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Soft Coup**

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Time for a Climate Insurgency?

By Jeremy Brecher

The leaders of the world's countries gathered in Glasgow signed a death warrant for the world's people. Is there anything the world's people can do about it? To answer effectively, human solidarity may have to challenge the very legitimacy of the nation-state system. (This Commentary draws on my contribution to the Great Transition Initiative Forum Can Human Solidarity Globalize? The Forum responded to an opening essay by Richard Falk titled "Global Solidarity: Toward a Politics of Impossibility." The ideas presented in this commentary are developed more fully in *Common Preservation in a Time of Mutual Destruction* [Oakland: PM Press, 2021].)

Since the end of the feudal era the world order has been largely structured by the nation-state system. Individuals have been willing to kill and die for their countries. The pursuit of individual and col-

lective interests has occurred largely within a national framework.

Nonetheless, social and political movements have often transgressed national boundaries and expressed solidarities that go beyond them. People frequently join together in social movements that embody the principle and practice of solidarity. And these movements often cut across national boundaries.

A few historical examples:

- The "Age of Democratic Revolutions" between 1760 and 1800 saw people in dozens of countries participate in uprisings and movements to establish popular control of the state. While these movements advocated national independence, there was extensive solidarity and mutual support among them.
- The international abolitionist movement spread throughout Europe and the Americas, abolished slavery in most major countries, and eventually made enslavement a crime worldwide.
- The rise of labor and socialist movements in the 19th and 20th centuries embodied a solidarity across national borders. From its incep-

tion, the International Workingmen's Association (First International) sent money, printed leaflets, and organized boycotts in support of workers engaged in fights in countries all over Europe.

- The nuclear disarmament movement of the 1950s and 1960s spread all over the world, penetrating the supposedly impenetrable "iron curtain," establishing its independence from both Cold War "blocs," and ultimately helping bring about a ban on nuclear testing and an 80% reduction in strategic weapons.
- In the 1960s, the movement against the Vietnam War spread around the world, challenged the countries that had allied with the U.S. in its war against Vietnam, and eventually contributed to the crisis in U.S. policy that led to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.
- The Women's Liberation Movement, which grew out of discussions in the Civil Rights Movement, has come to contest gender inequality in every country and sphere of life around the world.

- The environmental movement spread rapidly in the late 1960s. The underlying ecological concept of the interdependence of all forms of life developed from absurdity to common sense, and environmental legislation became a global norm. The global character of the movement was exhibited by the annual Earth Day, in which tens of millions of people participated in countries around the world.
 - The February 2003 protests against the U.S. attack on Iraq drew in 15 million people for demonstrations around the world, described by the *New York Times* as a reminder that “there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.”
 - The global justice movement coordinated action around the world and brought the attempt to form a “new world order” under the World Trade Organization to a halt in the 1999 Battle of Seattle.
 - Occupy Wall Street, which began as a sleep-in of a few hundred people in a New York City park, quickly became a worldwide movement with occupations in scores of countries. Its 2011 Day of Action was joined by rallies in more than 1,000 cities in 82 countries.
 - The climate movement has from the outset been global—like the global warming it contests. The student-initiated 2019 Global Climate Strike, for example, brought together 7.6 million participants in 6,000 events in 185 countries.
 - When Black Lives Matter protests swept across the U.S. after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, hundreds of thousands of people in London, Sydney, Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, Stockholm, Tokyo, and many other locations in many countries took to the streets in solidarity.
- Each of these examples illustrates the globalization of human solidarity. Why, despite the dominance of the nation-state framework, do movements arise in which solidarity transgresses nation-state boundaries?
- Common Preservation**

In a world where “self-preservation” is often regarded as “the first law of life,” solidarity is a form of action in which mutual aid serves as the means for realizing individual interests. Solidarity is the practice of pursuing individual ends by realizing mutual and common ends.

The process by which solidarity emerges is what, echoing the 17th-century Digger Gerrard Winstanley, I call “common preservation.” Common preservation is the process by which people shift from strategies based on greed and self-aggrandizement to strategies that pursue self-interest by promoting common interests.

Solidarity and common preservation are likely to emerge where people discover that they are powerless to realize their ends by themselves, but that they may be able to do so by cooperation with others.

New common preservations and solidarities generally develop when people are presented a common threat or problem that can’t be solved by individuals and limited groups. They experience the necessity to build new solidarities that cross national and other boundaries. This doesn’t happen automatically, but through an active process of constructing links among

people and groups who have been isolated, divided, and even antagonistic.

Such movements have repeatedly transcended national borders and established transnational cooperation, loyalty, and solidarity. But they have not yet transmuted the nations and the nation-state system that prevent global human cooperation to address global problems like climate change, nuclear holocaust, and injustice.

Climate Insurgency

How can nation-states be not only penetrated by global forces, but also have their most destructive aspects metamorphosed by them?

Consider today’s most urgent and devastating threat: climate change.

The nation-state system has helped cause and perpetuate climate destruction. National sovereignty gives states the authority to determine what can or cannot be emitted into the atmosphere in their territories; it is states that authorize the emission of climate-destroying greenhouse gas emissions. The sovereignty of nations ensures that common human interests are trumped by the authority of states—allowing governments to destroy the global atmospheric commons without restraint from higher authority or their people. The system of sovereign nation-states generates a competition in which each state must encourage the exploitation of nature’s resources or face loss of power and wealth within the competitive world order. The direct and indirect dependence of states and their officials on dominant economic actors—notably, industries that produce and use fossil fuels—often makes governments subordinate to those with an interest in perpetuating climate destruction.

To overcome these limitations, the climate movement needs to become what I have called a global nonviolent constitutional insurgency.

Insurgencies are social movements, but movements of a special type: they reject current rulers’ claims to legitimate authority. Insurgencies often develop from movements that initially make no such challenge to established authority, but eventually conclude that insurgency is necessary to realize their objectives. To effectively protect the earth’s climate and the future of our species, the climate protection movement may well have to become such an insurgency.

A nonviolent insurgency rejects and resists the authority of the state, but it eschews violence. Instead, it exercises power by mobilizing people for various forms of nonviolent mass action that withdraw acquiescence and cooperation from the powers that be.

A constitutional insurgency declares established laws and policies illegitimate and illegal and sets out to establish constitutionally legitimate law through nonviolent self-help. Destruction of the earth’s climate represents a violation of the most fundamental constitutional principles; as federal judge Ann Aiken straightforwardly ruled, “the right to a climate system capable of sustaining human life is fundamental to a free and ordered society.” If established government won’t protect that right, it is up to the people of the world to do so.

Global nonviolent constitutional insurgency is a vehicle for undermining the illegitimate authority of states. Under the public trust doctrine, all people have rights that states, whether their own or others, can’t violate. All human beings have valid claims against all states that are destroying a stable climate.

Today, we can see the emergence of climate solidarity all around us. We can see the emergence of new solidarities—self-preservation transformed to common preservation. But our solidarity is

still blocked by a world order based on the war of all against all. One way to overcome our thrust to mutual destruction could be to transform the global climate movement into a global climate insurgency. **Z**

The Publication of Origin for this article is *Labor Network for Sustainability*.

Seasonal Insomniacs in Times of Climate Chaos

By Rivera Sun

It snowed, finally. We’ve been waiting for months, restless and agitated. Have you ever seen your child settle more deeply into slumber after you tuck them under the blanket? That’s how it feels here. I live in the high-altitude desert of Northern New Mexico. Deserts often invoke images of Saharan sands, but this desert sprawls atop black, volcanic basalt. Perched at 7,000 feet, it snows here in the winter. Or, it used to.

Because of the human-wrought climate crisis, it rained on Christmas Eve.

This is a fierce and fragile

region, rugged and imperiled all at once. Deserts endure an existence one step closer to death’s scythe than other regions. Their inhabitants are wily survivors. The toads wear dragon’s spines. The cacti guard their precious water with miniature swords. The junipers twist upon themselves, the size of small children despite being centuries old.

The Native Puebloan cultures and their ancestors have spent more than 10,000 years in this drought-prone region. They’ve never seen anything like this.

Usually, everyone in our desert town exalts at the start of rainfall. We lift our heads in praise and welcome the sweet touch of water. But when we woke to the shush of rain on Christmas Eve, an uneasy hush twinged inside us. This is not normal. This should be snow.

We know it’s too warm. All December, the neighbors have walked their dogs in shirtsleeves. We’ve crossed paths on the bare, dusty mesa and cracked jokes about keeping our tans. We laugh, but warily. Such warmth is unnatural. We can practically hear the plants gasping in distress. The tips of the apricot trees are flushing red in fever-dreams of spring. We’re all insomniacs of the season, stirring restlessly when we

should be tucked in, sleeping.

From raising children, we know the importance of naps and sleep at regular intervals. We’ve seen the cranky toddler, the meltdowns, the screaming tantrums. Their whole bodies crave sleep. Unable to get it, they shudder in stress and strain. So it is with this desert ecosystem when December doesn’t fall below freezing, when the snows are nowhere to be found, or when the only precipitation falls as spits of rain, far and few between.

It’s our fault. Humans are responsible for this mess. The science is clear: the crisis is caused by our addiction to fossil fuels, overconsumption, excessive animal meat production, and pollution. The unseasonable warmth will continue unless we drastically change our way of life.

Last week, a young bull snake slithered out of its burrow, groggy and confused by the balmy weather. I halted in shock. These creatures hibernate when the autumn frosts give way to deeper freezes. I shouldn’t see this cold-blooded snake until April, heralding spring’s return. She shouldn’t even be able to move at this time of year. Our eyes met and I felt the full weight of my human responsibility. We are the ones who made this problem. We are the ones who must fix it.

This year, 2022, we must change, shedding the skin of our old existences as surely as a snake, shifting toward more respectful ways of living on this beloved and imperiled planet. Right now, my friends are writing New Year’s Resolutions. They’re turning the page on their calendars and examining their 2022 planners. We need to put climate action onto our schedule in 2022. We cannot wait another five years. We’ve already procrastinated for decades too long. This must be the year when systemic change ramps up. Our family, friends, banks, businesses, schools, shops—everyone and everything should be undergoing massive transformation.

Last year showed us a glimpse of the horrors that loom from doing nothing: tornadoes, hurricanes, catastrophic floods, heat domes, raging forest fires. And the dangers are not just in the shocking disasters. They also lurk in the eerie, uneasy times of unseasonable warmth that stress and strain our ecosystems. We can sense the subtle warning signs if we pay attention. It’s in the thirsty gasp of trees. It’s in the soul-piercing eyes of a groggy snake. It’s in the painful restlessness of a high-altitude desert that cannot sleep.

When the snow finally came, relief fell with it. We

are all grateful for the blanket of winter that curls over the quiet sagebrush. For the trees, snakes, and toads, these are times of rest and dreaming. For humanity, these must be times of reckoning and change. **Z**

Rivera Sun, syndicated by PeaceVoice, has written numerous books, including *The Dandelion Insurrection*. She is the editor of *Nonviolence News* and a nationwide trainer in strategy for nonviolent campaigns.

The Highest Attainable Standard of Health is a Fundamental Right of Every Human Being

By Vijay Prashad

As we enter the new year almost two years after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, the official death toll from COVID-19 sits just below 5.5 million people. WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adha-

nom Ghebreyesus says that there is a “tsunami of cases” due to the new variants. The country with the highest death toll is the United States, where the official number of those who succumbed to the disease is now over 847,000; Brazil and India follow with nearly 620,000 and 482,000 deaths respectively. These three countries have been ravaged by the disease. The political leadership of each of these countries failed to take sufficient measures to break the chain of infection and instead offered anti-scientific advice to the public, who suffered from both a lack of clear information and relatively depleted health care systems.

In February and March 2020, when the news of the virus had already been communicated by China’s Center for Disease Control to their counterparts in the United States, U.S. President Donald Trump admitted to *The Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward, “I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down, because I don’t want to create a panic.” Despite the warnings, Trump and his health secretary Alex Azar completely failed to prepare for the arrival of COVID-19 on U.S. soil by cruise ship and aircraft.

It is not as if Joe Biden, who succeeded Trump, has been monumentally better at man-

aging the pandemic. When the U.S. Food and Drug Administration paused the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in April 2021, it fed into growing anti-vaccine sentiment in the country; confusion between Biden's White House and the Center for Disease Control over the use of masks furthered the chaos in the country. The deep political animosity between Trump supporters and liberals and the general lack of concern for hand-to-mouth earners with no social safety net accelerated the cultural divides in the United States.

The wildness of state policy in the United States was replicated by its close allies Brazil and India. In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro mocked the severity of the virus, refused to endorse the simple WHO guidelines (mask mandates, contact tracing, and later vaccination), and pursued a genocidal policy to refuse funds for clean water delivery in parts of the country—notably in the Amazon—which are essential to preventing the spread of the disease. The term “genocide” is not used loosely. It was put on the table twice by Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Gilmar Mendes, once in May 2020 and then again in July 2020; in the former case, Justice Mendes accused Bolsonaro of implementing “a genocidal

policy in the management of health care.”

In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi neglected the WHO's advice, rushed into an ill-crafted lockdown, and then failed to properly assist the medical establishment—especially public health (ASHA) workers—with the provision of basic medical supplies (including oxygen). Instead, they encouraged the banging of pots in public and prayed that this would confuse the virus, creating an unscientific attitude toward the severity of the disease. All the while, Modi's government continued having mass gatherings during the election campaigns and allowed religious mega-festivals to take place, all of which became super-spreader events.

Studies of leaders such as Bolsonaro and Modi show that they not only failed to manage the crisis in a scientific manner, but that they have been “stoking cultural divides and have used the crisis as an opportunity to expand their powers and/or to take an intolerant approach to government opponents.”

Countries such as the United States and India—and to a lesser extent Brazil—were hit hard because their public health infrastructure had been weakened and their private health systems were simply not capable of managing

a crisis of this proportion. During the recent spread of the Omicron variant in the United States, the Center for Disease Control tried to encourage vaccinations by saying that while the vaccine was free, “hospital stays can be expensive.” Bonnie Castillo, the head of National Nurses United responded, “Imagine a dystopia in which the public health strategy is to threaten the people with the health care system itself. Oh wait, we don't have to imagine....”

In 2009, then WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan said, “user fees for health care were put forward as a way to recover costs and discourage the excessive use of health services and the over-consumption of care. This did not happen. Instead, user fees punished the poor.” User fees, or co-pays, and payment for private health care where public health care does not exist continue to be ways to “punish” the poor. India—currently the country with the third highest COVID-19 death toll—has the highest out-of-pocket medical expenses in the world.

The sharp words from the head of the nurses' union in the United States are echoed by doctors and nurses around the world. Last year, Jhuliana Rodrigues, a nurse at the São Vicente Hospital in Jun-

diaí, Brazil told me that they “work with fear,” recounting that the conditions are appalling, the equipment minimal, and the hours long. Health professionals “do their jobs with love, dedication, care of human beings,” she told me. Despite all the early talk about “essential workers,” health workers have seen little change in their working conditions, which is why we have seen a wave of strikes across the world—such as the recent militant strike by doctors in Delhi, India.

The mishandling of the COVID catastrophe in countries like the United States, Brazil, and India is a major human rights violation of treaties to which all of these countries are signatories. Each of these countries is a member of the WHO, whose Constitution, written in 1946, envisages “the highest attainable standard of health [as] one of the fundamental rights of every human being.” Two years later, the International Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Article 25, asserted that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widow-

hood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” The language is dated—“himself,” “his family,” “his”—but the point is clear. Even if the declaration is a non-binding treaty, it sets an important standard that is routinely violated by the major world powers.

In 1978, at Alma-Ata (USSR), each of these countries pledged to enhance public health infrastructure, which they not only failed to do, but which they systematically undermined by extensively privatising health care. The evisceration of public health care systems is one reason why these capitalist states could not handle the public health crisis—a stark contrast to the states of Cuba, Kerala, and Venezuela, which were vastly more successful at breaking the chain of infection with a fraction of the resources.

Finally, in 2000, at the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, member states of the United Nations endorsed a document that affirmed that “health is a fundamental human right indispensable for the exercise of other human rights. Every human being is entitled to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health conducive to living a life in dignity.”

A toxic culture has emerged

in many of the largest countries in the world, where there is routine disregard for the well-being of ordinary people, a disregard that violates international treaties. Words like “democracy” and “human rights” need to be rethought from the root; they are cheapened by their narrow use.

Our colleagues at New Frame started the new year with a strong editorial calling for resistance to these malign governments and for the need for a new project to restore hope. On the second point, they write: “There is nothing utopian about this. There are plenty of examples—all with their limits and contradictions, to be sure—of rapid social progress under progressive governments. But this always requires popular organization and mobilization to build a political instrument for change, to renew and discipline it from below, and to defend it from domestic elites and imperialism, most particularly the revanchism of American foreign policy, covert and overt.” **Z**

The Publication of Origin for this article is *Tricontinental*.

Yes, There Were 10 Good Things About 2021

By Medea Benjamin

2021 began with a huge sense of relief as Trump left office. We hoped to emerge from the ravages of COVID, pass a hefty Build Back Better (BBB) bill, and make significant cuts to the Pentagon budget. But, alas, we faced a January 6 white nationalist insurrection, two new COVID mutations, a sliced-and-diced BBB bill that didn't pass, and a Pentagon budget that actually INCREASED.

It was, indeed, a disastrous year, but we do have some reasons to cheer:

1. The U.S. survived its first major coup plot on January 6 and key right-wing groups are on the wane. With participants in the insurrection being charged and some facing significant jail time, new efforts to mobilize—including September's "Justice for J6" rally—fizzled. As for Trump, let's remember that in early 2021, he was impeached

again, he lost his main mouthpiece, Twitter, and his attempt to build a rival social media service seems to have stalled. QAnon is in decline—its major hashtags have evaporated and Twitter shut down some 70,000 Q accounts. We may still see a resurgence (including another Trump attempt to take the White House), but so far the insurrection seems to have peaked and is being rolled back.

2. Latin America is undergoing a massive shift toward progressive governments. Gabriel Boric, a young Chilean progressive who campaigned for broad reforms, including universal health-care and a higher minimum wage, won a landslide victory in December. His victory follows the victories of Xiomara Castro in Honduras in November, Pedro Castillo in Peru in June, and Luis Arce in Bolivia in October 2020. In Brazil, former president Lula da Silva may soon return to the presidency via next year's elections. All of this bodes well for policies that benefit the people of Latin America and for greater solidarity with Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua and other nations in the U.S. crosshairs.

3. The struggle for racial justice and accountability saw some major wins in 2021. Former police officer Derek Chauvin was found

guilty on all 3 charges related to the murder of George Floyd and has pled guilty in the federal civil rights version of the case. The three Georgia men who killed Ahmaud Arbery for the crime of going out for a jog were also convicted. Progressive District Attorneys in cities and counties across this country are fighting to end cash bail and no-knock warrants, mass incarceration, and mandatory sentencing minimums. We see a backlash against these DAs, such as in Los Angeles and San Francisco, but they have strong community support.

4. U.S. troops left Afghanistan, winding down a deadly 20-year intervention. Some of us were against this U.S. invasion to begin with, and pushed for 20 years for our troops to leave. The exit was carried out in the same shameful, chaotic way as the 20 years of war, and the U.S. is once again targeting the Afghan people by freezing the billions of dollars of Afghan money held in overseas banks. That's why we have joined the effort to #UnfreezeAfghanistan. But we do recognize that the U.S. troop withdrawal was necessary to give Afghans the chance to shape their own future, to stop spending \$300 million a day on a failed war, and to roll back U.S. militarism.

5. COVID has returned with a vengeance, but we have been winning battles against other deadly diseases. Malaria, which kills half a million people a year, mostly in Africa, might be vanquished thanks to a groundbreaking vaccine, the first ever for a parasitic disease. On the HIV front, a new vaccine has shown a 97% response rate in Phase I clinical trials. Almost 40 million people were living with HIV in 2020, and hundreds of thousands of people die from AIDS-related illnesses each year. While the vaccine is still in Phase I trials, it is an extremely hopeful sign for 2022.

6. The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted in 2017, went into effect this year after fulfilling the requirement that it be ratified by at least 50 countries. The U.S. and the world's other nuclear powers have not signed the treaty and it has no enforcement mechanism but, for the first time in history, nuclear weapons are illegal under international law. With 86 signatories so far, the treaty helps to delegitimize nuclear weapons and reinforce global norms against their use. At a time when the outcome of the nuclear talks with Iran are uncertain, and when conflicts with Russia and China regarding Ukraine and Taiwan are intensifying,

such a reminder is critical.

7. In the U.S., workers are actually gaining power amidst the ravages of COVID. Wages are going up and unions are starting to re-emerge. With millions of workers quitting their jobs from burn-out or re-evaluation of life goals (dubbed the "Great Resignation"), the resulting labor shortage has given workers more space to push for better wages, benefits and working conditions. There were over 300 strikes from hospitals to coal plants to universities—many of them successful. Starbucks workers in Buffalo, New York, succeeded in forming the first union at a Starbucks store in the U.S. Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama, lost their attempt to form the first Amazon union, but the National Labor Relations Board has ordered a new election due to management's improper conduct. So 2022 may well be a banner year for worker's rights and unions.

8. While not nearly enough, there were some key environmental gains, with Biden starting his term by re-entering the Paris Climate Accords. The COP26 meeting put a spotlight on the urgent need for revved up environmental action, with environmental activists worldwide pressuring their own governments to step up. Some 44

nations are now committed to ending the use of coal, and the G7 countries vowed not to fund coal plants any more. Here in the U.S., thanks to sustained environmental activism, the Keystone XL and PennEast pipelines were officially canceled and the Biden administration nixed oil and gas drilling on federal land. Renewable energy installations are at an all-time high and wind farms are planned along the entire U.S. coastline. Another major polluter, China, is building the largest energy installation in history, a whopping 100 gigawatts of wind and solar power (the entire capacity, as of 2021, of U.S. solar energy), and plans to plant a Belgium-sized area of forest every year going forward.

9. Yes, there have actually been some advances for women's choice this year. When we look beyond the outrageous anti-abortion law in Texas that empowers private citizens to sue abortion providers, we see that many countries in the rest of the world are moving in the opposite direction. In 2021, abortion was legalized in South Korea, Thailand, and Argentina, while safe access increased in New Zealand, Ecuador, and Uruguay. A major victory in a very Catholic country came in September, when Mexico's Supreme

Court decriminalized it. Isn't it ironic that, prior to *Roe v. Wade*, thousands of women from U.S. states along the Mexican border would cross into Mexico to get (illegal) abortions? Now, they might again be going, and this time for legal abortions.

10. Another reason to celebrate: 2021 is over. And 2022 may actually be the year we conquer COVID and move forward on a full agenda of pressing issues, including pushing Congress to pass a version of the Build Back Better bill; pressing for passage of the voting rights legislation that will stop the outrageous statewide voter suppression; mobilizing against the far right—and a return of Trump or Trump-lite; stopping the Cold War with China; preventing a military conflict with Russia in Ukraine; and cutting the outrageous Pentagon budget to invest in the health of our people and planet.

If we could make gains in a year as bad as 2021, just think what we can accomplish in 2022.

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Global Exchange and CODE-PINK: Women for Peace, is the author of the 2018 book, *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Her previous books include: *Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the U.S.-Saudi*

Connection (2016); *Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control* (2013); *Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart* (1989), and (with Jodie Evans) *Stop the Next War Now (Inner Ocean Action Guide)* (2005).

How Portland's Activists Are Bringing Mutual Aid to the Homeless

By April M. Short

Steven Stroud says when he was released from prison in 2020, where he'd wound up due to becoming addicted to doctor-prescribed opioids and eventually heroin, the Portland, Oregon, streets where he grew up had changed. The pandemic had shut down most of the already sparse jobs he would have potentially been able to pursue, and he ended up without work or a place to live.

Stroud spoke in an interview with Greg Bennick posted on SoundCloud in November 2021 about how people living on the streets in Portland now had to contend

with a near-constant militarized police presence, which developed in response to the city's Black Lives Matter protests (Note: the interview also details Stroud's youth as a skinhead, and how he eventually left this hate-filled existence behind and spent a period of time speaking out and educating people against white supremacist groups). Stroud shares in the interview that he met Bennick when a few people walking past noticed him and handed him a sandwich. These were volunteers with the Portland Mutual Aid Network (PMAN), which was formed in 2020 by a group of friends who noticed the impact of police on houseless residents of the city while participating in the Black Lives Matter protests.

Stroud's progression toward experiencing homelessness is sadly not all too unique in the U.S. Homelessness was already a serious issue, and increasing in many places across the U.S. prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic and physical stresses of the pandemic, particularly in 2020, compounded many of the issues that typically lead to homelessness, including unemployment and strain on access to basic resources.

The risks and stresses to people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic

increase during winter, particularly in damp, cold areas like the Pacific Northwest. Exposure to the elements can mean hypothermia and sometimes death for people experiencing homelessness.

In response to this reality, PMAN is collaborating with a number of other community volunteers and mutual aid groups on a winter drive effort to collect tents, sleeping bags and other gear to support neighbors experiencing homelessness. Several Portland businesses have signed onto the effort as drop-off locations.

One such business is the sandwich restaurant and pub Bunk Bar, where Kelsey Anderson, a kitchen manager, says she feels fortunate to work with people who share her interest in supporting underserved communities via mutual aid efforts. She notes that everything brought into any of the drop-off sites "is sorted and distributed directly into the hands and homes of people who have a need for it by other working-class people, almost immediately."

"We believe caring for each other and supporting people while in a system that pits us against each other is an inherently important and radical act," she says. "This is particularly clear in the cold months and whilst still in the throes of a pandemic. I want

people to understand their contributions to this drive can save a life. Every winter, humans in Portland and all over the country are abandoned outside, and there is absolutely no—absolutely no—justification for that."

She notes that many mutual aid groups and organizers have collaborated on winter drive efforts recently to support and work with neighbors living outdoors.

"I hope more people will begin to see people who live outdoors as their neighbors, and as people that have just as much value as anyone else in their lives, instead of possibly someone they think they can't relate to," she says. "I'd like to encourage people to try and meet their outdoor neighbors, to do their own clothes drives, to feel free and emboldened to work in their communities with people that live in them. 'Social solidarity not charity' is a commonly used phrase when discussing mutual aid. We are caring for each other as an equal community, instead of relying on top-down organized philanthropy that can tend to ostracize."

A volunteer with PMAN who has participated in mutual aid efforts for 30 years and asked to remain anonymous said they do so because the official systems in place to support people are inadequate.

"We need to be organizing as community members to [support] ourselves," they said. "[PMAN] started in early June of 2020 in order to support downtown Portland houseless people who were being assaulted by police response to protesters. We had been going downtown participating in the protests and one night handed two men on the street a banana and a bottle of water while we were retreating from a tear gas attack. We stopped and talked to them, and heard what they were facing nightly, and asked what they needed."

The interaction, they say, caused a shift in the focus of their activism, from primarily participating in the protests to taking direct action on the behalf of those in need. That day, a regular mission to support people living on the streets started, and it has stayed consistent each week since, the volunteer said.

"The city government in Portland pays good lip service to supporting houseless initiatives, but realistically what they support is sweeping people off the streets and making sure that they are not seen, heard, or endured," the volunteer said.

"It would be an exaggeration to suggest that there are no services available, but it would be entirely accurate

that these services are the pieces and scraps left behind after a system rooted in profit and advancement has had their fill at the table.”

The volunteer said this is part of why mutual aid is not only helpful but necessary.

“Mutual aid is inherently political, and inherently socially driven,” they said. “If we wait for protection from the police, we won’t get it. If we wait for salvation from the government, we won’t get it. And if we wait for solutions from the failed system in place, we won’t get it.... Think of mutual aid as action plus solidarity-based support networks which are community-driven. The core tenet is of uniting with, supporting, and upholding those who otherwise would have to fend for themselves, and instead doing it together, on the terms of those who are oppressed.”

They note that in preparation for winter, Portland’s many mutual aid groups are actively gathering hats, gloves, hand warmers, sleeping bags, blankets, coats, tents and scarves. If someone wants to get involved in their local mutual aid efforts, the volunteer says the best thing to do is to look up the mutual aid groups nearby, and assess “which speaks to them in terms of the work they are doing and how people want to get involved.”

“Ours is a small but very consistent group,” the volunteer said. “Other groups are larger and more thorough in their areas of focus. If people want to support what we are doing, they can read more about mutual aid and about us at our Instagram @portland-mutualaid or via the web at portlandmutualaidnetwork.com. We can direct people to other groups if they are interested in aspects of community work where we aren’t currently focused.”

If someone wanted to start a mutual aid group, the volunteer says step one would be to assess need around them.

“Step two is to further determine the people you will work for and why, and the people you will work with,” they said. “Step three is to strategize on the terms of the people you are working for. You are not doing charity. You are trying to rebuild and build alternatives to the systems in place which are failing otherwise.... Let others—specifically those you work for—speak and be heard. We can easily fall into an unfortunate narrative rooted in comfort and privilege when we stop listening... Mutual aid is constantly in flux and flow, but directed toward cooperation. Charity is one-way. Mutual aid is an experience of solidarity.”

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GOP’s Soft Coup Is Still Underway One Year After Capitol Assault

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

C.J. Polychroniou: A year ago, on January 6, 2021, a mob of Donald Trump’s supporters broke into the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to block certification of the electoral votes—a routine procedure following a presidential election—that would have formalized Joe Biden’s victory. The Capitol building had been breached on a few occasions in the past, but this was the first time in the history of the country that an assault on democracy was actually incited by an outgoing president. In fact, months later, former President Trump would go so far as to condemn the criminal prosecution of those who took part in the Capitol attack that day even though he had

denounced the insurrection after he had been impeached over it. From your perspective, Noam, how should we understand what happened on January 6, 2021?

Noam Chomsky: Participants in the assault on the Capitol doubtless had varying perceptions and motives, but were united in the effort to overthrow an elected government; in short, an attempted coup, by definition. It was furthermore an attempt that could have succeeded if a few prominent Republican figures had changed their stance and gone along with the coup attempt, and if the military command had made different decisions. Trump was making every effort to facilitate the coup, which would surely have been applauded by a large majority of Republican voters and by the Republican political leadership, which, with a few exceptions, grovels at his feet in a shameful display of cowardice.

Implications for the future are all too clear. The Republican organization—it’s hard to regard them any longer as an authentic political party—is now carefully laying the groundwork for success next time, whatever the electoral outcome may be. It’s all completely in the open, not only not concealed but in fact heralded with pride by its

leaders. And regularly reported, so that no one who is interested enough to pay attention to the American political scene can miss it. To mention just the most recent discussion I’ve seen, the Associated Press describes how the GOP is carrying out a “slow-motion insurrection” and has become “an anti-democratic force,” something that has not happened before in American politics. A few weeks earlier, Barton Gellman outlined the plans in detail in *The Atlantic*.

There is no need to review the many well-known flaws of the formal democratic system: the radically undemocratic Senate, the enormous role of concentrated wealth and private power in determining electoral outcomes and legislation, the structural advantages provided to a traditionalist rural minority, and much else. But there are also broader issues.

What was progressive in the 18th century is by now so antiquated that if the U.S. were to apply for membership in the European Union, it would probably be rejected as not satisfying democratic norms. That raises questions that merit more attention than they receive.

With all due respect for the Founders, one question—raised by Thomas Jefferson in his own terms—is why we should revere the sentiments

of a group of wealthy white male 18th-century slaveowners, particularly now that the amendment system has succumbed to the deep flaws of the formal political system. No less curious are the legal doctrines of originalism/textualism that call on us to decipher their pronouncements with little regard to social and economic conditions as a decisive guide to judicial action. Looking at our political culture from a distance, there is a lot that would seem passing strange.

But even the tattered system that still survives is intolerable to GOP wreckers. Nothing is overlooked in their systematic assault on the fragile structure. Methods extend from “taking hold of the once-overlooked machinery of elections” at the ground level, to passing laws to bar the “wrong people” from voting, to devising a legal framework to establish the principle that Republican legislatures can “legally” determine choice of electors, whatever the irrelevant public many choose.

In the not-too-distant background are calls to “save our country” by force if necessary, where “our country” is a white supremacist Christian nationalist patriarchal society in which non-white folk can take part as long as they “know their place”; not at the

table.

[White people’s] fear of “losing our country” is [in part a response to] demographic tendencies that are eroding white majorities, resisting even the radical gerrymandering that is imposed to amplify the structural advantages of the scattered conservative rural vote. Another threat to “our country” is that white supremacy is increasingly rejected, particularly by younger people, as is devotion to religious authority, even church membership.

So while the charges of right-wing propagandists are largely fantasy and delusion, they have enough of a basis in reality to enflame those who see their familiar world of dominance disappearing before their eyes. And with the social order crumbling under the neoliberal assault, these fears can easily be manipulated by demagogues and opportunists—while their masters in the executive suites and mansions relish the opportunity to carry forward the highway robbery that they have engaged in for 40 years if future challenges can be beaten down, by state and private violence if necessary.

That’s a world that may not be remote, though it won’t last long with the supreme climate denialists in charge. When Hungary, the current darling of the right, de-

scends towards fascism, it’s bad enough. If the U.S. does, long-term survival of human society is a dim prospect.

What does the January 6 Capitol attack tell us about the state of U.S. democracy in the 21st century? And do you agree with the view that Trump was the product of bad political institutions?

It tells us that the limited political democracy that still exists is hanging by a delicate thread.

If political institutions—more generally, intertwined socioeconomic-political institutions—can yield a President Trump, they are infected with profound malignancies. A moment’s reflection shows that the malignancies are so profound that they are driving organized human society to suicide, and not in the distant future, with Trump and his acolytes and apologists enthusiastically in the lead. By now it takes real literary talent to exaggerate.

What are these institutions? That’s much too far-reaching an inquiry to undertake here, but there are some instructive highlights.

The so-called Founders outlined clearly enough the kind of society they envisioned: “those who own the country ought to govern it” and ensure that “the minori-

ty of the opulent are protected from the majority” (John Jay, James Madison, respectively). Their model was England, where the reigning institutions had been described accurately a few years earlier by Adam Smith in words that bear repetition: The “masters of mankind,” the merchants and manufacturers of England, are the “principal architects” of government policy and ensure that their own interests are “most peculiarly attended to” no matter how “grievous” the impact on others, including the people of England but also, much more severely, the victims of “the savage injustice of the Europeans,” notably the people of India, then the richest country in the world, which England was robbing and despoiling for the benefit of the masters. Under the protection of the state they control, the masters can pursue their “vile maxim”: “All for ourselves and nothing for other people,” the maxim of the feudal lords adopted by the masters of mankind who had been replacing them since the “glorious revolution” of the preceding century.

The masters of mankind have always understood that free-market capitalism would destroy them and the societies they owned. Accordingly, they have always called for a powerful state to protect them

from the ravages of the market, leaving the less fortunate exposed. That has been dramatically plain in the course of the “bailout economy” of the past 40 years of class war, masked under “free market” rhetoric.

These core features of the reigning state capitalist institutions have been exacerbated by the rot spreading from interwar Vienna, adopting the term “neoliberalism” in the international Walter Lippmann symposium in Paris in 1938, then in the Mont Pelerin Society. The ideas were implemented under almost perfect experimental conditions during Augusto Pinochet’s murderous dictatorship in Chile, crashing the economy in half a dozen years, but no matter. By then, they had bigger game in sight: the global economy in the era of vigorous class war launched by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and carried forward by Bill Clinton and other successors, establishing more firmly the vile maxim and dismantling such troublesome impediments as a limited welfare system and labor unions.

That’s the kind of terrain in which a Trump can appear, though there are of course multiple factors of varied nature that interact.

It seems that political vio-

lence has become an accepted norm among many Americans today. Firstly, what do you think are Trump’s motives for continuing to spin the “Big Lie”? Secondly, do you share the view that neo-fascism is gaining ground and that election subversion remains a real threat?

Trump’s motives are clear enough. We don’t need a degree in advanced psychiatry to know that a sociopathic megalomaniac must always win; nothing else can be contemplated. Furthermore, he’s a canny politician who understands that his worshippers will easily accept the “Big Lie.”

Many have wondered at the willingness of two-thirds of Republicans to believe the ludicrous pretense that the election was stolen. Should we really be surprised? Have a look at the views of Republicans on other matters. For example, on whether humans were created as they are today: about half of Republicans. Or on whether Muslims are seeking to impose Sharia law on the U.S.: 60 percent of Republicans who trust Fox News. Or on a host of other pre-modern beliefs in which the U.S. (mostly Republicans) stands virtually alone among comparable societies.

So why not a stolen election?

Election subversion is not merely a threat. It's happening in the "soft coup" that is underway right now. As is the drift toward a form of fascism. There is evidence that general attitudes of Trump voters on a range of issues are similar to those of European voters for far right parties with fascist origins. And these sectors are now a driving force in the GOP.

There's also substantial evidence that this drift to the far right may be driven in part by blind loyalty to Trump. That seems to be the case on the most critical issue that humans have ever faced: environmental destruction. During Trump's years in office, Republican recognition of climate change as a "serious issue," already shockingly low, declined by 20 percent, even as nature has been issuing dramatic warnings, loud and clear, that we are racing toward disaster.

The phenomenon is deeply disturbing, and not without grim precedent. A century ago, Germany was at the peak of Western civilization, producing great contributions to the sciences and the arts. The Weimar Republic was regarded by political scientists as a model democracy. A few years later, Germans were worshipping Der Führer and accepting the vilest lies, and acting on them. That in-

cluded some of the most respected figures, like Martin Heidegger; I recall very well my shock when I started to read his 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics* when it appeared in English 60 years ago. And I'm old enough to remember hearing similar atrocious thoughts as a child in the 1930s, close to home. Sinclair Lewis's 1935 classic on how fascism might be implanted in America by Christian nationalists (*It Can't Happen Here*) was not mere fantasy when it appeared, and it's no surprise that it has been returning to the best-seller lists in the Trump era.

State-level contests have moved to the very center of U.S. politics, but the Democrats are failing to catch up with this new reality. What's going on? Why do state politics matter more these days, and why do the Democrats seem to have embarked on a suicide mission as far as political strategy is concerned?

The neglect of state politics by Democrats seems to have taken off under Barack Obama. That critical area of American politics was handed over to Republicans who, by that time, were already moving toward their current stance of rejecting democratic politics as an impediment to their task of "saving the

country" (the version for the voting base) and maintaining power so as to serve the rich and the corporate sector (the understanding of the leadership).

So far, there have been, surprisingly enough, no breakthroughs in the House committee investigation of the January 6 attack. Do you think that the congressional select committee involved in this task will establish accountability for what happened on that infamous day? And if it does, what could be the political implications of such an outcome?

The Republican leadership has already neutralized the select committee by refusal to participate on acceptable terms, then by rejecting subpoenas—a sensible strategy to delay the proceedings by court proceedings until they can simply disband the committee, or even better, reshape it to pursuing their political enemies. That's the kind of tactic that Trump has used successfully throughout his career as a failed businessman, and it is second nature to corrupt politicians.

That aside, the events of January 6 have been investigated so fully, and even visually presented so vividly, that nothing much of substance is likely to be revealed. Repub-

lican elites who want to portray the insurrection as an innocent picnic in the park, with some staged violence by anti-fa to make decent law-abiding citizens look bad, will persist no matter what is revealed. And though there is more to learn about the background, it is not likely to have much effect on what seems now a reasonably plausible picture.

Suppose that the select committee were to come up with new and truly damning evidence about Trump's role or other high-level connivance in the coup attempt. The Rupert Murdoch-controlled mainstream media would have little difficulty in reshaping that as further proof that the "Deep State," along with the "Commie rats" and "sadistic pedophiles" who supposedly run the Democratic Party, have conspired to vilify the "Great Man." His adoring worshippers would probably be emboldened by this additional proof of the iniquity of the evil forces conniving at the "Great Replacement." Or whatever fabrication is contrived by those capable of converting critical race theory into an instrument for destroying the "embattled white race," among other propaganda triumphs.

My guess is that the committee's work will end up being a gift to the proto-fascist forces that are chipping

away at what remains of formal democracy, much as the impeachment proceedings turned out to be.

It's worth proceeding for the sake of history—assuming that there will be any history that will even care if the plan to establish lasting Republican rule succeeds.

No exaggeration.

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Hey, Hey, USA! How Many Bombs Did You Drop Today?

By Medea Benjamin & Nicolas JS Davies

The Pentagon has finally published its first Airpower Summary since President Biden took office nearly a year ago. These monthly reports have been published since 2007 to document the number of bombs and missiles dropped by U.S.-led air forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria since 2004. But President Trump stopped publishing them after February 2020, shrouding continued U.S. bombing in secrecy.

Over the past 20 years, (as documented in the table on page 42) U.S. and allied air forces have dropped over 337,000 bombs and missiles on other countries. That is an average of 46 strikes per day for 20 years. This endless bombardment has not only been deadly and devastating for its victims but is broadly recognized as seriously undermining international peace and security and dimin-

ishing America’s standing in the world.

The U.S. government and political establishment have been remarkably successful at keeping the American public in the dark about the horrific consequences of these long-term campaigns of mass destruction, allowing them to maintain the illusion of U.S. militarism as a force for good in the world in their domestic political rhetoric.

Now, even in the face of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, they are doubling down on their success at selling this counterfactual narrative to the American public to reignite their old Cold War with Russia and China, dramatically and predictably increasing the risk of nuclear war.

The new Airpower Summary data reveal that the United States has dropped another 3,246 bombs and missiles on Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria (2,068 under Trump and 1,178 under Biden) since February 2020.

The good news is that U.S. bombing of those 3 countries has significantly decreased from the over-12,000 bombs and missiles it dropped on them in 2019. In fact, since the withdrawal of U.S. occupation forces from Afghanistan in August, the U.S. military has officially conducted no air strikes there, and only dropped 13 bombs or missiles

on Iraq and Syria—although this does not preclude additional unreported strikes by forces under CIA command or control.

Presidents Trump and Biden both deserve credit for recognizing that endless bombing and occupation could not deliver victory in Afghanistan. The speed with which the U.S.-installed government fell to the Taliban once the U.S. withdrawal was under way confirmed how 20 years of hostile military occupation, aerial bombardment and support for corrupt governments ultimately served only to drive the war-weary people of Afghanistan back to Taliban rule.

Biden’s callous decision to follow 20 years of colonial occupation and aerial bombardment in Afghanistan with the same kind of brutal economic siege warfare the United States has inflicted on Cuba, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela can only further discredit America in the eyes of the world.

There has been no accountability for these 20 years of senseless destruction. Even with the publication of Airpower Summaries, the ugly reality of U.S. bombing wars and the mass casualties they inflict remain largely hidden from the American people.

How many of the 3,246 attacks documented in the Air-

power Summary since February 2020 were you aware of before reading this article? You probably heard about the drone strike that killed 10 Afghan civilians in Kabul in August 2021. But what about the other 3,245 bombs and missiles? Whom did they kill or maim, and whose homes did they destroy?

The December 2021 *New York Times* exposé of the consequences of U.S. airstrikes, the result of a five-year investigation, was stunning not only for the high civilian casualties and military lies it exposed, but also because it revealed just how little investigative reporting the U.S. media have done on these two decades of war.

In America’s industrialized, remote-control air wars, even the U.S. military personnel most directly and intimately involved are shielded from human contact with the people whose lives they are destroying, while for most of the American public, it is as if these hundreds of thousands of deadly explosions never even happened.

The lack of public awareness of U.S. airstrikes is not the result of a lack of concern for the mass destruction our government commits in our names. In the rare cases we find out about, like the murderous drone strike in Kabul in August, the public wants

to know what happened and strongly supports U.S. accountability for civilian deaths.

So public ignorance of 99% of U.S. air strikes and their consequences is not the result of public apathy, but of deliberate decisions by the U.S. military, politicians of both parties and corporate media to keep the public in the dark. The largely unremarked 21-month-long suppression of monthly Airpower Summaries is only the latest example of this.

Now that the new Airpower Summary has filled in the previously hidden figures for 2020-21, here is the most complete data available on 20 years of deadly and destructive U.S. and allied air strikes.

Numbers of bombs and missiles dropped on other countries by the United States and its allies since 2001 (see table on page 42):

These figures are based on U.S. Airpower Summaries for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria; the Bureau of Investigative Journalism’s count of drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen; the Yemen Data Project’s count of bombs and missiles dropped on Ye-

men (only through September 2021); the New America Foundation’s database of foreign air strikes in Libya; and other sources.

There are several categories of air strikes that are not included in this table, meaning that the true numbers of weapons unleashed are certainly higher. These include:

Helicopter strikes: *Military Times* published an article in February 2017 titled, “The U.S. military’s stats on deadly air strikes are wrong. Thousands have gone unreported.” The largest pool of air strikes not included in U.S. Airpower Summaries are strikes by attack helicopters. The U.S. Army told the authors its helicopters had conducted 456 otherwise unreported air strikes in Afghanistan in 2016. The authors explained that the non-reporting of helicopter strikes has been consistent throughout the post-9/11 wars, and they still did not know how many missiles were fired in those 456 attacks in Afghanistan in the one year they investigated.

AC-130 gunships: The U.S. military did not destroy the Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, in 2015 with bombs or missiles, but with a Lockheed-Boeing AC-130 gunship. These machines of mass destruction, usually manned by U.S. Air Force special op-

erations forces, are designed to circle a target on the ground, pouring howitzer shells and cannon fire into it until it is completely destroyed. The U.S. has used AC-130s in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, and Syria.

Strafing runs: U.S. Airpower Summaries for 2004-2007 included a note that their tally of “strikes with munitions dropped... does not include 20mm and 30mm cannon or rockets.” But the 30mm cannons on A-10 Warthogs and other ground attack planes are powerful weapons, originally designed to destroy Soviet tanks. A-10s can fire 65 depleted uranium shells per second to blanket an area with deadly and indiscriminate fire. But that does not appear to count as a “weapons release” in U.S. Airpower Summaries.

“Counter-insurgency” and “counter-terrorism” operations in other parts of the world: The United States formed a military coalition with 11 West African countries in 2005, and has built a drone base in Niger, but we have not found any systematic accounting of U.S. and allied air strikes in that region, or in the Philippines, Latin America or elsewhere.

The failure of the U.S. government, politicians and corporate media to honestly inform and educate the Amer-

ican public about the systematic mass destruction wreaked by our country's armed forces has allowed this carnage to continue largely unremarked and unchecked for 20 years.

It has also left us precariously vulnerable to the revival of an anachronistic, Manichean Cold War narrative that risks even greater catastrophe. In this topsy-turvy, "through the looking glass" narrative, the country actually bombing cities to rubble and waging wars that kill millions of people, presents itself as a well-intentioned force for good in the world. Then it paints countries like China, Russia and Iran, which have understandably strengthened their defenses to deter the United States from attacking them, as threats to the American people and to world peace.

The high-level talks beginning on January 10th in Geneva between the United States and Russia are a critical opportunity, maybe even a last chance, to rein in the escalation of the current Cold War before this breakdown in East-West relations becomes irreversible or devolves into a military conflict.

If we are to emerge from this morass of militarism and avoid the risk of an apocalyptic war with Russia or China, the U.S. public must challenge the counterfactual

Cold War narrative that U.S. military and civilian leaders are peddling to justify their ever-increasing investments in nuclear weapons and the U.S. war machine.

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