

RUNNYMEDE GAZETTE

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EDITORIAL

THE GAG TIGHTENS

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EDITORIAL

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BBC News does not often feature in these pages. But it is as good a story as many of the others related to the choice of the Electoral Commission as to their selection of the 'lead' campaigns in the European plebiscite.

But there is another central point to this entire matter. Amidst the general vapid unquestioning acceptance of anything 'official', no one seems to ask why it is that such a commission needs to be making such a choice in the first place.

It is not as if this were a matter of spending limits. Such limits have been in legal force (that all the major parties have been running ... and continue to run ... a coach and horses through them in key marginals and at by-elections, for at least three decades is perhaps a side issue!), since the last Reform Act and long before the Electoral Commission was even a gleam in a bureaucrat's eye. It does not need such a quango to enforce this or any other electoral law. Indeed, after running clean elections successfully (parking to one side the question of the electoral system), for more than a century, it might be wondered why we need such a commission at all.

What we have in effect is a Quango running a kangaroo court to determine whose voice shall be heard and whose shall not. True, any campaign or person can speak and publish, but if they are not 'officially' sanctioned by the Electoral Commission's imprimatur, they will only do so under some serious handicaps. And, of course in matters political it is the volume (and, indeed, if we read the Epstein item below even the *spatial positioning*) of the message that really counts.

If we take this legalised censorship together with the items from Prof Prav and 21st Century Wire does this all not fit into a far bigger jigsaw? As for the last item, it is but a small sample of current articles on restrictions on freedom of speech, and not only in France.

The definition of who is a 'terrorist' has been creeping like some advancing inkblot, for quite a few years. Now it seemingly includes anyone giving credence to so-called 'conspiracy theories' (It is always just possible that there actually are conspiracies) and even to those critical of the European Union.

Freedom of speech is under attack ... as usual in small stealthy nibbles, that is

always the way these things are done ... as never before.

Frank Taylor

COLOR REVOLUTIONS AS AN ELEMENT OF NET-CENTRIC WARFARE

Prof.Dr. Vladimir Prav; SouthFron; via Nathan Allonby

Contemporary geopolitical struggle concepts invariably include provisions concerning the creation and functioning of “networks.” The sense of a “net” or a “network principle” lies in the exchange of information, the maximum possible expansion of information production, access, distribution, and feedback. The “net” is the main element of information space, in which information operations are carried out with the aim of achieving political, economic, informational, technical, and military objectives. “Network” as a system in the global understanding of the term includes several elements which earlier used to be viewed as strictly separate phenomena.

The basic principle of conducting modern geopolitical struggle is “net-centrism.” This principle based on three postulates.

1. The modern world is defined not only by transport corridors with associated flows of goods and services, but also informational and communications networks, which form the skeleton of the global information space.
2. The global historical process is a unified, global process of conflict, mutual help, or neutral coexistence of human societies organized along hierarchical (vertical) and also network (horizontal) principles, with the net-centric (horizontal) possibly becoming dominant in the future. Vertical and horizontal network structures, with varying origin, purpose, numerical strength, geographic and temporal boundaries, and legal status, are both the objects and subjects of the global historical process whose interaction facilitates the emergence of new structures and connections.
3. The dynamically developing of artificial (electronic) networks which intertwine and interact with psycho-social networks and amount to a qualitatively new social phenomenon, are a unique feature of the informational network skeleton of the future global society. That phenomenon is identified within the net-centric information war concept as SPIN—Segmented, Polycentric, Ideologically integrated Network. We should note that Microsoft offered a more precise definition of this phenomenon, namely “electronic nervous system,” or ENS.

The main global actor systematically using the net-centric principle in geopolitical struggle is the USA. Its executive actors are the mutually intertwined state agencies, corporations, and international network structures.

The international networks structures, which are usually referred to as “behind the scenes actors”, and which are the basic initiators of the process of globalization, are essentially a network of highly influential NGOs which form the Euro-Atlantic’s globalists (or Western) ideological “super-community” and which are closed to outsiders. Such network structure can exert serious pressure on the whole of global political environment, financial system, economy, through its representatives and lower-rank international entities. They can also make and implement decisions to effect a change of regime and course of development of selected countries.

Relying on the mobilization of net-centric assets located under the control of these representatives, the Euro-Atlantic’s globalists “super-community” can effect a “soft” resolution of a wide range of clearly defined and coordinated domestic and international political problems. Global direction and control can be effected thanks to the existence of such a distributed and hierarchically ordered meta-net-centric organization whose upper echelons are represented by networks which belong to the Western “super-community”. The individuals being directed may not even understand that he is being directed, and even if he does, he will not be able to figure out from where the directions are emanating and who bears responsibility for it.

The main content of all “net-centric wars” consists of “effects-based operations” (EBO). This is the most important concept in the entire net-centric warfare theory developed in the US. EBO are defined by US specialists as a “combination of actions aimed at forming a specific model of behaviour among friends, neutral forces, and enemies during peace, crisis, and war.” (Edward A. Smith, Jr. Effects based Operations. Applying Network centric Warfare in Peace, Crisis and War, Washington, DC: DoD CCRP,

2002.) EBO's main result is the establishment of full and absolute control over all parties to the conflict (including armed conflict), and their complete manipulation under all circumstances. Including when the conflict is ongoing, when it is threatening, and when there is peace.

The essence of "net-centric warfare" is that it does not have a beginning or an end, it is being conducted on a permanent basis, and its objective is to ensure that the parties conducting the war have the ability to effect comprehensive control over all international actors. Embedding the "network" deprives countries, nations, armies, and governments of all vestiges of independence, sovereignty, and even separate existence, transforming them into closely controlled, programmed objects. It allows the implementation of a new model of direct planetary control, of global dominion of a new type, where the content, motivation, actions, and intentions of international actors are all subject to outside direction.

It's a design for global manipulation and total control on a world scale. That is apparent from the EBO definition. EBO tasks include forming a behaviour structure not only among friends, but also neutrals and enemies, in other words, both enemies and neutrals act in accordance with a scenario imposed on them and are driven not by their own will but by the will of the EBO executors. If enemies, friends, and neutrals do that which the Americans want them to do, they become puppets even before their ultimate defeat. The battle is won before it even begins. EBO are conducted concurrently with military operations, during crises and during peacetime, which reflects the total character of net-centric wars.

A net-centric war's strategic objective is the absolute control over all the participants of the political process on a global scale. Its tactical objective is to establish the geopolitical aggressor's control over the victim state's assets, with the "transfer" largely taking place in a willing and voluntary manner since the attack is not perceived as aggression but rather as an impulse toward further development. This makes net-centric war far more complex to implement than a traditional "hot" war, but it is also vastly more effective. Results of "hot wars" are usually challenged and dissipated over time (as shown by World Wars I and, especially, II). The effects of net-centric wars can last for centuries, until the aggressors and their basic needs change.

Net-centric war's main front is located in the mental space, with the enemy's goal being the destruction of traditional basic values of a given nation and implanting its own. The existence and structure of this type of war cannot be perceived on the level of mass consciousness. If the political elite of a society that is being targeted by net-centric war is not sufficiently qualified to identify this type of aggression and organize suitable response, the society itself is doomed to a crushing geopolitical defeat.

Specialists note another characteristic peculiar to net-centric wars, namely the absence of a rigid structure within the aggressor entity. We'd like to point out that it is due to the high degree of heterogeneity among the entity's institutional elements. Individual and comparatively autonomous state and non-state elements of the aggressor are not part of some vertical hierarchy, instead they are connected by irregular horizontal interactions. The absence of hierarchy and regularity of interaction makes it difficult to clearly identify the existence and activities of the aggressor.

Due to the peculiar nature of NCW (Net-Centric Warfare), its technological structure (or the sum total of social technologies used to attack the target society) is very complex. NCW technologies include "multi-step combinations and intrigues whose instigators are not evident, a wide spectrum of means of influence, and using individuals who are ignorant of their role." Most importantly, according to US experts, NCW is a post-industrial informational post-modern era differ from ordinary wars of industrial modern era by their desire to achieve an outwardly bloodless reapportionment of territories and resources. The objective is to sustain the image "developed democracies" which are conducting NCWs in a wide variety of geopolitical contexts under the slogan of protecting human rights. In an era of total "humanization", conducting combat operations is viewed as a flawed option. The world society sleeps better if outwardly everything looks fine. Thanks to modern technologies and gathered experience, even genocide can be pursued without gas chambers and mass shootings. It's enough to create conditions to reduce birth rates and raise death rates. Success can also be achieved by dumbing down the nation through changing its stereotypes and behavior norms so that even an escalation of events to the level of violence is perceived as natural.

Today one of the characteristic manifestations of NCW in a globalizing world are "color revolutions". A Color Revolution (CR) is a net-centric operation whose objective is the removal of existing political regimes in another country. It is based on "non-violent struggle" methods developed by George (sic) Sharp in the 1980s (a US product, one of net-centric technologies). The CR concept implies establishing full control over a country and its territory without the use of armed force, if possible. It can be achieved by applying "soft power" which US political scientist Joseph Nye Jr. defines as a state's (or alliance's or coalition's) ability achieve desired international results through persuasion and not suppression, imposition, or compellence, which is characteristic of "hard power." Soft power

achieves its effect by inducing others to adhere to certain international norms of behavior, which leads to the desired outcome without applying compellence.

Color Revolution consequences.

For states and political systems, CRs contain aspects of colonialism. The interests of the target society are not taken into consideration, it is expendable "spare change." The "revolutionaries" are the first to vanish from stage and, often, from life itself. People who sincerely begin to believe in CR ideals without suspecting that those ideals have been induced are the fuel for such revolutions, and are also expendable. The society itself is destabilized, social foundations are undermined, the respect for government disappears, dissatisfaction increases, and economy is in anything but a normal state. These are the ideal conditions to impose Western social models. US enters the country.

CR brings no benefit to the country's political forces or society. The only beneficiary is the USA, which establishes a painless, non-violent, "soft" control over its new territory. Modern Georgia is an example. It lost its sovereignty after the "Revolution of Roses" triggered serious transformations, destabilized the society, and led to the loss of about 20% of the country's territory. Georgia is the most important US bridgehead in the Caucasus. It is so for a number of reasons:

- Georgia is an element of the Caucasus isthmus through which Russia obtains direct contact with Iran with which it wants to establish a strategic relationship.
- Georgia is a base for a force build-up and projection throughout the entire Caspian region, including Russia.
- Georgia is a transit country for energy resources from the Caspian to Europe.

Pursuing the main task of US geopolitics related to Russia and Caspian, the US took Georgia from under the last vestiges of Russia's geopolitical influence and subjected it to its own direct geopolitical control. Georgia adopted an Atlanticist development vector and lost the last remnants of its sovereignty.

There are a number of other important factors.

1. The US seeks to establish direct military and strategic control over Azerbaijan and Armenia. Leaders of Azerbaijan are certain that the opposition demonstrations in March of 2011 and the planned attempts to oppose the existing constitutional order were organized from outside the country.
2. In order to ensure partnership with the EU, and particularly with Germany, the US created a cordon sannitaire extending from the cold northern seas through the Baltic States, Ukraine, Moldova, toward Georgia. Belarus is at the moment a breach in the cordon, with Poland filling that breach. The belt, consisting of Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, and Georgia, which cuts Russia off from Europe, was created by the US in order to achieve their top geopolitical objectives through the sequential initiation of CRs in these countries as part of the NCW against Russia. In the last 20 years, US and NATO transformed Ukraine into a country hostile to Russia also through the application of net-centric technologies. The 2014 coup and 2014-2015 civil war were initiated by the US, which also provided informational, financial, and military support. Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies are strictly anti-Russia in character.
3. Uzbekistan and Kirgiziya will remain key US geopolitical presence platforms in Central Asia. US will never abandon the intent to establish full control over the region. It will periodically destabilize the situation there in order to take Uzbekistan and Kirgiziya under control.

Usually such unsuccessful "velvet" coup attempts of the sort we observed in Uzbek Andijan or in the somewhat confusing "revolution cascade" in Kirgiziya are followed by harsher scenarios. The level of pressure is gradually increased. The "velvet" scenario is replaced by a harder line, including clashes with police, first casualties, pogroms, and then, as a rule, the situation is destabilized along ethnic lines since it is the hardest type of conflict to resolve. These actions are accompanied by a parallel creation of several social instability epicenters, the rise in economic problems, disruptions of the social situation, and a general domestic political polarization. The goal is to force these countries' leaders to agree that they have lost control, that they no longer have power.

The outcome is the country's territory passing under US control. The CR, should it be successful or semi-successful, is followed by more direct approaches which can ultimately lead to military operations as in Iraq and Libya.

Being a nuclear weapons state, Russia is considered by the US and NATO one of its main geopolitical adversaries. The current key geopolitical US objective is a regime change in Russia consisting of removing Vladimir Putin and his team from power. Analysis suggests that at the moment Ukraine, Caucasus, and Central Asia are the most advantageous places for the US to use in order to

ratchet up pressure on Russian leadership. Maintaining the potential for violence in these locations will continue until they find a new, fresher source of conflict on Russian territory, with a potential for successful separatism, which could become a constant source of externally induced political pressure on Russian leadership.

THE NEW MIND CONTROL. “SUBLIMINAL STIMULATION”, CONTROLLING PEOPLE WITHOUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE

Robert Epstein; Aeon; via Global Research

The internet has spawned subtle forms of influence that can flip elections and manipulate everything we say, think and do

Over the past century, more than a few great writers have expressed concern about humanity’s future. In *The Iron Heel* (1908), the American writer Jack London pictured a world in which a handful of wealthy corporate titans – the ‘oligarchs’ – kept the masses at bay with a brutal combination of rewards and punishments. Much of humanity lived in virtual slavery, while the fortunate ones were bought off with decent wages that allowed them to live comfortably – but without any real control over their lives.

In *We* (1924), the brilliant Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin, anticipating the excesses of the emerging Soviet Union, envisioned a world in which people were kept in check through pervasive monitoring. The walls of their homes were made of clear glass, so everything they did could be observed. They were allowed to lower their shades an hour a day to have sex, but both the rendezvous time and the lover had to be registered first with the state.

In *Brave New World* (1932), the British author Aldous Huxley pictured a near-perfect society in which unhappiness and aggression had been engineered out of humanity through a combination of genetic engineering and psychological conditioning. And in the much darker novel *1984* (1949), Huxley’s compatriot George Orwell described a society in which thought itself was controlled; in Orwell’s world, children were taught to use a simplified form of English called Newspeak in order to assure that they could never express ideas that were dangerous to society.

These are all fictional tales, to be sure, and in each the leaders who held the power used conspicuous forms of control that at least a few people actively resisted and occasionally overcame. But in the non-fiction bestseller *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) – recently released in a 50th-anniversary edition – the American journalist Vance Packard described a ‘strange and rather exotic’ type of influence that was rapidly emerging in the United States and that was, in a way, more threatening than the fictional types of control pictured in the novels. According to Packard, US corporate executives and politicians were beginning to use subtle and, in many cases, completely undetectable methods to change people’s thinking, emotions and behaviour based on insights from psychiatry and the social sciences.

Most of us have heard of at least one of these methods: subliminal stimulation, or what Packard called ‘subthreshold effects’ – the presentation of short messages that tell us what to do but that are flashed so briefly we aren’t aware we have seen them. In 1958, propelled by public concern about a theatre in New Jersey that had supposedly hidden messages in a movie to increase ice cream sales, the National Association of Broadcasters – the association that set standards for US television – amended its code to prohibit the use of subliminal messages in broadcasting. In 1974, the Federal Communications Commission opined that the use of such messages was ‘contrary to the public interest’. Legislation to prohibit subliminal messaging was also introduced in the US Congress but never enacted. Both the UK and Australia have strict laws prohibiting it.

Subliminal stimulation is probably still in wide use in the US – it’s hard to detect, after all, and no one is keeping track of it – but it’s probably not worth worrying about. Research suggests that it has only a small impact, and that it mainly influences people who are already motivated to follow its dictates; subliminal directives to drink affect people only if they’re already thirsty.

Packard had uncovered a much bigger problem, however – namely that powerful corporations were constantly looking for, and in many cases already applying, a wide variety of techniques for controlling people without their knowledge. He described a kind of cabal in which marketers worked closely with social scientists to determine, among other things, how to get people to buy things they didn't need and how to condition young children to be good consumers – inclinations that were explicitly nurtured and trained in Huxley's *Brave New World*. Guided by social science, marketers were quickly learning how to play upon people's insecurities, frailties, unconscious fears, aggressive feelings and sexual desires to alter their thinking, emotions and behaviour without any awareness that they were being manipulated.

By the early 1950s, Packard said, politicians had got the message and were beginning to merchandise themselves using the same subtle forces being used to sell soap. Packard prefaced his chapter on politics with an unsettling quote from the British economist Kenneth Boulding: 'A world of unseen dictatorship is conceivable, still using the forms of democratic government.' Could this really happen, and, if so, how would it work?

The forces that Packard described have become more pervasive over the decades. The soothing music we all hear overhead in supermarkets causes us to walk more slowly and buy more food, whether we need it or not. Most of the vacuous thoughts and intense feelings our teenagers experience from morning till night are carefully orchestrated by highly skilled marketing professionals working in our fashion and entertainment industries. Politicians work with a wide range of consultants who test every aspect of what the politicians do in order to sway voters: clothing, intonations, facial expressions, makeup, hairstyles and speeches are all optimised, just like the packaging of a breakfast cereal.

Fortunately, all of these sources of influence operate competitively. Some of the persuaders want us to buy or believe one thing, others to buy or believe something else. It is the competitive nature of our society that keeps us, on balance, relatively free.

But what would happen if new sources of control began to emerge that had little or no competition? And what if new means of control were developed that were far more powerful – and far more invisible – than any that have existed in the past? And what if new types of control allowed a handful of people to exert enormous influence not just over the citizens of the US but over most of the people on Earth?

It might surprise you to hear this, but these things have already happened.

To understand how the new forms of mind control work, we need to start by looking at the search engine – one in particular: the biggest and best of them all, namely Google. The Google search engine is so good and so popular that the company's name is now a commonly used verb in languages around the world. To 'Google' something is to look it up on the Google search engine, and that, in fact, is how most computer users worldwide get most of their information about just about everything these days. They Google it. Google has become the main gateway to virtually all knowledge, mainly because the search engine is so good at giving us exactly the information we are looking for, almost instantly and almost always in the first position of the list it shows us after we launch our search – the list of 'search results'.

That ordered list is so good, in fact, that about 50 per cent of our clicks go to the top two items, and more than 90 per cent of our clicks go to the 10 items listed on the first page of results; few people look at other results pages, even though they often number in the thousands, which means they probably contain lots of good information. Google decides which of the billions of web pages it is going to include in our search results, and it also decides how to rank them. How it decides these things is a deep, dark secret – one of the best-kept secrets in the world, like the formula for Coca-Cola.

Because people are far more likely to read and click on higher-ranked items, companies now spend billions of dollars every year trying to trick Google's search algorithm – the computer program that does the selecting and ranking – into boosting them another notch or two. Moving up a notch can mean the difference between success and failure for a business, and moving into the top slots can be the key to fat profits.

Late in 2012, I began to wonder whether highly ranked search results could be impacting more than consumer choices. Perhaps, I speculated, a top search result could have a small impact on people's opinions about things. Early in 2013, with my associate Ronald E Robertson of the American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology in Vista, California, I put this idea to a test by conducting an experiment in which 102 people from the San Diego area were randomly assigned to one of three groups. In one group, people saw search results that favoured one political candidate – that is, results that linked to web pages that made this candidate look better than his or her opponent. In a second group, people saw search rankings that

favoured the opposing candidate, and in the third group – the control group – people saw a mix of rankings that favoured neither candidate. The same search results and web pages were used in each group; the only thing that differed for the three groups was the ordering of the search results.

To make our experiment realistic, we used real search results that linked to real web pages. We also used a real election – the 2010 election for the prime minister of Australia. We used a foreign election to make sure that our participants were ‘undecided’. Their lack of familiarity with the candidates assured this. Through advertisements, we also recruited an ethnically diverse group of registered voters over a wide age range in order to match key demographic characteristics of the US voting population.

All participants were first given brief descriptions of the candidates and then asked to rate them in various ways, as well as to indicate which candidate they would vote for; as you might expect, participants initially favoured neither candidate on any of the five measures we used, and the vote was evenly split in all three groups. Then the participants were given up to 15 minutes in which to conduct an online search using ‘Kadoodle’, our mock search engine, which gave them access to five pages of search results that linked to web pages. People could move freely between search results and web pages, just as we do when using Google. When participants completed their search, we asked them to rate the candidates again, and we also asked them again who they would vote for.

We predicted that the opinions and voting preferences of 2 or 3 per cent of the people in the two bias groups – the groups in which people were seeing rankings favouring one candidate – would shift toward that candidate. What we actually found was astonishing. The proportion of people favouring the search engine’s top-ranked candidate increased by 48.4 per cent, and all five of our measures shifted toward that candidate. What’s more, 75 per cent of the people in the bias groups seemed to have been completely unaware that they were viewing biased search rankings. In the control group, opinions did not shift significantly.

This seemed to be a major discovery. The shift we had produced, which we called the Search Engine Manipulation Effect (or SEME, pronounced ‘seem’), appeared to be one of the largest behavioural effects ever discovered. We did not immediately uncork the Champagne bottle, however. For one thing, we had tested only a small number of people, and they were all from the San Diego area.

Over the next year or so, we replicated our findings three more times, and the third time was with a sample of more than 2,000 people from all 50 US states. In that experiment, the shift in voting preferences was 37.1 per cent and even higher in some demographic groups – as high as 80 per cent, in fact.

We also learned in this series of experiments that by reducing the bias just slightly on the first page of search results – specifically, by including one search item that favoured the other candidate in the third or fourth position of the results – we could mask our manipulation so that few or even no people were aware that they were seeing biased rankings. We could still produce dramatic shifts in voting preferences, but we could do so invisibly.

Still no Champagne, though. Our results were strong and consistent, but our experiments all involved a foreign election – that 2010 election in Australia. Could voting preferences be shifted with real voters in the middle of a real campaign? We were skeptical. In real elections, people are bombarded with multiple sources of information, and they also know a lot about the candidates. It seemed unlikely that a single experience on a search engine would have much impact on their voting preferences.

To find out, in early 2014, we went to India just before voting began in the largest democratic election in the world – the Lok Sabha election for prime minister. The three main candidates were Rahul Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal, and Narendra Modi. Making use of online subject pools and both online and print advertisements, we recruited 2,150 people from 27 of India’s 35 states and territories to participate in our experiment. To take part, they had to be registered voters who had not yet voted and who were still undecided about how they would vote.

Participants were randomly assigned to three search-engine groups, favouring, respectively, Gandhi, Kejriwal or Modi. As one might expect, familiarity levels with the candidates was high – between 7.7 and 8.5 on a scale of 10. We predicted that our manipulation would produce a very small effect, if any, but that’s not what we found. On average, we were able to shift the proportion of people favouring any given candidate by more than 20 per cent overall and more than 60 per cent in some demographic groups. Even more disturbing, 99.5 per cent of our participants showed no awareness that they were viewing biased search rankings – in other words, that they were being manipulated.

SEME’s near-invisibility is curious indeed. It means that when people – including you and me – are

looking at biased search rankings, they look just fine. So if right now you Google 'US presidential candidates', the search results you see will probably look fairly random, even if they happen to favour one candidate. Even I have trouble detecting bias in search rankings that I know to be biased (because they were prepared by my staff). Yet our randomised, controlled experiments tell us over and over again that when higher-ranked items connect with web pages that favour one candidate, this has a dramatic impact on the opinions of undecided voters, in large part for the simple reason that people tend to click only on higher-ranked items. This is truly scary: like subliminal stimuli, SEME is a force you can't see; but unlike subliminal stimuli, it has an enormous impact – like Casper the ghost pushing you down a flight of stairs.

We published a detailed report about our first five experiments on SEME in the prestigious Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) in August 2015. We had indeed found something important, especially given Google's dominance over search. Google has a near-monopoly on internet searches in the US, with 83 per cent of Americans specifying Google as the search engine they use most often, according to the Pew Research Center. So if Google favours one candidate in an election, its impact on undecided voters could easily decide the election's outcome.

Keep in mind that we had had only one shot at our participants. What would be the impact of favouring one candidate in searches people are conducting over a period of weeks or months before an election? It would almost certainly be much larger than what we were seeing in our experiments.

Other types of influence during an election campaign are balanced by competing sources of influence – a wide variety of newspapers, radio shows and television networks, for example – but Google, for all intents and purposes, has no competition, and people trust its search results implicitly, assuming that the company's mysterious search algorithm is entirely objective and unbiased. This high level of trust, combined with the lack of competition, puts Google in a unique position to impact elections. Even more disturbing, the search-ranking business is entirely unregulated, so Google could favour any candidate it likes without violating any laws. Some courts have even ruled that Google's right to rank-order search results as it pleases is protected as a form of free speech.

Does the company ever favour particular candidates? In the 2012 US presidential election, Google and its top executives donated more than \$800,000 to President Barack Obama and just \$37,000 to his opponent, Mitt Romney. And in 2015, a team of researchers from the University of Maryland and elsewhere showed that Google's search results routinely favoured Democratic candidates. Are Google's search rankings really biased? An internal report issued by the US Federal Trade Commission in 2012 concluded that Google's search rankings routinely put Google's financial interests ahead of those of their competitors, and anti-trust actions currently under way against Google in both the European Union and India are based on similar findings.

In most countries, 90 per cent of online search is conducted on Google, which gives the company even more power to flip elections than it has in the US and, with internet penetration increasing rapidly worldwide, this power is growing. In our PNAS article, Robertson and I calculated that Google now has the power to flip upwards of 25 per cent of the national elections in the world with no one knowing this is occurring. In fact, we estimate that, with or without deliberate planning on the part of company executives, Google's search rankings have been impacting elections for years, with growing impact each year. And because search rankings are ephemeral, they leave no paper trail, which gives the company complete deniability.

Power on this scale and with this level of invisibility is unprecedented in human history. But it turns out that our discovery about SEME was just the tip of a very large iceberg.

Recent reports suggest that the Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton is making heavy use of social media to try to generate support – Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat and Facebook, for starters. At this writing, she has 5.4 million followers on Twitter, and her staff is tweeting several times an hour during waking hours. The Republican frontrunner, Donald Trump, has 5.9 million Twitter followers and is tweeting just as frequently.

Is social media as big a threat to democracy as search rankings appear to be? Not necessarily. When new technologies are used competitively, they present no threat. Even though the platforms are new, they are generally being used the same way as billboards and television commercials have been used for decades: you put a billboard on one side of the street; I put one on the other. I might have the money to erect more billboards than you, but the process is still competitive.

What happens, though, if such technologies are misused by the companies that own them? A study by

Robert M Bond, now a political science professor at Ohio State University, and others published in Nature in 2012 described an ethically questionable experiment in which, on election day in 2010, Facebook sent 'go out and vote' reminders to more than 60 million of its users. The reminders caused about 340,000 people to vote who otherwise would not have. Writing in the New Republic in 2014, Jonathan Zittrain, professor of international law at Harvard University, pointed out that, given the massive amount of information it has collected about its users, Facebook could easily send such messages only to people who support one particular party or candidate, and that doing so could easily flip a close election – with no one knowing that this has occurred. And because advertisements, like search rankings, are ephemeral, manipulating an election in this way would leave no paper trail.

Are there laws prohibiting Facebook from sending out ads selectively to certain users? Absolutely not; in fact, targeted advertising is how Facebook makes its money. Is Facebook currently manipulating elections in this way? No one knows, but in my view it would be foolish and possibly even improper for Facebook not to do so. Some candidates are better for a company than others, and Facebook's executives have a fiduciary responsibility to the company's stockholders to promote the company's interests.

The Bond study was largely ignored, but another Facebook experiment, published in 2014 in PNAS, prompted protests around the world. In this study, for a period of a week, 689,000 Facebook users were sent news feeds that contained either an excess of positive terms, an excess of negative terms, or neither. Those in the first group subsequently used slightly more positive terms in their communications, while those in the second group used slightly more negative terms in their communications. This was said to show that people's 'emotional states' could be deliberately manipulated on a massive scale by a social media company, an idea that many people found disturbing. People were also upset that a large-scale experiment on emotion had been conducted without the explicit consent of any of the participants.

Facebook's consumer profiles are undoubtedly massive, but they pale in comparison with those maintained by Google, which is collecting information about people 24/7, using more than 60 different observation platforms – the search engine, of course, but also Google Wallet, Google Maps, Google Adwords, Google Analytics, Chrome, Google Docs, Android, YouTube, and on and on. Gmail users are generally oblivious to the fact that Google stores and analyses every email they write, even the drafts they never send – as well as all the incoming email they receive from both Gmail and non-Gmail users.

According to Google's privacy policy – to which one assents whenever one uses a Google product, even when one has not been informed that he or she is using a Google product – Google can share the information it collects about you with almost anyone, including government agencies. But never with you. Google's privacy is sacrosanct; yours is nonexistent.

Could Google and 'those we work with' (language from the privacy policy) use the information they are amassing about you for nefarious purposes – to manipulate or coerce, for example? Could inaccurate information in people's profiles (which people have no way to correct) limit their opportunities or ruin their reputations?

Certainly, if Google set about to fix an election, it could first dip into its massive database of personal information to identify just those voters who are undecided. Then it could, day after day, send customised rankings favouring one candidate to just those people. One advantage of this approach is that it would make Google's manipulation extremely difficult for investigators to detect.

Extreme forms of monitoring, whether by the KGB in the Soviet Union, the Stasi in East Germany, or Big Brother in 1984, are essential elements of all tyrannies, and technology is making both monitoring and the consolidation of surveillance data easier than ever. By 2020, China will have put in place the most ambitious government monitoring system ever created – a single database called the Social Credit System, in which multiple ratings and records for all of its 1.3 billion citizens are recorded for easy access by officials and bureaucrats. At a glance, they will know whether someone has plagiarised schoolwork, was tardy in paying bills, urinated in public, or blogged inappropriately online.

As Edward Snowden's revelations made clear, we are rapidly moving toward a world in which both governments and corporations – sometimes working together – are collecting massive amounts of data about every one of us every day, with few or no laws in place that restrict how those data can be used. When you combine the data collection with the desire to control or manipulate, the possibilities are endless, but perhaps the most frightening possibility is the one expressed in Boulding's assertion that an 'unseen dictatorship' was possible 'using the forms of democratic government'.

Since Robertson and I submitted our initial report on SEME to PNAS early in 2015, we have completed a

sophisticated series of experiments that have greatly enhanced our understanding of this phenomenon, and other experiments will be completed in the coming months. We have a much better sense now of why SEME is so powerful and how, to some extent, it can be suppressed.

We have also learned something very disturbing – that search engines are influencing far more than what people buy and whom they vote for. We now have evidence suggesting that on virtually all issues where people are initially undecided, search rankings are impacting almost every decision that people make. They are having an impact on the opinions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of internet users worldwide – entirely without people’s knowledge that this is occurring. This is happening with or without deliberate intervention by company officials; even so-called ‘organic’ search processes regularly generate search results that favour one point of view, and that in turn has the potential to tip the opinions of millions of people who are undecided on an issue. In one of our recent experiments, biased search results shifted people’s opinions about the value of fracking by 33.9 per cent.

Perhaps even more disturbing is that the handful of people who do show awareness that they are viewing biased search rankings shift even further in the predicted direction; simply knowing that a list is biased doesn’t necessarily protect you from SEME’s power.

Remember what the search algorithm is doing: in response to your query, it is selecting a handful of webpages from among the billions that are available, and it is ordering those webpages using secret criteria. Seconds later, the decision you make or the opinion you form – about the best toothpaste to use, whether fracking is safe, where you should go on your next vacation, who would make the best president, or whether global warming is real – is determined by that short list you are shown, even though you have no idea how the list was generated.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, a consolidation of search engines has been quietly taking place, so that more people are using the dominant search engine even when they think they are not. Because Google is the best search engine, and because crawling the rapidly expanding internet has become prohibitively expensive, more and more search engines are drawing their information from the leader rather than generating it themselves. The most recent deal, revealed in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing in October 2015, was between Google and Yahoo! Inc.

Looking ahead to the November 2016 US presidential election, I see clear signs that Google is backing Hillary Clinton. In April 2015, Clinton hired Stephanie Hannon away from Google to be her chief technology officer and, a few months ago, Eric Schmidt, chairman of the holding company that controls Google, set up a semi-secret company – The Groundwork – for the specific purpose of putting Clinton in office. The formation of The Groundwork prompted Julian Assange, founder of Wikileaks, to dub Google Clinton’s ‘secret weapon’ in her quest for the US presidency.

We now estimate that Hannon’s old friends have the power to drive between 2.6 and 10.4 million votes to Clinton on election day with no one knowing that this is occurring and without leaving a paper trail. They can also help her win the nomination, of course, by influencing undecided voters during the primaries. Swing voters have always been the key to winning elections, and there has never been a more powerful, efficient or inexpensive way to sway them than SEME.

We are living in a world in which a handful of high-tech companies, sometimes working hand-in-hand with governments, are not only monitoring much of our activity, but are also invisibly controlling more and more of what we think, feel, do and say. The technology that now surrounds us is not just a harmless toy; it has also made possible undetectable and untraceable manipulations of entire populations – manipulations that have no precedent in human history and that are currently well beyond the scope of existing regulations and laws. The new hidden persuaders are bigger, bolder and badder than anything Vance Packard ever envisioned. If we choose to ignore this, we do so at our peril.

Robert Epstein is a senior research psychologist at the American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology in California. He is the author of 15 books, and the former editor-in-chief of Psychology Today. This article is a preview of his forthcoming book, The New Mind Control.

We hear things retrospectively when we have understood them.

-Marcel Proust; thanks to Edward Spalton

EU REFERENDUM: HOW WILL OFFICIAL LEAD CAMPAIGNS BE CHOSEN?

BBC News

Campaigning for the EU referendum is effectively under way already even though we don't yet know when it will be held or what the final package of reforms to the UK's membership that David Cameron will put to the British public.

Another unknown factor to add to the mix is the question of which will be the official campaigns on the In/Remain and Out/Leave sides. While a plethora of groups have been set up to argue the case for the UK to stay in or leave the EU, to quote Christopher Lambert from the cult movie Highlander, "there can be only one" when it comes to the official lead campaign for either side. So how does the process work?

What is a lead campaign?

Referendums are relatively rare in British political history but when they do happen, they are governed by a series of protocols and rules enshrined in law. One of these is that a lead campaign is officially designated on each side, if it meets certain criteria. For instance, in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, Better Together was chosen as the official pro-UK lead campaign while Yes Scotland was chosen as the official pro-independence lead group.

The Electoral Commission, which is in charge of making sure the EU referendum is a fair contest, will make the decision. The choice is very important, not merely for the increased media profile it confers on the chosen campaigns but also for the financial benefits.

What are the benefits?

The official campaigns will get access to a grant of up to £600,000, an overall spending limit of £7m, campaign broadcasts on TV and radio, free mail shots and free access to meeting rooms. Other groups are free to run their own campaigns but they will be limited to a spend of £700,000 if they register with the Electoral Commission and will have to report the source of donations. If they don't register with the Commission they will be limited to spending less than £10,000.

Who is in the running?

On one side of the fence, the state of play looks relatively straightforward. Britain Stronger In Europe is the main, and as yet unchallenged, campaign group making the case for the UK's continued membership of the EU.

Although the SNP and Labour have both said they will run their own separate campaigns, and there are other internal Tory groups, this umbrella body - which is chaired by former M&S chair Lord Rose - commands broad support among those who believe the UK's future lies within the EU.

However, it is a very different picture among those arguing that leaving the EU will benefit Britain. At the moment, there are three rival groups who could all ultimately vie for the nod from the Electoral Commission. Six months ago, it looked like a straight fight between Vote Leave and Leave.EU. The former was spawned out of the Business for Britain group, a longstanding Eurosceptic lobby group which campaigned for the UK to overhaul its status with the EU.

It has historic links with the Conservative Party - it is now chaired by former Conservative chancellor Lord Lawson and its campaign director is Dominic Cummings, a former special adviser to Michael Gove. It also has experience of fighting and winning referendums. Its chief executive Matthew Elliott ran the successful No 2 AV campaign in 2011, which opposed any change to the electoral system. Its deputy chairman is Labour donor John Mills and it includes UKIP's MP, Douglas Carswell, amongst its backers.

Leave.EU is a different animal altogether. It was set up last July by businessman Arron Banks, a former Conservative donor who became one of UKIP's biggest supporters in the run-up to last year's election. It has portrayed itself as more of a popular movement focused on immigration.

Relations between the two groups have never been cordial, amid claims of hidden agendas, differences in strategies, and failing to reach out to others in the Out camp.

Amid signs that their differences were irreconcilable, a new outfit - Grassroots Out - sprung up last month and has gained support. GO was formed by Tory MPs Peter Bone and Tom Pursglove and Labour's Kate Hoey. It has since won the backing of UKIP leader Nigel Farage and the party's ruling body which described it as a "genuinely cross party, well organised, energetic campaigning group".

Why does all of this matter?

All of the groups concerned are making big play of their cross-party credentials and being a "broad church". This is not a coincidence. Any group seeking the official designation has to meet a series of criteria, set down by the watchdog. In other words, it has to pass a series of tests. One of these is demonstrating that it commands support from across the political spectrum.

The other criteria are:

- Does its objectives fit with the referendum outcome it supports?
- How organised it is and how capable is it of representing its supporters?
- Can it properly fight a campaign and is it financially sound?

The Electoral Commission has said it will chose "whichever of the applicants appears...to represent to the greatest extent those campaigning for that outcome".

However, it is not as simple as that. The watchdog has the power to reject all applications to be the lead campaign on the grounds they do not meet the criteria set down in the 2000 Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act. To do this, however, would be highly unusual and controversial.

Whichever Out campaign is chosen is likely to influence the tone and conduct of the campaign as well as who its figurehead is. Nigel Farage is likely to play a much more prominent role if either Leave.EU or Go is chosen - with the campaign likely to have the issues of immigration and security at its heart.

Many Tory Eurosceptics - including a number of Cabinet ministers - will feel more comfortable with Vote Leave, which wants, according to UKIP MP Douglas Carswell, to have a "broad-based, optimistic, upbeat campaign", with a focus on what they claim will be the economic benefits of leaving the EU. Labour Eurosceptics, at the moment, seem uncertain about which horse to back, with John Mills - the founder of Labour Leave - insisting that it remains affiliated to Vote Leave despite rumours to the contrary.

When will we know the result?

The watchdog has said it will publish details of the designation process once David Cameron has named the date for the referendum, which could happen as early as Monday 22 February, if a deal on his draft renegotiation package is agreed by EU leaders the previous weekend. The timing of the process will be among details set out in legislation relating to the EU poll that will have to be approved by MPs.

With the prospect of the referendum itself taking place in late June, campaigners on both sides will be keen for the watchdog to make a speedy decision, potentially before the Easter holiday at the end of March.

The Scottish referendum campaigns were designated on 23 April 2014, just under five months before the referendum was held on 18 September. While the period is likely to be slightly shorter this time, activists will be arguing that time is of the essence in getting their message across.

“When you see a worthy person, endeavour to emulate him. When you see an unworthy person, then examine your inner self.”

Confucius; thanks to the Libertarian Alliance Blog

AFTER 2020, ALL EU MEMBERS WILL HAVE TO ADOPT THE EURO

Andrew Lilico; via Sonya Porter

Political union in the eurozone is an economic existential necessity, not a re-negotiable ambition

Recent events have made the British political commentariat more aware than before of just how committed European political leaders are to delivering political union in a Single European State.

It should now be clear that this is not the unlikely ambition of a few starry-eyed visionaries. It is the stated official goal of the Italian Prime Minister, the French President, the German Chancellor, the current and next Presidents of the European Commission, the President of the European Council, and just about every significant mainstream political figure in the Eurozone. It is also, according to a Eurobarometer opinion poll in 2013, the desire of 60pc of Eurozone citizens.

What may still be less clear to some in the UK is that in the Eurozone this is not seen only as a culturally and politically desirable objective. It is also regarded as an existential necessity, a *sine qua non* for economic prosperity, and the answer to Euroscepticism of the sort seen in the 2014 European Parliament elections. So when British politicians propose that EU political integration should slow or that the EU should prioritize some other objective (e.g. the Single Market), that is not merely seen as unattractive — it is impossible.

The reasons why are economic. As was widely discussed in the UK debate about the euro in the 1990s and early 2000s, to make a single currency such as the euro work, one needs an adequate combination of trade integration, similarity of economic cycles (so that one size fits all interest rate and exchange rate policies do indeed fit all), capital and labour mobility (to offset any asymmetries in economic shocks – that is, economic shocks hitting some parts of the Eurozone harder than others) and fiscal transfers (to compensate for any large or long-term differential performance that is not offset by capital and labour mobility).

The Eurozone has fairly good trade integration, some material differences in economic cycles (though not especially larger than the differences between regions within the UK or US), and fairly high capital mobility. But even when they occur at around the same time (so cycles are not out), economic shocks affect some parts of the Eurozone much worse than others (as we have seen in the Eurozone crisis). And, Ireland excepted, labour mobility is not particularly high (despite all the complaints about immigration in some Member States).

That means – as has been argued all along – that for the Eurozone to work over the longer term there will need to be much more significant fiscal transfers between regions. The EU has a modest system of fiscal transfers (the structural and cohesion funds) but these are only of order €60 billion across the whole EU, much of which currently goes to non-Eurozone Member States.

A country like the UK has internal fiscal transfers between regions (e.g. London to Liverpool) of some 3 per cent of GDP (more on some definitions). For the Eurozone, with its €9.6 trillion GDP, that would imply nearly €300 billion of fiscal transfers — several times the he current amount.

One option to make the Eurozone work without adding significantly to budgets would be for Member States to cease their own internal regional transfers, with funds instead going to create a system of centralized fiscal transfers, with a Eurozone treasury distributing funds. That may be more than is required, however. It could perhaps be adequate only to have around €100 billion extra distributed directly from the Eurozone.

But even at only €100 billion, the Eurozone would still need an income stream to fund such transfers. The Financial Transactions Tax was intended to provide an initial funding stream for the Eurozone, but some other tax will in due course be identified. The key will be that such taxes will be imposed and levied directly by Eurozone tax authorities – not received as contributions from

Member State treasuries. With its own tax stream, the Eurozone will also be able to raise debt, and that debt can straightforwardly be backed by the European Central Bank (in a way that individual Eurozone Member State debt cannot).

As a body that raises taxes and debts and distributes hundreds of billions in funds, the Eurozone treasury will need to be politically accountable to those that pay it taxes. That will mean pan-Eurozone elections of politicians to oversee Eurozone tax-and-spend decisions. Greater tax-and-debt-raising powers at Eurozone level will inevitably entail some limitations upon spending and debt-raising at Member State level.

Furthermore, increased capital mobility also means greater financial linkages between banks. So if a bank becomes distressed in one Member State that has increasing implications for other Member States and for the functioning of the Eurozone payments system. In the Eurozone, the lack of such mechanisms of fiscal transfers, banking system oversight, constraints upon Member State spending and debt-raising decisions, and the associated much deeper political union are seen as a key cause of the Eurozone crisis.

The Eurozone crisis, in turn, is seen as creating economic hardship and anxiety that has fostered Euroscepticism and in some cases racism and other forms of political extremism. If adequate economic mechanisms and political union are not introduced, it is believed that the Eurozone crisis will return and anti-European sentiment will (rightly) increase, ultimately destroying the Eurozone and the EU project as a whole. Banking union and constraints upon Member State budgets have been introduced. Even more political integration is on the way.

So in the Eurozone, the answer to increased Euroscepticism is not seen as any form of rowing back on integration. Quite the opposite — Euroscepticism has arisen because political integration had not proceeded rapidly enough.

For the Eurozone and EU to survive at all, deeper political integration, including Eurozone-level tax and spending decisions and democratic mechanisms to oversee them plus reduced control over tax and spending decisions for Member State, are an existential necessity. The only remaining question is whether this Single European State, formed from the Eurozone, will be something distinct from and alongside the European Union, or simply identical to or part of the European Union.

When the euro was first agreed, the UK and Denmark opted out. But at that stage that only meant they were not joining at the start. There was never intended to be any long-term form of EU membership that did not include euro membership. The UK did not say never to begin with, and all new EU members since the euro began in 1999 have had to commit to joining. Indeed, by 2020, all but five member states of the EU are due to be euro members and Poland is likely to join by then as well, leaving just the UK, Denmark, Sweden and Bulgaria outside. That means that at some point, perhaps shortly after 2020, with the Eurozone constituted as a confederate Single European State and wanting to use the institution of the EU as its institutions — the European Parliament as its confederation-level Parliament, the Commission as its civil service and so on — the residual nugatory non-Eurozone EU will have to be wound up.

The most likely course is for it to be fused together with the non-EU members of what is called the European Economic Area (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein). The Single European State will set the rules for the Single Market, and the other members of the European Economic Area will be welcome to trade with each other and with the Single European State provided they abide by those rules.

This all means current debates about whether the UK will have a referendum and how folk will vote is of only passing significance. What counts fundamentally to whether the UK stays in the EU after about 2020 is whether there are any non-euro members of the EU at all, given the existential economic necessity of the Eurozone forming into a deeper political union. At present that seems highly unlikely,

****I offer my opponents a bargain: if they will stop telling lies about us, I will stop telling the truth about them.****

Adlai Stevenson; thanks to Sonya Porter

EPP LEADERS BANG DRUM FOR EUROPEAN ARMY

Daniela Vincenti; EurActiv.com

Centre-right leaders will greenlight a plan to move towards an EU defence union at the European People's Party congress in Madrid next week, EurActiv.com has learned. In a strategic paper which will be adopted at the Congress, and obtained by EurActiv.com, EPP leaders will say that the various crises in Europe's neighbourhood have taken the bloc to a moment of truth.

"We are going to move towards an EU army much faster than people believe," said EPP president Joseph Daul to a small group of journalists on Thursday (15 October). The EPP is the largest European-level political party, and currently includes 10 EU and 6 non-EU heads of state and government.

Attempts to move towards a common defence have been part of the European project since its inception. In 1950, French Prime Minister René Plevin proposed a plan for a far-reaching defence integration – including the setting up of European Army and the appointment of a European minister of defence. But France itself killed off the idea before it got off the ground.

Earlier this year, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker sparked outcry when he said the European Union needed its own army to face up to Russia and other threats, as well as to restore the bloc's standing around the world.

In a strategic note unveiled in June, Michel Barnier, tasked by Juncker to draft a vision for a much more far-ranging Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), argued that the "EU's soft power must be matched by collective hard power and a more efficient use of our €210 billion yearly defence spending." The paper published in June was barely noticed in the midst of the Greek crisis. But now confronted by yet another emergency, the refugees and migration crisis, it has become a blueprint for the way forward. "In today's security environment, the CSDP stand as one of the weakest spots of the EU's project for peace, integration and development," reads the paper to be adopted by EPP leaders. "Rising threats must now lead to a change in mind-set."

EPP leaders are determined to respond to rising threats by pushing the European Council to support three new steps, laying the ground for a full-fledged EU Security and Defence Union, and ultimately a European army.

Three step-strategy

As Europe is called to respond to more crisis, it needs a European operational headquarters that will give it the appropriate command-and control framework to plan and run military operations rather than rely on ad-hoc or NATO structures.

"Moving beyond CSDP's focus on post-conflict and low-intensity missions to being able to conduct territorial defence and higher intensity," the paper reads.

In building capabilities, the 28-country bloc would need to move from the current patchwork of bilateral and multilateral military collaboration to a more efficient permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), as foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty. A good example for the PESCO would be the setting-up of a European medical command.

No member state will ever be pushed into joining PESCO, as participation will remain voluntary.

Another area that EPP leaders are pushing to include in that framework is border control and crisis control such as the development of European coastguard capacities or entrust the implementation of such tasks to a group of member states.

Containing Putin and privileging Turkey

Containing Putin's Russia is at the core of the motivation for rapidly developing a common defence union. "Russian aggression against members of the EU and NATO must be deterred," will say EPP leaders, according to Congress conclusions. "This presupposes, first of all, a NATO which is militarily stronger thanks to more and smarter defence spending but also higher levels of pooling and sharing of

military infrastructure, materiel and personnel between member states of the EU and NATO.”

In the new geopolitical context, EPP leaders see Turkey as a ‘pivotal’ country in the southeastern neighbourhood and as such needs to be given incentives to better coordinate with EU policies and foster cooperation in the field of security.

“A privileged partnership with Turkey remains a full-fledged alternative for membership in the EU,” the Congress conclusions read.

Forget enlargement fatigue

EPP leaders will also slam so-called enlargement fatigue. “Enlargement has been the most successful European policies and has proven the importance of the EU model,” they insist. “The EU should not be caught up in enlargement fatigue, but should rather keep a pro-EU spirit in the region of the Western Balkans alive and support the aspirations of these countries to join the EU. “We need to open up much more and develop cooperation with the Western Balkans. We will listen much more to EPP leaders in these countries,” said Joseph Daul.

Background

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) replaces the former European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The Treaty of Lisbon introduces this name change by dedicating a new section in the founding treaties to this policy. The Treaty of Lisbon emphasises the importance and specific nature of the CSDP, which still forms an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

The Treaty of Lisbon introduces for the first time a mutual defence clause, specifically binding EU Member States. If a member state is the victim of an armed attack on its territory, it can rely on the aid and assistance of the other member states, which are obliged to help.

Two restrictions moderate this clause:

- the mutual defence clause does not affect the security and defence policy of certain Member States, specifically those which are traditionally neutral;
- the mutual defence clause does not affect the commitments made under the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

There is still no European expenditure or European defence budget. The crisis in public spending induced cuts in national defence budgets. And as in the preceding Treaties, the CSDP remains a fundamentally intergovernmental issue.

The challenges created by shrinking defence budgets are aggravated by the fragmentation which leads to unnecessary duplication of capabilities, organisations and expenditures. Studies on the added value of EU spending show that by integrating European land forces, EU countries would be able to save substantial resources.

'GOLDMAN PLEDGES SUBSTANTIAL SIX-FIGURE SUM TO BRITISH PRO-EU GROUP': REPORT

Anthony Bellchambers; Global Research

A “six sum figure”! You mean the same as the annual bonus for just one single employed trader sitting in front of a screen? Shouldn't that figure have seven or eight digits not six, to cut any ice?

Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan are making large donations to the campaign to keep Britain inside the European Union, sources said, highlighting the concern among some of the world's biggest banks over the impact of a British exit. Goldman Sachs has agreed to donate a “substantial six-figure sum” according to one source, while JPMorgan was preparing to make a similar donation, another source familiar with the matter said.

Another U.S. bank, Morgan Stanley, is also likely to make donation but has yet to decide a sum to contribute, a source said. The bank declined to comment.

In the face of growing Euroscepticism among the British electorate and political pressure from within

his own party, Prime Minister David Cameron has promised to hold a referendum on Britain's EU membership by the end of 2017.

Or is the report just a banking in-joke to raise a smile during a winter week of plunging global markets, index turmoil, thousands of refugees on the move and a \$28 oil price? Might raise a wry smile in the City of London but that's merchant bankers for you – always ready to crack a joke, and always profitable, whatever the economic or political weather.

However, the obvious implication of this reported derisory offer must be that the bank actually prefers Britain out, not in. And, of course what Goldman wants, Goldman always gets. Which must be a bit worrying for Mr Cameron and the British government who thought they were running the country.

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

21st Century Wire; via Nathan Allonby

Political elites and super-bureaucrats are worried. It's becoming harder to control their fragile, constructed consensus reality. This is intellectual terrorism, perpetrated by the state. 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 everyday speech and public discourse. 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 (see below), 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.

Curiously, Cameron mentions that the belief that "the 7/7 Bombings were staged" is somehow an extremist one, even though the hard core facts have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that 7/7 was staged – as evidenced by the multi-agency 'security drill' headed by Visor Consultants and its head Peter Power which was carried out on the same morning, and at the exact same locations as where the alleged terrorist bombs were detonated.

As yet, few are aware of how in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo shootings, French Prime Minister, Francois Hollande delivered an official declaration (see full report and text from his speech below). 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.

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, saying:

You are being directed to this official website since your computer was about to connect with a page which provokes terrorism or which condones terrorism publicly

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 Memorial:

“[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-Stator 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”” (p. 2).

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, of Georges Clemenceau, of Alain and of 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 “(p. 8).

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...

Continue this story at Voltaire Network. READ MORE CONSPIRACY NEWS AT: 21st Century Wire Conspiracy Files

SAMSUNG WARNS CUSTOMERS TO THINK TWICE ABOUT WHAT THEY SAY NEAR SMART TVS

Jake Anderson; Activist Post

In a troubling new development in the domestic consumer surveillance debate, an investigation into Samsung Smart TVs has revealed that user voice commands are recorded, stored, and transmitted to a third party. The company even warns customers not to discuss personal or sensitive information within earshot of the device.

This is in stark contrast to previous claims by tech manufacturers, like PlayStation, who vehemently deny their devices record personal information, despite evidence to the contrary, including news that hackers can gain access to unencrypted streams of credit card information. The new Samsung controversy stems from the discovery of a single haunting statement in the company’s “privacy policy,” which states:

Please be aware that if your spoken words include personal or other sensitive information, that information will be among the data captured and transmitted to a third party.

This sparked a back and forth between the Daily Beast and Samsung regarding not only consumer privacy but also security concerns. If our conversations are “captured and transmitted,” eavesdropping hackers may be able to use our “personal or other sensitive information” for identity theft or any number of nefarious purposes.

There is also the concern that such information could be turned over to law enforcement or government agencies. With the revelation of the PRISM program — by which the NSA collected data from Microsoft, Google, and Facebook — and other such NSA spying programs, neither the government nor the private sector has the benefit of the doubt in claiming tech companies are not conscripted into divulging sensitive consumer info under the auspices of national security. Michael Price, counsel in the Liberty and National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU School of Law, stated:

I do not doubt that this data is important to providing customized content and convenience, but it is also

incredibly personal, constitutionally protected information that should not be for sale to advertisers and should require a warrant for law enforcement to access.

Responding to the controversy, Samsung updated its privacy policy, named its third party partner, and issued the following statement:

Voice recognition, which allows the user to control the TV using voice commands, is a Samsung Smart TV feature, which can be activated or deactivated by the user. The TV owner can also disconnect the TV from the Wi-Fi network.

Under still more pressure, Samsung named its third-party affiliate, Nuance Communications. In a statement to Anti-Media, Nuance said:

Samsung is a Nuance customer. The data that Nuance collects is speech data. Nuance respects the privacy of its users in its use of speech data. Our use of such data is for the development and improvement of our voice recognition and natural language understanding technologies. As outlined in our privacy policy, third parties work under contract with Nuance, pursuant to confidentiality agreements, to help Nuance tailor and deliver the speech recognition and natural language service, and to help Nuance develop, tune, enhance, and improve its products and services.

We do not sell that speech data for marketing or advertising. Nuance does not have a relationship with government agencies to turn over consumer data.....There is no intention to trace these samples to specific people or users. Nuance's Wikipedia page mentions that the company maintains a small division for government and military system development, but that is not confirmed at this time.

Despite protestations from these companies that our voice command data is not being traced to specific users or, worse, stored for use by government or law enforcement agencies, it seems that when it comes to constitutional civil liberties, the end zone keeps getting pushed further and further down the field.

For years, technologists and smart device enthusiasts claimed webcam and voice recording devices did not store our information. While Samsung may be telling the truth about the use of that data, there are countless companies integrating smart technology who may not be using proper encryption methods and may have varying contractual obligations to government or law enforcement.

Is it really safe for us to assume that the now exceedingly evident symbiotic relationship between multinational corporations and government agencies does not still include a revolving door for the sharing of sensitive consumer data?

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Jake Anderson joined Anti-Media as an independent journalist in April of 2015. His topics of interest include social justice, science, corporatocracy, and dystopian science fiction. He currently resides in Escondido, California.

CREATING A PEOPLE'S FOOD POLICY

Food Sovereignty Movement; via Critical Thinking

(This is somewhat off the Runnymede Gazette's normal beaten track. But it is good to know of a new movement arisen in a vital, and often much neglected, area of policy and activity. Further reports as to how this all progresses welcome - Ed)

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.'

We warmly invite those who share our vision for a fairer food system to participate in this first stage of the process of creating The People's Food Policy.

As part of the consultation process, we've been running workshops to gain an understanding of what people want from a food policy. We are now asking people to facilitate workshops in their own sectors. You can find the workshop guidelines at the bottom of this page

- Please take a few minutes to read the information below to understand how this process has come about and what this stage involves.
- Following the end of this workshop stage on 1st April 2016 all input received will be collated to produce a first draft of the People's Food Policy document.
- We will then send you the first draft (May/June 2016) and invite you to comment/feedback/consult.
- A second draft – taking account of consultations – will be circulated Aug/Sept 2016.
- Once finalised, the aim is to launch the People's Food Policy in the final quarter of 2016 and then lobby government in early 2017!

During the autumn of 2015, over 250 people attended the UK Food Sovereignty Gathering in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire – an event organised by multiple like-minded organisations that make up the UK Food Sovereignty Movement. This movement sprouted from and is in turn a part of the global Food Sovereignty movement. A movement based on 'The 6 Food Sovereignty Principles' which are; National Gathering 2015

- 1: Focuses on Food for People
- 2: Values Food Providers
- 3: Localises Food Systems
- 4: Makes Decisions Locally
- 5: Builds Skills and Knowledge
- 6: Works with Nature

This however was not the beginning of this story and where exactly it all begun is not so important but following the first UK Food Sovereignty Gathering at Organiclea's Hawkwood Community Nursery in 2012, The Landworkers' Alliance was born. The Landworkers' Alliance is an organisation that works to raise the profile of small scale producers to the public and government and achieve this by building alliances with like minded organisations and people who make their livelihoods from producing food, fuel and fibre using sustainable methods. Collectively, the Landworkers' Alliance grows and becomes stronger and in turn is a louder voice in campaigning for change.

Back at the Birchcliffe Centre in Hebden Bridge, the Landworkers' Alliance hosted an interactive workshop as part of the gathering, attended by around 30 people. The aim of the workshop was to encourage attendees to think about what they would like to see in a People's Food Policy based on the 6 Food Sovereignty Principles.

The diversity of attendees produced a diversity of ideas and subsequently a core group of volunteers from a range of organisations and networks got together to create a working group and take this process forward with an aim of creating a draft document. This working group has since been communicating via email, sharing documents on electronic clouds, holding Skype meetings and met again at the Oxford Real Farming Conference in January 2016 where the workshop was repeated to gather wider input and further inspiration.

The working group identified a number of challenges in the process. One such challenge is the exclusivity of the workshop carried out at the Hebden Bridge – we felt there were a number of key sectors involved in sustainable food activity who were missing. The solution for this, considering the time limitations of a small working group, is to ask other groups to also run a similar workshop and feed back their findings. The more groups that carry this out, the stronger the solidarity and strength of the mission will be.

If we together can move forward from this stage, with the views of an array of groups such as those working in alternative retail, tackling food waste or addressing food poverty – as just some examples- represented and then in turn also be consulted on with regards to the draft document, our collective voice will be harder to ignore by those who need to listen.

The guidelines attached will hopefully explain this clearly and it is important to note that there is malleability in the delivery of the workshop to ensure it is relevant to each groups own activities.

If you have any questions or comments please contact us on thepeoplesfoodpolicy@gmail.com

CENTRAL BANKS ARE TROJAN HORSES, LOOTING THEIR HOST NATIONS

Washington's Blog; via Global Research

A Nobel prize winning economist, former chief economist and senior vice president of the World Bank, and chairman of the President's council of economic advisers (Joseph Stiglitz) says that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank loan money to third world countries as a way to force them to open up their markets and resources for looting by the West.

Do central banks do something similar?

Economics professor Richard Werner – who created the concept of quantitative easing – has documented that central banks intentionally impoverish their host countries to justify economic and legal changes which allow looting by foreign interests. He focuses mainly on the Bank of Japan, which induced a huge bubble and then deflated it – crushing Japan's economy in the process – as a way to promote and justify structural “reforms”.

The Bank of Japan has used a heavy hand on Japanese economy for many decades, but Japan is stuck in a horrible slump. But Werner says the same thing about the European Central Bank (ECB). The ECB has used loans and liquidity as a weapon to loot European nations. Indeed, Greece (more), Italy, Ireland (and here) and other European countries have all lost their national sovereignty to the ECB and the other members of the Troika.

ECB head Mario Draghi said in 2012:

The EU should have the power to police and interfere in member states' national budgets.

I am certain, if we want to restore confidence in the eurozone, countries will have to transfer part of their sovereignty to the European level.

Several governments have not yet understood that they lost their national sovereignty long ago. Because they ran up huge debts in the past, they are now dependent on the goodwill of the financial markets.

And yet Europe has been stuck in a depression worse than the Great Depression, largely due to the ECB's actions.

What about America's central bank ... the Federal Reserve?

Initially – contrary to what many Americans believe – the Federal Reserve had admitted that it is not really federal (more). But – even if it's not part of the government – hasn't the Fed acted in America's interest? Let's have a look ...

The Fed:

■ *Bailed out foreign banks ... more than Main Street or the American people. The foreign banks bailed out by the Fed include Gaddafi's Libyan bank, the Arab Banking Corp. of Bahrain, and the Banks of Bavaria and Korea*

■ *Offered to bail out Mexico, if it would agree to join the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)*

■ *Threw money at “several billionaires and tens of multi-millionaires”, including billionaire businessman H. Wayne Huizenga, billionaire Michael Dell of Dell computer, billionaire hedge fund manager John Paulson, billionaire private equity honcho J. Christopher Flowers, and the wife of Morgan Stanley CEO John Mack*

■ *Bailed out wealthy corporations, including hedge funds, McDonald's and Harley-Davidson*

■ *Artificially “front-loaded an enormous [stock] market rally”. Professor G. William Domhoff demonstrated that the richest 10% own 81% of all stocks and mutual funds (the top 1% own 35%).*

The great majority of Americans – the bottom 90% – own less than 20% of all stocks and mutual funds. So the Fed's effort overwhelmingly benefits the wealthiest Americans ... and wealthy foreign investors

- *Is largely responsible for creating the worst inequality in world history*
- *Turned its cheek and allowed massive fraud (which is destroying the economy). Fed chair Greenspan took the position that fraud could never happen. Fed chair Bernanke also falsely stated that the big banks receiving Tarp money were healthy when they were not*
- *Acted as cheerleader in chief for unregulated use of derivatives at least as far back as 1999, and is now backstopping derivatives loss*
- *And for subprime loans*
- *Allowed the giant banks to grow into mega-banks, even though most independent economists and financial experts say that the economy will not recover until the giant banks are broken up. For example, Citigroup's former chief executive says that when Citigroup was formed in 1998 out of the merger of banking and insurance giants, Greenspan told him, "I have nothing against size. It doesn't bother me at all"*
- *Argued that economists had conquered the business cycle, and that modern, technologically advanced financial markets are best left to police themselves*
- *Preached that a new bubble be blown every time the last one bursts*
- *Had a hand in Watergate and arming Saddam Hussein, according to an economist with the U.S. House of Representatives Financial Services Committee for eleven years, assisting with oversight of the Federal Reserve, and subsequently Professor of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin.*
- *Intentionally discouraged banks from lending to Main Street, which has increased unemployment and stalled out the economy*

Moreover, the Fed's main program for dealing with the financial crisis – quantitative easing – benefits the rich and hurts the little guy, as confirmed by former high-level Fed officials, the architect of Japan's quantitative easing program and several academic economists. Indeed, a high-level Federal Reserve official says quantitative easing is "the greatest backdoor Wall Street bailout of all time".

Some economists called the bank bailouts which the Fed helped engineer the greatest redistribution of wealth in history.

Tim Geithner – as head of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York – was complicit in Lehman's accounting fraud, (and see this), and pushed to pay AIG's CDS counterparties at full value, and then to keep the deal secret. And as Robert Reich notes, Geithner was "very much in the center of the action" regarding the secret bail out of Bear Stearns without Congressional approval. William Black points out: "Mr. Geithner, as President of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York since October 2003, was one of those senior regulators who failed to take any effective regulatory action to prevent the crisis, but instead covered up its depth"

Indeed, the non-partisan Government Accountability Office calls the Fed corrupt and riddled with conflicts of interest. Nobel prize-winning economist Joe Stiglitz says the World Bank would view any country which had a banking structure like the Fed as being corrupt and untrustworthy. The former vice president at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas said he worried that the failure of the government to provide more information about its rescue spending could signal corruption. "Nontransparency in government programs is always associated with corruption in other countries, so I don't see why it wouldn't be here," he said.

But aren't the Fed and other central banks crucial to stabilize the economy?

Not necessarily ... the Fed caused the Great Depression and the current economic crisis, and many economists – including several Nobel prize winning economists – say that we should end the Fed in its current form. They also say that the Fed does not help stabilize the economy. For example:

Thomas Sargent, the New York University professor who was announced Monday as a winner of the

Nobel in economics ... cites Walter Bagehot, who "said that what he called a 'natural' competitive banking system without a 'central' bank would be better.... 'nothing can be more surely established by a larger experience than that a Government which interferes with any trade injures that trade. The best thing undeniably that a Government can do with the Money Market is to let it take care of itself.'"

Earlier U.S. central banks caused mischief, as well. For example, Austrian economist Murray Rothbard wrote:

The panics of 1837 and 1839 ... were the consequence of a massive inflationary boom fuelled by the Whig-run Second Bank of the United States.

Indeed, the Revolutionary War was largely due to the actions of the world's first central bank, the Bank of England. Specifically, when Benjamin Franklin went to London in 1764, this is what he observed:

When he arrived, he was surprised to find rampant unemployment and poverty among the British working classes... Franklin was then asked how the American colonies managed to collect enough money to support their poor houses. He reportedly replied:

"We have no poor houses in the Colonies; and if we had some, there would be nobody to put in them, since there is, in the Colonies, not a single unemployed person, neither beggars nor tramps." In 1764, the Bank of England used its influence on Parliament to get a Currency Act passed that made it illegal for any of the colonies to print their own money. The colonists were forced to pay all future taxes to Britain in silver or gold. Anyone lacking in those precious metals had to borrow them at interest from the banks.

Only a year later, Franklin said, the streets of the colonies were filled with unemployed beggars, just as they were in England. The money supply had suddenly been reduced by half, leaving insufficient funds to pay for the goods and services these workers could have provided. He maintained that it was "the poverty caused by the bad influence of the English bankers on the Parliament which has caused in the colonies hatred of the English and . . . the Revolutionary War." This, he said, was the real reason for the Revolution: "the colonies would gladly have borne the little tax on tea and other matters had it not been that England took away from the colonies their money, which created unemployment and dissatisfaction."

And things are getting worse ... rather than better. As Professor Werner tells Washington's Blog:

*Central banks have legally become more and more powerful in the past 30 years across the globe, yet they have become de facto less and less accountable. In fact, as I warned in my book *New Paradigm in Macroeconomics* in 2005, after each of the 'recurring banking crises', central banks are usually handed even more powers. This also happened after the 2008 crisis. So it is clear we have a regulatory moral hazard problem: central banks seem to benefit from crises. No wonder the rise of central banks to ever larger legal powers has been accompanied not by fewer and smaller business cycles and crises, but more crises and of larger amplitude.*

Georgetown University historian Professor Carroll Quigley argued that the aim of the powers-that-be is "nothing less than to create a world system of financial control in private hands able to dominate the political system of each country and the economy of the world as a whole." This system is to be controlled "in a feudalist fashion by the central banks of the world acting in concert by secret agreements," central banks that "were themselves private corporations."

Given the facts set forth above, this may be yet another conspiracy theory confirmed as conspiracy fact.

GREECE FALLS PREY TO ECB FINANCIAL DIKTATS AND BLACKMAIL

Eric Toussaint; Global Research

(All has been quiet on the Greek front for a while. Perhaps the following item will bring matters up to date. This drama, as with all matters 'European', is far from over - Ed)

There follows the summary of a talk given at the European Parliament in Brussels by Eric Toussaint on 14 January 2016 on the occasion of the international meeting organized by the left-wing European Parliamentary Group GUE/NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left). The theme was "The ECB, Europe's unelected government" (For the full programme, see <http://www.guengl.eu/news/article/the-ecb-europes-unelected-government>)

Eric Toussaint gave his talk on a panel whose moderator was Dimitris Papadimoulis, a Syriza MEP. Other speakers on the panel were Marika Frangakis, who heads the economics department of Syriza's political secretariat, and Pearse Doherty, spokesperson on financial matters for the Irish party, Sinn Fein. On other panels held during this day devoted to the ECB were Gabi Zimmer, Die Linke MEP and president of GUE/NGL, Fabio Di Masi, also a Die Linke MEP, Miguel Urban, an MEP from Podemos, and Harald Schumann who made an excellent documentary on the Troika (see <http://www.arte.tv/guide/fr/051622-000/puissante-et-incontrolee-la-troika>). All the talks can be seen on video at <http://www.guengl.eu/news/article/the-ecb-europes-unelected-government>

Jean-Claude Trichet, president of the ECB, while the memorandum to be imposed on Greece in May 2010 was being drawn up, threatened to cut access to the liquidities needed by Greek banks if Greece asked for reduction of the debt. During his audition before the Truth Committee for Greek Public Debt, Panagiotis Roumeliotis who represented Greece at the IMF from March 2010 until December 2011 before becoming vice-president of the Piraeus Bank, declared

"Mr Trichet – then president of the ECB – was among those resisting debt restructuring by threatening to cut Greece's liquidities. In fact, Mr Trichet was bluffing in order to save French and German banks!". See <http://cadtm.org/Audition-de-Panagiotis-Roumeliotis>

In 2015, under the presidency of Mario Draghi, the ECB carried out the threat made by his predecessor, Jean- Claude Trichet.

In May 2010 the ECB helped create the Troika which imposed measures that violated the fundamental rights of Greek citizens. The Truth Committee for Greek Public Debt's report includes a list of measures dictated by the Troika (within which the ECB played, and continues to play, a key role) which result in the violation of fundamental rights.

Loans granted to Greece within the framework of the memorandum are used to protect the interests of the major private French, German and Greek banks even though they were responsible for the speculative credit bubble which began to burst in 2009.

Within the framework of the SMP (Securities Market Programme), in 2010-2011-2012 the ECB bought Greek bonds at a significant discount. For the period 2010-2012, the total amount of Greek bonds bought up by private banks came to 55 billion euros. At the beginning of 2016, the ECB still holds bonds worth about 20 billion euros bought over that period, which Greece is expected to pay back by 2018.

By buying up Greek bonds on the secondary market, the ECB helped French, German, Greek and other banks to get rid of them, thus dodging the 2012 "haircut". Moreover, the ECB buying large quantities of bonds on the secondary market also had the effect of raising the prices of these financial instruments. This enabled French, German and Greek banks to cut their losses when they sold them off.

In 2012, the ECB refused to take part in any restructuring and in July/August 2015 it demanded the repayment of 6.7 billion euros' worth at face value.

Between 2011 and 2015, it clocked up large amounts of interest from Greek bonds (see below). The way that the ECB used the Troika to organize restructuring in 2012 is scandalous and bears clear signs of illegitimacy.

The major French and German banks have mainly been spared, having had forewarning of the coming haircut, unlike the Cypriot banks that had bought huge quantities of Greek bonds and which

were directly affected by it. Far more seriously, Greek pension funds, small Greek savers and workers at Olympic Airways were the direct victims of the haircut. The Greek pension system has yet to recover. On the other hand, the bonds' fall in value meant that vulture funds were spared.

The ECB bought up Greek debt while imposing drastic conditions. There were times when, judging that the Greek authorities were not cooperating enough in implementing the measures dictated by the Troika, the ECB suspended bond-buying as a means of blackmail.

The ECB made profits at the expense of the Greek people

Although Greece owes the ECB less money than Italy or Spain, the ECB gets more interest from Greece than either of those countries. In 2014, the Greek government paid 298 million euros of interest on loans from the ECB, which amounted to 40 % of the 728 million euros of revenue that the ECB earned from the five countries concerned by the SMP, even though Greek debt towards the ECB only comes to 12 % of the total it is owed.

The ECB's profits from Greek bonds will attain more than 7.7 billion euros by 2018 when Greece will have repaid the last non restructured bonds. The ECB has repeatedly blackmailed Greece with the suggestion that it might return its ill-gotten gains to that country. During the Tsipras government's first six months in power, the ECB refused to return the ill-gotten gains it had made since 2012. After the Greek government's capitulation on 13 July 2015, some of those profits were paid back, but on the condition that the money be used to repay creditors. The profits that have been returned to Greece do not benefit the Greek population. [1]

This is an excerpt from an official document dating from July 2015:

“Total SMP and ANFA profits until July 2018 amount to EUR 7.7 bn. If agreed by Member States, the SMP profits of 2014 and 2015 (totalling EUR 3.3 bn), although insufficient, could be used in July to repay arrears to the IMF and other upcoming payments.

SMP profits of 2016, 2017 and 2018 could also be used for subsequent programme financing. Over the July 2015-July 2018 period, Greece is expected to receive EUR 2.7 bn in SMP profits (excluding the 2014 and 2015 profits used for urgent debt payments) and EUR 1.7 bn in ANFA profits from the other Member States and the BoG, reducing financing needs accordingly.”

See http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/assistance_eu_ms/documents/2015-07-10_greece_art_13_eligibility_assessment_esm_en.pdf page 10.

The ECB and Hellenic Financial Stability Fund (HFSF) in charge of recapitalizing Greek Banks

Among the members of the General Council of the Financial Stability Fund [2] is Pierre Mariani, [3] who shares responsibility for the failure of the bank Dexia and the resulting financial disaster. This Belgian-French-Luxembourg bank has had to be bailed out on three separate occasions by the Belgian, French and Luxembourg authorities. The heavy losses posted by Dexia between 2008 and 2012 did not prevent Mr. Mariani from ensuring he was granted substantial increases in his emoluments. Even so the ECB saw no problem with appointing him to be one of the directors of the Financial Stability Fund in charge of recapitalizing the Greek banks.

Is it acceptable that someone who is largely responsible for the disaster of a major bank like Dexia be appointed to head the entity in charge of managing the recapitalization of the Greek banks? Dexia sold billions of euros' worth of toxic loans to French public bodies and its failure had a highly damaging impact on public finances in Belgium, France and Luxembourg. Is it prudent to continue to trust Pierre Mariani? When Dexia was bailed out by the Belgian government, Pierre Mariani was forced to leave on account of his catastrophic management; and yet he walked away with a million-euro “golden parachute”. For the year 2012, Dexia paid him 1.7 million euros. [4] Now he shows his nose in Greece to participate in cleaning up the Greek banks.

Among the other members of the Fund's General Council is Wouter Devriendt. This adviser to Belgium in banking matters has held important posts at two banks which had to be bailed out in 2008: Fortis, rescued by the Belgian government and re-sold to BNP Paribas, and ABN-Amro, nationalized by the Dutch government. Like Pierre Mariani, Wouter Devriendt is one of the people who are responsible for the banking crisis in Europe.

It would be a shame to conclude this assessment of the membership of the General Council of the HFSF without mentioning Steven Franck, who held high positions at the North American bank Morgan Stanley, then at BNP Paribas between 2006 and 2009 – during the period when that bank was actively contributing to the creation of a private-credit speculative bubble in Greece and becoming entangled in the subprime and structured-products market in the US. Note also that Steven Franck has also worked for the US President at the White House and served in US naval aviation.

We need to ask a question: is it acceptable that the interests of Greece and her citizens be entrusted to this sort of person? The make-up of the directorial body of the entity in charge of recapitalizing Greek banks is a perfect illustration of the nature of the ECB's and the Troika's actions in general – that is, defending and promoting the interests of big capital and the major powers.

The ECB continues to blackmail Tsipras government for access to cash for Greece's banks

The ECB has an obligation to supply cash to banks in the Euro Zone. After the “stress test” the banks were subjected to in 2014, the ECB and the oversight authorities declared Greek banks to be sufficiently robust. As a result the ECB was required to take action to supply cash to Greece's banking system. But during the first six months of the Tsipras government, the ECB constantly engaged in discourse which destabilised that government and raised the worst kind of doubts about what would happen to deposits in Greek banks. This acted as a catalyst, causing significantly large withdrawals of deposits (approximately 40 billion euros were withdrawn from Greek banks between January and July 2015). The ECB kept the flow of emergency cash running, but implied that it might cut it off any minute. Which is exactly what it did in late June, 2015 when the Tsipras government called a referendum for 5 July 2015. As a result, from 28 June Greece's banks were closed for a period of three weeks.

At the moment when the ECB limited emergency cash, it was estimated that Greek banks should have had access to an additional 28 billion in emergency cash. The ECB clearly failed to honour its obligations as provided for in the EU Treaties. Its blockage of Greece's payment system constitutes a clear violation of the provisions of Article 127 of the TFUE (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union).

Yannis Stournaras (currently governor of the Greek Central Bank and former finance minister under the Samaras government) has just stated that in 2015 he held regular meetings with the President and other personalities in order to influence the decisions to be made by the government and the Hellenic Parliament.

We should also stress that as part of its policy of destabilising the Tsipras government, the ECB refused to buy Greek securities in 2015. Yet since January 2015, under its quantitative easing programme, it has purchased securities from the other states in the Euro Zone amounting to some 60 billion euros per month. Now that the Greek government has submitted to a third Memorandum of Understanding, the ECB is considering buying Greek debt, provided that Greece follow the neoliberal diktats and once again savage pensions while continuing privatizations, etc.

The ECB and the referendum of 5 July 2015

On 28 June 2015, the ECB acted to close Greece's banks.

On 29 June, Benoît Coeuré, a member of the ECB's executive board, in an interview with the French daily Les Echos, declared that “an exit from the Euro Zone, which until now has been quite theoretical, unfortunately can no longer be excluded”, adding that this was a consequence of Athens's decision to break off negotiations. He then said that if the Greeks voted “Yes” in the referendum, there would be no doubt that the Euro Zone authorities would find a solution for Greece. If the “No” vote carried the day, however, “it would be very difficult to re-establish dialogue”. [5]

On 3 July 2015, the Vice-President of the ECB, Vítor Constâncio, announced that he could not confirm that the ECB would release emergency cash (Emergency Liquidity Assistance – ELA) to Greece's banks if Greeks voted “No” the following Sunday. “It will be a decision by the (ECB) Governing Council. We will have to wait and see how the Governing Council as a whole will analyse the situation”, he told a news conference following a speech he made to a financial conference. [6]

On 14 September 2015, in an interview with the Reuters press agency, Vítor Constâncio answered the question “What doubts were raised about the Euro?” in the following manner: “It raised doubts for the markets that countries like Greece could cope with the challenges of monetary union. There was never any doubt among the majority of member countries. We maintain that the euro is irreversible. Legally, no country can be expelled. The actual prospect of that happening was never for real.”

The situation of the Greek banks

The public authorities have become the main shareholders of the four major Greek banks since 2010, at the specific request of the ECB, but they don't actually exercise their power since they hold only preferred stock, which does not give them voting rights as common shares do.

Banking concentration has increased. The four major banks have absorbed seven others since 2010. A very large share of the 45 billion euros injected into Greece's banks has ended up in other countries and has been used by private bank shareholders to increase their economic power.

The Greek banks have not really been cleaned up; the Financial Stability Fund (HFSF) and the ECB have not encouraged the implementation of measures that might have restored a robust banking system –which, in my view, requires the banking sector to be socialized.

A key factor in the poor health of the Greek banks is the number of Non-Performing Loans (NPLs). In December 2015, the ECB and the Eurogroup pushed through a financial operation on these NPLs, once again favouring the specific interests of the private sector. Investment funds will be able to buy a share of these NPLs and make profits off them. One consequence of this operation will be to reduce the share of capital held by the public authorities.

The Truth Committee on Greek Public Debt, which had been created by the Speaker of the Greek Parliament in April 2015 and was dissolved by the new Speaker in November 2015, is continuing its work, taking into account the new context created by the third Memorandum of Understanding. The commission will produce a public document on the situation of Greek banks in the form of a critical assessment of the way in which the banks have been recapitalized.

We will have the opportunity to present that document to the European Parliament on 1 March 2016. In conclusion, for the reasons I have just described, the Truth Committee on Greek Public Debt considered in its report, made public in June 2015, that the debt repayments being demanded of Greece by the ECB should be considered illegitimate, illegal, odious and unsustainable. See: <http://cadtm.org/Preliminary-Report-of-the-Truth> and <http://cadtm.org/Illegitimacy-Illegality-Odioussness>

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Notes:

[1] This information comes from Chapter 3 of the Truth Committee for Greek Public Debt's preliminary report, which can be consulted and downloaded free of charge at <http://cadtm.org/Preliminary-Report-of-the-Truth>

[2] A list of members of the General Council can be found on the Fund's official site: <http://www.hfsf.gr/en/generalcouncil.htm>

[3] https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Mariani (in French); see also <http://topics.wsj.com/person/M/pierre-mariani/1017>

[4] http://www.rtf.be/info/economie/detail_pierre-mariani-a-touche-une-indemnite-de-1-7-million-d-euros-de-dexia?id=7963605 (in French) ; see also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dexia#Salary_of_Pierre_Mariani

[5] <http://www.lesechos.fr/monde/europe/021174193580-benoit-coeure-bce-la-sortie-de-la-grece-de-leuro-ne-peut-plus-etre-exclue-1132860.php> (in French)

[6] Cited in Truth Committee on the Greek Public Debt, "Illegitimacy, Illegality, Odiousness and Unsustainability of the August 2015 MoU and Loan Agreements", published 5 October 2015 <http://cadtm.org/Illegitimacy-Illegality-Odioussness>

CENTRAL BANKERS ADMIT THAT CENTRAL BANKS HAVE FAILED TO FIX THE ECONOMY

Washington's Blog; via Global Research

Between 2008 and 2015, central banks pretended that they had fixed the economy. In 2016, they're starting to admit that they haven't fixed much of anything.

The current head of the Bank of England (Mark Carney) said last week:

The global economy risks becoming trapped in a low growth, low inflation, low interest rate equilibrium.

For the past seven years, growth has serially disappointed—sometimes spectacularly, as in the depths of the global financial and euro crises; more often than not grindingly as past debts weigh on activity This underperformance is principally the product of weaker potential supply growth in virtually all G20 economies. It is a reminder that demand stimulus on its own can do little to counteract longer-term forces of demographic change [background] and productivity growth. In most advanced economies, difficult structural reforms have been deferred [true, indeed]. In parallel, in a number of emerging market economies, the post-crisis period was marked by credit booms reinforced by foreign capital inflows[including from central banks themselves], which are now brutally reversing.... Since 2007, global nominal GDP growth (in dollars) has been cut in half from over 8% to 4% last year, thereby compounding the challenges of private and public deleveraging Renewed appreciation of the weak global outlook appears to have been the underlying cause of recent market turbulence. The latest freefall in commodity prices – though largely the product of actual and potential supply increases – has reinforced concerns about the sluggishness of global demand. Necessary changes in the stance of monetary policy removed the complacent assumption that “all bad news is good news” (because it brought renewed stimulus) that many felt underpinned markets [Zero Hedge nailed this]. As a consequence of these developments, investors are now re-considering whether the past seven years have been well spent. Has exceptional monetary policy merely bridged two low-growth equilibria? Or, even worse, has it been a pier, leaving the global economy facing a global liquidity trap? Can more time be purchased? If so, at what cost and, most importantly, how would that time be best spent? Despite a recent recovery, equity markets are still down materially since the start of the year. Volatility has spilled over into corporate bond markets with US high-yield spreads at levels last seen during the euro-area crisis. The default rate implied by the US high-yield CDX index is more than double its long-run average [background here and here]. And sterling and US dollar investment grade corporate bond spreads are more than 75bp higher over the past year.

Similarly, the former head of the Bank of England (Mervyn King) is predicting catastrophe:

Unless we go back to the underlying causes [of the 2008 crash] we will never understand what happened and will be unable to prevent a repetition and help our economies truly recover. The world economy today seems incapable of restoring the prosperity we took for granted before the crisis. Further turbulence in the world economy, and quite possibly another crisis, are to be expected. Since the end of the immediate banking crisis in 2009, recovery has been anaemic at best. By late 2015, the world recovery had been slower than predicted by policymakers, and central banks had postponed the inevitable rise in interest rates for longer than had seemed either possible or likely. There was a continuing shortfall of demand and output from their pre-crisis trend path of close to 15pc. Stagnation – in the sense of output remaining persistently below its previously anticipated path – had once again become synonymous with the word capitalism. Lost output and employment of such magnitude has revealed the true cost of the crisis and shaken confidence in our understanding of how economies behave [Right]. Almost every financial crisis starts with the belief that the provision of more liquidity is the answer, only for time to reveal that beneath the surface are genuine problems of solvency [We told you]. A reluctance to admit that the issue is solvency rather than liquidity – even if the provision of liquidity is part of a bridge to the right solution – lay at the heart of Japan’s slow response to its problems after the asset price bubble burst in the late 1980s, different countries’ responses to the banking collapse in 2008, and the continuing woes of the euro area. Over the past two decades, successive American administrations dealt with the many financial crises around the world by acting on the assumption that the best way to restore market confidence was to provide liquidity – and lots of it. Political pressures will always favour the provision of liquidity; lasting solutions require a willingness to tackle the solvency issues.

Former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan said today that the Dodd-Frank financial bill didn’t fix anything [d’oh!], that we’re in real trouble, and that he’s been pessimistic for a long time:

We're in trouble basically because productivity is dead in the water...Real capital investment is way below average. Why? Because business people are very uncertain about the future. The [Dodd-Frank] regulations are supposed to be making changes of addressing the problems that existed in 2008 or leading up to 2008. It's not doing that. "Too Big to Fail" is a critical issue back then, and now. And, there is nothing in Dodd-Frank which actually addresses this issue. I haven't been [optimistic on the economy] for quite a while.

And the world's most prestigious financial agency – called the “Central Banks’ Central Bank” (the Bank for International Settlements, or BIS) – has consistently slammed the Fed and other central banks for doing the wrong things and failing to stabilize the economy.

If the central bankers’ words aren’t clear enough for you, their actions reveal their desperation.

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