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Prashad: Your Privileges Are Not Universal

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GOP Offers Preview of Brutal Climate Policies in Texas

By Sonali Kolhatkar

As Texas battles a severe snowstorm and mass power outages this winter, Tim Boyd, the now-former Republican mayor of Colorado City, revealed his party's plan for the deadly extreme temperatures linked to climate change. In a lengthy Facebook post that was deleted soon after it went viral, then-Mayor Boyd told his residents that they were entirely on their own as the brutal winter weather caused mayhem and deaths across the Lone Star state.

His honesty was like catching a glimpse of a rare animal in the wild. "Sink or swim[,] it's your choice!" he wrote, without bothering to couch his words in euphemisms. Boyd added, "The City and County, along with power providers or any other service owes you NOTHING!" For such an exhortation to come from the elected leader of a city—a man literally chosen by his people to ensure that local government works for them—was shocking.

Just as they pay their mayor, Colorado City's residents also pay authorities to provide them with basic necessities like electricity and water. But apparently, Boyd thought an expectation of services was out of line. He conjectured, "If you don't have electricity you step up and come up with a game plan to keep your family warm and safe." Many Texans have tried to do just that, running their car engine in their garage to warm their homes. So far in Harris County, there have been at least 50 cases of carbon monoxide poisoning and several people have died.

"If you have no water you deal without and think outside of the box to survive and supply water to your family," posited Boyd, expecting Texans who were searching for ways to provide their own electricity to also deal with a lack of water as pipes froze in the plummeting temperatures.

Boyd's diatribe veered into familiar Republican territory as he blamed residents for their own plight by saying, "If you are sitting at home in the cold because you have no power and are sitting there waiting for someone to come rescue you because your (sic) lazy [it] is [a] direct result of your raising." It is a long-simmering idea among conservatives that Americans who depend on their government are simply lazy.

Generally, white conservatives have reserved the word "lazy" for people of color who are victims of systemic racial discrimination. Indeed, the weather-related blackouts in Texas impacted the residents of minority neighborhoods disproportionately. Boyd and those who share his views would likely assume this must have been a direct result of their laziness.

Hours after writing his screed, Boyd announced his resignation and apologized. But he qualified his apology by saying that he never meant to imply that the helpless elderly were the lazy ones—just everyone else. "I was only making the statement that those folks that are too lazy to get up and fend for themselves but are capable should not be dealt a handout," he wrote in a manner that suggested he was "sorry, not sorry."

Most Republicans are not as overt as Boyd in their faith in social Darwinism. Take Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who instead of openly blaming Texans for their own suffering instead decided to blame climate-mitigating policies and renewable ener-

gy programs like wind power. Speaking on "Fox News," Abbott railed against the "Green New Deal," claiming that a reliance on wind turbines was disastrous because the state's wind-generated power "thrust Texas into a situation where it was lacking power on a statewide basis." For good measure, he added, "It just shows that fossil fuel is necessary."

The conservative *Wall Street Journal*, which has long been hostile to tackling climate change through renewable energy, repeated this claim in an editorial blaming "stricter emissions regulation" and the loss of coal-powered plants for widespread misery in the snow-blanketed South.

In fact, millions of Texans are going without power because of the Republican emphasis on cheap power over reliable power. Seeing electricity generation as a profit-making enterprise rather than the fulfillment of a public need, GOP policies in Texas have made the state vulnerable to such mass outages. Moreover, plenty of wintry areas successfully run wind turbines when properly prepared to do so. And, Abbott did not see fit to point out that harsh winter temperatures lead to frozen natural gas pipelines—the real culprit in the outages.

Even as a majority of Texans now believe that climate change is really happening, their governor in late January vowed to "protect the oil and gas industry from any type of hostile attack from Washington." Apparently protecting Texans from the ravages of the fossil fuel industry is not in his purview. This is hardly surprising given how much fossil fuel industry contributions have ensured Abbott's loyalty to oil and gas interests.

The conservative mindset can be counted on to prioritize private interests over public ones. In a Republican utopia, the rich are noble and deserving of basic necessities, comforts, and life itself. If they have rigged the system to benefit themselves, it means they are smart, not conniving. In the future that Republicans promise, "Only the strong will survive and the weak will parish (sic)," as per Boyd's post. In other words, our lives are expendable, and if we die, it is because we deserve it and were simply not smart enough to survive.

This was utterly predictable. Republicans have used this same approach on health care—think of all the Republican governors who backed lawsuits against the Affordable Care Act and opted their states out of the federal government's Medicaid program even though a majority of Americans support Obamacare. Even more Americans support the government nationalizing health care, but Republicans warn that if the program is expanded from Medicare for those over 65 to all Americans, it will suddenly become "socialism" and thus "evil." Their solution for health care is the status quo of a deregulated "Wild West" private insurance market.

Republicans have offered a similar approach to the coronavirus pandemic where any public safety standards set by the government are anathema to "personal freedoms," even though a majority of Americans support such precautions. It is also how Republicans have approached poverty and rising inequality: by opposing a federal government increase to the minimum wage even though most Americans want a floor of $15 an hour.

Interestingly, Republicans believe strongly in the idea of "big government" when it comes to regulating their pet social issues such as harsh anti-immigrant measures and attacks on abortion. (Meanwhile, most Americans support a pathway to legalization for the undocumented and a majority supports reproductive choice.)

As Americans are subject to the brutal impacts of inevita-

ble climate change, we face a clear choice: strong government intervention to save our lives, or a "survival of the fittest" dystopia that contemporary conservatism promises. The Texas debacle is a preview of what is to come if the free-marketeers have their way while the climate changes. The nation's conservative party went from insisting that climate change does not exist (it is a "hoax!") to shrugging their shoulders and telling us, as Boyd did, that we're on our own when the consequences hit. Z

This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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A Big Victory at FERC

By Ted Glick

One of Joe Biden's very first appointments on January 21st, one of his least publicized but definitely one of his most important when it comes to the future of the earth's ecosystems and human societies, was the appointment of Richard Glick to be chair of FERC, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Why was that appointment so important?

It is essential that we as a species urgently transition away from polluting fossil fuels and nukes to clean, jobs-creating, renewable energy sources—wind, sun, tides and currents and the relative heat, in winter, and the relative coolness, in summer, of the earth. These non-polluting energy sources can then not just generate electricity for the world's homes and businesses, but to power electric cars, trucks, buses, and electric heat pump-powered heating and cooling systems.

Electrification of power sources, transportation vehicles and heating and cooling systems is absolutely essential to make a clean energy revolution in enough time to prevent escalating and massive, worldwide climate catastrophe.

Richard Glick was nominated to be a FERC commissioner in 2017. Before his nomination he had a decades-long history of work in government and business in support of renewable energy. I learned this from him in person when we met about a week after I had been arrested during a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing on FERC in the summer of that year. Glick, who is no relation, was at that time the general counsel for the Democrats on that committee. He was in the room up at the front with all the Senators when I stood up as part of an organized nonviolent action and loudly said something like, "FERC is a rubber-stamp agency for the fossil fuel industry and a threat to the future of life on earth." I was quickly removed by Capitol Police and ending up spending two days and one night in DC Central Cellblock before being released.

A couple of days later, us two Glicks received an email from a staffer for one of the Democratic Senators on the Senate ENR committee. She suggested that the two of us might benefit from meeting and talking. I agreed to do so, and a week later Rich and I met in the same room where I had been arrested.

By the end of 2017 he had been nominated and approved as a FERC commissioner, and since then I have

watched with some amazement as Glick did something no other FERC commissioner has ever done: speak truth to power over and over again from within the corridors of power, particularly about the urgency of the climate crisis. The Republican majority over those years continued what had been happening under both Democrats and Republicans for at least 20 years, rubber-stamping every methane gas industry permit application to expand that industry. They were also making decisions to disadvantage renewables. In those 20 years, according to a House Committee on Oversight and Reform report last summer, of the 1,021 gas industry permit applications to FERC over that time only 6 had been rejected.

Glick dissented from just about all of those renewable energy disadvantaging and gas industry expansion permits when they came before the commissioners for a vote. He always wrote clear and well-reasoned dissents, primarily arguing that FERC was not doing serious analyses of the climate impacts of those new pipelines, compressor stations and gas export terminals. There's little doubt that his dissents helped to educate people, including federal judges, about the reality of rubber-stamping FERC. By the fall of 2020 he was saying publicly that it was understandable why so many people were describing FERC as a rubber-stamping agency.

Glick's first commissioners meeting as chair was on February 18th. Once again, he didn't disappoint. In his opening presentation, he made clear that FERC must become an agency where renewable energy and battery storage would be given space to grow and expand; where FERC's rubber-stamping ways would be a thing of the past; where environmental justice concerns would become, for the first time, FERC concerns; where, 43 years after being authorized by Congress, there would be a FERC Office of Public Participation; and where the rampant abuse of landowners and property owners via eminent domain for corporate gain would be reined in. And from statements made by the other four commissioners, it was clear that some of those positions were more than just his.

As of June of this year, when Republican commissioner Neil Chatterjee's term is up, Biden will be able to appoint a third Democrat to team with Glick and commissioner Allison Clements, giving them a majority for the next four years to transform FERC. It really is a whole new FERC world.

There is no question that there will be all kinds of pressures brought to bear to weaken what a Glick-led majority will try to do, including lawsuits brought by deep pockets fossil fuel and pipeline companies. There's also FERC's internal culture, corrupted by many years of partnership with the fossil fuelers. And if, in 2024, Republicans take over the White House, whatever positive has transpired up until then will be threatened.

That is why Beyond Extreme Energy and 240 other organizations, as well as Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, among other elected officials, are supporting the idea of replacing FERC with FREC, a Federal Renewable Energy Commission. FREC would have a Congressional mandate to be all about helping to lead the transition away from fossil fuels to renewables. Leadership would be required to have a background of support for renewables. Environmental justice and community participation in decision-making would be guiding principles. Eminent domain abuse for corporate gain would come to an end.

BXE has been talking with House and Senate offices about this idea for the last several months, and we've

been pleased by the response. We anticipate that legislation will be introduced, hopefully this spring, for FERC Into FREC.

In the meantime, we will continue to keep watch on FERC, expecting to like a lot of what we see and hear but prepared to take action as necessary to stand up for communities and the planet, as the movement against fracking and new fracking infrastructure has been doing over the last decade. It is good to know that this time, when we do so, we have reason to expect that our arguments will be taken seriously, finally. ***Z***

Ted Glick has been a volunteer organizer with Beyond Extreme Energy since its founding in 2014. He is the author of *Burglar for Peace: Lessons Learned in the Catholic Left's Resistance to the War*, published last year. Past writings and other information can be found at https://tedglick.com, and he can be followed on Twitter at https://jtglick.com.

The Good, The Bad and the Profound

By Saskia Hostetler Lippy MD

January 29th marked the day the United States of America rejoined the Paris Climate Accords and is back in the global fight against the climate chaos, which is inevitable if we follow business as usual, now termed RCP (representative concentration pathway) 8.5.

To make the political climate even worse, politicians served up the doozy of trying to blame renewable energy for the failure of the power grid in Texas.

Though it should still be a day of celebration, today also marks the day we reached the unthinkable number of 500,000 deaths due to COVID-19, at the same time that most states are opening back up. And, our young people are becoming suicidal at alarming rates, a secondary, yet major, pandemic. As a psychiatrist, I see that thus far we are doing virtually nothing about that escalating tragedy.

Increasingly my work in mental health brings me up against this fundamental moral and existential crisis. How can humanity go on in a world so in denial about the facts which confront us? Our tendency to compartmentalize bad things works against us in the most urgent of ways now. But it is our inability to confront our own mortality that most haunts us. We trick ourselves into believing it will never happen to us.

I spent many nights of my childhood worrying about the myriad of ways I could die. I am the opposite of most people. And the world did not disappoint. I have had many near death experiences. I come from trauma so it feels like it accompanies me.

Those who come from trauma know what I speak of. It tends to happen, again and again. If you are one of those struggling, I would highly recommend taking a course in psychological first aid, a technique I have been using through the pandemic to help those in crisis.

There are others who suffer with solastalgia, a term coined in 2003 by Glenn Albrecht, an Australian psychiatrist. The term encompasses both somaterratic illness (threats to our physical wellbeing caused by climate change) and psychoterratic illness (damage done to our psyche due to our distress over the changes we observe). Increasingly I think we are not suffering from any illness at all.

Rather, I think it is our inability to admit that as individuals we do not control

our physical environment. But as a species we destroy ourselves as we go. As thinking humans, we simply cannot stand that. At this point, we find ourselves at a major crossroads, and our young people know it.

What if it is they who are having the normal reaction to a highly abnormal situation which we older humans caused? Then we are doing a great disservice to the generations to follow by presenting it as pathology. They know we are lying to them, just as I knew that my parents were lying to me about my anxiety. Death was real and they always pretended it wasn't.

In the past year, I have become a radical activist, for many issues. For violence prevention, for social justice, for climate change, for all of human rights.

Take this for what it is worth: I feel better in my body. It turns out aligning your moral values with your lived values is good for mental health, especially in a pandemic. It turns passive to active, increases a feeling of efficacy, and confronts the learned hopelessness many of us were taught.

It is soul work. I can feel my ancestors cheering me on. They would not want our planet destroyed. I do it for them, I do it for me, I do it for my children and the children of the 7th generation.

Join us.There is room for all humanity under the umbrella of the "movement of all movements" coined by the wise elder activist George Lakey. He writes in *How We Win*: "My hope is that you, if you are not already acting boldly, will experience the joy and empowerment I have found by my decision to act in history rather than watch it go by."

Friday was a good day for activists everywhere, all over our blue planet. Today, we mourn and tomorrow we get back to work. Mother Earth is calling. We are killing each other with our division. Our children are dying. We need everyone to care for everyone else. This means a lot of seismic change. Ps: It also means continuing to wear your mask.

Are we ready?

Texas, we see you and feel your pain. We will all be next. We are in this together, whether we know it or not. ***Z***

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A Minimum Wage? A Fake Debate

By Richard D. Wolff

Capitalism's "conservative" defenders yet again oppose raising the minimum wage. They fought raising it in the past much as they tried to prevent the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) that first mandated a U.S. minimum wage. The major argument opponents have used is this: setting or raising a minimum wage threatens small employers. They may collapse or else fire employees; either way, jobs are lost. What is conveniently assumed here is a necessary contradiction between minimum wages and small business jobs. That assumption enables opponents to claim that not setting a legal minimum wage, like not raising it, saves jobs. The system thus presents very poorly paid workers with this choice: low wages or no wages.

"Liberals" in the United States have mostly accepted the assumption of that con-

tradiction, the necessity of that final choice. However, they try to demonstrate that the social gains from a higher minimum wage would exceed the social losses from the reduced employment they admit. Their idea, in effect, is that a higher minimum wage would increase demand for goods and services. Any workers fired because of the minimum wage would be rehired elsewhere to meet the rising demand. Countless empirical studies by conservatives and liberals yield, as usual, correspondingly conflicting conclusions.

In the actual history of U.S. capitalism, the minimum wage has been undercut from the outset. In real terms (what the minimum wage can actually buy), its long-term decline began from a peak in 1968. It was last raised in 2009 (to $7.25 per hour) despite a rising consumer price index every year since then. U.S. business interests plus the "conservative" politicians, media, and academics they support have inundated the public with the idea that raising the minimum wage will hurt poorly paid workers (by losing mostly small business jobs) more than help them. This debate over the minimum wage, intensified whenever proposals to raise it gain public attention, has been "won" chiefly by the conservative/business side.

Despite its political effectiveness for conservatives and big business till now, their argument—like the entire debate—is flawed logically. Its underlying, shared assumption is unnecessary and inaccurate. It serves chiefly to undercut the level, purpose, and social effects of the minimum wage in the United States.

Paying a decent living wage to workers by raising the minimum wage need not threaten the viability of small businesses. The latter need not collapse nor fire workers when minimum wages are raised. Indeed, raising the minimum wage can and should be one basis for a mutually beneficial alliance between wage workers and small businesses.

Few dare quarrel with the notion that in the U.S. today, paying the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour is an outrage against decency. It is among the very lowest minimum wages of industrialized economies: quite the achievement for one of the "richest countries in the world." So the defense of such an outrage has always begun by focusing attention elsewhere. We are asked to sympathize with the small businesses whose profits and thus viability will be undone if they are required to pay a raised minimum wage. We are asked likewise to sympathize with the plight of minimum wage workers who will become jobless when their employer cannot pay a raised minimum wage. Thus the conclusion beloved by opponents of raising the minimum wage: it lies in the interest of low-paid workers and small businesses to join the opposition to raising the minimum wage.

So many flaws attend such logic that it is not easy to decide where to begin its demolition. We might note that it clearly implies that were we to drop the minimum wage even further, below $7.25 per hour, we might achieve lower unemployment rates. But that is so gross an idea that right-wingers rarely go there. They don't dare.

There is a parallel example we can draw from the history of wage workers when they included children as young as five years old. The parallel logic then held that allowing child labor (with the oppression and abuses it entailed) was doing poor families a favor. Were child labor to be outlawed, capitalism's defenders then insisted, two tragedies would necessarily follow. First, poor families would suffer an income loss because they could no longer sell their children's labor power to capitalist employers for a wage. Second, businesses whose profits depended

at least partly on low-wage child labor would collapse and render adults jobless too.

It is important to note that after sustained political agitation, child labor was in fact outlawed. The logic of its defenders was rejected and rarely resurfaced afterward even in right-wing and "conservative" literature. Former capitalist employers of children found other means (paying adults more, improving productivity, economizing on other inputs, and so on) to profit and grow. As we know, U.S. capitalism over the last century prospered without child labor. And where U.S. capitalists relocated abroad to employ children, opposition there has replicated what happened in the United States, albeit slowly. What happened to child labor can and likely will happen as well to abysmally low minimum wages.

How then might a civilized society raise its minimum wage to provide a decent livelihood to workers and protect its small businesses? The solution is straightforward. Offset the extra labor costs for small businesses from a higher minimum wage by providing them with some combination of the following: a new and significant share of government orders, tax breaks, and government subsidies. Such supports now overwhelmingly favor big business and thereby facilitate its many efforts to destroy and replace small businesses. Those supports should be reapportioned with special consideration/targeting for small businesses. To be eligible, small businesses would need to show how raising the minimum wage increased their total wage bill. In this way, society can concretely support small business and a decent minimum wage as twin, shared social values.

In effect, this proposal changes the terrain of the minimum wage debate. It brings into stark relief that raising the minimum wage leaves open the question of which part of the employer class will bear the burden of compensating for that in the short run. An effective political coalition of low-wage workers and small businesses could require big business to pay by losing some of its government business, paying higher taxes, or obtaining lower subsidies—all to compensate small businesses for a raised minimum wage. For decades, an alternative political coalition—of big and small business—blocked or delayed minimum wage increases. Nothing requires this latter coalition to always or, indeed, ever prevail over a competing coalition of labor and small business that seeks a higher minimum wage for one plus greater state supports for the other. Likewise, nothing warrants continuing the current debate over raising the minimum wage as if only small business would always have to absorb its possible costs.

The debate over the minimum wage has been lopsided for a very long time. Uncritical media coverage of the debate has allowed big business to evade its proper share of paying to sustain a viable small business sector. Meanwhile, workers and small businesses pay taxes that favor big business. Most Americans want a thriving small business sector. Most also increasingly criticize big business: "antitrust" remains part of government regulation as well as a part of popular ideologies. We can and should correct the old debate now to enable a different political coalition to shape minimum wages in a different way from the past. ***Z***

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Your Privileges Are Not Universal

By Vijay Prashad

Stencilled in red on the walls of Santiago, Chile is a statement of fact: "your privileges are not universal" (tus privilegios no son universales). This is a factual declaration because the privileges of power and property are not shared across the gaping class divide. Consider the fact that before the pandemic struck last year, over 3 billion people—or half the world's population—had no access to health care. This data appears in a 2017 World Health Organisation (WHO) report that tracks important matters such as access to basic household sanitation (lacked by 2.3 billion people) and medical care for uncontrolled hypertension (suffered by 1 billion people).

An Oxfam report from January 25, 2021 called "The Inequality Virus: points out that "the pandemic could cause the biggest increase in inequality since records began, as it precipitates a simultaneous and substantial rise across many countries." Before the pandemic, the World Bank calculated that about 2 billion people "remain in poverty, that is, living below the standards their own societies have set for a dignified life." Because of the pandemic-triggered jobs crisis, it is likely—the United Nations notes—that half a billion more people will sink into poverty by the end of the decade; World Bank numbers concur.

"And with the pandemic," write the World Bank analysts, "the newly poor are more likely to live in congested urban settings and to work in the sectors most affected by lockdowns and mobility restrictions; many are engaged in informal services and not reached by existing social safety nets." These are the billions who will slide deeper into debt and despair, with education and healthcare slipping away from them as hunger rates rise.

Nothing of what is written above is an exaggeration. All of it comes from researchers and analysts at mainstream organisations such as the World Health Organisation and the World Bank, neither of whom are known to inflate the ill-effects of capitalist policy. If anything, these organizations have a tendency to minimise the perils of privatization and corporate-based policies, urging on further cuts to public systems. During the tenure of Gro Harlem Brundtland at the helm of the WHO (1998-2003), the organization encouraged the creation of Private-Public Partnerships (PPPs) and Product Development Partnerships (PDPs). The WHO's emphasis on the private sector—alongside pressure from the International Monetary Fund to cut public sector funding—accelerated the haemorrhaging of public health systems in many of the poorer countries.

When the WHO should have led the fight to deepen public health systems and to create regional and national pharmaceutical production systems, the agency produced PPP platforms such as the underfunded Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI); along with

other agencies, GAVI is now spluttering forward to provide COVID-19 vaccines to low-income countries. The people who produced global austerity, a desert of possibilities, only now recognize the perils of the inequality virus.

To be anxious about inequality is insufficient. A range of possible, common-sense reforms are being demanded by people's organizations across the world, which include:

Free Universal Healthcare. This has been achieved in poorer countries like Costa Rica and Thailand as well as in socialist states and should, therefore, be the objective of every country on the planet.

A People's Vaccine. Momentum toward the availability of a people's vaccine is growing, which should include not only open access to all patents for the COVID-19 vaccine but also the creation of pharmaceutical production facilities in the low-income states and in the public sector.

These two basic measures could be easily financed by the money now exported to service odious debts. But such logical solutions that would provide immediate relief to people are set aside. Despite the strong words about the problems posed by austerity, more austerity will be demanded, and more social disorder will be produced.

Rather than focus attention on the actual problems that face the planet's people and acknowledge the democratic demands coming from people's organizations and manifestations, government after government has taken refuge in undemocratic behavior. For example, the farmers and agricultural workers in India continue their months-long protest against three anti-farmer laws pushed through by the extreme right Indian government. The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi knows that its commitment to big capital—personified in the wealthy Adani and Ambani families—prevents it from any serious negotiation with the farmers and agricultural workers. Instead, the government has tried to portray the farmers and agricultural workers as terrorists and as anti-national.

When this did not work, the government went after reporters and media houses that amplified the farmers' struggle. Many who have reported on, participated in, or shown solidarity with protestors have been arrested—such as in the cases of journalist Mandeep Punia, worker rights activist Nodeep Kaur and activist Disha Ravi, who created and shared a toolkit to support the farmers. Finally, in an act of lawfare, the government conducted a 113-hour raid against NewsClick, one of the key media houses to cover the protests; accusations of money-laundering tried to sully the name of NewsClick, which has earned the trust of millions of readers and viewers with its frontline reporting that lifted up the sentiments and demands of the agriculturalists.

Meanwhile, India's Ministry of Education released an order on January 15 that required any online conference or webinar that might discuss India's "internal matters" and those that receive foreign sponsorship to seek prior government approval. Similarly, the French government started a process to investigate academic research that promotes "Islamo-leftist" ideas and thereby, according to the Minister of Higher Education, "corrupts society." In the name of Order, freedom of speech is easily set aside and the fragility of the formal nature of democracy is exposed. The attack on NewsClick, alongside the investigation of academics in France, reveals the yawning gap between democratic ideals and the practice of statecraft.

Despite the $364 billion prêt garanti par l'État (PGE) program to provide relief for the French population, there is a serious long-term problem of inequality and joblessness. Rather than focus on

this, the French government has whipped around to fight an illusionary adversary: Islamo-leftists. In the same way, faced with mass dislocation and social suffering deepened by the pandemic, the Indian government is prosecuting a war against farmers and media platforms that are sensitive to the issues raised by the farmers. Both these formal democracies retain their constitutions and their laws, their elections and their public hearings—all part of the panoply of modern democracies. They fail, however, to actually listen to the suffering of the people, let alone the demands made by the people; they remain insensitive to the possibility of a more viable future for our societies.

During the period of the military dictatorship in Pakistan, the communist poet Habib Jalib sang:

Kahin gas ka dhuan hae kahin golian ki baarish
Shab-e-ehd-e-kum nigahi tujhay kis tarah sarahein

Teargas smoke is in the air, bullets are raining around.
How can I praise you, the night of the period of myopia?

Your privileges are not universal, since your privileges earn you—the few—the vast bulk of social wealth; when the people put forward our views, you fire teargas and bullets. You believe that your myopia will allow your nighttime to last forever. We praise the hopes and struggles of the people, whose desire to advance history will cut through your repression. ***Z***

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Class Struggle or Get it in the Neck, Part 2

Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Barsamian

David Barsamian: Let's talk about historical memory. The 75th anniversary of the Nuremberg Tribunal for high ranking Nazis was just marked. Robert Jackson, the chief U.S. prosecutor and Supreme Court Justice, said, "We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow. To pass these defendants a poison chalice is to put it to our own lips as well." There's an excellent new book out called The United States, Southeast Asia, and Historical Memory. *You have a chapter in there called "From Mad Jack to Mad Henry," the latter being Kissinger. But who is Mad Jack?*

Noam Chomsky: Mad Jack, John Percival, commander of a navy ship invaded Vietnam in, I think it was 1845. That was the first major American attack on Vietnam. Mad Henry, we know the record, in between plenty, after Mad Henry plenty more. Justice Jackson was mistaken when he said, "History will judge us." It hasn't. History hasn't judged us. History has ignored us. The custodians of history, mainly liberal intellectuals, don't talk about this. Try giving a talk at a law school as I've sometimes done and ask them what they think about the fact that every U.S. president radically violates the U.S. Constitution. You can explain it to a 10 year old. Take a look at Arti-

cle Six of the Constitution, "Treaties" entered into by the U.S. government are "the supreme Law of the Land."

What's the main treaty entered into by the U.S. government since the Nuremberg Tribunal? UN Charter. What does the UN Charter say? Take a look at article 2.4. It says, "The threat or use of force" in international affairs is outlawed, it's criminal. Can you think of any American president who hasn't used either the threat or use of force in international affairs? What does it mean when every president and numerous high officials, including the Nobel Prize peace laureate Obama, what does it mean when they say that in the case of Iran all options are on the table? Is that a threat of force? Is that a violation of the U.S. Constitution? I even put aside the use of force. How about Obama's massive global assassination campaign, to kill people who the government claims are threatening us? Now suppose that any other government was doing that. Suppose that Iran was killing people around the world who they claim are a potential threat to them. We'd notice it. When we do it, doesn't matter.

There was an actually interesting article that came out recently by a major British legal authority who's been defending some of the Guantanamo prisoners. He pointed out that of the prisoners in Guantanamo, overwhelming majority, there are plenty who still remain without any charges, but the great majority have been released after U.S. intelligence agencies carefully inspected their records and discovered that they were no threat. Now these are supposed to be the worst of the terrorists. Those are the ones the drone campaigns are aimed at. You kill plenty of other people, but theoretically they're aimed at the people who are supposedly threats.

Thepeople that were sent to Guantanamo are the peak of those who were supposed to be threats. And after years of torture and illegal imprisonment and other atrocities, they were released because it was recognized they never were a threat. What does that tell you about the drone campaign? You don't have to be a genius to figure it out, which is murdering people, not only the people we aim at, we often miss, but the families, children, wives, community, terrorizing areas, because we're trying to kill people who aren't a threat, but who somebody mistakenly said were a threat. But even if they were a threat, I mean, is Mike Pompeo a threat to Iran? So why don't they kill him? Would that be okay? Would we cheer, doing what we're supposed to be doing? Going back to Robert Jackson, I'm afraid he's wrong. We have proven him to be wrong. The intellectual community, good liberals, legal authorities have simply said, "We're not subject to the law. Even our own Constitution doesn't apply to us." What applies to us is what we feel like doing.

Hermann Goering was the highest ranking Nazi at Nuremberg. He said, "The victor will always be the judge and the vanquished the accused."

Unfortunately, it's true. Take even the Nuremberg Tribunal itself. It was probably the least defective of all of the international tribunals. The people who were charged were undoubtedly terrible criminals. But the Nuremberg Tribunal itself was severely flawed. That was pointed out by Telford Taylor, the American counsel for the prosecution. He wrote about it later, and he agreed that there was a deep flaw in the Tribunal. Essentially, the Tribunal defined a war crime as something you did and we didn't do. So bombing of urban concentrations to try to kill as many civilians as possible was not considered a crime. The reason was the British and the Americans did it far

more than the Germans, so therefore it's not a crime. So destroying cities with the explicit goal of killing civilians, that was after all the explicit goal, we have to harm their morale by killing civilians, not secret. That wasn't a crime.

Dresden, other German cities, Tokyo, much worse than Hiroshima, not crimes. In fact, if you'll take a look at the Tribunal, the German war criminals were able to plead successfully that what they did was also done by the West, so therefore they were innocent. The submarine commander Admiral Doenitz was charged with attacking civilian ships. His lawyers brought in his defense an American Admiral who said, "We did the same thing." Okay, therefore it's not a crime. That's the Nuremberg Tribunal, the best of all the tribunals. So I'm glad the Tribunal took place, it's better than if it didn't, but we shouldn't have any illusions about it. It was deeply flawed. That was victor's justice. The Tokyo Tribunal was just ridiculous. Japanese commanders were executed because of crimes committed by troops they had no contact with, things like that.

In the book, Retargeting Iran*, you discuss in the chapter "U.S. War with Iran: Covert and Overt" the proposal for a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East. Few people have ever even heard of this. And then you mention the 1976 Symington Amendment. He was a senator from Missouri. You say, "U.S. aid to Israel for the past almost 40 years is illegal under U.S. law." Talk about that.*

There's a profession called lawyers, whose task is to show that words don't mean what they say. So I understand that. But if we look at the actual words, it's arguable, but it is certainly at least arguable that U.S. aid to Israel is illegal under U.S. law. There are updates to the Symington Amendment which carry it further. And there's a very interesting issue there, which is one of those things is undiscussable in the United States, but very critical to contemporary affairs. There's much highly justified concern now about a possible war with Iran. Is Trump going to go out in a blaze of glory by bombing around or something like that? But take the whole issue with Iran, not just Trump, Obama, everyone else. Iran is supposed to be a terrible threat to peace, maybe the greatest threat to peace. And worst of all is their program for developing nuclear weapons.

Let's think about that for a moment. Let's say Netanyahu is right, they are secretly developing nuclear weapons. Is there a way to stop that? Yes, a very simple way. Impose a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East with intensive inspections. We know that inspections can work.

U.S. intelligence confirms that, the International Atomic Energy Agency confirms it. They were very effective during the period of the JCPOA, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement, the Iran Deal. So reinstitute them and impose a nuclear-weapons-free zone.

Is anybody opposed to that? Actually, only two countries, the U.S and Israel. Arab countries strongly in favor, Iran strongly in favor, non-aligned countries, most of the world, former non-aligned, so called G77, 130 or so countries strongly supporting it, Europe supports it. Every time it comes up, the U.S. vetoes it. Obama, in 2015, came up to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review conference. Everyone in favor, Obama blocked it. In meetings since, same thing. Why does the U.S. block it? Everybody knows, nobody can say, because it would mean that Israel's nuclear weapons would be subject to inspection. The United States does not officially recognize that Israel has nuclear weapons. It's a joke. Everybody knows they have nuclear weapons, but the

U.S. government won't recognize it.

That goes back to the Symington Amendment. As soon as you recognize it, it opens that door. Nobody in the government, Democrat or Republican, wants to open that door. The liberal intellectual community doesn't want to open that door. So you don't have any discussion of a very simple way of ending whatever threat you think Iran poses. So no justification for murderous sanctions, no justification anyway, but the official justification gets totally knocked down. No justification for the efforts to torture Iranians, especially now during the pandemic, none. All goes, simple solution, can't talk about it. I mean, you can talk about it in arms control circles, and it's a free country, I can give talks about it, as I've done a 1,000 times. Pointing this out, of course, audiences understand immediately. In fact, I should say that if there were a really functioning Palestinian solidarity organization here, this would be one of its top priorities. Let's impose a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East. Let's pursue the fact that U.S. aid to Israel is arguably even in violation of U.S. law.

This is not incidentally the only case. There's the so- called Leahy Law, Senator Patrick Leahy, which bans U.S. military aid to any military unit anywhere that's engaged in systematic human rights violations. The Israeli army is up to its neck in systematic human rights violations all the time. You can read about it in the Israeli press, Israeli human rights groups, B'Tselem, international human rights groups, not a secret. So yes, there are points where activist pressures could make a big difference. They're not being carried out, unfortunately. But these are things that are kept under a veil, you don't want to talk about them. It's kind of like the Chinese vaccine, even worse, we don't talk. That's at least sometimes mentioned. This, you can search, it's almost a total ban.

And I should add there's more to it. The U.S. and Britain are uniquely committed to a nuclear-weapons-free zone, there's a reason. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the U.S. and Britain rammed through a Security Council resolution, which called on Saddam Hussein to eliminate his nuclear weapons programs, which he in fact did. The resolution had a series of other provisions. One of them, Article 14, commits the signers, the U.S. and Britain to work to establish a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the region. That's a U.S.-British sponsored Security Council resolution calling on these two states to move to institute a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the region. They have a unique responsibility to do it, meaning to open up Israeli nuclear weapons to inspection and to raise the question about the legality of U.S. economic and military aid to Israel. That's a direct duty, cannot be discussed. Of course, it can, like we're talking about and we've talked about it before. But it can't enter the mainstream.

This year began with the U.S. assassination of Iranian general Qassem Suleimani, and it almost is ending with the assassination of the Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, probably by Israel. David Sanger writing in The New York Times reported, "The assassination threatens to cripple President-elect Biden's efforts to revive the Iran nuclear deal before he can even begin his diplomacy with Tehran." And he continues, "And that may well have been a main goal of the operation." About Benjamin Netanyahu, Sanger writes that he has a second agenda, and that is, quoting Netanyahu, 'There must be no return to the previous nuclear agreement.' Nowhere in the article does Sanger even mention that Israel has nuclear weapons, or that this assassination is yet another example of its violations of international law. What's going on with U.S.-Iran relations in this interim period and the

dangers of a possible wider war?

That's an important question, but we should remember there's a background. Why is the U.S. torturing Iran in the first place? What is the justification for the U.S. sanctions regime? This is not the first murder of a nuclear weapons scientist. There have been a string of others, sabotage of Iranian facilities, just one very recently, all of these things. What's the justification for any of them? Actually none, as I just mentioned, but let's talk about this specific one. I think that analysis is pretty plausible. It looks as if, for some time now, the Trump/Pompeo administration has been trying hard to provoke Iran to carry out some kind of act, which can be used as a pretext for a sharp escalation of the war against Iran.

Notice we are at war against Iran. We have a blockade.

U.S. sanctions are a serious business, U.S. sanctions are third party sanctions, means everyone in the world must observe them or else. Europe doesn't like them, but they have to observe them, or else we'll toss them out of the international financial system. We just saw this shown dramatically at the UN recently. The United States went to the Security Council and requested, meaning demanded, that the Security Council renew the lapsed sanctions against Iran. They refused, almost total refusal. Every U.S. ally refused. The U.S. reacted, Pompeo returned to the Security Council and said, "You are reinstituting the sanctions." They obeyed. You can't step on the toes of the godfather. Now this also passed without comment. So this is just one of the many examples where the Trump administration is trying almost desperately to get Iran to carry out some action, which they can use as a pretext probably for missile attacks against the nuclear facilities or something like that, to which Iran might respond.

For example, they do have the missile capacity to attack the Saudi energy facilities in northeast Saudi Arabia, near the Iran border. They can to attack this. That's the main center of global fossil fuel production. Also, Saudi Arabia's desalination facilities and others, although it'd set off a huge war. We don't know what it would lead to. But they are eager to do this to try to ensure exactly, as Netanyahu said, that we do not go back to the earlier situation. Now actually, I agree with Netanyahu. We should not go back to the earlier agreement. What we should do is impose a new nuclear- weapons-free zone, which is really nuclear weapons will be subject to international controls and inspection, and in which U.S. aid to Israel will be questioned.

That's what we should do, not just go back to the JCPOA. So in some ways, I agree with him. But we shouldn't be trapped in this narrow conception that's provided by the media and general intellectual framework. We don't want to be trapped in that, that's wrong. But that's probably what they're trying to do. I think the analysis is correct. In fact, the Biden administration is playing along. One of their top appointees, national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, recently said that the Biden administration will be willing to consider going back to the joint agreement, but the ball is in Iran's court. They have to start by cutting back, by reversing their increased enrichment of uranium. And they've got to have a positive attitude toward negotiations. If they do that, we'll consider it.

Absolutely backwards. We are the ones who should be pleading with them to go back to the negotiations, which we have consistently undermined, actually destroyed under Trump, but undermined under Obama. Even under Obama, we were not living up to the agreements. The agreements say, one part of them is that no party shall try to injure the Iranian economy during the period of the negotiations. I don't remember the exact words, but

it was something to that effect. The Obama administration was doing it constantly. We weren't living up to the agreements. But now the Biden administration spokesperson is saying, "We might be willing to consider going back to the negotiations, if they take the first steps," as if they're the guilty party, not us. Should never accept any of this.

Robert Fisk, we both knew him, shared platforms with him, passed away in late October. In 2010, he said this about objectivity, "It is the duty of a foreign correspondent to be neutral and unbiased on the side of those who suffer, whoever they may be." Fisk was a critic of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, the Israeli treatment of Palestinians. He wrote of the Kurdish question, the Armenian genocide and other taboo topics. Talk about him briefly, and then this notion, this almost sacred notion of objectivity.

Fisk was a marvelous correspondent, brave, honest, knowledgeable, great writer. Much of the profession just hated him. And now he's under very ugly attacks from many journalists. A number of good journalists have written about this, like Jonathan Cook. Now that he's dead, he can't sue anybody, all kind of ugly attacks are coming from journalists. It's sick. He was one of the top ones. So what about objectivity? It's a funny notion. First of all, we shouldn't pretend that we're just neutral observers. Every human being has a point of view. If you don't have a point of view on things, you're not a human being, you don't have a functioning brain. If you're a serious journalist or scholar, what you do is make your point of view very clear, so that your readers can understand it and compensate for it, and then try to be as accurate as you can about what's happening, always framed in the background about what's important to you.

If what's important to you is the rights of the powerful, okay, make that clear and write from that perspective. If your point of view, perspective is the rights of the suffering and the oppressed, make that clear, and then describe that as accurately as you can, without cutting corners. But pure objectivity is just a meaningless notion in the sciences as well. No nuclear physicist approaches the next article he reads with pure objectivity, as if he didn't have some beliefs about the subject. I mean, it's just ludicrous. You read the scientific literature.

A paper just came out a couple of weeks ago in one of the top quantum theory journals, with a debate among a bunch of scientists, top scientists, about what a particle is, the most critical concept in physics. What's a particle, a lot of different views, people arguing about it. Any way they look at an experiment is going to be shaped by their point of view. That's fundamental physics. Suppose you're looking at the Syrian war. Of course, you're going to have a point of view. But that doesn't mean you can't be a fine objective journalist, as Robert Fisk was, Patrick Cockburn, Charles Glass, Jonathan Steele, and quite a few others. They all have a point of view. Fisk was also a great human being. I knew him personally for many years.

November 29th is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a UN-organized observance. It marks UN resolution 181 of November 29th 1947, which proposed the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. The national poet of Palestine is Mahmoud Darwish. (1941-2008) One of his greatest poems is "Under Siege." This is the opening verse,

"Here on the slopes of hills, facing the dusk and the cannon of time,

close to the gardens of broken shadows, We do what prisoners do,

And what the jobless do:

We cultivate hope."

What hope is there for the Palestinians, a people that you have been in solidarity with for decades, at this what seems to be the bleakest moment in their history? Where more and more land and water is being annexed by Israel and the possibility of a viable, independent Palestinian state recedes?

It is a grim moment in the history of the Palestinians. And anyone concerned with their rights and prospects has to be super careful about two things. One, being clear about what the actual situation is. Two, being clear about the kinds of choices, of action that can be taken to try to improve, overcome, at least mitigate the crisis in which they live. Those two things require serious clear thought, and I don't think it's being done. So on the issue of what the circumstances are, almost all discussion these days that you see is between two options. One is a two-state settlement of some sort. There has been a general international consensus on that since the 1970s, so something like that. The other option that's considered is one state, Israel, takes over the West Bank, and then an anti-apartheid struggle ensues. That's the second option.

But that's missing the third and crucial option, the one that is in fact being implemented before our eyes, which has been the major guideline for Israeli policies for 50 years. That's a greater Israel, which Israel takes over whatever is of value to it in the West Bank, formerly Gaza, but now on the West Bank, but evades the Palestinian population concentrations. So Israel does not want Nablus, doesn't want Tulkarm, doesn't want Palestinians. So nothing like the anti-apartheid struggle, where the white population needed the black population, and in fact tried to subsidize the Bantustans, tried to make them look decent to the international community. This is quite different. Israel just wants the Palestinians out. It does use them for cheap labor, but they can get cheap exploited labor from Thailand or other places and do in fact.

They just want the Palestinians out. What they've been doing for 50 years and what you see before your eyes, which you can see if you drive around the West Bank, is a greater Israel, in which Israel takes over all the valuable areas, the Jordan Valley, about a third of the territory, fertile land, kick out the population on one or another pretexts. Take greater Jerusalem, huge area about five times the size of what Jerusalem ever was or take the city of Ma'ale Adumim east of Jerusalem, built up mostly in the Clinton years, corridor to it, pretty much bisects the West Bank. Same to the north with the town of Ariel, the town of Kedumim, leave out the Palestinian population concentrations, and don't take Nablus, that's for them, until we finally manage to get rid of them.

The rest of the Palestinians who live in the areas that Israel's taking over, put them in isolated enclaves, separated from their olive groves, agricultural areas, herds, with checkpoints, which occasionally are open at the will of Israeli soldiers. Keep them in isolation, subjected to constant attacks by what are called hilltop youth and other terrorist crazies and just make life impossible for them. Meanwhile, the Jewish-held areas are basically suburbs of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. So you can live in Ma'ale Adumim in a nice villa, subsidized by the government, and take the Jewish-only superhighway. It takes you to your job in Tel Aviv, come back to your nice, subsidized home in the suburbs in the evening. You don't even see an Arab. That's greater Israel. That's what's being implemented.

Like any other new colony, anywhere, the Israeli authorities understand that you have to do something for the Palestinian elites. So have a place where they can gather, go to the theater, have nice restaurants, shopping malls,

pretend they're in Europe. That's Ramallah, basically, you've got to do that. Same thing you find all through Africa and other similar neocolonial areas. That's the reality. Israel is not going to accept taking over the Palestinian population. Israel is not going to accept becoming a minority state with a minority of Jews. We can be quite certain of that. So that's just not an option. A lot of talk about it, but I don't think it's an option. Discuss that, but it seems to me that's what has to be faced.

As far as actions are concerned that could overcome this crisis, there's one point that's critical, that's the United States. If the United States continues, as it has pretty consistently, with some breaks, to support the Israeli greater Israel project, they'll just continue with it. No reason for them to stop, as long as the global godfather says, "You can go ahead." Will it continue? I think that's an open question. If you look at support for Israel within the United States, it's shifted radically over the last couple of decades. Go back 20 years and beyond, Israel was the darling of the liberal population, loved Israel, it's the most wonderful place in the world. I think this was true pretty much worldwide, saying, "Swedish teenagers could live in a kibbutz because it was that wonderful."

That's all changed. Israel is now a pariah state among liberal opinion. In fact, most people who identify as liberal Democrats are more supportive of Palestinian rights. Support for Israel has shifted to the far right, as Israel itself has shifted to the far right. So the support for Israel in the United States is now the Republican Party. It's evangelicals, ultra-nationalists, those connected to military industry, which has very tight links to Israel. That's the support for Israel. And there are open possibilities. This is also true of the younger Jewish population, I should say. A lot of possibilities for trying to move to shift U.S. policy, and they're very concrete things. We've already mentioned a few, the legitimacy of U.S. military and economic aid to Israel. Sore point, that's why nobody wants to talk about it. But it's a point for activism, and there are other things like that. Israel's constant violations of international law or it's huge human rights violations, that's the vicious repression in the occupied territories.

All of this should be front and center. And I think with that, there could be a change in U.S. policy, and it doesn't have to be a huge change. Even bringing up the possibility of terminating or limiting the huge economic and military aid to Israel would have a big effect, moving forward on even more. So I think there are things that can be done. I don't think the situation's hopeless. But you have to be clear about it. Ask yourself what can be done effectively, not what makes you feel righteous. It's kind of like talking about defund the police. You have to do it in a way which is going to work, not in a way which is going to be self-destructive.

During the summer, you used to find time to read fiction. Can you recall any particular novels that stuck in your mind? And you told me that in this pandemic year, you've been so busy you've been unable to read any fiction. This goes to the question of what can art do in a society?

That's a long story. This is in fact the first summer where I haven't had the luxury of enjoying a series of novels and other forms of relaxation, too busy. The last summer I was on a Saramago kick, running through his novels. But it's much too broad a topic to discuss.

Last question. Years ago, you told me you had "bad genes" and that you did not expect to live a long life. Well, you turn 92 on December 7th. You have a Bicycle Theory of Longevity. Explain what that is.

It's pretty simple. If you keep riding fast, you don't fall off. Unfortunately, my wife Valeria won't let me get near a bicycle.

I think I can say for a lot of people, "Happy Birthday, Noam."

Thanks. Keep riding. ***Z***

(Due to time constraints some portions of the interview were not included in the national broadcast. Those portions are included in this transcript.)

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25 Years of GMOs, and Some New Insights from Argentina

By Brian Tokar

In the winter of 1996, Monsanto and a few other companies first began to sell genetically engineered seeds to commercial growers, and also mounted a massive public relations effort to convince people of their supposed benefits. They hyped their new GMOs as the answer to world hunger, a way to help troubled farmers stay on the land, and as a technology that would bring higher quality, more nutritious food to all. Skeptics in many countries responded swiftly: Greenpeace blockaded shipments and planted symbols in farmers' fields, while decentralized networks of activists organized Global Days of Action. Saboteurs in some countries attacked GMO test plots in the dark of night, but in the UK they started doing it out in the open, leading to dramatic acquittals by local courts. Some farmers in India held large, public ceremonies to burn GMO crops. Within a year, the European Union began to require labeling of food products containing GMO ingredients.

Twenty-five years later, genetically engineered crop varieties are grown on roughly 190 million hectares worldwide—a relatively constant figure since the early to mid-2010s—and the profile of what is being grown and where does not differ very much from the late 1990s. Half the global GMO acreage is in soybeans, with soybeans, corn, cotton and canola representing 99 percent of all genetically engineered crops. Forty percent of all GMO acreage is in the U.S. and 95 percent of the acreage is in just 7 countries. Eighty-five percent of GMO crops are engineered to withstand high doses of chemical weed-killers—most often Monsanto/Bayer's "Roundup" family of herbicides—and more than 40 percent produce a bacterial pesticide aimed to attack various "pest" species, but with long-documented harms for a host of beneficial insects. (The total exceeds 100 percent due to varieties that contain multiple, or "stacked," engineered traits.)

As many readers know, this technology has failed to demonstrate any consistent advantages for crop yields or food quality, but has helped drive an unprecedented consolidation of corporate power in the global seed and agrochemical sectors. Following a mid-2010s cycle of merger —which greatly compounded the impact of the original late-nineties wave of GMO-driven mergers and acquisitions—three global agribusiness empires came to control 70 percent of agrochemical production and more than 60 percent of the commercial seed market. The recently merged entities are Bayer-Monsanto, ChemChina-Syngenta and Corteva, a company formed from the merger of Dow and DuPont's agribusiness divi-

sions. Four giant grain-trading and processing companies (ADM, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfuss) now control 90 percent of crop export markets worldwide.

While much of the world continues to reject GMO crop production, these varieties still dominate global food processing and markets for livestock feed. Farmers in many countries have had an increasingly difficult time obtaining seeds with desired agronomic traits—nearly always the result of traditional crop breeding—that aren't also genetically engineered to resist herbicides and/or produce insecticidal toxins. And while GMO skeptics are occasionally written off as anti-science, researchers around the world continue to document the unintended consequences of GMO products, often in defiance of corporate-driven assaults on their reputations and livelihoods.

While active resistance to GMOs continues in many countries, many people have become complacent about our bifurcated food supply: those who are able to pay more increasingly favor organically grown and GMO-free products, while others are faced with an increasingly synthetic and often toxic food supply. The latest wave of advocacy for state-level GMO labeling in the U.S. was curtailed by an Obama administration-supported bill that purportedly mandated a uniform national labeling rule, but one that is fundamentally misleading, filled with loopholes, and designed to be widely ignored. Still, people in much of the world continue to reject genetically engineered foods and agriculture.

One notable exception to this is Argentina, the third largest GMO producer after the U.S. and Brazil. GMO soybean production has come to increasingly dominate Argentina's agriculture, with only occasional sparks of resistance. Over a decade ago, I met the Argentine sociologist, Amalia Leguizamón, who was then a graduate student in New York City struggling to understand just how that had come to pass. She began to explore the conditions on the ground in the centers of GMO soy production in Argentina, and found that the rare voices of resistance were typically overwhelmed by what appeared to be an unbreakable national consensus. Now a professor at Tulane University in New Orleans, she has produced a meticulously researched and superbly readable volume that tells the story of her investigations and reaches to the core of Argentina's apparent infatuation with GMO soybeans.

Leguizamón's book, *Seeds of Power*, transports readers into some of the most soy-dependent places in Argentina, spanning the famous pampas grasslands and the forested Chaco region, together encompassing the northeastern third of the country. Fields of herbicide-dependent GMO soybeans have spread as far as the eye can see in many areas, running right into people's backyards and dominating the roadsides. Many large soy plantations are managed remotely by corporate-tied entrepreneurs and technicians who utilize the latest high-tech tools, and often live in urban and suburban areas many hours away from the farms they operate. They have expanded upon a tradition of large export-oriented farms that goes back to the late-nineteenth century wave of European immigrants, who were recruited by the millions to help turn Argentina's rangelands into "el granero del mundo"—the "granary of the world."

But it was only after the arrival of GMOs that the region shifted dramatically from producing wheat, corn, beef, dairy and a variety of other products toward increasingly mechanized monocultures of soybeans. Soybeans now represent half of Argentina's agricultural production, with 80 percent of all farmland in plots larger than 1000 hectares (nearly 2500 acres). Rural dwellers—now less than ten percent of the country's population—typically work as contract laborers and their lives are

dominated by the decisions of corporate managers and remote farm owners. Yet people in cities and towns still commonly proclaim that "we all live off the countryside," as they rely on the relative economic stability the export soy industry can offer. The military dictatorship of the 1970s and eighties largely pacified the rural areas politically, and the neoliberal policies of the 1990s further entrenched patterns of corporate dominance, boosted by hefty seed discounts and relaxed patent rules that made GMO soybeans appear even more desirable for Argentine growers than for their counterparts in the U.S. The neo-populist administrations of Nestor and Cristina Kirchner supported the expansion of the soy economy and large growers successfully defeated a government attempt to raise export taxes during the global food crisis of the late 2000s, further entrenching their political influence.

Leguizamón did, however, happen upon some pockets of concern and skepticism. In one soy-dependent town, she learned of high rates of cancer, miscarriages and birth defects, but most people insisted they had no idea why this was occurring and voiced a persistent sense of resignation and fatalism, even amidst the ever-present fumigation trucks. While a few more trenchant concerns occasionally slipped through—most notably when she found herself in temporarily women-only spaces—people typically shut themselves down before their conversations got very far. However in one city, deep in the interior of the country, tacit concerns blossomed into an organized resistance that led to a local ban on crop dusting, a nationally famous lawsuit against a major violator, and eventually the cancellation of plans to build a massive new Monsanto corn seed plant that would have been one of the largest in the world. That community, on the outskirts of the city of Córdoba, became the site of a blockade and encampment that lasted a couple of years and hosted as many as 200 people, including international supporters. Indigenous communities in the northern part of the country, facing widespread deforestation and dislocations, have also made some waves, but have had fewer tangible successes.

Seeds of Power contains insightful reflections throughout on a compelling problem that is rarely closely examined by activist-researchers: "how power operates to create acquiescence." What is often characterized as public support for corporate-friendly policies is often just a mere acceptance by those who feel they have little power or agency to raise difficult questions. Constraints of culture, history, enforced traditional gender roles and other such factors play a powerful silencing role. Where people feel disempowered, we know they are often far more susceptible to forms of political and religious demagoguery that may feed their acceptance of the health hazards and economic stresses they experience on a daily basis. Groups of mothers, like those near Córdoba, will sometimes see most clearly through the fog, and are often in the forefront of struggles for environmental justice. Leguizamón's insights on the politics of acquiescence also shed light on the realities faced by famers in the U.S. Midwest, where the constant pressure to keep expanding operations just to keep their families on the land often compels acceptance of labor-saving technologies such as herbicide-tolerant GMO crops.

This past year, the coronavirus pandemic and the worldwide race to develop and distribute COVID-19 vaccines has boosted the reputations of companies engaged in medical biotechnology research, and their agribusiness counterparts have mounted a public relations offensive to try to share in the benefits. They systematically obscure the fundamental distinction between the use of advanced genetic methods as research tools and the release of living genetically manipulated organisms

into the open environment. While genetically engineered yeasts or bacteria in confined laboratory settings are typically involved in the initial phase of production of new pharmaceuticals such as mRNA vaccines, the purified end products carry far less risk of unintended consequences than whole engineered organisms. The scientific literature on GMO technologies' disruption of genetic regulation at the cellular and molecular levels is quite extensive and compelling, despite industry disinformation to the contrary. While biotech approaches to monitoring and analysis have also helped enhance the speed and reliability of plant breeding research, there is a similarly clear distinction between diagnostic methods in a laboratory setting and uncontrolled releases of engineered seeds, plants and even insects. We are told that newer methods of gene editing by methods such as the Nobel-honored CRISPR-Cas9 technology are inherently more precise than conventional genetic engineering methods, but there is also a growing cautionary literature on unintended consequences of those more advanced genetic manipulations.

The book, *Seeds of Power*, offers important insights on the complex dynamics of power and compliance and how they can play out in a broad national context. It helps us understand how individuals position themselves amidst those dynamics and appreciate the often unconscious personal decisions that can serve to reinforce patterns of social control. It offers an exceptional mix of scholarship and storytelling, and deserves to be widely read by everyone who wants to better understand how the global GMO debate has evolved over these past 25 years. *Z*

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Seeds of Power: Environmental Injustice and Genetically Modified Soybeans in Argentina, by Amalia Leguizamón (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020, 207 pp.).

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Climate Justice and Community Renewal: https://www.routledge.com/Climate-Justice-and-Community-Renewal-Resistance-and-Grassroots-Solutions/Tokar-Gilbertson/p/book/9780367228491
Institute for Social Ecology: https://social-ecology.org
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