PROJECT CENSORED'S TOP 25 NEWS STORIES

Following an extensive review process, the Project Censored team presents its list of the top 25 validated independent news stories of 2012–2013 which received no attention or only partial coverage in the corporate media.

Compiled by Project Censored © 2013

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1. Bradley Manning and the Failure of Corporate Media

In February 2013, United States military intelligence analyst Bradley Manning confessed in court to providing vast archives of military and diplomatic files to the antisecrecy group WikiLeaks, saying he wanted the information to become public "to make the world a better place" and that he hoped to "spark a domestic debate on the role of the military in [US] foreign policy". The 700,000 released documents revealed a multitude of previously secret crimes and acts of deceit and corruption by US military and government officials.

According to Manning's testimony in February 2013, he tried to release the Afghanistan and Iraq War Logs through conventional sources. In winter 2010, he contacted the Washington Post, the New York Times and the Politico in the hope that they would publish the materials. Only after being rebuffed by these three outlets did Manning begin uploading documents to WikiLeaks. Al Jazeera reported that Manning's testimony "raises the question of whether the mainstream press was prepared to host the debate on US interventions and foreign policy that Manning had in mind".

Indeed, US corporate media have largely shunned Manning's case, not to mention the importance of the information he released. When corporate media have focused on Manning, this coverage has often emphasised his sexual orientation and past life, rather than his First Amendment rights or the abusive nature of his imprisonment, which includes almost three years without trial and nearly one year in "administrative segregation"—the military equivalent of solitary confinement.

At his February 2013 court appearance, Manning pleaded guilty to 12 of the 22 charges against him, including the capital offence of "aiding and abetting the enemy". He faces the possibility of a life sentence without parole. His severe treatment is a warning to other possible whistleblowers.

(Sources: FireDogLake, 28 February 2013, http://tinyurl.com/lgaywhn; The Guardian, 28 February 2013, http://tinyurl.com/mymjvl4; Al Jazeera, 9 March 2013, http://tinyurl.com/cr70s4y)

2. Richest Global One Per Cent Hide Trillions in Tax Havens

The global one per cent holds US\$21–32 trillion in offshore havens in order to evade taxes, according to James S. Henry, the former chief economist at the global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company. Based on data from the Bank for International Settlements, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and 139 countries, Henry found that the top one per cent hid more than the total annual economic output of the US and Japan combined. For perspective, this hidden wealth is at least seven times the amount—\$3 trillion—that many estimates suggest would be necessary to end global poverty. If this hidden wealth earned a modest rate of 3.0 per cent interest and that interest income were

taxed at just 30 per cent, these investments would have generated income tax revenues between \$190 and \$280 billion, according to the analysis.

Domestically, the Federal Reserve reported that the top seven US banks hold more than \$10 trillion in assets, recorded in over 14,000 created "subsidiaries" to avoid taxes.

Henry identified this hidden wealth as "a huge black hole in the world economy that has never before been measured", and noted that the finding is particularly significant at a time when "governments around the world are starved for resources, and we are more conscious than ever of the costs of economic inequality". (Sources: Washington's Blog, 24 July 2012, http://tinyurl.com/pgkhshl; Tax Justice Network, July 2012, http://tinyurl.com/cgin5p3)

3. Trans-Pacific Partnership Threatens to Enforce a Regime of Corporate Global Governance

T he Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), branded as a trade agreement and negotiated in unprecedented secrecy, is actually an enforceable transfer of sovereignty from nations and their people to foreign corporations.

As of December 2012, 11 countries—Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and the United States—were involved, with the possibility of more joining in the future due to the inclusion of an unusual "docking agreement".

While the public, US Congress and the press are locked out, 600 corporate advisers are meeting with officials of signatory governments behind closed doors to complete the text for the world's biggest multinational trade agreement, which aims to penalise countries that protect their workers, consumers or environment.



Leaked text from the 30-chapter agreement revealed that negotiators have already agreed to many radical terms, granting expansive new rights and privileges for foreign investors and their enforcement through extrajudicial "investor-state" tribunals. Through these, corporations would be given special authority to dispute laws, regulations and court decisions. Foreign firms could extract unlimited amounts of taxpayer money as compensation for "financial damages" to "expected future profits" caused by efforts to protect domestic finance, health, labour, environment, land use and other laws which they claim undermine their new TPP privileges.

There is almost no progressive movement or campaign whose goals are not threatened, as vast swaths of publicinterest policy achieved through decades of struggle are targeted.

Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, reported that once this top-secret TPP is agreed to, its rules will be set in stone. No rule can be changed without all countries' consent to amend the agreement. People of the world will be locked into corporate domination.

(Sources: Global Research, 10 September 2012, http://tinyurl.com/lxjhqpc; Democracy Now!, 14 June 2012, http://tinyurl.com/cejgwvz; Truthout, 20 November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/cqmyp8v; Yes! magazine, 21 November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/d2hx7sq)

4. Obama's War on Whistleblowers

US President Barack Obama signed the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act, expanding whistleblower protections, in November 2012 and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), furthering these protections, in January 2013. However, in his

NDAA signing statement, Obama undermines these protections, stating that those expanded protections "could be interpreted in a manner that would interfere with my authority to manage and direct executive branch officials". Thus, in his signing statement. Obama promised to ignore expanded whistleblower protections if they conflicted with his power to "supervise, control, and correct employees' communications with the Congress in cases where such communications would be unlawful or would reveal information that is properly privileged or otherwise confidential".

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Obama administration is targeting government whistleblowers, having invoked the otherwise dormant Espionage Act of 1917 seven times.

Obama's Department of Justice has also used the Intelligence Identities Protection Act to obtain a conviction against Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) whistleblower John Kiriakou for exposing the waterboarding of prisoners, ironically making Kiriakou the first CIA official to be sentenced to prison in connection with the torture program. The Department of Justice charged former National Security Agency senior executive Thomas Drake with espionage for exposing hundreds of millions of dollars of waste.

The highly visible prosecution of Bradley Manning has become what some may argue to be the most effective deterrent for government whistleblowers. Manning admitted to leaking troves of classified documents to WikiLeaks, but pleaded not guilty on counts of espionage.

(Sources: Mother Jones, 10 January 2013, http://tinyurl.com/atk9h9l; The Guardian, 27 January 2013, http://tinyurl.com/kk2mnmb, 9 February 2013, http://tinyurl.com/mvhsqtv, 1 March 2013, http://tinyurl.com/k3w9kw4)

5. Hate and Antigovernment Groups on Rise across US

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which monitors hate groups and antigovernment groups, released a report in March 2013 showing that 1,360 radical, antigovernment "patriot" groups and 321 militias actively operate within the United States. These statistics show

an 813 per cent rise in the number of such groups since 2008, with increasing numbers each year. Hate groups are most prevalent in California, with 82 in total; Texas is second among states with sixty-two.

The SPLC counted over 1,000 hate groups in the US in 2012. By the SPLC's standards, hate groups "have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics", and their activities can include "criminal acts, marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafleting or publishing".

With the numbers of patriot groups now much higher than they were during the peak of the militia movement in the 1990s, the threat of domestic terror attacks is very real. After the SPLC's report was released, the Center's president, Richard Cohen, sent a letter to the US Attorney General as well as the Homeland Security Secretary, requesting them to create a new task force to ensure that the government is devoting the resources needed to address domestic terrorism.

Hate groups are now transitioning from racist hatred to hatred focused on the government and its representatives. The patriot and militia groups are some of the fastest-growing groups, and their goals and rhetoric must be understood in order to implement

successful strategies to counter their behaviour if it should become violent, according to the SPLC. The SPLC also identified "sovereign citizens" who often operate as "lone wolves", breaking away from the group to perform violent acts.

Unfortunately, with the use of social media and the Internet, hate groups are able to recruit and spread their beliefs more readily than in the past.

Corporate media have paid scattered attention to the SPLC report and its findings. Both the New York Times and MSNBC covered the report on the day the SPLC issued it, but, otherwise, establishment media have done little to shed light on this subject.

(Sources: Southern Poverty Law Center, Spring 2013, http://tinyurl.com/chd7k3v; The National Memo, 7 March 2013, http://tinyurl.com/kor68cn; Huffington Post, 8 March 2012, http://tinyurl.com/75utl9d)

6. Billionaires' Rising Wealth Intensifies Poverty and Inequality

As a direct result of existing financial policies, the world's 100 richest people grew to be US\$241 billion richer in 2012. This makes them collectively worth \$1.9 trillion, just slightly less than the United Kingdom's total economic output.

A few of the policies responsible for this occurrence are the reduction of tax rates and tax enforcement, the

privatisation of public assets, wage controls and the destruction of collective bargaining. These same policies that are building up the richest people are causing colossal hardship to the rest of the world's population.

George Monbiot has attributed this situation to neoliberal policies which produce economic outcomes contrary to those predicted, and even promised, by advocates of neoliberal policy and laissez-faire markets. In consequence, across the 34 countries that constitute the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, taxation has decreased among the rich and increased among the poor. Despite what neoliberals claimed would happen, the spending power of the state and of poorer people has diminished, contracting demand along with it.

Wage inequality and unemployment have both skyrocketed, making the economy increasingly unstable with monumental amounts of debt.

Monbiot observed: "The complete failure of this world-scale experiment is no impediment to its repetition. This has nothing to do with economics. It has everything to do with power."

(Source: Monbiot.com, 14 January 2013, http://tinyurl.com/d2n3jxn)

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7. Merchants of Death and Nuclear Weapons

The Physicians for Social Responsibility released a study estimating that one billion people—one-seventh of the human race—could starve over the decade following a single nuclear detonation. A key finding is that corn production in the United States would decline by an average of 10 per cent for an entire decade, with the most severe decline (20 per cent) in the fifth year. Another forecast is that increases in food prices would make food inaccessible to hundreds of millions of the world's poorest. The 925 million people in the world who are already chronically malnourished (with a baseline consumption of 1,750 calories or less per day) would be put at risk by a 10 per cent decline in their food consumption.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons released its 180-page study showing that nuclear-armed nations spend over \$100 billion each year assembling new warheads, modernising old ones, and

building ballistic missiles, bombers and submarines to launch them. The US still has about 2,500 nuclear weapons deployed, and 2,600 more as backup. Washington and Moscow account for 90 per cent of all nuclear weapons. Despite a White House pledge to seek a world without nuclear weapons. the 2011 federal budget for nuclear weapons research and development exceeded \$7 billion and could (if the Obama

administration has its way) exceed \$8 billion per year by the end of this decade.

The institutions most heavily involved in financing nuclear arms makers include: Bank of America, BlackRock and JPMorgan Chase in the United States; BNP Paribas in France; Allianz and Deutsche Bank in Germany; Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group in Japan; Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA) and Banco Santander in Spain; Credit Suisse and UBS in Switzerland; and Barclays, HSBC, Lloyds and the Royal Bank of Scotland in Britain.

(Source: Project Censored, 22 November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/lobtc5y)

8. Bank Interests Inflate Global Prices by 35–40%

As Ellen Brown reported: "That helps explain how wealth is systematically transferred from Main Street to Wall Street." In her report, Brown cited the work of Margrit Kennedy, PhD, whose research in Germany documents interest charges ranging from 12 per cent for garbage collection to 38 per cent for drinking water and 77 per cent for rent in public housing. Kennedy found that the bottom 80 per cent pay the hidden interest charges that the top 10 per cent

collect, making interest a strongly regressive tax that the poor pay to the rich.

Drawing on Kennedy's data, Brown estimated that if we had a financial system which returned the interest collected from the public directly to the public, 35 per cent could be lopped off the price of everything we buy. To this end, she has advocated direct reimbursement. According to Brown: "We could do it by turning the banks into public utilities and their profits into public assets. Profits would return to the public, either reducing taxes or increasing the availability of public services and infrastructure."

(Source: Web of Debt, 8 November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/n7d36lf)

9. Icelanders Vote to Include Commons in Their Constitution

In October 2012, Icelanders voted in an advisory referendum regarding six proposed policy changes to the nation's 1944 Constitution. In response to the

question, "In the new Constitution, do you want natural resources that are not privately owned to be declared national property?", Iceland's citizens responded with a decisive "yes". Eighty-one per cent of those voting supported the commons proposal.

The constitutional reforms are a direct response to the nation's 2008 financial crash, when Iceland's unregulated banks borrowed more than the

country's gross domestic product from international wholesale money markets.

As Jessica Conrad of On the Commons reported: "It is clear that citizens are beginning to recognize the value of what they share together over the perceived wealth created by the market economy."

After the October vote, Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir said: "The people have put the parliament on probation."

(Sources: Commons Magazine, November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/mfbnz6p; Open Democracy, 12 November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/kpclbgf)

10. A "Culture of Cruelty" Along Mexico-US Border

Migrants crossing the Mexico–US border not only face dangers posed by an unforgiving desert but also abuse at the hands of the US Border Patrol. During their journey through the desert, migrants risk dehydration, starvation, exhaustion and the possibility of being threatened and robbed. Unfortunately, the dangers continue if they come in contact with the Border Patrol.

In "A Culture of Cruelty", the organisation No More Deaths revealed human rights violations by the US

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Border Patrol including limiting or denying migrants water and food, inflicting verbal and physical abuse and failing to provide necessary medical attention. Female migrants face additional violations including sexual abuse.

Public debate on immigration tends to ignore not only the potential dangers of crossing the desert but also the reasons for the migration of undocumented immigrants to the US. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed by US President Bill Clinton and Mexican President Carlos Salinas in 1994, displaced many Mexican farmers and workers from their farms. Lack of employment resulting from NAFTA continues to motivate

many to migrate to the United States. (Sources: AlterNet, 26 June 2012, http://tinvurl.com/lvpd8mx; No More Deaths, 21 September 2011, http://tinyurl.com/l4tzzak)

11. Bush Blocked Iran Nuclear Deal

ccording to a former top Iranian **A**negotiator, Seyed Hossein Mousavian, in 2005 Iran offered a deal to the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom that would have made it impossible for Iran to build nuclear weapons. At that time, Iran did not have the capability to

fabricate fuel rods. The offer included the plan to ship its uranium to an "agreed upon for enrichment in country" exchange for yellowcake, the raw material used to make fuel rods. Once uranium is fabricated into fuel rods, it is practically impossible to reconvert it for military purposes.

As Gareth Porter reported for Consortium News, Mousavian's account makes it clear that

President George W. Bush's administration "refused to countenance any Iranian enrichment capability. regardless of the circumstances".

The French and German governments were prepared at the time to discuss the offer and open up negotiations, but the United Kingdom vetoed the proposal at the insistence of the United States. "They were ready to compromise but the US was an obstacle," Mousavian reported in his 2012 memoir The Iranian Nuclear Crisis. The continuation of these negotiations could have headed off the current political crisis over the Iranian nuclear program, if not eliminated the threat of war and the strain of strict economic sanctions.

After the US and the UK rejected the offer, the European Union (EU) stated that more time was required to consider the proposal, but Mousavian's team learned later that the EU had no intention of revisiting the proposal.

Mousavian quoted François Nicoullaud, France's ambassador to Iran, as saying that "for the United States the enrichment in Iran is a red line the EU cannot cross".

The British representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Peter Jenkins, recalled that "the British objective was to eliminate entirely Iran's enrichment capability" at the urging of the United States.

One proposal placed a ceiling on the number of centrifuges and the scale of production so that it remained well below the levels necessary for the production of weaponry.

Then British and American teams ignored these negotiations to put pressure on Iran with the threat of

> referral to the United Nations Security As Iranian presidential elections approached, the talks were

> Now a visiting research scholar at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs. Mousavian was arrested by the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad administration in April 2007 on charges of espionage. (Source: Consortium News, 6 June 2012, http://tinyurl.com/7x6qw7w)

Council. abandoned. High levels of lead, mercury

12. The US Has Left Iraq with an **Epidemic of Cancers and Birth Defects**

 \mathbf{I} igh levels of lead, mercury and depleted uranium are believed to be causing birth defects, miscarriages and cancer for people living in the Iraqi cities of Basra Researchers have and Fallujah. claimed that America's bombings of Basra and Fallujah are to blame for this rapidly increasing health crisis.

A recent study showed that more than 50 per cent of babies born in Fallujah have a birth defect, and one in six pregnancies ends in a miscarriage. While there is no conclusive evidence to show that US military attacks directly caused these health problems among Iraqi citizens, the immense increase of birth defects and miscarriages after the attacks has been enough to concern a number of researchers.

Military officials continue to dodge questions about the attacks and about the use of depleted uranium in particular, while maintaining silence about the health crisis. Instead, the US government has dismissed the reports as controversial and baseless.

Independent, 14 October 2012, The http://tinyurl.com/gm78wx7; The Guardian, 25 October 2012, http://tinyurl.com/kk6b2zb; Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology 89(5), November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/lxfx9xb; Democracy Now!, 20 March 2013, http://tinyurl.com/bsrkoyo)

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13. A Fifth of Americans Go Hungry

An August 2012 Gallup poll showed that 18.2 per cent of Americans lacked sufficient money for needed food at least once over the previous year. To make matters worse, the worst drought in half a century impacted 80 per cent of agricultural lands in the country, increasing food prices. Despite this, in 2012 Congress considered cutting support for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—the official name of its food stamp program—as part of the 2013 Farm Bill.

Proposed Senate cuts would cost approximately 500,000 households about US\$90 a month in nutritional assistance. Proposed cuts in the House of Representatives would go much further than the ones in

the Senate, and would have removed at least 1.8 million people from SNAP. Republicans controlling the House have been eager to cut spending and were the primary supporters of food stamp cuts.

Opponents have expressed concern over the harm the cuts would cause to society's more vulnerable members, including seniors, children and working families. Rising food prices would hit Southern states the hardest, while Mountain Plains and Midwest states would be least affected.

Despite all the food hardship, the Natural Resources Defense Council reported that 40 per cent of food in the country goes to waste.

(Source: Truthout, 23 August 2012, http://tinyurl.com/luo4k2j)

14. Wireless Technology a Looming Health Crisis

As a multitude of hazardous wireless technologies are deployed in homes, schools and workplaces, government officials

and industry representatives continue to insist on their safety despite growing evidence to the contrary. Extensive deployment of "smart grid" technology hastens this looming health crisis.

By now, many residents in the United States and Canada have smart meters installed on their dwellings. These meters transfer detailed information on residents' electrical usage back to the utility every few minutes. Each meter has an electronic cellular transmitter that uses powerful bursts of electromagnetic radiofrequency (RF) radiation to communicate with nearby meters, which together form an interlocking network. Such information can easily be used to determine individual patterns of behaviour based on power consumption.

Utilities sell smart grid technology to the public as a way to "empower" individual energy consumers, allowing them to access information on their energy usage so that they may eventually save money by programming "smart" (i.e., wireless-enabled) home appliances and equipment to run when electrical rates are lowest. In other words, a broader plan behind smart grid technology involves a tiered rate system for electricity consumption that will be set by the utility, to which customers will have no choice but to conform.

(Source: Global Research, 8 July 2012, http://tinyurl.com/ls8q74q)

15. Food Riots: The New Normal?

 $R^{
m educed}$ land productivity combined with elevated oil costs and population growth threaten a

systemic, global food crisis. Citing findings from a study by Paul and Anne Ehrlich, published by The Royal Society, Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed identified the links among intensifying economic inequality, debt, climate change and fossil fuel dependency to conclude that a global food crisis is now "undeniable".

"Global food prices have been consistently higher than in preceding decades," reported Ahmed. This trend is leading to dramatic price increases in staple foods and triggering food

> riots across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. The crux of this global phenomenon is climate change: severe natural disasters including drought, flood, heat waves and monsoons have affected major regional food baskets.

> Ahmed stated that, by midcentury, "world crop yields could fall as much as 20–40 per cent because of climate change alone". Industrial agricultural methods that disrupt soil have also

contributed to impending food shortages. As a result, Ahmed reported, global land productivity has "dropped significantly"—from 2.1 per cent during 1950–90 to 1.2 per cent during 1990–2007.

By contrast with Ahmed's report, corporate media's coverage has tended to treat food insecurity as a local and episodic problem. The corporate media have not connected the dots to analyse how intensifying inequality, debt, climate change and consumption of fossil fuels have contributed to the potential for a global food crisis in the near future.

(Sources: The Guardian, 6 March 2013, http://tinyurl.com/lmk95ah; Proceedings of The Royal Society B 280(1754), 7 March 2013, http://tinyurl.com/bgg7d3h)

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16. Journalism Under Attack Around The Globe

The world is a more dangerous place for journalists. Journalists are increasingly at risk of being killed or imprisoned for doing their jobs, a situation that imperils press freedom. From 2011 to 2012, the number of journalists behind bars because of their work increased from 53 to 232, and the 70 journalists killed in the line of duty during 2012 represents a 43 per cent increase compared with 2011, according to a study by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

The CPJ also published a Risk List, identifying the 10 countries worldwide where press freedom suffered the most in 2012. Notably, half of the nations on the list—Brazil, Turkey, Pakistan, Russia and Ecuador—"practice some form of democracy and exert significant influence on a regional or international stage".

The CPJ has been a leader in advocating for full implementation of a five-year-old UN resolution calling for protection of journalists in conflict zones in order to guarantee a free and safe press. Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the

freedom to "impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers", making freedom of the press a transnational right.

Dave Lindorff, of This Can't Be Happening!, wrote that "the incidence of journalists being killed by US forces in recent US conflicts has been much, much greater than it ever was in earlier wars, such as the one in Vietnam, or in Korea or World War II", begging the question of

whether some of the deaths have been "deliberate, perhaps with the intent of keeping journalists in line". (Sources: Committee to Protect Journalists, http://tinyurl.com/l562796; ThisCantBeHappening!, 22 November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/klzsosd; The Guardian, 14 February 2013, http://tinyurl.com/lfcv3e0;)

17. The Creative Commons Celebrates 10 Years of Sharing and Cultural Creation

Creative Commons (CC) is celebrating 10 years of helping writers, artists, technologists and other creators share their knowledge and creativity with the world. CC provides free, public and standardised licences that allow creators to share their material with others and help create a balance between the open nature of public domain (e.g., the Internet) and copyright laws.

The first Creative Commons licences were issued in December 2002, and they now number in the millions. For example, governments and libraries make their information available to the public using CC tools. YouTube now has over four million videos available under CC, allowing everyone to use, remix and edit them.

A strong push for copyright reform is currently occurring around the world, coming from the increased recognition of public/user rights as well as the need for author protection.

Creative Commons and the free culture movement envision a new world in which partnership premised on shared benefits replaces the false battle between selfinterest and community.

To imitate or steal an idea is one thing, but to transform or remix content, while crediting its originator, is something new and completely different. Collaboration is the centre of community, and Creative Commons tools offer a major step towards a more collaborative and abundant world.

(Sources: Open Source, 29 November 2012, http://tinyurl.com/cqm5cfy; Shareable, 7 December 2012, http://tinyurl.com/k9desfl; Creative Commons News, 20 March 2013, http://tinyurl.com/lnrkn33)

18. Fracking Our Food Supply

The effects of hydraulic fracturing (or "fracking") on our food supply and the environment are slowly

emerging. The fracking process runs contrary to safe, sustainable, food production. In the agriculturally and energy-rich region called the Marcellus Shale, a tug-of-war between food producers and energy companies has begun.

Chemicals used in the fracking process contaminate surrounding land, water and air. Ranchers in Pennsylvania, North Dakota, Louisiana and New Mexico have been reporting

health problems and incidents of dead and tainted livestock due to elevated levels of contaminants from nearby wells. While no long-term research exists on the effects of fracking on humans, livestock or plants, a peer-reviewed report by Michelle Bamberger and Robert E. Oswald has linked fracking to illness in animals. They believe that chemicals leaking from fracking sites could start appearing in human food supplies because of a lack of regulation and testing.

There is an absence of both adequate disclosures by energy companies and timely regulation by government to protect the environment and landowners. Secrecy shrouding the fracking process and Bush-era loopholes obscure consumer knowledge of food safety. The lack of whistleblowers has been attributed to fear of retaliation, nondisclosure agreements or involvement in active litigation. While some fear that the early warnings will be ignored, two major agricultural insurance companies now refuse to cover damages from fracking.

(Sources: New Solutions 22(1)51-77, January 2012, http://tinyurl.com/mljm7wt; The Nation, 17 December 2012, http://tinyurl.com/c47amtg)

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19. The Power of Peaceful Revolution in Iceland

Iceland is experiencing one of the greatest economic comebacks of all time, reported Alex Pietrowski. After privatisation of the nation's banking sector, completed in 2000, private bankers borrowed US\$120 billion (10 times the size of Iceland's economy), creating a huge economic bubble that doubled housing prices and made a small percentage of the country's population exceedingly wealthy. When the bubble burst, the bankers left the nation on the verge of bankruptcy and its citizens with an unpayable debt.

In October 2008, Iceland's people took to the streets in response to the economic crisis caused by the banksters. Over a span of five months, the main bank of Iceland was nationalised, government officials were forced to resign, the old government was liquidated and a new government was established. In March 2010, Iceland's people voted to deny payment of the \$3,500 million debt created by the bankers, and about 200 high-level executives and bankers responsible for the economic crisis in the country were

arrested or faced criminal charges. In February 2011, a new constitutional assembly settled in to rewrite the tiny nation's constitution, which aimed to avoid entrapment by debt-based currency foreign loans.

In 2012, the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development expected Iceland's economy to outgrow the euro and the average for the developed world.

(Source: Waking Times, 11 December 2012, http://tinyurl.com/kmguy5y)

"How can Israel claim that it is not responsible for civilian life in Gaza when it controls even the type and quantity of food that Palestinian residents of Gaza are permitted to consume?" asked Sari Bashi, Gisha's executive director, in a statement.

These developments occurred against the backdrop of

These developments occurred against the backdrop of a 2008 diplomatic cable showing that Israel informed US officials that it would keep Gaza's economy "on the brink of collapse" while avoiding a humanitarian crisis.

(Sources: Antiwar.com, 17 October 2012, http://tinyurl.com/mqxzl4t; BBC News, 17 October 2012, http://tinyurl.com/c6fy5we; Ma'an News Agency, 17 October 2012, http://tinyurl.com/n4j3xof; Al Jazeera, 18 October 2012, http://tinyurl.com/dxzx6e2)

21. Monsanto and India's "Suicide Economy"

Monsanto has a long history of contamination and cover-up. In India, another Monsanto cover-up is ongoing. Since 1995, nearly 300,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide due to massive debt. Monsanto has argued that these suicides have no

single cause. However, there is clear evidence that Monsanto's Bt cotton is implicated.

Physicist and author Dr Vandana Shiva has been monitoring what is going on in these rural farming towns. Shiva noted that the price per kilogram of cotton seeds has gone from seven to 17,000 rupees. She added that "Monsanto sells its GMO seeds on fraudulent claims of yields of 1500/kg/year when farmers

harvest 300–400/kg/year on an average". Shiva and other critics concluded that Monsanto's profit-driven policies have led to a "suicide economy" in India.

A new documentary film, *Dirty White Gold*, by Leah Borromeo, examines the cotton supply chain with the aim of generating support for legislation that, in Borromeo's words, will "make ethics and sustainability the norm in the fashion industry".

Monsanto's horrific impact in India is also highlighted in an earlier documentary, *Bitter Seeds*, directed by Micha X. Peled, which follows a teenage girl whose father committed suicide due to debt. *Bitter Seeds* showcases the major problems that people in India are having and how Monsanto lies directly to Indian farmers, going as far as making up fictitious farmers who "have success" with the new *Bt* cotton. Monsanto has claimed that there has also been a 25 per cent reduction in pesticide costs. In *Bitter Seeds*, both of these claims were proved false.

(Sources: Global Post, 8 October 2012, http://tinyurl.com/khqqmqf; Al Jazeera, 8 December 2012, http://tinyurl.com/c4a224r)

Continued on page 79

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20. Israel Counted Minimum Calorie Needs in Gaza Blockade

Declassified documents reveal that the Israeli military calculated how many calories a typical Gazan would need to survive, in order to determine how much food to supply the Gaza Strip during Israel's 2007–2010 blockade.

The Israeli human rights group Gisha, which campaigns against Israel's Gaza blockade, fought a legal battle to force Israel's Ministry of Defense to release the documents. Israel began its blockade in September 2007, identifying Gaza as a "hostile territory" that had been "seized" by Hamas. Israel claimed that the blockade was necessary to weaken Hamas. Critics accused the Israeli government of targeting Gaza's more than 1.5 million people in its failed effort to overthrow Hamas.

In the food calculation, Israel applied the average daily requirement of 2,279 calories per person to determine that it would allow roughly 1,836 grams of food per person per day. Food imports to Gaza were cut by nearly 75 per cent, from 400 to 106 trucks per day, five days a week, from the start of the blockade.

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"...the USDA turned a

blind eye to proof of

contamination in 2005".

thus allowing widespread

GM contamination of

GM-free crops.

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22. Pennsylvania Law Gags Doctors to Protect Big Oil's "Proprietary Secrets"

 $I^{\rm n}$ communities affected by hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking", people understand that this process of drilling for natural gases puts the environment and their health at risk.

In February 2013, legislators in Pennsylvania—a state on the forefront of a national debate over fracking—passed a law that requires companies to disclose the identity and amount of chemicals used in fracking fluids to health professionals who request the information so they can diagnose or treat patients who may have been exposed to hazardous chemicals. However, as Kate Sheppard reported for Mother Jones, a provision in the new bill requires those health professionals to sign a confidentiality agreement stating that they will not disclose the information to anyone else—not even their own patients. The companies

deem the chemical ingredients used in fracking as "proprietary secrets".

The crucial provision gagging doctors was added after the bill was introduced, so many lawmakers did not recognise the broad, problematic alterations to the proposed law.

Pennsylvania senator Daylin Leach told Mother Jones: "The importance of keeping it as proprietary secret seems minimal when compared to letting the public know what chemicals they

and their children are being exposed to."

Under Obama's administration, the Environmental Protection Agency has pressed companies to provide information voluntarily about fracking fluids, but the industry has largely rebuffed those appeals.

(Sources: Mother Jones, 23 March 2012, http://tinyurl.com/nxolhv4; Liberation News, 13 June 2012, http://tinyurl.com/l5waepd)

23. Transaction Tax Helps Civilise Wall Street and Lower the National Debt

In February 2013, United States senators Tom Harkin (Dlowa) and Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) introduced a bill to implement a new tax of three basis points on most nonconsumer stock trades. If made law, the tax could generate \$350 billion in federal revenues over the next 10 years.

Describing the proposed tax as "a simple matter of fairness and fiscal sanity", Senator Harkin elaborated: "We need the new revenue that would be generated by this tax in order to reduce deficits [after sequestration] and maintain critical

investments in education, infrastructure, and job creation. ...Wall Street [investors] can easily bear this modest tax."

Because the tax is percentage based, large transactions would be harder hit; most middle-class investors would see minimally increased charges. The tax would also help curb overzealous market speculation by discouraging the large-sum, short-term, risky trading that tends to put the economy in a fragile state.

This bill has been proposed in previous congressional sessions, yet it has been underreported in the corporate media, making it hard to gain public support.

France recently became the first country in Europe to pass such a tax. Finance Minister Pierre Moscovici said that the law marks "the first step toward fiscal reform and a move toward justice". Ten other European countries are discussing similar laws.

For the US, the Harkin–DeFazio transaction tax would be a major step in civilising speculative investment, stabilising the economy and reducing the national debt.

(Sources: Bloomberg

Bloomberg Businessweek, 1 August 2012,
http://tinyurl.com/m56pgb3; The Nation,
28 February 2013,
http://tinyurl.com/jw5zomg; Albany
Tribune, 28 February 2013,
http://tinyurl.com/m97d79l; Reader
Supported News, 7 Mar 2013,
http://tinyurl.com/kbm3jkp)

24. GM Contamination: Did Monsanto Plant GMOs Before USDA Approval?

Genetically modified (GM)
Galfalfa was introduced by
Monsanto in 2003—two years
before it was deregulated,

according to recently released evidence. Global Research reported on a letter from Cal/West Seeds which indicated that "evidence of contamination was withheld and the USDA turned a blind eye to proof of contamination in 2005", thus allowing widespread GM contamination of GM-free crops.

The Cal/West Seeds letter to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) stated that it found the Roundup Ready gene in foundation production lot seeds in 2005. According to the letter, the GM-contaminated foundation seed originated in 2003 from a field in Solano County, California. The letter stated: "Cal/West Seeds had zero access to Roundup Ready seed at that time; therefore we assume the contamination originated from an external source."

Alfalfa is a perennial plant that is exceptionally vulnerable to contamination. This GM alfalfa could quickly spread to alfalfa crops across the US, threatening

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the integrity of organic products—including organic meat and dairy products if those animals are fed alfalfa believed to be GM-free but which is carrying Monsanto's patented genetically modified trait.

In 2010, the USDA released a Final Environmental Impact Statement which acknowledged awareness of GM alfalfa spreading its traits to non-GM alfalfa as far back as 2003. Not only was the USDA aware of the scandal, but it also deregulated genetically modified alfalfa with full awareness of the environmental dangers and contamination concerns. (Source: Global Research, 4 May 2012, http://tinyurl.com/kcjslhq)

25. Israel Gave Birth Control to Ethiopian Immigrants Without Consent

In January 2013, Israel acknowledged that medical authorities have been giving Ethiopian immigrants long-

term birth-control injections, often without their knowledge or consent. The Israeli government had previously denied the charges, which were first brought to light by investigative reporter Gal Gabbay in an 8 December 2012 broadcast of Israeli Educational Television's news program, Vacuum.

In January, the Israeli Health Ministry's Director-General, Ron Gamzu, ordered all gynaecologists to stop administering the drugs.

Gabbay interviewed over 30 women from Ethiopia in an attempt to discover why birth rates in the immigrant community were so low. Israeli medical authorities had been injecting women of Ethiopian origin with a drug alleged to be Depo-Provera, a highly effective and long-lasting form of contraception. In some cases, the drugs were reportedly administered to women waiting in transit camps for permission to immigrate to Israel.

Writing for The Electronic Intifada, Ali Abunimah made the case that "if the allegations are proven, this practice may fit the legal definition of genocide".

Nearly 100,000 Ethiopian Jews have moved to Israel under the Law of Return since the 1980s, but some rabbis have questioned their Jewishness.

In May 2012, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ignited controversy when he warned that illegal immigrants from Africa "threaten our existence as a Jewish and democratic state". (Sources: The Independent, 27 January 2013, http://tinyurl.com/atangsh; The Electronic Intifada, 28 January 2013, http://tinyurl.com/n5gohph; Common Dreams, January 20 2013, http://tinyurl.com/a4rfdoe)

Editor's Note:

See review of *Censored 2014: Fearless Speech in Fateful Times* in this edition.