

The Peace Memo

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AUSTERITY AND VIOLENCE

I am increasingly alarmed by the continual daily violence that goes unnoticed and increasingly concerned with the relationship between that violence and deteriorating economic conditions. Americans tend to have a fairly high tolerance for social unrest elsewhere in the world; but now there's evidence of it here, too. And we appear willing to tolerate loss of wages, benefits, schools, safe food and water, and security. Are we that unaware? Or do we simply lack the means to come together to work for a common good?

Bob Rundle's insights in his series on *Economic Violence*, previously published in these pages, provided a starting point for my reflections on what I've observed around us the last few years, which is a logical progression from what I've observed since I entered the adult work force in the 1970s. The recent governmental (and banking) emphasis on "austerity" simply makes visible the underlying attitudes and assumptions that have slowly impoverished workers in "developed" nations and prevented significant "development" in other nations, despite the huge sums of money invested in the name of development.

Earlier this summer, I decided to devote one issue of *The Peace Memo* to investigating the relationship between "austerity" and violence. The attempted re-emergence of the Occupy Movement at the same moment that the European Union was imposing still harsher banking conditions on Greece and Spain, and the similar response of the authorities made it clear that resistance will be met with force. Those who attempt to hold the Economic Powers accountable will be treated as criminals or, if possible,

terrorists. Those who block the entrance to Goldman Sachs will be jailed. Peaceful assemblies in public spaces will be met with paramilitary forces in riot gear, too many of whom are all too ready to use their pepper spray and tasers.

I collected articles, to which you may link from this issue, and read until I wept. I grieved for all the lost lives – the war dead, the starved children, the "collateral damage" of Capitalist empire; for the wasted lives – in Kosovo, in Iraq and Afghanistan, in Palestine, in Camden, NJ, and so many other places; and for the wasted Earth – the only home we've got. I learned a lot, but too much was beyond my power to express in words. So I was delighted to see that Bill Moyers' guest this week was Chris Hedges. I sat down to watch with notepad handy and ... my Public Television Station was off the air. No test pattern, no static; just a black screen. But thanks to podcasts, I was able to watch – and replay a couple of places. I recommend [Capitalism's Sacrifice Zones](#) to you. If you haven't the time or the technology, here are two ideas that might inspire you, as they inspire me.

First, Chris Hedges. Although he no longer considers himself "much of a Christian," he understands the importance of being true to his inner compass. Hedges defines "faith" as the conviction that what we do will make a difference, in spite of evidence to the contrary. So, for those of us who wonder why we keep on working for peace against tremendous odds and all logic, he provides strong support for continuing to do what we "can't not do."

And second, a quote from H.L. Mencken: "*The notion that a radical is one who hates his country is naive and usually idiotic. He is, more likely, one*

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who loves his country more than the rest of us, and is thus more disturbed than the rest of us when he sees it debauched. He is not a bad citizen turning to crime; he is a good citizen driven to despair."

Let us not be driven to despair. Rather, let us be disturbed enough to work for peace wherever we find ourselves. Let us resist violence without hiding from it and, perhaps most important, let us find others with whom to build vital, mutually respectful civic options so that our children may have peaceful neighborhoods and grow up with tools to craft a peaceful country.

SELECTIONS

[The violence of the alienated](#)

Violence and deprivation in African-Caribbean sections of London, England.

Excerpt: The violence in Tottenham certainly included opportunists looking to make a quick profit at someone else's expense and – to the extent that it involved local people – might be described as a form of irrational behaviour which only succeeded in inflicting millions in damage to the local environment and left many without businesses and homes. Of course much the same could be said for the City traders during the financial crisis – the only difference being that the Tottenham rioters will no doubt be banged up whilst the delinquents in the City still receive their bonuses and knighthoods, despite the fact that the vandalism they perpetrated on the British economy was nationwide and cost hundreds of billions.

But acknowledging that the riots were spontaneous and conducted by rebels without a cause does not mean we should also discount the idea that the event was also a political and economic protest – not the kind of protests we have witnessed during the Arab spring, with their clearly articulated grievances and political goals but the violence of the alienated and the angry who no longer feel they have a voice that is heard in the public discourse between politicians, bankers and the ratings agencies.

As the full significance of recent events unfold, the worst that politicians can do is demonise the African-Caribbean community as they did with the Muslim community in the aftermath of 2001. Denouncing multi-culturalism may win the Prime Minister international plaudits and praise from the Far Right for standing up for British values but those young people who spilled out onto the London boroughs over the weekend are fourth generation British citizens – they don't belong to a remote 'Them' – they are part of the collective WE.

The only difference is that being from Tottenham and from a BME community they are doubly deprived - not so much an example of protest from David Milliband's squeezed middle as from the 'squeezed squeezed'. If Britain is going to be truly cohesive then this government cannot continue to remain blithely insouciant about the devastating legacy of its own actions. For example, its relentless attack on equal rights legislation at the behest of lobbyists who characterise it as a bureaucratic encumbrance is a symbolic slap in the face for minority communities who face persistent systemic and structural discrimination and institutional racism.

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Corporate Profits at All-Time High; Wages at All-Time Low: Can We Call it Class War Yet?

Excerpts: The rhetoric of austerity, sounded loudest from Republicans but often echoed by far too many Democrats, is a language of belt-tightening, of shared sacrifice, of somber speeches by pompous politicians who proclaim that they feel your pain while announcing budget cuts that freeze salaries, lay off workers and force more work onto those who remain. And CEOs use that same language when sorrowfully explaining why they simply can't create jobs. Morgan Stanley's CEO, James Gorman, beset by New Yorkers at his bank's shareholder meeting, blamed the lousy economy when asked why he hadn't created the jobs his company had promised the city in exchange for massive tax breaks.

As unions declined, so have wages for most people. The Center for American Progress found in a study that as union membership decreases, so does the so-called middle class's share of national income. The middle class long served as a buffer between those at the top and those at the bottom. As long as the majority of Americans were comfortable, had decent jobs and pensions, and

could send their kids to school, the wealthy could stay wealthy and the poor were pretty much just ignored. And that middle class was built through decades of union agitation, not just for higher wages and healthcare benefits, but for the eight-hour day, for the weekend, for safety in the workplace and some job security.

But now the middle class has been hollowed out. Increasingly, there are the super-super-rich, and there are the rest of us.

The same people who are pushing wages downward are the ones paying for politicians' campaigns, and they're the same people on the boards of directors and trustees of our universities, our institutions—like JP Morgan Chase's Jamie Dimon, who serves on the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, the Harvard Business School, Catalyst, as well as on the Board of Trustees of New York University School of Medicine.

Meanwhile, for the vast majority of us, the recession that supposedly ended in 2009 looks more like a depression each day, and as long as low wages and high unemployment remain the order of the day, there's no recovery in sight.



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[Study: Austerity Leads to Violence And Instability](#)

Excerpt: In this paper, we assemble cross-country evidence for the period 1919 to the present, and examine the extent to which societies become unstable after budget cuts. The results show a clear positive correlation between fiscal retrenchment and instability. We test if the relationship simply reflects economic downturns, and conclude that this is not the key factor. We also analyse interactions with various economic and political variables. While autocracies and democracies show a broadly similar responses to budget cuts, countries with more constraints on the executive are less likely to see unrest as a result of austerity measures.

As CNN [notes](#):

Studying instances of austerity and unrest in Europe between 1919 to 2009, Ponticelli and Voth conclude that there is a “clear link between the magnitude of expenditure cutbacks and increases in social unrest. With every additional percentage point of GDP in spending cuts, the risk of unrest increases.”



[Anger and Political Culture: A Time for Outrage!](#)

Excerpt: Stéphane Hessel (b. 1917), the French diplomat, ambassador, writer, resistance fighter and human rights advocate, wrote a 32-page essay published as a polemic that recalled the values he had fought for during the Resistance as a basis for democratic protest today. The essay originally published as "Indignez-vous!" (2010) sold more than 3.5 million copies worldwide and has been translated into fifteen different languages.

His polemic raises general issues about anger in politics: Whether it is acceptable at all and in what forms? How should we deal with anger in civic education? Should we follow Seneca or Gandhi? How should we explain the complex link between political anger and violence? Indeed, is violence in a democracy ever justified? There are some like Fanon, Trotsky, Orwell and Malcolm X that would argue that it is. These critics see the philosophy of nonviolence as an attempt to foist bourgeois morality on the working class. They argued that anger is required for revolutionary change and that the link to violence is also acceptable, especially when it accompanies the right to self-defense. To them, the ideal of nonviolence is false because it presupposes both compassion and a sense of justice on behalf of one's adversary, even in circumstances where the adversary has nothing to lose. These thinkers believe not only that political anger has a positive role to play, but that the link to political violence is not only acceptable but required, and that militant activism is strategically superior to nonviolence.

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On austerity, violence, and what it takes to be a citizen

Excerpts: We know that demoralized immigrant communities in Britain are also hotbeds of extremism and terror recruitment, for the same reason. And yet we blame foreign forces and wage wars of words and weapons, and treat these fiscal issues and domestic governance issues as if they're completely unrelated. (Actually, the US government released a strategy for local combating of radicalization, articulating the idea that a "lack of identity" among youth can make them susceptible to radicalization by skinheads, jihadists, and other violent groups. The idea that we can use schools and communities to help youth build identity and confidence in their government is exactly what I am talking about. But of course, confidence in government requires a government that works, and provides sufficient funds to support such measures.)

When people get poor, they become desperate. And everything the government is doing is likely to make its citizens poorer and less able to participate and feel confident in that government. When the Arizona shooting happened in the winter, we talked about inflammatory rhetoric in

our politics. But we never mentioned why our people are so susceptible to that language, or so hungry for it.

I think this kind of willful ignorance comes from the fact that to many of these politicians, rioting and extremism and civil unrest is simply not a concern that they have, while right-wing (white) anger and inflammation is cast as a virtuous, "patriotic" anger that has a place in political discourse (though research by the consistently fascinating Southern Poverty Law Center, such as their [hate map](#), should probably dispel these assumptions).



**PICTURES WORTH
THOUSANDS OF WORDS**

**Corporate Profits Just
Hit An All-Time High,
Wages Just Hit An All-
Time Low**

In case you need more confirmation that the US economy is out of balance, here are three charts for

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you.

[This Chart Predicts Rising Violence And Unrest Around The World](#)

Spanish economic historian Hans-Joachim Voth has discovered a stronger link than anyone realized between austerity and civil unrest. Which of course is terrifying as we enter the [Age of Austerity](#).

In a presentation at the [Institute for New Economic Thinking](#), Voth compared historical changes in government spending to an indexed measure of "Chaos"—anti-government demonstrations, riots, assassinations, general strikes and attempted revolutions. He found that declines in government spending lead to chaos.

[Austerity And Bloodbaths: Historical Graph Shows Perfect Correlation Between Austerity Programs And Mass Violence](#)

Here is a graph I found (H/T: ["Financial](#)



[Armageddon](#)”) based on a study by [Control Risks](#) that illustrates as simply and clearly as can be, so that even My Pet Goat readers can grasp it, the linear correlation between harsh austerity measures and mass violence.

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We always welcome news of events. Not just for information, but for the tremendous support it provides our friends. So please send stories and calendar items to the [Editor](#).

Please consider supporting our work in ways that are appropriate to your location and means. We would love to have more willing hands.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Sunday, August 12

Regular PIET meeting. Continuing discussion of *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh; Section Two, Transformation and Healing. All are welcome!

[Church of the Savior](#), 2:00-3:00 PM

Sunday, September 30

Deadline for presentation proposals for the 2013

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PIET Conference on Violence in Knoxville.
Email Carrie Mayes San Angelo at carrie@peacebuildinginstitute.org. The conference is scheduled for **March 2013**, and though we are open to all submission requests, we want to offer workshops on the following topics:

Domestic Violence

Bullying

Gender & Sexuality

Animal Neglect & Abuse

Religious Violence

Environmental Violence

(Purple peace symbol graphic separator thanks to [HOT Hrs](#))