

Bloomberg, and San Francisco liberal billionaire Tom Steyer. Another interesting example is that the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, founded on profits from Standard oil, is now committed to abandoning all fossil fuel investments. Robert Rubin, Treasury Secretary under Clinton and Citicorp executive, joined the choir writing in the *Washington Post*, 'We do not face a choice between protecting our environment or protecting our economy. We face a choice between protecting our economy by protecting our environment – or allowing environmental havoc to create economic havoc.' Added to these developments is China's move to implement serious environmental policies, and that Germany has already reached 30 per cent use of alternative fuels.

A Green New Deal solves three major problems facing the system: stagnation, legitimacy and defence. In terms of economic stagnation new investments in green technologies can set off a renewed cycle of accumulation, creating an expansion of new industries, jobs and profits. The crisis of political legitimacy can be resolved by promoting ideological and cultural identification with an environmental narrative and a passive revolution to absorb movement leaders. And lastly, by solving some of the most immediate and present environmental dangers, capitalism can achieve greater systemic stability. This speaks to the concerns of the Pentagon and CIA who have been warning of possible social and political chaos as the result of global warming, a fight over resources and the movement of vast numbers of environmental refugees.

This scenario does nothing to contradict Robinson's thesis or warnings. He is careful to discuss the contingency of history, agency and structure. In fact, the work is essential reading for all those who want to understand contemporary capitalism and are concerned with the fate of our planet. In other words, everyone should read this book.

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Profits of Doom: how vulture capitalism is swallowing the world

By ANTONY LOEWENSTEIN (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2013), 288 pp. \$32.99.

The death in 2010 of Jimmy Mubenga at the hands of three G4S guards during deportation brought to wider public attention the role and the methods of outsourced security contractors in Britain. Since then, it seems that each month brings another outsourcing scandal: Serco and G4S charging for tagging dead prisoners; Atos medical assessments sending terminally ill claimants back to work and driving the vulnerable to suicide; Serco staff lying to cover up systemic failures in out-of-hours medical services; the G4S Olympics fiasco; and the Capita court interpreting shambles. Yet the drive to privatise goes on, in job creation, probation, the NHS ...

At the same time, legislation proposed as a result of public disquiet about the influence of corporate lobbyists on government policy does nothing to curb lobbying or to make it more transparent, but threatens to hobble unions and curtails charities' campaigning.

This book, by Australian journalist Antony Loewenstein, takes the story global, describing the corruption or sidelining of governments by multinational contractors. Companies like Serco, Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR) and Blackwater deliver 'security' worldwide, guarding diplomats, soldiers, prisoners; they tear up the earth for minerals and gas, polluting air and ground water; they mop up post-disaster reconstruction contracts to build factories for sweated labour. The author's term 'vulture capitalism' is inadequate to describe this; vultures are carrion birds, feeding on dead creatures, but the capitalism that is swallowing the world has live human beings for its prey – whether immigration prisoners in Australia, villagers in the way of polluting mines and gas plants in Papua New Guinea, earthquake victims in Haiti or civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Australia's immigration detention estate has grown exponentially in five years – from seven centres and a few hundred detainees in 2009 to 10,000 detainees in over twenty centres in 2013. One academic cited by Loewenstein traces the outsourcing of the detention estate to the 'client state' relationship between Australia and the US, which encouraged companies such as the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) to find contracts there. In opposition, Labor condemned immigration detention, the 'Pacific solution' (offshore detention of asylum seekers) and privatised provision, but once in power it enthusiastically adopted all three, privatising offshore detention (till then run by not-for-profits). Serco got the detention contract in 2009 by slashing its prices to match G4S – but by simply failing to recruit more staff in line with the growing numbers of detainees, it managed to make profits of up to 65 per cent (when agreed profit margins were between 7.5 and 10 per cent). This means detention centres run like prisons, with security and containment paramount. The 'gulag conditions' referred to in a 2001 inspection of Curtin, a remote area of Western Australia, are back, there (recently reopened) and at other centres, onshore and offshore. Reports of brutality and bullying, abuse of power to obtain sexual favours, and high levels of self-harm abound. On Christmas Island (where fines for contractual failures can top \$A1 million a month), in one week of June 2011, forty-eight of 1,000 detainees attempted or threatened self-harm.

Vulture capitalism, says the author, rewards contractors' failure because the alternatives – such as investing in publicly run public service – is politically unpalatable. But when did it become so? When did outsourcing everything become the only game in town? The book doesn't analyse this – although the chapters on immigration detention, natural gas and mineral extraction, the 'war economies' of Iraq and Afghanistan and post-earthquake aid to Haiti, demonstrate how the blurring of the public/private line, with its diffusion of responsibility, suits governments down to the ground. A more personal convergence of

interests is revealed, too, in the form of the ever-faster 'revolving door' which sees company executives appointed as political advisers and government ministers and civil servants morph into company directors or board members.

When governments do the bidding of the huge contractors, accountability is lost. When someone dies, like the Aboriginal man who died from heatstroke in 2008 in an airless, unventilated truck constituting G4S' 'prison escort' services, the contract is simply transferred (just as it was in the UK after Mubenga's death).

It is not only the outsourcing of core government functions such as incarceration which causes alarm, but the way government agencies work to contractors' agendas. The chapter on the 'dirty gas' (liquefied natural gas, LNG) plant in Kimberley, Western Australia, reveals that KBR, which runs water, transport, infrastructure and mining developments, works with the army in providing security for the plant. Another company, calling itself 'Hostile Environment Services', provides a militia which works with the police 'protecting' the plant from activists protesting at the degradation of the land and the treatment of the indigenous inhabitants. While funding for indigenous people is conditional on their acceptance of the gas project, which is taxpayer-subsidised to the tune of \$A250 million, opponents are branded 'racist' for wanting to deprive the indigenous of the 'fruits of development'. It is no surprise to hear that the state president's advisers are ex-employees of the extraction company. Furthermore, with the Australian media 70 per cent Murdoch-owned, corporate interests shape reporting. The destruction of land, of people's culture, of their lives, is portrayed as inevitable, 'the price of progress'.

Perhaps the most shocking of the six chapters is that on the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake of 2010. In the post-earthquake 'gold rush', US companies swallowed nearly all of the \$1.8 billion aid granted to the stricken island. Even the US special co-ordinator for relief and reconstruction resigned after three months to jump on to the gravy train, setting up a company which went on to win \$20 million-worth of construction contracts. Only one-fiftieth of 1 per cent of USAID contracts went to local Haitian contractors. As cholera killed 8,000, and with no health infrastructure available for the 650,000 sick, 'reconstruction' was not, in the main, of hospitals or homes but industrial parks, displacing 300 farmers, containing factories delivering cheap labour to multinationals such as Gap and Walmart.

As Loewenstein reflects, the companies, large NGOs such as the Clinton Foundation, the UN and the Haitian government, all sharing the same neoliberal values, colluded to keep Haiti dependent on privatisation and neo-colonial, top-down aid. It was ever thus, the author reminds us, going back to the 1915 occupation and the later US-supported dictators, Papa Doc and his son Baby Doc – ensuring US interests were served first and foremost, and undermining the small landowners who have been the lodestone of the island's culture, dignity and autonomy since Toussaint L'Ouverture wrested the island from the French.

In this world, nothing is what it seems: 'national sovereignty' applies only to rich countries; poor ones don't have that luxury. The rich countries use 'national sovereignty' to justify ever harsher and inhuman control of mass migration, but

they have surrendered sovereignty to the corporations whose interests they single-mindedly serve. 'National security' means keeping people in a state of fear, to benefit corporate security interests; 'the national interest' means corporate interests, which enrich a global elite.

There is resistance: within the detention centres and, since the book's publication and the beating to death of Reza Berati in Manus Island detention, a growing movement among the Australian public for the decent treatment of asylum seekers; protest camps at the site of proposed mines, fracking sites and 'dirty gas' plants; a small number of journalists seeking to make audible the voices of the dispossessed, pointing out the despoliation and the fatal erosion of democracy it entails.

Loewenstein is a journalist, and does not join the dots between the chapters to demonstrate how, through destruction of livelihood and habitat, resource wars, conflict and repression, the corporate takeover forces much of the migration it then polices. But as a journalist, he brings the corporate takeover to vivid and telling life. His book demonstrates both the urgency and the magnitude of the task at hand: nothing less than reclaiming the world for human values and human life.

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The Price of Experience: writings on living with cancer

By MIKE MARQUSEE (London, OR Books, 2014), 106 pp. £8.00.

Why, I wondered, before I began reading, had Marqusee titled his collection of essays the *price* of experience, and not the *cost*? But I realised a price is something that you pay, with thought; it denotes value. A cost is extracted, willy nilly. And that thoughtfulness, that attention to exactitude, is evident in every page of this small, immensely readable series of essays, whose value is in direct relation to the depth of the experience from which they are drawn. It was, indeed, only after plunging through the essays themselves, that I sensed the force of the Blake poem 'What is the price of experience' with which Marqusee prefaces his collection.

Without grandstanding or fanfare, Marqusee charts the process (and processes) he has lived through since that first, lurching, terrible period of diagnosis – not a single moment, but a shifting, off-kilter pattern that will be familiar to all who have suddenly found the stable certainty of their lives shattered by the irrevocable. The pain of the health and apparent good fortune of others, so hard to look upon; the heightened awareness of how cliché can dominate our interactions at times such as these. The 'good days', 'bad days' mantra that we serve up, to comfort ourselves and others, so as to mask the flux and uncertainty of what the next – day? hour? darkness? will bring. The tawdry language of 'bravery', 'self-help', 'fighting', 'living life to the full' that serves to personalise responsibility for a complex, not fully understood, phenomenon that has social as well as