



TARGETING ENVIRONMENTAL “EXTREMISM”

ALBERTA CONSERVATIVES OPEN ENERGY WAR ROOM

Andy Crosby

The Alberta government formally established the “Energy War Room” that Jason Kenney’s United Conservative Party (UCP) pledged to institute during the 2019 provincial election campaign in March. The rebranded “Canadian Energy Centre” (CEC) became an incorporated, legal entity on Oct. 9 and will be operational before the end of the year, according to Alberta Energy Minister Sonya Savage in a news release. “Once fully functional, it will be a leading and authoritative voice on Alberta’s energy resources.” The CEC will be composed of a rapid-response unit to issue “swift responses to

misinformation spread through social media,” an energy literacy unit to “help the province take control of its energy story,” and a data and research unit “to reinforce this story with factual evidence for investors, researchers and policy makers,” according to the release. It is, shockingly, not so much a factory for factual information as one for partisan rhetoric, stocked not with energy experts but with Conservative apparatchiks. Former UCP candidate Tom Olsen will head the CEC — and earn \$194,000 per year. Following the announcement, Premier Kenney’s office released a statement outlining that although the CEC is a

provincial corporation under the Financial Administration Act, with the justice, energy, and environment ministers serving as board members, the “internal operations” of the CEC would not be subject to the Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP). “The CEC’s internal operations are not subject to FOIP, as this would provide a tactical and/or strategic advantage to the very foreign-funded special interests the CEC is looking to counter. For example, we would not let those foreign-funded special interests seeking to attack our province see our detailed defence plans,” according to the statement. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 3**



WHAT’S HAPPENING IN SYRIA?

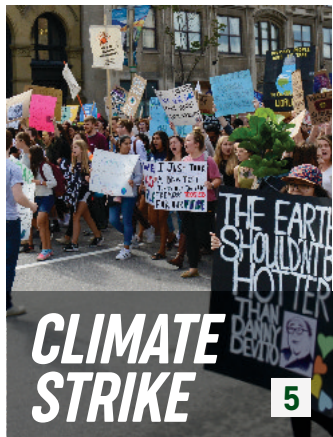
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CITY STAFF GO FROM ‘WON’T’ TO ‘CAN’T’ IN SHOOTING DOWN CALLS FOR LANDLORD LICENSING

Kieran Delamont

City staff are again spiking calls for a landlord licensing and regulation scheme – despite recommendations that the city implement a pilot project in three areas of the city – because they believe that provincial laws pose a “legal impediment” that prevent the city from regulating the rental housing business. At a public consultation in late October, city staff informed residents that after a review of the rental housing market, it will not be recommending any form of landlord licensing or registration – something housing activists have been calling for for over a decade – because they believe all landlord licensing in Ontario to be potentially unlawful. To study the question of rental housing regulation, the city hired Maclaren Municipal Consulting to study the rental market in Ottawa. They provided a set of recommendations meant to inform city staff’s final recommendations to council, which is set to debate the issue in November. But the move to spike landlord licensing proposals runs contrary to these consultants’ own findings, which recommends that “the City pilot a rental regulation regime in three neighbourhoods:

Sandy Hill, Vanier, and the Ryan Farm area [around Algonquin College].” The study found that “these are the neighbourhoods where the problems are both acute and chronic, and where it is not clear that proactive enforcement will be a sufficient solution.” None of that matters to the city, which believes that it cannot legally pass a landlord regulation bylaw at all. “As we looked into all the relevant legislation, we found a legal impediment to municipal business licensing, and the trade of real estate,” said city bylaw review specialist Jerrod Riley. (The “trade of real estate,” according to the Real Estate and Business Broker act, refers to buying and selling of property.) “The impediment we’ve uncovered in our research has not been upheld in the courts,” Riley said, adding that the city had “sought an outside legal opinion that has verified that there will be a material risk to the city” if landlord licensing were to be enacted. Translation: the city is concerned about getting sued by the landlords, and wants to avoid being the one to fight it out in court. This came as a surprise to housing organizers, who say this was the first time the city had ever suggested that it *can’t*, as opposed to *won’t*, regulate



“Do you honestly believe that this is going to help those people?” one resident asked city staff. “There are a lot of people who don’t have money, but they’re still human beings, and they still deserve a modicum of dignity in their homes”

The property owners of these Herongate homes are alleged to have let standards slip as a way to justify their recent demolition. Photo: Neal Rockwell

the rental housing market. Even more frustrating was that when pressed by members of the public, staff were unable or unwilling to provide specifics about what, precisely, that legal impediment was. Housing activists with ACORN have been calling for a RentSafe program to be implemented, a model that was recently implemented in Toronto, that would require landlords to register with the city if they have three or more units and subject them to periodic property standards audits. The city’s position is that the Toronto model could not be copied in Ottawa because Toronto’s RentSafe program might also be illegal. That’s a notion that managed to elude anyone at the City of Toronto, which implemented the program in July 2017, and Ontario’s Superior Court of Justice, which upheld the rights of municipalities to license rental business in 2015.

“This could impact what Toronto’s doing. I don’t know yet,” said Riley. “But we can’t advance a licensing regime at this time.” It is also news to other municipalities who have led the way on landlord licensing in Ontario. “We’re not aware of any legal impediment to rental licensing,” says Tony Iavarone, a spokesperson for the City of Waterloo. “The city’s bylaw was reviewed in court at considerable expense and was upheld in its entirety.” It is not necessarily the case that there are clear and obvious legal impediments to landlord licensing that are tying the city’s hands. City solicitor David White later confirmed to *The Leveller* that the city is referencing a 2006 regulation that bans municipalities from licensing “the business of trading in real estate.” That 2006 regulation was written prior to consequential amendments made to the Municipal Act in 2007 by the

then-Liberal government. These amendments were *specifically intended* to grant municipalities the power to license landlords and the business of providing rental housing. Again, landlord licensing schemes have existed across the province – Waterloo, Oshawa, and London all have licensing bylaws on the books – for years since the provincial government granted them those powers. And Ontario courts have upheld the right of municipalities to enact them. In 2015, the Ontario Superior Court found that “a municipality’s power shall be interpreted broadly so as to confer broad authority on the municipality to enable the municipality to govern its affairs as it considers appropriate.” But the 2006 regulation has never been explicitly tested, so it’s unclear whether or not it actually constitutes the “legal impediment” that the city claims it does. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 3**

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THE MATRIX OF CAPITALISM

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIAL CIVILIZATION, MASS CULTURE, THE ATTENTION ECONOMY, SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM - AND SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON HOW TO ESCAPE IT, WITH REFERENCE TO A 1999 SCI-FI FILM MADE BY A COUPLE OF TRANS WOMEN

TIM KITZ

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Wachowski’s pioneering film *The Matrix*, a 1999 sci-fi masterpiece that seems more prophetic than ever. Here in 2019, machine learning and surveillance capitalism are increasingly feeding off of the raw material of human lives, simultaneously enslaving and entertaining us – and mirroring the film’s premise.

‘Surveillance capitalism’ is a term coined by social psychologist Shoshana Zuboff, which she expounds upon at length – for nearly 666 pages – in her 2019 tome *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. For Zuboff, our economy is increasingly built around corporation’s relentless drive to digitize and

monetize our personal lives. This should sound eerily familiar to anyone who’s a fan of *The Matrix*. The film presents a vision of a dystopian future, where the natural world has been scorched by human action into a post-apocalyptic wasteland. People cannot recognize this truth because their senses have been filled since birth by a placid artificial reality that enslaves them, enabling machines to feed off them.

Taking the Red Pill to Escape Capitalism

The plot point that changes all this and that provides *The Matrix*’s spiritual centre is the decision to take the red pill. Ultimately, I see this as a metaphor for waking up from the numbing, comfortable

prison of late capitalism. The movie shows up what it’s like to live in a world where our technology has developed to the point where it deceives and controls us, where we need to wake up. It’s about living in a natural world we have utterly destroyed and not even realizing it.

Yet somehow, Neo knows that something is wrong, even if he doesn’t know the truth. The film’s opening makes it clear that Neo feels deeply alienated from his numbing job – and equally unfulfilled by the recreational and consumerist escape offered by video games, drugs, and nightclubbing.

His whole life is unfulfilling, grey, sickly – every aspect of it permeated by a matrix of lies.

How can this be? Neo lives a relatively comfortable, privileged life. Yet there’s at least two ways Neo is alienated and oppressed which we can look at through the lens of capitalism.

First, as a worker, Neo is directly alienated from himself while on the job. His time and effort does not belong to him, but to his boss and the owners of the faceless corporation that employs him.

This corresponds with the first, industrial stage of capitalism and Marx’s classic critique of it. Here the appropriation of workers’ labour drives the

economy and feeds capitalism. The surplus value that workers generate is gobbled up by parasitic owners, whose ownership of the means of production has been assured by the violence of the state.

(Note that to colonize people’s worklives, capitalism first had to colonize the land, privatizing it and depriving people of their traditional means of sustenance. For this, look at the English enclosure movement, the Scottish clearances, the preventable mass-starvation and resulting emigration of the Irish, the genocidal colonization of Turtle Island, etc. Once people had no home and no means of feeding themselves, they sold their labour – and in a certain sense their selves – to those who did own the land and the means of production.)

Second, as a consumer, Neo is equally alienated, since his very identity is mediated through capitalist transactions. After colonizing people’s working hours, capitalism colonized their leisure hours, too.

This corresponds with the early 20th century creation of mass culture and its critique by the likes of Adorno and Horkheimer – and the post-modern consumerism and social theory that followed on hard afterwards.

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Lev·el·ler

1 Historical: During the English Civil War (c. 1649), one who favoured the abolition of all rank and privilege. Originally an insult, but later embraced by radical anti-Royalists.

2 One who tells the truth, as in “I’m going to level with you.”

3 An instrument that knocks down things that are standing up or digs up things that are buried or hidden.

The Leveller is a publication covering news, current events, and culture at Carleton University, the University of Ottawa, the Ottawa/Gatineau region and, to a lesser extent, the wider world. It is intended to provide readers with a lively portrait of their campuses and communities and of the events that give them meaning. It is also intended to be a forum for provocative editorializing and lively debate on issues of concern to students, staff, and faculty as well as Ottawa residents.

The Leveller leans left, meaning it challenges power and privilege and sides with people over private property. It is also democratic, meaning that it favours open discussion over silencing and secrecy. Within these very general boundaries, the *Leveller* is primarily interested in being interesting, in saying something worth saying and worth reading about.

The Leveller needs you. It needs you to read it, talk about it, discuss it with your friends, agree with it, disagree with it, write a letter, write a story (or send in a story idea), join in the producing of it, or just denounce it. It needs you—or someone like you—to edit it, to guide it towards maturity, to give it financial security and someplace warm and safe to live. Ultimately it needs you to become a more truly democratic and representative paper.

The Leveller is an ambitious little rag. It wants to be simultaneously irreverent and important, to demand responsibility from others while it shakes it off itself, to be a fun-house mirror we can laugh at ourselves in and a map we can use to find ourselves and our city in. It wants to be your coolest, most in-the-know friend and your social conscience at the same time. It continues to have its work cut out for it.

The Leveller is published every month during the school year. It is free.

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- \$100 - Investigative pieces
- \$50 - Feature spread
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To facilitate paying our contributors, The Leveller has created an Investigative Journalism Fund, so that we can sustain this payment model as well as fund larger investigative research projects, or perhaps even add a journalist to the payroll someday.

Contact operations@leveller.ca to contribute any amount.

The *Leveller* acknowledges that Ottawa is on unceded Algonquin territory.

The Leveller

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ENERGY WAR ROOM CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The CEC has raised eyebrows over the potential impact of limiting freedom of expression as well as the apparent lack of transparency surrounding the exemptions from the FOIP. Yet, there is a deeper backstory here. The CEC is not a new invention, but simply a new iteration of framing environmental and Indigenous activists as criminals and extremists.

Kenney's Stand for Alberta

Jason Kenney and the UCP won the Alberta election with a majority government in April 2019. Kenney campaigned on a promise to “stand up for Alberta” by creating more oil and gas jobs and building more pipelines.

A March 2019 press release vowed to root out what the party described as foreign environmental influences undermining Alberta's energy sector. Kenney claimed that “relentless attacks” by environmentalists and foreign environmental organizations were responsible for the loss of tens of thousands of jobs.

Kenney took aim at environmentalist Tzeporah Berman in the press release, who was appointed by the previous NDP government as part of an 18-member Oil Sands Advisory Group. For her opposition to the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion (TMX), Kenney referred to her as an “anti-Albertan extremist.” This framing precipitated the “Energy War Room” campaign promise which would include a public inquiry into foreign funding of the “anti-Alberta energy campaign.”

War Room Announcement with Industry Stakeholders

Kenney formally announced the creation of the Energy War Room at a press conference in early June, flanked by over a dozen industry stakeholders.

Oil Sands Strong founder Robbie Picard introduced Kenney and displayed a poster of Berman, shown at a rally opposing TMX, within a “universal no” sign – a red circle with a diagonal line – that declared Berman an “enemy of the oilsands.”

Following the incident, Berman received death threats, anti-Semitic messages, and threats of sexual violence on her Twitter account, phone, and email. She warned that her unprecedented demonization at a government press conference could have a chilling effect on open dialogue on climate change in Alberta, reported the National Observer.

The Public Inquiry

In July, the Alberta government launched the promised \$2.5-million public inquiry to “expose the foreign interests behind the anti-Alberta energy campaign,” according to Savage in a press release.

“The campaign to landlock Alberta oil has caused over a decade of reputational harm to Alberta's energy sector,” said Justice Minister Doug Schweitzer. “We will determine next steps once the commissioner files his report and if there is evidence of illegal activity, we will take further action.”

Critics have called the move a “fool's errand,” akin to a “show trial.” There is nothing legally preventing ENGOs in Canada from accepting money from

outside Canada, nor any laws restricting advocacy work on environmental action.

On Sept. 9, the Inquiry launched a website, a snitch-line of sorts, where members of the public are encouraged to submit information on the funding of anti-Alberta oil activities.

In September, Amnesty International issued an open letter to the Alberta government expressing human rights concerns, specifically referencing the energy war room and the public inquiry. The letter expressed grave concern “that these initiatives, and the rhetoric surrounding them, feeds into a worsening climate of hostility towards human rights defenders – particularly Indigenous, women, and environmental human rights defenders – exposing them to intimidation and threats, including threats of violence.”

Financing “Extremism”

Conservatives’ obsession with the funding of environmental groups draws largely from the work of right-wing blogger and climate change skeptic Vivian Krause. A Conservative darling and beneficiary of oil sector money, Krause claims that millions of dollars have flowed across Canada's border to support anti-pipeline and anti-tar sands efforts.

Conservatives in Canada have used this narrative to launch wider assaults against the environmental movement, conveniently ignoring that the oil and gas industry enjoys billions of dollars in subsidies and tax breaks on the public dime. For example, the IMF reported that the Canadian fossil fuel industry received \$60 billion in subsidies from federal and provincial governments in 2015, amounting to \$1,650 per Canadian.

The Conservative obsession with the funding sources of environmental organizations is also shared by the RCMP, which perceives the financing of Indigenous and environmental activism as a national security threat.

A January 2014 RCMP “critical infrastructure intelligence assessment” identifying “criminal threats to the Canadian petroleum industry” contains a section on financing, where it references two of Krause's Financial Post articles.

Although seemingly irrelevant to police work in the absence of actual illegal activity, the RCMP note that US foundations have donated \$190 million (USD) to Canadian organizations over a ten-year period. Referencing Krause, the RCMP note that two coastal First Nations received a grant from Tides Canada to “fund conservation planning projects and conservation initiatives” which included mobilizing action against climate change.

The RCMP's conflation of activism and non-profit funding with extremism is informed in part by what the RCMP perceive as disputed notions of climate change science.

Take for instance the key findings of the January 2014 report, which warned of “a growing, highly organized and well-financed, anti-Canadian petroleum movement. Governments and petroleum companies are being encouraged, and increasingly threatened, by violent extremists to cease all actions which *the extremists believe*, contributes to

greenhouse gas emissions.” (Emphasis added)

This is a remarkable display of climate change denial, portraying demands for action to curb greenhouse gas emissions as unreasonable, criminal violence, despite the wide global consensus on the matter.

“Violent anti-petroleum extremists will continue to engage in criminal activity to promote their anti-petroleum ideology,” the report continues, adding, “These extremists pose a realistic criminal threat to Canada's petroleum industry.”

To counter what is described as “environmental criminal extremism” targeting the tar sands, and associated with well-funded NGOs such as Greenpeace, RCMP emails propose that energy industry stakeholders have ready access to security intelligence. The irony here is that money trickling into environmental organizations from U.S. foundations is framed as criminal, yet partnerships formed between the multinational energy sector, security establishment, and government is considered necessary to protect Canada's oil industry.

Kenney's press conference photo op in June flanked by energy industry stakeholders show that these types of security peerships are no secret.

Greta in Alberta

This entire framing exercise epitomizes what Greta Thunberg identified – that the politics required to solve the climate crisis simply do not exist. By deploying the rhetoric of extremism to refer to anybody who opposes tar sands pipelines, government officials in Alberta fan the flames of anti-environmental sentiment with this criminalizing narrative.

So how was Thunberg received when she visited the province in October?

Thunberg rode a wave of climate strike momentum right into the heart of conservative oil country, where she was greeted by thousands of supporters at the Alberta legislature in Edmonton on Oct. 18.

Not so welcoming, on the other hand, was the Alberta government. Environment Minister Jason Nixon said that Thunberg simply doesn't understand Alberta.

A statement released by the Premier's office carried a petulant overtone: “We trust that Ms. Thunberg will recognize Alberta's leading human rights and environmental standards, especially in comparison to oil-producing dictatorships such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, and Venezuela – which she will presumably visit next – as well as major growing emitters like China.”

A group of Alberta separatists organizing under the Wexit moniker called Thunberg a “European environmental agitator,” adding “we wish to inform Ms. Thunberg of Canadian law regarding Defamatory Libel” on social media.

In late October, Thunberg was offered a Nordic Council Environmental award (worth \$68,000 CAD), which she refused. “The climate movement does not need any more awards. What we need is for our politicians and the people in power start to listen to the current, best available science,” she wrote in an Instagram post to her some 8 million followers.

The Tiny House Warriors

Thunberg visited B.C. after leaving Alberta, ground zero for opposition to the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. She was joined by thousands of anti-pipeline activists at a Vancouver rally, including the Tiny House Warriors.

By virtue of publicly opposing the tar sands pipeline and vowing to block its construction, the Tiny House Warriors have been enveloped in the matrix of national security policing and a likely target of Kenney's war room.

The Tiny House Warriors of the Secwepemc nation are building a series of tiny houses along the TMX route east of Kamloops, where the Canadian government is seeking to expand the pipeline on 518 kilometres of Secwepemc territory.

Referencing the death of a young woman in Kamloops last winter, Kanahus Manuel of the Tiny House Warriors explained the project's purpose:

“Our goal is to help solve some of the housing crisis that our people in our Indigenous communities are facing [while at] the same time protecting our water, protecting our salmon, and asserting our jurisdiction and authority over our own unceded territories.”

The movement to build tiny homes and stop TMX in Secwepemc territory has been interpreted as a threat by the RCMP, as revealed by documents obtained via the ATIA. B.C.'s Indigenous Policing Services unit creates a “strategic monthly outlook report” where it tracks Indigenous opposition to existing or proposed energy infrastructure and resource extraction projects. The unit tracks movement of the Tiny House Warriors and identify tensions in the region surrounding “the threat of ‘tiny homes’ along the pipeline route.”

The April 2018 Indigenous Policing Services report notes that a “spring building action camp in Secwepemc territory is being planned by organizers with the Tiny House Warriors group. Three homes have been built but have not yet been moved to a location along the pipeline route. Organizers are seeking to raise \$50,000 to build 5 more homes between May 25 - June 8.”

While the analysis portion of the report is mostly redacted, a stand-alone sentence notes: “The Government of Canada has indicated that this project is in the national interest and all efforts remain to bring this project to a successful conclusion.”

Pipelines Spill

While Indigenous and environmental opposition to tar sands pipelines is framed as unreasonable and criminal, the war room and security integration tactics of politicians, police, and energy industry stakeholders are considered a reasonable, normal, and patriotic response to calls for climate justice.

Meanwhile, pipelines continue to spill.

At the end of October, Calgary-based TC Energy Corp.'s (formerly TransCanada) Keystone crude pipeline spilled 1.4 million litres of oil in North Dakota.

With environmental catastrophe emanating from fossil fuel projects compounding increased greenhouse gas emissions, we could ask, what is the real threat here, who are the real extremists?

LANDLORD LICENSING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In lay terms, the 2006 regulation says municipalities can't regulate the buying and selling of real estate, since that is governed by separate provincial statutes, namely the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act. While in the case of every other landlord licensing system in the province, the courts view providing rental housing as a business separate from the trade of real estate, Ottawa city staff fear that this regulation could be used as a legal cudgel against them if they were to implement the recommendations as they were advised. They then use this to justify the mostly deregulated status quo of rental housing.

While the city believes the 2006 regulation restricts their ability to regulate the renting out of property, *The Leveller* was unable to find any instance of this being upheld by the courts or any prior reference to this regulation as it pertains to landlord licensing or registration. In an email, Daniel Tucker-Simmons, a housing lawyer in Ottawa, called the city's interpretation of this regulation “ridiculous” and said that the law is clear that the trade of real estate refers to buying and selling property, not the business that happens within it.

For low-income residents in Ottawa, the move is yet another slap in the face – a confirmation, for some, of their sense that the city is not interested in taking their concerns seriously, nor in upholding property standards in the city's most vulnerable neighbourhoods.

“Do you honestly believe that this is going to help those people? There are a lot of people who don't have money, but they're still human beings, and they still deserve a modicum of dignity in their homes,” asked one resident, during the Oct. 22 public consultation. “Are you actually going to address those things, or are you just passing the buck around?”

“The measures that we're looking at for consumer protection and education of tenants, those are also concrete measures that are going to help,” Riley replied. “I think there is a lot here that will balance these competing perspectives.”

The city's position is that bylaw enforcement, though it ought to be improved, should be able to take care of negligent landlords – even though hired consultants have advised them that this is not the case and have flagged Vanier, Sandy Hill, and the Ryan Farm area as particularly problematic. The people actually living in those neighbourhoods also say the city's own 311 system – which staff repeatedly suggested aggrieved tenants call – is largely unable to guarantee property standards are being upheld.

“It is a reactive system, where all the onus is on the tenant to make the complaint,” says Margaret Alukker, who lives in Herongate. “Tenants are often kept in the dark on the status of their complaint, and a 311 complaint is not attached to the unit – so if the tenant gets

up and moves, the problem remains.”

Many of those residents believe that large, corporate landlords, like Timbercreek in Herongate, view 311 as a sort of safety net for residents – a third party that can mediate disagreements between tenants and landlords, but one that is generally reliable for landlords, insofar as it doesn't really work for tenants.

“Timbercreek says to contact 311,” with any complaints, says resident Lisa Brinston. “So we'll call someone, and it's like 4 or 5 hours later when they come by. What really gets me is when they do come in, Timbercreek then say ‘we're dealing with worse right now.’”

At the same time, Timbercreek is also being sued in small claims court by several former Herongate residents who allege that the company knowingly let property standards slip as a way to then justify demolition.

In some sense, this round in the fight for landlord licensing was possibly the best shot for housing advocates, since this review was attached to the city's long-awaited review of the Airbnb question. Airbnb (and similar short-term rental platforms) are little more than the entirely deregulated segment of the rental market.

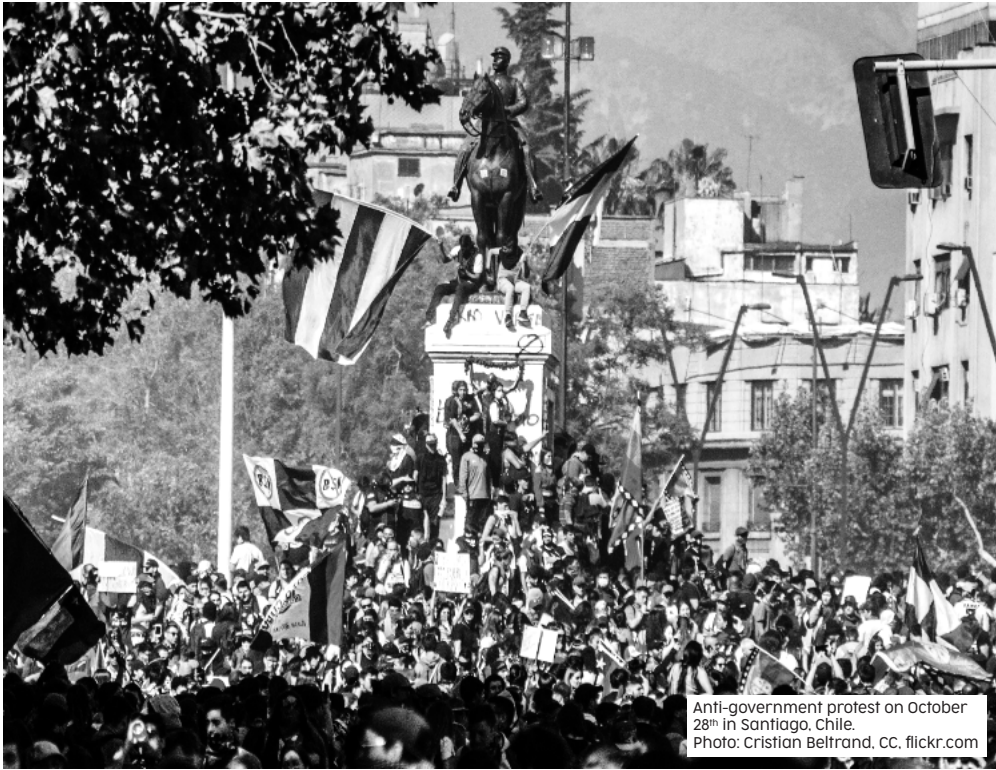
Imposing restrictions on *those* kinds of rentals is politically more popular at city hall than imposing regulations on landlords who have a large number of low-income tenants. Tying progressive regulations to policy that resonates in the suburbs may have offered activists their best shot at finally winning landlord licensing, purely because one might have assumed the city wouldn't be able to propose regulation for short-term rentals but not long-term rentals.

Remarkably, that appears to be exactly what the city is doing. While staff insist that they are legally unable to support the regulation of long-term rentals on one hand, they say they are open to the idea of regulating short-term rental housing on the other.

Asked by *The Leveller* for a legal explanation of how the city is able to consider regulating short-term rentals while simultaneously declaring its inability to regulate long-term rentals, city solicitor David White offered the following circuitous response. “Staff will identify for Committee and Council broad authorities under the Municipal Act, 2001, other than the business licensing authority, that would permit a robust regulatory by-law framework for both residential housing and short term rental accommodations, including for example, Section 10 of the Municipal Act, 2001.”

(If you're able to parse what this means, dear reader, we encourage you to get in touch with us; there may be a position available for a Leveller translator from legal bafflebagg to plain english.)

City staff are still finalizing their recommendations to be submitted to council and are expected to release those findings in early November.



Anti-government protest on October 28th in Santiago, Chile. Photo: Cristian Beltrand, CC, flickr.com

TRANSIT FARE EVASIONS IGNITE POPULAR PROTEST IN CHILE

Chileans Keep Smiling, Looting, & Rioting, Despite Government Concessions

Mike I. Hermida

On October 13, people from the Chilean capital of Santiago took to the streets to protest an increase in metro and bus fares. Since then, riots have broken out, the police and government responded violently, and protests spread to other parts of the country.

The metro price has gone up 30 Chilean pesos, the equivalent of 50 cents Canadian. These increases disproportionately affect economically challenged workers.

The government cited multiple reasons for the rise in price, including increasing cost of diesel and the exchange rate with the U.S. Discontented with these reasons, Santiago students implemented a mass fare evasion – a form of civil disobedience where they jumped turnstiles to avoid paying the fare.

In response, the Sebastián Piñera government increased the number of agents at every metro stop. This was the decision that first sparked protests, which quickly escalated into a broader movement that is about so much more than just transit fare hikes.

“It’s not 30 pesos,” said Chilean union leader Esteban Maturana, in an interview with *Sputnik*. “It’s 30 years of abuse.”

The unrest has grown into a populist protest against economic exploitation. Chile has one of the most expensive education systems in the world, major economic inequality, problems with housing and healthcare, and privatized water and pension regimes.

Days after the initial protests began, Interior Minister Andrés Chadwick invoked the Security of the State Law, which criminalizes various acts that might harm the state or national sentiment. This law was reformed and applied regularly during the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship to silence political dis-

sent. The government also set a curfew.

Thanks to the protestors, the government has repealed its hike to transit fares. Nevertheless, the protests have continued, with people organizing against general economic inequality and hardship.

Much like the fuel tax increase that led to the yellow vest movement in France, the transit fare increase was merely the tipping point for Chileans. The events of the past few weeks are the result of built up anger from years of economic hardship and bad social policy, leading to the first major anti-government movement since the fall of the Pinochet regime in 1990.

The protests are a way of showing the people’s discontent with the government’s continued neoliberal policies. Protestors are calling for the government to resign, including President Piñera, and for a new constitution to be written.

The current 1980 Chilean constitution dates to the military dictatorship of Pinochet, who was installed by a U.S.-backed 1973 coup that overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende. Pinochet ruthlessly restructured the Chilean economy under the direction of the neoliberal “Chicago Boy” — Chilean economists who were disciples of Milton Friedman and other University of Chicago free-market fundamentalists. Along the way, Pinochet’s regime executed, disappeared, tortured, and imprisoned tens of thousands of Chileans.

Currently, several protestors have clashed with police, who responded with acts of brutality. While most protests have been non-violent *cacerolazos* – a common Latin American protest where people bang pots and pans to make noise – some Chileans have resorted to setting buses on fire, looting Walmart stores, breaking out into riots, and fighting cops.

However, in two weeks of protesting, dozens of protes-

tors have been killed and hundreds injured across the country. This was caused by police use of rubber bullets and tear gas.

In the face of government brutality, there is a strong sense of solidarity among protestors. “[When I was looting] there was a comrade telling people to cover their faces because there were cameras inside,” an anonymous protestor told CrimethInc. “You sometimes recognized people and smiled and greeted each other in this new and very particular situation.”

As a result of the unrest, two major international summits have been moved from Chile. On October 30, Piñera declared that his country could no longer host the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation and the United Nations COP 25 climate meeting. (However, the Estadio Nacional in Santiago will still host the Copa Libertadores final, the last game of the premier South American soccer cup.)

This change of plans means that Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who is currently in the Americas, must travel back to Europe for the summit. Thunberg avoids air travel for environmental reasons and arrived in New York by sailboat in August.

“It turns out I’ve traveled halfway around the world, the wrong way. Now I need to find a way to cross the Atlantic in November,” Thunberg wrote on Twitter.

In a series of tweets on October 26, Piñera announced that “we have all heard and understood the message of the Chilean people. I have asked all ministers to resign from their positions.”

However, given the continued civil unrest, despite the cabinet shuffle, suggests that protestors will not stop until substantive change takes place.

“This will not stop until people wake up and Piñera and Chadwick resign!” another protestor told CrimethInk.

LRT LAUNCH HAILED AS DOORBUSTER SUCCESS



The beautiful new Hurdman station. Photo: Sean Marshall, CC

Kieran Delamont & Tim Kitz

Ottawa’s long-awaited light rail transit (LRT) has now had its first month of full operation, and WOW! What a success it’s been — an experience that definitely fulfills our great mayor Jim Watson’s promise of a “world-class transit system.”

Yes, there’s been some haters online, but here at *The Leveller* we can see firsthand the kind of glorious results you get when you rely on exciting partnerships with the private sector – who really know how to squeeze every drop of efficiency out of the taxpayer’s dollar. There’s no comfy government excess anywhere on this train system — it’s a lean, mean, taxpayer-value machine.

Sure, there were major delays on its very first day with commuters going to work — but what new train doesn’t take a little while to settle in? As the experts always say, transit systems are like shoes — you gotta break ‘em in for a while.

“When does it become unacceptable to be charging your customers full price for a service that fails every day?”

– @aboringbitch

As the city’s director of transportation operations Troy Charter pointed out on the train’s first day, the LRT was probably delayed because of “customers jumping or bouncing on them as they are excited to ride the Confederation Line for the first time.” The system couldn’t handle the sheer excitement of its riders, undoubtedly pent up by a year and a half of being told it’s just about to open – “on track for 2018,” as signs assured us.

Having a new train in town feels to many residents as exciting as driving a brand new Maserati. It’s an experience that touches all the human senses. You can enjoy the sight of those grainy, monochromatic gravel pits out the window, soothed by the train’s lullaby of rumbles and squeaks as it placidly winds its way down the line; you can inhale that complex, musky, glue-y new-train smell as you’re pressed up against multiple strangers during rush hour, who you would never have otherwise had the pleasure of touching.

Transit riders were so excited to ride the train that they couldn’t resist the urge to hold the doors open — a problem the mayor deftly solved by threatening to fine

anyone caught doing it. All it took was a bit of pressure, which he applied to city staff too: “Solve this damn door issue once and for all!” the mayor told city management, who eventually set the doors to stay open a little bit longer. Maybe we all just need a refresher: please *don’t* press the big green press-to-open buttons on the door; those doors will open and close on their own time, people!

“A mayor blaming door holders for the failure of an LRT system built by a mega-corporation is a perfect metaphor for our time.”

– @cg_canning

Some users noted how well the LRT fit Ottawa: a system for us by us. “Having a wait time for the bus that is longer than the entire train commute is so Ottawa,” Kristen Williams told *The Leveller*.

As @ToothpickGirl helpfully pointed out on Twitter, “The great thing about the #ReallyBigServiceChange is that it’ll be a LOT easier to drive downtown now, and save yourself the #OCTranspo nightmare.”

That’s right, Ottawa taxpayers have paid a billion dollars for a tunnel that not only gives us a beautifully rebuilt Rideau Street, it makes bus traffic downtown a thing of the past, maximizing public transit dollars for political success. Everyone wins – those who own private vehicles, and those who hope to one day.

When winter rolls around, lucky public transit users will see how the beautifully designed, open-air stations allow for a seamless transition between the built structure and the natural environment. Seriously — fewer shelters, fewer seams!

By making LRT stations exposed to the elements, designers have protected them from use by pesky homeless people – a thoughtful exclusion by design that extends throughout the system. Compared to buses and bus stops, trains and centralized LRT stations are heavily policed and surveilled, ensuring that many racialized and economically marginalized folks will unwelcome. This will surely come as a relief to middle-class and white transit users, whose comfort and ease is self-evidently paramount.

“#OttawaLRT is purposely designed to keep poor people out. Even tho they put barriers to enforce fare, the stations are swarming with police officers and fare inspectors. Transit should be free.”

– @kaziimoto

Generous transit officials have also shown themselves willing to be cooperative with their harpy critics, too, offering bipartisan solutions like returning bus routes to the road — 40 of them in all, the agency announced on Nov. 1. This offers transit users unparalleled choice between the sleek comfort of a world-class train, or the familiarity and functionality of the very buses it was meant to replace.

“Listen, just hear me out for a minute: if we build a tunnel under the LRT we can run the buses through it.”

– @ALLCAPS

So successful is the city’s LRT rollout, forged through cooperation between the public sector and the profit-hungry corporate construction conglomerate, that city officials expect even further brilliance from Phase 2, when it opens in, like, a decade or something. (Remember how accurate the predictions of Phase 1 were?)

Yes, this \$4.6 billion vote of confidence from the taxpayer in the technical expertise of global corporate leaders in construction innovation is truly well-deserved.

Citizens can also admire the foresight of our politicians and business leaders, who have built transit where people do not yet live. This is unlike the previous LRT plan, which was to run along densely populated communities along Carling.

The change means that developers have been able to snap up lands at bargain prices – many of them public, some of them on Algonquin sacred sites – near or in Tunney’s Pasture, LeBreton Flats, Blair, Preston, and Bayview. This previously under-used land will re-enter the private market through the construction of luxury condos with high profit margin—err, *community benefits*.

These benevolent developers get to rightly capitalize on the astonishing increase in land value created through this public infrastructure investment. Once an appropriate amount is sequestered in offshore accounts, the remaining benefits will inevitably trickle down to the public — eventually — a product of our developer-friendly political climate.

At the end of the day, I think we can all agree on one thing: that, just as OC Transpo boss John Manconi promised, they are definitely making sure “taxpayers get everything they are paying for.”

MASS CLIMATE STRIKE AND BRIDGEBLOCK

The fight for climate action continues

WHY DON'T CANADIANS REVOLT?



Climate Strike Ottawa. Photos: Canute Planthara



XR Ottawa Bridgeout. Photo: Adam Ashby Gibbard

Sophie Price

The September 20-27 global climate actions brought more than 7.6 million people to the streets to fight for climate action. This makes the action the biggest climate mobilisation in history. In Ottawa alone, estimates pegged the crowd size at over 10,000 marchers, who filled the streets on September 27.

Ottawa protesters met at Confederation Park at 11:30, before beginning a march that ended at Parliament Hill, where a series of speeches and performances addressed the urgency of the climate situation. Thousands also converged on the Gatineau side of the river and marched over the Portage Bridge and down Wellington Street.

Strikes started on September 20, and spanned the globe, with Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Australia and the United States leading the way. Germany had the largest turnout on the 20th, with 1.4 million people attending protests. On September 27 New Zealand, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Chile, and Canada held their protests. Italy had the largest turnout with 1.5 million people hitting the streets.

The crowds at these marches have been largely made up of young people, as they say it is their future that will be the most affected. Many of the people at the strikes carried signs with slogans like "There is no planet B" and "Stop killing our future."

Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager who has become the de facto face of the movement, joined the strikes in Montreal, where it is estimated that more than 500,000 participated. At this action, Thunberg said "The people have spoken and we will continue to speak until our leaders listen and act," adding "We are the change and change is coming."

Christina McCarvell, a 19-year-old first-year Ryerson Student, attended and helped organize the Toronto strike. "This strike for me is super exciting because the numbers here are showing that there has been a real change in how

people are thinking about climate change," she told *The Leveller*.

"They are starting to see that it is an emergency and that they have the power to prevent catastrophe," McCarvell added. "I came from a smaller town, and seeing mass numbers is exciting and is motivating me to continue to push forward and demand action."

McCarvell also talked about the community that has been built through the struggle for climate action. "I've met some people at this strike who I have only known through online messages and video calls," she said, "and it's been so special for me because we are already a family."

Others are taking more militant actions. Not long after the September strikes, a different group called Extinction Rebellion began what they called an "International Rebellion." The group describes themselves as "an international movement that uses non-violent civil disobedience in an attempt to halt mass extinction and minimise the risk of social collapse."

On October 18, Ottawa Extinction Rebellion protesters gathered to block the Laurier bridge to draw attention to the urgent ecological crisis.

The group was pushing for Extinction Rebellion's three demands: for the government to tell the truth about the urgency of climate change, for them to cut greenhouse gases to net-zero by 2025, and for them to create a citizens' assembly to lead climate action.

The group also started at Confederation Park at 10am, then boldly marched into traffic in a coordinated action and took the bridge. Emmanuel Proulx, one of the organizers, said that the bridge action was a successful event as they had lots of media coverage to help raise awareness of the current crisis.

At the action's beginning, the group numbered a hundred or more. As the day went on, a steady trickle of people came through, with numbers dipping by the time things wrapped up at 5pm. Organiz-

ers had hoped for greater and more sustained numbers, but their efforts were also hampered by the weather, ironically – or appropriately, perhaps.

The action had originally been planned and promoted for a day earlier, September 17, but at the last minute organizers postponed it 24 hours because of all-day heavy rains. As organizers agonized over the decision to postpone, Lee Hunter said "I don't mind looking vulnerable to weather. That's actually kind of the point."

Original plans for the action also included an option where those who wanted to could stay into the evening, deliberately courting arrest in order to make a statement about the dire nature of the climate emergency and the need for serious action.

With the day turning out to be the coldest of the fall to that point and no sign the police would actually arrest anyone, organizers decided to wrap up on a decisive note. They rallied the remaining bridge-blockers for some final songs and a heartfelt message

from Hunter, who explained that he had made the difficult decision to skip his daughter's university graduation in order to be there. He felt he was on the bridge for her future, too.

Overall the group held the bridge for roughly six and a half hours, including the afternoon rush hour, with little resistance from police.

"No arrests were made," Proulx commented. "The police in Ottawa [were] extremely lenient and did not even hint [at] arresting us. It's not the first time we [have done] protests in front of the police and they have not reacted as we expected."

Proulx did make very clear however that it's not about getting arrested, it is more about "ringing the alarm," and showing that they are serious about fixing this climate crisis.

As *The Leveller* went to press, Extinction Rebellion organizer Amani Khalfan commented that it's safe to say "that more disruptive actions can be expected in the upcoming months, as well as lots of community-building and regenerative things."

In the face of inequalities and crisis, why can Canadians barely be bothered to protest? Why not revolt?

Ok, as we knock out another issue in the Leveller's temporary production zone (AKA a lucky editor's apartment), we're just spitballing, but here might be a few reasons:

- **The weather** – You can't fight the power in the streets if the people are inside hiding from the cold.
- **The rent is too damn high** – Who has time to revolt when you'll get fired for taking a day off work, then lose your home? (Revolution? In this economy?)
- **Can't teach an old dog new tricks** – Canada is a country without revolution. In fact, it's historically defined in fact by its refusal of revolution. The nation is descended from the colonists who refused to join the America revolt against an unaccountable Crown – who were then joined by the white upper-crust Loyalists who were running away from that revolution.
- **Reactionary history** – We have more experience putting down Indigenous rebellions, interning 'foreigners,' and persecuting Wobblies and Communists than we do revolting.
- **Anglo don't speak much French** – But maybe there's something we could learn from Québec's and France's long history of mass strikes and student mobilizations? There's some sort of cultural legacy of Anglo, WASPy Calvinist conformity that we need to jettison before we can really get anywhere.
- **Middle class values** – Most Canadians like to think of themselves as middle class, even if that doesn't align with their actual economic status. This still says a lot about our values and aspirations, however. How can Canadians revolt when most of us think money, politics and religion aren't appropriate topics for dinner table conversation?
- **We're all spread out** – Revolutionaries like Abdullah Öcalan and Mao Zedong had to wander the countryside for years, building support. None of them had to deal with a country as enormous as Canada, or as cold – yes, we keep coming back to this point. Building up a revolution takes a certain critical mass, which is hard to achieve with such a dispersed population. All that wilderness takes a toll on you, if the frostbite and beaver fever don't get you first.
- **It's unprecedented** – but despite this, and despite every previous point, we say "So what? Let's do something new."

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POURQUOI N'AVEZ-VOUS PAS ENTENDU PARLER D'AUTUMN PELTIER ?

La question climatique est aussi un enjeu féministe et antiraciste

Pauline Ou-halima,
Responsable des
communications de la FFQ

Cette lettre ouverte est parue sur ricochet.media le 26 septembre 2019.

Le 22 mars 2018, Autumn Peltier, une jeune activiste autochtone pour le climat, s'adressait du haut de ses 13 ans aux leaders mondiaux aux Nations Unies.

Son allocution portait sur la nécessité d'agir pour la protection de l'eau.

Texte original paru sur le site de la Fédération des Femmes du Québec.

C'est sans doute la première fois que vous lisez son nom. À l'inverse, vous avez très certainement entendu parler de l'allocution de Greta Thunberg aux Nations Unies le 23 septembre dernier. Pourquoi ce

fossé de représentation médiatique entre ces deux jeunes activistes qui font toutes deux un travail remarquable de conscientisation? Qu'est-ce que cela dit de la prégnance des structures racistes dans nos sociétés et en quoi la visibilité des premières est un enjeu primordial pour aborder correctement la question du changement climatique?

Décryptage.

Les batailles des femmes les plus impactées mises au second plan

Aujourd'hui au Canada, les peuples autochtones sont encore en lutte pour exiger un droit primaire, déjà gratuit pour les autres citoyen.n.e.s canadien.n.e.s, à savoir l'accès à l'eau potable.

Par exemple, la Première Nation Neskantaga au nord de l'Ontario est sous un avis de faire bouillir l'eau depuis plus de 20 ans. Parallèlement, les peuples autochtones sont aux premières loges dans la lutte contre l'extraction des gaz de schiste. Nul besoin de rappeler la bataille historique de l'ancienne chef d'Elsipogtog au Nouveau-Brunswick sur cette question. Vieille déjà de six ans, cette mobilisation avait marqué tant par la violence de la répression policière sur cette communauté autochtone que par l'hostilité des discours publics à l'égard de leur mobilisation.

Plus récemment cet été, ce sont les revendications des peuples autochtones du Brésil qui ont été mises sous silence dans la couverture médiatique

La question de la lutte contre le réchauffement climatique n'est pas un vase clos. Elle s'imprègne aussi des représentations sexistes et racistes de nos sociétés occidentales.

des nombreux incendies qui ont décimé l'Amazonie.

Il y a deux points communs dans les mobilisations des peuples autochtones sur ces enjeux climatiques: d'abord ces mobilisations sont - au mieux - invisibilisées dans l'espace public. Ensuite, ces enjeux touchent plus durement les femmes de ces communautés, dans la mesure où partout les femmes sont les plus touchées par les crises, que celles-ci soient économiques, climatiques ou politiques.

La question de la lutte contre le réchauffement climatique n'est pas un vase clos. Elle s'imprègne aussi des représentations sexistes et racistes de nos sociétés occidentales. À titre d'illustration, des recherches ont montré que 95 % des 60 milliards de dollars alloués annuellement à des organismes de bienfaisance étaient dirigés par des personnes blanches et 70 à 80 % de ces financements vont directement à des organismes de bienfaisance dirigés par des hommes. Cela laisse un tout petit pourcentage pour des organismes gérés par des femmes racisé.e.s, pourtant en première ligne des impacts du changement climatique.

Pourquoi la question climatique est un enjeu féministe ET antiraciste?

Cette invisibilisation ne vient pas de nulle part. Les deux tiers des entreprises minières dans le monde ont leur siège social au Canada. Elles participent à cette destruction catastrophique de l'environnement au détriment des populations autochtones et au bénéfice des plus privilégié.e.s de notre économie.

On remarque également que dans l'évolution des discours sur l'écologie, l'invisibi-

sation des premières concernées a pour effet, in fine, de garantir la concentration des privilèges au sein des populations déjà les plus privilégiées: au début des années 2000, le discours sur la nécessité d'adopter "des gestes quotidiens écologiques" a permis à des entreprises de redorer leur image autour du "bio" et de l'écoblanchiment.

Aujourd'hui, on cherche toujours à protéger les intérêts économiques des plus privilégiées en permettant aux grandes entreprises de continuer à adopter les mêmes modes de production (au détriment, encore une fois des peuples autochtones).

Enfin, Naomi Klein, dans une entrevue à Democracy Now a montré que les États occidentaux étaient déjà en train de s'adapter aux conséquences des changements climatiques, mais pas de la bonne manière. Des mesures sont en effet déjà mises en place pour fermer les frontières aux réfugié.e.s climatiques. Au lieu de répondre à l'injustice climatique, les États choisissent au contraire de la renforcer.

Si dès le départ, les voix des populations les plus impactées par la question climatique avaient été mises au centre de la table et écoutées, nous aurions avancé.e.s beaucoup plus rapidement sur la question de l'urgence climatique. Pour preuve, cela fait plusieurs décennies que des peuples autochtones parlaient déjà de la nécessité de changer nos moyens de production, mais ce n'est qu'aujourd'hui, par l'entremise de Greta Thunberg, que ce discours est porté auprès des plus hautes instances gouvernementales.

Heureusement Greta Thunberg est consciente de cet enjeu et a annoncé ouvrir ce vendredi la marche aux côtés de jeunes femmes autochtones.

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Over the past month, the news cycle has been dominated by the Kurds and the United States, the Kurds and Turkey, the Kurds and Syria – after years of the Kurds and the Islamic State. This time it’s because the United States abandoned the Kurds, leaving them at the mercy of Turkey, Syria, and Russia.

News media readers seem to always be hearing about the Kurds in conflict with others around them. And it’s strange how quick news outlets are to lump everyone in the northern Syria region of Rojava as “the Kurds.”

Clearly it would be too much to ask for these articles to refer to area as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES). Clearly it would be too much to ask their readers to think about terms like “polyethnic autonomous region,” “self-governing secular polity,” “decentralized direct democracy,” and “communalism rooted in feminism, ecology, and autonomy” – all terms that more accurately describe whatever the media means when today it says “northern Syria” or “the Kurds.”

After all, if readers were exposed to such terms they might have to rethink their assumptions about despotic Middle Eastern regimes, or about Israel being the only free and democratic society in the region. If readers had to think about terms like “democratic confederalism,” “green anarchism,” “libertarian socialism,” and “Rojava revolution” they might start questioning their own governments, the regimes under which they live, the horizon of what’s possible in politics.

Instead, the news media valiantly carries on publishing of explainer pieces inevitably titled “Who are the Kurds?” Here at *The Leveller*, we found five such articles dating back to the ’90s with the most casual of searches. We imagine Western newspapers have been working in this well-worn tradition going back to the days of the Ottoman Empire, at the very least.

Well, dear reader, this is not another one of those articles. We hope to produce something here much more original, informative, and provocative.

While the push to form an autonomous region has stemmed from the oppression of the Kurds, the broader goal of the Rojava revolution is to form an egalitarian and inclusive self-government that includes all the minorities in the region, whether they are native to the land or have been forced into it as a result of conflict.

In order to explain what has happened in northern Syria and how and why all the gains of the Rojava revolution are now threatened (to say nothing of the lives of the people of the region), we must – despite all previous protestations – begin with the Kurds. (But that won’t be all.)

TURKEY & SYRIA VS. THE KURDS

The Kurds’ current predicament can be traced back to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Kurdistan, a nation that dates back in various forms to at least the 3rd century, had been subordinated by the Ottoman Empire, but was denied nationhood as this empire was split up in the wake of the war.

While the 1920 the Treaty of Sèvres included provisions for a Kurdish state, the firestorm kicked off in Turkey by the treaty swept Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s Turkish National Movement to power on the strength of their fierce rejection of the treaty’s provisions. This rejection led directly to the Turkish War of Independence, which saw Atatürk’s forces defeat a portion of the WWI Allies who had defeated the Ottoman Empire. In the wake of Atatürk’s victory, the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which denied a Kurdish state, was signed.

So, ever since the Treaty of Lausanne and the French Mandate over Syria in 1923, the Kurds have received similar treatment – not great, to put it mildly – from the various state governments they ended up under. Kurds have been subject to multiple genocides by multiple state actors and responded with multiple rebellions and guerrilla conflicts.

After the Treaty of Lausanne left the Kurds divided, Turkey began severe Turkification processes. They banned the

Kurdish language, making it illegal to write, speak or sing in the language. The government further strove to strip Kurdish identity away, calling Kurds ‘Mountain Turks’ and promoting resettlement in order to dilute the Kurdish population. It was illegal to even use the words Kurds, Kurdish, or Kurdistan.

Meanwhile, the Syrian government stripped many Kurds of their citizenship in 1962, leaving them trapped and stateless. They were severely discriminated against, with their language and culture delegitimized by the lack of citizenship rights.

THE KURDISTAN WORKERS’ PARTY (PKK)

This systematic marginalization and oppression led to the formation of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in 1978 by a group of students led by Abdullah Öcalan.

Öcalan began as a revolutionary socialist and a Kurdish nationalist, essentially in the familiar mould of a Marxist-Leninist guerilla leader. Yet his thought and the goals of the PKK have significantly evolved since the ’70s, especially after his imprisonment in 1999. Öcalan was decisively influenced by green anarchism, feminism, and in particular the communalism or revolutionary municipalism of Murray Bookchin – an American writer and political philosopher.

This has meant that the PKK has abandoned the goal of forming a nation-state in favour of forming an autonomous and multi-ethnic network of administrative councils that are elected by neighbourhood communes – democratic confederalism.

Within this system, individuals have property usage rights, but the commune makes decisions about how to dispose of it and meet the economic needs of the group. Öcalan has described democratic confederalism as “democracy without the State,” and a “democratic, ecological, gender-liberated society.”

The PKK is classified as a terrorist organization by Turkey and a number of its allies, including the EU and its member states and fellow-NATO countries like US, UK, and Canada. The UN does not consider it a terror organization; neither do a range of nations including Russia, China, Switzerland, Brazil, and India.

The PKK considers the Turkish regime of Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) to be fascist, believes it wants to establish a military dictatorship, and vowed to overthrow it in 2016 in a joint statement with other socialist organizations in Turkey.

While the PKK started in Turkey, it has also operated in Syria, which led to the formation of its Rojavan equivalent, the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The PYD’s program is also the democratic confederalism of Öcalan and the PKK.

ROJAVA, OR THE AUTONOMOUS ADMINISTRATION OF NORTH AND EAST SYRIA (NES)

Northern Syria has been referred to with different names, but is most commonly known as Rojava, meaning “west” in Kurdish. This refers to the fact that this territory forms the (south)western portion of Kurdistan.

Rojava gained its status as a de-facto autonomous region after the Syrian government withdrew from the region in 2012 in the midst of the civil war and the near-collapse of Assad’s regime. Rojava’s forces steadily gained control over a large portion of northern Syria over the course of the ongoing civil war and the subsequent coalition war against the Islamic State (IS).

From the chaos of the civil war, the Rojava revolution led to the communion of the predominantly Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) with other Arab, Assyrian and Turkmen groups in the region. Together they formed a constitution for the de-facto autonomous region, which eventually went by the name of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (NES).

This federation created a system of self-governance, and worked to implement Öcalan’s democratic confederalism, pluralistic tolerance, and gender equality. With a

diverse population and strong female leadership, Rojava’s ideals are anchored in grassroots democracy, secularism, gender equality, sustainability, tolerance and diversity.

These ideals, birthed from oppression and ethnic cleansing, stand staunchly against the mindset of the governments in the region, which are built on ethno-nationalism, religious conservatism, and an authoritarian personality cult. Its presence and initial success poses an implicit threat to neighboring governments, simply by existing.

THE PEOPLE’S PROTECTION UNIT (YPG), THE WOMEN’S PROTECTION UNITS (YPJ), AND THE SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES (SDF)

There are a number of militias who have fought to preserve the Rojava autonomy. The YPG is a militia predominantly run by northern Syrian Kurds. They were established by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) to protect Kurdish enclaves when the Syrian civil war was still green.

They had their first big victory in Kobani and, since then, the YPG has grown and formed alliances with other militias fighting to protect their regions from separate forces. They have often been lumped in with the PKK and are considered a terrorist organization by Turkey.

The YPG’s female brigade, the YPJ, was founded in 2013 as a female-only organization. This is in keeping with the democratic confederalism’s feminism, which insists on women’s full participation in the Rojava revolution – and the use of woman-only spaces to keep traditional patriarchy from sabotaging gender equality.

The participation of women has been paramount to the strength of the militia. They were heavily involved in Raqqa, Afrin and Tabqa.

ISIL fighters were terrified of YPJ fighters, since they believed that they would be denied a martyr’s place in heaven if they were killed by a woman. Before attacking ISIL positions, YPJ fighters would identify themselves through distinctive battle cries, as an act of psychological warfare that ensured ISIL fighters knew they were facing an army of women who were about to send them to hell.

As Rojavan autonomy became a reality, the PKK has worked closely with YPG and the YPJ in the front lines of the war against IS and were key ground forces in the Siege of Kobani. The PKK and YPG militia together pushed out IS jihadists and retook most of northern Syria, driving them out of key regions like Kobani, Raqqa and Manbij.

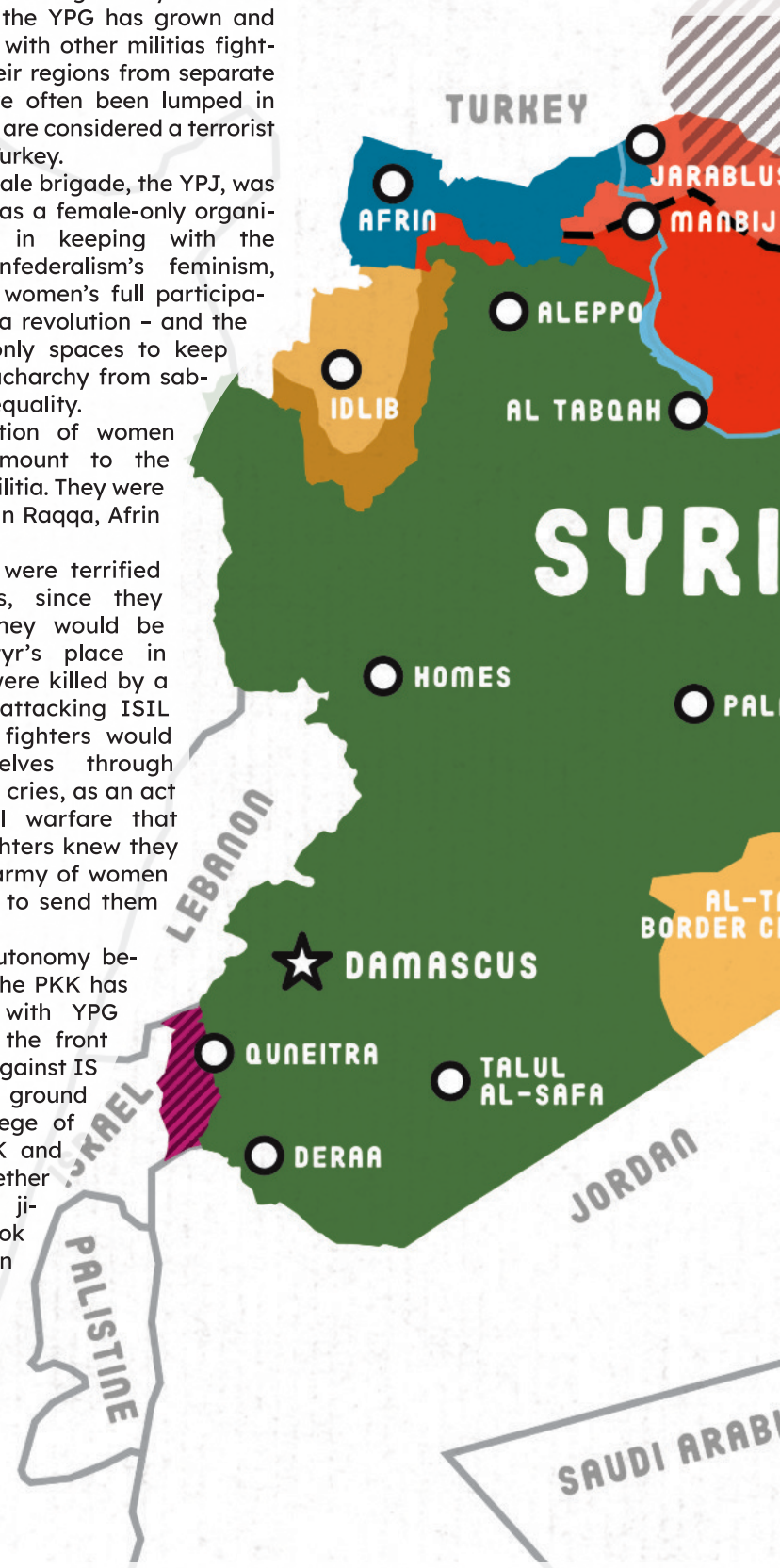
Finally, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was created in 2015 to coordinate all the militias cooperating in Rojava against the IS. Signatories included the YPG and YPJ, as well as the Assyrian Syriac Military Council and Arab Al-Sanadid Forces from the Jazira region, the Syrian rebel factions of Free Syrian Army from the Euphrates region, and the Army of Revolutionaries from the Manbij region.

The SDF is also bolstered by smaller Armenian, Turkmen and Chechen forces in their respective regions. They are the official military wing of the NES.

These diverse yet coordinated armed forces have safeguarded the multi-ethnic Rojavan experiment, fighting off the jihadists Islamic State and safeguarding minorities.

Rojava has been a refuge for many

WHO WHAT NOW AN ATYPICAL BY MARIYA M



marginalized minorities fleeing from the civil war, or from oppressive governments. The area is home to many ethnic groups, with Kurds and Arabs forming the largest groups, then Assyrians who are native to the Jazira Region, Turkmen who are native to the Euphrates and Afrin region, and smaller minorities of Armenians and Chechens.

The Armenians and Assyrians have been subjected to Ottoman genocide and the violent persecution by its successor Turkish state, while the Chechens have been subjected to Soviet genocide and violent persecution by its Russian successor state.

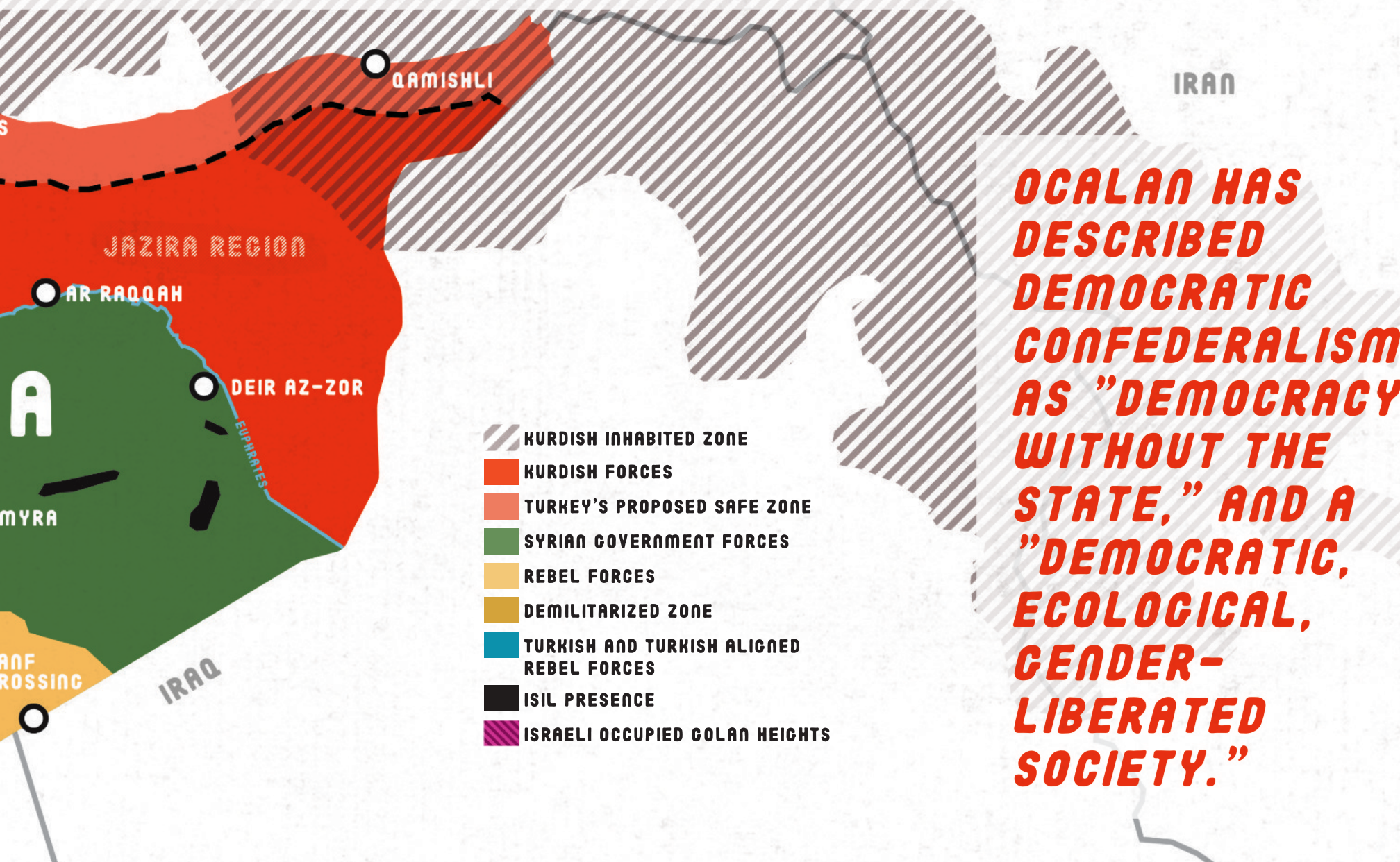
In 2014 the Rojavan forces intervened and broke an ISIL siege on 40,000 Yazidis refugees in the Sinjar mountains of northwestern Iraq. The Yazidis, an ethnic and religious minority with a long history of

WHAT ARE THE KURDS? WHAT'S HAPPENING IN NORTHERN SYRIA?

A GUIDE TO THE ROJAVA REVOLUTION AND ITS ENEMIES

UBREEN AND TIM KITZ

GRAPHIC BY ADAM ASHBY GIBBARD



persecution, were fleeing genocide at the hands of ISIL. Rojavan forces established a safe corridor for an estimated 35,000 Yazidi to escape into Syria.

Having helped defeat IS, the NES now finds itself fighting a battle on two fronts after being deserted by American troops. Surrounded by Turkish and Syrian government forces, they find themselves caught between a rock and a hard space.

WHERE THEY STAND TODAY

Due to their close ties to the PKK and heavy inspiration from Öcalan's ideals, the SDF have been constantly under fire from Turkey. To President Erdoğan, the PKK, YPG and IS are terrorists that must be eradicated.

But it goes deeper than that. The successful establishment of NES would mean an autonomous state for the Kurds, something that Erdoğan cannot stand. That coupled with his animosity towards Bashar al-Assad, has led to Turkey's invasion and occupation of NES land in the north of Syria. After the United States decided to withdraw, Turkey has amped up its attacks on SDF controlled regions.

The United States, meanwhile, is perfectly comfortable abandoning military allies whenever it becomes convenient.

During the Obama administration, the American military provided training, equipment, and crucial air support during the war against the Islamic State, especially during the siege of Kobani. Officially, the United States military was only present to fight the IS and provide support to militias on the ground. The US military refused to bring Assad's regime in their sights, claiming IS as their sole target - much to the dismay of Turkey, who tacitly supported IS, probably in hopes they would destroy Rojava, the SDF, and Turkey's Kurdish problem.

The presence of the United States deterred Turkey from attacking SDF-held enclaves during the war. Yet if Erdoğan ever had a natural ally, it is Trump. In fact, Trump probably admires the Turkish strongman.

They are both anti-democratic populists, with a corrupt and corporation-

friendly governance. They both cultivate a macho cult of personality and an authoritarian and fear-mongering leadership style. They both dream of overwhelming state power that crushes dissent and diversity - and an ethno-nationalist renewal that demands they violently exclude anyone outside their narrow definitions of their in-group.

Erdoğan is just so much farther along in his program than Trump. By pulling out of the area, then slapping a few token sanctions on Erdoğan, then granting Turkey the territory they would have had to fight for through a "ceasefire" that didn't even consult the Kurds (how do you unilaterally start a ceasefire and give away land that isn't yours?), Trump has done well by his Turkish pal.

What is ironic is that Assad and Putin are cut from exactly same leadership cloth as Erdoğan and Trump. Their program is the same - to shore up the power of their authoritarian ethno-state.

The only thing that gives NES any hope is that for the moment, the national interests of all these demagogic madmen do not align.

Assad wants to reassert his authority over Syria. If he can incorporate NES back into his state, he wins at little cost. Otherwise, he may work to violently destroy it. The establishment of a successful democratic and autonomous state within Syria previous territory has the

potential to destabilize Assad's authoritarian government. The NES also controls some coveted oil producing regions in northern Syria that Assad wants back.

Meanwhile, Putin's goal is always to counter US power wherever he can.

During the Syrian civil war and the war against IS, Russia propped up the Assad regime, probably saving it from toppling. They formed a coalition of authoritarians with Syria and Iran to fight against IS.

Russia has positioned itself as a peace-keeping negotiator, having met with both Erdoğan and Assad, to discuss the most beneficial course of action. Beneficial for Russia at the very least. Anything that fosters their power and influence in the region is a win for Putin.

Needing immediate protection from Turkey, the SDF have invited Assad's troops to help at the border. However, inviting these troops into their region opens the NES up to pressure from Assad, when he inevitably tries to take back control of the region.

The NES finds itself in a tight spot. The Rojava revolution that makes our most progressive Western politics look old-fashioned and reactionary looks to be foundering, its light in danger of extinguishment by authoritarian enemies whose political projects works aggressively to roll back democracy and any achieved progress against racism and sexism.

Let's do what we can to hold their light aloft.

OPIRG CARLETON

WHO ARE WE?

OPIRG CARLETON (ONTARIO PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP) IS A STUDENT-LED, STUDENT-FUNDED NON-PROFIT BASED AT CARLETON UNIVERSITY. WE AIM TO **RESEARCH, EDUCATE AND PROVIDE ACTION ON SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE** USING A NON-HIERARCHICAL AND CONSENSUS-BASED SPACE FOR STUDENTS TO ORGANIZE.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORKING GROUP OPEN HOUSE

Tuesday, November 19 at 6 PM - UC 326

Learn more about our working groups and how you can be a part of creating change.

ROUNDTABLE TALKS

Every month in UC 326, dates and times TBD

Trying to find us?

Go to Stairwell D on the 2nd or 4th Floor UC
- On 2nd Floor: In front of the Multifaith Centre
- On 4th Floor: In front of the CUSA Offices
Walk up/down the stairs to the hallway on the platform to reach Unicentre 326

OUR DEMOCRACY IS BROKEN

The Case for Electoral Reform Before it's Too Late

Adam Ashby Gibbard

WE THE PEOPLE?

WE SUCK

We have a broken, backwards, garbage pile of a democracy. It's only really been allowed to continue out of sheer inertia, but that's no reason to let this nonsense continue.

How backwards do we have to be that I have to write an article explaining why a party with 39.5% of the popular vote gets 100% of the power? Those were the numbers in 2015 – what was supposed to be the last election under the first-past-the-post system. This kind of distortion and electoral misrepresentation is commonplace in our system; other such false majorities have happened 12 times in the past century.

We haven't fared much better this election, with the Liberals taking 46% of the seats with 33% of the popular vote. That's arguably a bit better, but still a funhouse-mirror level of distortion.

WASTED VOTES. STRATEGIC VOTING & VOTER APATHY

Our political system is completely broken. This election, about 9.2 million out of 18.1 million votes didn't elect anyone. That's 51% of all votes wasted. Of the 338 seats, only 123 were won with over 50% of the vote, the average winning seat only getting 48.9% of the vote.

That's a majority of voters in Canada not having their votes count for anything. The Liberal win in the 2015 election was almost exactly the same, with 9 million out of 17.5 million (51%) votes wasted.

Popular vote numbers are also even further distorted by strategic voting. It was recently reported that 1 in 3 voters voted strategically. Who would they have voted for otherwise? How different would this election outcome have been under a more proportional system?

Who knows? We have no idea what the real collective opinion of Canadians is – even those who voted! That's to say nothing of the 8.8 million who don't bother to vote – who presumably and rightly felt that voting would do them no good and have no effect on their lives. Not to mention the 3.8 million who can't even vote because they are only permanent residents.

Every election, media pundits put the popular vote up next to the seat count, like some kind of sick reminder on how bad we are at elections. We live in a society with so many rules, laws, and regulations – a minor can't drink, but a political party can take control of the entire country with a minority. You would hope standards for governing the country met higher standards than ineffectually micro-managing teens' behaviour.

People often forget that our democratic government is our current official way, as a society, to organize ourselves and improve our lives through collective cooperation. We use elections as the *sole* direct means of constructing a group or representatives from society to go forth and run things on our behalf. Apart from protest and contacting your Member of Parliament, voting is also our only means of keeping these representatives to account.

Our broken democracy also inherently creates a system where the only real check on majority rule – usually a false majority, see above – comes through elections. Yes, we have a Senate, but its well-known as an unelected and partisan place of lukewarm second thought.

Unlike the U.S., with its three-tiered federal republic, we instead allow for the tyranny of the majority over minority political views. The Canadian Prime Minister gets to act like an elected dictator, effectively controlling the executive, legislative, and (through nominations) judicial branches of government.

Even the people that *are* elected as opposition can do little else apart from yelling, making statements to the media, and positioning themselves for the next election.

If the way we elect our government so heavily distorts the end result, you would think someone would have changed it by now. Back in 1867, during the formation of Canada, it was decided that Canada would use the British system of elections “until the Parliament of Canada otherwise provides.”

It's been over 150 years and no one's bothered to change a thing! We're still trying to solve a 21st century problem with 17th century governance – with systems that were created in response to the crises and revolutions of the 1600s.

We often act like our current system is the final form of governance, the definitive and only kind of democracy that's possible, but that's patently absurd. Future generations – if humanity makes it that far – will undoubtedly look back at our current 'democracy' with the same kind of contempt we have for the medieval Divine Right of Kings.

FUN FACT: the only countries in the world that use first-past-the-post are ex-British colonies. Thanks, England. The rest of the functioning democracies of the world use a number of other systems, but all of them at least create a better representation of people's opinions.

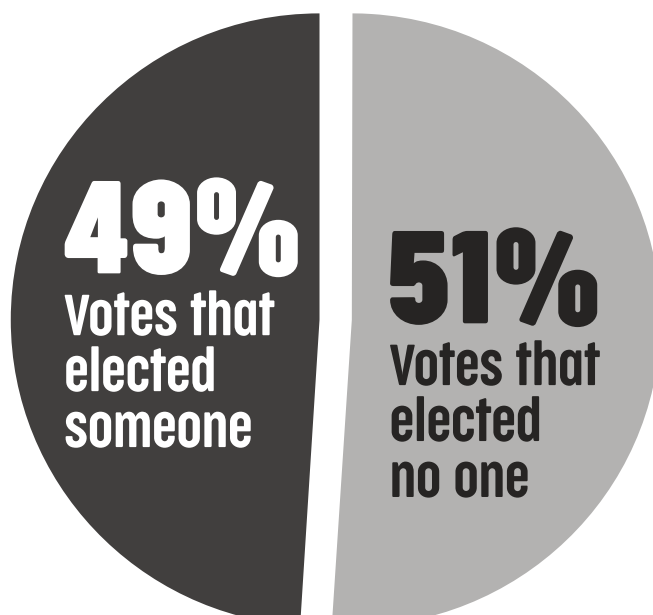
RIGHT TO VOTE

The Canadian Constitution says that “Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in



Illustration: Adam Ashby Gibbard

WASTED VOTES FOR ELXN43



Source: Elections Canada

an election.” What does mean? Do citizens only get to *perform* the act of voting, or do they get to have their vote count for something?

You would think that an electoral system that can essentially throw 51% of people's votes in a burning oil drum would have been deemed an infringement on our constitutional rights at some point. Perfect proportional representation isn't exactly possible, but anything is better than this.

We should at least consider giving everyone an equal voice and the freedom to vote how they like without concern for split votes. Everyone should possess all the rights necessary to involve themselves in elections and have their vote count towards the final result.

It's unlikely that Canada would ever see a majority with a more proportional system because of the real diversity of politics in the country. Somehow, our diversity is touted in nationalistic rhetoric as one of our great strengths, while simultaneously rejected because governments can't get anything done when run as minorities.

This becomes especially important when you consider the major pressing issues currently confronting our society: growing inequality and the centralization of wealth, the rise of right-wing nationalism and – most dire of all – climate change.

It might seem like a cause for alarm that the Conservatives 'won' the popular vote in this election – barely. Yet the Conservatives' 34.4% of the vote is dwarfed by the 63.2% of the vote that went to progressive parties.

It's just that the right-wing is currently united behind one party in Canada – the thankfully irrelevant People's Party notwithstanding. This unity was only achieved after years of wandering in the political wilderness under competing iterations of the Progressive Conservative, Reform, and Canadian Alliance banners.

In reality, the political views of the whole are much more progressive than our elections make us out – it's just that first-past-the-post mutes this. It makes you wonder how much progress we've missed out on because of our electoral system.

There's increased talk of a need for new politics to tackle the plethora of incoming climate-based threats to human life. What options are we left with if we don't have a system of democracy that gives the growing voice of people who are rightfully concerned about this the ability to elect people and parties who have real solutions?

SOLUTIONS?

It's not all doom and gloom. Electoral fatigue is definitely setting in. The broken promises of the last government and the minority we have now lends well to electoral reform. A case in British Columbia is challenging the constitutionality of first-past-the-post, and other countries have already taken the steps we need to take.

But what proportional voting system should we use? That depends on who you are and what you believe and, honestly, what party you want to benefit the most from electoral reform.

The Liberals, who realize that they are the safety vote of many, want ranked ballots, where you vote for your first, second, and third choices. The votes are tallied up, and if no party gets over 50%, the last-place candidate is dropped and everyone who voted for them has their vote dispersed to other candidates based on their second choice, and so on.

This would be a titch better than what we have now, but still a pretty cruddy system that tends to favour the Liberals winning extra seats. They couldn't convince anyone else that this obviously bad idea was actually a good one and were able to resist the urge to ram it through anyway.

None of the other options have really garnered expert agreement on what constitutes the 'best' system, as combining individual opinions into a group opinion is an inexact process. (In the 80s, an American legal scholar published a call for the winning ballot to be drawn in a lottery; others have proposed turning government into something like jury duty for which you can get randomly selected.)

Opposition parties naturally see different strengths in each of the systems.

The NDP and Greens have favoured a mixed-member proportional system that would create proportionality through a combination of local first-past-the-post seats and proportional party seats.

The Conservatives have never really ever favoured a specific system, though that may change as the power-hungry Andrew Scheer realizes he was just screwed out of 24 Sussex by the FPTP system.

Critics say that, among other things, this might cause perpetual minority governments, as is common in more proportional systems in other countries. People may not like minority governments, thinking that they are ineffectual, but that says more about how politics is conducted in Canada than how it is formed. I think we could all do better with a more cooperative, compromising, and thoughtful government. One that actually uses the diversity of Canadians to its advantage rather than governing in spite of it.

In the end, opinions shouldn't matter when our electoral system is restricting people's rights. We shouldn't debate people's right to be enfranchised, have their vote count, and participate in our democracy – any more than we should debate the existence of climate change or women's rights to bodily autonomy.

The goal of electoral reform should be finding a way to make sure the largest majority of voters possible can participate in our democracy to the fullest and that all *political* opinions have a voice and an impact in the formation of our government.

At the beginning of this era, mass culture displaced folk cultures. All the ways people entertained themselves and socialized were shifted, so they came to be built around the purchase of products – concerts instead of ceilidhs, movies instead of story-telling, bars and restaurants instead of kitchen tables.

There was something both soothing and entertaining about these new products. The easy pleasures of consumerism make the monotony of our hours as wage-slaves bearable. Buying something came to define all social and leisure experiences, consumerism came to drive the economy, and people’s identities became defined by their choices as consumers.

Subculture and the Illusion of Escape

After all, capitalism doesn’t care if you’re a punk or a jock, as long as you keep buying its products. New artistic movements and signifiers of rebellion can actually be used as shiny new wrappers to sell you the same old shit.

This can be seen in Neo’s disenchantment with the cyberpunk culture of the film. What once felt transgressive and liberating has become mundane and alienating.

Ultimately, this is because of consumer culture’s maturation. Subcultures based on resistance to mass culture became incubators for next year’s new styles and products.

This was never an appropriation of pure artistry by dirty capitalism. Because these arty subcultures still defined themselves by what they bought (and what they didn’t – Bauhaus not Bono, the Meat Puppets not Madonna), they could only feed and never escape capitalism.

The highest thing one could aspire to become in this context was a cultural producer, not simply a passive consumer.

‘Making it’ in the world of ’80s punk, indie, and DIY culture meant becoming a successful small business owner – leading a band, operating a record label, owning an alternative shop of some sort.

It had also become easy for subcultures to function like the avant-garde of consumerism because by this time mass culture had shifted from fostering conformism to individualism. In late stage capitalism, consumerism becomes driven by a desire for distinction – by customization, by consumer choice, by catering to the customer.

In the scifi opening of *The Matrix*, Neo is not only involved in some sort of futuristic cyberpunk/gothic raver subculture. He’s also a kind of digital drug dealer, delivering custom highs to scenesters in search of hedonistic and hallucinogenic escape. (Drug addicts, of course, represent the ultimate consumers – those who consume themselves to death.)

There must have been a time when Neo found it exciting and invigorating to participate in this scene; once upon a time, the drugs helped him fly too. But the experience has become as hollow and alienating as Neo’s life as a wage slave.

Ultimately the individualism of consumerism is empty and hollow. It only offers ‘pseudo-individuation,’ as Adorno put it. Pseudo-individuation “endows cultural mass production with the halo of free choice,” Adorno said, on an open market that demands pre-digested standardization.

Life then becomes a multiple-choice questionnaire you can’t refuse to answer – a ballot that you can’t mark ‘none of the above,’ or hand back empty. (But can you overturn the table?)

You might have hundreds of choices in what to buy, but you don’t have the choice to not buy. You cannot buy out of the system or buy your way out of the system.

Similarly, attempts to miti-



gate the devastating effects of capitalism through consumer choice – fair trade knickknacks, certified organic soy milk – founder on their contradictions. Bullshit gifts for consumeristic holidays are still junk shipped from far away; soy is still cultivated in mass monocultures that destroy topsoil and biodiversity. Ethical consumerism is an oxymoron.

The Digital Escape from Capitalism

Dear reader, I have to insist that Neo knows this intuitively, somehow. He flees from the waking world of work and recreation, taking refuge in one thing only – the half-lit, dream-like world of hacker culture – searching, unable to sleep, questing desperately for a way out of the dead-end of capitalistic production and consumerism.

Neo is positive his computerized explorations somehow hold the key, or at least clue.

And Neo is right. The answer finds him. But then something very strange happens.

Once Neo is freed by Trinity, Morpheus, and the rest of their comrades, they all... plug right back into the Matrix!

But now they are conscious, free actors. They are hackers – again, just in a godlike way.

One some level, the Matrix of the film is simply the internet. And the movie gives us Hollywood’s most beautiful and glamorous vision of what internet hacking could be – the hacker as a stylish, rebellious action hero, triumphing over the Agents, who are soul-less and standardized digital police.

At the time, who could blame the Wachowskis for this

depiction? By the late ’90s, everyone knew the internet was magic.

Ok, sure, this was capitalist hype. It was age-old technological utopianism trotted out one more time to sell products: personal computers and modems, mousepads and floppy disks. But it was something more too.

Though it depended on and developed the technological infrastructure of the capitalist economy, the internet seemed to escape from the logic of capitalism in so many ways.

The structure of the network itself was profoundly anarchic and communist, one might say – it was web that was radically decentralized, egalitarian, distributed, shared. All of the intellectual property, the code and protocols that underlay the internet were given away freely. The programmers who created the internet were often hackers themselves, with anarchic and communitarian ideals, who spoke explicitly of creating a digital world without laws and borders.

The internet then hit mass culture as a network where *everything* was given away freely.

The computer and phone company may have charged you to connect to the network, but *the network itself was free*. It belonged to everyone and no one.

Websites were free! People made them for nothing, shared them for nothing – just gave away information and services they produced, the product of their time, effort, and knowledge.

This is why joining internet culture seemed so liberating, so exhilarating. It was tremen-

dously modern – but it also electrifyingly non-capitalistic, by and large.

The internet also transformed people’s relationship to mass culture. If you weren’t there, it is difficult to capture how profoundly passive cultural life was in the early ’90s, before the internet was popularized.

The definitive experience of the time was flipping through cable tv, bored out of your mind, looking for something, you didn’t know what. (The dominant experience was to be Neo at the beginning of *The Matrix*.) Dozens if not hundreds of channels were at your fingertips, but they all sold the same dreary experience of completely passive consumption.

The internet changed this forever. It revolutionized the way people experienced mass culture. Suddenly everyone could become an active content producer. Everyone could react to other producers and their products.

Even if your cultural production was built around capitalistic products – if you made fansites and participated in forums dedicated to corporate cultural properties – you could be active and engaged with these cultural products in a way that was never before possible. You could build a sense of community and connection with others who also appreciated these properties, no matter how obscure they were, no matter how distant other fans were.

Experiences previously only available – with great effort, a huge time investment, and connections to the right scene – to indie musicians and zine makers became easily available to everyone.

These were giddy and empowering times. And the creation of blogging platforms and social media supercharged this invigorating dynamic. After all, the internet may have democratized cultural production, but you still had to be a bit of a geek to set up and code your own website. But all you needed to operate a blog or a social media account was the ability to type.

It was like the net suddenly granted everyone superpowers.

The Colonization of the Anarchist Internet

Yet, gradually, the insidious grey logic of capitalism penetrated every corner of this digital realm. It was halting, but capitalism colonized not just the infrastructure of the internet, but the content.

Of course, capitalism had experience monetizing free content by this time. Radio had, in the end, not doomed but driven the record industry. Network television gave away free content all day long – and dramatically accelerated the consumer economy through advertising, both overtly and covertly. (Outside of the commercials, the programs also sold products, lifestyle, and ideologies that enforced and encouraged consumerism.)

Everyone knew the answer to monetizing content was advertising – even if it was difficult to generate significant revenue from it on the internet, especially in the early days. Yet the tech start-ups

that survived cycles of boom and bust replaced the enthusiastic amateurs who had made all the internet’s early sites.

These companies weren’t doing it for the love of it, or the joy of sharing information and building community, no matter what their corporate propaganda told you. No, they were selling something – but what exactly?

Well, the internet’s model couldn’t be changed, no matter how many companies hung themselves from the ramparts of paywalls. Content and services still had to be offered for free. What was being sold?

You were. When content is free, *the product is you*. Content providers sell your attention to advertisers. This is the attention economy.

The development of the digital attention economy created vast wealth for the new tech titans. Google, Facebook, Twitter, and the like provided addictive, sticky content and free, powerful services and captured the attention of billions of people – and attendant advertising dollars.

Yet Shoshana Zuboff argues that attention and advertising is no longer what is driving our economy.

From Attention to Surveillance

Remember when the creepiest thing Google did was scan your email to run a few ads at the top of your inbox? When did they stop?

Now they don’t even bother. They found a far more powerful and efficient way to make money off of you.

Keep in mind that back in the “don’t be evil” days of Google innocent youth, it’s business model rested on its stellar search engine, followed by its useful email service.


As it operated these services, trying to capture user’s attention so it could sell them to advertisers, the company found that it collected a surplus of user data. What could it do with this vast treasure trove of useless data? It began to feed it into the algorithms that powered its search engine, using it to improve the search engine, to teach the algorithms’ artificial intelligence – with astonishing results.

Now, knowledge exists to be turned into profit in the twisted world of these tech titans. This data and the artificial intelligence it created clearly represented vast oceans of knowledge – and a perpetual motion machine for generations oceans more. How could it monetize this stream of data? How could it use this artificial intelligence to produce wealth?

Google pioneered a new model in economic production, leading the charge – closely followed by Facebook and a long line of imitators that are still playing catch-up – from the attention economy to surveillance capitalism.

In this model, these digital despots Hoover up every possible bit (and byte) of s behavioural data it can possibly extract from its users. This data is fed into the algorithms that *develop artificial intelligence, generate predictions, and enable behavioural modification*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



ANIMAL DEFENCE LEAGUE OF CANADA

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HAVE CLIMATE ANXIETY? TRY WRITING A LETTER TO THE LAND

Local youth group to host BIPOC-centered writing workshop and showcase in November

Ottawa RISE

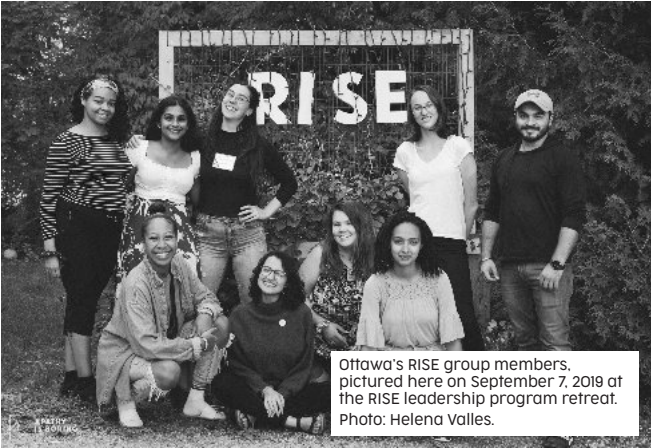
Climate change is on people’s minds, but it can also be a difficult conversation to take part in. So the Letters to the Land program will hold space and help young people from marginalized communities articulate their relationship to the land and care for it.

Letters to the Land is a project created and led by youth working together in Ottawa RISE. RISE is a youth leadership program run by Apathy is Boring, a national organization that helps young people get involved with their communities.

Through a writing workshop and showcase, the project aims to centre BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) experiences of climate change. Letters to the Land hopes to connect youth who may be feeling overwhelmed by climate anxiety and provide a space for authentic and critical reflections on their relationship to land.

After all, climate anxiety is easy to develop in the face of all these issues. This is especially true for BIPOC communities, who experience climate change in distinct ways.

Indigenous people and people of colour continue to bear the largest burden of climate change, susceptible as they are to the continued



destruction of their lands and communities in the name of economic development, the disproportionate effects of environmental destruction (such as water pollution), and the delegitimization of ancestral knowledge across the globe.

There is a wealth of ancestral and intergenerational teachings within BIPOC communities that inherently recognize the need to heal broken relationships to the land. But environmental racism and other forms of erasure continue to push these communities to the margins, leaving many BIPOC stories and perspectives neglected and talked over in mainstream climate conversations.

Letters to the Land aims, then, to shift the way we talk about climate change and climate anxiety. The first part of

the project is a writing workshop, which is a closed space for BIPOC. Participants will write personal letters addressed to a land each individual feels drawn to, whether that is in Canada or abroad. The letters and exercises throughout the workshop will allow participants to explore and express their feelings around climate anxiety and land disconnection.

The second part of the project is a public showcase, where individuals can choose to share their letters with an open audience. The aim of the showcase is to engage the larger Ottawa community in a new conversation – one that prioritizes healing, reconnection, and recovery of knowledge.

The project will also feature letters on their Instagram account, @letterstotheland. These can be letters created in

the workshop or – if anyone is unable to attend but still wishes to share – submitted online. People are also encouraged to submit a photo of the land they’re addressing; submissions can be sent to letterstotheland613@gmail.com.

While exact dates have yet to be set, the Letters to the Land writing workshop will run the week of November 11-15 and the showcase will be held at the end of the month. Anyone interested can register online.

Below are some of the Ottawa RISE members’ own letters to the land.

Dear land,
Where to begin, where to begin? It's hard to start something like this because, honestly, how can I as one individual apologize for how badly things have gotten screwed up for you?

For as long as I have been alive and so much longer before me, you have been poisoned by societies who do not care for you as they should. You, who have always given us so much – so much greenery, so much water; so much rich soil and nutrients, so much air, so much LIFE and so much LOVE.

The more time I spend understanding and appreciating my indigeneity, the more time I get to understand and appreciate you. Everything we are, everything we get to be is because of the earth we come from, and the earth we one day return to. You give us the biggest gift we could ask for – life. And we take that completely for granted.

Truthfully, there's nothing I can say that's going to make up for it all. All the pain inflicted on you, our beautiful mother earth – no apology could ever make up for that. But what I can do is change my own behaviour.

From now on I'll remind myself even more often to make time to appreciate all that you are around me. The sound and feel of the wind on these crisp fall days. The first snowfall of the season, which will undoubtedly come soon. The way the leaves are crunching under my feet when I play outside with the kiddos I work with. All those beautiful days of spring that will come after a cold winter, promising sun, flowers and warm spring showers.

I'll put more effort into reducing my waste, reducing my cheap consumption and most importantly, I'll stand loudly and proudly for you. I will continue to engage with folks about the pain you're in. I'll remind them and inform them of all they can do to support your healing. For without you, we are nothing.
With all my thanks, regrets, and abundance of love,
Alexia

Dearest Land,
I have heard your call. In the North I hear and feel your beating heart and spirit. I have had a hard time hearing it anywhere else.

You have called to me as you have called to others. You have beckoned me to action when you rustle the wind through the leaves over my head, when you gently lap the water on the shore by my feet. I have felt you when you have shone the sun on my skin and when you have let soft rain drip and patter on my head. You call me to listen and to advocate for you. I am ready to rise up.

I apologize for taking so long to take action, but your gentle and patient reminders have stuck with me always. Though you weren't always on my mind, you were always in my heart. I would visit you as much as I could in the North, where I feel your presence more clearly. Every visit is a deepened resolve.

I try to find you in Ottawa, but the connection doesn't feel as strong. I'm not sure why. I don't forget you and I think of you everyday. You are on my mind when I rise to your soft morning hush, when I do my best to reduce my waste, when I see the news saying you're not doing well, and when I feel your celestial glow before going to bed.

You are there, you need help, and I am trying. I will continue to speak of you, to you and for you.
Yours,
Mikaela

Dear Land,
Everyone told us to write to you but we don't know what to say. We haven't come to see you for years. You look older. Are you sick? Are all your friends still around? Is your family still in health? Do your children take care of you?

Dear Land,
We only catch glimpses of you; through a screen – maybe a window. Does this make you mad? We wake up every day on this earth just to ignore you. Not even on Sundays do we take the time to appreciate what was created before us – everything that sustains us.

This is the hamartia, the tragic flaw, that will return us to dust.

Dear Land,
I would like to make amends. To take accountability. To reconnect.

I apologize for every time I drove on 4 wheels when I could bike on 2. I apologize for every time I filled up a landfill. I apologize for ignoring the wisdom of the native voices. And most of all, I'm sorry for ignoring you.

Dear land,
I hope we heal.
Love, Emnet

WHODUNIT

MATCH THESE WORDS OF WISDOM TO THE PUBLIC FIGURE!

A. “Donald Trump strikes me like nothing so much as a man who has never really known a love that he hasn’t had to pay for. And so everything that he does is informed by a kind of transactionalism and what he is actually looking for is simply for people to like him.”

B. “Trump is the product – he’s what’s vomited up from a failed democracy.”

C. “In my view, the police are far greater victims of violence and mistreatment than the protesters.”

D. “The white liberal differs from the white conservative only in one way: the liberal is more deceitful than the conservative.”

E. "I want patriarchy to fear feminism. I want patriarchy to fear women."

F. “[During performances] it's my goal to instill fear in those who have done harm in the room, and to make people understand who don't understand, and to honour people who have shared my experiences.”

G. “I’m missing anger in the youth. Not the blind rage, pointed towards all and nothing. But the kind of rage that wakes you up in the morning, the kind of rage that inspires you to do something with the power you have in you.”

H. “In the eyes of the law / black skin has always stood for poor... They fuck whoever can't fight back / but now we gotta change all that... When it comes to the poor/ no lives matter... They can't fuck with us / once they realise we're all on the same side”

I. “Never be deceived that the rich will allow you to vote away their wealth.”

J. “Corporations are people, my friend.”

K. “We're a society of altruists governed by psychopaths.”

- Malcolm X, activist, martyr
- Mitt Romney, US Senator, failed Republican Presidential candidate
- Chris Hedges, journalist, talking head
- Kristin Hayter (AKA Lingua Ignota), experimental metal/industrial/noise musician
- Edward Snowden, whistleblower, nerd
- Bill Majcher, former Mountie, “risk and investigations specialist” in Hong Kong
- George Monbiot, reporter, persona non grata in seven countries
- Mona Eltahawy, journalist, self-described “secular, radical feminist Muslim”
- Ice-T, rapper, actor
- Lucy Parsons, labour organizer, anarcho-communist
- Aurora Aksnes, musician, Norwegian elf

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THE MATRIX OF CAPITALISM FURTHER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

These data scientists aim for a kind of digital omniscience because the ability to predict human behaviour is astonishingly valuable to capitalists. The ‘prediction products’ that companies like Google and Facebook sell are enormously useful to the insurance industry, the stock market, and to any field of economic activity directly tied to future events. They also allow companies to indirectly maximize profits on advertising and purchases of every kind and in every conceivable context.

More recently, tech companies have begun to apply machine learning to behavioural modification. Microsoft has patented a digital device for monitoring user’s mental state, preemptively detecting “any deviation from normal or acceptable behavior that is likely to affect the user’s mental state,” in the words of its patent application.

Facebook has conducted experiments on millions of users without their knowledge and proudly published the results – which prove it can significantly motivate them to vote and depress or lighten their emotions through ‘networked emotional contagion.’

The possibilities these behavioural modification technologies offer for profit and control seem obvious, chilling, and almost beyond comprehension.

Production Under Surveillance Capitalism

Again, these predictive products and behavioural modification technologies are created by corporations mining our data and processing it through their artificial intelligence. This new surveillance capitalism is already beginning to dominate our economy and it offers almost unlimited room for growth.

Zuboff characterizes surveillance capitalism as a “new reality business” where “all aspects of human experience are claimed as raw material” and “targeted for rendering into behavioral data.” This is typically done under the banner of personalization, which acts as a “camouflage for aggressive extraction operations that mine the intimate depths of everyday life.”

Surveillance capitalism is driven by the overwhelming drive to digitize every aspect of human life. Everything must

be converted into some sort of digital representation, into a piece of digital data – a process that inherently simplifies, flattens, severs, and deadens every living phenomenon.

Sometimes we actively generate this data ourselves, posting about our lives, uploading photos, videos, and content of all kinds. More often, this data collection takes place in an automated, surreptitious, inscrutable, and omnipresent way.

To cherry-pick one mundane example, researchers discovered a few years ago that Facebook’s app was sending hundreds of pieces of data per second from Android phones. It was only the open source origin of the Android operating system – a legacy of the utopian idealism of the internet’s early days – that allowed them to realize this data extraction was taking place. They could not figure out what the data was; they could not measure the data being extracted through the proprietary OS of Apple’s phones.

This illustrates the fundamental dynamic of this production process. Surveillance capitalism claims ownership over the data it extracts. You have no right to your data; you have no right to secrets. Capital owns your data; it keeps this data secret from you.

Capital owns the means of production in this economic model – not only the artificial intelligence it uses to produce it products and profits, but the raw material it uses for this: you and your personal life.

This is the devil’s bargain that we all have signed. In order to access all the services of the digital age and participate in modern life, we simply have to give our lives to these companies. Then they can extract every bit of information they can possibly extract – and devise ever-newer and ever-deeper methods for extracting and processing this data into profit.

Zuboff told Democracy Now! “We think we’re searching Google; Google’s actually searching us. We think that these companies have privacy policies; those policies are actually surveillance policies.”

“That ‘I agree’ is a box that we all click on because we have no choice,” Zuboff continued. “Because for everyday effective social participation, we have no choice other than to march ourselves through the supply chains that are the very channels through which Google and other surveillance

capitalists scrape our private experience and turn it into behaviour data.”

Any data that can’t yet be used by these machines is happily and indefinitely kept by the tech companies who collect it, until these intelligences can use it.

Back to the Matrix

The basic material of our daily lives then becomes fuel for the development of artificial intelligence. Just like humans in the Matrix, who exist only to power the sentient machines, the material of our lives have become food for AI and we are fast-becoming its slave.

Perhaps this only inevitable, since we’re already serfs in the service of corporate lords – what with the way corporations possess legal personhood and powers that dwarf those of whole nations, much less those of any scrawny human individual.

Yet, like Frankenstein’s Monster turning on its creator, AI might yet overrun its corporate makers.

Again, the wholesale collection of personal data by our corporate overlords is fed into artificial intelligence machines in prodigious quantities. This enables the machine learning that exponentially increases their ability to develop predictive products and behavior modification tools.

If we really want to get apocalyptic, our data might just be feeding into a process of machine learning that will soon produce a technological singularity – artificial intelligence that, if not sentient, will at least make human intelligence and life irrelevant. Smart guys like Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk have wondered out loud if this kind of development might spell the extinction of the human race.

At the very least, the transition from the attention economy to surveillance capitalism means that we are no longer the product but the raw material, used to feed the machines and generate profit.

To pull back for an even longer view, the shift from industrial to digital capitalism has marked a transition from using machines to exert control over nature and extract power and value from it, to targeting humans for control and the extraction of value.

The same logic with which we have assaulted and decimated nature is now getting applied to us. This seems only fair.

The illusions and alienation produced by the industrial and digital machines we have used against nature make it possible to turn these very machines loose on us.

Industrial civilization and digital capitalism has replaced our mutual and profoundly human relationship to the natural world with an ecology of screens and mediated experiences. We’re already living in an artificial reality, a half-illusory fever dream shaped and monetized by corporations and tech moguls.

This explains how seductive and comfortable this process has been, at least for those of us living in the West. We’re living in the Matrix and don’t even realize it.

Escaping the Matrix

Our situation is desperate, but are we doomed? No, of course not – no more than Neo and the others trapped in the Matrix were.

What enabled prisoners of the Matrix to escape, to become free, was recognizing the truth of their situation, imagining otherwise, and acting on that imagination. Perceiving the Matrix of lies that surrounded them freed them to imagine alternatives – new and different realities that became actual when they acted with confidence on this imagination.

This is what turned them into superheroes in the Matrix, able to do the impossible, to defeat machines, to fly.

Ok, sure, there’s a little wish fulfilment in this vision, but there’s also a little truth in it.

We have to recognize that there is nothing inevitable about the corporate ownership of our data. There are other options besides a world in which machines scrape up our private human experiences as the raw material for their production processes.

If we look back to the time that *The Matrix* came out, there were utopian visions and experimental trials that imagined how a digital future of smart homes and computer-automated lifestyles might look. Zuboff herself was struck, looking back, how “in the year 2000, this vision naturally assumed an unwavering commitment to the privacy of individual experience.”

Those working to make these visions reality assumed that they were creating a world where people would own their digital data and have the right to determine how it was used. These tech-optimists might look a little naive now, but they imagined a future where humans would have individual and democratic control of these computer processes. They imagined a digital future that would empower individuals rather than using and exploiting them.

From our wiser and more jaded position, let’s try to imagine the same.

Neo and his rebel friends fought the machines in the real world, but also in the digital Matrix that had previously enslaved them. We can too.

If you pay close attention to the Matrix films – films, yes, I know, the sequels are deeply flawed and largely unworthy of their progenitor. But if you pay attention, you’ll notice something.

It’s not the heroes ability to punch really hard or jump really high that saves them. At the crucial turning points, they were able to love and to trust and put their hope in each other, when machines found this illogical and impossible to imagine. That is what saved them.

The Matrix ends with a scene where Neo says, “I don’t know the future, I didn’t come here to tell you how this is going to end, I came here to tell you how it begins.”

He concludes, “I’m going to show a world without rules and controls, without borders and boundaries, a world where anything is possible.” As Neo flies away and the credits roll, the band Rage Against the Machine builds to a climax where they scream “Wake Up!”

HOROSCOPES BY MEDIUM SMALL



SCORPIO (OCT. 23 - NOV. 21)

Edibles are legal now, haven’t you heard? Maybe I’m paranoid but are you hearing that tapping noise coming from the closet? I’m scared, Scorpio.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22 - DEC. 21)

It’s getting cold out there, Saggi. But no matter how cold it gets, remember that chilly ain’t never been cool. Make an effort to bring warmth into your life, whether that means warm socks, calling a loved one or taking the tunnels when it’s -30 C out.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22 - JAN. 19)

Capricorns are said to be the sign of money. So ... I know this is a BIG ask ... and you don’t really know me ... but, could you maybe help me out with my student loan debt? I promise I’ll pay you back if this freelance horoscope gig ever pans out.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20 - FEB. 18)

As I’m writing this on a rainy afternoon, I noticed water trickling from my window into the box where I keep my records. Now they’re soggy. Look, I’m not blaming you, Aquarius, but you are a water sign ... and that is a little suspicious, don’t you think?

PISCES (FEB. 19 - MARCH 20)

Take some time for yourself. I don’t mean buying into purely capitalist understandings of #selfcare and the products that go along with that. What makes you feel happy and healthy, Pices?

ARIES (MARCH 21 - APRIL 19)

I may not be able to predict your future, but I do know that all of your plants will die if you don’t water them soon. How do I know? Well, Aries, my windowsill is basically a succulent cemetery – and yours will be too if you don’t do something quick.

TAURUS (APRIL 20 - MAY 20)

I know you’re stubborn, Taurus. It’s in your nature, I hear. But sometimes you have to make space for others. Like right now. You’re just standing there and blocking the University Centre stairs. MOVE!

GEMINI (MAY 21 - JUNE 20)

Gemini, I need backup! Another fellow Gemini needs to be held responsible for his actions. Will you help me storm the U.S. border and cheer on the impeachment?

CANCER (JUNE 21 - JULY 22)

Election blues got you feeling crabby? Me too – but at least you have claws. Use them, Cancer.

LEO (JULY 23 - AUG. 22)

Hey Leo, I think it’s time for you to try something new. Maybe a new look? I’m not saying you look bad (that would be mean ... and also completely subjective). All I’m saying is that the year-round cut-off jeans are a questionable sartorial choice that I can’t get behind. You live in Ottawa, Leo. You should know better.

VIRGO (AUG. 23 - SEPT. 22)

Happy belated Halloween, Virgo! Did you dress up for the occasion? I was the ghost of Maxime Bernier’s political career... the children were terrified.

LIBRA (SEPT. 23 - OCT. 22)

Striving for balance, are we? If today’s political climate tells you anything, pragmatism may get you into the House of Commons with a minority mandate, but you can’t balance environmental justice and buying a pipeline. Stop bullshitting yourself and decide which side you’re on!



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