What's Here Today Won't Be Left To Be Gone Tomorrow!

With most of the world now in or near to lockdown due to Covid-19, and the intelligent spending their time in isolation reading this journal, people's daily realities are changing. As we can all observe, expectations and priorities are changing as much as personal routines, and with them their perception of what the world was, and will be.

As always in such situations, even people in the direst circumstances are hoping everything will go away as soon as possible, and their world will get back to how it was before. The problem is, it never will.

It is the same when every other every major war, pandemic or natural disaster afflicts us. Someone has to sort it out, and those at the top at both national and global levels are the only ones with the resources to do it.

How well they do it will determine what happens to them as much as the rest of us. How we respond to what they do will determine what sort of world we live in afterwards - but it will not be the same one, as whether governments are strengthened or overthrown, and how that affects the relations between them, will inevitably make the post-crisis world a very different place to the pre-crisis one.

High Noon, Low Sun

For example, after the First World War most European governments did everything they could to avoid any repetition of a war of that scale. This is why the 1914-18 conflict is still called The Great War - it was so awful that it was thought to be the final atrocity, as such mechanised slaughter was beyond the level of what people should do to each other.
European voters generally supported this policy. No matter what the Nazis or Soviets were doing, it was better to try and meet them halfway where possible, as peace was the ultimate goal.

Winston Churchill, now regarded as a great war hero (outside Orthodox countries) was a voice crying in the wilderness for the UK to rearm against the German threat. His fellow Conservative Stanley Baldwin, most often Prime Minister between the two world wars, fought elections on a policy of appeasement, the term most associated with his successor Neville Chamberlain. He won these because few people disagreed with his assessment of the needs of the country.

After Hitler invaded Poland, and Chamberlain was forced by his own agreements to declare war, the same people who had supported these policies were angry. Chamberlain was soon moved aside and branded an unfit leader, and the people demanded to know why the country was not armed and ready for war, ignoring the fact they had consistently voted for this.

It was only at this time that "appeasement" became a dirty word. But since 1939 any politician active in the interwar years has been judged on their attitude to appeasement. The United Kingdom, like any European country, can never go back to the interwar world, because how governments responded to the crisis of World War Two, whether they ultimately won or lost, fundamentally changed the prevailing mentality in the world which came afterwards.

Republican Warren G. Harding won the 1920 US presidential election on the promise of a "return to normalcy". He is now known for giving the people that by appointing a number of crooks to his Cabinet. But on the surface his appeal made sense: let us get away from the dark years of war, recession and strikes and go back to the days before these existed.

There are several reasons why this idea was subscribed to. But one of the main ones, though now often overlooked, was the failure of the previous Administration, that of Democrat Woodrow Wilson, to properly address the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-19.

This pandemic, which killed around 50 million people, was associated with Spain because the Spanish reported the casualty figures accurately. Through false reporting and taking knowingly inadequate measures, the US government tried to hide the truth from the public, part of which was that Wilson himself had been infected.

The subsequent weakening of the president's health led to his subsequent stroke and incapacity, which was again lied about. When the public discovered this, they made a connection. They decided that global idealism meant nothing more than empty words, and that Wilson and his party were untrustworthy on the issues which actually mattered in their daily lives.

The Spanish Flu had been recognised as bad, but been a lot worse in practice. So what was the true state of the economy, which people also saw as bad? What could they believe in, when idealism had been undermined by a fundamental dishonesty, and therefore had no meaning to begin with?

The Republicans had selected Harding, so the Democrats selected James Cox, who also happened to be an Ohio newspaperman, just like his opponent. This was seen as another cynical political ploy, the equivalent of lying about the candidate's actual merits and purpose for cheap gain.

If the party of government had addressed the nation's problems honestly, maybe the perception would have been different. As it was, Harding, and his promise of a return to homespun values every American believed they possessed, won in a landslide.

After Watergate brought down Nixon, the Republicans only narrowly lost the 1976 election and won the next three. Despite all the scandals which beset the Harding Administration, it was twelve years before the Democrats regained the White House.

Even then they only managed it by offering a "New Deal" to put the Wilson years behind everyone. No one could go back to the world before Spanish Flu because the public couldn't bear to live in that world any more.

**The tough get going**

In times of crisis, you have to trust a government because there is no one else. It's them or nothing. No one else has the resources to address a crisis, so they have to take all the responsibility, praise and blame.

At the present time, a number of governments are run by anti-politicians, who got the job because people felt let
down by the political process, and many of the same politicians, they are now relying on. A distinct cleavage has
developed between the "straight" countries and these "alternative" ones, who have leaders like Donald Trump and
Boris Johnson.

Now everyone is in this together, we are going to see which are men and which are boys. You can be against
politicians, but eventually you have to do the job of one.

For instance, Trump is presently doing everything he can to alert the world to the existence of the US biological
weapons programme he officially maintains does not exist. His response to this global pandemic is to insist on
referring to it as "Chinese Flu", even crossing out the word “Corona" in briefing notes and replacing it with
"Chinese".

The US is conducting a trade war with China, and the crisis has had a drastic effect on the Chinese economy. But
this isn't good enough for the man who wants to Make America Great Again.

Like all economies, that of China is interdependent with all the others to some degree. So the US is spearheading
efforts to persuade other countries to shut down their economies on "health grounds", whilst keeping its own
functioning as long as possible.

Boris Johnson, like Trump, initially refused to take Covid-19 seriously, despite warnings from the countries affected
that it is real, and spreads faster than you can catch it. Also like Trump, he is struggling with the perception than he
isn't substantial enough to deal with a crisis like this, having been elected for his jokes more than his malleable,
soundbite-driven policies.

Initially Johnson decided that Covid-19 would go away if assaulted by "herd immunity", i.e. letting many people get
infected so that more would become immune to it. This outrageous piece of wilful abuse cost him a lot of public
support on this issue, even amongst those who support and like him in general.

Now it has been ditched in favour of closures and restrictions on gatherings. But still BoJo the Clown can only
operate by making jokes out of everything.

Speaking about a plan to address a lack of ventilators (inhalers) in the UK, he dubbed his proposals the "Last Gasp
Solution". This description may be funny, but not for those who depend on these inhalers to breathe at this time, and
anyone else who fear they might end up that way.

Nor were his intended audience, the manufacturers of these ventilators, impressed. They consider themselves above
such cheap language, and are likely to ignore the government and do what they see fit, rather than subscribe to a
plan presented in this way.

Other leaders have reacted differently. Justin Trudeau has self-isolated, although he was not obliged to, setting an
example of both caring for the public health and continuing with important business from his isolation. Angela
Merkel has made a direct TV address, for the first time in her long career, informing Germans about the extent of
the crisis before them and asking them to abide by voluntary agreements before they become law.

The cleavage between "straight" and "alternative" countries is being clearly displayed. Time will tell whether both
approaches are equally effective, or the public are prepared to tolerate both equally.

But the longer this crisis continues, the more people will associate their governments with this issue alone. It won't
matter what their politics are, what their anti-politics are, or what else they do. If they don't do a good job on this,
their citizens won't be able to go back to the world they used to live in, won't want to.

**Infection by association**

When anyone in the public eye gains a negative reputation for something they've done, this cross-contaminates
everything else they do. A person guilty of X might be guilty of anything, and great effort is expended in finding out
what that "anything" might be.

If people feel let down by their governments in general, they will not expect them to respond properly to the Covid-
19 crisis. Even if they do, any achievements will be ignored, and Covid-19 itself will be used as a means of bringing
them down.

There were demonstrations in Brazil against the Bolnosaro government before this crisis came. These have now
intensified over his handling of this health pandemic. His miscalculations may not have been worse than those of many others, but if the system is considered corrupt, any failure is seen as the inevitable consequence of that system.

Logically, the same should be happening in China. This remains the antithesis of what the West believes a country should be, which is why its success is seen as a threat.

This has been the tone of Western reporting: China covered up the extent of the outbreak because it is Communist China, we are led to believe. But China has reported no new cases from Wuhan, the centre of the outbreak, and is now getting people back to work, at the expense of Western countries.

If China comes through this crisis while the West languishes, this will have significant consequences for the global balance of power. Imagine your children having to learn Chinese at school to compete for jobs when they graduate, and Chinese models being imposed on European countries with very different cultural traditions.

Covid-19 will leave the world a different place on many levels. The shape of that world will ultimately depend on the respect people gave their governments during the crisis. "Normalcy" will be a return to basic standards of decency as well as effective functioning, and woe betide any government which gave its people neither when they most needed them.

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