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Cultivated Bigots Run Wild

As I write, a Far-Right candidate looks likely to be the next President of Brazil. A man compared to Donald Trump, and who glories in the comparison.

Trump is sensibly ending the USA's failed globalist project, while pursuing damaging and reactionary policies at home. He would not be there if the leaders of the Democrat Party had not bent the primaries to exclude Bernie Sanders.

Brazil has no significant global role, so only damage can be expected. But the man got just over 46% in a vote for multiple candidates, many right-wing. It seems unlikely he will lose the second round, to be held on 28 October.

His opponent will be a decent but colourless man from the Workers' Party. Under the famous 'Lula', this party won two elections with him as President. Laws supposedly intended to protect the public from tyranny then stopped him standing again; but his chosen successor Dilma Rousseff then won twice more. But with the global economy unhealthy, the centre-right got the blame shifted to the Workers Party. And manipulated the legal system to get Dilma Rousseff removed and replaced by one of their own. Managed to get Lula barred for supposed corruption, in a society where corruption is endemic.

Lula could legally have stood again, after the break. It was thought he would win. The legal establishment prevented this.

The Brazilian franchise of US globalisation showed the same faults as their masters and owners. They are smart at working the system, but deluded and ignorant when it comes to knowing how the system works at a deep level. Continuously blaming what they call unexpected outbreaks of evil.

Much of it could be called evil, if you like histrionics. But absolutely none of it was unexpected, outside of believers in New Right or Soft-Liberal fantasies.

The Centre-Right has lost control of the bigots it spent several decades cultivating.

The Soft-Liberals have been soft about calling this process entirely planned and cynical. (Cynical but in the long run unrealistic and ineffective, as it happens.)

One instance I found in a news report from before the first round.

“Bolsonaro followers, however, believe Brazil is on the verge of a historic shift under a corruption-busting, communist-combating conservative who can lead their country out of moral decay and its worst even recession.

“‘Bolsonaro is Brazil’s only option right now if it wants to avoid becoming a Venezuela,’ said Paulo Henrique Villa Boas, a 46-year-old supporter from the north-eastern city of Recife. ‘Bolsonaro fights communists. They want to implement this ideology – which has killed millions of people in other countries – here in Brazil.’”¹

It was liberal-capitalists who killed tens of millions in World War One. And this in turn led fairly directly to World War Two, and more immediately to an abnormally bad outbreak of flu. One which killed at least 50 million, and started in military training camps in the USA when they decided to step in.

Communism evolved to fix the offenses of liberal-capitalists of the pre-1914 vintage, and actually did fix them. The Soviet version went into decline when it lost its historic purpose in the 1960s and became an excuse for a Russian imperial vision. Chinese communism carries on just fine. And both under Mao and since Mao, it has a much lower death-rate than nice multi-party India. But the centre-right got a different story believed, and the Soft-Liberals and even many left-wingers fail to challenge it.

The lies they spread are now out of control

The Neoliberals despise ordinary people, and thought that the voters who no longer trusted socialism would keep voting for pro-capitalist politicians who did not believe the trash they told the public. I had wondered for years how long they would get away with it.

With Brexit, Trump and a swarm of other outbreaks, it seems clear that the act has fallen apart. The fools and bigots remain fools and bigots, but no longer fooled in the same ways.

The Soft-Liberal response is to call for some very small and modest fix. They want a continuation of what they see as the Grand Liberal Tradition.

Liberalism is Dead, Long Live Liberalism?

No. Liberalism is Dead, including its small malignant child Neo-Liberalism. It was never a true description of the world. And now its time is past.

Liberalism is Dead. Bury It!

Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell correctly identified 19th century Liberals as the heirs of Oliver Cromwell. And Cromwell himself owed a lot to the earlier heritage of Henry 8th and his daughter Elizabeth Tudor, even being descended from a sister of King Henry VIII's minister Thomas Cromwell. Those two monarchs laid the basis in England for what flourished later as the Enlightenment. Did this along with other monarchs elsewhere in Europe, none of them at all tolerant of anyone who stood in their way or who dared to stand up to them. But both Oliver Cromwell and the later leaders of the French Revolution were among those who *did* dare stand up to them.

Revolutionary Democracy is not tolerant. Mostly it is not conventionally democratic, in the sense of tolerating an opposition that might replace it. But it does generally give a majority of the population what they actually want. Systems with too many checks and balances mostly fail to do this.

Brazil's failure contrasts with China's continuing success. It shows that Revolutionary Democracy is still needed in developing countries. Utterly unsuitable for Britain and the rest of Western Europe, obviously. But when European Leninism collapsed, it was replaced by Populist Authoritarianism east of Vienna. And that was the traditional dividing-line between places where liberalism would work and places where it would not.

Modern liberalism lives in delusions. The Soft-Liberal delusions are fine on purely personal matters. Disastrous when political.

Rich Britain Does Not Care

“Pay for chief executives at Britain’s biggest listed companies rose more than six times faster than wages in the wider workforce last year as the average boss’s pay packet hit £3.9m.

“Chief executive pay at businesses on the FTSE 100 index surged 11% on a median basis in 2017 while average worker earnings failed to keep pace with inflation, rising just 1.7%, according to the High Pay Centre’s annual review of top pay.

“A worker on a median salary of £23,474 would have to work 167 years to earn the median annual pay of a FTSE 100 boss – up from 153 years in 2016, the report showed. The gap between bosses and workers widened despite government efforts to hold companies accountable for runaway pay.”²

“Britain’s richest person is quitting the UK for Monaco – just two months after he was knighted by the Queen for ‘*services to business and investment*’.

“Sir Jim Ratcliffe, the founder and chief executive of petrochemicals company Ineos and a high-profile Brexiter, is preparing to move to the tax-free principality on the Côte d’Azur in order to avoid UK taxes on his vast wealth. His fortune is estimated at £21bn.

“Ratcliffe, 65, did not respond to requests for comment, and a spokeswoman for Ineos declined to comment on his decision – first reported in the Daily Telegraph – describing it as a ‘personal matter’. The company said only that Ineos was ‘committed’ to its business base in the UK and planned to keep its headquarters in London ‘for the foreseeable future’…

“In the run-up to the Brexit referendum, Ratcliffe provided a fillip for the Leave campaign when he said Britain would thrive outside the EU.”³

Meantime the *Economist* magazine, always putting the business viewpoints, wants to go after the windfall property gains of the modestly well-off:

“If you are a high earner in a rich country and you lack a good accountant, you probably spend about half the year working for the state. If you are an average earner, not even an accountant can spare you taxes on your payroll and spending.

“Most of the fuss about taxation is over how much the government takes and how often it is wasted. Too little is about how taxes are raised. Today’s tax systems are not only marred by the bewildering complexity and loopholes that have always afflicted taxation; they are also outdated. That makes them less efficient, more unfair and more likely to conflict with a government’s priorities. The world needs to remake tax systems so that they are fit for the 21st century…

“Expensive housing, often the result of a shortage of land, has yielded windfall gains to homeowners in big, global cities. House prices there are 34% higher, on average, than five years ago, freezing young people out of home ownership (see article). Windfall gains should be an obvious source of revenue, yet property taxes have stayed roughly constant at 6% of government revenues in rich countries, the same as before the boom.”⁴

We are told that prosperity depends on the public not questions the Deep Mysteries of business and finance. Not even after a whole string of cases in which the job-creating business dies and the ‘wealth creator’ walked off with millions, usually quite legally.

You also get ordinary people following advice to *become* rich rather than resenting them. And finding that if you’re not an ‘insider’ or one of the small minority of ‘fresh blood’ they choose to admit, you will not succeed:

“Pete Roberts of Nottingham, England, was one of the many risk-takers who threw their savings into cryptocurrencies when prices were going through the roof last winter.

“Now, eight months later, the \$23,000 he invested in several digital tokens is worth about \$4,000, and he is clearheaded about what happened.

“‘I got too caught up in the fear of missing out and trying to make a quick buck,’ he said this week. ‘The losses have pretty much left me financially ruined.’

“Mr. Roberts, 28, has a lot of company. After the latest round of big price drops, many cryptocurrencies have given back all of the enormous gains they experienced last winter.”⁵

‘Silly money’ gambled by people without good information is one source of the ever-greater share of the social wealth sucked up by an elite more-than-millionaire class. A necessary source, since Britain’s overall economic growth got slightly worse in the 1990s and up to the 2008 crash. Being endlessly greedy, they need more wealth they have done nothing to earn.

Another good source is squeezing the poor and needy:

“After eight years of difficulty and controversy, universal credit may well be about to move into an even more fraught phase, suggests Paul Gray, who has just stepped down after six years as chair of the Department for Work and Pensions’ (DWP) social security advisory committee (SSAC).

“Up to 3 million people will start to be ‘migrated’ on to the new benefit system next year. And Gray, who as a senior civil servant was closely involved in the rollout of tax credits under a Labour government, says the potential operational and political risks for universal credit (UC) are huge: ‘This is where it gets really serious.’

“If ministers do not heed the lessons of the past few years, the migration process, he reckons, could trigger more strife.”⁶

Mr Grey believes that ministers genuinely did not foresee the pain they would be causing. Myself, I believe the Tories wanted a stingy and damaging system. Had no concern about the pain they caused, if it freed money that could be given to the rich in tax cuts. It all fits the New Right view.

Ayn Rand in one of her books has an entire train-load of passengers suffocate, and then explains in detail why every one of them deserved it.⁷ Guilty of making unreasonable demands on the rich. And though she’s not popular in Britain, she was and is very influential in the USA. The general attitudes filter through.

Sadly, they may get away with it. Polls repeatedly show Tories as about level with Labour, despite their massive mess-up over Brexit.⁸

The long-term trend is against them – in the 2017 election, the Tories got 69% of the votes of those over 70 and 50% of those over 60. Labour got a majority in all age-groups under 50, with more than 60% for people under 30.⁹ Also the Tories had a 55 to 33% advantage for those with limited education, and a 32 to 49% disadvantage for those with degrees. But a right-wing majority among the disappointed Baby Boomer generation may keep them in power, even though most of them have not gained by Thatcherite policies.¹⁰

Voter Power

A sad factor in British politics is that older people are much more likely to vote. Here, Labour is missing a trick. They should delegate some senior figures to get together with a range of non-partisan figures to push a general campaign to get more people to vote.

Everyone knows that more voters would mean more *Labour* voters, overall. But from my limited knowledge of British law, I would suppose that this is one of those common-sense facts that Anglo law refuses to let itself notice. Spending on this overtly non-political campaign should be outside of normal rules for electoral spending.

Another encouragement – it is being done in the USA. A widespread wish to copy everything of theirs, good or bad, would in this case pay off.

I'd not previously heard of a 28-year-old pop-singer lady called Taylor Smith. I am 67, and most things later than the Rolling Stones pass me by. But she is famous, and she is now urging her fans to vote. And also backing the Democrats against a female Republican in her home state:

“Pop star Taylor Swift is not really known for making political statements, but the ‘Bad Blood’ singer is no longer holding back ahead of the midterm elections in November.

“In a lengthy post on Instagram, where she has 112 million followers, the 28-year-old Swift says while she has been ‘reluctant’ to share her political views in the past, she has changed her mind.

“She endorsed the Democrat running for the US Senate in her home state of Tennessee, and unleashed a fierce attack on his opponent, Republican Marsha Blackburn, who currently serves in the House.

“‘As much as I have in the past and would like to continue voting for women in office, I cannot support Marsha Blackburn. Her voting record in Congress appals and terrifies me,’ Swift said.

“‘She voted against equal pay for women. She voted against the Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which attempts to protect women from domestic violence, stalking, and date rape.’...

“Last year, Swift won a lawsuit against a former radio DJ she accused of groping her...

“‘These are not MY Tennessee values. I will be voting for Phil Bredesen for Senate and Jim Cooper for House of Representatives.’”¹¹

This is part of a much wider campaign, with women very active. Taylor Smith didn't mention climate change, nor the USA's massive inequality. But others *are* making these big issues.

And people need to be reminded that you don't need to get your candidate elected to make an impact. All votes are noted and expertly sifted for trends. So you count even if the person you vote for is certain to lose, or certain to win.

Australia – Waltzing to a Foolish Theme

“There is no way you can write the sentence, ‘The treasurer of Australia, Scott Morrison, came to question time with a lump of coal on Thursday,’ and have that sentence seem anything other than the ravings of a psychedelic trip, so let's just say it and be done with it.

“Scott Morrison brought coal into the House of Representatives. A nice big hunk of black coal, kindly supplied by the Minerals Council of Australia.

“‘This is coal,’ the treasurer said triumphantly, brandishing the trophy as if he'd just stumbled across an exotic species previously thought to be extinct.

“‘Don't be afraid,’ he said, soothingly, ‘don't be scared.’

“No one was afraid, or scared. People were just confused. What was this fresh idiocy?”¹²

Idiocy from someone who later rose to be Prime Minister, as it happened.

Someone should have said, ‘*it's fine while left unburnt. And if you shut yourself in a sealed room with it and set it on fire, you'd suffer and might not emerge alive.*’ Also ‘*if I'd known you'd*

do this, I'd have brought a bucket of water. Safe enough while in a bucket, but in other contexts it can kill you. Even without containing sharks.”

The stunt with the coal was back in February. *Greenpeace* were one of many appalled when the same man rose to be Prime Minister in August. But it is part of a pattern. Smart right-wing politicians figure out the benefits of acting the fool. Know that there are a lot of rather dim people out there. Many of them vote for Centre-Right politicians who must privately despise them.

This jollying-along of the unintelligent manages to outweigh what a majority actually want:

“The vast majority of Australians want to see the country dramatically increase the use of renewable energy, a new survey has found, despite attempts by the federal government to characterise renewables as unreliable and expensive.

“The Climate Institute’s national Climate of the Nation survey, published on Tuesday, pointed to frustration with the government’s inaction and lack of leadership on clean energy.

“Of 2,660 respondents from across Australia, 71% agreed that climate change was occurring, continuing a trend established in the survey through 2014 and 2015. Two-thirds said they were highly concerned by its impacts, while 57% accepted that human activity was the main cause.

“Ninety-six percent of respondents said they wanted the country’s primary energy source to be renewable, with support from either storage technologies (58%) or fossil fuels (38%). The phaseout of coal and replacement with clean energy received support from 59%, with 72% of those in favour calling on the government to drive the transition.”¹³

The following comment was made during the fight, when the displaced Prime Minister was still hanging on:

“In advance of a critical vote on a new energy bill, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull wisely noted that it is well known ‘what happens when you allow ideology and idiocy to take charge of energy policy.’

“Yet right after saying that, Mr. Turnbull, under pressure from rebellious conservatives in his party, abandoned his ‘National Energy Guarantee’ and its modest effort to reduce energy emissions. With that, he appeared to confirm Australia as a poster child for something completely different, as reported by Damien Cave in *The Times* on Tuesday: a political inability to enact sorely needed energy legislation because of acute partisanship on addressing climate change and the influence of a coal industry that accounts for more than a third of all global coal exports.

“Though recent Australian governments have been reasonably progressive on many of the issues that have tested other democracies, such as gun control, health care and wages, and Mr. Turnbull’s achievements include legalizing same-sex marriage, the bitter divisions over climate change have led to the fall of two prime ministers in the past decade. By jettisoning his energy bill, Mr. Turnbull narrowly escaped becoming the third, at least for now.”

But not for long, as it turned out.

In Australia, the Centre-Right are still successfully herding the mass of ignorant voters. And unless the left start describing it in much the same terms I’ve been using, they may carry on regardless.

Genome Seekers and the Half-Blood Girl

“A few years ago, archaeologists found a 90,000-year-old bone fragment in Denisova cave. Samantha Brown, then at the University of Oxford, discovered that it came from a hominin by examining the proteins preserved inside it. Her team nicknamed the hominin ‘Denny’. Based on the structure of the bone, Denny died at about 13 years of age.

“Our DNA comes in paired strands called chromosomes, one from each parent. In Denny’s case, each pair had one Neanderthal and one Denisovan chromosome, with very little mixing. She was the daughter of parents from different species (*Nature*, doi.org/cs64).

“Denny’s mitochondrial DNA, which is inherited only from mothers, is Neanderthal. Therefore, her mother was Neanderthal and her father Denisovan.”¹⁴

Neanderthals were once believed to be a different species: one that we either wiped out or pushed into bad lands where they eventually died off naturally. But DNA studies found that humans outside of Africa had genes from them. And meantime a third group called Denisovans were identified just by the DNA of a few bone fragments. And some of the details are amazing:

“[Experts] have now examined Denny’s DNA, discovering that Denny was female – and that she had astonishing parentage. Her DNA was almost 50:50 Neanderthal and Denisovan, arranged in a tell-tale way. Our DNA comes in paired strands called chromosomes, one from each parent. In Denny’s case, each pair had one Neanderthal and one Denisovan chromosome, with very little mixing. She was the daughter of parents from different species.”¹⁵

It also may have been an unhappy mix – the poor girl died young, after all. But at least some mixes worked:

“The discovery has led scientists to suspect that different groups of archaic humans, including the ancestors of people alive today, had few qualms about interbreeding when the chance arose. ‘I’m beginning to think that when these groups met, they were quite happy to mix with each other’...”

“Until 40,000 years ago, Eurasia was home to both groups of archaic humans with Neanderthals in the West and the elusive Denisovans in the East. Although the groups separated from each other more than 390,000 years ago, they occasionally crossed paths, and evidently got along royally when they did...”

“The suspicion that distinct groups of ancient humans were happy to interbreed undermines the view that Neanderthals and Denisovans were wiped out through violent conflict with modern humans who arrived in Eurasia 60,000 years ago. Instead, they may simply have been absorbed into the population...”

“Scientists have little idea what the Denisovans looked like, but some hints have emerged. A handful of Denisovan teeth recovered from the cave are much larger than those of Neanderthals, and work that will be published soon finds that a piece of Denisovan skull is thick compared with other ancient humans. ‘They seem to have been very large and robust, even compared to Neanderthals, ... They were probably pretty impressive.’”¹⁶

Impressive as individuals. But people living along-side them might have found them stupid, and slow to pick up new ideas. Maybe their view was ‘That family are dumb and can’t behave’, and so avoided marrying and casual sex.

It is also possible that singing was part of it. Singing, dance and music are common to all known human culture. Being a good dancer improves the chances of sex and marriage. Maybe the hybrids were bad at it and were largely eliminated from the surviving populations. But useful genes were kept – one gene of Denisovan origin helped Tibetans adapt to high altitude, though Tibetans in general are not much different from other East Asians. And studies of modern humans show that various populations adapted to different high plateaus have *different* gene changes to make them fitter for it.

Whatever else, the pattern of ancient hybridisation was complex:

“Scientists didn’t have to look all that long to find a hybrid. Until today, scientists had discovered only four Denisovans; the fifth turned out to be a first-generation hybrid.

“Hybrids may not have been all that uncommon. In 2015, researchers discovered that a modern human who lived in what is now Romania 40,000 years ago had a great-great-grandparent who was Neanderthal...”

“Her Denisovan father’s kin were local, it turned out. His DNA most closely resembles the genetic material from Denisova 3’s pinky, discovered at the cave in 2010. She lived in the cave a few thousand years after Denisova 11, the hybrid human.

“Her Neanderthal mother, however, was closely related to Neanderthals who lived thousands of miles to the west in what is now Croatia, 20,000 years after Denisova 11 died. She was only distantly related to the Neanderthals who lived in the cave 120,000 years ago.”¹⁷

More recently, further gene studies have turned up more oddities. They found a group of ancient Eurasians who *didn't* interbreed with Neanderthals, but later fully merged with those who had. And among Africans, signs of a long-absorbed population of ‘African Neanderthals’ similar to but distinct from the Neanderthals of Eurasia.

There are probably many more surprises to come.

Money In a Sickening World

It is worth remembering that for most of human existence, we had no such thing as money. We had extended families that pooled everything, just as a modern nuclear family does. And beyond that, there were systems of gift-exchange, in which you gained prestige by giving away more than you received. And where it was all about making ties of friendship.

As populations increased, gift-exchange probably decayed into barter. With barter, you may have no interest in the other person beyond what you can get from them. You would mostly be pleased to get more than you give.

From barter, money slowly evolved. The *Iliad* lacks it – values are expressed in terms of cattle, and other societies used weights of grain. Or weights of metal, but the apparently obvious idea of coins came rather slowly:

“From about 1000 BCE, money in the form of small knives and spades made of bronze was in use in China during the Zhou dynasty, with cast bronze replicas of cowrie shells in use before this. The first manufactured coins seem to have appeared separately in India, China, and the cities around the Aegean Sea between 700 and 500 BCE. While these Aegean coins were stamped (heated and hammered with insignia), the Indian coins (from the Ganges river valley) were punched metal disks, and Chinese coins (first developed in the Great Plain) were cast bronze with holes in the center to be strung together. The different forms and metallurgical processes imply a separate development. All modern coins, in turn, are descended from the coins that appear to have been invented in the kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor somewhere around the year 600 BCE and that spread throughout Greece in the following centuries: disk-shaped, made of gold, silver, bronze or imitations thereof, with both sides bearing an image produced by stamping; one side is often a human head.”¹⁸

That doesn’t mean than money was ever the main human motivation. You could think of the things that motivate real humans as being as follows:

- Level Zero. We’ve always done it this way. It works.
- Level One. I personally will benefit, either in terms of goods and services, or with emotional satisfaction.
- Level Two. This benefits my friends and relations, and others I care about.
- Level Three. My Own Stranger-Group. Being a nationalist, racist, chauvinist for your religion etc.
- Level Four. Everyone. And things that are inherently the right thing to do.

‘Rational’ economics leaves out everything except Level One interactions based on money. Commerce can get to be like that, but few people like it. And it’s not very rational.

What it is very good at is undermining all other values. That’s why since the 1980s, when ‘rational’ economics was sanctified and glorified, all of the supposed moral principles of the centre-right have been undermined.

There was also the hopeful notion, inherited from Adam Smith, that people encouraged to stick to Level One selfishness would somehow still meet Level Four ideas, guided ‘as by an

invisible hand'. It does work sometimes, but more often it does not. That's why a Mixed Economy system, with the state regulating business according to its own notion of 'the right thing to do', worked better than systems that gave greater scope to selfish desires.

More of the Sickness

A whole generation were caught by the sudden collapse of the bubble of speculative finance that the New Right had been generating when they decided that rules put in place after the 1930s Great Slump were silly and unnecessary.

People now know something is wrong:

"In 2008, I was one of the 1.5 million students who graduated from university in the US.

"And, like everyone else, I was caught off guard.

"Whatever we expected then, the reality today is that as a generation, we have more debt, fewer children and quite a few scars.

"A decade on, there has been quite a bit of handwringing about what's changed since the financial crisis.

"And I'm convinced that the biggest fallout isn't the increased regulation, or the jailed bankers (or lack thereof), but the impact it had on those of us who were just entering the workforce in 2008..."

"In the UK, research commissioned by the BBC found that people who are 30-39 years old now were worst affected by the financial crisis - losing on average 7.2% in real terms, or £2,057 (\$2,684) a year between 2008 and 2017.

"That's pretty similar to what happened in the US.

"Americans born in the mid-1980s have accumulated 34% less wealth than predicted based on previous generations, the St Louis Federal Reserve found..."

"We trust no-one

"Trust in institutions was on the decline well before the financial crisis, but as a generation, our faith is especially low.

"Just 19% of millennials agree with the statement that 'generally speaking, most people can be trusted' - compared to 31% for the generation before us, and 40% for our parents' generation, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts."¹⁹

Mistrust means that a lot of them listen to whoever backs their view that the system *as it now is* cannot be trusted. The populist left or the populist right.

The collapsing centre has a lot to explain away. Their 'reforms' since the 1980s failed to boost wealth creation. All it did was boost a rich minority. Give more to those who were already receiving enough extra cash to motivate them for the stressful jobs they did.

(If indeed they did anything stressful: some were drones and many are parasites.)

As boosted from the 1980s, most of them are now grossly overpaid:

"The number of people in the UK earning more than £1m a year has jumped to over 18,700, with more than one in 10 of them living in Kensington and Chelsea, according to figures released by HM Revenue & Customs..."

"More than a third of all the £1m earners live in London, with more than 2,000 in Kensington and Chelsea, and 1,400 in the City of Westminster in the 2015-16 tax year."

Meantime others suffer:

"Almost 4 million children in the UK live in households that would struggle to afford to buy enough fruit, vegetables, fish and other healthy foods to meet the official nutrition guidelines, a groundbreaking food poverty study reveals.

"The research, by the Food Foundation thinktank, says the diminishing ability of low-income families to pay for healthy food is consigning the least well-off to a greater risk of diet related illness, such as obesity and diabetes, as well as widening health inequalities across society.

“The poorest fifth of families would have to set aside more than 40% of their total weekly income after housing costs to satisfy the requirements of the government’s Eatwell guide, the study finds.”²⁰

They may also be a long way from any shop that sells fresh products, which spoil quickly and therefore are mostly sold where there are lots of buyers. Junk food mostly keeps and so is easy to find.

Tories, supported from 2010 to 2015 by the Liberal Democrats, carried through policies which protected the rich and squeezed the rest of us. Did nothing to protect the most needy, despite promises:

“More than a fifth of the population live on incomes below the poverty line after housing costs are taken into account, even though most of these households are in work. Nearly one in three children live in poverty and the use of food banks is rising.

“There is a sixfold difference between the income of the top 20% of households and those of the bottom 20%. Wealth inequality is much worse, with 44% of the UK’s wealth owned by just 10% of the population, five times the total wealth held by the poorest half...

“Inequality between the richest 1% and the rest of the country is continuing to rise, according to the report, worsened by weak wage growth and rising living costs. The growth in property values in recent years might have helped homeowners, yet the younger generations have suffered. Millennials, or people born after 1981, are four more times likely to be renting, and only half as likely as baby boomers to own their own home by the age of 30.”²¹

Yet far too many still vote Tory. Think of Tories as the sound sensible people who will get the country through hard times. They’ve not been that since Thatcherism triumphed.

Worse in the USA

“The chief executives of America’s top 350 companies earned 312 times more than their workers on average last year, according to a new report published Thursday by the Economic Policy Institute.

“The rise came after the bosses of America’s largest companies got an average pay rise of 17.6% in 2017, taking home an average of \$18.9m in compensation while their employees’ wages stalled, rising just 0.3% over the year.”²²

Trump got laughed at when he told the United Nations how well the US economy was doing. It was visibly unhealthy, but good for Trump’s own more-than-millionaire Overclass:

“For Wages, a Trump Slump

“The official economic indicators look pretty good. The trends in hourly pay do not...

““Let’s start with the good news. The unemployment rate keeps falling, and economic growth is solid. These headline numbers are the ones that Republicans emphasize (and that the media sometimes overhypes).

“As a result of the growth, nominal wages — that is, the numbers people see in their paychecks, before taking inflation into account — are growing. You can see the pickup in the gentle upward slope of the chart’s solid gray line. Over the past year, the average hourly nominal wage has risen 2.7 percent.

“There are two problems, though. First, 2.7 percent isn’t a great growth rate for nominal wages. It was rarely so slow in the entire second half of the 20th century, for example. These days, though, most workers don’t receive their fair share of economic output. An outsize share instead flows to corporate profits and the rich...

“Second, nominal wages by themselves can’t buy a higher standard of living. Prices matter, too. When the prices of goods and services are rising faster than nominal wages, people end up with less buying power. And that is exactly what’s happening now.

“Inflation has surged, as you can see in the dashed line, mostly because of higher oil prices. Events in the Middle East, Russia and Venezuela have reduced the supply of oil, even as a growing global economy is increasing demand. Trump has aggravated the situation by pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal, further raising oil prices...

“There is no reason to think that most Americans are on the cusp of truly healthy pay increases.

“They face too many obstacles: Companies that are larger and more powerful than they used to be; unions that are weaker; and, thanks in large part to Trump, a federal government that keeps siding against workers, be it on overtime pay, work rules, health care costs, for-profit-college scams or tax cuts.”²³

Socialism in the USA

The USA is still governed by the two dominant parties that were there in the 1860s, unlike anywhere else in the world. And in those days, the Republicans were the radicals. But radical-capitalist, which left them ineffective when socialist measures were needed to save the system.

Since it was the Democrats who saved the system in the face of bitter Republican commitment to ‘sound finance’, socialism as an ideology never got properly established. Was damaged in the Cold War, whereas in Western Europe there were always socialist parties supporting NATO. This made it easy for the betrayal of the Clinton Democrats, who dumped left-wing economics while pushing social liberalism.

But the public are learning. Trump only won because the Democrats chose to be represented by Hilary Clinton, who was correctly seen as part of the failed liberal centre. Other candidates would have won:

“Lefty politicians Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren and Democratic stalwart Joe Biden all led the American president in head-to-head matchups in a recent poll, something many Democratic presidential hopefuls cannot say.

“Sens. Sanders (I-VT) holds the strongest advantage over US President Donald Trump with 44 percent support to 32 percent, according to a Politico/Morning Consult poll released Wednesday. Biden, Barack Obama's vice president, leads Trump by nearly the same margin, with a 43 to 31 percent edge.

“Political newcomer Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), who successfully reached office in 2012 on her first attempt, is ahead of Trump in the polls 34 to 30 percent.”²⁴

Attitudes shift, with 57% of Democrats positive about socialism in a recent survey, more than are positive about capitalism.²⁵ Very much the opposite for Republicans, of course. But Democrats before Reagan were normally the majority party.

Back in 1949, most US citizens thought they had adopted some socialism, but wanted less of it.²⁶ Got their wish under Reagan, of course, and it hurt them.

Opinion is shifting, though. A recent article in the *New York Times* debunks Neo-Liberal claims

“What, after all, were and are the selling points for low taxes and minimal regulation? Partly, of course, the claim that small government is the key to great economic performance, a rising tide that raises all boats. This claim persists – because there are powerful interests that want it to persist — even though the era of neoliberal dominance has in fact been marked by so-so economic growth that hasn't been shared with ordinary workers.

“The other claim, however, has been that free markets translate into personal freedom: that an unregulated market economy liberates ordinary people from the tyranny of bureaucracies. In a free market, the story goes, you don't need to flatter your boss or the company selling you stuff, because they know you can always go to someone else.

“What Robin points out is that the reality of a market economy is nothing like that. In fact, the daily experience of tens of millions of Americans – especially but not only those who don’t make a lot of money – is one of constant dependence on the good will of employers and other more powerful economic players...

“Now, there are no perfect answers to the inevitable sacrifice of some freedom that comes with living in a complex society; utopia is not on the menu. But the advocates of unrestricted corporate power and minimal worker protection have been getting away for far too long with pretending that they’re the defenders of freedom – which is not, in fact, just another word for nothing left to lose.”²⁷

Innovation Without Capitalism

Would socialism have done all of the wonderful things we’ve had since the 1980s, and now credited to capitalism.?

Definitely. The big advances from the 1940s to 1980s were often funded by the military, or span off from academic research. Nor was this new. James Watt developed his superior steam engine using an understanding of heat that academic Joseph Black had developed. The existing Newcomen Engine wasted a lot of fuel by turning water into steam and then back into water in a single place. Aware of the importance of Latent Heat – later understood as the energy involved in breaking the links between water-molecules so that they became a gas – he invented the Separate Condenser and had a much better design.²⁸ It also needed help from industrialist Matthew Boulton to make it a success: but Boulton was a member of the socially progressive Lunar Society and as much interested in social improvement as personal profit.²⁹

In the 19th century, Heinrich Hertz was an academic who mastered the production and detection of radio waves in order to prove what fellow-academic James Clerk Maxwell had implied with his famous equations: that light was actually electromagnetic radiation.³⁰ This had seemed likely when Maxwell’s maths showed that if electromagnetic radiation existed, it would have the same speed as had been found by an astronomer studying irregularities in the times we on Earth saw eclipses of the moons of Jupiter, caused by light having a finite and measurable speed.

Hertz set out to create another sort of electromagnetic radiation, which was what we now call radio waves. Demonstrated that this stuff behaved just like light, if you allowed for it being a very different wavelength: four meters for the waves he was producing. If he noticed the interesting fact that these waves could go through walls, he didn’t see this as important:

“Hertz did not realize the practical importance of his radio wave experiments. He stated that,

“It’s of no use whatsoever[...] this is just an experiment that proves Maestro Maxwell was right—we just have these mysterious electromagnetic waves that we cannot see with the naked eye. But they are there.’

“Asked about the applications of his discoveries, Hertz replied,

“Nothing, I guess.”

He guessed wrong, with these invisible rays developed for communications, mostly by Marconi. Who was very much interested in money, but was also an enthusiast for Mussolini’s fascism, joining the party in 1923, well before Mussolini had transformed from Prime Minister to Dictator. Remained in good favour, with Mussolini appointing him President of the Royal Academy of Italy, which also made Marconi a member of the Fascist Grand Council. He died in 1937. Hertz meantime had died young, but would have been in trouble had he lived into the Nazi era, since his father had been a Jewish convert to Lutheranism. His portrait was removed by them from its prominent position of honor in Hamburg’s City Hall. His widow and daughters sensibly found refuge in England while this was still possible.

Apart from Hitler’s anti-Jewish obsession, fascism was quite at home with science and new inventions. They were slightly behind with radar, but developed the first jet fighter.

Incidentally, the notion that light was electromagnetic radiation needed to be proved and might have been wrong. Einstein's later concept of space-time said that any massless particle must move at the speed originally identified for light. There could have been several different types of radiation with the same speed, though current physics suggests not, with even neutrinos turning out to have a very tiny mass. Gravitational waves ought to have the same speed, and recent detections included one where the source was also seen and was simultaneous, in as far as we can measure.

What about Leninism? The Soviet Union got into space using completely different methods than the US program. Which anyway had the German missile program at its core, conceived independently of Nazism but taken up by Hitler to produce the deadly V2 rockets. Taken up by the USA, and given prime focus when their home-grown rockets kept blowing up when stretched to give them power enough to launch a satellite. And Soviet science remained excellent down to the end, though the increasing irrationality of the post-Stalin system offended people like Sakharov. Technology too was at one time excellent, with the best tanks of World War Two and also the remarkable Katyusha rocket launcher, known to Germans as the Stalin Organ. It was only in the 1960s and Brezhnevite corruption that the general quality of goods declined. This included the once-brilliant space program: the Soyuz spacecraft and its rocket from the 1960s remain in use and had a much better safety record than the Space Shuttle, but a string of interstellar missions achieved little after the first landing on Venus.

Let's imagine a different 1960s. Soviet generals in 1968 decide that invading Czechoslovakia is madness and remove Brezhnev. Bobby Kennedy does not get assassinated and he gets elected President, with a policy somewhat like Europe's Christian Democrats.

Mao relaxes, and China still becomes a global centre for cheap manufacturing. But the weak industries of other poor countries are protected rather than being destroyed.

The USA carries on with its standard pattern of growth from the 1940s, but the benefits flow to the whole society, with the less-well-off continuing to gain slightly more.

We still get the Microcomputer Revolution and then the Internet Revolution. Indeed, Mao's Cultural Revolution system would have permitted a version of this, had their science and technology been advanced enough. It favoured low-level initiatives, but not for private profit.

Several of the pioneers of the West's IT Revolution were not motivated by profit and in fact made very little. The slew of ideas in the Xerox Parc led to no significant profit, and nor did Steve Jobs' first go at copying them with the Apple Lisa. But having a lot of money from the previous more conventional Apple computers, he was able to make the brilliant Apple Macintosh.

The Internet was invented as a military system that could survive a nuclear war. The World Wide Web is something different: hypertext that runs on an internet system. It was developed by Tim Berners-Lee while working at CERN, where the main task is subatomic physics, and no commercial outcome is expected.

New Right economics ignores most of what happens in the real economy. Concentrates instead on maths that is largely pompous gibberish.

Something Not Rotten in Denmark

"Last weekend, Trish Regan, a Fox Business host, created a bit of an international incident by describing Denmark as an example of the horrors of socialism, right along with Venezuela. Denmark's finance minister suggested that she visit his country and learn some facts.

"Indeed, Regan couldn't have picked a worse example — or, from the point of view of U.S. progressives, a better one.

"For Denmark has indeed taken a very different path from the United States over the past few decades, veering (modestly) to the left where we've veered right. And it has done just fine.

"American politics has been dominated by a crusade against big government; Denmark has embraced an expansive government role, with public spending more than half of G.D.P. American

politicians fear talk about redistribution of income from the rich to the less well-off; Denmark engages in such redistribution on a scale unimaginable here. American policy has been increasingly hostile to organized labor, and unions have virtually disappeared from the private sector; two-thirds of Danish workers are unionized...

“Danes are more likely to have jobs than Americans, and in many cases they earn substantially more. Overall G.D.P. per capita in Denmark is a bit lower than in America, but that’s basically because the Danes take more vacations. Income inequality is much lower, and life expectancy is higher.

“The simple fact is that life is better for most Danes than it is for their U.S. counterparts. There’s a reason Denmark consistently ranks well ahead of America in measures of happiness and life satisfaction.

“But is Denmark socialist?

“The libertarian Cato Institute says no: ‘Denmark has quite a free-market economy, apart from its welfare state transfers and high government consumption.’ That’s some qualification.

“It’s true that Denmark doesn’t at all fit the classic definition of socialism, which involves government ownership of the means of production. It is, instead, social-democratic: a market economy where the downsides of capitalism are mitigated by government action, including a very strong social safety net.

“But U.S. conservatives — like Fox’s Regan — continually and systematically blur the distinction between social democracy and socialism. In 2008, John McCain accused Barack Obama of wanting socialism, basically because Obama called for an expansion of health coverage. In 2012, Mitt Romney declared that Obama got his ideas from ‘socialist democrats in Europe.’” (*Something Not Rotten in Denmark*, New York Times.³¹)

Capitalism from the 1920s has kept itself alive by borrowing ideas from socialism. The New Right notion of purging these has largely failed. Obviously you can reduce socialist notions of a caring society by just not caring and letting people suffer and die. That has been the real basis of Britain’s system of ‘Universal Credit’.

Getting Tough With Turks

As Turkey moves away from Western values, many in Europe and the USA think that ‘getting tough’ with them is the answer:

“Double US tariffs on steel and aluminium helped to crash the Turkish lira, which has lost 45 per cent of its value this year, although Erdogan might also be blamed for his refusal to raise interest rates against inflation. But let’s be sane. Is all this because of a Presbyterian pastor?

“No. For here’s the real list of Erdogan’s crimes. He is buying the Russian S-400 missile system for Turkey. He refuses to accept US support for America’s Kurdish YPG allies. He allowed Islamist fighters to pour over Turkey’s border into Syria along with a lot of weapons, mortars and missiles – to which Washington had no objections at the time since the US was trying to knock Erdogan’s former friend Bashar al-Assad off his perch. Then, after shooting down a Russian aircraft along the Syrian border in November 2015 – for which he was immediately boycotted by Moscow – Erdogan cuddled up to Putin. It was thus the Russians and the Iranians who first warned Erdogan of the impending ‘Gulen coup’ against him in July 2016. They had been listening in to the Turkish military’s internal radio traffic – and tipped off the Sultan of Istanbul.

“And now Erdogan is helping Iran to dodge US sanctions which were imposed after Trump flagrantly tore up the 2015 nuclear agreement, and – in a decision demonstrating the cowardly response of the EU’s own oil conglomerates to Trump’s insanity – has announced that he will continue to import Iranian oil. Thus will Washington’s further threat of increased oil sanctions against Iran be blunted. Sunni Saudi Arabia, one of Trump’s closest allies – where religious freedom for the likes of Pastor Brunson has never existed – is already furious with Erdogan. Not

long ago, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman denounced Turkey as part of a ‘triangle of evil’ – the other bits of the ‘triangle’ being Shiite Iran and militant Islamists.

“So you can see how things are lining up in the Middle East right now. Erdogan has made good friends out of Putin and Iran’s supreme leader and, as an opponent of Saudi Arabia, is naturally on the best of terms with Qatar, whose Emir – in a miraculous moment which even Pastor Brunson might envy – has just promised an investment of \$15bn to Turkey. Saudi Arabia’s siege of Qatar is beginning to look as miserable as its war against the Shiites of Yemen. Turkish troops are stationed in Qatar to ‘protect’ the little emirate against its larger and threatening neighbour – and we all know who that is.”³²

The hope is to bring down a government they dislike. But I doubt it will work. To me, ‘getting tough’ with Turks is the last thing you should do. Not unless you are ready to shed blood, and quite a lot of blood.

I am quite sure they are not. It’s been done – the Western powers did break up the Ottoman Empire. But the cost was vast, and the outcome didn’t benefit the West in the long run.

Erdogan as President of Turkey is now warning them:

“For the past six decades, Turkey and the United States have been strategic partners and NATO allies. Our two countries stood shoulder to shoulder against common challenges during the Cold War and in its aftermath.

“Over the years, Turkey rushed to America’s help whenever necessary. Our military servicemen and servicewomen shed blood together in Korea. In 1962, the Kennedy administration was able to get the Soviets to remove missiles from Cuba by removing Jupiter missiles from Italy and Turkey. In the wake of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, when Washington counted on its friends and allies to strike back against evil, we sent our troops to Afghanistan to help accomplish the NATO mission there.

“Yet the United States has repeatedly and consistently failed to understand and respect the Turkish people’s concerns. And in recent years, our partnership has been tested by disagreements. Unfortunately, our efforts to reverse this dangerous trend proved futile. Unless the United States starts respecting Turkey’s sovereignty and proves that it understands the dangers that our nation faces, our partnership could be in jeopardy.

“On July 15, 2016, Turkey came under attack by members of a shadowy group led by Fethullah Gulen, who leads his organization, officially described by my government as Fethullah Terrorist Organization, from a compound in rural Pennsylvania. The Gulenists tried to stage a bloody coup against my government. On that night, millions of ordinary citizens rushed to the streets out of a sense of patriotism, similar to what the American people undoubtedly experienced after Pearl Harbor and the Sept. 11 attacks.

“Two hundred and fifty one innocent people, including Erol Olcok, my longtime campaign manager and dear friend, and his son, Abdullah Tayyip Olcok, paid the ultimate price for our nation’s freedom. Had the death squad, which came after me and my family, been successful, I would have joined them.

“The Turkish people expected the United States to unequivocally condemn the attack and express solidarity with Turkey’s elected leadership. It did not. The United States reaction was far from satisfactory. Instead of siding with Turkish democracy, United States officials cautiously called for “stability and peace and continuity within Turkey.” To make matters worse, there has been no progress regarding Turkey’s request for the extradition of Fethullah Gulen under a bilateral treaty.

“Another source of frustration relates to the partnership between the United States and the P.Y.D./Y.P.G., the Syrian branch of the P.K.K., an armed group that is responsible for the deaths of thousands of Turkish citizens since 1984 and that is designated a terrorist group by the United States. According to estimates by the Turkish authorities, Washington used 5,000 trucks and 2,000 cargo planes to deliver weapons to the P.Y.D./Y.P.G in recent years.

“My government has repeatedly shared our concerns with American officials about their decision to train and equip the P.K.K.’s allies in Syria. Unfortunately, our words have fallen on deaf ears, and American weapons ended up being used to target civilians and members of our security forces in Syria, Iraq and Turkey.”³³

As a left-winger, I am hugely amused by the USA insulting and alienating what had been one of its best allies.

Or amused unless it lays the foundation for a grand coalition against Israel, which is possible.

An Unseen Danger to Israel?

Western leaders fail to realise their era is ending. Trump is going for an Alternative New World Order, composed of rival nation-states and with the USA the largest. And will remain second and powerful even if China becomes Number One.

I also notice that Trump is making more probable a line-up that might be deadly for Israel - an alliance between Turkey and Iran, including Syria and perhaps Egypt. He also recently insulted Pakistan.³⁴ Pakistan could offer a nuclear shield to an anti-Israel coalition.

Zionists are obsessed with Corbyn. They don't seem to have noticed the looming peril. Or not that I have heard of.

Trump loud-mouths for Israel, but might not in fact mind. His daddy was in the Klu Klux Klan, which as revived for the 20th century was as much against Jews as Blacks.

Turkey was once quietly on good terms with Israel, as was Iran under the Shah. The disaster has been brewing since the decline of Secular Socialism in Turkey.

No one anywhere has been able to produce a governing party based just on New Right economics. They have to stir up community prejudice.

The British Tories, and the Republicans before Trump, managed to do this without letting the prejudiced to anything much.

In Turkey, it was serious Muslims who emerged.

The opposition is 'against', but very unclear what it is for. It is not much of a challenge.

By simultaneously insulting both Iran and Turkey, Trump is laying the foundation for a possible grand alliance against Israel.

It would cost them plenty. But history shows that Turks have an immense ability to endure suffering and to bounce back.

They re-created their state after the fall of the Ottomans.

The New Right line against Turkey indicates they have learned nothing from past mistakes. Instead they have learned all of their mistakes and intend to repeat them as exactly as possible.

That's the problem with lying - it isn't true. Their main success was to convince most of the West that their nonsense was wisdom. But it remains nonsense.

(The curious matter of the Saudi dissident journalist murdered in their Turkish embassy I will deal with in the next regular Newsnotes. Along with the release of a US pastor who'd been arrested for being involved with the coup in Turkey, an issue which Trump had taken up.³⁵)

China Stands Firm as a Mixed Economy

“As China’s economy slows and the trade war with the United States intensifies, Beijing’s economic bosses are swinging into action.

“Chinese officials are pushing banks to lend more and allowing indebted local governments to spend money on big projects again. They have moved to shore up the value of the country’s currency. They have also helped out the stock market, say financial analysts, as the government works to avert a stock market collapse like the one three years ago that shook the world...

“China’s softening economy has led some within the Trump Administration to believe Beijing is vulnerable, which could lead the White House to escalate the trade war even further.”³⁶

China’s debts don’t matter that much, because it is almost all money owed to other Chinese. Foreign investment has mostly been in actual production, stuff that can’t bolt and wreck the economy in the way Asia’s Tiger Economies were damaged in the 1997 Asian financial crisis.³⁷

Deng always insisted that while he was allowing some capitalism, this was only as a way of building socialism in the long run. Not everyone believed it, and I can’t prove that Deng himself was sincere, though I think he was. But those who *did* see it that way gained dominance under Hu Jintao, the leader before Xi. Xi is just as committed, and much more powerful.

China has settled down to a rather more state-dominated version of the Mixed Economy system that the West tried to abandon in the 1980s. And which the West has not actually abandoned, though it was no great trick to fine-tune it so that a rich overclass got most of the benefits.

In China, the system remains solid. I’ve said this for years, and now I find mainstream writers saying it, though very unlikely to have been influenced by me. One instance:

“After World War II, the American foreign-policy establishment was caught up in an intense debate: ‘Who lost China?’ Someone had to be blamed for Mao’s takeover. Today we are hearing the stirrings of a new debate: ‘Who lost China a second time?’ China is marching toward global technological leadership and increasingly challenges the United States both economically and militarily in what Michael Lind has termed Cold War II. Who was responsible for letting this happen?

“At one level, China lost China. As Michael Pillsbury writes in *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, China has had a strategy to supplant the United States as the dominant military and economic power since 1949. Now China seeks not just economic growth but technological leadership. President Xi Jinping himself has stated that China wants to be ‘master of its own technologies.’ Indeed, China seeks not only mastery but global dominance in a wide array of advanced-technology products including artificial intelligence, computers, electric vehicles, jet airplanes, machine tools, pharmaceuticals, robots, and semiconductors…

“These administrations didn’t act alone. They were cheered on by the stifling groupthink of the Washington trade and economics establishment, which, almost without exception, refused even to consider the possibility that Chinese economic and trade policies might pose a threat to the United States. The Washington elite-consensus view was and is that trade is always good (even one-sided free trade in which the other side is mercantilist); that while trade might hurt individual workers, it can’t hurt the overall economy; and that there is no difference between challenging foreign mercantilism and naked protectionism.

“Coupled with this rigid adherence to a strict free-trade ideology came the argument that China simply could not succeed with a state-run economy. Wasn’t it obvious? The Chinese leadership had clearly never bothered to read Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*.³⁸

Some Chinese did read it. Some believe it: most know better. And they see the US attitude as unreasonable:

“Ye Fangsu was a teenager in 1949 when Mao Zedong’s Communist troops marched into Shanghai, the vanguard of a revolution that vowed to end China’s ‘century of humiliation.’ Now 84 and widowed, Ye says she was ‘angry’ when she learned from state-run media about the United States’ punitive trade tariffs on Chinese products. ‘It just seems like the foreigners are bullying us again,’ she told me. But this time will be different, she said, pointing out that rather than panic or surrender, China’s leaders announced a reciprocal ‘counterattack’ aimed at products, like soybeans and pork, meant to hit the heart of President Donald Trump’s rural base. ‘We’ve become strong now, and our leaders are more tenacious. They won’t back down.’”³⁹

They might also suspect that it is pointless to try to compromise. The West has a bad record of making each concession the basis of a new demand. They followed the retreating Russian armies

as far as the Baltic states. But then balked when Russia went to war with Georgia. It turned out that the West was ready to die to the last Georgian, but not to risk its own troops.

So is Trump doomed to lose the trade war? That depends on what he's aiming at. He might not consider it a failure if it damages globalisation.

Globalisation from the 1990s has been dominated by the USA, but also by centrists like Hilary Clinton. The people Trump is against, and not without reason.

With globalisation, the USA's own culture has been getting damaged - becoming yet another suburb of Nowheremuch.

Trump seems to be after a narrow White-dominated version of the USA's traditional culture. And is likely to fail. But will also help free the world.

Kamikaze Currency?

“Even in the gloomiest of doomsday scenarios, there is one weapon that has long been considered unthinkable: the Chinese, the biggest holder of United States foreign debt with more than \$1 trillion, publicly taking a step back from buying United States Treasuries — or worse, dumping what they own in the open market.

“The very idea is typically dismissed as a waste of time to even consider, and the reason is a sort of mutually assured destruction. It would be wildly irrational in economic terms, the thinking goes. China selling Treasuries would send interest rates up and hurt the United States, but it would simultaneously severely damage the value of China’s own Treasury holdings...

“Beijing’s endgame is not necessarily to ensure the financial health of its country this year or the next. If China were to suffer short-term pain to gain a real and lasting advantage over the United States — or at least not lose any advantages it does have — it might be willing to struggle a bit today.”⁴⁰

The way the Communist Party under Xi Jinping has cracked down on dissenters *before* any major threat makes me think that such a move has been considered as one option. Long ago, it was established that the World Wide Web was not all that hard to control. (Something I warned about as far back as the year 2000.)⁴¹ And with few effective opposition voices, it is likely that the Chinese government could persuade its people to accept a lot more suffering than any US government ever could.

‘Kamikaze’ was of course Japanese – people crashing their aircraft into US warships. The two cultures are much less similar than most Westerners think – but very similar in their ability to endure suffering. In the Sino-Japanese war that later merged into World War Two, it was the Chinese who took the Japanese to their limits by not yielding. Who pushed them into the profoundly foolish decision to attack the USA at Pearl Harbour.

China and Turkey

When the USA was trying to pressure Turkey, a Chinese on-line news service made the following comments:

“With the rapid slump of the Turkish lira, many people think that Turkey’s modernization has been hit hard and the country may fall into the middle-income trap and find it hard to get out of it.

“What’s happening in the Turkish economy is not alone among emerging markets. Similar currency crises occurred in South America, Asia and Russia, showing the vulnerability of emerging markets whose high-speed development also brings serious inflation that imperils them.

“In a bid to cement the US’ comparative advantage, Washington is unwilling to see smooth development of emerging countries and takes some actions, intentionally or not, to foster the crises that confront the latter...

“There are more differences than similarities in the Chinese and Turkish economies. Both countries are latecomers to emerging markets and both have experienced an overheated economy. But there's no comparison of their economic scale. China is the world's second largest economy, the largest manufacturing nation and the largest trading nation. It takes much more to carry out an effective assault against China than bring Turkey to its knees.

“China has the most competitive real economy in the world as well as the fastest-growing consumer market. It is not reliant on foreign trade as much as other emerging economies and such dependence has been constantly reduced in recent years. China is the world's biggest holder of foreign currency reserve, which can protect China's economic stability. Beijing has been taking a proactive but cautious approach to financial liberalization.”⁴²

As I said earlier, Turkey is unlikely to yield. Particularly since the USA is demanding surrender to Neo-Liberal policies that are visibly failing in the West. While rejecting the failed attempt at US-dominated globalisation, Trump remains broadly Neo-Liberal for policies within the USA. He has just added an overt racism that was always there in the background.

In rating themselves just as tough as Turks, the Chinese may well be correct. The Ottomans *did* crack during World War Two, after some respectable resistance. China, though often defeated in the sad years between the Opium Wars and 1949, never actually gave up. Each had a leader who rallied them in their hinterland: Kemal Ataturk around Ankara and Mao in Shaanxi.

(Mao's core after the Long March was Shaanxi, which includes the ancient capital Xi'an. It was not Yan'an (Yennan), which never had the importance that outsiders supposed it did. Outsiders mostly saw the previously-mysterious Chinese Communist leadership in that city. But they didn't hold Yan'an when Edgar Snow gathered material for his famous *Red Star Over China*. They got it as a free gift when the Xi'an Incident⁴³ created united Chinese resistance against Japan. Freely yielded it as a lure to their foes during the final Chinese Civil War.)

The leadership has also so far prevented the sort of popular anti-US demonstrations that were directed against Japan a few years back. They probably figure that Trump is blustering and will compromise if China stands firm. Which is probably true.

China in the South China Sea

“While China lags in projecting firepower on a global scale, it can now challenge American military supremacy in the places that matter most to it: the waters around Taiwan and in the disputed South China Sea.

“That means a growing section of the Pacific Ocean — where the United States has operated unchallenged since the naval battles of World War II — is once again contested territory, with Chinese warships and aircraft regularly bumping up against those of the United States and its allies.

“To prevail in these waters, according to officials and analysts who scrutinize Chinese military developments, China does not need a military that can defeat the United States outright but merely one that can make intervention in the region too costly for Washington to contemplate. Many analysts say Beijing has already achieved that goal...

“Last year, the Chinese Navy became the world's largest, with more warships and submarines than the United States, and it continues to build new ships at a stunning rate. Though the American fleet remains superior qualitatively, it is spread much thinner.”⁴⁴

When In Public, Strangers May Recognise You

“In the Chinese city of Zhengzhou, a police officer wearing facial recognition glasses spotted a heroin smuggler at a train station.

“In Qingdao, a city famous for its German colonial heritage, cameras powered by artificial intelligence helped the police snatch two dozen criminal suspects in the midst of a big annual beer festival.

“In Wuhu, a fugitive murder suspect was identified by a camera as he bought food from a street vendor.

“With millions of cameras and billions of lines of code, China is building a high-tech authoritarian future. Beijing is embracing technologies like facial recognition and artificial intelligence to identify and track 1.4 billion people. It wants to assemble a vast and unprecedented national surveillance system, with crucial help from its thriving technology industry.”⁴⁵

This report from the *New York Times* is typical in that it plays down how far similar things are being done in the West. Not to mention extensions like using DNA database information freely offered by relatives to catch persons unknown who have left behind DNA from a rape or murder.

It does certainly mean that any dissident movement would find it hard to last long.

Windrush – Dishonest Methods

Tories typically sell a controversial policy as ensuring fairness. But then work it in a way that is grossly unfair:

“The immigration and asylum barrister Colin Yeo said that ‘the rules are so precise’ it has become essential to use a lawyer, forcing applicants to pay ‘astronomical’ legal fees. Attempts to eliminate discretion from the rules since 2012 have instead ‘removed any human element, humane judgments. It’s a ‘computer says no’ exercise.

“‘The frequency of the changes mean it’s very difficult to keep on top of them,’ Yeo said. ‘You have to read everything that’s coming out and it’s very hard to be certain you’ve captured every single change that might be relevant to your clients. The changes are often hurried out, which means they can be badly written. They can be very difficult to understand, even for judges and lawyers. We’ve seen a number of errors in drafting that have to be corrected in later versions.’

“A key change in the period analysed by the *Guardian* was a widespread loss of appeal rights introduced in the Immigration Act 2014, which resulted in ‘far less scrutiny of the Home Office’, Yeo said.”⁴⁶

As with the notorious failure of the Child Support Agency, giving people quotas for success meant it was much easier to go after the honest than the actual offenders. They also applied the classical bureaucratic Law of Delay. You don’t say ‘no’, but you ensure that there isn’t a ‘yes’ in a reasonable period of time. Something normally done by administrators to avoid rules they disagree with.

A lot of right-wingers regret that Afro-Caribbean people were ever let in. And want to get rid of as many as possible.

Or you give people a selfish motive to bend the rules as far as possible:

“The private company that handled the Windrush cases had a Home Office contract that paid extra money if more people were removed from Britain, according to newly released documents.

“The information, sent to a parliamentary committee investigating the Windrush scandal, shows that the Home Office’s contract with Capita gave the company a bonus payment of 2.5% on top of the normal fee above a certain target for removals from the UK, rising to 12.5% if the total exceeded the target by 10%.”⁴⁷

Amazon – Lordly Ways

Charity gives the rich a chance to show off and be superior. It is no substitute for economic rights.

“The Amazon boss has launched something called the Day One fund, which feels like the will-this-do title for the will-this-do initiative it is. Bezos has long been criticised for his glaring lack of a philanthropic arm, long after he became the richest man in modern history...

“Off the top of my head, Jeff has already had two very clear chances to help homeless people and low-income families. The first was in Seattle, where Amazon is headquartered, and where the firm recently killed a proposed city tax on big firms to alleviate the homeless crisis by threatening to halt a building project. The second was by simply paying his own low-income workers better. As the old saying goes, charity begins in aisle 89 of the Amazon warehouse, where workers are so terrified of being docked points for nipping to the bathroom that they’re pissing in bottles.

“But guys like Jeff don’t want governments, or properly paid worker ants, taking credit for what is, after all, his bounty. The rule you learn on Day One of being a billionaire philanthropist is that you don’t give money via pay packets to the poor people who literally already work for you. They’d only spend it poorly. However, if they want to humbly queue up and apply for it via some thinly disguised hardship grant that you take the applause for, that’s a different matter. Dignity is something you hand out, not something that others get to earn. I missed this bit in *The Wealth of Nations*; I guess there’s a sealed section.”⁴⁸

Actually Adam Smith supported the Enlightened Aristocrats that ran Britain in the 18th century. He was close to the three British Ministers generally blamed for starting the American War of Independence.⁴⁹ Most of his letters have been lost, or perhaps intentionally destroyed: but what we have shows him on the side of the British government against the pioneering forces of US Democracy.

In the modern world, US democracy and liberalism have exhausted their useful role. Economic liberalism has become a source of oppression. And Amazon, while providing a useful service, has been amazingly mean and aggressive with its ordinary workforce. One employee reported:

“I had done warehouse work previously when I was younger, along with a range of other poorly paid, manual jobs. In other words, my shock at the way workers were treated by Amazon was not a product of some wet-behind-the-ears naivety: I fully expected warehouse work to be tough. Yet what I witnessed at Amazon went far beyond that. This was a workplace environment in which decency, respect and dignity were absent.”⁵⁰

All this has helped Amazon become world’s second company to be valued at more than a trillion dollars, just behind Apple.⁵¹

But protest works. Amazon did raise wages recently.⁵² And took away some other benefits at the same time – no doubt Mr Bezos aspires to run a two-trillion-dollar company, and isn’t going to let a few suffering workers get in his way. But it’s been shown that resistance is far from futile.

The Last Racists?

“Star Wars actress Kelly Marie Tran has broken her silence after a barrage of sexist and racist abuse led her to delete her social media in June.

“The actress is the daughter of Vietnamese refugees and the first lead woman of colour in the franchise.

“Writing in the *New York Times*, Ms Tran says the abuse revived feelings she experienced growing up.

“The article addresses her feelings of cultural shame, racial stereotypes and society’s narrow definitions of beauty.

“‘Their words reinforced a narrative I had heard my whole life: that I was ‘other’, that I didn’t belong, that I wasn’t good enough, simply because I wasn’t like them,’ Tran writes.

“I believed those words, those stories, carefully crafted by a society that was built to uphold the power of one type of person - one sex, one skin tone, one existence.”

“Tran also reveals she and her parents changed their first names after coming to the US so they would be easier for Americans to pronounce.

“The actress began to receive abuse after being cast as mechanic-turned-Resistance fighter Rose Tico in 2017's *The Last Jedi*.

“She writes that their comments ‘awakened something deep inside me - a feeling I thought I had grown out of. The same feeling I had when at nine, I stopped speaking Vietnamese altogether because I was tired of hearing other kids mock me.’”⁵³

The mainstream is increasingly less tolerant of White Racism, which had been flourishing underground since being formally outlawed after World War Two. The original *Star Trek* had just one black person, Uhuru, who was also the only women in the regular cast. Its black characters have rather too often been stereotypes: tough and violent enforcers on the side of virtue.

Exactly the same fault was there in the short-lived *Firefly* series, and its film sequel *Serenity*.⁵⁴ It even had a covert plug for the Confederacy as a Noble Lost Cause.

As for *Star Wars*, the first film was all-white apart from James Earl Ray, who did the Darth Vader voice. Protest worked: later casts were more mixed, though often still stereotyped.

Racism was mainstream in the 1930s. Hitler was a disaster for White Racism, losing his World War after attacking Britain and the USA the main White-Racist powers. Surviving overt racists show their intellectual limitations by heroizing a man who was a bungler in the world politics that he believed himself expert in.

Hitler discredited overt racism. But racism did not vanish after ceasing to be respectable:

“In the runup to the 2018 *Unite the Right* rally in Washington, DC, this Sunday — the sequel to last year’s infamous Charlottesville, Virginia, tiki torch demonstration — it’s vitally important to try to figure out just how significant the movement known as the alt-right is as an American political force. If people like white nationalist Richard Spencer are marginal cranks, whose ideas have no resonance with a wider audience, the best thing to do might be to ignore them.

“But new research from the University of Alabama’s George Hawley, published by UVA’s Institute for Family Studies, suggests this isn’t the case. According to Hawley, a political scientist who specializes in demography and the far right, roughly 5.64 percent of America’s 198 million non-Hispanic whites have beliefs consistent with the alt-right’s worldview. Whether or not they would describe themselves as alt-right, Hawley argues, they share the movement’s belief in a politics that promotes white interests above those of other racial groups.

“If Hawley is right, then the alt-right’s constituency isn’t a tiny fringe. It’s about 11 million Americans.”⁵⁵

Trump has them voting for him, while keeping tens of millions more who would not accept overt racism. Who have lots of prejudices that the US Republicans have been carefully massaging ever since Richard Nixon saw the chance of winning over racist voters in the US South, who had previously been solid Democrats.

In the event ‘*Unite the Right*’ made a pathetic showing, with just 20 of them daring to turn up.⁵⁶ And with a culture that punishes poor people for having children, the white majority will soon be reduced to being just the largest of many minorities.⁵⁷ They are increasingly powerless and increasingly malicious.

Iraq Fails

“The opening up of Iraq’s enormous verified oil reserves to foreign expertise in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein was hailed as the means to kickstart its economy and potentially transform the south into an economic stronghold. Instead, ordinary Iraqis have seen little or no benefit from the proceeds of the country’s multibillion-dollar oil industry, much of which has been siphoned off

by corrupt politicians. Across the south in recent months, simmering anger over corruption and unemployment has been fuelled by the dire state of public services, regular power cuts and water shortages.

“The oil companies, which are supposed to train and hire a workforce from local populations and invest back into development projects, are forced to hire those with connections to powerful tribal sheikhs and the Islamist parties. Funds for those populations rarely materialise and almost none of the oil revenues trickle down to the population. Meanwhile, local militias with links to clans and political parties have formed their own companies, which land lucrative security contracts with subsidiaries of foreign oil firms.”⁵⁸

Do the oil companies care? They were maybe less ‘forced’ than the article suggests.

Under Saddam, Iraq was a one-party state that accepted obligations to all of its citizens. Corrupt and brutal, but it also provided a decent life for anyone who did not openly oppose them.

Thanks to Western intervention, it is still corrupt and brutal. But also sectarian, fragmented and with a dismal future.

The West has made billions out of the oil, though this cost trillions. Of course the tax-payers provided the trillions. The elite got the billions, and manage to legally evade most taxes.

But they are not so smart. Had they spent those trillions giving a decent transition to Russia and the other ex-Soviet states, they might have Russia as a useful ally rather than a dangerous foe. Ukraine as a useful ally rather than a pro-Western failed state that can give them nothing useful.

Saudi Autocrats

The article I quote below was written before the amazing Khashoggi scandal. As I said earlier, this is developing fast as I write, so I will hold off commenting. But even before that, there was good cause to doubt.

The much-praised ‘reform program’ looks to be as big a flop as the failed modernisation under the Shah of Iran. It might be doomed to the same outcome. It is certainly not going well:

“The Saudi reversal on the decision to sell shares in oil giant Aramco highlights all the flaws in MBS' reform drive

“Offering shares in in Saudi Aramco wasn’t a critical part of the kingdom’s ambitious economic reform plans. But the ensuing muddle captured all its over-the-top zeitgeist.

“Aramco is the world’s largest oil producer, and heir apparent Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, or MBS, the man leading the reform drive, was confident it was worth \$2 trillion, twice Apple’s valuation. The IPO would be the biggest in history and the world’s leading stock exchanges were competing for the privilege of the listing...

“Now, as Reuters reported on Wednesday, the IPO has been halted.

“Well, not quite halted but delayed, according to an official government statement. But read between the lines: ‘The government remains committed to the IPO of Saudi Aramco at a time of its own choosing when conditions are optimum.’

“That’s ‘forget it,’ as Sir Humphrey of ‘Yes, Minister’ would say...

“The old guard at Aramco and in the government didn’t want to disclose as much information about the secretive company as the New York and London exchanges were insisting on.

“MBS’ vision of an economy of innovative, educated Saudis and the dynastic rule of the al-Saud family are a complete mismatch. MBS has shown not the slightest inkling of ceding any royal prerogatives – least of all his own – of absolute rule. Indeed, tolerance of dissent has diminished, as evidenced by the arrest of female activists and the threat of imposing the death sentence on one.

“Yes, MBS is letting women drive for the first time and has made some other gentle social reforms. But the modus operandi is that of the ruler bestowing gifts on his people, who’d better be grateful, rather than a process where Saudi society decides through an open process of debate.

“MBS’ other problem is that Saudi Arabia doesn’t have the human capital to pull off an economic revolution...

“It’s not that the kingdom wants for money to educate its population, but Saudis have gotten too used to the idea that real work is performed by expatriates. The idea that they will be leading and founding innovative, transformative business is hard to imagine.”⁵⁹

Trump trumped

If Trump is brought down, it will probably be over trivia. Had the private lives of politicians been examined in the past as closely as they are now, we’d have been denied some of the best and most effective leaders the west has ever had. Such as Franklin Roosevelt, with no one showing him in his wheelchair. No one spoke of him having an unofficial wife, while his official wife was almost certainly a practicing lesbian.

But things are as they are. Or are until they aren’t, and massive changes for the USA and the West in general are likely. Maybe not changes for the better, but certainly changes.

The unfolding scandal may be a last gasp for a dying system. And should be fun, regardless.

“Those payments to women were unseemly. That doesn’t mean they were illegal...

“The U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York has extracted a guilty plea from Cohen for ‘knowingly and willfully’ violating campaign finance laws by arranging for payments to two women accusing Trump of extramarital affairs. Cohen admitted he did so under the direction of ‘a candidate’ — obviously referencing Trump — to ‘influence’ an election. Cohen was facing multiple tax and fraud charges that could have landed him in jail for the rest of his life, even if he beat the campaign finance allegations. By pleading guilty, he limits his jail time to just a few years.

“However, regardless of what Cohen agreed to in a plea bargain, hush-money payments to mistresses are not really campaign expenditures. It is true that ‘contribution’ and ‘expenditure’ are defined in the Federal Election Campaign Act as anything ‘for the purpose of influencing any election,’ and it may have been intended and hoped that paying hush money would serve that end. The problem is that almost anything a candidate does can be interpreted as intended to ‘influence an election,’ from buying a good watch to make sure he gets to places on time, to getting a massage so that he feels fit for the campaign trail, to buying a new suit so that he looks good on a debate stage. Yet having campaign donors pay for personal luxuries — such as expensive watches, massages and Brooks Brothers suits — seems more like bribery than funding campaign speech.”⁶⁰

The man’s offices were raided by the FBI with the object of finding evidence of suspected Russian involvement in the Trump campaign. Having impounded documents and computers from his office and home they discovered nothing along those lines. But did find the evidence of his undeclared taxable income — the sort of thing we are told almost all of the rich in America do.

“Oh, the audacity of dopes. The crimes of Paul Manafort and Michael Cohen are notable not just for how blatant they were but also for their lack of sophistication. The two men did little to hide their lying to banks and the Internal Revenue Service. One can almost sympathize with them: If it wasn’t for their decision to attach themselves to the most unlikely president in modern history, there’s every reason to think they might be still working their frauds today...

“Are there legions of K Street big shots working for foreign despots and parking their riches in Cypriot bank accounts to avoid the IRS?...

“We don’t know. We don’t know because the cops aren’t on the beat. Resources have been stripped from white-collar enforcement. The FBI shifted agents to work on international terror in the wake of 9/11. White-collar cases made up about one-tenth of the Justice Department’s cases in recent years, compared with one-fifth in the early 1990s. The IRS’ criminal enforcement capabilities have been decimated by years of budget cuts and attrition. The Federal Election Commission is a toothless organization that is widely flouted.

“No wonder Cohen and Manafort were so brazen. They must have felt they had impunity.

“How could they not? Any person in any bar in America can tell you who was held accountable for the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression, which peaked 10 years ago next month: No one. No top officer from any major bank went to prison.”⁶¹

If Cohen then ratted on people who trusted him, that also is typical. His tax offences were used to get a plea bargain where he admitted his involvement in the payments to the woman who had the affair. Although it doesn't have any direct bearing on allegations of Russian involvement, it is now being used as a soap-opera sub-plot in that campaign.

War – an Avoidable Evil

Is war part of human nature? Not really.

Individual violence has always been there. It is found also in our chimp and gorilla relatives. But war is something that can develop as societies develop. Societies can live without it – but once it starts, it tends to persist.

“War appeared at different times in different places... the multiple violent deaths at Jebel Sahaba along the Nile in northern Sudan ... severe competition among settled hunter-gatherer groups in an area with once rich but declining food sources may have led to conflict.

“At a slightly later time, settlements, weapons and burials in the northern Tigris suggest war involving settled villages of hunter-gatherers between 9750 and 8750 BC. Nearby, the earliest known village fortifications occurred among farming people in the seventh millennium, and the first conquest of an urban centre took place between 3800 and 3500 B.C. By that date, war was common across Anatolia, spread in part by conquering migrants from the northern Tigris.

“In stark contrast, archaeologists have found no persuasive evidence in settlements, weapons or skeletal remains in the southern Levant (from Sinai to southern Lebanon and Syria) dating to before about 3200 B.C. In Japan, violent deaths from any cause are rare among hunter-gatherer groups from 13,000 to 800 B.C.

“With the development of wet rice farming around 300 B.C., violent fatalities become apparent in more than one in 10 remains...

“When people have more to fight over, their societies start to organise themselves in a manner that makes them more prepared to go ahead and embrace war.” (*Scientific American*⁶²)

The decline in overall violence was nicely documented in Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Not that the man understands wider matters: his recent book on Enlightenment values is just silly, as I have detailed elsewhere. I said:

“If we stand on the shoulders of cannibal giants, it is embarrassing. But an embarrassment we need to face up to, to make a better future for ourselves.” (*In the Dark About Enlightenment*⁶³)

Pinker can't bring himself to think toughly about society he lives within, sad to say. Whitewashes the vicious processes by which a relatively peaceful world has been created. Closer to the truth is Jared Diamond in *The World Until Yesterday*. Among other things, he sees the usefulness of state power. The endless violence that is normal if you let people manage security on an individual or small-group basis.

A drawback, certainly, is that while states reduce individual violence, they are prone to fight other states. Yet in the 20th century, the only successful wars have been Civil Wars, Wars of National Liberation and Wars of Ethnic Cleansing. Some of these fail, but enough produce a Long Result that is viewed as satisfactory by those who started the conflict.

Wars happen, only when there are aggressors who hope to profit. You also get disputes about who was innocent: in most 20th century wars the aggressor has posed as acting defensively. This also often happens with Wars of Ethnic Cleansing. Only Wars of National Liberation are typically launched by people who feel justified going to war because they were denied freedom. But for World War One, most of the original parties to that war lost. Germany lost territory,

Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were broken up and Tsarist Russia was replaced by the Soviet Union. Italy gained little. The British Empire and French Empire were overt winners and gained territory, but it was the start of their decline.

If wars of aggression no longer pay once wars are fought with modern machines, then ‘star wars’ may never be more than fantasy.

Fantastic Weather and Why to Fear It

“The year 2018 is on track to be the fourth warmest on record, beaten only by 2016, 2015 and 2017. In other words, we have had the warmest four-year run since we started measuring. According to data from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), June 2018 is the 402nd consecutive month with temperatures above the 20th-century average. The UK’s Environmental Audit Committee has warned that we could see summer temperatures reaching 38C by the 2040s, leading to a potential 7,000 heat-related deaths a year.

“One hot summer does not a changing climate make, but the trend in the global data is now irrefutable. When Michael Mann published the ‘hockey stick’ graph back in 1998, there was vociferous public pushback, yet **the observed temperature rises match what Mann had predicted.** Today’s hockey stick graph isn’t a forward projection but a historical record. The world has been getting hotter, and it will continue to do so. The only question now is how much hotter it gets.”⁶⁴

That was from the end of July, before the amazing run of unusual hurricanes, some larger than usual and others in places when hurricanes are seldom seen. Just what was likely with warmer seas, since warm seas are part of the processes that power them.

Does that mean we are all doomed? Thankfully not. With the USA explicitly defending polluters, and with many other governments doing so in practice, the rich and guilty are likely to have a few more years bloated profits before paying the price for saving the world. The price will be paid by the deaths of many ordinary people. But the ruling elite are not stupid, and are almost certain to react when they see that they themselves might get hurt.

People who know science know what is likely to happen, whether or not they understand the politics of it:

“We are setting in motion huge changes that cannot be stopped. Most notably, there may already be no way to prevent sea level rising at least 5 metres.

“But it is also wrong to go to the other extreme and claim we are doomed. For starters, no scientists are claiming a Hothouse Earth will happen anytime soon.

“Many of the processes that could push the Earth towards this state operate over centuries and millennia. And while estimates of sea level rise by 2100 are creeping up to as much as 3 metres, almost all glaciologists think the melting of polar ice sheets will take many centuries. So this is mostly about what happens after 2100, not before.

“There is still time to prepare and adapt, then. And what we do still matters even in this worst-case scenario, because the more we do to reduce emissions, the more time we will buy ourselves.”⁶⁵

We could still get a major disaster. Fears of the Gulf Stream failing are now much reduced. Much more to be feared is a failure of the monsoons that keep the Indian Subcontinent alive. This would make India almost uninhabitable, and hurt other countries including China.

The dominant powers of the West seem willing to risk it, since it will not be their people who get hurt.

Snippets

Quality Cinema Needed

“She is one of Hollywood’s most celebrated actresses, the award-winning star of John Huston’s *Prizzi’s Honor* and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Peggy Sue Got Married* – for which she received an Oscar nomination.

“But now Kathleen Turner has turned on Hollywood with an angry attack on the eye-watering millions that studios spend on movies and A-list actors, which she describes as ‘immoral’. Funds should be redirected, Turner says, into improving the quality of scripts and performances, investing in writers and allowing actors rehearsal time rather than mere ‘read-throughs’ before the shoot begins...

“While arguing that women and men should receive equal pay, ‘certainly when they carry the film or they’re a full co-star’, Turner criticises the astronomical fees paid to stars. ‘How much money does a person need?’ she said. ‘You can only live in one house at a time. Perhaps they could designate that the studio pay a portion of the fee to an organisation or an educational institution.’”

I’ve often wondered why so many expensive films have really stupid scripts. It’s because of the way cinema has been played, mostly hyping stars rather than the films they appear in. And competing to get them, which explains the excessive money they get.

It helps sell an entire false way of life. A world view that leads to addiction and misery, more often than to happiness.

Bitcoin – Freedom for Organised Crime

I’ve said before that Bitcoin only made sense to make life easier for criminals. On the side, it makes money from people who believe it is clever to buy into something that is hyped in the mainstream press. Such reports mostly come near the peak of the market; the time when the smart money is getting out, as I mentioned earlier. But criminality is the core of the business, given the beautifully anonymous and convenient nature of the new currency.

Some of the crooks still get caught, despite the best efforts of the Libertarians to hamper the law in the name of freedom:

“A Greek Supreme Court ruling Tuesday in a computer crime case may return to Russia, rather than extradite to the United States, a potential witness in the investigation into Russian hacking during the 2016 American presidential election.

“The Greek police detained the man, Aleksandr V. Vinnik, last year on an American warrant that accuses him of running a Moscow-based Bitcoin exchange that laundered as much as \$4 billion in illegal funds.”

Russian hacking is probably over-hyped. But bitcoin remains a real menace.

Capitalism or Science?

“The Myth That Capitalism Saved the World...

“The industrial revolution dates to 1760. Guess what else does? The scientific method. The very first controlled experiment happened in 1753. The industrial revolution depended critically on the very first age of what we’d consider proto ‘modern’ research into the new natural sciences happening at universities, which was then shared and publicized by royal societies. But that research was only finally taking place because the rudiments of the scientific method were finally laid down—statistics, controls, experimental design, inductive logic, and so forth—after centuries of blind alleys. It’s true that the great inventors commercialized this research, and built products atop it—but without sudden, revelatory understandings of the basic laws of physics, all those

contraptions, engines, ‘gins’, pistons, lightbulbs, plugs, and so on, wouldn’t have been built at all.”⁶⁶

True enough, as far as it goes. You could take the process back further, to the European Renaissance plus the vast damage done to conventional belief by the vicious struggles of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. And capitalism had a useful role in breaking down a very unequal traditional order – what is loosely called feudalism.

It is also true that enthusiasts for capitalism are quite often enthusiasts for science also. Though mostly also those whose main interest has been in making a useful new product and creating a better world, rather than the strictly capitalist aim of making more money.

A distinctive feature of capitalism is that when let run unchecked, it will act like a corrosive acid. Eat its way out of whatever social system it was operating within. Today’s Neo-Liberals are only the latest of many to bump into this inconvenient truth.

Red and Green

“Anglo-Saxon capitalism’s drive to maximise profits in the short term won’t save the planet. Perhaps the Chinese model can?...”

“The good news is that in Beijing and New Delhi, policymakers have woken up to the idea that green growth is better growth. China is committed to phasing out coal, in part because it is worried about climate change and in part because it sees an opportunity to be a world leader in green technology. India, although slower to act, is also starting to take advantage of collapsing prices for electricity generated by solar and wind, and has set itself demanding renewables targets.”⁶⁷

Meantime the USA uses 77.3 million acres for crops eaten by humans, and a further 127.4 million acres to feed livestock, mostly meat animals.⁶⁸ A way of life that cannot last long.

A Right to Live, a Right to Die

“Legal permission will no longer be needed [in the USA] to withdraw treatment from patients in permanent vegetative state, the Supreme Court has ruled.

“It will now be easier to withdraw food and liquid to allow such patients to die across the UK.

“When families and doctors are in agreement, medical staff will be able to remove feeding tubes without applying to the Court of Protection.”

This is imperfect. Foolish to have someone starve to death in the hope they can’t feel it. All arising from medical ethics being contaminated with rubbish inherited from mediaeval theology. Nonsense about indirect actions not really being actions.

I favour right-to-die, but I’d also want it to be done with the same consideration that is shown to murderers in countries where the death penalty still applies. Kill them humanely.

I also repeat an idea I’ve put in previous *Newsnotes* – a distinct organisation charged with being ‘*Defenders of Life*’. Not denying a right to die, or to end a life that has become pointless. But to be sure that there is no abuse.

Most families show proper concern and sorrow at the death of a family member. But not all of them, particularly when large amounts of property are involved.

Unsavoury Liberalism

“Britain must strike deals with ‘unsavoury’ elites, says FCO report...”

“Based on studies of 21 different global conflicts, in which Britain often played a part, the independent report has been published by the cross-government Stabilisation Unit, bringing

together the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and Department for International Development.

“It admits that hasty efforts to set up liberal democratic institutions from scratch are likely to fail, especially if any new arrangements do not reflect the political context and reasons for the existing distribution between the elite.

The study is the British government’s most comprehensive analysis of what makes external diplomatic and military interventions succeed or fail. It represents a repudiation of many of the assumptions behind British actions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.”⁶⁹

This is at best half-wise. Not facing up to the foolishness of overthrowing repressive regimes without taking a long hard look at just what it is they are repressing.

Not mentioning that Britain’s own democracy was set up by an unsavoury elite. First Cromwellian radicalism and then a set of corrupt compromises after the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Europe Asserts Itself - Slightly

“In Major Shift, Germany Calls for Payment Channels Independent of U.S.

“Heiko Maas said the U.S. and Europe have been drifting apart since well before Donald Trump’s presidency — but he also criticized recent decisions such as Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal.

“Germany’s foreign minister called for Europe to strengthen its financial independence from the United States and set up independent payment channels as he laid out proposals for a future ‘balanced partnership’ with the U.S.

“Heiko Maas wrote in a piece for the daily *Handelsblatt Wednesday* that he envisions taking a ‘balanced share of responsibility’ and being ‘a counterbalance when the U.S. crosses red lines.’

“Maas said the U.S. and Europe have been drifting apart since well before Donald Trump’s presidency — but he also criticized recent decisions such as Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. Germany, France and Britain, the European signatories to the 2015 agreement between Iran and world powers, have vowed to keep it alive.”⁷⁰

This all ties in with Trump wanting the USA to shrug off its Only Superpower role, which hasn’t worked. But has meant the USA becoming more Cosmopolitan than he likes.

Do Eyebrows Make a Human?

“It’s one of the first things you notice when you look at archaic human relatives in a natural history textbook or museum. Just above the eyes rests an imposing feature, a prominent brow ridge that juts out above the eye sockets.

“But why did many of our distant relatives have this distinct facial feature? Why don’t we have it anymore?...

“O’Higgins started to ask around about other ideas that might explain the brow ridges. He heard about the work of the late Grover Krantz, who in addition to being a Bigfoot seeker was a physical anthropologist interested in the function of brow ridges. To figure out what they might be good for, he once wore an artificial one on his own face. It didn’t keep hair or sweat out of the way, but it did seem to serve another purpose.

“‘When he was walking down dark alleyways at night, people crossed the road to avoid him,’ O’Higgins says. Krantz suggested that the brow ridges might be used as a physical sign of aggression to intimidate others. ‘That got us thinking, maybe that why it’s there in [fossil skull] Kabwe—to give a signal of dominance.’

“Around the same time that he was contemplating brow ridges, O’Higgins’ teenage daughters were increasingly interested in grooming their eyebrows, an obsession that their father noted to his colleague, archeologist Penny Spikins...

“So pervasive are our eyebrow movements that it’s even made its way into our language. ‘You know the phrase ‘somebody raised a few eyebrows with that idea?’’ Sipkins says. ‘That means they were given really subtle signals that what they did wasn’t acceptable, and that people didn’t agree with them.’

“It makes you realize that you don’t realize how many subtle movements we’re making all the time. But compared to other species, we do pick up on tremendously subtle social signs—it’s all part of being human,’ Spikins says.”⁷¹

Raised eyebrows are a well-understood signal of doubt. Doubt communicated without being unduly aggressive and maybe staring a fight.

I’d suggest a test. Show a film in which someone is making an argument, with an audience. In half, you see raised eyebrows among the audience. Does it make the viewer less inclined to believe?

I’d also suggest that as humans developed, having eyebrows that scared people off became a net disadvantage. All men back then were hunters, and there would always have been some ready to use back-stabbing against whoever offended them. A little ‘accident’ for a tough fellow who had made too many enemies. Or they might openly gang up and drive him out, denying him the chance to breed with the best females.

Free Trade?

“Two multinational oil companies have launched a pre-emptive legal strike, seeking to stop Vietnam from collecting taxes on the profits made in a major oil deal.

“An investigation by Finance Uncovered has found that ConocoPhillips and Perenco will attempt to stop the Vietnamese government from levying an estimated \$179m (£140m) in taxes on the profits made from the sale of oilfields in the country. The dispute will be heard at a little-known but powerful international court, so secretive that information on the date and location of the hearing is restricted.”⁷²

The sort of abuse that the Transatlantic and Trans-Pacific ‘Free Trade’ agreements would have extended. Thankfully, Trump has killed both. Not because he values fairness, but another instance of trying to make the USA less cosmopolitan.

Japan Cheats

“One of Japan’s most prestigious medical schools has admitted deliberately altering entrance exam scores for more than a decade to restrict the number of female students and ensure more men became doctors.

“Tokyo Medical University manipulated all entrance exam results starting in 2006 or even earlier, according to findings released by lawyers involved in the investigation, confirming recent reports in Japanese media.”⁷³

That’s the drawback of a society modernised by Social Conservatism, rather than socialism or communism. It avoids the social destructiveness of Neo-Liberalism. But hangs on to as much inequality and unfairness as it can get away with.

Dying of Foolishness

“In the early 2000s, after the link between the MMR vaccine and autism was thoroughly debunked, healthcare professionals, including GPs and our teams, worked hard to re-establish public

confidence in vaccinations. It took years to restore, but uptake rates in children receiving the MMR vaccine began to improve and there was a time, not so long ago, when we thought we had eradicated measles entirely.

“That is why recent data about the surge in measles cases across Europe will come as distressing news – even to us here in the UK...

“The rapid spread of measles across Europe is an inevitable consequence of lower uptakes of the MMR vaccine globally, and the particularly virulent nature of this disease and how easily it can spread.”⁷⁴

Vaccinations were hated from their earliest days. Causing a minor sickness to avoid something worse can be a hard concept to grasp. And the old idea of illness as caused by sin and cured by prayer died hard. So protests keep popping up in the guise of science:

“The founder of [Italy’s] Five Star [political party], Beppe Grillo ... is a vaccine sceptic. Vaccines can be as dangerous as the diseases they protect against, he once asserted. In 2015 the party proposed changing the law on vaccination, citing “the link between vaccinations and specific illnesses such as leukaemia, poisoning, inflammation, immunodepression, inheritable genetic mutations, cancer, autism and allergies”. Scientific misunderstandings are common among the anti-vaccine movements, along with a failure to properly weigh experimental results. Not all scientific studies are equal. Vaccine denialists tend to be selective in their approach to the evidence.

“Vaccine hesitancy does not map neatly on to party affiliation. Alongside the Trump-following populists and the rightwing anti-establishment individualists are the left-leaning Mother Earth-lovers. These are people who worry about injecting their children with chemical compounds in the same way that they worry about pesticides in their food.

“Common to both groups is suspicion of big pharma. Anti-vaccine rhetoric cites pharmaceutical company scandals, of which there have been many. Multinational companies are only interested in profits and not to be trusted with children’s bodies, the doubters argue. These doubts spread globally online. You don’t see articles in newspapers arguing that vaccination causes autism any more, but that doesn’t matter in an era of social media. Mainstream scientists who want to demolish the conspiracy theories and bad science and explain how the evidence stacks up in favour of vaccines are talking into a vacuum.”⁷⁵

A popular book on the long-running and repeatedly mistaken anti-vaccine movements would be very useful. I’m not well qualified to write it, nor inclined to take time off from other issues where I am already well informed. But it is needed.

New Zealand Protects Itself

“The New Zealand government has banned the sale of existing homes to foreign buyers, saying New Zealanders were sick of being ‘tenants in our own land’ ...

“The ban applies to all nationalities, except buyers from Singapore and Australia...

“New Zealand has become a destination for Chinese, Australian and Asian buyers and has gained a reputation as a bolthole for the world’s wealthy, who view it as a safe haven from a potential nuclear conflict, the rise of terrorism and civil unrest, or simply as a place to get away from it all.

“Land sales to foreign buyers boomed under the previous centre-right National government, with 465,863 hectares (1.16m acres) bought in 2016, an almost sixfold increase on the year before. That is the equivalent to 3.2% of farmland in a country of 4.7 million people.”⁷⁶

New Zealand has always been very tolerant of people who want to live there. But now finds it is being damaged by people with no real interest in the country except as a refuge from the chaos they are creating.

Vietnam and the Cold War Balance

“In one of the darkest moments of the Vietnam War, the top American military commander in Saigon activated a plan in 1968 to move nuclear weapons to South Vietnam until he was overruled by President Lyndon B. Johnson, according to recently declassified documents cited in a new history of wartime presidential decisions.

“The documents reveal a long-secret set of preparations by the commander, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, to have nuclear weapons at hand should American forces find themselves on the brink of defeat at Khe Sanh, one of the fiercest battles of the war.

“With the approval of the American commander in the Pacific, General Westmoreland had put together a secret operation, code-named Fracture Jaw, that included moving nuclear weapons into South Vietnam so that they could be used on short notice against North Vietnamese troops...

“The president’s fear was ‘a wider war’ in which the Chinese would enter the fray, as they had in Korea in 1950.”⁷⁷

Had the Soviet Union not been there, would the USA have used nuclear weapons to impose its own version of globalisation on the rest of the world?

They definitely tried to turn the clock back after the Soviet collapse. A major reason for the series of wars against Iraq was the hope that the USA could roll back its loss of control of overseas oil fields. A lot of attention has been paid to Dick Cheney, Vice-President to Bush Junior and former Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Halliburton, a vast global oil field service company. But it must have gone much wider than Cheney.

Weirdly, the USA treated Russia with contempt when it was sincerely trying to be a friend. Called it ‘Upper Volta with Nukes’. And has been whining about unexpected outbreaks of evil, ever since a deeply offended Russia re-asserted its role as a serious balance.

Going to Pot

Canada has just fully legalised cannabis. How will this work out?

“It is now widely accepted that marijuana is, at the very least, less dangerous than other recreational drugs. The typical line you’ll hear — I certainly do in my email inbox — is that ‘marijuana is harmless,’ often meant as a justification for legalizing cannabis.

“But at the Atlantic, Annie Lowrey provides a corrective to this narrative, diving into the real risks of marijuana addiction. The whole thing is worth reading, but here’s the key paragraph:

““For Keith Humphreys, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University, the most compelling evidence of the deleterious effects comes from users themselves. ‘In large national surveys, about one in 10 people who smoke it say they have a lot of problems. They say things like, ‘I have trouble quitting. I think a lot about quitting and I can’t do it. I smoked more than I intended to. I neglect responsibilities.’ There are plenty of people who have problems with it, in terms of things like concentration, short-term memory, and motivation,’ he said. ‘People will say, ‘Oh, that’s just you fuddy-duddy doctors.’ Actually, no. It’s millions of people who use the drug who say that it causes problems.”⁷⁸

Meantime the Dutch are reducing their former informal tolerance.⁷⁹

Prison Failure

“Hundreds of senior staff and management have left the Prison Service in the past five years without being replaced, new figures reveal, which has led to ‘dangerous’ flaws in the system, according to campaigners.

“The exodus of crucial experienced staff has coincided with record levels of assaults, suicides and self-harm in jails in England and Wales and forced the government to take action to increase prison officer numbers after almost a decade of cuts.”⁸⁰

Railway Failure

“In the 1980s, the Treasury thought rail efficiency would flow from replacing a single corporate hierarchy with a mass of internal sub-contracts between government, operators and an infrastructure company. The same principle was applied, by Labour and Tories alike, to the NHS, social benefits, prisons and probation. It went down great in management schools but it was wrong. The rail infrastructure company Railtrack went bankrupt, and its state-owned replacement, Network Rail, under-performed. Operating rail franchises have been vulnerable to fiasco. Whitehall is now more involved in running railways – and subsidising them – than ever under nationalisation.

“Privatisation has not worked, not because a private company cannot run a railway but because the structure was wrong. Internal contracting and transfer pricing, as the NHS has found, does not suit a fast-moving public service. It corrupts corporate morale, diminishes executive responsibility, and shifts blame on to contracts.”⁸¹

Religious Failure

“Church attendance [in the USA] has edged down in recent years. Gallup's latest yearly update from its daily tracking survey shows that in 2017, 38% of adults said they attended religious services weekly or almost every week. When Gallup began asking this question in 2008, that figure was 42%.”⁸²

Slower than in Britain, but visibly part of the same process. Religion declining as commerce becomes more and more dominant:

“We might preach kindness and gentleness in church—and even desperately believe it—but the daily reality of American economic, social, and cultural life is that an absolutist, totalizing, atomizing self-interest has prevailed, isn't it? We're instructed, maybe indoctrinated, to believe that to be aggressively self-interested is what is good—not just for us, but, strangely, for everyone. Economics teaches it, psychology teaches it, business practices it, culture celebrates it, politics institutionalizes it—America is built on it. (Hence, we're told to “take responsibility” and “be self-reliant individuals” and so on.) We fight the system—norms, bosses, codes, rules—if we want to genuinely care about anyone else but ourselves.

“And yet the limits of this moral philosophy are becoming clearer by the day—as, thankfully, Americans are beginning to reject it. People crowdfunding healthcare. “Active shooter drills.” Kids buying bulletproof backpacks. Elderly people who'll never retire. Young people saddled with life-crippling debt just for getting an education. These are just some of the self-evident failures of morality as aggressive, naked self-interest. These things enrage us as much as they aggrieve and frighten us. They cannot be good, we are realizing, deep in our bones, these days.”⁸³

A good analysis, but I'd also ask, *‘why did all successful religions from about 600 BC teach compassion and generosity?’*

Such a view does not follow automatically from a belief in Gods or God. Older religions like Norse myths and Greek Paganism often admired violence and trickery. And late Paganism tried to soften the doubtful aspects of their tradition.

Then as now, they found that selfishness is a fool's creed in the long run.

Warfare teaches a distorted version of collectivism and sympathy. A ‘band of brothers’, but ‘rank has its privileges’, as they said in the original *Star Trek*.

Attitudes have shifted. But nothing like enough.

Rent Rises – Not a Law of Nature

“I write this piece from Berlin, where I am currently staying in an airy three-bedroom apartment within easy reach of the city centre. The people who live here are not rich by any stretch of the imagination, but their home is light and spacious, and it’s not bankrupting them.

“Berlin’s housing system is not perfect. Friends who live here tell me securing an apartment is ludicrously competitive, and prices are rising faster than anywhere else in the world. But the apartment I’m staying in would still be at least twice as expensive to rent in London, and renters here don’t live in fear of rent hikes or waking up to an eviction notice one day.

“So I read the news that UK rents are expected to climb by 15% over the next five years (according to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) knowing that it is not inevitable. Housing can be done differently; it is being done differently elsewhere in Europe.

“Britain’s corrupted housing system is the product of political choices that have lined the pockets of landlords at the expense of everyone else. From four in 10 right-to-buy properties being owned by private landlords to the decision not to build more social housing, every element of this system is set up to screw the average renter. In fact, the forthcoming rent hikes are expected partly as a response to the fact that properties are becoming too expensive to buy in the UK.”⁸⁴

A Nation Without Shopkeepers?

“Labour’s shadow business secretary Rebecca Long Bailey said House of Fraser staff would be concerned about the implications of the sale to Sports Direct.

““Some of the biggest retailers on Britain’s high streets are being replaced by gaping holes,” she said. ‘It is unforgivable that the Conservatives have stood by and done nothing while tens of thousands of jobs have been put at risk.

““Their inaction has prepared the ground for the likes of Mike Ashley, notorious for his company’s poor treatment of workers, to hoover up businesses. Staff will undoubtedly be concerned about what the sale means for their wages and conditions.””⁸⁵

The New Right has been a ruthless killer of small businesses, and even the better sort of large business. They make grand promises, but the reality has been otherwise. They let big business delay paying legitimate debts without penalty. And after the 2008 crisis, money was given to the banks even though they mostly refused to lend to small businesses.

Sweet Addiction

“Food companies have invested heavily in designing products that use sugar to bypass our natural appetite control mechanisms, and in packaging and promoting these products to break down what remains of our defences, including through the use of subliminal scents. They employ an army of food scientists and psychologists to trick us into eating more than we need, while their advertisers use the latest findings in neuroscience to overcome our resistance...

“Just as the tobacco companies did with smoking, they promote the idea that weight is a question of ‘personal responsibility’. After spending billions on overriding our willpower, they blame us for failing to exercise it.”⁸⁶

It is also about Market Share. Which is why state controls are needed. Personal choice has not protected most people from sophisticated trickery.

Trump in the USA

“President Trump and the Koch brothers have made it clear that they don’t like each other. Politically speaking, they are in fundamental disagreement over trade, tariffs and immigration.

“Nonetheless, there is a functional Trump-Koch alliance, and the Republican Party has capitalized handsomely on it. Trump’s racially freighted, anti-immigrant rhetoric has been essential to persuading white voters to agree to Republicans’ long-sought tax and regulatory policies. These policies are inimical or irrelevant to the interests of low- and moderate-income Americans. They have been promulgated by the Trump administration, but many of them have been meticulously prepared and packaged by the Kochs’ massive political network.”⁸⁷

Something I’d already figured. The Poor Right are led by the nose.

But retreating from globalisation will help some US workers:

“President Trump’s aluminum tariffs have rattled global businesses, set off retaliatory levies and started to eat into profits of some major American companies.

“But they have also provided a lifeline to other United States businesses, like Century Aluminum, the struggling smelter in Kentucky that is at the heart of Mr. Trump’s trade fight.

“After years of foreign competition that eroded Century’s market share, prompted layoffs and put its smelter here on the brink of perpetual collapse, the company is now riding high.

“Century is planning to invest over \$150 million to more than double output at the plant, and add 275 jobs in the process. The average salary and benefits package for a worker is \$90,000 a year.”⁸⁸

Indonesian Tsunami – Neglect Cost Lives

“Indonesia’s buoy network uses the floating devices to record changes in the sea level in deep water to confirm the existence of a tsunami. The buoys send a signal to a data center, which alerts the national meteorological agency, which in turn informs local authorities.

“No data was received from the buoys because none of them were operational.

“Indonesia has 22 open water tsunami buoys that have not worked since 2012 because of vandalism and lack of maintenance.”⁸⁹

It would be interesting to know more. Just which government set up the system, and why did it lapse? I’ve not seen it mentioned again.

It definitely reminds me of other disasters caused by the general notion that state spending must be wasteful and should be cut. And pointless malice from some of the neglected.

Ukraine Racists

“After a spate of brutal attacks on Roma settlements by far-right groups, authorities have been accused of failing to act. As the violence escalates, human rights groups are suing the police for failing to protect families from raids by masked men...

“Now the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is suing the national police for failing to investigate the attacks properly, and for negligence in protecting the Romani citizens from ethnic violence. Along with the National Roma Centre, they will allege failings under the European convention on human rights.

“They claim there is growing evidence of collusion between the national police and far-right militias. Activists allege that, after the attack in Ternopil, a Romani woman said: ‘I don’t trust the police. The next day I saw the police officer drinking coffee with one of the guys who attacked our camp.’”⁹⁰

That’s the fruit of the Western-backed Orange Revolution.

Web Imperialism in India

“In India, American companies dominate the internet. Facebook’s WhatsApp is the most popular app on phones. Virtually every smartphone runs on Google’s Android system. YouTube is the favorite video platform and Amazon is the No. 2 online retailer.

“For some Indian political leaders, it is as if their nation — which was ruled by Britain for a century until 1947 — is being conquered by colonial powers all over again...

“As India sets the new rules of the game, it is seeking inspiration from China. Although India does not want to go as far as China, which has cut off its internet from the global one, officials admire Beijing’s tight control over citizens’ data and how it has nurtured homegrown internet giants like Alibaba and Baidu by limiting foreign competition. At the same time, regulators do not want to push out the American internet services that hundreds of millions of Indians depend on.”⁹¹

Who Do You Think Is IRA?

For those who’ve not followed it, *Who Do You Think You Are* is a long-running BBC series in which they investigate the ancestors of some actor, journalist or other media figure. It has been running since 2004 and has just completed its 15th series.⁹² And since 2010 has had an imitator in the USA.

There was a glitch this year. Eccentric pop star Boy George has an IRA ancestor, and had chosen to celebrate him. It was scheduled as the 4th in the series, but then things got strange.

The first program was Wednesday 6th June. Then a four-week gap until the next two, on Monday 9th and 16th. Then the Boy George episode appeared on the next Wednesday, where it might easily be missed if you were not looking. Then the last four were back to Monday again.

Very curious.

Why I Write

For years, I have been doing regular monthly Newsnotes for the magazine *Labour Affairs*. But recently I find I have more to say than the magazine has room for. Hence this blog.

It is my second October blog. It includes stuff I had collected but not used since June.

Websites

I do regular *Newsnotes*, going back many years. Available at

<http://labouraffairsmagazine.com/past-issues/> and <https://longrevolution.wordpress.com/newsnotes-historic/>. And blog at <https://gwydionmw.quora.com/>.

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