It’s also important to realize that even if implemented and used properly, encryption is not a panacea. For example, the fact that you used encryption may be utterly obvious to outside observers (and attract their interest as a result), as may be the source, destination, size, or frequency of your messages or data. Furthermore, encryption can only ensure privacy if performed in an environment that has not already been compromised. A computer virus, or other malware disguised as an otherwise useful app, might still be eavesdropping on the information you’re trying to encrypt. Even so, encryption is the best option we have when we want to ensure our privacy.

Finally, we believe it is important for us all to speak up about the importance of digital security and the violations caused by misguided public policy. Together we can make it clear that it is not acceptable to spy on, intercept, tamper with, or misuse the private communications and personal information of others, and we can support the pioneering efforts of those who are both developing solutions and taking on the public policy issues.

Digital Security; Tools and Technology Tips

Here is some specific advice on the kinds of tools available to help secure your digital privacy:

Instant Messaging. OTR stands for “Off-the-Record Messaging” and is an encryption protocol made specially for instant messaging. It provides “deniable authentication” which allows you to be sure of the authenticity of the messages you receive from the other party in a way that can’t be proved to anyone else.

There are several reasonably priced, free, or subscription apps that use OTR, including TextSecure for Android, ChatSecure for iOS and Android, and Jitsi for Windows, Mac, and Linux, among many others. Silent Circle is a paid service that offers a suite of tools for state of the art encryption for text, as well as voice and video communications. Phil Zimmermann, a pioneer in the field and creator of PGP and ZRTP, is one of their developers.

The Silent Circle source code, as well as TextSecure is available for review on GitHub, adding another layer of protection with the transparency of their system, increasing the likelihood of vulnerabilities being exposed and patched quickly.

Telephone Conversations. For smartphones, as mentioned before, Silent Circle offers an encrypted voice and video option. Another option is Open Whisper Systems’ Signal for iOS and RedPhone for Android. The folks at Silent Circle have also partnered with a smartphone manufacturer to create the Blackphone, an entire smartphone built for secure communications. It includes its own privacy focused operating system, PrivatOS, which prohibits backdoor access, and other common hacks.

Online Searching and Browsing

Here are some tips to improve your online privacy:

Instead of Google, use search engines offering strong privacy protection, such as StartPage, Ixquick or DuckDuckGo.

Connect to sites using HTTPS whenever possible (e.g. using HTTPS Everywhere), and always when transferring personal information. HTTPS refers to a standard for encrypting communications with web servers, also known as TLS or SSL. (HTTPS imposes certain costs on web servers to support it, so not all do. Some sites, including our own at Thrive, use HTTPS when submitting or transferring sensitive personal information.)

Use Tor when you want or need to browse the web in complete anonymity.

For additional privacy (especially when traveling), use Tails to start almost any computer from portable media and leave no trace when you are done.

If you regularly communicate with colleagues in multiple locations, consider setting up a virtual private network (VPN) to encrypt all communications between the sites using OpenVPN or IPsec. This is an advanced but effective technique for taking direct responsibility over the privacy of your communications. Some commercial services also offer VPN tunnels you can use to connect privately to the Internet.

Email

Probably the most widely used encryption standard for email is PGP (also GPG) which can be used both to sign and encrypt messages. PGP relies on a decentralized “web of trust” to provide confidence that the key you use to encrypt messages to someone (or to verify the signatures of someone) actually belongs to the person in question, and is not a decoy or forgery. In practice this usually means meeting in person once to verify the other person’s key fingerprint, or relying on the judgment of others you trust who have directly or indirectly confirmed this themselves. You can find software available for Mac, Windows, and Linux.

Computer Security

Unless your computer is never connected to the Internet, there are always risks to the information stored on it. Often the worst risks come from trusting software of questionable origin — for example, free apps that you can download from the Internet. While operating

systems are getting better at insulating your private information (like your address book contacts and your calendar) from random apps and require your permission before allowing access, there may still be loopholes. It is always better to err on the side of caution by not running software you don't trust completely. This is why it is good advice never to open email attachments you don't recognize or from people you don't know, and also why open source software is preferable to closed-source: you benefit when the software source code can be reviewed for integrity by anyone.

It's worth noting that any time you are asked to enter an administrative password on your computer, you are essentially giving the app making the request complete and unrestricted access to do anything with your computer; consider whether you really trust the app in question before granting such permission.

Assuming you trust your computer and all the software it runs well enough not to be compromised, here are some tools you can use to encrypt your files:

Mac: Encrypt your entire startup disk with FileVault (System Preferences... > Security & Privacy > FileVault), or create an encrypted image for a smaller set of files using Disk Utility. In recent versions of OS X, you can also use Disk Utility to encrypt an external disk.

Windows: Until it was discontinued last year, TrueCrypt was a popular option for encrypting files on Windows. VeraCrypt and CipherShed have been identified as current alternatives.

Some recent versions of Windows also include built-in encryption facilities, and Windows 8.1 may automatically encrypt everything on your hard drive by default.

Linux: Encrypt disk partitions using dm-crypt (e.g. cryptsetup/LUKS) or encrypt individual files with GnuPG.

Passphrases

Any time you rely on encryption, it is critical to use a good passphrase, or the effort will be for naught. It turns out this is not as easy as you might think. Fortunately, we can recommend a simple and reliable technique to generate extremely secure passphrases.

Cloud Services

While the ubiquity of "cloud" services like Dropbox, Google Docs, or iCloud makes them attractive and convenient, it's important to realize that we give up several layers of control (both physical and digital) when we use these services. Be conscious of the power you give away to the cloud operators, and understand their policies. If privacy is essential, encrypt your files before storing them in the cloud, or consider using a service with higher standards for privacy.

Devices

Be aware that many devices today want to connect to the "cloud" to store and retrieve data, whether they are mobile phones, tablets, game systems, "smart" TVs, or other "smart" appliances. Often this data contains personal information about you, even a recording of your voice if you make requests that way. It may be disconcerting to realize the TV in your living room may be listening to you and sending what it hears to a remote third party, so if this bothers you, consider turning such features off if you can, or vote with your wallet and don't purchase devices with these capabilities. Also let the companies know that you chose not to purchase their device for this reason.

Additional Resources

VIDEO: Documentary film — Terms and Conditions May Apply

VIDEO: Jacob Appelbaum & Laura Poitras — Reconstructing narratives

Privacy Project — Blackphone

You Can Now Easily Send Encrypted Texts to Anyone, and the NSA Is Gonna Hate It
Motherboard

The Best Cloud Storage Services that Protect Your Privacy — Liferhacker

Passphrases That You Can Memorize — But That Even the NSA Can't Guess — The Intercept
Cisco is Shipping Equipment to Fake Addresses to Protect Customers; Meanwhile Amazon
Refuses to Provide Any Transparency — Liberty Blitzkrieg

The Electronic Frontier Foundation is a staunch advocate of digital civil liberties, including
personal privacy

Here's our challenge to you: can you identify better solutions that also adhere to the
principle of non-violation?

*Bruce Schneier is a well-known security researcher who has had direct access to the Snowden documents. (See a recent interview he gave after the release of his latest book, *Data and Goliath*; you can also read an excerpt from the book.) He offers good analyses of a wide range of security issues, but also tends to endorse collectivist (violating individual rights for the "good of the group") solutions to the problems he identifies.*

ICELAND LOOKS AT ENDING BOOM AND BUST WITH RADICAL MONEY PLAN

AFP; Daily Telegraph; via Lincs Patriot

Icelandic government suggests removing the power of commercial banks to create money and handing it to the central bank

Iceland's government is considering a revolutionary monetary proposal - removing the power of commercial banks to create money and handing it to the central bank. The proposal, which would be a turnaround in the history of modern finance, was part of a report written by a lawmaker from the ruling centrist Progress Party, Frosti Sigurjonsson, entitled "A better monetary system for Iceland".

"The findings will be an important contribution to the upcoming discussion, here and elsewhere, on money creation and monetary policy," Prime Minister Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson said.

The report, commissioned by the premier, is aimed at putting an end to a monetary system in place through a slew of financial crises, including the latest one in 2008.

According to a study by four central bankers, the country has had "over 20 instances of financial crises of different types" since 1875, with "six serious multiple financial crisis episodes occurring every 15 years on average". Mr Sigurjonsson said the problem each time arose from ballooning credit during a strong economic cycle. He argued the central bank was unable to contain the credit boom, allowing inflation to rise and sparking exaggerated risk-taking and speculation, the threat of bank collapse and costly state interventions.

In Iceland, as in other modern market economies, the central bank controls the creation of banknotes and coins but not the creation of all money, which occurs as soon as a commercial bank offers a line of credit. The central bank can only try to influence the money supply with its monetary policy tools. Under the so-called Sovereign Money proposal, the country's central bank would become the only creator of money.

"Crucially, the power to create money is kept separate from the power to decide how that new money is used," Mr Sigurjonsson wrote in the proposal, "As with the state budget, the parliament will debate the government's proposal for allocation of new money," Banks would continue to manage accounts and payments, and would serve as intermediaries between savers and lenders.

Mr Sigurjonsson, a businessman and economist, was one of the masterminds behind Iceland's household debt relief programme launched in May 2014 and aimed at helping the many Icelanders whose finances were strangled by inflation-indexed mortgages signed before the 2008 financial crisis.

The small Nordic country was hit hard as the crash of US investment bank Lehman Brothers caused the collapse of its three largest banks. Iceland then became the first western European nation in 25 years to appeal to the International Monetary Fund to save its battered economy.

Its GDP fell by 5.1pc in 2009 and 3.1pc in 2010 before it started rising again.

PFI DEALS LEAVE BRITAIN £222BN IN DEBT

Jonathan Owen; Independent; via Nathon Allonby

Treasury data analysis unearths the 'enormous financial disaster' of Private Finance Initiatives

Every man, woman and child in Britain is more than £3,400 in debt – without knowing it and without borrowing a single penny – thanks to the proliferation of controversial deals used to pay for infrastructure such as schools and hospitals.

The UK owes more than £222bn to banks and businesses as a result of Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) – “buy now, pay later” agreements between the government and private companies on major projects. The startling figure – described by experts as a “financial disaster” – has been calculated as part of an Independent on Sunday analysis of Treasury data on more than 720 PFIs. The analysis has been verified by the National Audit Office (NAO). The headline debt is based on “unitary charges” which start this month and will continue for 35 years. They include fees for services rendered, such as maintenance and cleaning, as well as the repayment of loans underwritten by banks and investment companies.

Basically, a PFI is like a mortgage that the government takes out on behalf of the public. The average annual cost of meeting the terms of the UK’s PFI contracts will be more than £10bn over the next decade.

And the cost of servicing PFIs is growing. Last year, it rose by £5bn. It could rise further, with inflation. The upward creep is the price taxpayers’ pay for a financing system which allows private firms to profit from investing in infrastructure. An NAO briefing, released last month, says: “In the short term using private finance will reduce reported public spending and government debt figures.” But, longer term, “additional public spending will be required to repay the debt and interest of the original investment”.

A case in point is Britain’s biggest health trust, Barts Health NHS Trust in London, which was placed in special measures last month. It is £93m in debt – struggling under the weight of a 43-year PFI contract under which it will pay back more than £7bn on contracts valued at a fraction of that sum (£1.1bn).

PFI’s were the brainchild of the Conservative Party in the 1990s, but were swiftly embraced by New Labour. Successive governments signed hundreds of the deals. PFI-funded schools, streetlights, prisons, services, police stations and care homes can be found across Britain.

The system has yielded assets valued at £56.5bn. But Britain will pay more than five times that amount under the terms of the PFIs used to create them, and in some cases be left with nothing to show for it, because the PFI agreed to is effectively a leasing agreement. Some £88bn has already been spent, and even if the projected cost between now and 2049/50 does not change, the total PFI bill will be in excess of £310bn. This is more than four times the budget deficit used to justify austerity cuts to government budgets and local services.

Responding to the findings, TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady said: “Crippling PFI debts are exacerbating the funding crisis across our public services, most obviously in our National Health Service.”

According to Jean Shaoul, professor emerita at Manchester Business School, PFIs have been “an enormous financial disaster in terms of cost”. She added: “Frankly, it’s very corrupt... no rational government, looking at the interests of the citizenry as a whole, would do this.”

Unlike government funding, PFI’s cannot be adjusted to match the economy’s fortunes. They are governed by contracts that often run to thousands of pages. In contrast to the radical cuts to public spending, less than 1 per cent has been trimmed from the total cost of PFI deals since 2012.

Danny Alexander, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, admitted last month: “Too many of the old

PFI deals were poorly negotiated... with high costs draining local and national coffers.”

Last year The Independent revealed how firms given 25-year contracts to build and maintain schools doubled their money by selling their shares in the schemes less than five years into the deals. Four – Balfour Beatty, Carillion, Interserve, and Kier – made combined profits of over £300m. Repeated concerns over projects suffering years of delays and soaring costs have been raised in Parliament in recent years, chiefly via the Public Accounts Select Committee. Its chair, Margaret Hodge, has spoken of Labour’s promotion of the deals during its time in power: “I’m afraid we got it wrong... we got seduced by PFI.”

Allyson Pollock, professor of public health research and policy, Queen Mary University of London, said the diversion of funds from other budgets to PFI payments make the schemes “an engine for closure of public services and further privatisation”

SUPERMARKET WORKERS' MINIMUM WAGE PAY TOPPED UP BY £11BN IN BENEFITS, SAYS CITIZENS UK

Lamiat Sabin; Independent; via Nathan Allonby

Bosses of five million employees are being 'subsidised' by the taxpayer

Supermarket employees do not get paid enough to live on and national minimum wage earnings are topped up by in-work benefits that total £11billion a year, a charity said. According to the Citizens UK, supermarket bosses who employ five million people are being “subsidised” by the taxpayer as wages they pay do not make ends meet – the BBC reports.

The national minimum wage currently stands at £6.50 per hour for people over the age of 21. Citizens UK set up the Living Wage Foundation and campaigners have called for the living wage to be used as the minimum instead. It is paid at £7.85 per hour, £9.15 for those employed in London, by companies who agree to do so.

Most people who earn less than the living wage work in the retail sector, the charity also claimed, however the British Retail Consortium said that most supermarkets paid around £8.40 per hour on average when “extra earnings” are factored in. Retailers have come under fire after investigations by The Independent revealed that not a single high street retail chain has guaranteed staff the living wage.

Nearly 80 per cent of 1,813 retail staff polled by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers say that they are financially worse off than they were five years ago. Only 5 per cent said they are better off in comparison. This is despite the tax threshold being raised to £10,600 per year before the lowest-paid have to start paying to the Treasury. But in-work benefits remain stagnant. The rising cost of living is also a big strain on consumers.

A supermarket worker interviewed by the Mirror said that although she was paid a wage for working at a supermarket check-out, she had to use a food bank more than once as she has been struggling financially, and often goes without. She cannot even afford to buy the food stocked at her workplace, even with staff discount. Even with discounts, some workers struggle to fill their own fridge “I was totally embarrassed,” she said about her food bank experiences. “And angry. My wages should be enough to feed me.”

John Hannett, Usdaw General Secretary, criticised the government after the Budget announcement last month for freezing in-work benefits. He had said: “With the economy growing and unemployment falling, it is time for workers to feel the benefit in their pay packets.”

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