

LOOK UP! 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

“It Can’t Happen Here.” I had never read Sinclair Lewis’ novel, *It Can’t Happen Here* until a couple of years ago. I knew of its literary importance, vaguely, since high school, doesn’t everyone? At least you remember the names of all those books we were told we should read because of their significance in the history of literature, right?

But it was only two years back that I began to feel that I *really* must read *It Can’t Happen Here*, but because I needed to read it, *now*. It was written in 1935, a time that offers too many parallels to our own era for comfort. I had an old yellowed paperback, so I read it two years ago because I had a foreboding feeling that it might offer some insights to the trends I was seeing, even when what I prefer to call the *Fake President* had left his first, and I imagined, his only term in office. So much more was involved.

I was very wrong in that comfortable imaginary, of course, but I was not wrong about *It Can’t Happen Here*. The story shows how an autocratic coup can happen anywhere. I will not review the book here, but I recommend it to all Americans for its prescient storytelling. It was a different time in many ways, save one set of conditions: the political, economic, and social factors that threaten an authoritarian overthrow of our semi-democratic nation.

I have completely lost track of the many instances and different ways by which the Musk/Trump henchmen have trampled the most fundamental rights of U.S. citizens and legal as well as undocumented residents while seeking to destroy every democratic practice and institution in the nation. But it is the pattern of abuses that I felt coming as Trump-2 approached. The tactics are clear and the strategy is emerging exactly as it happened in the 1930s and succeeded in Germany and Italy. The fascist coup is happening before our eyes, much like Sinclair Lewis warned.

While we can point to all sorts of differences between the U.S. in the 1930s and in the 2020s, the process and pattern Lewis described by telling a story and that which we observe today, are fundamentally the same. As the two experts I cite most often, highly regarded historian of twentieth century Europe, Timothy Snyder, and Yale Professor, Jason Stanley, who wrote the book on *How Fascism Works*, describe the elements of modern tyranny Sinclair Lewis warned us about in his novel.

But here's the thing. In all cases, from the novel to the real-world tyranny of the mid-twentieth century, people thought that 'it couldn't happen here.' Well, it happened then in Europe (and almost happened here) in the 1930s, and it is happening here and now.

The cases of unconstitutional arrests, literally grabbing people off the street and throwing them into unmarked cars, disappearing them unidentified into a notorious Salvadorian prison, defying courts right and left, indiscriminately firing civil service workers with the obvious goal of making their agency unable to function, are all intended to confuse the people, throw the objectors off balance, and overload the courts, in order to stifle any dissent or effort to stop the coup. It is time to stop all that convenient "it might happen here," talk and face what is happening right now.

It can happen here because it *is* happening here. Of course, it can also be stopped. But only if certain things happen, which means that certain people act with courage and purpose, but not alone. I have argued for some time now that sufficient, even some major climate action will not happen until organized people overcome the organized money (cf, Bill Moyers) to force not just abstract policy talk, but concrete corporate and government programs and practices to rein in the political economy of the industrial age, which is on its last legs anyway, but not soon enough unless we take serious collective action.

My friend and lifelong international development professional, Earl, told me a couple of years ago that over the span of his career with various agencies and institutions, from the World Bank to the IMF, the State Department, etc., these agencies' efforts at aiding development of diverse 'underdeveloped' nations, caused continuing frustration for anyone who was actually trying to make a difference.

His point was that these diverse institutions had moved from the practical on-the-ground efforts to increasingly abstract activities that had less and less impact on the conditions from which people suffered. As he put it, they went from projects to programs to policy—from doing small actions to talking about them to further abstracting their talk. Climate policy went from integrating scientific findings into watered down implications, and abstract promises to more of the same, until Trump invoked his standard "it's a hoax" dismissal.

Efforts to improve the lives of people by shaping a world where human wellbeing is a priority that almost always runs up against short-term politics largely driven by the privileged few, the multi-billion dollar hyper-elite; sometimes a little real work escapes their suppression, often not. In the U.S. most recently, this extreme power-grab has accelerated in the extreme. Now it has gone so far as to become an open game of plundering the national purse in the form of demolishing government agencies that do important work for society, however imperfectly, such as USAID.

It has gone so far as to fire, file suit against, threaten, or disappear anyone who opposes any illegal act of the coup. They are working to transfer the "savings" from destroying government programs and careers of public servants into the coffers of the super-rich in the form of more tax cuts for the rich, to add to their many exceptions, subsidies, and lucrative government contracts. Musk's marauders are openly shifting funds in direct conflict with their explicit legislated

purpose to contracts and payments to companies he controls. Some call that the corporate state, the merging of the state and corporate power, the essence of a fascist regime.

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**Here is that Pitch for my Book Again:** You need to read it almost as much as you need to read Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny*. And Jason Stanley's *How Fascism Works*.

*Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation* can be purchased directly from the publisher, [Bear Claw Press](#), or from your favorite independent bookstore via [Bookshop.org](#). Of course, you can also buy it on [Amazon.com](#), but try ordering it in person by walking into your favorite local bookstore. Independent bookstores are valuable social places where that direct human contact, which is lost to your flat-panel screen, can still be found, along with the tactile feel of books as real objects of pleasure and enlightenment.

I know that putting the advert below for *Holding IT Together* in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing. I don't charge myself a penny. So, it is a free reminder to buy and read the book. How could I turn that down?

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HOLDING *IT* TOGETHER



*Social Control in an
Age of Great Transformation*

ROBERT MACNEIL CHRISTIE, PhD

Published July 26, 2024, and the product of decades of research and reflection, [Holding IT Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation](#) explains the global changes that have resulted in the catastrophic convergence of the crises of climate, ecosystems, economies, and politics, and the societal chaos, which we now see intensifying every day. In it, I also describe the deep changes that are necessary in order to effectively head off societal collapse so we can more comfortably shape the New Great Transformation of our institutions and our ways of living necessary in a world of less intensive energy consumption. We *will* transition away from fossil fuels, like it or not, and the sooner and more intentionally the better. Later would be catastrophic. Petroleum products provided great affluence for some for a while, yet are already causing chaos and environmental destruction for everyone.

"Buy it!" says the author.

Here are excerpts from some prominent editorial reviews:

A dense and sweeping call to change the direction of human society before it's too late. Still, his core message is strikingly direct and forceful. It's hard to imagine any reader not being convinced that just such a massive change is necessary. ~ **Kirkus Reviews**

Christie embeds history surrounding social deconstruction and construction with the kinds of modern references that readers will relish...[He] offers an unprecedented opportunity for readers to apply the basics of economic understanding to the major issues facing humanity's survival today... Hope is embedded throughout his approach. ~ **Midwest Book Review**

Both a wake-up call and a guide, this book calls for decisive action toward a sustainable, equitable future, making it an essential resource for policymakers, activists, and concerned citizens alike. ~ **The Prairies Book Review**

With the publication of [***Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation***](#), by Bear Claw Press, I seek a wide span of possible readers. After all, the book's content has important implications for the lives of everyone.

If you are a researcher or teacher and would be interested in sending me a short review (two or three paragraphs), or would consider it for use in a class you teach, please go to the BearClawPress.com website, click on the [Review/Exam Copies](#) tab (upper right) fill in the information, and I will send you a [pdf](#) or [ePub](#) copy free. Also, copies can be bought at a nice discount from the list price at Bear Claw Press.

Otherwise, please buy, read, and offer a customer [rating-review](#) for ***Holding IT Together*** on Goodreads.com or Amazon.com. Without a significant number of customer reviews, good or bad, the Amazon algorithm will ignore a book into oblivion, regardless of its quality.

Some have estimated that Amazon.com sells around seventy percent of all books sold. Nevertheless, I hope many who buy ***Holding IT Together*** will do so at their local independent bookstore. Of course, both paper and eBook versions are available on Amazon.com as well as from independent bookstores via Bookshop.org. It is now also available at a discount directly from the publisher, BearClawPress.com

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. Or, [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: As always, past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

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

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

### **The Predicament of Initiating Great Societal Change.**

The interplay between social order and social change has always been a core issue for sociology. At the same time, the order versus change problem has always constituted one of its greatest perplexities. Much of the concern that motivated the emergence of the social sciences arose from the growing chaos and change that accompanied the industrial revolution.

The earliest social scientists came from the traditions of social philosophy, especially the ‘philosophes’ of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many of whom were well educated Scottish aristocrats. Seeing and fearing unprecedented changes in the social order, they struggled to explain the chaos around them. Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Lock, David Hume, and a host of others, including many on the European continent grappled with “moral sentiments,” the search for laws of economy, human freedom and dignity, social change, and Nature itself.

So, here we are in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century facing very similar problems, but in relation to vastly more serious crises in our world. We are faced with essentially the same problems of order, chaos, and change today, but with many orders of magnitude more of an existential threat than the societal changes that disrupted traditional society in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, revolutions and all.

Today, the continuation of the last eleven thousand years or so of Earth System stability—and therefore our own survival—is existentially threatened with termination. [I’m trying to be emphatic here, but the words just are not strong enough to convey the magnitude of the threat to life on Earth as we have known it.]

Here is the essence of the current human predicament, as I see it. Humans are intermittently rational and irrational when their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs are concerned. In a sense, we believe what we want to believe, feel selectively resulting in compassion for some and unspeakable brutality in others, and we take the attitudes that their peers hold often in contradiction to plainly visible facts.

We in the U.S. pride ourselves as being a nation of individualists, as the corporate marketing and advertising industries reinforce our consumer conformity by playing up our illusions of personal independence as we sit in corporate cubicles or engage in repetitive motion on what is left of American production lines. Any form of critical thinking is mostly absent, but when it arises it is suppressed, and, when it comes to politics now, anyone who steps on the MAGA toes will lose her/his job or be banished to a foreign torture prison. And now, the Orange King would insist on directly censoring the work of the oldest university in the nation. This is serious folks!

We are confronted once again with the prospect, and the present unfolding, of yet another regime of violent political authoritarian oligarchy. We watch often far too passively as those “rights of man” so eloquently delineated by our eighteenth century forefathers, are stripped away with rapidly fired “executive orders” by a narcissistic sociopath who dares to call himself king. We complain of the brutal destroyer of the institutions of modernity, the richest man in the world, who would install a techno-oligarchy, as if the money he amassed should make him

philosopher-king of a new surveillance state (devoid of any philosophy). Street protests allow us to vent our frustrations, but we need so much more.

All this occurs, even as the instruments of government need desperately to be transformed to better serve the wellbeing of all life. All this confronts us as the environmental consequences of the dominator culture of industrial civilization threaten not only the comforts of the more affluent classes and the power of the financial and corporate elites—as they boldly wallow in denial—but the lives of all people.

In the nineteenth century, revolutions threatened the order of industrial development and offered freedom to its victims as philosophers tried to confront the pain and suffering of ordinary people under the harsh conditions of extreme social change. The outcomes were certainly mixed as most revolutions failed in ideological quicksand. China finally ignored its ideology as it proclaimed it and deployed state capitalism to create an political-economic oligarchy.

Now, all the modern world is confronted by the [catastrophic convergence](#) of multiple global crises that, unlike the industrial revolution, seem to have no upside. Modern industrial states, which control the global economy together, seem incapable of changing their ways.

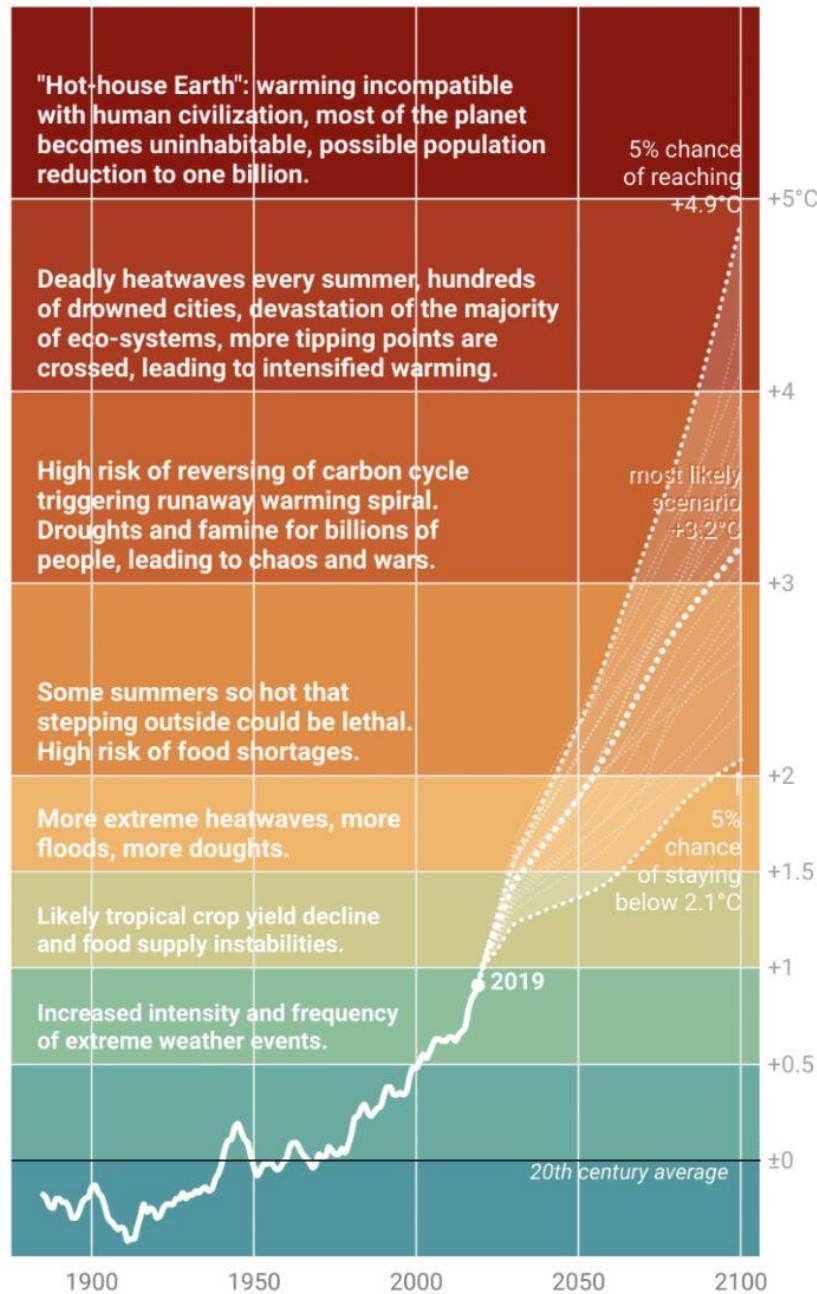
The ‘authorities’ of today’s industrial societies, which are organized as corporate political economies with little remnants of human community left, keep trying to find ways to perpetuate business-as-usual “solutions” to what can no longer be claimed to be ‘problems’ to be addressed within the existing social order, but are. The accelerating global crisis cries out for a new great transformation of society to cope with the catastrophic convergence that Christian Parenti described early on when others talked only of managing what was framed as a relatively benign “global warming.”

So, now we get, instead of a global strategy for implementing a New Great Transformation to a livable ecological civilization, the rise of a newly strengthened billionaire-financed oligarchy of denial and plunder. That means only one thing. Maybe the people will rise up in a movement for justice and ecological survival and create a New Great Transformation of the global political economy of extraction, plunder, and domination, into an ecological civilization. Or, we will become passive victims of the collapse of a failed techno-industrial oligarchy. It ***IS*** happening here! Time to wake up to the facts represented in today’s featured image.

***Today’s Featured Image:***

**Here is a clear graphic representation yet of our scary future.**

## Degrees of Global Warming



The solid line shows 5-year average of global land and ocean temperature anomalies (NOAA). Dotted lines show different percentiles of warming predictions according to Raftery et.al, 2017. Inspired by The Guardian.

Chart: Gregor Aisch, Datawrapper • Created with Datawrapper



***The obvious implications are that massive societal transformation is necessary now to stave off the unlivable conditions it predicts from the trends we now experience. These are rarely discussed and almost never by politicians or corporate executives. These trend lines “assume \*dramatic\* [hashtag#emissionsreduction](#). See also <https://lnkd.in/gwU6MA7D> where the colored chart below appears,” suggests renowned evolutionary ecologist, [Phoebe Bernard](#).***

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

Well before most public discussion of the realities of “global warming,” Christian Parenti wrote an assessment of the global geopolitical changes related to climate destabilization. He coined the phrase, “catastrophic convergence” of multiple crises as their symptoms emerged in the economically and politically damaged postcolonial nations and war zones of the planet’s mid-latitudes. His assessment of global conditions and the emerging crises was prescient and as relevant as ever today.

Parenti, Christian. 2011. *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*. New York: Nation Books.

Failed states and various disasters were the first signs of growing modern phenomena of global destabilization, and they happened in the postcolonial mid-latitude regions of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. On the ground as a journalist, Parenti saw the early stages of climate-driven violence and the open-ended counter insurgency by the Western states, which we continue to see as the global political economy heads toward collapse, ecologically blind to its own suicidal path.

### ***Quotable Quotes***

As I have said before, Timothy Snyder is one of the most important voices warning us of the rising tide of tyranny in the U.S. today. Here, in a Substack post, he warns of the failure to act. The Constitution is nothing more than a piece of paper if it is not **enacted** by the people. To wait for ‘them’ to protect our freedom and security is to, in effect, give up those rights.

*Poles will want you to know that Poland was more important than East Germany in the history of the end of communism. And that is very true. But the crucial thing to remember is [what Poles did](#). In the face of dictatorship they found concepts of cooperation and lived them.*

~ Timothy Snyder

The new fascist attempt at autocracy in the U.S. is enabled by its persistent attack on all institutions in order to assert executive power over them, in direct contradiction of the Constitution’s explicit separation of powers. You can’t have a fascist dictatorship without breaking the balance ordinarily maintained by the three co-equal branches of government. To



stop the autocratic attempt, we must cooperatively refuse to accept the autocratic intrusion into the domains of the Congress (violating its laws by defunding the programs and agencies it legislated and firing their employees) and the Courts (refusal to obey court orders). Our fear and passivity will assure their victory. Our collective political action will stop them.

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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://TheHopefulRealist.com), read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my new book, [\*Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation\*](#).