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VOLUME 26**



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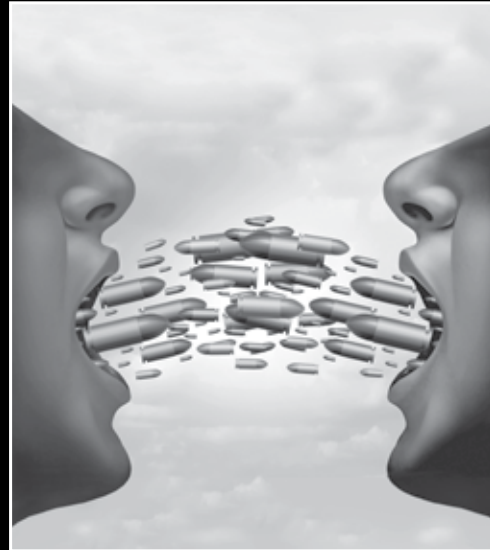
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"BULLET POINTS "

HELI SWENSSON

**"Bullet Points "**

Cover Design by Heli Swenson.

Governments rarely reform themselves. Significant change will occur only if the momentum is generated from below. Since the alienation among the excluded is so marked, it's difficult to imagine what would spark this process. Elite party members, especially at the national level, usually have in mind who's next in line for slots way in advance (like when Hilary was nominated four years ahead). Since change often begins at the local level, putting pressure on more familiar and accessible players to advance an alternative agenda would be promising. But it's also hard to believe the Democratic Party would veer far from its identity as an increasingly elite institution even with such action. Over the past few generations this party has after all succeeded in coopting, and weakening, movements inspired to produce substantial change, according to Jeffrey St. Clair ("Is This Tomorrow Or Just The End of Time," CounterPunch, 1/21/22). And we should ask, who would have the time or experience to do this work besides professional players?

- John O'Kane

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DEMOCRACY LITERACY AND AUTHORITARIANISM

JOHN O'KANE

The voting rights legislation that's apparently now down for the count in Congress---titled "Freedom To Vote: The John R. Lewis Act"---was a spiritually correct initiative. But to overhaul our very limited version of democracy will require much more than securing free choice on the ballots that currently exist.

Celebrated power players, current and former, are now lamenting the crisis of our democracy, claiming that this country is on the cusp of morphing into an authoritarian state due mostly to the efforts of Republican obstructors, and especially the Trump legions. Beyond the flagrant restriction of voting rights in some states, there's the state-by-state redistricting measures mostly engineered by the Republicans that could give them the edge in getting more candidates elected to Congress, and in getting more clout in the Electoral College; and the mounting refusal by many Republicans to acknowledge and certify election results (Hilary and the Democrats expressed a lighter version of this attitude in 2017 when Trump was elected). This certification issue, it should be mentioned, did not get the necessary attention in the doomed legislation (Zach Montellaro, "What Got Left Out in the Voting Rights Bill," *Politico*, 1/14/22).

The real fear is that since the Republicans are the minority party the success of these actions will endow them with the legal right to thwart the majority.

None of these legitimate concerns begins to address the issue of whether we have ever had a democracy worthy of being lost. Granted, our system has evolved in a positive direction since the founding of the country when women, blacks, and men without property couldn't vote, for example. Women have had the franchise for only a century, and blacks affirmatively only since the mid-1960s Civil Rights legislation. But despite these legal guarantees, obstructions remain, physical and mental. We're witnessing the physical barriers in play now, as mentioned. But the mental barriers are also significant. Many citizens who can vote simply don't.

Our participation rate is extremely low compared to other advanced industrial countries.

The core reason why people don't vote is that they don't feel it will make much of a difference. This in turn reflects the fact that there aren't that many choices. The schoolbooks in the lower grades hammer home the idea that our democracy is special since we have two parties. Two parties to represent the diverse interests of over 330 million people! All advanced industrial democracies have multiple parties.

It would be somewhat different if the Republicans and the Democrats were notably different and represented a diversity of interests and constituents. But they've been converging in a rightward drift ever since the backlash against the center-left policies of the 1960s was mainstreamed in the 1970s. After the Democrats got over their infatuation with a "too-liberal" McGovern they chose to compete for the presidency by becoming more like the Republicans. The result of this convergence over the years has been collusion against the lower

classes, especially the working classes. The Republicans in their contemporary constellation are not supporters of the lower classes, since "class" as a category is not in their lexicon. Socially constructed inequality is averse to their celebration of individual mobility (Trump's appeal to and success in increasing his support from workers in the 2020 election reflected the failure of the Democrats' appeal more than anything else). Hence the continuing epidemic of inequality we've inherited.

They're both believers in the neoliberal creed, the Democrats realizing a lite version of what the Republicans crassly preach. They're endorsers of monetary policy as the primary engine for economic change. Biden's

overtures toward FDR-type fiscal policy intervention have been mostly that, overtures, substantive social-democratic policies yet to emerge, and the bipartisan conservative bloc in Congress will likely cancel them at any rate if tested. They're hawks, opening the coffers to whatever the Pentagon mostly wants. They're market fundamentalists, engineering changes in healthcare, for example, through the private sector. Obamacare, however much of an improvement, pumped up the private insurance industry. When it passed, there was not even enough Democratic votes to deliver a public option. The moves to privatize Medicare under Trump have been ratified under Biden who has continued the Medicare Advantage fiasco which allows companies to deliver benefits to seniors while overbilling the government for excess billions. And the Biden administration has yet

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— John O'Kane

to reverse the monthly increase for Medicare, which recently spiked nearly 30%, because the program had to factor in the astronomical costs of the new Alzheimer drug (not even officially approved by the FDA).

The arrival of the squad, the fringe of "progressives" housed in the Democratic Party who are a throwback to LBJ liberalism, has given citizens hope in representing a true alternative, however marginalized they've been since Biden---surprisingly---appeared to accommodate his left flank. And they were at least partially responsible for the increased voter turnout in 2020.

The Republicans' rhetoric suggests that policy differences are greater than what they are. They're rabidly anti-government while spending big on different programs than the Democrats. And both are willing supporters of corporate partnering. They're perennially supportive of reduced taxes for the wealthy, while the Democrats have yet to propose legislation that's appreciably different. They're against union power because it threatens to reverse the low-wage economy that unfairly capitalizes corporations, but the Democrats' initiatives have barely bucked this trend. They're for deregulation, letting private corporations govern themselves in the spirit of maximum productivity, while ignoring the resulting concentration of economic power in oligopolies, effectively imposing new regimes of regulation. Here the Democrats are even more in sync despite gesturing otherwise. They're obviously against hot-button cultural issues, like anti-racism and feminism, but the Democratic elite are their main supporters.

But the ideological convergence trumps the divergence, the differences between the agenda items routinely fought over in Congress, and this raises the question of what explains our epidemic of polarization. The Republicans after all are a reactionary, do-nothing party, mostly interested in staying the course and doing what's necessary to keep the checks coming. They block virtually anything the Democrats propose even to the point of denying their own constituents. This is more pathology than ideology and suggests that it is a ruse to regain or secure power, and fomenting division and adversity is surely a productive appeal strategy. They know what colossal benefits to expect from snatching control of the Federal government, partnering with lobbyists and their private benefactors (given so much more leverage post-Citizens United). After all, over the course of the 2020 election cycle America's 661 billionaires contributed nearly \$1 out of every \$10 spent to influence outcomes (Jake Johnson, "Oligarchs Poured \$1.2 Billion Into 2020 Elections," *Common Dreams*, 1/24/22).

This funding issue is especially significant since both parties are underwritten by essentially the same donors, a striking fact which supports ideological convergence and the necessity to contrive division and polarization to gain the electoral edge.

The Obamacare issue presents a revealing example of this ruse. The Republicans have been hostile toward Obamacare, endlessly attempting to cancel parts



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of it or the whole program. But it is essentially the same program proposed by the Gingrich Congress in the early 1990s, and Governor Mitt Romney's "Romney Care" in Massachusetts.

The apparent support for a slate of issues in the Build Back Better (BBB) initiative announced that the Democrats at least wanted to diverge from the script and deliver sorely needed investments in the country. But business as usual has trumped the wishes of those in Congress who wanted to return the party to its progressive roots, thanks especially to the efforts of Senators Manchin and Sinema whose apparent allegiances are more endemic to the Democratic Party than what most people want to believe.

There's no question that Biden was a different choice than Trump in the 2020 election, but his main value for voters was that he could beat Trump. He was the lesser-of-evils, anti-Trump candidate, a limitation now exposed in his failure to get much accomplished and in his increasing convergence with conservative positions (the lesser-of-evils choice invariably backfires, spiking the popularity of the persona and positions that were cosmetically replaced). And the slate of candidates who ran with Biden were strikingly similar.

The issue of choice at the ballot box is related to that of literacy. More choices will bring more voters into the mix and in their exposure to how the system works they'll become more knowledgeable about the issues (one of the lessons delivered by Occupy Wall Street). Informed citizens perform a watchdog function, monitoring the activities and policies of public officials. They can also begin to influence the early stages of the process, help decide who gets on the ballot in the first place, not just ratify the choices made by players at the top. Bottom-up citizen awareness was an idea strongly supported by some of the founders, especially Thomas Jefferson who believed participatory democracy was a more credible form than representative democracy. The nation is certainly too complex and densely populated to scrap the roles of legislators and middlemen who do the work of getting the job of governing accomplished, revive the experiment of Vermonters in the early days, for example, when farmers and small business owners dropped what they were doing and muled it monthly to Montpelier to take care of the state's concerns. But we need to push in this direction.

What good are more voters if they're not sufficiently informed about the issues? As modern history has shown, authoritarianism breeds from systems---particularly weak liberal ones---that don't include an adequate number of citizens able to perform through a humane social contract. Liberalism as a cultural feeling---and ideology---promises absorption and the chance for citizens to mobilize and transcend their existing circumstances. But the practical political realities trump the rhetoric, guarantee that not everyone can be included. The social contracts constructed by the powerful through their own private networks and forced upon the populace are interest driven, designed to exclude. This is why,

against popular myth, capitalism and democracy don't mix. These private social contracts effectively enable the powerful to possess many votes, not merely the proverbial one which we are all nominally guaranteed.

So, as cultural feelings about everyone being equal, for example, begin to circulate and become normalized, frustration inevitably mounts in the face of these political realities. Citizens expect results that can't be delivered. Liberal society produces the seeds of its dissolution, secures its impossibility, as Jean Baudrillard claimed, leading to dysfunction and polarization if not chaos since the system as currently constructed can't satisfy all the demands on it. Support grows for a leader who can exert firm authority to get something done now. In this sense the latent desires of the mass---sickened by the endless polarization---can beckon authoritarianism.

This paradox is replayed through the utopian/dystopian literary tradition. H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, *Ape and Essence*, and *Island*, Zamyatin's *We*, George Orwell's *1984*, Anthony Burgess's *1985*, and Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, are just a few of the more notable examples. The dissolution of liberal experiments spawns top-down totalitarian social arrangements that establish stability, though obviously at the cost of individual freedom. Neither liberalism---especially the weak form---nor the authoritarian compensation can produce a utopia, which literally means "doesn't exist."

The victims of instability who don't gain access will lack the means to learn about the issues sufficiently, and they can become a potential drag on the system by voting for the wrong candidates, oftentimes wanting a disciplinarian who can return things to "normal," make the chaos go away. They often vote against their interests, as Wilhelm Reich showed in his study of the mass psychology of fascism. This becomes natural when their true interests are not being represented. So, they start to panic, get seduced by tough-love rhetoric, and make irrational choices.

But how do we know if a leader or an ideology is wrong? If many citizens don't know their interests because their knowledge is inadequate or they're being pressured by certain group affiliations, for example, then how can those who are reasonably sure of their interests, the elite who have access to the means to understand, responsibly judge those of others? And of course, intellectuals, writers and artists don't always choose what would seem to be the most humane paths. Think of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot in the Modern era, for example, who sympathized with the rise of fascism (because it offered stability in the face of liberalism's dysfunction!). We are all in ideology, as Louis Althusser contended, sure to misperceive the full truth of our positioning in social existence. We can judge after the fact, of course, tracing how beliefs and leaders contributed to a pernicious tendency or toxic movement, like the rise of racist and nationalist strains that led to carnage on a mass scale.

Many---who's to say how illiterate---get satisfaction from attaching themselves to symbols



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that make them feel free and fulfilled while society effectively cancels their power and citizenship. It simply feels good to bull through the barriers put in place by the elites who refuse to recognize their interests and finally be recognized, relishing the ability to refuse whatever it is that passes for rational thought or the right position. These are perhaps ripe recruits for mindless mob actions. Should they vote?

Democracy---from the Greek---literally means a social arrangement where the people have the power to shape its destiny. But in fact, for the US, this has meant that only certain people, a relatively small minority, have this power. Striving toward a system that realizes this principle should be the goal, which extends well beyond protecting the right to vote. There's the need to force structural changes at the top, ideally the expansion of the party system; limit campaign spending in league with endorsing more public financing of elections; establish shorter election cycles; reform the Senate, which as a result of the two-member team that represents all states, gives more representation to small, rural and often red regions; reform or eliminate the Electoral College which gives too much power to swing states and allows the presidential election to be decided by a handful of states; and better secure vote certifications, to mention the most significant. All these changes would help make the political class more answerable to the people's wishes. Poll after poll shows that the issues popular among citizens are either ignored or severely compromised. All filter-down failures that restrict access to power must be exposed for what they are and replaced with filter-up

processes in the spirit of a more perfect democracy.

Governments rarely reform themselves. Significant change will occur only if the momentum is generated from below. Since the alienation among the excluded is so marked, it's difficult to imagine what would spark this process. Elite party members, especially at the national level, usually have in mind who's next in line for slots way in advance (like when Hilary was nominated four years ahead). Since change often begins at the local level, putting pressure on more familiar and accessible players to advance an alternative agenda would be promising. But it's also hard to believe the Democratic Party would veer far from its identity as an increasingly elite institution even with such action. Over the past few generations this party has after all succeeded in coopting, and weakening, movements inspired to produce substantial change, according to Jeffrey St. Clair ("Is This Tomorrow Or Just The End of Time," *CounterPunch*, 1/21/22). And we should ask, who would have the time or experience to do this work besides professional players?

One promising turn would be for movements to gain steam that could generate viable additional parties which represent a greater diversity of interests. Other parties have formed, of course, but they haven't garnered the requisite votes to win elections. Voters don't choose alternative parties because they know their choice will be largely symbolic since the party has no base in Congress from which to legislate and as a result their vote will take one away from the candidate that is most like theirs. This happened in 1992 when Ross Perot's votes divided the

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Republican ticket, giving the election to Bill Clinton; and in 2000 when Ralph Nader's votes weakened the Democratic ticket, giving the election to George W. Bush. Parliamentary systems can accommodate multiple parties, and virtually every advanced democratic society which has the parliamentary form has multiple choices on the ballot. It may take a new Constitutional Convention to make these changes possible.

Another promising turn would be the creation of a broad-based movement modeled on the Civil Rights Movement. It surfaced in response to the failure of the two parties to pass legislation, its actions eventually successful in forcing a Congressional reversal. This movement reached the mass proportions it did because Martin Luther King believed the issue of race was linked to that of equality, that racial and ethnic subjugation were functioning through the class system. Perfecting democracy is one with motivating more people to get involved in changing the system, and this means that a comprehensive slate of issues must be part of the movement to recruit them. And no group's issues should take undue priority over another's; no gain for one group should result in a loss for another. This can only fragment the whole. A focus on broad-based progressive change should transcend specific issues and groups and above all identity politics, the miscalculation that has dogged the left ever since the disbanding and fragmentation of the 1960s social movements. The larger goal must be inclusion and equality for the whole since the fate of the specific group's issues will be dependent on their evaluation through the movement's larger successes. Specific differences must be repressed in favor of the momentum to win. This is a lesson the right---masters at winning elections---learned long ago.

How can all the alienation, separation, and angst that fuel mob actions be converted into a movement of this type in polarized America? We need a catalyst. If only those convoys---currently bulling through the mask-mandate barriers---could join forces in support of progressive causes, like exposing inflation as a symptom of corporate greed, or how the pandemic and the social policies to contain it have unduly burdened the lower classes, for example. The confidence from such actions could spread, like they did when the student protests in May 1968 France spread to a cross-section of society and eventually the intellectuals, producing a general strike. As such actions spread here, they could be absorbed with an upgraded Occupy Wall Street methodology--greatly dependent on MLK's bottom-up, direct action strategies---and the resulting consciousness for change could filter up to the protected players, spawn a frenzy of instant learning through experience that will send newly minted organic intellectuals to expose the internet's easy polarizing scripts for the substantive education bypassing most of the populace...

The filter-up model of democracy is one of our greatest protections against authoritarianism.

Excerpted from *Musing the Masses*.

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STUDENT ACTIVISM

DAWSON BARRETT

“The myth that the heyday of student activism was in the past — in the 1960s and 1970s — is a fiction. Globally, no period has seen more student activism than the past 20 years.”

So writes Mark Edelman Boren in *Student Resistance in the Age of Chaos*, a new two-volume book series from Seven Stories Press. Boren’s books offer a truly global history, moving deftly from country to country while outlining the many struggles that young people have engaged in, on a vast range of issues, over the last two decades.

The breadth of the project is stunning. Boren presents a complex, even aotic, world, in which young people have experienced significant and rapid changes in a variety of political and economic contexts. Some of these movements’ demands have had global or regional implications, such as those confronting war or climate change. Others, meanwhile, have targeted policies and issues specific to individual nations, cities or schools. Students have also faced a wide range of opponents in these conflicts — some of them relatively sympathetic, others firmly entrenched and quick to employ violence.

What unites these activists, beyond their youth, is a common quest to find and expand cracks in old regimes — a shared desire to shape their collective future. These books offer much to consider and discuss, but because they cover so much ground, they are also difficult to summarize. In this interview, Boren reflects on how this research has impacted him, on the horrors and challenges of the present, and on how we can face the future together to build a better world.

How have these books changed how you understand the last 20 years? Why do you think it is important to center student protest in recent history?

My team of (what grew to six) researchers sifted through hundreds of thousands of articles, reports, documents and other items to research this. When I

started, I had no idea how massive this project would be, how prolific and ongoing student activism has been, and how much it has changed the world. Globally, the mid-to-late 20th century actually pales by comparison.

What I came to realize was exactly how central to the evolution of modern societies student resistance is, how it identifies and opens possible paths for change — and how it can then generate momentum for that change.

I now see the entire world, in its myriad societies and their factions, all locked in a constant struggle between those who want to amass power to control others, and those who seek to control themselves — between authoritarians and citizens, and between conservative social forces (I mean this in terms of maintaining a status quo) and creativity (forces of change and evolution).

From controls on freedom of speech in one country to global climate change battles in the houses of parliament of another, from the recognition of ignored or unaddressed crimes against a people to the rash of “treason” laws adopted in almost every nation — it’s all about power: who wields it, what they are willing to do to keep it and how those who don’t have it can get some.

In the U.S., today’s college students (including those in our classes) have already lived through historic protest waves — the Women’s March, high school walkouts over gun violence, Black Lives Matter — as well as a global pandemic. In some sense, you’ve written their history. What do you hope that it offers them?

Everyone has a stake in this world. I hope these

books help show students that despite the forces against them — physical, societal, legal, internal — they are not alone and can effect real change.

I would also hope that the books lend readers a global perspective to the ongoing human struggle and ultimately foster a sense of compassion. I want them to see that the world is far bigger and more complex than perhaps they were aware — and, also, that those distant places are closer to them than they realize.

Many of the incidents discussed were only recorded in brief local or underground newspaper mentions, humanitarian reports or eyewitness accounts, and so would be otherwise lost to history. In addition to the successes, these books document (and serve as a

I think you are right in identifying that split. Sometimes they are separate. Sometimes they overlap. And, as we’ve seen in many places recently, sometimes a student movement can blossom into a massive social movement — or even spark a revolution.

— Dawson Barrett



ABOUT BEYOND BAROQUE

Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center is one of the nation's most successful and influential grassroots incubators of literary art. Founded in 1968, and housed in the original Venice City Hall building in Venice, California, it is a nonprofit public space dedicated to cultivating new writing and expanding the public's knowledge of poetry, fiction, literature, and art through cultural events and community interaction. The Center offers a diverse variety of liter-ary and arts programming, including readings, workshops, art exhibits, and education. The Center also houses a bookstore with the largest collection of new poetry books on the west side of Los Angeles; the Mike Kelley Gallery, which specializes in text and language-focused visual art; and a 50,000 vol-ume archive of small press and limited-edition publications that chronicles the history of poetry movements in Los Angeles and beyond.

Few literary spaces have done more to cultivate innovative art from cultural outsiders, or to shape emerging artistic movements. Across five decades Be-yond Baroque has nurtured the Venice Beats, cradled the Los Angeles punk scene, and provided crucial support to a series of seminal experimental writ-ers and artists that include Dennis Cooper, Wanda Coleman, Mike Kelley, and Will Alexander.

It's legendary free workshops have profoundly shaped Los Angeles literature by helping to launch a number of influential careers, including those of Kate Braverman, Tom Waits, Leland Hickman, Bob Flanagan, Eloise Klein Healy, David Trinidad, Jim Krusoe, Exene Cervenkova, Amy Gerstler, Paul Vange-listi, Michael Ondaatje, Harry Northup, Brendan Constantine, Jenny Factor, and Sarah Maclay.

It's reading and performance series have exposed L.A. audiences to some of the world's most notable writers and artists, often at early stages in their ca-reers, including Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka, Raymond Carver, X, Patti Smith, Viggo Mortensen, Paul Auster, Chris Kraus, Eileen Myles, Luis J. Ro-driguez, Dana Gioia, Hector Tobar, David St. John, Robin Coste Lewis, and Maggie Nelson.

Today the Center continues to provide a vital cultural forum through it's free workshops, reading series, youth programming, and artistic gatherings.

Beyond Baroque's Mission

Beyond Baroque's mission is to encourage the writing, reading, publication, dissemination, and preservation of contemporary literature through program-ming, education, archiving, and services in literature and the arts.

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monument to) the thousands of struggles that were only successful locally, or that failed — and to the activists who risked being beaten, imprisoned, or even killed to change their world.

Movement histories often exist in the shadow of “the 1960s,” but your books establish student protest as a constant — the rule, rather than the exception. What do you think we gain by moving beyond a focus on the 1960s?

A lot has happened since the 1960s — Tiananmen Square, the Eastern European color revolutions, the Arab Spring, the Latin American Spring, the pro-democracy battles in Africa and Asia, the #MeToo movement, Black Lives Matter, and the global climate strikes, to name but a few.

There is a perennially flowering idealism in new generations, and youth have creativity on their side and a willingness to risk, sometimes everything, to throw off the yoke of another.

The 1960s protests were watershed, yes, and they serve as both milestones and symbols, but the world has traveled far beyond them. We’ve had at least two massive waves of student protests globally, though I see these as more or less constant waves moving around the globe, often washing across regions or continents.

The first major post-1960s wave coincided with the rise of the internet, and the second came with the proliferation of the cell phone and the rise of social media. It is no accident that there has been an explosion of activism corresponding with the proliferation of the cell phone, which allows the immediate networking of individuals, and, also, empowers each with a voice (and a camera). The next generation has found it has both agency and power. They want their societies and world to be different than what they’ve inherited.

And they’ve used that agency and power toward so many different ends. The movements you document seem to break down, roughly, into two main categories: those that address the interests of students as students and those that attempt to shape the future more broadly. What connections do you see among them?

I think you are right in identifying that split. Sometimes they are separate. Sometimes they overlap. And, as we’ve seen in many places recently, sometimes a student movement can blossom into a massive social movement — or even spark a revolution.

Some of those general collective concerns you allude to have to do with self-determination (such as pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria, Venezuela, and others), historical injustices faced by new generations (including the #MeToo Movement and Black Lives Matter), and the existential crisis facing us due to climate change and the gross mismanagement of the earth’s resources.

Reading these stories is a bit of a roller coaster. On the one hand, it is incredibly heartening to see young

people putting their hopes into action and compelling changes. There is also a lot of brutality in this history, though. Arrests, beatings, torture, and murder by authoritarian regimes are a constant.

That authoritarian toolbox is medieval, and the sheer relentlessness of malice and horror uncovered by our research took a tremendous emotional toll. We were clearly not prepared for the extent of the brutality we would find. There were times when we each needed to take a break from the material for a while.

That said, what inspiration and successes we found, as well! No matter how bleak it gets, how vicious the authoritarian, or how controlling the state (and I’m thinking here of China’s stranglehold over information), there are those who will and do resist. And they often will be young. Just as the tactics and brutality of authoritarians have continued, so, too, has a drive for independence, freedom, and self-determination.

Authoritarianism does seem to be on the rise in recent years. What lessons do young people in the 21st century offer us for resisting it moving forward? What is new here?

Those in power have more tools than ever. In addition to cudgels and capsaicin spray, new laws that define protesters as “terrorists” and mandate harsh sentences for convictions have proliferated, as well, even in the U.S., France, and the U.K.

States and authoritarians use technological advancements in surveillance to identify members of opposition groups for arrests, new tactics (such as kettling protesters or bringing in police from outside a community to suppress local protests), controlling education, or revising history (all references to the Tiananmen Square massacre, for example, have been deleted from China’s internet, as well as unwanted words or phrases, such as #MeToo).

But the state is always slower to change than those resisting it. There is a perennially flowering idealism in new generations, and youth have creativity on their side and a willingness to risk, sometimes everything, to throw off the yoke of another.

We see that in the defenders of Ukraine, but we also see it by thousands of young Russian students that came out onto the streets of Moscow to protest the war, facing beatings and immediate arrests.

Before I let you go, what question do you wish that I had asked you?

I would have wanted you to ask if, after all this, I was an optimist.

And are you?

Absolutely!

Dawson Barrett teaches history at Del Mar College in Texas. He is the author, most recently, of *Punks in Peoria: Making a Scene in the American Heartland*.



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I N F L A T I O N **HOW THE FED CAN** **SAVE MAIN STREET**

E L L E N B R O W N

Inflation is plaguing consumer markets, putting pressure on the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates to tighten the money supply. But as Rex Nutting writes in a MarketWatch column titled “Why Interest Rates Aren’t Really the Right Tool to Control Inflation”:

“It may be heresy to those who think the Fed is all-powerful, but the honest answer is that raising interest rates wouldn’t put out the fire. Short of throwing millions of people out of work in a recession, higher rates wouldn’t bring supply and demand back into balance, a necessary condition for price stability.

The Fed (and those who are clamoring for the Fed to raise rates immediately) have misdiagnosed the problem with the economy and are demanding the wrong kind of medicine. ...

Prices are going up because crucial inputs—labor, electronics, energy, housing, transportation—are in short supply. Normally, the way to solve this imbalance would be to give workers and businesses incentives to increase their supply. ...

The Fed has been assigned the job of fixing this. Unfortunately, the Fed doesn’t have the tools to do it. Monetary policy works (in theory) by tweaking demand, but it has no direct impact on supply.”

The Dire Effects of the “Wrong Kind of Medicine”

Not only will raising interest rates not fix the supply crisis, but according to Alasdair Macleod, head of research at GoldMoney in London, U.K., that wrong medicine is likely to trigger the next financial crisis. He thinks it is imminent and will start in Europe, where negative interest rates brought the cost of doing repo trades to zero. As a result, the European repo market is now over €10 trillion (\$11.4 trillion), far more than the capital available to unwind it (to reverse or close the trades). Rising interest rates will trigger that unwinding, says MacLeod, and the ECB lacks the tools to avoid the resulting crisis. Meanwhile, oil prices have risen over 50% and natural gas over 60% in Europe in the past year, “due to a supply crisis of its governments’ own making,” writes

Macleod. Member governments are heavily in debt, yet European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde wants to borrow more to finance the transition to carbon neutral. Macleod writes darkly:

“As for the euro’s future, it seems unlikely that the ECB has the capability of dealing with the crisis that will unfold.... The deconstruction of this shabby arrangement should prove the end of the euro and possibly of the European Union itself.”

German journalist Ernst Wolff paints an even darker scenario. He contends that the globalist European leaders heading the World Economic Forum (WEF) are crashing the global economy intentionally, in order to clear the chessboard for the WEF’s “Great Reset.” They’re doing this, he says, because they have to. The global bankers’ boom-and-bust financial system is now so top-heavy and debt-laden that it cannot be sustained. Problem/reaction/solution: desperate people will welcome the WEF’s Great Reset, in which

they will own nothing but will be offered a marginally adequate Universal Basic Income with onerous strings attached. This subsistence income will be doled out through a central bank digital currency (CBDC) controlled nationally by the country’s central bank and globally by the IMF as issuer of the reserve currency and, ultimately, of a single global currency.

There are indications, however, that the U.S. Fed is not going along with this Eurocentric globalist push. Financial blogger Tom Luongo points to Jerome Powell’s clash with Christine Lagarde in May last year over her insistence that central banks require private banks to monitor the business of their clients, and to the Fed’s raising its repo rate to 0.25% in June,

attracting investors earning zero interest in the European repo market into the U.S. dollar and away from the euro. Luongo suggests that the Fed’s resistance to the globalist plan comes from the Wall Street banks that own the New York Fed, which are not willing to give up the U.S. dollar’s status as global reserve currency and could be driven out of business by a CBDC distributed directly through individual central bank accounts.

Preserving the current Wall Street-dominated system, however, hardly helps Main Street. The pandemic added \$5 trillion to the fortunes of the billionaire class; but government-instituted lockdowns permanently shuttered more than 100,000 U.S. businesses and left vast portions

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because the American
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to take it in exchange
for their goods
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— Ellen Brown

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of the population living on the edge. According to a recent study from Johns Hopkins University, the detrimental impact of global lockdowns substantially outweighed their public health benefits.

Is It Time to Amend the Federal Reserve Act?

The U.S. dollar is backed by the full faith and credit of the United States: it retains its value because the American public is willing to take it in exchange for their goods and services. But the public has not been allowed access to the bottomless pool of central bank liquidity that backstops this public credit.

According to Cornell Law School Prof. Robert Hockett, however, the framers of the Federal Reserve Act intended for Main Street businesses to be able to tap this liquidity pool. He argues that the Fed already has the monetary tools it needs to rescue the real, productive economy. They just haven't been used – for over a century. The Fed can stay in its own lane and stimulate local production using monetary policy baked into the Federal Reserve Act itself.

Cornell Law School's Prof. Robert Hockett wrote in *Forbes* in March last year that the Federal Reserve System was originally designed to be "something akin to a network of regional development finance institutions. ... Each of the twelve regional Federal Reserve Banks was to provide short-term funding directly or indirectly (through local banks) to developing businesses that needed it. This they did by 'discounting' – in effect, purchasing – commercial paper from those businesses." Investopedia explains:

"Commercial paper is a commonly used type of unsecured, short-term debt instrument issued by corporations, typically used for the financing of payroll, accounts payable and inventories, and meeting other short-term liabilities.... Commercial paper is usually issued at a discount from face value and reflects prevailing market interest rates."

In determining what kinds of commercial paper to discount, wrote Hockett, "the Federal Reserve Act both was – and ironically remains – quite explicit about this: Fed discount lending is solely for 'productive,' not 'speculative' purposes."

In a follow-up article, Hockett explained that the drafters of the Federal Reserve Act, notably Carter Glass and Paul Warburg, were essentially following the Real Bills Doctrine (RBD). Previously known as the "commercial loan theory of banking," it held that banks could create credit-money deposits on their balance sheets without triggering inflation if the money were issued against loans backed by commercial paper. When the borrowing companies repaid their loans from their sales receipts, the newly created money would just void out the debt and be extinguished. Their intent was that banks could sell their commercial loans at a discount at the Fed's Discount Window, freeing up their balance sheets for more loans.

Hockett wrote: "The RBD in its crude formulation held that so long as the lending of endogenous [bank-created] credit-money was kept productive, not speculative, inflation and deflation would be not only less likely, but effectively impossible. And the experience of German banks during Germany's late 19th century Hamiltonian 'growth miracle,'

with which the German immigrant Warburg, himself a banker, was intimately familiar, appeared to verify this. So did Glass's experience with agricultural lending in the American South."

According to Prof. Carl Walsh, writing in *The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco Newsletter* in 1991: "The preamble sets out very clearly that one purpose of the Federal Reserve Act was to afford the means of discounting commercial loans. In its report on the proposed bill, the House Banking and Currency Committee viewed a fundamental objective of the bill to be the creation of a joint mechanism for the extension of credit to banks which possess sound assets and which desire to liquidate them for the purpose of meeting legitimate commercial, agricultural, and industrial demands on the part of their clientele."

"Liquidating" loans backed by "real bills" basically meant turning a company's receivables into bank-issued credit that could be spent on the workers and materials needed to produce its goods and services, bringing supply in balance with demand. That "monetization" of debt might not drive up prices, but external factors obviously could. Today those factors include supply chain problems, worker shortages, and resource shortages. In the 1920s, the trigger was speculation in the stock market.

The real bills policy was discredited after the stock market crash of 1929, due to overly-strict application by the Fed. As the tale is told in Wikipedia: "Fed Board member Adolph C. Miller in 1929 launched his Direct Pressure initiative. It required all member banks seeking Federal Reserve discount window assistance to affirm that they had never made speculative loans, especially of the stock-market variety. No self-respecting banker seeking to borrow emergency reserves from the Fed was willing to undergo such interrogation, especially given that a "hard-boiled" Fed was unlikely to grant such aid. Instead, the banks chose to fail (and the Fed let them), which they did in large numbers, almost 9000 of them.

But the policy's original objective remains sound: "creation of a joint mechanism for the extension of credit to banks which possess sound assets and which desire to liquidate them for the purpose of meeting legitimate commercial, agricultural, and industrial demands on the part of their clientele."

Walsh noted that discount window borrowing is currently available only for easing very short-term reserve shortages. When the Fed wants to expand bank lending, it purchases government securities from the banking sector, allowing bank reserves to expand. But he observed that this maneuver does not necessarily increase bank lending, and that some commentators argued that the Fed should be allowed to purchase existing loans from banks that could then use the funds to back new loans on the "real bills" theory.

Compare North Dakota's "Mini-Fed"

How might that work today? For some idea, we can look to the highly successful state-owned Bank of North Dakota, which has been described as a "mini-Fed" for the local banks of that state.

Again quoting Wikipedia: "The BND serves as a

THERE IS A RIVER

there is a cheerful ignorance
a chance meeting and
luck like gold that cannot be
mined or
stolen

a common atom

a dance

and stars that trick the
water with their
certain
magic

do not wash your wars in it
take your holy rituals to the
precious fountains built by your
agencies of fear

press your
wine from the fallout
and drink your
bitter victory

for yes

there is a river
a giving river that will
sing you safely

a river of
light

final
fast
and free

where you can
disrobe
and leave your casual sadness
walking sideways at the
shore

meet me there
whoever you are
and we will agree to
swim it
together

– S.A. Griffin

S.A. Griffin is the author of *Dreams Gone Mad with Hope* and co-editor of *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*.

wholesale bank for the state's community banks and credit unions. It participates in loans created by the local banks by expanding their size, providing loan guarantees, and 'buying down' interest rates. Additionally, it buys loans from bank portfolios as well as community bank stocks. The bank provides other banking services to local banks, such as clearing checks, acting as depository for their reserves, and providing federal funds."

According to a May 2020 article in *The Washington Post* titled "North Dakota Businesses Dominated the PPP": "Small businesses there secured more PPP [Paycheck Protection Plan] funds, relative to the state's workforce, than their competitors in any other state What's their secret? Much credit goes to the century-old Bank of North Dakota According to Eric Hardmeyer, BND's president and chief executive, BND connected the state's small bankers with politicians and U.S. Small Business Administration officials and even bought some of their PPP loans to help spread out the cost and risk."

... BND offers few retail services or direct loans, with the notable exception of student loans. Instead, it partners with local banks, multiplying their lending power and guiding them through the ever-evolving global financial system....BND has already rolled out two local successor programs to the PPP, intended to help businesses restart and rebuild. It has also offered deferments on its \$1.1 billion portfolio of student loans."

Updating the Federal Reserve Act

The Paycheck Protection Plan was one of many relief programs established in March 2020 that were funded with Fed credit and capitalized with money from the Treasury. But Treasury backing would not actually be necessary to restore the Fed's Discount Window to its original function. The Federal Reserve Act would just need a bit of tweaking to bring it into the 21st century.

To start, Hockett says we need many more Federal Reserve branches than the original twelve, which are not distributed proportionately to today's populations. The three-month limit on commercial loans and six-month limit on municipal government loans in Federal Reserve Act §10b also need to be extended; and we need a national funding agency for infrastructure, similar to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation that restored the depression-ridden U.S. economy in the 1930s. Hockett has drafted a bill for implementing his proposals.

That could work for long-term production, but families faced with rising food and energy bills need help right now. Until production catches up with demand, the innovative Cornell professor suggests that the Fed can counteract the speculation that is driving up those prices with "Open Market Operations," using its new Chicago Fed trading desk to short them in the market. Direct market intervention is highly controversial and could obviously be misused; but the tool exists, and, if properly directed, it could help satisfy the Fed's mandate to maintain consumer price stability.

To sum up: today's price inflation was triggered not so much by "too much money" as by "too little supply," due to lockdowns and mandates. The Fed can help restock

consumer supplies using tools already in its toolbox. They include Open Market Operations to counteract speculation, and the Discount Window to purchase loans from local banks that would be willing to fund Main Street businesses if they had some help from the national Lender of Last Resort. We need the sort of Discount Window envisioned by the drafters of the Federal Reserve Act, one providing the liquidity to backstop bank advances against the future productivity of local businesses.

Ellen Brown is an attorney, chair of the Public Banking Institute, and author of thirteen books including *Web of Debt*, and *Banking on the People*. She also co-hosts a radio program on PRN.FM called "It's Our Money." Her 300+ blog articles are posted at EllenBrown.com.



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THE DEMOCRATS AND SPECIAL INTERESTS

ALEX WEATHERHEAD

When former York Gov. Andrew Cuomo took the stage on August 10 to announce his resignation, offering the now-infamous “Italian defense” to allegations that he had sexually harassed 11 women, his response was being carefully monitored in real time. Jeffrey Pollock, a founding partner and the president of Global Strategy Group, had helped craft the public relations response to the scandal and was in direct contact with Cuomo’s top aide during the press conference, urging the governor to sound more contrite. While MSNBC anchor Katy Tur reported on the speech, Democratic operative Lis Smith took to a group chat for the team advising Cuomo, reporting gleefully: “Katy is saying my spin live... Like verbatim on CNN.”

Pollock, who was in the group chat, was uniquely qualified to contribute to the spin. Just two years prior, GSG, a consulting and polling firm, had produced a report on behalf of Time’s Up, the celebrity-led nonprofit that raises money to support victims of sexual harassment, titled “Opportunities to Engage: Voter Attitudes on Sexual Harassment.” By late February, Cuomo appeared to have made the most of his opportunities, launching a political comeback that cast aside contrition for vindication. “Politics won,” declared his new TV ad, “and New Yorkers lost a proven leader.”

Working for both the premier #MeToo organization and one of the highest-profile #MeToo offenders goes beyond a mere conflict of interest. A political operative playing both roles has a considerable advantage, as they learn how to craft a message precisely calibrated to disarm the opposing side by embedding directly within it. Cuomo framed his exit with an eye toward his reentrance. Time’s Up, meanwhile, imploded significantly as a result of the exposure of both Chair Roberta Kaplan and CEO Tina Tchen’s work helping Cuomo navigate the crisis. And now Cuomo is back, with GSG never having paid even the smallest political price.

Because they work behind the scenes, pollsters have a unique ability to escape scrutiny in American politics. Some of these firms have exploited that immunity to cash in on a startling amount of well-paid work that is directly and immediately at odds with the goals of the clients whose mission they claim to share.

Two firms providing the bulk of research, public relations consulting, and polling for members of the Democratic Party provide those same services to a wide array of corporate clients, many of whom are in direct opposition to the stated aims of their Democratic clientele. GSG and Lake Research Partners have a long history of partnering with candidates, officials, and causes aligned with the Democratic Party’s platform. A review of their other partnerships, however, calls into question the impartiality of the services rendered to the party.

To say that the Democratic Party and GSG have a close relationship would be a gross understatement. GSG boasts its service as pollsters for “some of Washington’s most esteemed leaders,” including Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.; Joe Manchin, D-W.Va.; Ed Markey, D-Mass.; and Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., as well as many Democratic House members. The firm further claims itself to be the “leading polling partner for national Democratic party committees and PACs.” White House press secretary Jen Psaki is herself an alumnus, having served as the senior vice president and managing director of GSG’s Washington, D.C., office from 2011 to 2012.

In its role as a research partner and political adviser, GSG conducts studies to make recommendations to politicians and organizations as to how they can best convey and target their messaging. GSG-led focus groups for NextGen America, a youth-focused super PAC, led to the creation of the “Democratic Avengers” ad campaign during the 2020 presidential election. At other times, GSG offers strategy advice for contentious issues. Appearing on the podcast “The Great Battlefield” in 2019, Pollock revealed the guidance he gave to all of the firm’s Democratic clients regarding whether to vote for or against Trump’s impeachment: “I put my faith in Nancy Pelosi any time,” he said. “The singular advice I told all members is follow her. She knows what she’s doing. ... Follow her, and whatever you do, don’t get out in front of her.

GSG’s partnerships have included numerous corporations with a vested interest in government regulation. Oil companies such as Chesapeake Energy

**Because
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— Alex Weatherhead

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Corp. and Lukoil, the third-largest corporation in Russia by revenue, were clients of GSG from 2007 to 2014 and 2006 to 2014, respectively. The firm has also partnered with Big Tech companies including Meta, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter; pharmaceutical companies such as GlaxoSmithKline, Purdue Pharma, and Pfizer; and major financial institutions like Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Pershing Square Holdings, and Vulcan Capital.

Uber and Lyft have each hired GSG to conduct research in support of their bids to resist reclassifying their drivers from independent contractors. David Weil, President Joe Biden's nominee for administrator of the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division, has staked a clear position in opposition to these efforts, saying, "Uber and Lyft produce a highly valued brand experience for consumers and investors based on their ability to control and direct drivers who are central to the service they provide. ... Those workers are employees, not contractors."

Weil's confirmation is currently being held up by members of the business lobby, and it will require full support from Senate Democrats to push through. The major Democratic holdout in Weil's confirmation is none other than Manchin, a GSG client since 2004, who has yet to fully explain his reluctance to confirm.

While the Democratic Party could hardly be classified as anti-corporate itself, several of GSG's political clientele profess to stand against the same corporate behaviors that GSG has enabled and continues to enable through its partnerships. When asked if the firm's corporate partnerships influence its work with Democratic clients, Pollock said in a written statement, "GSG is proud to help elect Democrats up and down ballot and our work for each of our clients is confidential and independent of any other work we do."

This confidential and independent work strains credulity given the oppositional goals of several of the firm's clients. There are instances, though, of GSG political clients acting against the interest of GSG corporate clients. In 2020, Gillibrand introduced the Data Protection Act to Congress, which would create an "independent Data Protection Agency to regulate the processing of personal data" in the executive branch — four months after Facebook, another GSG client since 2014, agreed to pay over half a million dollars for its role in the Cambridge Analytica data harvesting scandal. In such scenarios, GSG is content to make money from either side of the issue.

Lake Research Partners, too, counts many Democratic candidates and organizations among its clients. The firm conducted research for Biden's presidential campaign and both Bill and Hillary Clinton's respective presidential campaigns; it has also provided services to nine senators and 56 House members — including progressive Reps. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, and Katie Porter of California — among many other politicians, labor organizations, and committees.

Lake differentiates itself from other pollsters

through its lack of corporate partnerships. "We don't do conventional market research for corporate branding or products. Our clients, whether from the worlds of politics, philanthropy, advocacy, government, labor, or business, are seeking insights and strategy to advance a social purpose and a progressive, inclusive future," reads its website. A closer look at its history, however, shows a record of serving clients within the pharmaceutical industry and a decades-long partnership with Republican pollsters.

Lake works with several nonprofit organizations with nice-sounding names that act as fronts for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, or PhRMA, a trade group that lobbies on behalf of major pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer, Amgen, and GlaxoSmithKline. For at least 14 years, Lake has worked with the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease, a 501(c)(4) organization with a long list of partners, including Johnson & Johnson and Eli Lilly and Co., the drugmaker sued for driving up the price of insulin. In 2021, the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease spent at least \$5.3 million airing TV ads in 13 states and Washington, D.C., against allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. Since 2009, PhRMA has given over \$1.8 million to various firms to lobby on behalf of the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease.

Between 2019 and 2020, PhRMA donated funds to the campaigns of two Lake Research clients in their House races. Reps. Raul Ruiz, D-Calif., and Ron Kind, D-Wis., each received \$3,000 from the organization. Kind, who was in the top 25 recipients of pharmaceutical PAC funds in the 2020 election cycle, joined Rep. Scott Peters, D-Calif., last year in drafting a letter to Biden encouraging the president to continue denying low-income countries' request for a temporary waiver from intellectual property rules limiting their ability to mass produce Covid-19 vaccines. The letter, which read quite similarly to Pfizer's own opposition, came two weeks after several prominent Democratic senators drafted a letter of their own asking the president to "prioritize people over pharmaceutical company profits" by supporting the waiver.

Lake Research also conducted polling for the American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network in 2018, and it currently lists the group as an advocacy client. In 2019, Cancer Action Network ran nationwide ads opposing changes to Medicare. These changes would have given insurers more opportunities to steer patients toward lower-cost therapies and generic drugs rather than more expensive options. A Kaiser Health News analysis showed that Cancer Action Network reported \$671,500 in contributions from PhRMA and drug companies in 2015 alone, leading experts to question whether its opposition to the Medicare changes was rooted in the interests of patients or of drugmakers.

In addition to its work with these nonprofits, Lake has teamed up for decades with Republican-aligned polling and public relations firms. Celinda Lake of Lake Research and Ed Goeas, president of the Tarrance Group, a prominent Republican pollster since 1977, have partnered on bipartisan "Battleground Polls" since June

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1991. Among the 110 Republican clientele the group has successfully helped elect to political office are several members of Congress who voted against confirming the 2020 election — including former Reps. Devin Nunes, R-Calif., and Steve King, R-Iowa, and sitting Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla.

In October 2021, Lake Research and Tarrance published the results of a “Battleground Poll” in which Lake concluded, “Voters in this survey clearly prefer a politician who is willing to work together to get things done, even if it means compromising on their values sometimes (66%) over a politician who consistently fights for their values, even if this means not finding a solution very often (26%).” The poll in question offered only these two responses — a binary choice that leads a voter to conflate compromise with solutions and ideals with stagnation. (Eight percent of voters polled chose not to respond along the suggested lines, writing in their own answer to the question or not answering at all.) Perhaps it is this commitment to bipartisanship and “finding a solution” that Lake clients Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., refer to when they argue the necessity of a strong Republican Party and defang progressive initiatives, such as the infrastructure bill, to ensure bipartisan support.

The Tarrance Group is not Lake’s only “bipartisan” polling partnership. In 2017, Lake was commissioned to conduct a survey on gerrymandering in conjunction with WPA Intelligence, a Republican pollster founded by Texas Sen. Ted Cruz’s former director of research and analytics, Chris Wilson. WPA Intelligence claims to have “done work for over 100 of the Fortune 500 and been involved

in work for over 100 current and former members of the House of Representatives, the United States Senate, and gubernatorial and statewide officials across the nation,” making it “the go-to research and analytics firm for the conservative-right community.”

Lake Research and GSG are not the only polling firms that work with both Democratic and corporate clients. They are not even the only firms that work with some of the organizations mentioned above. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, a firm that, like GSG, conducts polling on behalf of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, has represented a variety of corporate clients including Monsanto, Verizon, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and UnitedHealthcare. Hart Research Associates, another prominent Democratic pollster, works with PhRMA as well as Eli Lilly. Along with SKDK, yet another major polling firm working with the Democratic Party, all of these organizations have counted as a client at one time or another the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

GSG and Lake, the public relations professionals they are, market themselves quite differently from one another. Lake’s website appeals to the progressive wing of the Democratic Party — extolling its virtue as a “woman-owned small business with a commitment to diversity.” Almost refreshingly honest, however, is GSG owning its function as an influence broker by advertising its team members’ “decades of experience working in government across state and federal capitols” and “deep relationships with top leaders of every level of government.”

Alex Weatherhead writes for the *Intercept* and other publications.



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A CLASH OF EMPIRES

V A N E V E R Y

Chalmers Johnson's notion of "blowback" is crucial for understanding the crisis in Ukraine. In his 1999 book of the same name, he argued that the US's aggressive policies abroad were provoking negative reactions from many of the governments and populations subjected to our imperial overreach, the symptom of all empires in their declining phase when they've tried to extend their zones of influence.

This was nearly a quarter century ago, before Russia had even partially recovered from the "shock therapy" delivered in the wake of the Soviet collapse by Wall Street which took advantage of the sudden forced sell-off of its once public-held assets at fire sale prices. This revolution returned massive wealth to a new regime of colonizers, keeping Russia in a dependent state like a third world country, victimized by authorities like the IMF which demand low wages for workers, adherence to "free" market principles, and the shrinkage of the public sector as price for financial support. It also contributed to the creation of oligopolies, the inevitable result of a low wage economy linked to radically decreased public regulation as we've seen develop here in the US and other western nations, the formula for the continuing spike of inequality. And these conditions, echoes of the Tsarist times, enabled the minting of Russia's first wave of Oligarchs.

Many in Russia during those years were not very happy about these quick and extreme changes. They lived through the horror of an eventually failed revolution but wanted to preserve some of its positives, like the safety net, still considered superior to that in many western countries, and the collective check on private power. This is why the Communist Party remained strong well into the current century, garnering significant electoral votes, even though a return to a Communist system was not in the cards.

We're surely witnessing now the blowback from these policies, from the failure to reconstruct the post-Cold War era in a humane fashion. We could have welcomed Russia into the western capitalist order by capitalizing this

suddenly capital-starved country, giving it the stake that would've helped it avoid the trauma it unfortunately had to endure.

Our attitude toward Russia is clarified in Francis Fukuyama's 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*. It celebrated our victory in the Cold War but went well beyond this to fully discredit socialist experiments, piling on the negatives to drive home the point that our system was superior. The ideological war between east and west had been resolved without a shot fired and in our favor. We were now beyond ideology, and we believed we had the license to dictate our model of progress to other nations, remake the world in our image. For the first time since we inherited the global empire in 1945, we had no major competitor. But despite the lack of a hot or cold enemy, we increased our presence around the globe. The number of military bases spiked through the 1990s, helping

to protect our investments. We stepped on a lot of toes in this decade, according to Johnson, cultivating the conditions for revenge that he believed contributed to 9/11.

And many more subsequently as we invaded Iraq and Afghanistan, ultimately killing astronomically more than died at this tragic event, overkilling to drive home the point that we had the power to police the globe, remake it in our image. But something happened in this long march from 1991 to the recent embarrassing exit from Afghanistan. We encountered new enemies that we couldn't defeat. We were unable to dictate as we'd imagined we could at that pinnacle of megalomaniac glory in 1991. We

remained in these countries, stewing in our failure to deliver the punch, sending mixed and false messages to justify our presence to the world. We had misread the status of our overextended empire. The world had evolved. There were new kinds of enemies surfacing, motivated by causes we couldn't understand, and new unexpected alliances. They were equipped with a warring temperament that refused to be dominated, and new forms of warfare that defied our tried and tested ingenuity. Our empire was becoming unsustainable.

Mr. Putin has surely went to school on these failures, capitalizing on the weakness of our overextended empire, our fitful efforts to motor regime changes, and especially on our crippled exit from Afghanistan. And perhaps he's seized the moment to realize his vision of an ascendant Eurasian empire. Years and years of perceived mistreatment by the

We could have welcomed Russia into the western capitalist order by capitalizing this suddenly capital-starved country, giving it the stake that would've helped it avoid the trauma it unfortunately had to endure.

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west certainly compounded his motivation, especially the demonizing of Russia and the chorus of allegations about influencing elections in this country ranged around the larger issue of---mostly---the Democrats' "Russiagate." Even reputable independent journalists jumped on this elections-bandwagon until a Special Prosecutor at least pared those claims back, forcing some to recant. The constant refrain of "dictator"---however much deserved---has substituted for any reasonable discussion about Mr. Putin's position in relation to this historic country. It's astounding how many in this country still call Russians, Communists!

We heralded Mr. Putin in the 1990s as the leader who was taking Russia in the right direction after the chaos of the Yeltsin years, but like so many of our former allies---Osama Bin Laden, Ho Chi Minh, to mention a few---he soon flipped to enemy status. Tragically, not enough consideration has been given to the conditions which created him. Of course, none of this mistreatment excuses the atrocity Mr. Putin has delivered to the world.

But it's revealing that much of the media coverage since the bombs dropped has become even less open to the larger picture, offering mostly a cursory glimpse of the issues that preceded the conflict. At times it approximates the spectacle of a grade-B western. The complexities of Russia's relationship to Ukraine, of the US's policies toward Russia since the 1991 dismantling of the Soviet Union, of NATO's creep eastward since this moment, especially its incursion into Russian territory in the late 1990s, of Ukraine's treatment of the Russian-speaking people in its eastern sector after the 2014 coup engineered by the Obama administration, all once discussion points for a potential diplomatic solution, have been mostly erased. The crisis is only a simple story. A larger-than-life dictator villain, obsessed with imperial grandeur, invaded a sovereign country, and the forces of good are committed to stopping him. Bad is bad, good is good. History is bunk. You're either on the bus or off it.

It's of course easy for many to suppress the issues that were allegedly on the negotiating table to deliver a diplomatic solution given Putin's excesses since the invasion. But some of these were credible. Mr. Putin demanded from the start that Ukraine should maintain its neutrality through a constitutional guarantee; refuse to join the EU or NATO; acknowledge Crimea as Russian territory; and recognize the separatist republics of Donetsk and Lugansk as independent states. He recently agreed to meet with Zelensky and discuss these issues if there is an immediate ceasefire. If these issues are even mentioned now in the press, they're passed over and dismissed as Russian propaganda. If individuals bring them up, they're accused of being unpatriotic, a right-wing sympathizer, or even a Trumper.

Facing these issues now and attempting to negotiate a compromise could stave off disastrous consequences, claimed Yanis Varoufakis in a recent interview (*DemocracyNow*, 3/24). The longer the conflict continues the more hostile the rhetoric has become. There are even increasing calls for a no-fly zone. If that happens, we could be facing Armageddon. Instead of forcing the diplomatic

route, the Biden administration has steadily increased our involvement, sending more weapons and aid and soldiers in what it claims are defensive moves. But this will only inflame the situation and Mr. Putin, and likely prolong the war, making it more difficult to forge a compromise and prevent more atrocities.

What's at the root of this refusal? It's surely "American Exceptionalism" again, our inability to accept that we can be wrong. Only other countries should be blamed. The slants of much of the media coverage now are thoroughly steeped in "American Exceptionalism." We are morally outraged about Russia's Oligarchs, but our Oligarchs have been given a pass for generations. Russia is targeting civilians and committing war crimes, but the astounding number of civilians killed---in the millions---in our invasions were mostly erased from public consciousness. In fact, we refused to participate in the International Criminal Court. Where was this kind of media coverage then? Only Russia has imperial fantasies. We step into situations for defensive, humanistic reasons to restore order all over the globe.

This helps explain why we're suppressing the role of NATO in this whole crisis. We're ever ready to pump up its resources and encourage our "allies" to follow suit but can't face the fact that a military alliance that was the creature of the Cold War with the Soviet Union wasn't dismantled when this society was dissolved, as the Reagan administration authorities at the time said it would be after the reconstruction, effectively positioning Russia as the perpetual enemy. NATO and the US have been engaged in a silent war of aggression against Russia for over 30 years.

This refusal to negotiate must reflect the desire to prolong the war itself since the US and its NATO allies have the most to gain, according to the US Peace Council. It will help to further unify NATO under US domination, reduce Russian economic competition in the European energy market, justify increasing the US defense budget, and facilitate the sale of war material to NATO vassals ("Peace Council Statement on Russia's Military Intervention in Ukraine," *Portside*, 3/26/2022).

The Biden administration must be secretly elated by this misadventure since now it will have no need to even try and resuscitate its flagging domestic agenda. Keep the populace fixated on external affairs, one of the seminal lessons of George Orwell's 1984.

It should be mentioned that for some time before the hostilities commenced Europe was already turning toward Russia, China, and other non-western sources for its energy needs since they were more economical (Michael Hudson, "America's Real Adversaries are Its European and Other Allies," *CounterPunch*, 2/11/2022). This shift has threatened to damage our already dismal export-import imbalance. So, it's revealing that President Biden just recently announced that the US will work with the EU and "international partners" to ramp up liquefied natural gas shipments to Europe to help the continent wean itself off Russian energy! It will "supply an additional 15 billion cubic meters of LNG to Europe this year" (Gloria Gonzalez, "US, EU Pledge to Seek New Natural Gas Supplies to Displace

Russia,” *Politico*, 3/25/2022).

And then there’s the oil issue, the war giving this American oligopoly the power to raise prices, justified to a degree because of the supply shortages but not for the price-gouging at the consumer pump. Polls show over 80% of Americans believe the oil companies are engaging in profiteering, a fact which has even gotten their owned Congress to take note. It’s also ironic that these same companies have been colluding with Russia’s state-owned energy companies since 2014, generating billions of dollars in profits for Mr. Putin’s war chest, and helping to prolong the war (Jessica Corbett, “How Big Oil Funded Putin’s War Chest,” *Common Dreams*, 3/25/22).

And finally, the expenditures on defense have spiked here and in Europe due to the war. Mr. Biden’s Pentagon budget has increased to well over 800 billion dollars. Contractors are cuing up for the cash. Budgets don’t go down!

The beneficiaries of this catastrophe are breeding fast, interests who will wield considerable pressure to stay on the gravy train, keep the hostilities going. This power bloc will also likely pressure the Biden administration to veto any proposed peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine should one hopefully present itself soon.

Will these entrenched interests dictate the course of events in Ukraine, help to prop up an empire reeling from years of misadventures and decline, or will the anti-war forces step up and counter this pressure, force the current stewards of the empire to face up to the legacy of addictive domination and embrace the evolving multi-polar world, or possibly the multi-civilizational one that Samuel Huntington---in his 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations*---posed against the Fukuyama script?

PAGE

AGAINST THE MACHINE



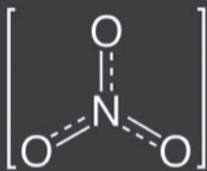
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DIPLOMACY U.S. PEACE COUNCIL STATEMENT

U.S. PEACE COUNCIL

What we all hoped would not happen has happened. The Russian Federation sent troops into Ukraine on February 24 in response to decades of relentless US-led NATO provocation. The present situation puts many serious, fundamental questions before the global peace movement.

A fierce propaganda campaign, long simmering with Russiagate and the onset of a new Cold War, demonizing the Russian president and state has intensified. Wholesale condemnation of Russia has assumed global proportions, instigated by the US and allies, and supported by their sycophantic media. Alternative views and voices of opposition to the official anti-Russian narrative have been suppressed or shut down.

Not surprisingly, many people subjected to this toxic bombardment of massive propaganda have placed all the blame on Russian aggression. Various reasons are given to justify their, in our view dangerous, position. Let us look at some of these justifications and assess the degree of their moral, legal, and political validity.

Applying the UN Charter

The first and most morally justifiable reason given is the argument that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is in violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Based on this fundamental principle, shouldn't the U.S. Peace Council, a staunch supporter and advocate of the Charter, also condemn Russia as a violator?

Let us look at the UN Charter to see whether we can firmly decide that Russia is in violation:

Article 2

3. All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.

4. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the terri-

torial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

Article 51

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations....

Looking at Article 2, especially paragraph 4, it can be argued that Russia is in violation. But based on Article 51, the Russian Federation has invoked its right to self-defense and has duly informed the Security Council. Russia presents important arguments in favor of its use of force under Article 51.

The Ukraine government has acted as the US and NATO's proxy in hostilely encircling the Russian Federation. Ukraine military and paramilitaries have attacked

Donetsk and Lugansk since 2014, resulting in the deaths of some 14,000 of their own people, many of whom were Russian speakers and some Russian citizens. Most recently, Russia discovered an imminent Ukrainian government plan for a large-scale invasion of the Donetsk and Lugansk that border Russia. Russia now recognizes these two republics as independent states, after they asked Russia to aid in their defense.

Russia clearly asked for security guarantees from the US and NATO, which refused to adequately respond to Russia's concerns. Ukraine was planning to host US/NATO nuclear weapons on its territory that could reach

Moscow in a matter of five minutes. This took place in the alarming context of the US decision in 2019 to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia.

If this is not an act of war against Russia, what is it? Aren't those who are complicit in an act of murder equally guilty of murder? This is not to say that Russia was right in its decision. Rather we are insisting that the UN Charter should be applied to Ukraine on the basis of facts, as a specific case with a given historical background. Second, the United Nations itself has been unsuccessful in upholding its own Charter in the face of blatant violations by the NATO states. Here, our intention is not to justify the Russian action, but to provide a realistic context for the need to uphold the UN Charter.

**As a peace
organization,
we cannot
principally agree
with the escalation
of the Ukraine
conflict to the
level of military
confrontation.**

— U.S. Peace Council

Since the end of the Soviet Union, when the US became the sole superpower, Washington has blatantly ignored the UN Charter in its drive to impose global “full spectrum” dominance. We should understand NATO as more than just an “alliance” of nominally sovereign states, but as an imperial military integrated under US command.

Let us look at two of the relevant articles of the UN Charter that have been trampled upon by the imperialist powers since the end of the century:

Article 6

A Member of the United Nations which has persistently violated the Principles contained in the present Charter may be expelled from the Organization by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.

Article 25

The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter.

US, NATO, and their allies have increasingly violated these and other articles of the UN Charter over the past two decades. Here are just a few examples:

— In 1999 for 78 days, NATO attacked, dropped 28,000 bombs, and shattered Yugoslavia into pieces without the consent of the United Nations.

— In 2001, as a response to the 9/11 attack, US declared an indefinite “war on terror,” affecting at least

60 countries, including seven targeted for illegal regime change.

— In 2003, US and the members of its “coalition of the willing” illegally attacked and invaded Iraq in defiance of the UN Security Council.

— In 2011 US, UK, and France unilaterally and without the consent of the UN Security Council attacked Libya and killed its leader, Moammar Qaddafi.

— Starting in 2011, US, NATO, and regional allies started a proxy war in Syria by arming and funding terrorist groups, a war which is still taking innocent lives.

— In 2014, the US staged a coup with the help of neo-Nazi forces in Ukraine and established a pro-NATO government, which led to the massacre of Russian-speakers in eastern Ukraine.

— Throughout this period, the US and its European allies have imposed illegal unilateral economic sanctions on more than 40 countries of the world, causing the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent people.

— And, of course, one should mention the illegal occupation and annexation of Syrian and Palestinian territories by Israel with full support of the United States.

The crisis facing us in Ukraine today is a result of the UN’s inability to uphold its charter against such illegal actions by the sole superpower and its NATO allies, which has enabled US/NATO to push Russia and other targeted nations of the world into such an impossible situation.

Yes, we should defend the UN Charter, but not selectively as imperialism hypocritically wants us to. We



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should not allow ourselves to be duped by imperialism's "blame the victim" narrative when the victim is forced to defend itself.

Inter-Imperialist War

Many, especially on the left, have taken the position that Russia is a capitalist/imperialist state, that this is an inter-imperialist war, and that we have to condemn both sides equally. But whether or not Russia is an imperialist state is irrelevant to the issue at hand.

First, such a position implies that only countries with certain socio-economic systems need to be defended against imperialist aggression and others should be left to fend for themselves. Given the fact that the majority of countries targeted by imperialism are capitalist themselves, such a position leads to weakening the anti-imperialist struggle.

The second and more important problem with this kind of argument is that it removes the whole issue of aggression from the picture. It no longer matters who is the aggressor and who is the victim. It obviates the fact that the US seeks to be the world's hegemon with global "full-spectrum" dominance. In short, US imperialism generated a war without using US soldiers.

Let us, for the sake of argument, assume that Russia is indeed an imperialist state and that what is going on is nothing but an inter-imperialist war. Even so, isn't this inter-imperialist war going to impact the future of humanity? Don't we all have a stake in its outcome?

False Equivalency of US/NATO and Russian Roles

As a peace organization, we cannot principally agree with the escalation of the Ukraine conflict to the level of military confrontation. However, we oppose the one-sided position of condemning Russia alone.

Some others have taken a more "balanced" position of condemning both sides, by simultaneously calling a halt in NATO expansion and the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. But this position, too, ignores the causal relationships inherent in the Ukraine situation. It places the cause and effect on the same level, while ignoring the fact that the NATO expansion is the material cause of the Russian military response. For these reasons, the position of equivalent blame superficially looks balanced, but it really isn't.

Second, the natures of the two demands are different. The first is a general, strategic, long-term demand; the second is an immediate and concrete one. By formulating the demands in this way, such a position inevitably ends up putting the main pressure on Russia alone.

Third, the first demand about NATO expansion is not specific to the case of Ukraine while the second one is. It ignores the fact that US/NATO has flooded Ukraine with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of military equipment along with dispatching military and covert operations personnel to "advise." A correct demand would be recognition of Ukraine as a neutral state, removal of all foreign weapons and military personnel (including

mercenaries) from Ukraine, and full implementation of the Minsk II agreement.

NATO's success in its effort to expand to the Ukraine-Russia border would create a hellish world and lead to the possibility of a nuclear war. Let us not forget that the story would not end there, and Belarus could be the next target. So, it is imperative for the peace movement to do everything we can to guarantee Ukraine's neutrality and US/NATO's recognition of it.

U.S. Peace Council Assessment

The US with its NATO allies have not only provoked this tragedy but have sought to prolong it in their refusal to engage in negotiations for a ceasefire. While no one wins in a war, the US has had the most to gain: further unifying NATO under US domination, reducing Russian economic competition in the European energy market, justifying increasing the US war budget, and facilitating sales of war materiel to NATO vassals. A Europe further divided between the EU/UK and Russia benefits none but the US.

On the basis of this assessment of the present situation in Ukraine, the U.S. Peace Council raises the following immediate demands, in order of priority and urgency:

1. Immediate ceasefire and dispatch of humanitarian aid to Ukraine, including the self-proclaimed independent republics.
2. Recognition of the neutrality of Ukraine.
3. Withdrawal of foreign militaries, weapons, and equipment – including mercenaries – from Ukraine.
4. Resumption of negotiations for a permanent settlement of internal conflicts in Ukraine with the participation of all parties concerned.

U.S. Peace Council

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FROM SHOCK THERAPY TO PUTIN'S WAR

KATHARINA PISTOR

As Russian tanks battle through Ukraine on the orders of an authoritarian president, it is worth noting that Ukrainians are not the only ones who crave democracy. Russians, too, have taken to the streets – at great personal risk – to protest Vladimir Putin's outrageous act of aggression. But they are fighting an uphill battle in a country that has never been given a chance to become democratic.

When such an opportunity was available, it was subverted not by Putin and his kleptocratic milieu, but by the West. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union 30 years ago, American economic advisers convinced Russia's leaders to focus on economic reforms and put democracy on the backburner – where Putin could easily extinguish it when the time came.

This is no trivial historical contingency. Had Russia become a democracy, there would have been no need to talk about NATO and its eastward expansion, no invasion of Ukraine, and no debates about whether the West owes Russia's civilization greater respect. (As a German, I recoil at that last proposition, which has clear echoes of Hitler and his self-proclaimed leadership over a "civilization.")

Let us recount the sequence of events. In November 1991, the Russian Supreme Soviet (parliament) gave then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin extraordinary powers and a 13-month-long mandate to launch

reforms. Then, in December 1991, the Soviet Union was officially dissolved by the Belovezh Accords, which created the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine declared respect for one another's independence.

Surrounded by a small group of Russian reformers and Western advisers, Yeltsin used this unique historical moment to launch an unprecedented program of economic "shock therapy." Prices were liberalized, borders were opened,

delay or even undermine economic policymaking. Only by moving fast – cutting the dog's tail with one blow of the ax – would Russia be put on a path to economic prosperity and the Communists be kept out of power for good. With radical market reforms, the Russian people would see tangible returns and become enamored with democracy automatically.

It was not to be. The Yeltsin presidency turned out to be an unmitigated disaster – economically, socially, legally, and politically.

Overhauling a Soviet-style centrally planned economy in the space of just 13 months proved to be impossible. Price and trade liberalization on their own did not create markets. That would have required legal institutions, but there was no time to establish them. Yes, extreme shortages disappeared, and street markets sprang up everywhere. But that is a far cry from nurturing the kind of markets needed to facilitate the allocation of resources on which companies and households rely.

Moreover, the shock therapy unleashed such severe and sudden social and economic disruptions that it turned the public against the

reforms and the reformers. The Supreme Soviet refused to extend Yeltsin's extraordinary powers, and what happened next would set the stage for the rise of authoritarian presidentialism in Russia.

Yeltsin and his allies refused to give up. They declared the existing Russian constitution of 1977 illegitimate, and Yeltsin proceeded to assume power unilaterally, while calling for a referendum to legitimize the move. But the constitutional court and the parliament refused to budge, and a deep political crisis ensued. In the end, the standoff was resolved

**Democratizing
Russia may
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given the country's
history of
centralized power.**

– Katharina Pistor

and rapid privatization began – all by presidential decree. Nobody in Yeltsin's circle bothered to ask whether this was what Russia's citizens wanted. And nobody paused to consider that Russians might first want a chance to develop a sound constitutional foundation for their country, or to express through an election their preference for who should govern them.

The reformers and their Western advisers simply decided – and then insisted – that market reforms should precede constitutional reforms. Democratic niceties would

by tanks, which Yeltsin called in to dissolve the Russian parliament in October 1993, leaving 147 people dead.

To be sure, many members of parliament were opponents of Yeltsin and his team, and perhaps wanted to turn back the clock. But it was Yeltsin who set a dangerous new precedent for how disputes over the country's future would be resolved. Tanks, not votes, would decide. And Yeltsin and his team didn't stop there. They also rammed through a constitution that enshrined a powerful president with strong decree and veto powers, and with no serious checks and balances.

I still recall a revealing conversation that I, a student of Russia's reforms at the time, had with Dmitry Vasiliev, a top member of Yeltsin's privatization team. When

I pointed out the shortcomings of the draft constitution, he said they would simply fix it if the wrong person ascended to power. They never did, of course – nor could they have. Vasiliev's statement fully encapsulated how the economic reformers thought about constitutional democracy.

In December 1993, the new constitution was adopted through a referendum, which was held jointly with elections to the new parliament. Yeltsin's candidates suffered a stunning defeat; but with the president's new constitutional powers secured, the economic reforms continued. Yeltsin was then "re-elected" in 1996 through a manipulated process that had been planned in Davos and orchestrated by the newly minted Russian oligarchs.

Three years later, Yeltsin made Putin prime minister and anointed him as his successor.

Democratizing Russia may always have been a long shot, given the country's history of centralized power. But it would have been worth a try. The ill-advised prioritization of economic goals over democratic processes holds lessons well beyond Russia. By choosing capitalism over democracy as the foundation for the post-Cold War world, the West jeopardized stability, prosperity, and, as we now see again in Ukraine, peace and democracy – and not only in Eastern Europe.

Katharina Pistor is the author of *The Code of Capital: How the Law Creates Wealth and Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2019). She teaches at Columbia University.



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PROFITEERING OIL GIANTS MADE \$205 BILLION IN PROFITS IN 2021

KENNY STANCIL

While millions of working people have been hurt by surging gas prices, a new analysis shows that 25 of the world's biggest fossil fuel corporations collectively pulled in an "eye-popping" \$205 billion in profits last year—and Big Oil is exploiting Russia's war on Ukraine to charge even more at the pump in 2022 and advance its financial interests.

According to a new report from government watchdog Accountable.US, top oil and gas companies took "full advantage" of last year's sky-high prices and record profits. Fourteen firms rewarded shareholders with more than \$35 billion in stock buybacks and dividend bumps.

As the report details, Big Oil has been bragging to investors about its windfall profits on recent earnings calls. Chevron, for instance, called 2021 one of its "most successful years ever." Shell CEO Ben Van Beurden described it as a "momentous year." Meanwhile, Coterra CEO Tom Jordan characterized high gas prices as "good," and Equinor CEO Anders Opedal marveled at how the industry has been "capturing value from high prices."

Last year's record profits came as average gas prices in the U.S. steadily increased—hitting around \$3.40 per gallon in December 2021, up from \$2.10 a year before. As consumer demand rose last year following a brief coronavirus-driven decline in 2020, shareholders pressured fossil fuel corporations to

restrict supply to drive prices higher.

Oil and gas costs have soared even higher during the first three months of 2022. Since President Joe Biden recently announced that the U.S. would ban imports of Russian fossil fuels in response to Moscow's deadly assault on Ukraine, the average price for a gallon of gas in the U.S. has continued to climb, surpassing \$4.31 a month ago.

Given that the United Kingdom and the European Union have also taken steps to clamp down on imports of Russian oil and gas,

the pockets of wealthy oil executives who receive massive chunks of their compensation in company stock," states the report.

When Biden announced the U.S. boycott of Russian petroleum products, he stressed that this is "no time for profiteering or price-gouging."

The Congressional Progressive Caucus followed up with a call to swiftly pass legislation to prevent more "shameless" price hikes, ramp up investments in renewable energy, and raise wages and lower the costs of necessities for working families amid high levels of inflation, which 82% of U.S. voters attribute to "corporate greed."

Big Oil, meanwhile, has sought to deflect blame for worsening pain at the pump, baselessly accusing Biden—who approved more permits for drilling on public lands and waters in 2021 than former President Donald Trump did in 2017—of suppressing domestic extraction.

As Biden bragged last week, U.S. fossil fuel corporations "pumped more oil during my first year in office than they did during my predecessor's first year."

Domestic oil and gas production is "approaching record

levels," said Biden, "and we're on track to set a record for oil production next year." The president, who has ordered the release of tens of millions of barrels of oil from the nation's strategic reserves, argued that any blame for untapped extractive potential should be placed on the shoulders of those who are sitting on millions of acres of federal property. "They could be drilling right now, yesterday, last week, last year," Biden said, referring to leaseholders who possess thousands of unused permits.

Kyle Herrig, president of

**Last decade's
drilling and fracking
boom turned the
Permian Basin into the
most productive oil
and gas field in the world,
transforming the U.S.
into a major exporter
of fossil fuels but keeping
prices low, much to
the chagrin of shareholders.**

— Kenny Stancil

fossil fuel executives are reportedly salivating at the prospect of forcing consumers to accept higher costs amid the war.

According to Accountable.US, the fossil fuel giants responsible for hiking prices have already announced plans to buy back nearly \$80 billion in stocks in 2022, boasting of their ability to deliver "even better" returns for shareholders this year. Devon Energy, for example, said last month that doubling down on share buybacks is the "clear thing for us to do."

"All this money helps to line

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PROFITEERING

Accountable.US, said in a statement that “as Americans encounter higher prices to fill their gas tanks or heat their homes, Big Oil is grasping at straws to explain why they are swimming in unused leases and hundreds of billions of dollars in profits—money they hand over to wealthy oil and gas company executives and shareholders rather than struggling consumers.”

Last decade’s drilling and fracking boom turned the Permian Basin into the most productive oil and gas field in the world, transforming the U.S. into a major exporter of fossil fuels but keeping prices low, much to the chagrin of shareholders.

The unwillingness of oil and gas companies to boost production in recent months “has been driven by investor sentiment,” Helima Croft, head of global commodity strategy at RBC Capital Markets, told CNN last year. Wall Street, she said, doesn’t want producers “to spoil the party” by expanding supply.

As Pavel Molchanov, an analyst at Raymond James, told the news outlet earlier this month: “Oil and gas companies do not want to drill more. They are under pressure from the financial community to pay more dividends, to do more share buybacks instead of the proverbial ‘drill baby drill,’ which is the way they would have done things 10 years ago. Corporate strategy has fundamentally changed.”

Herrig argued that “it’s time for Big Oil to stop lying about the

Biden administration’s public land policies, quit using it as a cover to cash in on inflation and the crisis in Ukraine, and pass the benefits of their massive profits on to consumers.”

Recently congressional Democrats introduced the bicameral Big Oil Windfall Profits Tax. The measure would hit large fossil fuel companies with a per-barrel tax—whether the oil is domestically produced or imported—equal to 50% of the difference between the current price of a barrel of oil and the average price per barrel between 2015 and 2019. An estimated \$45 billion in annual revenue would be redistributed to U.S. households in the form of quarterly rebates.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Biden said last week, “should motivate us to accelerate the transition to clean energy.”

“Loosening environmental regulations and pulling back clean energy investment... will not lower energy prices for families,” said the president. “But transforming our economy to run on electric vehicles powered by clean energy, with tax credits to help American families winterize their homes and use less energy—that will, that will help.”

“If we do what we can,” he added, “it will mean that no one has to worry about prices at the gas pump in the future.”

Earlier this month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that humanity has a “brief and rapidly closing window”

to avoid the worst effects of the fossil fuel-driven climate emergency, which is on track to exacerbate deadly extreme weather, with especially catastrophic consequences for the world’s poorest and most vulnerable.


While progressives have long urged Biden to exercise his executive authority to the fullest possible extent to improve the lives of working people and help secure a livable planet in the face of staunch opposition in Congress, they also have not given up on pushing for further legislative action.

Nearly 90 House Democrats recently urged Biden to revive the party’s stalled reconciliation package—which has been approved by the lower chamber but blocked in the Senate by every Republican plus right-wing Democrats Joe Manchin (W.Va.) and Kyrsten Sinema (Ariz.)—by prioritizing measures designed to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

In addition, more than 120 advocacy groups called on Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) to swiftly translate the party’s domestic priorities into a reconciliation package that can reach Biden’s desk by next month.

“We cannot wait another day,” said Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-N.Y.), “to safeguard the future of humanity.”

Kenny Stancil writes for *Common Dreams* and other publications.




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LABOR REFORM FIGHT INFLATION WITH SUPPLY SIDE LABOR REFORM

TODD BUCHHOLZ AND
MICHAEL MINDLIN

In the past few years, a million retired Americans have picked up a pickleball racket. We would have less inflation if they had picked up a hammer, wrench, or pencil instead. “Help Wanted” signs are everywhere, from coffee shops to pharmaceutical plants. Advanced economies could ease one major source of inflation by inducing more people to join the workforce, especially those at the two ends of the labor barbell: older people and young people.

Owing to the whirling printing press of central banks, excessive government spending, shipping disruptions, and now Vladimir Putin, inflation has spiked to levels not seen since *Rocky II* (1979). But with a supply-side labor policy, we can help fill the record 11.3 million job vacancies in the United States, while the Federal Reserve and its counterparts elsewhere figure out how to drain their bloated balance sheet.

In the popular press, the US economy appears to be blessed with Energizer bunnies. Tom Brady breaks touchdown records at age 44, Clint Eastwood directs movies at 89, and William Shatner boldly goes into space at 90. Despite these stunning achievements, the proportion of retired people in the economy has jumped by one-third over the past 15 years.

At the same time, more than 20 million prime-working-age (25-54) Americans effectively wake up each morning, smell the coffee, and then scroll through cat videos on TikTok until lunch. They

tell US Bureau of Labor Statistics surveyors that they “do not want a job now.” Sofa-dwelling gamers and crypto bros might help Xbox and Coinbase prosper, but a low labor-force participation rate is bad for the broader economy – and the country.

A smart supply-side labor strategy has three prongs. It should draw some of the “unworked” back into jobs by correcting public pension distortions, attacking the epidemic of occupational licensing and credentialism, and defending gig workers and the platform economy from heavy-handed regulation.

Seniors respond to tax

Unfortunately, Social Security penalizes retirees who return to work by cutting their monthly benefits.

– Todd Buchholz and Michael Mindlin

incentives, just as they respond to early bird dinner specials. Unfortunately, Social Security penalizes retirees who return to work by cutting their monthly benefits. A 62-year-old recipient loses \$2 of benefits for every \$1 she earns over \$19,560. The Urban Institute calculates that while a median-income 60-year-old faces an implicit tax on work of about 15%, the rate jumps to over 30% at age 66. So why bother working?

With America’s declining birth rate, each retiree now leans on a mere 2.7 active workers, a dependency ratio that is expected to worsen to 2.3 active workers per retiree by 2035. Countries like France, Italy, and Japan

face an even more dire calculus. To manage this imbalance, pension taxes for seniors should be eliminated when they reach a certain number of years in the workforce. After 45 years, for example, an individual would be “paid in full” and could continue to work without facing penalties or payroll taxes. Too many energetic seniors are moving to “active” communities too soon, indulging in rum punch when they might prefer punching a time card.

The government should also create better incentives for young people. In Italy, before COVID struck, nearly 30% of young people aged 20 to 34 were classified as NEET (“neither in education, employment, nor training”). The US labor-force participation rate has dropped 17% for 16-24-year-olds since 2000. In 2000, over half of teens worked during the summer; now, only about one-third do. Cooking hot dogs on the boardwalk may not do much for an academic resume, but it does build lifelong skills like self-discipline and time management. Moreover, according to a Northeastern University study, low-income high-schoolers who work are more likely to graduate.

With a smarter supply-side labor strategy, 16-24-year-olds who pay into government retirement plans would be credited at double the current payout rate when they retire. A 20-year-old who earns \$15,000 in 2022 and pays about \$1,200 in Social Security taxes would be credited at retirement as if she had earned \$30,000.

Another major problem is that workers of all ages who want to enter new fields must navigate around government barricades, including pricey licensing requirements. Nearly one-quarter of EU and US jobs require a license, compared to under 5% in the 1950s. While licensing makes

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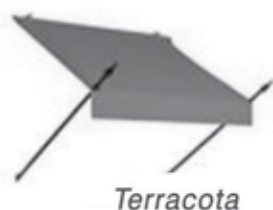


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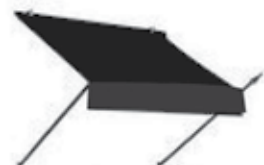
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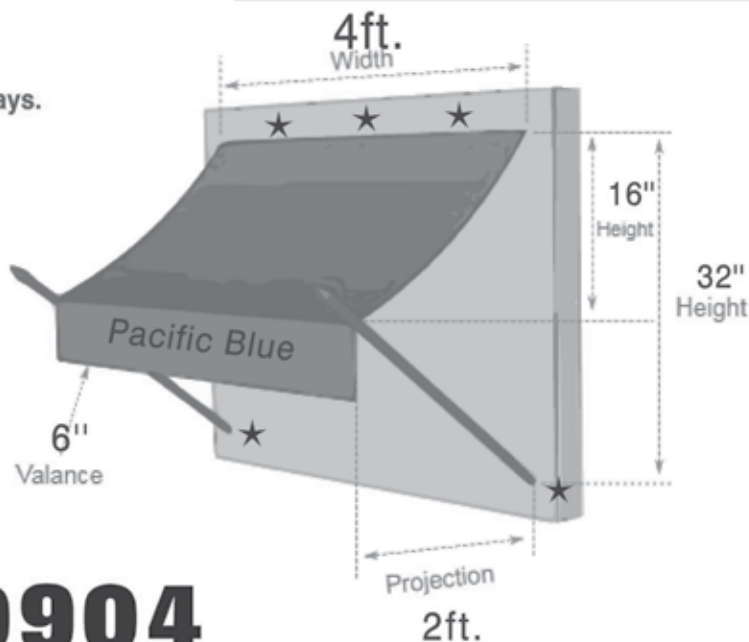
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LABOR REFORM

sense for surgeons and pilots, one can only wonder why the state of Arizona forces hair stylists to take 1,600 hours of classes. A Phoenix policeman spends 1,040 hours in training. Apparently, handling a blow-dryer is far more dangerous than handling a .40 caliber Glock.

This licensing epidemic has driven up costs for workers and consumers. In a world of gig work and online learning, even college-degree requirements seem old-fangled. According to the employment platform Indeed, 72% of employers think coding bootcamp grads “are just as prepared and likely to be high performers as candidates with computer science degrees.” A senior executive at Google declared that college grades are “worthless as a criterion for hiring.” No surprise then that IBM announced that half of its US jobs are now open to anyone with the right skills, and Ernst & Young (UK) flung open its doors to non-university grads. To excel at a tech job requires staying on top of the latest industry innovations – hardly a specialty of

tenured professors lecturing from last year’s notes. Governments can take the lead by hiring the best candidates, not necessarily those with gilded diplomas.

Finally, governments should stop undermining the gig economy. Gig workers perform an inflation-fighting service when they bring into use a spare apartment, a garaged car, or an idle dump truck sitting on the side of a construction site. Re-classifying these workers as employees robs them of flexibility and pushes up prices. New York City capped the profits on food-delivery companies, which only hurts city-dwellers. Parliamentary committees in the European Union, Australia, and Canada also are taking aim at firms like Airbnb and DoorDash.

A smarter labor policy would create opportunities for those who want to work, while combating inflation and helping reopen some of the nearly one-third of small businesses that were shuttered by lockdowns. For healthy people, retirement and other noble endeavors

like Xbox and pickleball can wait for another day.

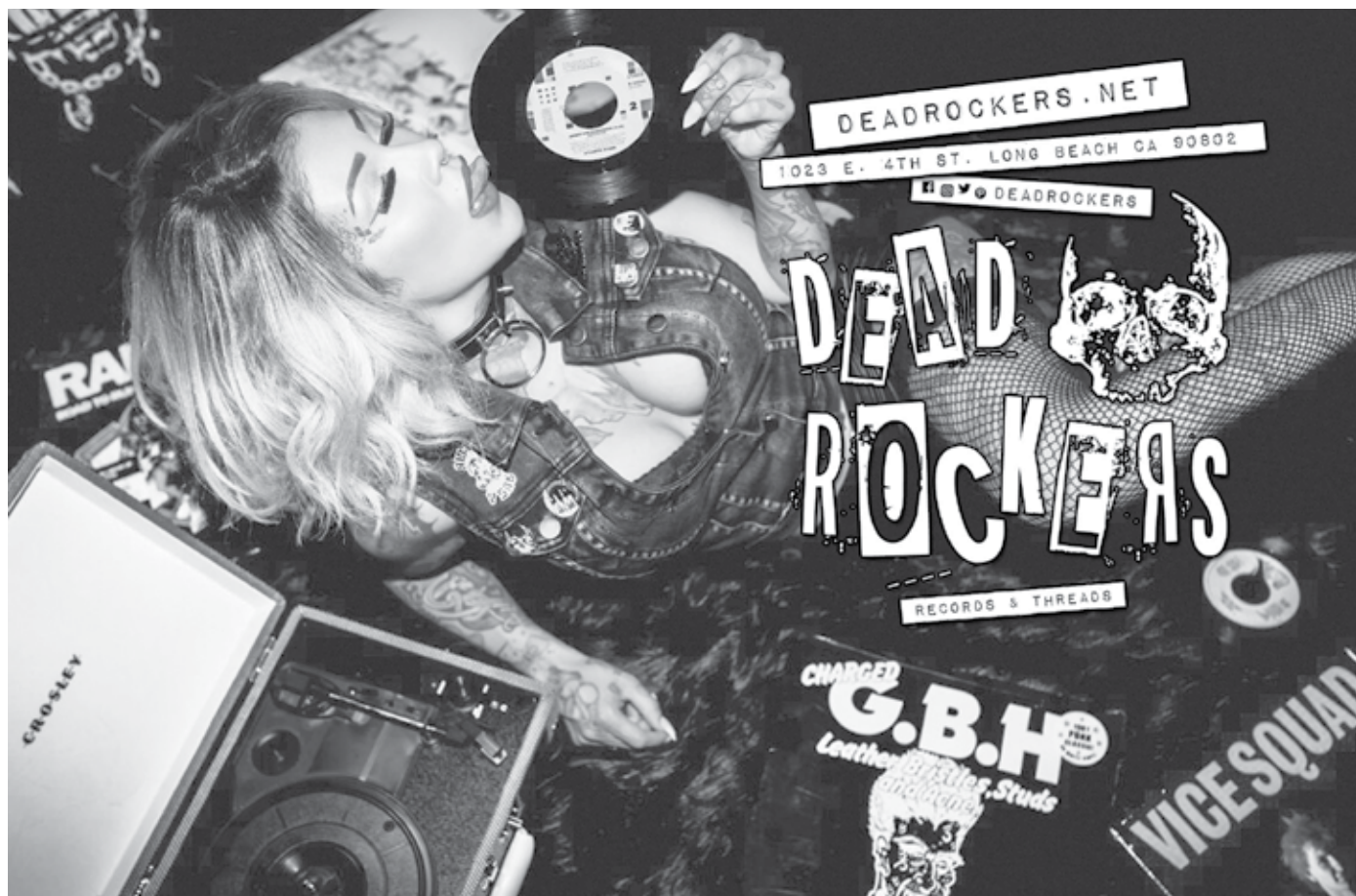
Todd Buchholz writes for the *Intercept* and other publications. Michael Mindlin writes for *Project Syndicate* and other publications.



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WAIT...WHAT???

AN ADDED WAY TO FIGHT INFLATION WHICH WILL LESSEN THE FREQUENCY (AND AMOUNT OF) INTEREST RATE HIKES AND QUANTITATIVE TIGHTENING (QT) THE FED NOW INTENDS TO IMPOSE

HAROLD ZIMMERMAN

IN ADDITION TO President Biden ordering the release of 180 Million Barrels of Oil from our Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) to be distributed over the next six (6) months basically at a rate of about One Million Barrels per day and his decision to restart domestic oil production ASAP to counteract the current high gas prices at the pump along with other actions The Administration has taken over the past year to resolve the numerous Supply Chain Issues we've all experienced as a Nation as a result of The Pandemic>>>

On April 6, 2022 (the date +1 of this article), THE FED ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO IMPOSE a series of Interest Rate Hikes and some VERY serious Quantitative (Belt) Tightening pulling Money-Capital out of Our Economy reversing the emergency measures it took in response to The Pandemic where it "pumped" into The Economy about \$9 Trillion Dollars.) And over the next year it will take out some \$1.1 Trillion Dollars at a rate of \$95 Billion (\$60 Billion in Treasuries and \$35 Billion in MBS (Mortgage-Backed Securities) PER MONTH beginning this month.

TO BETTER HELP FIGHT INFLATION (now and possibly in the future), the Federal Government could ALSO have in place a system, a financial mechanism, one that is

self-regulating based upon positive (tax) incentives which would motivate investors and the business, corporate community to "shunt" money/Capital AWAY from the Private (business and investment) Sector when the "Private Sector" becomes "over-amped" with too much Capital (Money Supply—"too many dollars") at a time when business and/or investment opportunities (including the stock market) are "too few", becoming "de minimis", having been fully "played out", "Bid-Up" with The Economy, in essence, approaching a point of Full "Economic Expansion".

THIS PLAN TO BETTER HELP FIGHT INFLATION as The Fed "winds down" its Quantitative Easing (deficit spending aka QE) and Mortgage-based Asset Purchases would allow The Fed NOT to be SO DEPENDENT to hike interest rates as much and as often as it NOW plans to in an attempt to slow The Economy down so as TO get a "grip" on our Present Inflation Problem.

Currently, The Fed intends to raise Interest rates 1/2% X 4 times (50 basis points each hike) at their next 4 FOMC meetings, then 5 more X 1/4% rate hikes each (25 basis points each) for a total 3.25% in Interest Rate increases. And when THIS article "comes out", there could be new information and NEW FORECASTS by THE FED as the situation develops over the next year So PLEASE READERS, please keep that in mind!

NOW getting back to the strategy for Interest Rate Hikes—Such strategy would increase the cost of borrowing money (for consumer loans—auto, home, etc. and for loans to businesses) therefore slowing down (Diminishing (or as some Economists put it "Destroying")) Demand and would also act to curtail further attempts at expansion (business startups, etc.) in an Economy for the most part already fully Expanded and "Bid-Up". However, THESE INTEREST RATE HIKES would be across-the-board AFFECTING ALL businesses and sectors of Our Economy regardless of a particular business's category sub-sector ACTUAL impact on Inflation.

NOW TO THE PLAN being suggested here, it would be IN

CONJUNCTION with SOME interest rate hiking and would help MORE SURGICALLY SHUNT"/divert money Capital (Money Supply) away from those particular portions of the Private (business and investment) Sector that have ACTUALLY become "over-amped" with too much—"too many dollars" chasing "too few" business and/or investment opportunities THEREFORE REDUCING THE NEED FOR AS MANY INTEREST RATE HIKES THE FED IS CURRENTLY CONTEMPLATING.

THIS PLAN suggested here BEING TAX INCENTIVE would allow businesses, corporations, institutional investors, wealthy individuals or any taxpayer for that matter, when filing their income tax returns to get a tax deferment on taxable income profits if such (net) profits ARE USED INSTEAD TO PURCHASE U.S. Treasury Bonds THEREBY IMMEDIATELY REDUCING THE AMOUNT OF CAPTIAL IN THE PRIVATE (Business, Corporate, Investment) SECTOR—the tax on these particular profits (but used INSTEAD to buy Bonds) to be paid AT A LATER TIME (DATE OR YEAR) ONLY WHEN such business, corporation, institutional investor, wealthy individual or middle-class taxpayer (hereinafter to be referred to as TAXPAYER) decides to redeem their Bonds.

THIS BOND BUYING TAX-INCENTIVE STRATEGY could ALSO be employed AS WELL at ANYTIME throughout the year. The advantage to The Government being that because the bond purchaser is getting a tax deferment on these bonds until they are redeemed at a later date (or year), no yield would be paid on these bonds but, at the same time, there would be many tax reduction strategies available to the bondholder as to when to redeem their bonds not to mention the possibility of a good business or investment deal coming along making bond redemption and paying the tax owed worthwhile. To be later explained in more detail.

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