افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان
AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مبـــــاد   بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مـــباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم   از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com   afgazad@gmail.com

| *European Languages* | زبانهای اروپائی |

AUGUST 20, 2018

by JAMES MUNSON
21.08.2018

"Not With a Bomb, But a Whimper" … Then More Bombs.

Those who have crossed

With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom

Remember us—if at all—not as lost

Violent souls, but only

As the hollow men

The stuffed men.

–T.S. Elliot, "The Hollow Men," 1920

I read a piece recently by a reborn-pessimist. Months in a hospital bed had changed him. Before he was riddled with anxiety and fear, and now, none. Now he's a famous author. (Before he was a struggling one.) To face death, he said, was 'life-affirming'. I didn't read his book.

But I share his euphoria for not being dead. Four years ago, I toppled from my bicycle to the street, dead at age 42 from cardiac arrest. A stranger was giving enough to administer CPR, and I was conscious again in two-days time.   I had no prior knowledge of my heart condition, don't know who saved me, and when I woke in the hospital, had no idea why.

I can not extend enough gratitude to everyone who helped me, nor tell you the joy of seeing my 4-year old daughter see her father again. But I reject the 'life-affirming' trope. Rather, I think like recovered addicts, blessed to be off drugs, but stuck with a sober reading of the world around them. Having access to First World medicine saved me. But its not apart from the technology menacing the poorer world.

That's not hyperbole. I now sport a *Medtronic* stent. That same year Medtronic moved its office from Minneapolis to Ireland to avoid $3 billion in taxes. I take Lipitor. *Pfizer* developed Lipitor. Pfizer also denied poor South Africans access to HIV medication, tested drugs on Nigerian children without their parents consent, and defrauded Medicaid to the tune of $49 million over the cost of …Lipitor.[i]

I can go on. While in the hospital, *General Electric* products monitored my repaired heart. Among other tasks, GE tested radioactive materials on captive or unwitting subjects for the army, giving some of them cancer.[ii] *Siemens* built my hospital bed. Siemens ran death camp for the Nazis. I take a *Bayer* aspirin. Bayer owns Monsanto.

I'm grateful to be alive, but knowing it doesn't make the world anymore just.

On that note, this year marks the 100th anniversary of WWI; a collective near-death experience that was *death*-affirming. Tragically, the class-awakening and social-revolutionary promise of the Progressive Era was dashed when, instead of attack the tottering old regime, and still-green capitalist one, the poor set to slaughtering other poor, at behest of their far-from-equitable nations.

WWI was to be the 'war to end all wars', but the opposite came true. Instead of peace it taught us to attack first, target civilian populations, and to gear our peacetime bureaucracies for the next one, because the cost of losing would be too much to bear. (But such was a boon for the capitalists.)

It taught us modernity hadn't in mind to liberate, but defend us -running in circles forever, from our own swarm of bees. And it taught us (except for the capitalists) shame of our past euphoria, and placed in its stead, images of barren earth, dead horses, and limbs sticking out of the mud.

As result, capitalism remains a juggernaut, but its hard to compare then and now an not think we've become more reactionary, more conservative, less liberal.

I don't remember my heart attack. I do remember lying in the hospital, wanting water, but I couldn't form the words. It must have felt the same in 1918. Wanting, but mute. As in T.S. Elliot's portrait of the trenches:

In this last of meeting places

We grope together

And avoid speech

Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

The river refers to Dante. You cross it to get to hell. His was the Lost Generation, stuck on one side.

Eventually we'd get there. Ecocide wasn't really a strategy until Vietnam. Nor were civilians our primary target until we fire-bombed, then hydrogen-bombed, Japan in WWII. Nor were they our *only* targets until the current wars on drugs and terror, and Tommy Franks admission that we don't count the dead. When you stop counting the dead, it's fair to say, you've crossed.

There are other 'life-affirming' narratives, Steven Pinker's thesis, that declining murder-rates are the upside of capitalist world-order, for example, and I reject these, too. He's not without merit considering an estimated 18 million people died in WWI. But there are other ways to die. 5 million each year from unclean drinking water. Over 6 million from unclean air. We attribute 400,000 deaths per year to climate change, and expect 650,000 per year by 2030.[iii] As you read, California Wildfires consume an area 10x the size of no man's land.

Civilians are no longer the by-catch of struggles between competing elites, but primary targets of class-warfare, as capitalists gobble-up the world, harming it directly or by spurring us to compete for lesser resources. You needn't hire ½ mankind (who wants to pay them), when a few drones aimed more-or-less in the right direction will do, and won't coming home bandaged and shell-shocked, needing pensions or health care.

US special forces are active in 134 countries. It's not insubstantial that our' and Mexico's Drug War, has claimed over 100,000 lives, and the War on Terror at least 600,000 (mean estimates). More than ½ million Afghanis have died since our invasion, plus another 60,000 where it's spilled into Pakistan. We killed ½ million during our most-recent stint in Iraq. While at least 75,000 more have died since our soft departure. We dropped more bombs on Baghdad than we dropped in WWI or II. The depleted uranium in our bombs produce birth defects akin to ones in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Famine-deaths in or after WWI (mean estimates) totaled 2 million in Iran, 600,000 in Germany, 200,000 around Lebanon, considerable numbers in Russia (but likely fewer than in Germany), plus scattered, smaller incidents. That puts us around 3.5 million. Terrible as it is, today, according to the UN, 20 million people in Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Yemen face death if they don't receive emergency food and medical aid. Each crisis stems in part from current wars that already have claimed more than 400,000, 300,000, 50,000, and 250,000, lives respectively.[iv]

Current estimates count 68.5 million refugees wandering the globe[v], compared to 10 million refugees after WWI.[vi] But today, instead of unseemly trenches, we build walls. Areas around Palestine, between the US and Mexico, and along Europe's southern border,

among others, look increasingly like no-man's land, but with only one entrenched side. Or maybe like Dante's river, once crossed, starring back from the other shore.

Is this the way the world ends?

As Eric Hobsbawm dubbed it, WWI began the 'bloodiest century', wiping the old regime of the map and most of its successors in the course of 75 years. After another 25, the remaining liberal-democracies seem little more than a rearguard for increasingly-rogue capitalism. You'd think somewhere among all that rubble they'd have gleaned a life-affirming lesson. Instead they've unearthed the same mess that buried 8 million men in trenches in WWI. That the worst they can do is still more acceptable than quiting. Including turning the planet into a no-man's land.

WWI ended, come November 11th, 100 years ago.   There are plans for bells to ring across Europe that day.   I expect, followed by more bombs.

They toll for thee.

Notes.

[i] https://www.corp-research.org/pfizer

[ii] https://www.multinationalmonitor.org/mm2001/01july-august/julyaug01corp4.html

[iii] https://newrepublic.com/article/121032/map-climate-change-kills-more-people-worldwide-terrorism

[iv] https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/03/553152-un-aid-chief-urges-global-action-starvation-famine-loom-20-million-across-four#.WOkk09LyuUk

[v] http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html

[vi] https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/refugees