

**The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter:**  
***Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter***

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*Here we explore the latest facts, actions, and perspectives on the New Great Transformation of the Earth System, as it unfolds before our eyes. We apply the Hopeful Realism we all need to work through the greatest predicament in human history.*

***Latest News from the Hopeful Realist***

**The Russians are Coming, and That's Not All.** Every now and then, I turn to CSPAN where I may fall upon a congressional hearing such as the one in which the Radical MAGA Republicans in the House were attempting to beat up on Anthony Fauci. Monday night I found on CSPAN-2 a panel discussion by three authors of a report on the current Russian military industrial complex and the dynamics of how it is trying to supply its disastrous attempt to conquer Ukraine.

The report was just released by the Center for International and Strategic Studies (CISS), in Washington, DC. Another expert, Dana Massicott, a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, also participated. I was stunned by how much these folks know in great detail about the complex Russian hierarchy, the corruption that makes innovation so difficult, and their attempts to ramp up production of military weapons, refine their deployment (partly successful), and seek outside supplies for their extremely wasteful war effort, mostly from China, Iran, and North Korea.

The report is available online at the CISS website. Dana Massicott, who seems a master of strategy, described some of the major blunders of the Russian military's approach, then said, "I'm not going to tell them how to get it right." In a lot of ways, Putin's dictatorship and his pretense to Empire have many of the same flaws of the old Soviet empire out of which Putin rose to power soon after it collapsed. To understand modern complex bureaucratic hierarchic nation states, we need to move beyond old ideologies such as 'communism' and 'democratic capitalism,' which are mere words that often have little to do with the actual politics and practices of modern administrative states.

For example, in the United States today, electoral politics has very little to do with any actual democratic process. As some have put it, the two dominant parties select candidates and the candidates choose voters, via propaganda, gerrymandering, voter suppression, and other techniques for gaining and holding on to power. Some critics complain that we need 'direct democracy,' but our institutions have evolved in another direction. That is why, via the

“electoral college,” a candidate can win the presidency when the other candidate got a significant majority of the popular vote.

Electoral politics, depending on how it is organized, can be more or less democratic. Putin gets around ninety percent of the vote, but then, he has any rivals jailed or assassinated. In the U.S., it has even gotten to the point where the very idea of democracy is now openly challenged by neo fascist white nationalist attacks, spurred on by the sociopathic former president.

According to Ami Ayalon, former director of Israel’s security agency, the ideal of Zionism was to have a democratic Jewish nation state. Some critics view Zionism as an oppressive colonial ideology of theocracy. Gabor Mate, an insightful and widely respected Jewish psychiatrist who barely escaped the Holocaust as an infant as his parents were hauled off to the concentration camps, says he became an enthusiastic Zionist as a young man until he recognized how Israel oppressed the Palestinian people whom they displaced, expelled, and killed in the process of forming the state of Israel. Despite the bloody formation of the nation, most Israelis today, like most Americans, appear to desire to live in peace in a democratic state. Not an easy task amid growing fascist movements all across the ‘modern world.’

One retired Israeli peace negotiator, has said, “If we could just get rid of the leaders [on both sides] we could find a way to peace.” When Ami Ayalon was interviewed by Christian Amanpour on June 24, he was very impassioned in condemning Netanyahu and his extreme theocratic allies, who are anything but democratic. Yair Golan, head of Israel’s Labor Party, which had fallen in influence in recent years, is now working to unseat Netanyahu in order to find a road to both democracy and peace with the Palestinian people, recognizing that a new Palestinian political authority is needed to replace the fanatical Hamas. Peace is impossible under occupation.

Netanyahu’s refusal to even entertain the idea of “the day after the war” demonstrates the impossibility of finding a road to peace or democracy when those in charge refuse to recognize the humanity of the subordinate population and seek to annihilate them. All dictators need an outside enemy, and sometimes internal ones, to attack in order to divert attention from their oppression of their own people. Only in democracy can dehumanization be overcome and peace achieved. Security is impossible without peace.

**That new publishing company, *Omega Publishers***, which will publish *Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*, under its imprint, Bear Claw Press™, is formed. Launch Date for the book is coming into view, as I regain my energy after that nasty shingles episode. The book cover and interior design are done and pre-publication reviews are coming in. The publication date is now set for July 26, 2024. We continue learning a great deal about the rapidly changing publishing business. Ben Franklin would be amazed.

My eBook ***HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto*** remains available as a **free** download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The regular Kindle eBook price is \$6.99. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Also, please [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page. You can do

so by clicking the button on the lower left of the book's Amazon page below "Customer Reviews," and say a few words about what you think about the issues and how I frame them.

**Note:** Past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

## ***LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary***

**Who Are We Kidding, Really.** This past year has been a constant struggle for me to keep up with the new and scary facts of life in the increasingly unstable world of industrial modernity. A few years ago, I had been enthralled, at first, with the prospects for electric cars. Despite being an old California 'car guy' who came of age in the late 1950s when the culture of hotrods peaked, I was ready and willing to give up on the old image of a big V-8 powered machine. I got a ride in one of the early Tesla sedans soon after they came out and was astounded by the quiet but extreme acceleration that a couple of electric motors could produce with their high torque, even with five people aboard. But everything has its cost.

Same goes for Solar and wind power. It was clear to me early on that giant wind farms run by giant corporations linking consumers with electricity via giant transmission lines across giant deserts was not the most efficient way to produce and consume 'clean' energy. I became convinced that energy production should be distributed so that production and consumption were geographically close, at a scale closer to human—that's what 'community power' is about.

Of course, I was never comfortable with giant lithium-ion battery systems for storing energy for use when the 'sun don't shine' or the winds die down. Far simpler physical systems using more common materials seemed a more sensible choice for storing energy. Soon enough it was obvious that 'renewable energy' at scale posed a serious toxic pollution problem along with an eventually terminal exotic-materials shortage.

A big part of the rising problems of 'renewable' resources is the same as the rest of the culture of industrial modernism. The 'environmental movement' exists largely within the framework of the same culture of industrial modernism as everything else. All these 'alternative' and 'green' products and processes require the same kinds of extractive and industrial processes as the 'old' economy of endless economic growth, and are in fact still part of the neoliberal economics that denies the terrestrial limits to economic growth within the Earth System. No fantasy escape to mars, an even more absurd illusion than the culture from which it emerges.

So, here is the problem as I see it. We are kidding ourselves. Almost nobody talks about downsizing energy *consumption*, just about how to substitute alternative energy production technologies for the overconsumption we refuse to give up. Even as 'renewable' energy production is added to the mix and coal-fired power plants phase out—they are economically untenable anyway—total energy consumption keeps rising. I mean, per capita consumption is

growing with the additional energy sources as they come on line—the Jevon paradox. Well, that is because in all our ‘environmentalism’ we still consume more than ever before. Why? Because we have failed to escape the grip of the culture of industrial-consumer modernism.

Serious scientists and climate activists are not immune to the cultural dominance of more, bigger, and faster. Two sources made this very clear to me recently and a third seems to confirm the source of the problem. One is a talk by [Kevin Anderson](#), a major British climate scientist, who argues that “not only do nations differ in historic carbon emissions and climate damage responsibility. It's equally vital to address equity within societies, as a select few drive the bulk of emissions and impacts through their lifestyles.”

If we avoid addressing equity, it will be impossible to keep global temperatures below even 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels. To dodge that catastrophe means radical change in the ‘lifestyles’ of the relatively wealthy, not only the super-rich, but most professionals, executives, academics, journalists, and entrepreneurs, “all the people who frame the climate debate.” In other words, all of us who remain fully engaged in the high-emitting economies.

The second source that struck me a couple of weeks ago, amid my shingles fog no less, was an [interview](#) Rachel Donald conducted with [Art Berman](#), a seasoned petroleum geologist and energy expert, and a harsh realist. Berman states very plainly that the numbers just don’t justify the high hopes environmentalists hold out for ‘renewables’ to replace fossil fuels. Part of it is just the sheer volume of rare minerals and other materials needed, the extraction of which will never be enough, but will wreak havoc upon the ecosystems near where they are taken.

Berman fully recognizes the damage caused by fossil fuels but points out that industrial civilization cannot survive in the near term without them. And therein lies the rub. Industrial civilization cannot continue *without* fossil fuels, but humanity and the ecosystems upon which we depend for survival cannot live *with* them. That implies the necessity of a new great transformation of society itself, which Berman doubts we can pull off. I insist that we must.

Well, a third source seems to link our existential dilemma with our social illusions about how we might somehow escape disaster and hold our lifestyles intact as well. Genevieve Guenther’s new book, *The Language of Climate Politics: Fossil-Fuel Propaganda and How to Fight It*, will not be released until July 10, but I already ordered a copy. Here is why.

Guenther’s analysis seems key to understanding not only the existential threat to humanity and planet stability. Just by reading a description and pre-publication reviews, I felt that it may hold the key to why we seem hell-bent on charging ahead with our illusory fixes, denials, and inattention, while avoiding the underlying causes of it all.

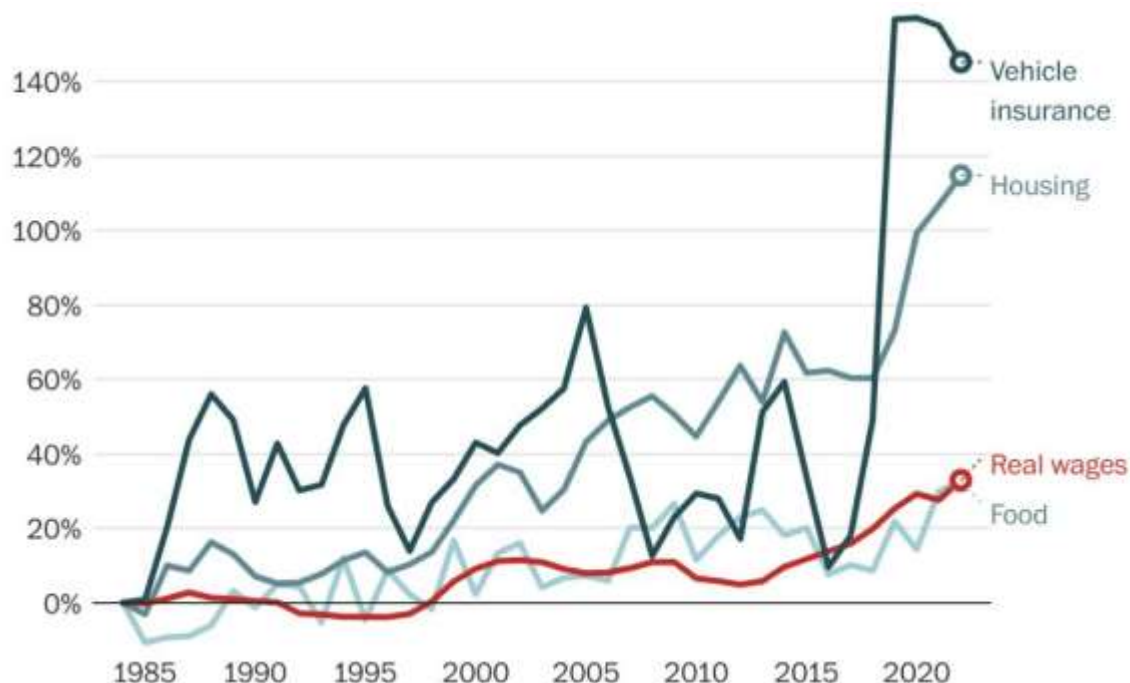
This book argues “that the climate debate is not, in fact, neatly polarized, with Republicans obstructing climate action and Democrats advancing climate solutions.” Instead, both sides of ‘the climate debate’ are captive of the language that the fossil-fueled propaganda machine has foisted upon all public discussion. As an overview on the Barnes & Noble website noted, “Fossil-

fuel interests weaponize the discourses of science, economics, and activism, co-opting and twisting climate language to help greenwash their plans for ongoing extraction.

But all too often climate scientists, economists, and even advocates will unwittingly echo the false and dangerous assumptions of their supposed political opponents.” Guenther exposes the dynamic whereby the distortions of reality filter through the media and become part of “common sense.” The book description says that Guenther also shows how to overcome this colossal social illusion to give us a chance for a livable future. So, I just had to buy it, despite my preference to avoid more expensive hardback books. Unless we stop kidding ourselves, we will have lost the struggle to survive.

### *Today's Featured Image:*

***In recent decades, the cost of living in the U.S. has accelerated way past the paltry growth in real wages. For older adults it has been bad enough. But for young people just entering the labor market the disparity between wages and expenses has become extreme. When I graduated from high school in 1958, a kid could get an entry-level job in the mailroom at an aerospace company in Southern California, rent an apartment and buy a used car (if s/he did not already own one) and have enough left over to party on the weekend. Today, with all that ‘economic growth,’ maybe only one of those is possible with an entry-level wage.***



## Gen Z Cost of Living

*Image credit: Washington Post*

***The financial elites and their politician-agents tout the benefits of economic growth. But for whom? Certainly not the general population. In the Great Recession of 2008, caused by extreme financial speculation on derivatives, many people lost their homes, which were then bought up by billionaires and corporations that jacked up prices and rents. Now, only the techno-financial elites can afford to buy a home. It is all about the concentration of wealth and income among the super-rich 0.01% of the investor class and the giant corporations they control.***

### ***Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation***

For quite a while now, I have been frustrated with the growing distance between potential of the internet for good and its realization of evil. Initially a giant leap forward for communication between scientists, government, and the military (developed with public funds) it soon became the nexus of commercial persuasion and political hucksterism. So called 'social media' became the vehicle for large scale manipulation by commercial interests. Even more important, giant tech companies discovered that by amplifying attention to anxiety producing and hateful speech, they could amplify click bait to increase their advertising revenue, despite the personal and social damage they indifferently caused. The internet has become a mental health risk as well as a political and intellectual cesspool.

Then, alone came Audrey Tang, who as Taiwan's Digital Minister, developed a technology for digital democracy that may not only grow into a new means of humanity asserting authority over itself, but could replace the current overseers of the dehumanizing technosphere we have so much difficulty avoiding. He and co-author Glen Weyl offer an open-source free book, with no copyright, to anyone who is interested, and invite all to contribute ideas, corrections, and improvements. Find it here:

<https://www.plurality.net/>

The trouble with electoral politics is that it is not really very democratic at all. Elites, politicians, and experts, without adult supervision—that is, democratic constraints and creativity—tend to mess it all up for the rest of us while taking the benefits of their actions to the bank, regardless of any public preference.

Various research projects have demonstrated that a random selection of persons can collectively come up with a solution to a problem that is superior to that produced by a room full of 'experts.' I know that sounds counter intuitive, but it is a proven fact. Diversity in society plays an essential role in social evolution, just as it does in biological evolution—diversity in

social interaction is inherently democratic and creative, except where suppressed. The [Plurality project](#) has worked in Taiwan and it very well may work elsewhere too.

### *Quotable Quotes*

Timothy Snyder is a remarkably wise political historian at Yale. He is a true public intellectual whose understanding of the movements of change in Europe in the twentieth Century is unrivaled in its depth of understanding, and even more important, its implications for our lives in the twenty-first century. Some say that history does not repeat itself, but the neo fascist movements today sure do closely follow the playbooks of Hitler and Mussolini.

*Strongman rule is a fantasy. Essential to it is the idea that a strongman will be your strongman. He won't.*

~ Timothy Snyder

One of the biggest problems with any variant of fascism is, along with its typical dehumanization of the 'other' and the barbarity of its ruthless violence, is the extreme hierarchic structure and the venality of its maximal leader. Whether Putin, Kim Jong Un, or Netanyahu, the pattern is the same. In the end, the people who follow and/or just tolerate them are the real victims in the end. Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, may be the worst of them all, indifferent to the death toll of his people—or *are* they his, really?

Only in the case of Israel, do the people have enough of a democratic tradition that we might expect them to cast out Bibi and his theocratic fascist gang. In Russia and North Korea, we may have to wait for generational change, and that is a crap shoot. In the U.S. on the other hand, we seem to be at a critical point where democracy might be saved or where a plunge into the abyss of fascism continues to a fateful end. Never has the quasi-democratic element in our electoral system seemed more important.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, say hello to a neighbor or stranger, check out my blog posts at [The Hopeful Realist.com](https://www.thehopefulrealist.com) and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).