

The Critical Mass Sunday Socialist

April 17th 2020

HOW MUCH MORE OF THIS SHOULD WE TAKE

Priti Patel announces plans to send refugees coming to Britain to Rwanda, some 6,000 miles away, to be processed and the press barely mutter a word of disapproval.

To even consider that Britain should offload its responsibility to people who have very often made a perilous journey would, not too long ago, have been considered beyond the pale. Yet, here we are, in 2022 in one of the richest countries of the world planning to send refugees thousands of miles in order to prevent them from setting foot on our soil. What kind of country have we become.

We have already turned our back on the Palestinian people, another 6 of whom were killed by Israeli occupying forces, this week.

The government can get away with this because with the collusion of the current Parliamentary Labour Party, the establishment destroyed what they thought of as a socialist challenge to their hegemony.

Never has it been clearer that the parliamentary system itself is failing us. And, never has it been clearer that weak opposition has paved the way for one of the most corrupt, mean spirited and anti-progressive governments in living memory.

Never has it been clearer that we need change. Critical Mass exists to help foster the conditions in which that change might emerge. We urge you to join with us and bring an end to a social system that is slowly but surely destroying our country, our lives and our planet.

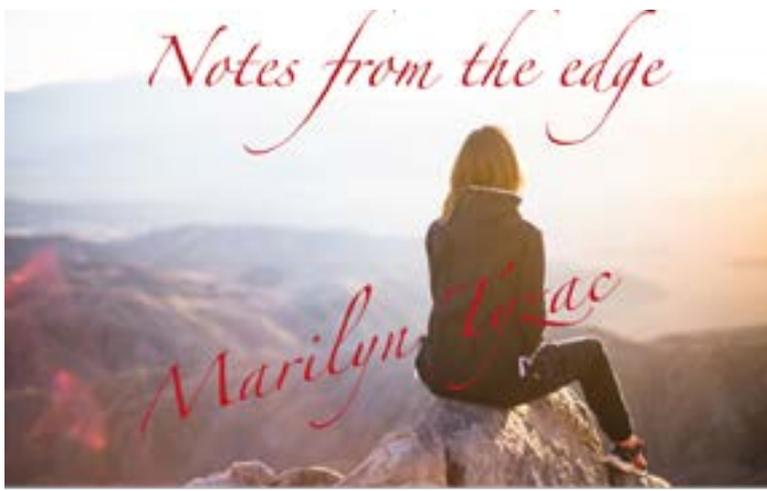


*Photo by Amusan on Pexels.com
: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/crop-black-person-raising-fist-8008669/>*

inside this issue

Notes from the edge featuring Luke Andreski , Marilyn Tyzack, Susie Granic, Fiat Knox and Mike Stanton

The latest from Ukraine.
Plus all the weeks news in one convenient place



daily basis. The short film, *The Present*, goes some way towards capturing this when Yusaf, a loving husband and father, attempts to buy a present for his wife on their anniversary. We feel his anger, shame and embarrassment as he is humiliated as he attempts to navigate the harrowing Checkpoint 200, an infamous crowded Israeli crossing point between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

So, where is the outrage. Where is the condemnation?

The problem is that any hint of support for the Palestinian struggle has been used to undermine and attack people, projects and organisations. Recently, six leading Palestinian human rights organisations were banned by Israel, threatening their operations and putting staff at heightened risk of arrest.

The Labour Party, traditionally associated with speaking up for minorities has, under Starmer, attempted to silence any support for Palestinian rights, going as far as censoring anyone expressing support. These attacks have been framed as a continuation of the fight against antisemitism. The consequence has been a stifling of both support and debate on both issues.

It is, though, the Palestinians who have to overcome the real fear. This is the fear they have for their lives and the lives of their families; this is the fear of not being able to get their seriously ill family members treated; this is the fear of not knowing when their homes will be confiscated or having to see their children denied the right to a higher education. This fear is compounded by the knowledge that they are fighting one of the world's most powerful nations with very little support.

Mark Muhannada Ayyash, a Palestinian academic living in Canada called on people to "Break the fear-barrier and speak up for Palestine....It is time to say enough is enough of this imprisonment, occupation, colonisation', enough of evading the issue.

There is no doubt that, unless we stop being afraid, until we recognise the need to put constant and collective pressure on the institutions capable of supporting or implementing change, we are all complicit in the ongoing plight of the Palestinian people.

At a time when news of the horrific attacks on innocent people in Ukraine fill our media, another conflict of some 55 years duration is being largely ignored. Not only is it being ignored, but there seems to be a fear associated with even mentioning its name.

Therefore, when un-armed Ghada Ibrahim Ali Sabateen from Bethlehem, a partially blind, widowed mother of six was shot dead by Israeli forces last week, her murder received little coverage.

Ghada's death is, of course, just one in a long line of deaths in the region. 5,600 Palestinians died between 2008 and 2020, while 115,000 were injured. 250 Israelis died during the same period, while 5,600 were injured.

These deaths and injuries are the measurable results of Israel's military occupation of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since 1967. According to the United Nations (UN) It is the "longest belligerent occupation in the modern world."

In a recent publication, "War on Want" describes how, throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, Palestinians' lives....are determined by the occupying force's military rule. 'As of January 2021, Israel held 4,500 Palestinians as political prisoners, 450 of whom are held in administrative detention and 140 of whom are children.'

Given these facts, the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of Human Rights has argued that, not only are many individual elements of Israel's occupation illegal, but fundamentally its entire role as the occupier has "crossed a red line into illegality."

These are the statistics and the facts, but they cannot convey the day to day experiences, the fear and degradations of living in a society where you are despised and belittled on a



Tory MP convicted of sexual assault

Imrán Ahmad Khan, who has represented Wakefield since 2019, was found guilty of sexually assaulting a 15 year old boy at Southwark Crown Court. He has been expelled from the Conservatives who do not allow lawbreakers to be MPs, unless they are the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There will now be a by-election in Wakefield which the Tories won in 2019.

Elon Musk takes over Twitter

Days after saying that we needed a new social media, multi-billionaire Elon Musk is seeking to buy Twitter outright. The world's richest man has acquired 9.2% of shares in the platform and has now made a \$43.4bn bid to buy the company outright. There are all sorts of financial controversies surrounding Musk who is being investigated for insider trading. But, the real issue for those of us who use Twitter is that it can so easily become the plaything of one person. Whether Musk will allow it to become a beacon of "democracy" is to be seen, but like Facebook a platform which has been instrumental in progressive movements may become even more restrictive in what it allows.

Attacks by Israel on Al Asqa Mosque

On the second Friday of Ramadan, Israeli forces attacked unarmed worshipers at Al Asqa Mosque, injuring at least 158 Palestinians. In the 24 hours preceding this, Israeli forces killed 5 Palestinians across the occupied West Bank. This took the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in 2022 to 47. One of those killed was 34-year-old Mohammed Assaf, a Palestinian lawyer and father of three young children during a violent raid into Nablus city in the northern West Bank, during which at least 17 others were injured. According to local media, Assaf was taking his kids and nephews to school when Israeli forces shot him in the chest, killing him.

Banks fuel climate emergency

As the IPCC warns that the climate emergency has gone beyond the point that damage to the earth can be halted, it emerges that two of the High Streets biggest banks are responsible for funding fossil fuels in Europe. UK bank Barclays is the biggest funder of fossil fuels in Europe. It's put more money into new projects, like oil and gas fields, than any other. Third in the list of shame is HSBC. Whilst big business is hand in glove with politicians in terms of their ability to make great sounding pledges on the environment, the truth is that we have to choose: carry on with business-as-usual or save the planet, a point Extinction Rebellion have been making forcibly for some time.

Student loans to rise

It's just been announced that student loan interest rates, remember they were introduced on the promise that they would be interest free, will more than double later this year - from 4.5% to 12% for higher earners, and from 1% to 9% for lower earners. This means that a higher-earning graduate with a loan balance of £50,000 will be charged £3,000 in interest alone over 6 months.

NOW IS NOT THE TIME . . .

Mike Stanton

This is the mantra from Tory loyalists who are trying to justify Johnson staying in office. According to them, “Now is not the time,” because, if we change prime minister while the war in Ukraine continues, this would undermine the anti-Putin alliance.

Even those who originally called for Johnson to go when the Partygate scandal first broke, like Scottish Tory leader, Douglas Ross, have backed down, at least for now. [He said,](#)

It would destabilise the UK Government when we need to be united in the face of Russian aggression and the murdering of innocent Ukrainians.

Cabinet ministers such as Nadine Dorries, Michael Gove, Liz Truss, Kwazi Karteng, Dominic Raab and, belatedly, Priti Patel have all joined the chorus of support. Grant Schapps, who voiced his anger over Partygate after he was unable to visit his dad in hospital for four months, said,

Now, as he leads the West’s response to Putin’s evil war he has my full support.

I think Macron and Biden would challenge the idea that Johnson is leading them. And the crisis in Ukraine has not stopped France potentially changing their leader. They are going ahead with [presidential elections](#) in which far right candidate, Marine Le Pen, who has a record of supporting Putin, is Macron’s closest challenger.

Shameful Record

And what has Johnson done to lead, not the world, but this country’s response? The two most important humanitarian tasks are to obtain a ceasefire and to help the millions of refugees. Has the word ‘ceasefire’ crossed his lips. He talks of stopping Putin, not stopping the war.

His record on refugees is shameful. EU countries are taking in hundreds of thousands of refugees and not asking for visas. Germany is known to have admitted 330,000 so far. Britain insists on visas first, but the set-up is so chaotic and bureaucratic that only a few thousand have been admitted. The Homes for Ukraine scheme attracted 150,000 offers from UK citizens and fewer than 2,000 Ukrainians have benefitted so far.



Protestors outside Number Ten understand fully that a crime has been committed.

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War Leaders

I even heard someone on Radio 4's PM programme say that whatever his faults, we needed Johnson's qualities as a war leader. War leader! As far as I know, we are not yet at war. And, if we were, it would not prevent us from changing our leader.

In 1916 we were at war with Germany. On July 1st, under a coalition government led by Asquith, we launched an offensive to break the deadlock on the Western Front that went down in history as the Battle of the Somme. On the first day 19,240 British troops were killed. Over five months the British advanced no more than seven miles. In December 1916 we did not say, "Now is not the time." Now **was** the time, and Lloyd George replaced Asquith as prime minister.

In 1940 we were again at war with Germany. Hitler was a more existential threat to the UK than the Kaiser had ever been. British troops had already failed to stop the Nazi advance in Norway. Then on May 10th Hitler launched his blitzkrieg against Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands and France. On the same day Parliament decided that now was the time and replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister with Winston Churchill.

Crisis of Leadership

On both occasions, Britain was at war, we were in crisis, the enemy was at the gate, and we changed our leader. We are beset with crises now: Climate Crisis, Cost of Living Crisis. Covid is still rampant with record levels of infection, hospital beds are full and the NHS is on its knees. Johnson's leadership response has been inadequate at best and criminally negligent in many respects.

Now is not the time to have a leader who is a known liar, a criminal, a bully and a coward with no regard for anything or anyone other than himself. Now is the time for Johnson to go. There are arguments that he will stay because there is no will to replace him amongst Tory MPs, and their majority in Parliament, in effect an elected dictatorship, means that even though 57% of the population believe he should resign, we have no power to remove him. So what is the point of Parliament? A time will come when we have to challenge the whole corrupt system. And, when it does, I will put money on Starmer, or whoever is leading the Labour Party then, to pipe up with, "Now is not the time."

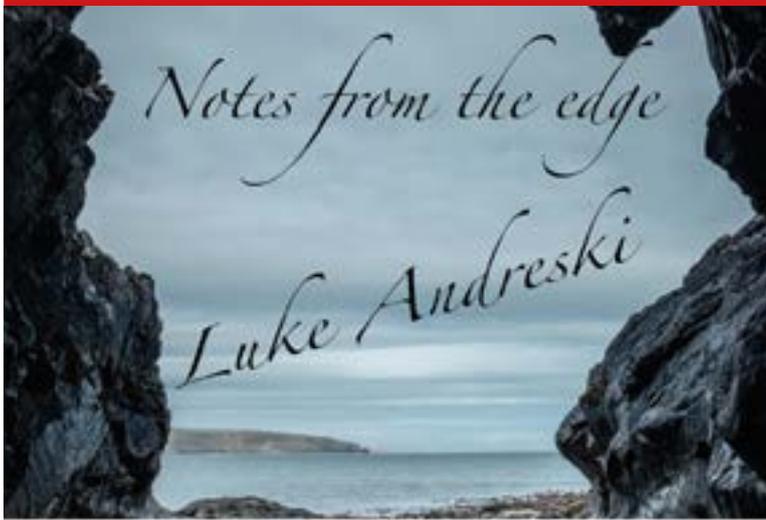
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Photo by Garry Knight from London, England
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*Now is not the
time to have a
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French Election

The week began with the French being faced with the unenviable choice of Macron vs. Le Pen. Le Pen is the face of the extreme right. For tactical reasons only, she's softened the message. Those of us who've seen her supporters on the street know they're an ugly group of vicious thugs and racists. Get in, and they'll make the lives of immigrants and refugees hell.

Le Pen's close relationship with Putin should come as no surprise. He's consistently supported the extreme right in Europe, including Johnson, Trump and Orban... with considerable success. Brexiteers who think Le Pen will befriend the UK live in cloud-cuckoo land. As with Trump's America First, with Le Pen it'll be France First. What did they think nationalism stood for?

The French left, represented largely by Jean-Luc Melenchon, came painfully close to the run-off, which he may well have won. A coalition with the Greens (who polled 4.6%) would have got them home.

The criminal in No.10

Of all the crimes committed by Johnson, No.10 parties are the least worrying.... but they're the one crime he's been found guilty of. The parties are symptomatic of the dramatic fall in standards in public life under this regime. Does this really matter? The funds that have been diverted to dodgy contracts under the cover of Covid; the fraudulent loans under furlough (which are not being investigated); the extraordinary amounts

spent on Serco Track 'n' Trace (which would have been better done by councils and the NHS). These are examples of £bn's that should instead have been spent reducing waiting lists and supporting people in poverty.

There are always victims of corruption – it's not a laughing matter.

A taxing situation

In contrast to Partygate, the tax arrangements of the Sunaks are legal if immoral. They've cost the country £20m, to which his wife has agreed to contribute £3m. The issue of non-doms needs to be investigated as it's open to abuse. The Daily Mail went on the offensive against Sunak, conveniently overlooking the fact that its owner, Lord Rothermere, inherited non-dom status from his father. As one Tweet put it, The Daily Hate is "an anti-European newspaper owned by an Englishman who lives in France... publishing articles written by Richard Littlejohn lamenting the decline of Britain....from his beach home in Florida."

Tory leadership

Of course, this is all part of the Tory leadership battle. The Tory right elected Johnson, an empty vessel who is easy to manipulate. He's dogged by his laziness and inability to produce coherent policies and plans. Is it finally dawning on the Party that he may not win the next election? Liz Truss appears to have the extremist wing of the party behind her. The ruthlessness of the Tories, regarding their failing leaders, might be admirable if their morals were too. They know how to win elections. Labour seems to have lost that knack.

Sending refugees to Rwanda is cruel and inhumane

Susie Granic

THE Tory government, in its ever-infinite wisdom, has decided to send refugees who arrive on our shores to Rwanda, stating the £120m scheme would “save countless lives” from human trafficking. While most decent people are appalled at this plan, the Tories are proud of it, with Home Secretary, Priti Patel, who signed the deal on her trip to the Rwandan capital of Kigali, saying it was a “global first and it will change the way we collectively tackle illegal migration”.

Under the [proposal](#), Rwanda would take responsibility for the people who first managed to arrive safely on our shores and then made the more than 4,000-mile journey to Rwanda, and put them through an asylum process. At the end of that process, if they were successful, they would have long-term accommodation in that country.

This is not a plan to process the refugees in order to see if they are eligible for asylum in the UK; this is forcibly sending them to a country where they will have to settle provided they are granted asylum. And to a country, Rwanda, which has a record of extrajudicial killings, suspicious deaths in custody, unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture, and abusive prosecutions, particularly targeting critics and dissidents. In fact, the UK has previously raised concerns about respect for human rights with Rwanda, and grants asylum to Rwandans who have fled the country. It is likely in violation of international law, but coming from a party which flouts its own laws probably shouldn't surprise us.

In exchange for its cooperation, Britain will pay Rwanda £120 million to finance “opportunities for Rwandans and migrants” including education, secondary qualifications, vocational and skills training and language lessons, the Rwandan government has said in a statement.

Inhumane

Quite apart from costs – and surely it would cost less to house these refugees in the UK, give them access to employment and allow them to contribute to society, thus seeing money going back into the economy – this is an inhumane plan and has rightly been called out as such by human rights organisations.

The UK branch of the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) warned agreements of the sort struck with Rwanda were often

“eye-wateringly expensive, often violate international law, lead to the use of widespread detention lead to more smuggling, not less. With this deal the UK is looking to shift its responsibilities towards refugees, not share them.”

UNHCR, UK branch

The chief executive of the UK-based charity, the Refugee Council,

This is not a plan to process the refugees in order to see if they are eligible for asylum in the UK; this is forcibly sending them to a country where they will have to settle provided they are granted asylum.



Enver Solomon, also hit out at the move, calling it a “cruel and nasty decision” and predicting it would not deter people-smuggling gangs.

“Sending people seeking asylum to be processed abroad will do absolutely nothing to address the reasons why people take perilous journeys to find safety in the UK,” Solomon said in a statement. “Instead, the Government should focus on operating an orderly, humane and fair asylum system, and developing safe routes such as humanitarian visas, rather than harming lives and destroying our reputation as a country which values human rights,” he added.

“Beyond cruel”

This is just common-sense and the right thing to do, as the former leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn pointed out, saying:

“The government’s plan to send refugees fleeing conflict, including those where there has been British involvement, to Rwanda is shameful and beyond cruel. We must build a world of peace and compassion. The plans to ‘offshore’ those seeking

safety and security must be resisted.”

But what does the current leader, Keir Starmer say about it? He said it was just a distraction from Partygate and that the scheme is “unworkable” and “extortionate”. Much the same words were used by Shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper (she of the anti-immigration mugs), who said the plan is “extortionate, unworkable and unethical”, and then went on to talk about the cost of these – basically concentration camps – being too high. Once again, the current Labour Party, led by a former human rights lawyer, forgets to focus on the human rights of these

refugees.

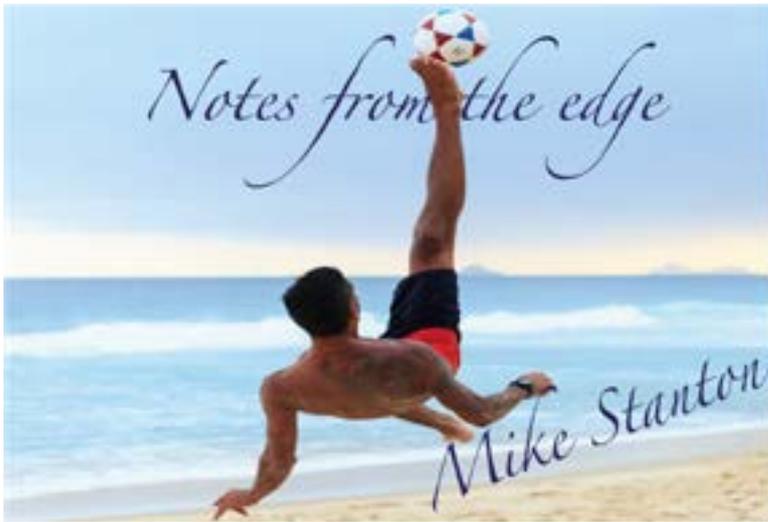
He also came out with his tired line that “Britain deserves better”. We do deserve better than the Tories, but we also deserve better than this current incarnation of Labour.

It may well be a distraction from all the problems the Tories are facing, and it will certainly be greeted with enthusiasm by their base, but surely the alleged opposition party can condemn this plan on the grounds that it will likely violate human rights and international law. Yet Sir ‘now is not the time’ appears to fear upsetting the base he is trying to pander to – the racist, anti-immigration (unless they are white Ukrainians) base.

If he won’t speak out now, when? And for who?

Read this article online at:

<https://creatingsocialism.org/inhumane-cruel-and-likely-to-violate-international-law/>



War Stories

This week saw the 3rd anniversary of Julian Assange's incarceration in Belmont Prison. He is facing extradition to the USA and a lifetime in prison on charges of espionage. His real crime is exposing allied war crimes in Iraq. He is guilty of journalism.

All around the world journalists are being silenced for telling the truth. According to Reporters Without Frontiers(RSF), so far this year 23 journalists have been killed and 360 are currently imprisoned. These are verified figures for death and imprisonment directly related to their work as journalists.

RSF also reports on those that cannot be verified. In Afghanistan, "The Taliban are arresting journalists arbitrarily, imposing new restrictions on them, and creating a climate of fear in all media outlets." The intelligence agencies, (Istikhbarat) are now banning radio broadcasts and TV programmes and arresting journalists or other media workers. During a raid on four local radio stations in the southern city of Kandahar on 28 March, Istikhbarat agents arrested six journalists for allegedly violating a Taliban ban on broadcasting music.

Independent media companies face bans for broadcasting the news programmes that

international broadcasters – the BBC, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle – provide in local languages, allegedly because of "the problem of the attire worn by these media's women presenters, after several warnings."

In Russia Putin is extending his grip. A draconian law adopted on 4th March, that makes the publication of "false" or "mendacious" information about the Russian armed forces punishable by up to 15 years in prison, effectively closed down all independent national and international media reporting of the War in the Ukraine from inside Russia. Now he is turning his attention to local news outlets, using punitive fines, bans and imprisonment to punish local journalists, editors and proprietors of independent media.

All this fills me with admiration for the courage that journalists are showing all over the world. It also fuels my contempt for the hacks in the UK media who do not deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as these brave men and women.

RSF is doing important work on their behalf. One of its initiatives, Collateral Freedom, sets up mirror sites for online sources of news and information that are banned in some countries.

Non-Dom Tax Dodge For The Rich and the Rishi

Mike Stanton

Rishi Sunak's wife, Akshata Murphy, opted for non-dom status to minimise her tax bills in the UK. She chose to pay tax on her substantial foreign income in India, where her billionaire father's lawyers and accountants doubtless worked tirelessly to ensure that she paid every last penny to the Indian government.

Privilege

Non-dom status has nothing to do with citizenship or where you live. It is a privilege granted to the rich, who can pay the Inland Revenue £30,000 a year to choose the most advantageous tax arrangements for themselves. Now she will pay all her required taxes in the UK, and I can categorically guarantee that Akshata Murphy will not use tax havens to shield her wealth from the Inland Revenue.

That is because she is 'so proud' to live in Britain and understands 'the British sense of fairness.' She is also acutely aware that her tax status was undermining her husband's political ambition to become leader of the Tory Party.

Rishi Sunak

But that ambition is threatened, not just by his wife's tax affairs, but by Sunak's own behaviour. He is known to own three properties in the UK: a flat in West London, a family home in London that he bought for £210,000 in 2010 and, as MP for Richmond in Yorkshire, he needed a home in his constituency. So he bought a manor house for £1.5 million.

He also bought a holiday home in Santa Monica, USA that is worth £5.5 million. But was it originally meant as a holiday home? We now know that Sunak also held a green card, a sort of get out of jail free card that allows you to live and work permanently in the United States. He has given it up now, but you have to ask why Sunak hung on to his green card for 20 months after becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer (February 2020 – October 2021).

Big Power Off

Meanwhile, millions of consumers were considering whether to join last night's [Big Power Off](#) and turn off the power in their homes in protest at the soaring cost of energy and the Chancellor's pathetic response to the cost of living crisis in his

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Spring package. This has left even Tory MPs scratching their heads, especially as it has now emerged that Sunak opposed the original plan for £500 of support and insisted on the £200 enforced loan that is all we can expect as energy prices double.

But it is not just Sunak. If you google non-dom status you learn that, according to [the Metro](#),

[Sajid Javid](#) has admitted having non-domicile status before entering politics after eyes turned to his financial arrangements. It's believed the health secretary did not pay UK tax on his overseas income for six years, while he also held some financial investments in an offshore trust. But he said he 'proactively chose' to give up the – entirely legal – status as he felt it was his 'moral duty'.

Emma Brazell : Metro

And there are [plenty of others](#), including:

- Roman Abramovich, one of Putin's oligarchs and owner of Chelsea FC
- Jonathon Harmsworth, owner of the Daily Mail
- Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England

Starmer Wobbles

Starmer has quite rightly seized on Sunak's case to point out the hypocrisy of a tax cutting chancellor who is raising taxes on the British people while his own wife benefited from a legal tax avoidance scheme. But when Labour was asked if it would abolish non-dom status, guess what? Yeah, they equivocated. Yvette

Cooper repeatedly dodged the question, and it has nothing to do with the fact that this was Labour Party policy under Jeremy Corbyn.

Breaking News

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has asked Boris Johnson to refer his ministerial declarations to the Prime Minister's independent adviser on ministerial interests, according to the [Daily Mirror](#). With Johnson on his case I am sure that truth will out.

Read this article online at:

<https://creatingsocialism.org/non-dom-tax-dodge-for-the-rich-and-the-rishi/>



The War in Ukraine

We are now in the tenth week of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. They had hoped for the rapid collapse of Ukrainian resistance leading to regime change in Kyiv, consolidation of separatist states in Donbas with a land bridge to Crimea, and a negotiated peace on Russian terms.

But Ukraine fought back, and its government refused to bend. They exposed the weakness of the Russian military in terms of its command structure, logistics and military planning, and forced it to abandon regime change and refocus its efforts in Donbas.

Civilians have paid a heavy price. Aerial bombardment of cities has killed or injured thousands. Safe passage for refugees has been sabotaged to use the suffering of trapped populations to weaken resistance. Horrific evidence of torture and massacre of civilians has emerged in newly liberated areas around Kyiv.

All this has served not to weaken, but to stiffen Ukraine's resolve. Western powers are pouring money and arms into Ukraine to strengthen their military capacity. Although the threat of nuclear war has faded slightly, the war of words continues to go ballistic. Massacres are dubbed genocide. Every civilian death is described as a war crime. Some undoubtedly are war crimes, but many are the inevitable outcome of modern warfare. Ask the citizens of Aleppo, Raqqa or Mosul.

There is little news coming out of Russia, thanks to Putin's clampdown on the media. But the hope and expectation of many governments is that the level of sanctions will cripple Russia and at the very least weaken Putin's grip on power. Few world leaders speak of regime change. But that is their hope. You get the feeling that they welcome the war in Ukraine as Putin's last gasp. He may go down fighting. But he will go down.

This is not the view of [Farida Rustamova](#) one of the casualties of Putin's purge of the Russian media, whose blog, [Faridaily](#), provides some well sourced insights into what is happening inside Russia.

Support both for Putin and for the war has increased. According to polling by the independent [Levada Centre](#) "In March, the approval of the main state institutions increased significantly: the activities of the president are approved by 83%, the prime minister - 71%, the government - 70%, the State Duma - 59%."

Official sources state that support for the 'military operation' in Ukraine (they do not call it a war in Russia) has increased from 50% in February to 75% at the end of March. Of course, the repression of all public protests, closing down independent media outlets and a constant stream of government propaganda have had an influence. But something else is happening.

While sanctions against Russia's money-laundering oli-





Kharkiv, Ukraine: 16 March, 2022 - Rescuers dismantle the rubble of a residential building destroyed after shelling by the Russian military-occupiers in Kharkiv

garchs is long overdue and moves to weaken Russia's economy and its ability to sustain the war are understandable, the use of Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions to punish the Russian people so they rise up against Putin has backfired.

Take the oligarchs. Denied access to their wealth and homes in the west, they are not plotting Putin's downfall. They are making the best of a bad job to rebuild their lives in Russia. Rustamova quotes a high-ranking source in one of the sanctioned state companies.

"All these personal sanctions cement the elites. Everyone who was thinking about a new life understands that, for the next 10-15 years at least, their lives are concentrated in Russia, their children will study in Russia, their families will live in Russia. These people feel offended. They will not overthrow anyone but will build their lives here."

This feeling is repeated among ordinary people. Rustamova again.

"The people I interviewed said in one voice that, for many ordinary citizens — at least until there is a big increase in unemployment — the sanctions and other economic and political consequences of the war have had the opposite effect from what Western countries may have intended. The mass withdrawal of Western brands (IKEA, Apple, Zara, McDonald's, Carlsberg, etc.), the suspension of businesses, the flight ban, the devaluation of the rouble, the difficulty of buying dollars and euros — all of this has made many Russians think that the whole world is against them, and this makes them behave in a certain way."

As well they might, when leading academics from Yale University can write an op-ed article for the [New York Times](#) that states,

"Our goal is absolute, and some might even say extreme: Every corporation with a presence in Russia must publicly commit to a total cessation of business there," they wrote. "Russians who rely on the food or medicine those companies make or jobs they provide may suffer hardship. But if that's what it takes to stop Mr. Putin from killing innocent Ukrainians, that's what businesses must do."

The economic bombardment of Russia by the West, if it is intended to bring unemployment, hunger and disease down on the ordinary people, could prove just as deadly as the military bombardment of the Ukrainian people by Russia. And it may strengthen their resolve and determination to back their rulers, just as Putin's assault on Ukraine has united Ukraine behind Zelenskyy.

XR should be applauded not vilified

Susie Granic

EXTINCTION REBELLION (XR) protestors were out again yesterday at Lloyd's of London in central London from about 7.00am with the aim of stopping staff from entering the building. And, as Lloyd's said it had advised its employees not to come in to work, it would appear that part of the protest is succeeding. Lloyd's said they had continued trading although City A.M. contradicted this saying Lloyd's had had to halt all trading.

The XR group say it is demanding Lloyd's stop insuring fossil fuel projects. Spokesperson Clare Walmsley said of the protest:

"We're here to demand an end to all new fossil fuel investments and insurance. By underwriting the world's most deadly fossil fuel projects, they are creating climate chaos – floods, famine, wildfires and death". Lloyd's is an insurer of the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion in Canada which Indigenous people have been protesting for some time.

Ms Walmsley continued:

"Insuring new oil and gas projects in the North Sea will do nothing to solve the cost of living crisis either. Instead, it locks us into a system that's already pushing millions into poverty."

Yesterday's action is a continuation of a wave of recent protests by the climate change activists. On Friday, two XR protesters shut down Tower Bridge, causing long queues of traffic, by abseiling off the sides of the landmark and unfurling a huge banner which read: 'End fossil fuels now.'

Demonstrations

This was followed by huge demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday with protestors from all over the country joining in as they marched through central London and staged sit-down protests at several landmarks to call for an end to investment in fossil fuels. On Saturday they gathered at Speakers' Corner at Hyde Park in the morning before moving on to Oxford Street and Regent Street, where they sat in the road and blocked traffic in the heart of the capital's shopping district. The activists later moved on to Trafalgar Square.

One of Saturday's protestors, Verel Rodrigues, a 27-year-old mechanical engineer from Bristol, told the PA news agency:

"We are currently in a dire situation and we are appealing to the government to stop investing in fossil fuels. We have no choice. We are sorry to



be causing this inconvenience but we don't have any other choice.

*"If an alarm is ringing because your house is on fire, you don't get p***ed off at the fire alarm. It is trying to save you and we are trying to raise the alarm of what is about to come."*

But getting angry at the 'fire alarm' is precisely what many are doing, rather than aiming their ire at those responsible for the mess the planet is in. It's bad enough to hear Joe Public spouting off that protestors are blocking traffic, stopping people getting to work etc – disrupting traffic is rather the point – but to hear politicians who we might expect to applaud the protestors instead come out and condemn them is worse.

Stop the disruption

Sharing an article from The S*n, the Labour Party tweeted that "the government must immediately impose injunctions to put a stop to this disruption", while the Shadow Justice Secretary, Steve Reed, fumed that "Motorists were already being hammered at the pump, and now millions can't even access fuel". Accessing fuel won't really be much of a problem if the climate catastrophe scientists are predicting hits us. We're already in crisis, and if we don't act now it will quite simply be too late.

And on the other side of the aisle, we have Tory MPs calling for financier Ben Goldsmith, brother of foreign office minister Lord Goldsmith, to be fired from his role at the Environment Department after he came out in support for XR, saying: "Not a good look from Labour. The protestors are right to be doing whatever it takes to wake people up. The fossil fuel industry is grubby and dangerous. We need to unhook ourselves from our dependence asap. I'm with Extinction Rebellion." And the aforementioned Steve Reed criticised him for it.

Mr Goldsmith has since deleted the tweet, saying that "support of ER is neither a Conservative Environmental Network nor a DEFRA position" but it does rather speak volumes that he said it in the first place while Labour MPs were condemning the action.

Do protests inconvenience workers and those trying to get their children to school? Yes, we've all seen footage of this. But peaceful, non-disruptive protests do not work. Nothing changes when people are not affected. Non-violent civil disobedience does – or we must certainly hope it does, given the escalating temperatures, the animals facing extinction or already extinct, our very ecosystem failing.

In what appeared to be a response to the Labour Party statement, former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn tweeted yesterday: "We need a Green New Deal and a sustainable planet for future generations. Those protesting against fossil fuel giants should be applauded, not arrested."

If we have a future, seeing what is happening to our environment, I think it's fairly safe to say that Jeremy Corbyn will once more be seen as on the right side of history.



Extinction Rebellion (XR) protestors were out again this week at Lloyd's of London in central London



Helping Hand

Welcome to my weekly column about finding, and having, a very real, practical faith that we need every day, just to get up in the morning.

Wants and Needs

Everybody has things they want and things they need. Despite the media bombarding you with advertisements conditioning you into wanting that fancy car, or that expensive perfume, what you really need can be small and simple and it won't hurt your wallet.

When your money supply has been cut, and everything's getting more expensive, it's tempting to curl up in a corner. You want so much, but your wallet says no.

People in power have abused that power to push a state of crisis and they still want us to believe in the fantasyland life you see in the media.

Perhaps we need to learn the difference between wanting and needing.

Precious Resource

Our most limited resource is not money. It's time. If you spend time on a useless thing, such

as the television, it's wasted. You haven't spent it on living. A flash car is a luxury. Family, companionship, and community are necessities.

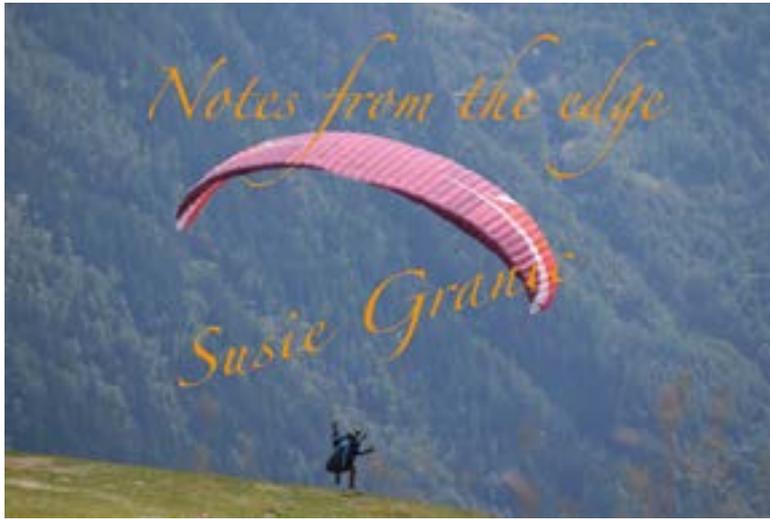
The media want you to put yourself first at the expense of everybody else. The Grand Illusion is that you can only have a good life if you own those luxury goods. But you already have a better life in front of you because your life is real, even with all the stress and pain; and you're not obliged to give the media the time of day.

Reaching Out

The most important thing to know about life is that everybody has time to connect with other people, to reach out to help, and to find out about your neighbours. The increasingly-irrelevant media want to isolate you, so you can focus your life around greed. They need your attention to stay relevant.

If you turn off your TV instead, and find out more about the real people around you, you might find a better life awaiting you that is no TV fantasy.

And that, perhaps, is all you really need.



I grew up in the era of the Vietnam War. It was in fact the first protest I attended at the tender age of 13, and somewhere my mother still has a photo of me in obligatory kaftan holding a 'Make Love Not War' sign, as so many of us did back then.

I mention this because I learned at an early age how soldiers from any nation will commit the most evil acts if given the opportunity. Most people are now aware of the My Lai massacre, but this wasn't an isolated event; there are examples of individual soldiers killing civilians and North Vietnamese soldiers, and being investigated by the army.

But at least during that war we had journalists on the ground with troops, reporting on what was happening and having no fear of letting the public know of the atrocities committed by their own soldiers. We don't seem to have this unbiased reporting now.

So, I take everything I read about what is happening in a war zone - any war zone - with a pinch of salt and wait until it can be verified, which only too often it never is. This is certainly the case with reports on the war in Ukraine. While of course I have sympathy for every single Ukrainian civilian caught up in this mess, and hope those who want to can get out, I have what I believe is a healthy scepticism of some of the reports we are seeing.

In this age of advanced technology, it is only too easy to 'doctor' and edit videos and photos, and we often have to rely on subtitled videos to understand what is being said; and, if we don't speak the language,

how do we know if the subtitles are accurately reflecting what is being said? I am speaking of both sides here - Russia and Ukraine, because I have no more faith in the truth of what Zelenskyy says than I do in what Putin says. Both leaders have something to gain by lying.

Just one example is the sinking of the Russian warship Moskva. The Russians stated ammunition on the ship exploded in an unexplained fire and that the ship sank while being towed back to port. Then Ukraine claimed it struck the vessel with its Neptune missiles. But, before it sank, Ukrainian officials said Russian rescue efforts were being hampered by ammunition exploding on board and bad weather. So was it a missile or was it ammunition exploding? It's not just a Russian versus Ukraine story, but Ukraine has changed their story, so who to believe?

In this age of constant misinformation it's difficult for those of us who want the truth. If you have never seen the film 'Wag the Dog', now might be the time to watch it.

Macron and Le Pen to face off in French Presidential race

Howard Thorp

Will the French elections provide a shock win for the far right candidate, Le Pen? Or can President Macron survive the second round run off?

Last Sunday, the first round of the presidential elections took place in France. There were twelve candidates. The media have been speculating that the far-right Front Nationale candidate Marine Le Pen might be in with a chance of winning the Presidential election in the second round as she closed on Macron in the polls. The results were reported by Le Monde:

On the Margins

The outcome of the ballot looks similar to the last election in 2017 with Macron, Le Pen, and Melechon doing well but there are important differences. Macron clearly did better than expected, and Melenchon once again failed to beat Le Pen by a couple of points. However, in 2017 the Les Republicans candidate Fillon came third with just over 20% of the vote. Yesterday Les Republicans only managed to obtain less than five percent of the vote. The Parti Socialiste scraped into tenth place. So, the two parties that used to dominate French politics, the Gaullists and the socialists, now appear to be on the margins. The bad news in 2022 is that the far-right racist candidates, Le Pen and Zemmour, together collected about a third of the votes.

Neoliberalism

Why have those once two dominant parties failed so badly? The simple answer is that they both embraced neoliberalism, the political ideology which has undermined trade unions, attacked workers' rights, pensions and wages, and led to the rise of the ultra-rich in the past forty years. This free-market ideology has created anger and resentment amongst the working and middle classes who have suffered at the hands of the banks and corporations and their tame politicians.

CANDIDAT	SCORE
Emmanuel MACRON La République en marche	27,84 % 9 703 578
Marine LE PEN Rassemblement national	23,15 % 8 138 389
Jean-Luc MÉLENCHON La France insoumise	21,95 % 7 714 949
Éric ZEMMOUR Reconquête	7,07 % 2 405 935
Valérie PÉCRESSE Les Républicains	4,78 % 1 679 470
Yannick JADOT Europe-Ecologie-Les Verts	4,63 % 1 608 387
Jean LASSALLE Résistons !	3,13 % 1 101 690
Fabien ROUSSEL Parti communiste français	2,28 % 802 618
Nicolas DUPONT-AIGNAN Debout la France	2,06 % 726 356
Anne HIDALGO Parti socialiste	1,75 % 618 657
Philippe POUTOU Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste	0,77 % 282 984
Nathalie ARTHAUD Lutte ouvrière	0,56 % 197 184

Populism



*Voters choice.
Look up and you move to the right.
Look down and you move to the right
So, no choice st all..*



This has led to the rise in populism and xenophobia in the West. Fostered by the media, millions have focused their anger on immigrants rather than those who are the real cause of their difficulties, and this has been a boon to right-wing demagogues such as Zemmour and Trump. These politicians make empty promises to improve the lives of the many by banning immigration and giving them jobs with slogans like ‘Make America great again’.

One reason for Le Pen closing on Macron is that, while he has been projecting himself as a leader of Europe over Ukraine, Le Pen has focused on domestic policy. As well she might. Macron’s team are busy now, reminding voters of her links to Putin. She backed his annexation of Crimea and her party was rewarded with financial support from Putin in the last presidential election in 2017.

No Real Choice

So it looks like ex-banker Macron could win again in the second round run off against Le Pen. But he remains a neoliberal who poses as a moderate, and he will continue with the same policies, further weakening the conditions of the working class. If he wins, it will be because the alternative, Le Pen, will be recognised as a worse option by the majority of French voters. That is the choice many voters in the West now face. You can’t vote for a candidate you really want to win, who will bring about real change that benefits you and your family, and you have to choose a candidate you know is going to do nothing to improve your economic health and wellbeing.

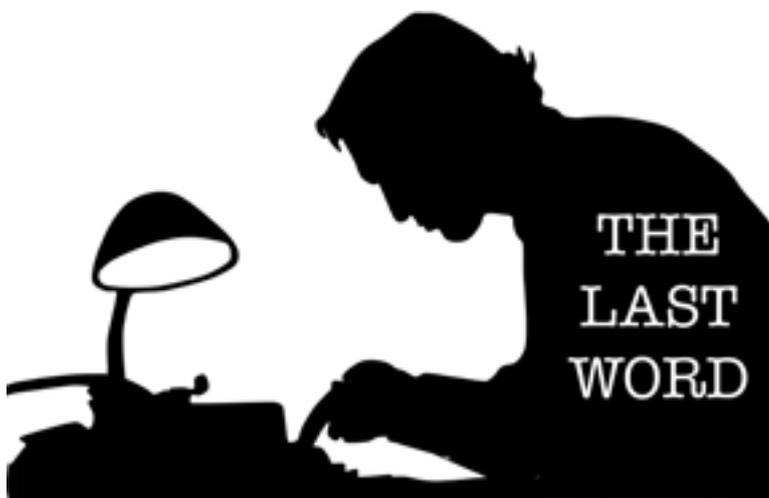
Feedback

Laura Pelling says:

The same happened in the US elections. Sanders was storming the primaries until the DNC’s co-ordinated efforts to oust him for someone more ‘moderate.’ Biden was performing terribly to begin with but as each Democrat folded, they all endorsed him. Voters were forced to get behind Biden, otherwise, it would have been four more years of Trump. It stinks to high heaven.

We’ll see it played out here shortly: Starmer or Johnson. The media may well get behind Starmer if they think the Labour Party is sufficiently neutered now. If people hold their noses and vote Starmer in, the PLP will see it as a vindication of ‘moderate’ neoliberal policies.

If I were a French voter, I think I’d abstain for the second round. I couldn’t bring myself to vote for LePen but couldn’t endorse Macron either.



As always these days it seems to have been a very hard week for those of us who hold any hope of a world in which peace and justice predominate.

The corruption at the heart of government has once again been laid bare both by the revelation that we have sitting ministers who have done all they can to avoid paying their taxes, and now a Prime Minister found guilty of breaking laws he was supposed to be overseeing it.

And, yet, it seems people still regard this social system as somehow irreplaceable. How often do we hear of corruption in politics and assume that is something that happens in faraway places ruled by some despot. Or hear human rights abuses and think that is something that happens in China or Russia, but could not possibly happen here.

I start to worry that change is even further from the agenda than ever. And I wonder why so many people are prepared to put up with a system that is so clearly broken and which is driving us down a path of environmental destruction.

This thought led me to the conclusion that there are, basically, two types of people in the world. They are not designated by their left or right views, but rather by their view of what we are living for. If we were ancient Greeks our prime consideration would be pursuing the good life and what that might mean.

In our society we have been conditioned to believe that the life we have is worth preserving regardless of its effects on the planet or those around us. But, even as I write that I can hear the screams of indignation from those who will say that they can see the problems with the world, that they do not simply accept what they are

told. And, that is right.

So, what are these two groups? ON the one hand, and this has been brought home by both reactions to the environmental crisis and Covid, are what we might call the "Now" people. These are people, and there are plenty of them, who if not comfortable with their lives, are suspicious of any substantial change to them. They hear about the rising level of Covid cases, for example, and say things like "well, we just have to learn to live with it".

They understand that there is an environmental crisis, but do not want to turn off their electricity, or give up their cars or their foreign holidays. They convince themselves that their small contribution is not going to make the difference we need.

They see corruption at the heart of government and shrug their shoulders. "It's just the way its always been," they will say. They are not, necessarily, bad people or stupid, but are living in the now and putting off worrying about the future until it is the new now.

On the other hand, are what I'm going to call "Future" people. They may equally be living in the now, but do not accept that nothing can change. They are prepared to give up things that they feel are bad, not just for themselves but for others.

They see environmental catastrophe and give up their car, or turn off the heating in, a probably vain attempt, to offset it. They demonstrate, they challenge and they are, continually treated by the "Now" people as cranks and outsiders.

The media, politics and business leadership is, unfortunately, full of "Now" people. We need to find a way to win more people to the future. And, that does mean advocating for social change.

Dave Middleton