

#1487 Oceans Rise, Empires Fall (The Coming New World Order)

Intro 5-4-22

[00:00:00] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning *Best of the Left Podcast*, in which we shall take a look at the tectonic shifts in geopolitics happening right under our feet. The long, slow decline of the US empire and the neoliberal order, the role of the war in Ukraine in hastening the end of globalization, and the rise of both China in the east and of the oceans all around us.

Clips today are from *Economic Update*, *Jacobin Radio*, *Inside Story from Al Jazeera English*, *Democracy Now!*, *Start Making Sense*, and *WhoWhatWhy*, with additional members-only clips from the *Bungcast* and the *Democracy Paradox*.

Ukraine and an Empire's Decline - Economic Update - Air Date 4-16-22

[00:00:45] **RICHARD WOLFF - HOST, ECONOMIC UPDATE:** You've been writing about an American empire that is falling apart or is coming apart at the seams, how do you connect that argument you've been developing for some time with this war? Where does the Ukraine war and what's happening, fit into that larger story?

[00:01:09] **CHRIS HEDGES:** The loss of economic hegemony, the ruling elites are attempting to compensate for that loss with military hegemony. But I think if you look in the early years of any empire, they tend to use military force, very judiciously and very carefully, but of course this is a classic example of how a military force is counterproductive.

We look at all of the debacles that have been carried out by empire. Go back to Vietnam, the wars in the middle east, the humiliating retreat from Afghanistan, the retreat under the Reagan administration for Lebanon, it's been one debacle after another, and yet they keep perpetuating these kinds of military fiascos and are not held accountable. That is a classic kind of sign of late empire, whether that is—go back to ancient Rome or Greece or anywhere else, read Thucydides—and I think that that wielding of military force without actually

calibrating it or understanding the geopolitical consequences is a symptom of late empire.

And of course we are also baiting China in the South China Sea over Taiwan. Building security alliances with Australia to kind of hem China in. These are very, very foolish moves.

[00:02:33] **RICHARD WOLFF - HOST, ECONOMIC UPDATE:** I'm reminded, and I would wonder if you could comment on it, the sanctions are a kind of, how shall I put it, economic warfare as an accompaniment to the military warfare, and so I look at it, I'm an economist, and I say to myself, wow, the sanctions are like an enormous supply chain disruption. They're going to have, they already have, the effect of driving up the price of suddenly broken trade agreements, suddenly broken delivery schedules. Prices are going up faster than they otherwise would have. The inflation is lasting longer than folks had hoped it might. This is not really the result of the military war so much as the economic sanction warfare that's going on, and it makes you wonder whether the end result will be a level of economic suffering by all those afflicted by inflation running faster than wage increases, by the price of food literally making people starve.

You're beginning to worry or wonder, who's going to quote unquote, win this so-called economic war, and it may surprise us. If you remember, Trump told us he would win the trade war. He clearly didn't, and now we're being told we're going to win this sanction war. That's not so clear to me either. How do you see it?

[00:04:05] **CHRIS HEDGES:** Yeah, well, there are two winners. One is the arms industry. We were all very foolishly, in 1989, talking about the peace dividend and naive enough to believe it, but that was never going to happen. They were going to continue to loot the state the way they did during the Cold War.

The other is the fossil fuel industry. You can't talk about war without talking about markets. And so cutoff Russian gas, well, they've got to get it from the states. Europe doesn't like it, cause it's a lot more expensive. We can't pump oil out fast enough. And that gets into the whole issue of the blow back from the climate crisis.

So those are the only real winners. But yes, the we as people... and then of course, remember the Ukraine is a huge net exporter of wheat in particular, and all of this is going down the tubes. So yes. And then I think we should talk

about, by pressuring, by imposing these draconian sanctions on Russia, we are accelerating the search... The other irony is that we've pushed Russia into the arms of China. So the whole Sino-Soviet Alliance that was... the whole Cold War was built around putting up a wall between Russia and China. And of course now we've created this coalition, and what they really want to do is extract the dollar as the world's reserve currency. You're an economist, you know more than I do, but there's certainly moving in that direction.

That's catastrophic for the US economy. Go back and look at what happened when the pound Sterling and the 1950s was dropped as the world's reserve currency. Plummeting in value. Exports are exponentially more expensive. Nobody wants to buy treasury bonds. That's a really catastrophic blow. So yes, I think many of the moves that Washington and NATO has taken, potentially, are very, very counter productive for them.

[00:05:52] **RICHARD WOLFF - HOST, ECONOMIC UPDATE:** Exactly. If we had time, I'd go into this stuff with the dollar and the fact that Russia is now demanding payment for oil in rubles, that they're linking the ruble to the gold value, which means they're putting a floor under the gold price. That shapes the United States. They're beginning to counter sanction and we haven't even begun to understand where that's going to go on top of the first wave. Because with Russia and China, the counter sanction problem becomes a very serious one, which seems not to have been calculated.

But hence my question, how do you account for taking this step, these steps, when they could be as counterproductive as you say? Is this a sign of desperation? Are we watching a Hail Mary pass here?

[00:06:42] **CHRIS HEDGES:** It's a sign of ineptitude. I mean, let's look at all of the policies, especially in terms of war, that the United States. Embraced over the last few decades. It's just been disaster piled upon disaster. And yet for this tiny cabal of arms manufacturers, the fossil fuel industry, private contractors, they make a killing. So what you've had is this kind of corporate coup d'etat. You service the profits and interests of these corporations at the expense of the nation. And frankly, at the expense of our democracy. They're driving the country into the ground, and then if we talk again, go back to the climate crisis, the rest of the planet with us. It's utter ineptitude and corruption on the part of a global ruling elite, which is Julian Assange exposed through the leaking of all sorts of documents, which is why they are psychologically and physically destroying him and Belmarsh prison.

I just came back from London. I was one of six guests invited to his wedding, and of course when the six of us that got to the gates of Belmarsh, none of us were allowed in. Just part of the sadism that defines prison culture, I teach in a prison.

So yes it is. But again, that is a symptomatic of late empire where you compound problems through rulers who are so corrupt, and so visionless, and so inept, that you, in many ways, become your own worst enemy.

A World to Win Imperialism and the Energy Crisis w David Wearing - Jacobin Radio - Air Date 4-1-22

[00:08:06] **GRACE BLAKELEY - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** So there's this argument that countries are less likely to hold dollar-denominated assets outside of their kind of safe geopolitical safe zone, because of what's happened with the kind of weaponization of the central bank with Russia's foreign assets held in central banks in the west being frozen and seized.

There is this argument that that's going to make a lot of states, particularly those that don't have good relations with the west, rethink the assets and the currencies that they use.

But there's another part of this as well, which is a big part of dollar hegemony is the global trade in fossil fuels, because that's all denominated in dollars.

Surely there is going to be some impetus here around this crisis to think we need to move away from like, you know, a lot of states, particularly in the global north need to think about moving away from oil and some push towards clean energy. Now that's going to have to happen whether it happens over the next decade or the next several decades.

And that's obviously going to have an impact on the dominance of the dollar, but also on those kinds of political economic relationships that you discuss in your book as well, and the kind of recycling of those petrodollars.

[00:09:16] **DAVID WEARING:** Definitely, definitely. I mean, if the relationship between Britain and the United States on the one hand, and the Saudis and the UAE and Kuwait and all that on the other is, is fundamentally about oil, strategic value of oil, economic value of oil, economic significance of

oil revenue. Then what happens when the oil's stopped being pumped? What happens when the petrodollar wealth dries up? What further use do those imperial powers have for those states?

And that is a question that's no doubt worrying deeply for those regimes who have been able to survive as monarchical regimes long into the 21st century, long past after other monarchies have fallen, and when democracy spread around the world. Because they'd been propped up by imperial powers, you know.

So they've got a big problem there and a big worry. And yeah, how'd that breaks down in the future is going to be really interesting.

In terms of oil being traded in dollars, I mean, that's an arrangement that the Saudis came to with the Americans, as part of the general deal: you keep us in power, we'll side with you, economically, geopolitically, et cetera, et cetera. I mean, if the Saudis were to move away, that's how you'd know, I think, that the Saudis are making a big geopolitical move.

And I'd be shocked if they did it. If I did it, they would be being very stupid. But it would be a crossing of the Rubicon. If I were to say now, actually ours is going to be trading in a basket of currencies, that will be a big slap to the Americans. And the fact that they haven't done it suggest that as I say, this is all kind of for show what they've been doing the last few weeks.

But yeah, all this stuff is in flux. All this stuff is in flux, as a result of what's been happening.

[00:10:55] **GRACE BLAKELEY - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** And it just creates so much uncertainty in terms of the future of, well, not just the world economy, but world politics in general.

It does, as you say, if we do move towards a kind of more multi-polar order, there are lots of risks, and particularly risks around the kind of re-emergence of a new cold war. The cold war was never obviously really cold. There was fighting that was taking place everywhere. There's fighting that's taking place now. But it also -- and you wrote an article in *Novara*, I think it was last year talking about how, when you get these kinds of "us versus them" conflicts, they tend to strengthen authoritarian leaders and quasi fascist movements in the global north.

So that's a threat as well as things like changes to global trade, decline in living standards, all the different sorts of things. But there are also potentially opportunities for states in the global south to move beyond the Washington consensus and actually think about, well, how can we play, as you say, play these states off against each other and try to strengthen our position?

What do you think on balance? This is like an incredibly difficult question. Basically an impossible question to answer. But like on balance, what do you think is the total effect of their shift going to be? Is it going to create opportunities for progressive change, or is it going to end up being really regressive and just strengthening authoritarianism and fascism?

[00:12:15] **DAVID WEARING:** I've got a stock answer to these questions. My stock answer to the question, what do you think will happen is always "well it's up to us."

[00:12:22] **GRACE BLAKELEY - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** Yeah. I like that answer. Cause that's what I'd say as well if someone asks me.

[00:12:26] **DAVID WEARING:** Well, it, I mean it is, and we can talk about the sort of general possibilities, a thing for the south. Those are dangers and opportunities. You know, you are strengthened in a global environment where there's such huge disparities of power between south states and north states. You are strengthened by being in a multipolar world, because you can play one side off against the other. But there is always a danger with that. In the south, those post-colonial elites weren't nice. Loads of them were not good. You know, Fanon had loads to say about that. And the ones that sided with the west and the ones that sided with the east could often be equally cruel and they could recruit global north power, could recruit superpower backing for their own quiet kind of nasty domestic politics.

[00:13:15] **GRACE BLAKELEY - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** But you did also have this sense that at least the global north had to, in some cases, be less awful and less purely harsh free market Washington consensusy, because there was this counter palette. Do you think that that's going to re-emerge?

[00:13:33] **DAVID WEARING:** Yeah, perhaps. The Washington consensus as, as --

[00:13:36] **GRACE BLAKELEY - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** It's already dead, isn't it really, in old ways?

[00:13:38] **DAVID WEARING:** Yeah, it's lost its legitimacy. I mean, even the IMF put out a paper didn't they 10 years ago saying, oh, we might've fucked up here. This doesn't actually work. We just looked, we just ran the numbers and oops, sorry guys. So it's lost its intellectual legitimacy.

So there might be more space. I mean, what would be great to see in the south is a democratic non-aligned politics. Not in a cynical "play one side off against the other, but to recruit superpower support for oppressive and regressive domestic politics," but a democratic, but enlightened, non aligned approach. Maybe in Chile for example, will still sort of thing emerge. In the north, I think it gives us a huge opportunity and a huge impetus to push for green energy, to move energy from the geopolitical equation, and to get energy security and an additional argument we can make in terms of decarbonization.

There is also this massive, massive danger of the politics of all this. I'm struggling to think of another word other than "euphoria" for the way certain people in the political discourse in the west have responded to the opportunity of a generational struggle against some official enemy. Now we can stop talking about wokeness. Now we can stop talking about blah, blah, blah. We've got to focus on the battle against evil, where the good is there the bad is. And this attempt to -- because in Ukraine you have got an authoritarian regime committing an act of imperialist aggression against a democratic country. But the way that's been exploited by western politicians and commentators to act as though the battle between NATO and Russia is about, oh, between democracy and a rules-based international order versus autocracies, is dangerous because any kind of increase in Western chauvinism and self-satisfaction and refusal to look at ourselves critically, it's going to produce -- it is a dangerous politics, which is going to produce quite dangerous actions.

And we don't look back to the cold war and look at everything that was done in the name of freedom and democracy, whether it's carpet bombing Vietnam, or back in death squads in Latin America. These grand narratives can be mobilized to excuse a lot of horrible stuff. Plus McCarthyism at home as well, where anyone who criticizes NATO is deemed to be a kind of traitor or in league with our enemies.

So this can turn quite nasty. What we on the left I think have to do is formulate an analysis and an answer to all of that, which manifests the fundamental values of anti-imperialism, anti all imperialisms, not just ours, but theirs too, but puts forward a kind of progressive agenda for a new internationalism.

We spent four years talking a lot about domestic politics, the British left, and during the Corbyn moment, I think we can talk a lot more now about international politics as well, and trying to come up with a positive forward agenda for what? For instance, internationalism, anti-imperialist internationalism. And we can do that in concert with comrades in Russia and elsewhere.

[00:16:41] **GRACE BLAKELEY - HOST, JACOBIN RADIO:** I couldn't agree more.

Coming back to how I opened, if liberals think that this kind of "clash of civilizations" narrative is going to provide some respite from the decline of liberalism and the dominance of liberalism in the context of people literally being unable to heat their homes, I think they have another thing coming.

Is the war in Ukraine ushering in a new world order? - Inside Story Al Jazeera English - Air Date 3-27-22

[00:16:58] **NICK CLARK - HOST, INSIDE STORY:** Do you think it's now inevitable that the international order will reposition itself?

[00:17:06] **GLENN DIESEN:** I think most definitely. Not just the international order, but in Europe as well. Keep in mind that for the past 30 years, we tried to figure out what to do with Europe, because we never really eliminated the dividing lines in Europe, but now these will be re-militarized as during the Cold War and the economies between Europe and Russia also be decoupled. So I think that also globalization as we've known it is officially over. Some of it's because of the sanctions against Russia as well.

I mean, after the west seized the money from the Russian Central Bank, this is after seizing similar money from Afghanistan Iran as well, I think that the world is becoming much more skeptical of both the dollar and the Euro. Russians, of course, they the longer one to trade with dollars or euros, and we see that the rest of the world responding to this. Indians are not wanting to buy energy and rupees, the Saudis are now considering to sell their energy and the Chinese also in the yuans.

Also, instead of sanctioning Russia, we see countries like China stating that they're willing to work now to establish some kind of a parallel economic

financial infrastructure that's not vulnerable to Western sanctions. So I think this is definitely a huge shift in international system that also displays how the West or NATO and the rest of the world aren't necessarily on the same page.

[00:18:23] **NICK CLARK - HOST, INSIDE STORY:** All right. We'll get into the why's and wherefores of all of that in just a moment, but Nizar first of all Nizar Messari, do you think we were inexorably leading to this moment? We had a series events going back to the Twin Towers in 9/11 to the financial meltdown in 2008 to Brexit to Trump, and now this. Do you think it's been a gradual progression that's been building up to this moment?

[00:18:46] **NIZAR MESSARI:** Gradual progression depends on the focus we give it. I think that this focus your giving it, but I think that there is another focus, the growth of China and the pivot to the Pacific. So what I notice in today's news and in today's analysis is that people who are reminiscent from the Cold War are reviving the tensions and the hecticness of the years of the Cold War and bringing in Russia as the main focus of international relations. Whereas if we look from the broader picture, the shift is definitely towards the Pacific. The shift is towards a competition between West lead by the us and, and China and its allies. So I see here Russia more as a satellite, not just a small satellite, but an important satellite, but more as a satellite of China than really the main player. I'm amazed at how many are now focusing on Russia as if the main topic is Russia.

The second point I want to make is that when we keep focusing our attentions in international relations to relations among states, we forget that some people are paying the price, and it's individuals, it's communities that are really paying the high price of this shifting power. So it's the the Ukrainians themselves, but it's the people around the world who, with the energy prices going up, with wheat prices going up, and this is provoking a lot of concern among a lot of people in the world. Not only about Ukraine, but about the survival of individuals on top of the refugee crisis.

So we need to bring our attention, not only to focus our attention, not only on state to state relations, but also on the impact of these on real people, real individuals.

“Russia & China, Together at Last”: Historian Al McCoy Predicts Ukraine War

to Birth New World Order - Democracy Now! - Air Date 3-21-22

[00:20:45] **AMY GOODMAN:** I wanted to turn to Qin Gang, the Chinese ambassador to the United States, appearing on CBS's Face the Nation Sunday. He was questioned by Margaret Brennan.

[00:20:56] **MARGARET BRENNAN:** Has Xi Jinping, your president, told Vladimir Putin to stop the invasion? Do you condemn it?

[00:21:04] **QIN GANG:** Actually, on the second day of Russia's military operation, President Xi Jinping did talk to President Putin —

[00:21:15] **MARGARET BRENNAN:** Was that their last phone call?

[00:21:16] **QIN GANG:** — asking President Putin to think about resuming peace talks with Ukraine. And President Putin listened to it, and we have seen four rounds of peace talks have happened. Let me continue. China's trusted relations with Russia is not a liability. Actually, it's an asset in the international efforts to solve the crisis in a peaceful way. And China is part of the solution. It's not part of the problem.

[00:22:02] **AMY GOODMAN:** Professor McCoy, can you respond to the significance of what the Chinese ambassador to the United States said?

[00:22:08] **ALFRED MCCOY:** Of course. He is again kind of affirming what President Xi said in that meeting last Friday with President Biden — in essence, that China is not going to rupture its relations with Russia, it's not going to apply pressure on Russia, it's not going to blame Russia, it's not going to call the Russian invasion of Ukraine an invasion, and it is going to affirm that Russia has legitimate security concerns in Ukraine that must be met, and that if China is going to do anything, it is going to apply its considerable international power and prestige to support Russia in establishing its security in Eastern Europe.

I think what's going on more broadly is that we're saying a sense of extraordinary confidence from Moscow and Beijing that, literally, history — and, more importantly, geopolitics — is on their side. They believe that their alliance gives them such dominance, such power on the massive Eurasian landmass, that they can prevail, that they can not only dominate the landmass, they can dominate international politics. In essence, they are pursuing a

geopolitical strategy to break U.S. control over the Eurasian landmass, and thereby break U.S. global power. They think that they are witnessing the birth, the historic birth, of a new world order in which the great global hegemon, the United States, which has dominated the world for the past 70 years — in which its global power is broken, and its dominance over Eurasia, something the United States has maintained since the start of the Cold War in the early 1950s, but that is coming also to an end.

[00:23:58] **AMY GOODMAN:** This is the White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki talking about Biden's meeting with Xi Jinping on video phone call.

[00:24:07] **PRESS SECRETARY JEN PSAKI:** The movement of China to align with Russia or to — yeah, the movement of them to align with Russia or their proximity of moving closer together is certainly of great concern to us, as we have expressed, and we are not the only country that has expressed that concern, including many other members of the G7 have expressed exactly that concern. So this is part of the discussion, has been an ongoing part of the discussion, expect it certainly would be when the president goes to Europe next week. But we're not in a place at this point to outline the specifics. We're still discussing.

[00:24:41] **AMY GOODMAN:** So, if you can talk more about, Professor McCoy, what Biden threatened, if it has an effect? You know, he is going to Europe this week. He's speaking with a lot of European nations today, then meeting in Brussels with other NATO members, then going to Poland to hold bilateral talks Friday and Saturday. What this means for Russia, and then for Russia and China?

[00:25:07] **ALFRED MCCOY:** The United States is concerned, I think, in two areas — one, that China will provide weaponry and financial support, and, in fact, China can break the financial embargo that the United States is trying to impose upon Russia in order to restrain them in their invasion of Ukraine. And so, what Washington is monitoring is flows of weapon and flows of financial support from China to Russia. That's what the United States is trying to restrain. And that, the weapons may have a short-term impact; the financial flows, a medium-term impact. That's the U.S. concern.

But I think we need to sort of analyze the situation in dual tracks — one, focus on the diplomacy, the military activity in Ukraine, the course of the war on the battlefield. OK? And that may or may not go Putin's way. But underlying that, there is this extraordinary confidence in Moscow and Beijing that the geopolitics of Eurasia are on their side, that because of their alliance and their

dominant position in this great landmass that comprises 70% of the world's population and productivity, that it almost inevitably — that they are going to emerge as the new centers of global power on the planet. And that, I think, is underlying their boldness and their resistance to Washington's pressure.

So, we can — from their perspective, we can provide weapons, we can mount financial pressure, we can even impact the situation on the battlefield by providing anti-tank missiles and handheld weapons that can bring — Stinger missiles that can bring down Russian helicopters and aircraft. We can do all, that but that is not material. That's not what's going to matter. They believe, because of the theory of geopolitics, that being the dominant powers in this great Eurasian landmass, that they can slowly break the controls that the United States has imposed over Eurasia since the start of the Cold War, and they can break U.S. global power, and they, together, can construct a new global order.

Every global hegemon — and that's the word that Beijing and Moscow use — every global hegemon for the last 500 years, from the Portuguese to the Spanish, the Dutch, the British, the United States, and now the Chinese, have done one thing in common: They have all dominated Eurasia. Their rise to global power, including the U.S. rise to global power after World War II, was accompanied by dominance over Eurasia. And decline of all of these global powers, including the United States, has been marked by their declining control over Eurasia.

And together, Beijing and Moscow are pursuing a strategy that I call, you know, push, push, punch. So, they are pushing at these great chains of geopolitical control that the United States has ringed around Eurasia since the Cold War — naval fleets, air bases, mutual defense pacts — they're pushing slowly at the east and west ends of Eurasia, hoping to strain and break those chains of control that the United States has imposed over Eurasia, until, in the succession of these punches, those chains of control snap, U.S. dominance over Eurasia comes to an end, and, correspondingly, in the theory of geopolitics, U.S. global power also declines.

U.S. vs. China vs. Climate Change: Alfred McCoy, plus Kristina Wong on Mutual Aid - Start Making Sense - Air Date 12-8-21

[00:29:03] **JON WEINER - HOST, START MAKING SENSE:** Climate change, you argue, will cripple China. What will happen there? What specifically are the climate vulnerabilities of China?

[00:29:13] **ALFRED MCCOY:** In China's development program, they have been sponsoring coal fired electricity, and they're reliant on it as whole. So that means that China is continuing to release greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. China in the United States between them account for 44% of all the emissions of all the greenhouse gases. China is committed to being carbon neutral by 2060. That's way too late.

So, what's going to happen around 2050, and this is according to sober scientific projections, is the rising seas are going to flood Shanghai. Shanghai, China's most powerful economic engine, a city of 18 million people, including the downtown, is going to be underwater. The North China Plain, according to another very sober scientific study, supervised by a professor at MIT, they calculated that the North China Plain, which is currently home to 400 million people and is in many ways the Heartland of Chinese agriculture industry, is going to become one of the least, if not the least habitable places on the planet.

Starting around 2060 or 2070, hundreds, literally hundreds of extreme climate emergencies. Moreover that around 2070, China's going to experience five, at least five and incidence of what's called 35 degree wet bulb temperature. Now what's that? That's when the balance of heat and humidity is such that the human body cannot sweat, and a healthy human being at rest, just sitting, is dead in six hours. The North China Plain, along with Northern India, are going to be these two areas that are going to experience 35 degrees centigrade wet bulb temperature, protracted periods.

So that means that China is going to be afflicted by climate change, and as they're dealing with their coastal cities, basically underwater, some you can remediate, others you can't, and massive population movement to cope with these uninhabitable areas, China will have to withdraw from the world just as the United States is starting to withdraw today.

[00:31:26] **JON WEINER - HOST, START MAKING SENSE:** I think we need to talk a little more about the hundreds of millions of refugees who will be fleeing the effects of climate change towards the more habitable and wealthier nations. We're already seeing just the beginnings of this in Western Europe and the United States. You see this as bringing political disaster and social and economic crisis to much of the developed world over the next 30 years.

[00:31:54] **ALFRED MCCOY:** Let's think back to the period between 2016 and 2018. The arrival of refugees in Southern Europe, Africans crossing the Mediterranean, Middle Easterners coming in from Turkey to Greece, and then central Americans and Mexicans on the US Southern border, this produced a surge in vocal, right-wing populism, Britain's Brexit, European ultra-nationalist parties, the election of Donald Trump. And how many people was that? If you add them all up -- the Middle Easterners, the Africans, and the Central Americans -- 2 million people. Just 2 million people. By 2050, the World Bank estimates that there will be over 200 million climate change refugees, and the estimates are as high in other sources as 1.2 billion.

Now these tides of humanity are not going to be moving by choice. The climate change is going to be so severe that these hundreds of millions of people are going to be uprooted from vulnerable seashores, flood plains, desert fringes. They're going to be forced to flee to survive to that narrow strip of the earth across the Northern temperate zone that will remain habitable in the second half of the 21st century.

The the world is then going to be faced with a very real choice. If we don't develop some kind of formal global governance to deal with this tide of humanity, then the world is going to collapse into all kinds of petty endemic, brutal wars, over water and food and habitable area. The alternative is an improved form of global governance with control over three critical areas.

First of all, if any nation by 2050 is still emitting, then they would be compelled by a more sovereign global governance to shift alternative energy. Second, the resettlement of these hundreds of millions of climate change refugees would not be a choice. There would have to be an empowered person, like an empowered UN High Commissioner for Refugees that could simply assign refugees to specific countries that have space and resources. And third and finally, and this is something that's been much talked about at the Glasgow climate conference, there needs to be a systematic transfer of resources for climate change remediation and for hunger relief in the tropical and desert areas that are going to be hammered particularly hard by climate change.

This is going to require a yielding of a portion of national sovereignty as we now see it, and a reorganization of the UN into a more empowered and also a more equitable organization.

[00:34:36] **JON WEINER - HOST, START MAKING SENSE:** You end your new book, *to Govern the Globe*, with an apology. I'm not sure I've ever seen that before. Tell us about that.

[00:34:44] **ALFRED MCCOY:** My generation has been profligate. We enjoyed America's absolutely unprecedented prosperity. We bought motor vehicles, we drove, we heated our homes with fossil fuels. We didn't take the growing warnings from Rio and Kyoto and Paris seriously until just now, until California erupted in fire last summer, and so we've left a terrible legacy for the young people.

The dates we've been talking about, 2050 is one of the dates when I'm talking about, I'm going to be gone. But my students, the 18 and 19 year olds in my classrooms, they're going to be in middle age. They're going to have children and they're going to be trying to deal with this world that we've left them. And certainly they're going to reach old age at 2080, 2090, if they're so lucky, and if the UN Secretary General in his 2019 statement is correct that the world might have actually 3.9 degrees centigrade global warming by 2100, that is going to be a very terrible legacy that we've left our grandchildren.

Climate Catastrophe, the Fall of America, and a New World Order - WhoWhatWhy - Air Date 1-14-22

[00:35:54] **JEFF SCHECHTMAN - HOST, WHOWHATWHY:** Should we be surprised at the degree to which the historical decisions that have been made for hundreds of years, 700 years in the case of what you write about, have a direct impact on the problems and issues that we're facing today?

[00:36:11] **ALFRED MCCOY:** Should we be surprised? No. The question is not to be surprised, to express outrage or condemnation in my case. There's much to be outraged about and much to condemn. But the effort that I'm trying to make in the book, *To Govern the Globe* is to try and tease out the key historical trends over the past 700 years, understand how they made our present, and how they're likely to shape our future. And historians are really good at figuring out the story when it's all over. Any historian worth his or her salt when it's all over can tell you not only what happened, but they can tell you with magisterial certainty, almost incontrovertible certainty, why it happened just that way and no other.

But when it comes to the future, we are all dwarfed. We are all at the feet of our muse Clio rendered virtually powerless. All of our analytic paradigms break down.

So, what I was able to do in this book, which does track the succession of empires, global hegemony, and their world orders over the past 700 years, was to try and use not historical science but environmental science. In environmental science, if you read the detailed reports, and they're very difficult and quite technical, in journals like *Nature*, the one thing that separates environmental science from almost any other form of social scientific or pure scientific inquiry is that environmental science is all about the future. It's a science of prediction. And when you read their reports, they predict not like economists, like what's going to happen in the current administration over the next year, two, or three years; they're trying to figure out what's going to happen over the next 80 or 100 years. All their projections go right to the end of 21st century. And they all have these lines on high probability, medium probability, low probability, and all kinds of statistical computations.

So what I did to figure out the shape of the present and the way that present is leading us into a very troubled future was to simply overlay the historical patterns of empires and world orders on top of these quite scientific environmental projections, and then see what the convergence of the two brings.

And what I say, basically, is the following. First, Washington's world order is coming to an end. And there are a couple of reasons for this. First of all, it's been in power for about 70 years, which is pretty long for any kind of global system. But more particularly, American decline has been something of a bipartisan project in Washington DC.

Back in 2001, elites in both Republican and Democratic parties decided that American power was so overwhelming, was so overweening, that the future was ours. It was the end of history. All the world was going to be swept away into a single pattern of liberal democracy and global capitalism with open borders and free world trade. That was the future of all humankind. It was preordained. We were so powerful. We won the Cold War. We were the sole superpower. We were the most powerful global hegemon in the history of the planet.

And so we figured, we'll admit China into the World Trade Organization and make them an equal in the international economy with all the privileges that accrue. And China, which has 20 percent of the world's population, they're going to play by American rules. They're going to become a nice democracy and a capitalist economy. They're going to follow our rules. And by 2014, a couple of things happened. First of all, China's economic progress was absolutely unprecedented. During America's rise to global power from 1900 to 1950, we increased our share of the global economy at the rate of 2 percent a decade. China has increased since 2001 its share of the world economy at an

extraordinary, unprecedented 5 percent per decade. So, by 2014, China had \$4 trillion in foreign exchange reserves. And about that time, President Xi Jinping announced something called the 'Belt and Road Initiative', which was an attempt to link the whole of the vast Eurasian landmass from the Atlantic all the way to the Pacific by a grid of pipelines, rails, and roads that would create an integrated market, although they never said it. And as if by natural law, commerce, profit, and ultimately geopolitical power would flow through this infrastructure across the Eurasian landmass to Beijing and make them the new epicenter of world power.

And around about 2013-14, the Obama administration began to figure it out and began the process of trying to challenge China. The Trump administration followed with its trade war, and the Biden administration is, of course, continuing the confrontation. So that was the first thing we did.

The second thing we did, which is another bipartisan disaster, was we, again, at this apex of our power, we invaded Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks and we took a war of choice: we invaded Iraq and we tried to insert ourselves -- this was a neoconservative project -- into the greater Middle East, build an imperial capital and the Green Zone in Baghdad, and transform the Arab world. And the economic logic for this is we would get a permanent hold on the world's oil reserves. And so, in effect, we invested about \$8 trillion in inserting ourselves into the Middle East and gaining control of oil just at the point when oil was joining cordwood and coal in the dustbin of history. A gross geostrategic miscalculation.

Meanwhile, China with its \$4 trillion was laying down that grid of infrastructure across the Eurasian landmass, road, rails, and oil and gas pipelines, and building 40 modern ports around the rim of Eurasia, expanding its military, cutting the circles of steel that Washington had laid down around Eurasia to dominate that critical epicenter of global politics during the Cold War. In effect, China was well on its way to becoming the world's great global hegemon. So by 2030, all the sources indicate, and these are short-term projections — they're therefore reasonably accurate. Back in 2012, the National Intelligence Council said that by 2030, China would be the world's largest economy by far. The international accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers published a report that says by 2030, China's economy will be 50 percent, at least 50 percent larger than the US economy. And since China and the United States spend roughly 2 percent and 3 percent, respectively, of their gross domestic product in the military, that means that China's military procurements will grow ever larger than America's. They're already ahead in a number of critical areas like satellite communication, security, and anti-missile defenses.

And by 2030, it's clear that China's economy will be larger than ours. They'll have moved ahead in critical areas like artificial intelligence, they'll be a military peer overall, and in a number of critical technological areas where China's emphasizing. Military, they'll be ahead of us. In short, it'll be over for American global hegemony. The only question of course will be whether the American liberal world order survives.

Oil & Disorder ft. Helen Thompson - Bungcast - Air Date 3-29-22

[00:44:10] **PHILIP CUNLIFFE - HOST, BUNGACAST:** Despite the lowering unit, or the declining unit costs, with respect to solar and wind, you make clear that until the problem of storage is solved, um, then with wind and solar will continue to be very intermittent sources of energy, particularly... particularly in places like Europe.

And you suggest this leads to a grim prognosis with the attempt to shift towards the green energy transition. There's the possibility, and the constant warnings from politicians, including people like Angela Merkel, about the need for Western citizens to adapt to a very different kind of life.

You suggest that, you know, it's possible to envisage a world where we have more political fault lines, and even cultural fault lines, around the energy transition. When you suggest, you know, you could imagine a world where we, kind of, regress to a pre- Henry Ford era, where, instead of the car being, um, something which is consumed by the masses, it becomes a symbol, a focus of class resentment and privilege, um, and the symbol of, um, inequality for those who can afford electric vehicles, and those will be, kind of, shunted onto public transit.

So, I wonder if you could talk just a bit about that prognosis, and how you see it playing out, and what the fact... what the core factors are within it, beyond the points that I've mentioned.

[00:45:29] **HELEN THOMPSON:** Yeah. I mean, I think that you've actually mentioned the... the... the central problem where... which is at this energy transition, um, is going to take a considerable amount of time; that it's actually monumental in terms of what it would mean to leave fossil fuel energy behind, or even to get to net zero where you still use it... we're still using fossil fuel energy, but, um, balancing um, it off with carbon, um, extraction.

And I don't think that the ways in which net zero is being talked about by politicians in Western democracies, um, engage with the magnitude of the transformation that it would constitute. I think that it also, as you've already said, Philip, depends for its success-- net zero-- on technology that doesn't yet exist. Now that doesn't mean that that technology won't exist, but it does mean, I think, that we haven't got a very good idea about when it might exist.

So actually having a strategy for how to get there, with dealing with such an unknown, is pretty difficult.

And the same thing applies actually to carbon extraction really, as it does to, as it does to, um, storage.

And then, at the same time, as we're dealing with this problem, of which is to say is enormous in size, is we've also got to deal with the fact that fossil fuel energy, particularly oil, but actually I think increasingly perhaps gas as well, is in its own terms in a crisis. Um, in... in that, uh, oil is going to become more expensive.

And to the extent that it won't be more expensive, it will be because demand destruction has taken place, and that is simply people, or enough people and corporations, won't be able to afford oil at the prices, um, that it will go to. Um, and this was even before... I think, it was true before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, um, with the levels of economic growth that we would like to, um, see.

So in that sense, it's a double energy crisis that's going on. We've got to manage the problems that fossil fuel energy causes us, and we can't just leave them behind, because we can't get away from fossil fuel energies that quickly. And at the same time, we need to be moving away from fossil fuel energies when we can, uh, and moving, um, towards, um, green, um, green energy.

And bearing in mind that that is also complicated by the whole set of issues, um, in regard to the metals that are needed for that energy to be produced.

So, I think that there's been an assumption in the net zero project and the approach to the net zero project, which is to say, we can just carry on as we are. We can use the energy transition itself as a growth strategy, and perhaps even as a manufacturing, industrial, um, strategy; and that what will ensure at the end of it is the same way of life, uh, in Western countries, but with a different energy basis to it.

And I'm not saying that that's a completely impossible scenario, but I don't think we would bet on it, shall we just say, as the most likely outcome.

And this is before we even get into the... into the consideration that in developing countries, they want to be using a lot more energy than they are presently using, um, per capita.

And so, I think that what we've done with the net zero is, in the way in which it's been... way in which has been conceived, uh, is to assume that these difficult questions aren't really there, or that they can be managed as we can go along. Um, but I think that, if we take the car example, is that how can we be sure, in any way whatsoever, um, that it will be possible for as many people to consume as much energy, or be it now by electricity rather than by, um, oil and that, that will be all turnout at pretty much the same kind of costs that it costs, at the moment, people to drive cars and use the energy, um, that they, that that is required, um, for that?

And I think if we look at the history of cars, if we look at, like, what happened, really, before Henry Ford's Model T car came along, there was a very strong sense in which this was quite dangerous political territory, um, for, um, democracies, you know, in the... in the... in the United States, before he was president, Woodrow Wilson said that he thought it was the most likely way that, um, car ownership, minority car ownership, as it then was, cars for the rich, was the shortest route to socialism in the United States, such was the... the... the class envy, in some sense, and that... that... that... that... and resentment that it, um, produced.

And I think we have to just bear in mind the possibility that we could be going in the same direction with this. And whether actually the better approach would be to encourage much more expenditure on public transportation, rather than to try to hold onto the idea that in the new energy world, as many people as do now will be driving cars.

And, as I say, I'm not saying that that's necessarily the conclusion we should, that should be drawn, that it should be public transportation over the aim for mass car ownership. But at the very least I would argue it's got to be part of the democratic political debate about the energy transition. We shouldn't just bury our head in the sands about the difficulty that this issue raises.

Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon on the End of American Hegemony - Democracy Paradox - Air Date 7-13-20

[00:51:36] **JUSTIN KEMPF - HOST, DEMOCRACY PARADOX:** You had just talked a lot about public goods and how the hegemon delivers things for other countries, um, that are positive.

It seems to me that the liberal order, um, at least in its ideal form, has been portrayed as... as a global system that's supposed to be in everyone's best interest. And to some extent it has been that, because of the security blanket it's offered, you've had many countries that are... you have micronations, uh, declaring independence, you have many nations around the world, and it's even... through the economic system of liberalism, has actually elevated many countries to be able to develop their own economies.

Um, I guess the question I've got for you, Alex is, uh, was the relative decline of American international power somewhat a natural consequence of the liberal order, and the way that it was so, um... gave away so many public goods?

[00:52:35] **ALEXANDER COOLEY:** It's an interesting, um, question to consider.

Uh, you know, yes and no. I mean, I think all orders, inevitably face things like emerging great power challenges, uh, kind of, you know, law of uneven growth, as Robert Gilbin, um, you know, sort of, wrote about. Um, and also a, kind of, sort of, overextension of commitments that get locked in.

Uh, I do want to just-- because you raised an important question about, well, isn't this in everyone's interest-- and it really depends. I mean, I think it's important to acknowledge, you know... you know, the... the... the bloodshed and the violence that has been waged in the name of liberalism. Right? Um, the most recent, kind of, you know, examples of the war in Iraq, um, you know, undertaken, um, you know, with the public justification anyway, of, sort of, um, regime change, fostering democratization. And then the kinds of ripple effects that it's had all throughout the region and... and quite illiberal outcomes. I think that's important.

One can also argue that a lot of the neoliberal economic medicine that the IMF and the World Bank, um, and especially in the 1990s, when conditions were

quite strict, disperse, really gutted the welfare state in many recipients. Um, we have the term of a "bread riot," um, that comes from the IMF going for, you know, subsidies on food commodities as, like, the first thing to, sort of, target.

Uh, and so, you know, these, you know, these types of prescriptions are... are debatable. Um, and of course, uh, the line that many critics of liberal order, and this is very common in Russian, uh, um, rise, scholarship analysis of IIR was that the system was hypocritical. That the U S would demand one set of standards and behaviors of others, and it wouldn't hold itself to those same kinds of standards. And we can find a lot of examples on whether it's, sort of, you know, surveillance and rights, um, you know, the treatment.... differential treatment of, sort of, citizens and minorities, um, you know, the types of, um, inequality that, you know, the U S or economic system produced you know. And so... so we go through that.

Um, I do think though it's important to note that even in hypocrisy, the reason the behavior's hypocritical is that it's been so entrenched as a benchmark of an international standard of conduct in the set of norms, right? That if this wasn't such a powerful norm and operating set of principles in the international system, there'd be no power to the hypocrisy charge. Right? It would just be like, you know, everyone, kind of, giving off, you know, the norms and things that they do themselves.

So, we don't need to glorify a liberal order, we think, and... and I'll... I'll speak for Danny, or he can, sort of, chime in with nuances and corrections, but we do feel that the... some of the central tenants of having, you know, a peaceful, rules-based order, that's based on the respect-- universal respect-- of individual rights, um, is an important component of the liberal international system.

It differs greatly with past orders. Most past orders have been illiberal. Um, and so, I think, you know, that caveat to us is... is... is certainly... is certainly important.

Um, now, in terms of, you know, was it inevitable? I... there's a couple of different pathways going on. I think that's one of the things we want to do in the book is, sort of, show there's a story about the rise and decline of great powers, inevitable challenges. But I think there's also more hidden stories about a couple of other mechanisms, right?

So, we all, kind of... we'll set aside China and Russia, and the challenge that they present. You know, another couple of stories is the rise of goods providers. Now on the one hand, China, uh, initiating the Belt and Road is about China

giving more stuff, right? And then creating a system of, sort of, clients, and crony deals for Chinese companies, taking over ports in places like Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and, sort of, you know, the... the... the opaque politics fostered by that.

But there's another dynamic now, that China's rise allows even nominally weak states to push back against liberal conditions in the traditional IFIs and ordering mechanism to say, "Yeah, we're not so interested in putting down those human rights provisions on this free trade agreement. And you know what? We can go to China for an agreement." Um, or push back against, sort of, economic conditions in the IMF loan, or oversight, or environmental conditions. The part of the world I'm more familiar with, you actually see a lot of examples of that. Sort of, countries like Tajikistan, sort of, um, um, uh, pushing aside the World Bank in favor of a Chinese loan that didn't have the same kind of oversight over governance, and the environment, and things like highway construction.

So, um, uh, so we don't mean to have, sort of, a nostalgia here, but... but... but I think that's... that's an important mechanism. And the second mechanism, which I think Dan can develop a little bit more, but I'll just briefly mention, is this idea of transnational networks.

So in, 1990s, most... when we said transnational networks, especially in the policy world and in international relations scholarship, we tended to think of NGOs internationalising their activities. And these NGOs operated according to activists principles: uh, human rights, the environment, women's rights, campaign against landmines, um, campaigns against deforestation, right? That these were all, sort of, causes that united liberal activists with like-minded activists and sympathetic policymakers in other countries of the world. We almost went so far as saying that these networks were quite nimble, that they could outmaneuver states, that they could undermine the sovereignty of states. Well, states have really bitten back.

But the point I think for your listeners that we get at in the book is that transnationalism is now contested. You not only have liberal NGOs, you have illiberal NGOs that are pushing, uh, common sense items[?] like de-globalization, or, uh, having common policies of, sort of, closed borders against, sort of, um, migrants and asylum seekers.

Um, you have a, sort of, common cause being made about the role that organized religion should play in domestic life. Um, as well as, you know, eschewing, um, sort of the dictates of international agreements, such as, you know, European Union regulations and conditions and so forth.

So, you have a lot of contestation now in these areas, in which 1990s we didn't see it, because it was this US led interpretation of what liberal ordering is. Um, and that's made things now, um, a lot more contested, a lot messier than they have been in the past, but it's also, I would argue, and we argue in the book, you know, a reversion to a more contested type of international politics. It's actually been the norm. So, Dan, I don't know if you want to have anything.

[01:00:22] **JUSTIN KEMPF - HOST, DEMOCRACY PARADOX:** I was just going to mention, too, that you just talked about, uh, contesting NGOs. Um, that comes back to a lot of what Victor Orban has been doing over in Hungary. And, like I said at the beginning, I mean, I just... just went through, um, an entire book focused on... on that. And the stuff that he's doing with the, uh, Soros Foundation, and Central European University, uh, fits... yeah.

[01:00:45] **ALEXANDER COOLEY:** Yeah, it's a great point. And Hungary is such a good example of some of the backsliding, right? So, here's a country that's, sort of, the first in the first wave of NATO expansion in the late 1990s; it is a new European member in 2004; it locks itself into this set of European Union rules.

And then, you have Orban, who comes from a liberal background, right? And worked with open society foundations before, uh, and starts drawing up this playbook of appealing to illiberal principles while deriving the benefits of liberal order. Right? And openly talking about the importance of alternative patrons in his speeches, like China and Russia, um, and so forth.

And I think your Central European University example's a very good one in this sense: that this was a university set up in the 1990s; by some estimates, third largest endowment in Europe, right? Um, and an enormously influential and important institution. And, you know, I think not only was it assumed it was always going to be there, I think the assumption was going to be that, you know, US policy makers would always go to the mat for it, right? I mean, should anything, sort of, negative happen, it was a core interest of the US to have this... this institution based on an educational system there.

And what you saw with the demise... not only did Orban tackle, go after CEU, which I think was in the cards for a while, after he went through his list of, sort of, um, you know, targets, it's how little resistance the US put up, right? Uh, in part, because of the whole, kind of, Soros brand. Um, but it's... it's, sort of, equation with political liberalism was actually, as it turns out, not part of the political calculation of the executive branch, um, that's been doling out, sort of, ambassadorships here.

So... so in that anecdote, I think you find a lot of pieces of the story of what sort of changed right now.

GENERAL Summary 5-4-22

[01:02:51] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *Economic Update* speaking with Chris hedges about U S militarism that is a classic symptom of late empire. *Jacobin* discussed the war in Ukraine throwing a wrench into the world order. *Inside Story* from Al Jazeera English discussed the shifting world order toward China. *Democracy Now!* looked at the geopolitical importance of Eurasia. *Start Making Sense* pointed out China's vulnerability to climate change and the destabilizing effect of climate refugees. And *WhoWhatWhy* applied environmental sciences to geopolitical history to attempt to predict climate driven political changes.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips from the *Bungcast* discussing the green energy transition and the future of consumption.

[01:03:39] **HELEN THOMPSON:** I think that there's been an assumption in the Net Zero Project and the approach to the Net Zero Project, which is to say, we can just carry on as we are, but with a different energy basis to it. I'm not saying that that's a completely impossible scenario, but I don't think we would bet on it, shall we just say, as the most likely outcome.

[01:04:07] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** And *Democracy Paradox* looked more at the decline of the liberal international order and the rise of illiberalism.

[01:04:16] **ALEXANDER COOLEY:** Transnationalism is now contested. You not only have liberal NGOs, you have illiberal NGOs that are pushing common sense items like de-globalization, or having common policies of closed borders against migrants and asylum seekers.

You have a common cause being made about the role that organized religion should play in domestic life, as well as eschewing the dictates of international agreements, such as European Union regulations and conditions and so forth.

[01:04:48] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at bestoftheleft.com/support to request a financial hardship membership, because

we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing market information. Every request is granted. No questions asked.

And now, we'll hear from you.

Pyramid scheme sticker club - Alan from Connecticut

[01:05:12] **VOICEMAILER: ALAN FROM CONNECTICUT:** Hey, Jay!, it's Alan from Connecticut calling 45-something-or-other, cryptocurrency and your personal experience about being scammed with the pyramid scam and blah, blah, blah. Interesting. I never did that myself. But, when my son was in kindergarten, they started these sticker clubs. And guess what? You got a list of five kids to send stickers to, and then you could send them to them and wait for the thousands and thousands of stickers that come pouring back. Well, him and I discussed what a pyramid scheme was and that, although it would seem like a great thing and everything else.

.But it was fascinating that the parents -- and it wasn't officially a PTA type of thing, but I mean, clearly, this was my hope, right? My hope was that there was someone that was going to teach their son or daughter how to run a pyramid scheme, how to take advantage of other people. Because in the Republican town I live in, it would only support the infrastructure that they, and the political aspects that they already have here. Well, if that's really what happened, and then I understand it. But I guess I inoculated my kids right from the beginning just by discussing that. And then we went to Target and took that \$5 and bought a bunch of stickers so that he didn't have to go out and buy envelopes and stamps.

So anyway, that's my 2 cents worth of inoculating my kids. Anyway, keep wearing your mask, stay safe, and stay awesome.

Final comments on how people find math so hard that many pyramid schemes likely get started by accident

[01:06:34] **JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be

played on the show, you can record a message at 202 999 3991,. Or write me a message to jay@bestoftheleft.Com.

Now, Alan, who we just heard from, was responding to a story that I had told-- a personal story-- about how I learned the nearly incomprehensible math of pyramid schemes. Mine was an email marketing scheme; alan mentioned stickers, which actually sounds vaguely familiar to me, like I may have heard of that when I was a kid, but never taken part.

I just did a quick search for the sticker scheme, and actually came up with a more modern version of it, which is the book exchange. And this is being marketed to parents. And I think it's actually not extremely predatory; it's just nonsensical. So, the idea is you give away one book into the book exchange, and you pass on the chain letter to six friends, and they of course pass on the chain letter to six friends; and all 36 of those people on your downline, we'll send you books in return. So it's the same principle, the same pyramid dynamic.

I... what I have concluded, after reading about people doing either these book exchanges or the sticker exchanges is: you know, I used to think that people who started pyramid schemes all knew what they were doing, and were consciously out to scam people. But I've been reading these people posting on the internet, being excited about the idea of getting a bunch of free books, or a bunch of free stickers, and then went on to say, like, "I've been inspired to start my own."

And I thought, "Oh no, that means that probably a lot of people who start pyramid schemes don't realize themselves that they're starting a pyramid scheme." They've, like, heard about it, and then, "Yeah, let's start that, and it'll be great for everyone."

You know, even the... in the, sort of, big, big ones that make the news... you know, I watched the LuLaRoe documentary a few months back, and I would absolutely believe that those people didn't understand that their business model was a pyramid, and depended on the population of the earth being infinite. I think after some time went by, they absolutely should have figured it out, and then maybe transitioned from believing their own nonsense, to realizing it was nonsense but feeling like they couldn't do anything but continue to push the lie. Like, maybe that's what happened, but you know, when it started, did they know? I don't know.

I find myself coming back more and more often to Hanlon's razor: never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity.

You know, the fundamental problem here is that math is hard for people. You know, we're not particularly wired for math. And so when it gets too complicated, we tend to just switch off and believe whatever someone tells us the answer is.

This is why the best piece of math education I ever got was in fourth grade as we were being allowed to use calculators in class for the first time. My teacher was warning us that calculators can lure you into thinking that whatever answered they give is the correct answer, but obviously that's not true. You know, if you input something wrong, it'll spit out the wrong answer. So the warning the teacher gave was that it was extremely important to understand the math well enough to know when the calculator was wrong. You don't have to be able to get the exact right answer in your head; you just have to know when it's clear that something has gone wrong.

If there's a book exchange, for example, where everyone offers one book, and everyone receives 36 books in return, it should be clear to any fourth grader learning to use a calculator that the math just doesn't add up. But telling people to, "Share with six people who will also share with six people, all of whom will send you a book," makes it sound like a simple six times six multiplication problem. And that's how easy it is to obscure the truth with a little bit of misdirection and the use of math, because people don't like math.

Which is also why it's so easy to lie and mislead with statistics. I mean, getting back to Hanlon's razor, misrepresenting data is easy enough to the point that I would believe many of the people peddling false ideas through math, in the media, don't even realize they're doing it. They just don't understand the data. They're misrepresenting it to themselves before they write it down or talk on television and misrepresented to the rest of us.

I mean, I recently watched a YouTube video breakdown of the racist book, "The Bell Curve," that's been used for decades claim that Black people are statistically less intelligent than white people among other debunked claims. And one of the major conclusions in the video is that the author of the book genuinely seems to not be able to understand the math that he himself is using in the book. The point being, it may not actually be a racist hatchet job; the author and his defenders might just be too dumb to realize that what they're saying is wrong.

I don't know about you, but I am sick to death of the never ending, "Are they dumb, or are they evil?" debate and, sort of, take comfort every time it can be shown that stupidity is the likely cause of terrible opinions and policies, not

evil. Though, I mean, I think Charles Dickens had some strong warnings about the doom that stems from ignorance. So I guess it's slightly cold comfort.

Anyway, as always keep the comments coming in at 202 999 3991, or by emailing me to jay@bestoftheleft.com. That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening.

Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes.

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Also, don't forget to join our Best of the Left Discord community to discuss the show, the news, other podcasts, interesting articles, videos, and books, anything like that, and continue to send in your recommendations directly to me; if you... if you don't want to join on Discord, just send interesting recommendations of things you found particularly interesting, "Jay should know about this." Send me those things. You can tweet at us, you can send me an email, whatever you like. And links for joining our Discord community are in the show notes.

So, coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the Best of left podcasts coming to twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from bestoftheleft.com.