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a short review of Daniel Ellsberg

The Doomsday Machine:

Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner (2017)

by John M Repp

Daniel Ellsberg is the whistle blower who exposed the lies of both Democratic and Republican Presidents about the American war of aggression in southeast Asia that we call the Vietnam War. Few knew Ellsberg was a nuclear war planner in the Kennedy Administration and that he also wanted to blow the whistle on the nuclear war plans of the United States. He copied all the secret plans he had access to (and he had access to nuclear war plans that members of Congress did not even suspect existed) but those documents were lost. Because essentially the main concepts of nuclear war policy have not changed since the 1960's, Ellsberg recreates what the lost documents showed.

The United States has a first strike policy. If a diplomatic crisis gets out of hand, and a shooting war between the United States and the Soviet Union, now Russia, begins, the United States military will launch its Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) to attack the war making capabilities of its avowed enemy, that includes its missiles and urban areas. In the 1960's the plans were, whether or not China was involved in the crisis, our first-strike would also attempt to destroy China's war making capability. When Ellsberg and John F. Kennedy asked the military how many people would be killed in such an attack, they replied without hesitation 600 million (100 Holocausts).

Now, after the understanding of nuclear winter that scientists developed in the early 1980's, the actual number of people who would die would be most of the people living in the Northern Hemisphere. Essentially it would be suicide or as Ellsberg writes **omnicide**, since most animals and plants would perish as well. Nuclear winter would be the result of firestorms and smoke which would be shot up into the stratosphere, blocking out 80% of the sunlight reaching the earth for several years. Hunger would kill billions. The title The Doomsday Machine is not an exaggeration.

When Ellsberg and one of his fellow nuclear war planners walked out of the movie theater after watching "Dr Strangelove" (1964) they both said to each other: "we just saw a documentary film". The plot in "Dr Strangelove" has an insane commander of a bomber group decide that the Communists are so evil they must be destroyed and on his own, orders his nuclear bomber fleet to attack the Soviet Union. Ellsberg tells us that the authority to order the use of nuclear weapons is delegated far beyond the President for the valid reason that if the enemy nukes Washington D.C. (or Mar a Largo) and kills the President, without the delegation of authority, the U.S. military would be decapitated. So, the nuclear war plans take that fact into consideration and delegate the authority further down the chain of command. At each level, the same logic applies. Ellsberg says that nuclear weapons simply do not belong in the hands of *Homo sapiens*.

In print issue of *The Nation*, May 14, 2018, Ellsberg says that Obama wanted to end the first-strike policy by getting rid of the ICBMs and declaring a no first-strike policy. But his ideas were vetoed by the military-industrial-congressional complex. To get a new START treaty through the Senate, Obama had to reverse course and commit to a \$1.2 trillion (now \$1.7 trillion) “modernization” of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Ellsberg ended his interview in *The Nation* by saying he hoped that China might take the lead in getting rid of nuclear weapons. He also hopes that the peace movement finds new tactics and strategy to change public awareness of the threat that remains after 70 years. Too many people think that because nuclear war has not happened, we should not be concerned. But all the near misses need to be better known. Ellsberg’s narration of the Cuban missile crisis could by itself wake us up. The corporate media is at the least negligent and at the most criminal in its protection of the status quo with regard to nuclear weapons, as well as climate change and economic instability. See WPSR’s website to get yourself better educated of these issues <https://www.wpsr.org/> In the age of Trump and in the increasing instability of our world, we need to double down on efforts to start a global movement to end the madness of the doomsday machine.

**The Senate Should Reject Gina Haspel and Mike Pompeo
The warning signs of another major Middle Eastern war
are flashing red.**

by Robert Crawford, published in *Common Dreams*, April 10, 2018 <https://www.commondreams.org/author/robert-crawford> (article written before the confirmation hearings)

The Senate is set to hold confirmation hearings this week on two nominees for high office who, if confirmed, will dramatically shift the balance of power in the Trump administration toward torture, Islamophobia and war. Trump’s choice of Gina Haspel for director of the CIA and Mike Pompeo for Secretary of State, along with John Bolton for National Security Advisor (needing no Senate confirmation), are linked. The Senate has a responsibility to the country and fundamental values to reject these appointments.

America’s claim to global leadership in human rights as well as our national security have already been compromised by torture authorized at the highest levels of the Bush-Cheney administration. My involvement in the anti-torture movement for eleven years has instilled in me a profound sense of loss, shared by many, about what torture has done to our country. I fear Haspel’s confirmation will further contribute to the irreparable harm of torture.

Can anyone possibly think that the appointment of a CIA director who ran a secret prison where brutal torture was employed won’t be interpreted both globally and in the U.S. as a stamp of approval for torture? Haspel was chief of a

base, that is in the direct chain of command, at the “black site” during late 2002 when Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, accused of bombing the U.S.S. Cole, was tortured. Haspel’s appointment implies at minimum that participation in torture is no obstacle to high office. Domestically, it sends a message that so-called “enhanced interrogation” was both patriotic and legal and that Haspel’s involvement in destroying videotape evidence was for the good of the country. It boosts Cheney’s “dark side” promoters in the ongoing struggle for American hearts and minds.

I suspect torture advocates are equally pleased with Pompeo, who has expressed support for waterboarding and has defended torturers as “heroes, not pawns in some liberal game being played by the ACLU and Senator Feinstein.”

The Haspel and Pompeo nominations must be defeated on the interconnected grounds of rejecting torture, rejecting Islamophobia and rejecting aggressive war. We must remember that both appointments are from a president who openly embraces torture and thinks it should be used for retribution (“even if it doesn’t work, they deserve it anyway”). Bear in mind that Trump recently announced that he will keep Guantanamo open and will treat “unlawful enemy combatants” “like the terrorists they are.” The two appointments should be understood as a declaration that once again “the gloves are coming off.”

The anti-torture movement resists that part of militarist ideology that says war can be waged without moral or legal limits. We should never forget that torture is a crime of war. A return to torture would be a moral and strategic calamity with both global and domestic consequences.

I also oppose these appointments for what they suggest about the threat of war. Several commentators are referring to Trump’s new “war cabinet,” an assessment that Trump is moving the U.S. toward a military confrontation with Iran. Pompeo, Bolton and Trump are on the same page about axing the Iran nuclear deal as part of a more aggressive stance toward Iran. Others, rightly, are also concerned about Korea.

The warning signs of another major Middle Eastern war are flashing red. Already, the U.S. is providing military assistance to Saudi Arabia’s war against the Houthi rebels in Yemen, a proxy war against Iran. Israel continues to threaten military action against Iran and Iran has vowed to retaliate. War with Iran would be a disaster for all concerned and could easily spin out of control. Senate rejection of Pompeo would send a powerful message that the Trump-Bolton-Pompeo war agenda is not acceptable.

Finally, war requires an enemy to hate and fear. Islamophobia is a dangerous movement gaining strength here and in Europe. Its hateful rhetoric imagines Muslims as an existential threat to Christians and “the West.” Pompeo has a disturbing record of Islamophobic views and acts. He was the recipient of an award from Act for America, the leading Islamophobic organization in the U.S. and a frequent guest on the radio program hosted by Frank Gaffney, a notorious Islamophobe. After the Boston marathon terrorist attack, Pompeo falsely accused U.S. Muslim leaders of remaining silent and then suggested that such silence meant that they were “potentially complicit” in this terrorist act. In 2016, he claimed that “people who deeply believe that Islam is the way” are a “threat to America.”

If Pompeo was as anti-Semitic as he is Islamophobic he would be instantly disqualified. Why aren't senators and leaders from all sectors of American society speaking out? Of course, to do so would require an equal condemnation of Trump's record as well. Millions of Muslims at home and abroad will hear the message. Have we not yet learned the lesson that racial or religious hostility fans violence and counter-violence? It is a recipe for endless war.

The Haspel and Pompeo nominations must be defeated on the interconnected grounds of rejecting torture, rejecting Islamophobia and rejecting aggressive war. Now is the time to stand for these fundamental values upon which the integrity, well-being, and safety of the republic depend.

How to Avoid Another Financial Crisis

a review of Steve Keen. Can we avoid another financial crisis? (Polity, 2017) by John M Repp

According to one reviewer, Steve Keen was "one of just 18 registered economists, out of a global total of around 36,000, who actually anticipated the global financial crisis" of 2008-2009. Keen's book lays out where he thinks mainstream economists have gone wrong and what they and the politicians they advise need to learn. Keen is not hopeful either party will actually take a new approach. They relish their positions in society for they are the only "social scientists" who advise the most powerful. They are the priesthood for a corrupt system.

The forecast of official economic bodies and the Central Banks was that 2008 was going to be a good year. However, by the end of Dec 2007, unemployment went up to 5% and the financial markets were in turmoil. In 2008 and 2009, unemployment rose faster than at any time since the Great Depression (1929 – 1941). In mid-2009, inflation turned negative, something that had not happened since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Economists in authority responded in sheer panic.

In the decades before 2008, with each new cycle, the unemployment rate and the inflation rate had gone up less than the last cycle. The period was called "the Great Moderation". The economics profession concluded that they had figured out how to successfully manage a modern capitalist economy.

Keen first looks at how the mainstream economists construct their models. The economists start their model building with the assumption that the conduct of individual consumers and companies in maximizing their benefits determines the behavior of the economy. Keen makes his model starting with the economic categories of creditors, wage earners, employers and governments, and it is the interaction between these players that determines what happens in the economy. Keen writes this way of constructing a model is more like what real scientists do.

What is most amazing is that mainstream economists do not include in their models the understanding that private

banks are not "money warehouses" but "money factories". How can this be after it has been empirically proven that banks create money out of nothing? Even the Bank of England admits it. Even more astounding is that a typical economic textbook may recognize these facts about banking in their chapter on finance, but they are not included in the models the conventional economists use for forecasting.

So let's cut to the chase. It is ever-rising levels of private debt that is the key to understanding why the inevitable cycles of an economy can end up in an economic depression. Increasing private debt can create new demand for an economy but when it gets too large or slows down after a particularly fast increase, a depression can result. Keen cites the fact that "every economic crisis over the last 150 years has manifested: the combination of a private debt to GDP ratio of 150 percent or more, and an increase in that ratio over a five-year period of 17 percent or more." (p.81)

The tragedy of a corrupt economic profession is amplified by the focus of the mainstream media on the Federal Government's public debt. Ironically, the deficits of the Federal Government are one way an economy can be delayed from going into depression.

Keen is not completely original in his thinking. There was Irving Fisher's famous 1933 article on debt deflation. Closer to our time were the theories of Hyman Minsky whom Keen credits throughout his book.

Because the ratio of private debt to GDP is above 150% in an ever larger number of countries, we face the possibility of another even larger financial crisis. Keen cannot say exactly when, since economic policy can affect the timing. Australia for example avoided the 2008-2009 crises with generous subsidies to first time home buyers.

So, what is the answer to the burning question posed in the title of his book: can we avoid another financial crisis? No, we cannot avoid another crisis if we don't recognize the problem of private debt. But yes, Keen writes, we can avoid the next crisis if we follow the proposals he discusses, two of which I will mention.

A Modern Debt Jubilee proposes that the Central Bank of a nation with too much private debt inject money into all citizens' private bank accounts but require that the money be used to pay down debt. Many people know that after the last crisis, the Federal Reserve injected billions of dollars into the accounts of the big banks in exchange for some paper of questionable value. The banks were saved but not the indebted economy.

Keen just barely mentions Modern Monetary Theory (MMT). This idea and the U.S. Constitution assert the right of the Federal Government to create money. MMT suggests the Congress spend enough new money into the economy to achieve real full employment. Government spending need not be limited to its income – through taxes or borrowing – like is the case with consumers, companies, states, and cities. It is the only institution in society "not revenue constrained." (p.120) The implications of this are huge.

Keen is an outsider and does not think his ideas will be used by policy makers. However, the Bank of International Settlements is now keeping track of the levels of private debt in all economies.

'Right to Work' is a cynical power grab

by Stan Sorscher, first published in The Stand, Feb. 22, 2018 Stan Sorscher is a labor representative for the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE 2001.

We could certainly use more rights at work, starting with respecting the role of unions as the voice of workers and communities.

The effort to expand cynically named "Right to Work" laws says a lot about what is wrong with politics in our country. Disguised as protecting workers, the real goal is to silence workers' voice, reduce our bargaining power, and make our jobs more precarious. It's about power — social, political and economic power.

After years of deceptive messaging, most people have the misconception that state law can force a worker to join a union. The reality is that no federal law and no law in any state can force a worker to join a union.

That's good. No state or federal legislator should tell you when to join a union or when you can't. This is a decision for you, your co-workers, and your employer.

There is one and only one way to have the situation where all workers contribute to their union. If your workplace has agency fee or fair share fees, it's because your co-workers demanded it and fought to write it into your contract. AND the employer agreed. AND your co-workers ratified the contract. In each subsequent round of contract negotiations, both sides ratify it again.

This condition becomes part of the collective bargaining agreement — "the contract" — which is just that, a legally binding contract between two willing parties.

To conservative thinkers, a contract is an object of reverence. Government shouldn't interfere with a contract between two willing parties. The cynically named Right to Work legislation really forbids workers and employers from writing mutually agreed contract language that recognizes workers' voice at work.

Let's be clear. We could certainly use more rights at work. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution does not apply inside the workplace.

Most employers have near-total authority over employees regarding hiring, firing, transferring, moving work locations, and assignment of work to employees. An employer can insist that all workers listen to anti-union speeches. In the workplace, an employer can search your belongings, tap your phone, read your email, tell you when and where you can eat, prohibit you from smoking, and tell you what you can and can't read on the Internet.

State and federal laws protect military veterans, women, older workers and certain protected classes. Beyond that, in most states you can be fired for almost any reason, or no reason at all.

Champions of Right to Work argue from a cynical pretense

that they care about workers. They don't.

If disingenuous Right to Work groups wanted to protect workers, they would champion free speech and due process in the workplace. They might insist that you could only be fired for just cause; and that workers not be disciplined for something they wrote on Face Book on their private time. Right To Work advocates might restrict "non-compete" agreements that block workers from seeking new jobs, or they could strengthen control of patent rights for employees.

The cynicism of Right to Work is in its true purpose — to weaken unions, and minimize one of the few remaining institutions of civil society that speaks for workers and communities.

The cynical premise Right to Work laws is that workers have too much power. They can overwhelm helpless employers. Particularly, they say local, state and federal governments are unable to resist the power of public employee unions.

It's worth stopping for a second to look at wages levels for public employees — teachers, legislative staff, fish and game agents, national park rangers, nurses at Veterans Administration hospitals, and cabinet members in the White House. No one goes into public service to get rich.

Public employees are driven by mission. They could almost always make more in the private sector.

While productivity has gone up steadily, wages in America have been stagnant for decades. Who got those gains from productivity?

For 30 years, we've heard promises that gains will trickle down to us. A more realistic strategy for higher living standards is for us to demand a share of the gains we create. In the post-war period, workers were able to demand a share of the gains they created. They could bargain, with the potential to strike. If one union strikes, another group of employees have that example of strength to bargain with their employer.

Since the mid-'70s, strikes have become more rare. Employers have moved work to low-wage locations with weak labor laws. Bargaining power for workers is at historic lows.

It is tough to argue that workers have too much power. It is even tougher to tell workers that everything will be fine if we just lower our standard of living faster by weakening unions.

Canadians understand the deceit underpinning Right to Work. Canada made labor rights a key demand in renegotiating NAFTA, a trade deal between Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. Canada wants the U.S. to end Right to Work.

A Canadian Labor leader put it this way. "The United States has two problems. Number one is Mexico, number two is themselves. Canada has two problems: Mexican [wages] and right to work states in the United States."

Right to Work falsely claims to be about free speech. Courts have already carved out religious objectors, and provided an opt-out regarding union expenses for legislative lobbying.

If you believe in collective bargaining and the legitimate role of unions in civil society, then the right place to deal with union dues is in collective bargaining between workers and employers. That's exactly what collective bargaining is for.