

Ep 60 rough cut (voice lev)

📅 Thu, 4/9 1:09PM ⌚ 59:34

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

violence, empire, wrote, chris, crozier, state, system, people, strike, military, covered, mentioned, protest, liberal, fact, largely, world war, economic, middle east, book

SPEAKERS

Danny Sjursen, Chris 'Henri' Henrikson, Chris Hedges, Keagan Miller

- D** Danny Sjursen 00:00
Alright, listeners. Well, well last you heard us kind of introduce our take on Corona fever and how it relates to the Empire and our veterans project and sort of left leaning veterans pod. But, you know, today we're really lucky to have Chris Hedges, the esteemed Chris Hedges on the pod. We've had some great guests recently. And I think this one really has the topics. So I'm gonna embarrass Chris a little bit. But uh, you know, it's funny when I started writing for TruthDig. Chris had been like, sort of their leader, top columnist for a while and I was just kind of happy to be there, and a year or two passed, and I was starting to get a little more play. And I was just sort of excited to be on the same page. I kept waiting for that moment, you know, in my fantasies, where, you know, Chris is gonna reach out he's gonna send me an email and tell me, I'm the greatest writer of my generation. And, you know, eventually he didn't say that and nor should he have been reached out. We've been in touch talk a few times. That's that's just really been exciting. So you know, Thanks, Chris, for coming on.
- C** Chris Hedges 01:06
Sure.
- D** Danny Sjursen 01:07
And so just for bio for you guys who don't know, you know, Chris, obviously a columnist. He

was a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, he still is, you know, best selling author, professor in the college degree program at the New York, you know, for New Jersey State prisoners at Rutgers University, as well as an ordained Presbyterian minister. He's written 12 books. I know, I've read them all I think most of us have, including Wars Force or gives us meaning, which of course was 2003, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. But, you know, this book spoke to me personally, because I read it in Baghdad in 2007, which was really an interesting moment to read it. I'm sure other people have had that experience. Other notable books for this conversation that will probably bring up our Empire of Illusion: the end of literacy and the triumph of spectacle...that was 2009 In his latest America: The Farewell Tour, which sounds more prescient than ever...that was in 2018. He also posted the show on contact on RT America. So Chris was a two decades as a foreign correspondent, I mean, around the world, Central America, the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans, he was kind of there when, when matters were happening, you know, especially in the 90s, before people were paying attention to what eventually became 911, this this global war, he worked, a lot of that time for the New York Times stood up to the corporate media, after, you know, getting a formal reprimand for publicly denouncing the George W. Bush administration. So he has a Bachelor's in English literature, a master of divinity. That last part, I think, a rather important aspect of his work. I'm sure we'll talk about it. And finally, though, I'm quite certain he's sick of hearing it from so many young activists. I know I can speak for we three in saying that he's kind of been a personal inspiration and a major influence on all of us. So thanks again, Chris, for taking the time with us today.



Chris Hedges 03:00

Thanks, Danny. Sure.



Danny Sjursen 03:02

Well, you know, Chris predictions or maybe perhaps more accurately diagnosis of the American political cultural disease has, it seems at least been kind of your stock stock in trade in some recent books. That no doubt is a tricky matter, as predictions always are, if that's even really what you're going for, but forgive the increasingly at least these days cliché, but you know, in light of that, how have you viewed this moment? You know, I mean, what stands out to you and the American zeitgeist response to coronavirus from, you know, political military or cultural standpoints. So two things I find interesting about this kind of very tragic moment that we're undergoing. One is that it exposes the rot decay within the system itself. The seizure of power by corporate neoliberal forces that have hollowed the country out from the inside out



Chris Hedges 04:00

So that is something that I have been writing about for a long time. The you know, the appalling lack of hospital beds the lack of preparedness because of course, it's not efficient to stockpile ventilators or protective equipment for medical workers in anticipation of a crisis. I mean, irony is that this is what actually what the military when it functions does really well. It prepares for, you know, the worst that might come. But we didn't do that as a country. corporations don't make money off of that. The failure of the entire healthcare system in terms of protecting the citizenry, you have huge segments of the country who are essentially outside the healthcare system, not only 11 million undocumented workers, but the 80 million under insured or uninsured 58% of the people get employee sponsored. Healthcare of the workforce, they've all lost their jobs, where do they go? You are seen because of the Craven subservience on the part of elected officials towards corporate power, the passage of a so called stimulus bill, where we're bailing out airlines, I mean, this is we know what they're going to do with this money because we watched them do it in 2008. They give themselves bonuses, they buy back their own stocks, and they lay off the workforce. So these were all issues that I have been reading about, not only in terms of the economic and political decay, but the cultural decay. You mentioned empire of illusion, the end of literacy in the tribal spectacle, which is why we have reality show, television host as president the inability to discern the difference between fact and fiction because, of course, his persona on the apprentice was a fictional persona was created for a television audience. And the rise of a huge segment of the population trapped in magical thinking the christian right I also wrote a book on that I'm American fascists the christian right in the war in America. You know, you have megachurch, pastors still holding services. Trump is a product of magical thinking, that inability to separate fact from fiction the merging of fact and fiction fiction, which is always one of the telltale signs of a totalitarian system. So, that So, the the, the inability of the corporate state to cope with this catastrophe is because it has essentially been dismantled in large part to serve the consolidation of corporate power and corporate wealth. So that I have been reading about I you know, it's always fascinating to watch How history plays out I didn't predict the occupy movement. In fact, I learned quite a bit from it. And I didn't predict a pandemic. I knew I wrote about stress about that the system couldn't handle stress, and then that would propel us into a very frightening trajectory. But, you know, when I kind of wrote my litany of what that would be, would be economic collapse, which is, of course we're getting but it's accelerated by the pandemic, catastrophic domestic terrorist attack or, you know, climate change coastal cities being wiped out. But I think it's this pandemic has really changed or has changed and in very dramatic ways, the configuration of American society and whatever comes out of this, it won't look like what it looked like before.



Danny Sjursen 07:57

What if anything, you know, has anything surprised? You in this response or in the way, either government or just society in general is handling this?



Chris Hedges 08:07

No, it hasn't surprised me because I spent a lot of time examining how these centers of power work how corporate power works. But of course, the response is not a rational response. When in fact, we haven't really had a response because we can't test for the virus. It's spreading exponentially. We can't control it. You can't control it if you can't test. And the economic shock now will be catastrophic, because it's not just about millions of people what 10 million people have filed for unemployment or something. It's not simply about a projected now 30% unemployment rate. But the way that that whole system then unravels because people can't pay their rent. They don't can't pay their credit card companies, the the whole house of cards begins to fall down people default on their student debt. And we are a society built on debt. peonage largely it's, it's built on consumption and debt peonage we don't really make anything except weapons anymore. And, and so the anemic quality of the economic and political structures that have been put in place, cannot withstand these very seismic shocks. And how far will it go? You know, what, what will be the final outcome again, as opposed to spent too many years as a newspaper reporter to to try and predict, but it won't be good. There certainly will be unrest. You know already seen rippling rent strikes and places Like St. Louis. But lacking a coherent vision and alternative vision to corporate power. These localized uprisings can be dealt with and very ruthlessly crushed. We have created mechanisms within the United States through wholesale surveillance, the militarization of police, the use of terrorism laws, which have been directed primarily at Muslim activists. So here, people are charged. They're not in secret trials, they're not allowed to see the evidence, if there is any evidence, but they're not allowed to see the evidence arrayed against them used to convict them. People I've been involved in this I mean, these cases like Fidesz, me and others, are essentially being imprisoned. He's in a supermax prison for speech for what they said. And so, the demonization of Muslims essentially saw the society complicit in the creation of Legal mechanisms by which they were put on show trials stripped of all their rights and imprisonment and within marginal communities. De industrialized communities were mostly poor people of color live in these urban pockets. The militarization of police has been accompanied by the right of police, in essence to revoke ABS corpus and due process and, you know, kick down doors at two in the morning with carrying long barreled weapons and Kevlar vests for nonviolent drug warrants. I mean, terror is not, you know, 1000 what 1000 people a year I think are killed by police, most all of whom are unarmed. So what you've done is created both legal and physical mechanisms that should there be unrest outside of these, what Malcolm X called internal colonies, the rest of the country

can be held in subjugation so that that that's my that's my greatest fear. If the left in this country is so disorganized, and anemic, that's not the fault of the left, there's been a war against the left. Starting with the 1948 Taft Hartley act after World War Two, which was a major crippling blow to unionization. The press is a joke. I mean, MSNBC, which is purportedly left or liberal, it's not it's owned by Comcast. It's just inclusive corporate capitalism, as opposed to Fox News, which is racist corporate corporate capitalism, but it doesn't confront the structures of power in any meaningful way. So, you know, all of the mechanisms by which a public is informed and empowered by the kind of system of legalized bribery that allows corporations to fund candidates. I mean, the specter of Joe Biden, I mean, is really, really Joe Biden the best that the democratic party can Come up with, but of course, he was anointed and chosen by the corporate donors. I mean, it's fascinating. last column I wrote for TruthDig, before I got fired, was on, you know, the one choice election, which was who's going to manage corporate power? And, you know, they always tell us the, the masses that, you know, are the democratic, you know, those people who veer towards the Democratic Party, that it's the least worst least worst you got to can't don't vote for Nader because you got to vote for the least worst, which is Carrie or Hillary Clinton or whoever it is, they cough up, but that doesn't apply to them. And they've been they were quite frank about it that if Bernie Sanders became the nominee, big donors like Lloyd Blankfein, the former CEO of Goldman Sachs, that they'd all vote for Trump. So he there really, really is no, you know, major, or important political difference between the republican and the Democratic Parties there? As Ralph Nader said, that's a duopoly. You know, yeah, one comes with a more tolerant attitude. But on all of the major issues, imperialism, surveillance state trade agreements, there's no there is no difference. There's complete unanimity. And and I think that's dangerous because the whole theological basis of neoliberalism has lost all of its credibility. That's what empowered Trump people are angry and have every right to be angry at the elites. And but of course, he does what demagogues do which is take it out on the vulnerable and the, you know, undocumented, and Muslims and African Americans and others and, and that anger and rage is only going to be increasing. East has the system fails to confront the most basic needs of working men and women in the working poor, which are already had failed to do. But now, we are really going to see the kind of breadlines that I used to see in Yugoslavia during the war that stretch 10 blocks long, the inability to find any kind of employment and a ratcheting up of police and state power to keep the population in check.

D

Danny Sjursen 15:32

Chris, I'm glad you brought up Taft Hartley, you know, which, of course clamped down on unions. I think what strikes me about that, and Kagan wants to follow up with some economics is, you know, that was a backlash against the last great or one of the last great

economic crises. You know, it was only 12 years after FDR and his sort of, you know, liberal approach and then the Wagner Act had given some of these same rights to labor and then there's this backlash afterwards, which I imagined We'll probably see, but yeah, Keagan so I'll turn it over to you to kind of address some of the, the economic components of this.

K

Keagan Miller 16:08

Um, Thanks, Chris. You put a lot of good points on there. And I really appreciate that. I, personally, I used to when I was in the Navy and I worked in NSA. I'm doing different intelligence operations in the Middle East and specifically more in Yemen and Syria. Now, I work for a county here in Portland area, Portland, Oregon, and I'm trying to work with homeless veterans getting them housed and resources and things like that. So when you talk about the people on the bottom of the spectrum, I am keenly aware because that's people I work with every day. And not only are they you know, emotionally, mentally and physically. They like you said they've already been there. And I have some people that are getting tested right now for the virus. And it's just really frustrating when, you know, their lies have already been stretched so much. And then something like this comes along and just makes it 10 to a million times worse, right? And we have to try and do what we can with our limited scope, you know, as people, like, as the case managers, you know, we have, so we're always dealing with limited resources, and so services. So it's, it's making things pretty difficult. But I wanted to ask you specifically about oil prices, because the storage reserves are getting full, and oil prices might drop. I'm wondering, you know, what, what's that? What does that do for us, economically? And also, what does that do for our operations in the countries that, you know, because we care so much about the price of oil, and our operations tied so closely with that, how do you start see that changing as the oil prices change?

C

Chris Hedges 18:05

Well, that'll be, you know, one more economic shock, along with numerous economic shocks. So and then of you know, of course, because so much of our oil comes from shale and fracking, you're going to see, but but I mean, this is just one sector. It's a major sector, but it's just one sector that's taking a huge economic hit. I mean, every sector of the American economy is, is taking gigantic hits the you know, hospitality sector, the airline sector, and because we can't contain the virus or we don't have the capacity to, to identify it and control it. This potentially can go on for a really long time with will send the economy into a kind of death spiral because how long can these small businesses afford not to function? We know we have what people get are going to get checks depending on their income level of 1000 or 1500 dollars, that money is going to go right to their landlord

or to the credit card companies. And then what what happens after what is it four months? I think they get a you get of unemployment. What happens after that? These are short term, very meager poultry and largely symbolic short term offerings to a very distressed public. Meanwhile, Wall Street rallies. So But yeah, I think the oil sector is just one component in in a deeply deteriorating economic landscape. Were the you know, the first is now printing billions of dollars. Of course, the deathblow to the American economy is when the dollar is no longer the world's reserve currency, then its value will plummet, we know what it's going to look like. Because in the 1950s, up until the 1950s, the British Pound sterling was the world's reserve currency. And it that changed, the dollar became the world's reserve currency in the 50s. And the British economy went into a nosedive. So we're playing a dangerous game, we can afford to create this kind of money As long as the world continues to use the dollar as its as its primary currency, but you see both the Russians and the Chinese and others attempting to move away from the dollar and that will be catastrophic. That will be the moment in which there's no going back because the American economy will then Essentially constrict to such an extent that it can't afford to maintain its empire it, then we really will truly become a kind of third world country with nukes, which is kind of what we already are. It's just now it's being exposed.

D

Danny Sjursen 21:24

You know, it's long been the case, of course. But it's increasingly clear that economics, as you mentioned, is extremely inextricably linked with the American Empire. And so kind of what I want to address next is, you know, one of my favorite books of yours was empire of illusion, which I even forced my ex wife to read. So you may have that breakup, at least partly on your conscience. But you know, the titles of the casual reader, maybe it's misleading to them, you know, as you largely are actually talking about the gap between reality and illusion in the book in the cultural realm as much as anything. However, we reading it, I got the sense that the thesis applies quite well to American Empire in the more standard sense, something that we talk a lot about here. So, to what degree and what things specifically, do you think the events of the last few months have exposed about the nature and mechanics of empire of this American Empire, this third world country with nukes?

C

Chris Hedges 22:21

Right. So of course, what we've done is use our resources to fund these futile and endless wars in the Middle East. Nobody knows the exact amount but five to \$7 trillion, at least. And this, you know, these disastrous military fiascos are characteristic of all late empires. historians call it micro militarism. And so you saw for instance, at the end of the Greek Empire, they Greek Athenian Empire they invade Sicily, in their entire All of their Navy

almost all their Navy is sunk and they're slaughtered. And then the Empire fragments and disintegrates. You saw in 1956, the British attempt to after Nasir nationalizes, the Suez Canal, which is considered vital to British interests. There's this disastrous attempt to invade Egypt and seize it and they have to retreat in humiliation that was kind of the British Empire declined slowly after it's the suicidal folly of World War One. But it ended with that example of micro militarism. So I have spent seven years in the Middle East. And for me, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq was the greatest strategic blunder in American history. It is not only diverted all of our resources to a project that we could never win that, in fact, we've lost. But it tarnished forever the notion of American power and American hegemony because of course, it was a unilateral decision to go in. It wasn't like the first Gulf War which I covered I went into Kuwait with first battalion first Marines. It where there was a diplomatic effort by James Baker than Secretary of State to bring in a coalition. I mean, we actually had Syrian and Egyptian troops stationed in northern Saudi Arabia. They, we I went when I was with the Marine Corps, we drove by them literally the Syrians were drinking tea they they didn't engage in any of the fighting but they were used for the photo op of we were we were actually north of Kuwait City, with the Marines and but they wouldn't let us go into the I wouldn't alone but we The Marines weren't allowed to go in, because the liberation of the city was carried out by, quote unquote Arab coalition partners who had never fired a shot at an Iraqi. But that wasn't why they were there. So that was a kind of example maybe the one of the last examples of the recognition by the managers of empire that you can't go it alone. But bush was different cheney and bush and these figures. So I think that the decline of the United States is inextricably tied up with its decision to exhaust its resources. Its its capital and its credibility in these 20 year, almost 20 year projects of endless war. And in the process, of course, we have become throughout much of the world pariahs, that's not understood by most Americans. And and this has been kept with the election of Donald Trump who's you know, buffoonish and inept. And so it's, it's all part of the same. You know, it kind of closes the circle with the disastrous decisions in terms of the management of Empire. In fact, if you look at the early stages of any Empire, they they actually use military force quite judiciously and quite sparingly. It's the later stage of empire where they're desperately trying to capture a lost glory, that they can't, that they begin to make these huge military blunders that result in in in their destruction, their self destruction. That was certainly true. If you go back and look at the monarchies on the eve of World War One, whether they Was World War One was the death of the austro Hungarian Empire the death of the German on our key, the death of Czarist Russia, because they miscalculated and they didn't understand and that's exactly what we've done in the Middle East.



Chris 'Henri' Henrikson 27:20

Hi, Chris. I'm Henry, one of the CO hosts say I'm an army veteran, military police I served

two tours in Iraq. I wanted to ask you about the strategy and tactics of protesting. You've spoken a lot about certain groups tactics, discussing how Antifa has used violence just furthers the other side's argument more than helping their own, along with criticism of the Weather Underground's promotion and use of violence during anti war protests for the Vietnam War. My question is, is that if you were writing a manual for protesting, what kind of strategy or tactics would you pursue? I recall hearing a speech of yours where you mentioned buying a bunch of junk cars, and using them kind of as a means of protest.



Chris Hedges 28:15

Obstruction, you know, not nonviolent resistance to muck up the system, so it doesn't work. So what you're referring to is, I was with a bunch of activists in Boston, and they're running one of these huge pipelines, right through one of these outer neighborhoods of Boston. And they had tried everything, you know, meeting with their elected representatives, petitions, publicity of the environmental danger and health danger of doing this. And not to mention the fact that we need to end our reliance on fossil fuels and nothing at work and I said, Well, you know, what you need to do is buy a bunch of old cars and drive them into where the construction is going to take place. Take the batteries out and block the road. I mean, any kind of activity that begins to hamper This is why I was standing rock, the assault by these forces against the ecosystem that essentially carry out this process of eco side. I mean, I was around a lot of violence. I spent five years in the war in El Salvador, I was in Gaza. I covered the civil war in Algeria. The Sudan was, as I mentioned, went into Kuwait, the first Gulf War, spent a lot of time on the Kurds, was then three years covering the war in the former Yugoslavia. And I am not a pacifist, although I don't think that even in a quote unquote, just cause when you use violence, it protects you from the poison that Violence is I've seen what it does to people. I mean, including my own family members, my uncle fought in the South Pacific in World War Two and came back a physical and emotional wreck, drank himself to death. So, but violence just within the confines of I mean, just from a logistical point of view, if you study how violence works, let's take the Algerian War of Independence. The The only way the Algerians were able to mount a concerted armed campaign was because they had Tunisia they had a bordering country by that they could use to bring in weapons. This was true when I covered the war in El Salvador. They needed Nicaragua as a kind of conduit in order to bring in armed supplies. They trained and you know, you can't you can't attempt to carry out a civil war unless you have a bordering country that Essentially acts as your surrogate that it just doesn't work. So the whole idea that people can mount armed resistance within the heart of Empire is just logistically untenable. I also because I've covered all sorts I've covered all the revolutions in Eastern Europe, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania, the the two Palestinian uprisings, the Intifadas, street demonstrations that brought down Milosevic. I'm aware that that no revolutionary movements succeeds until a significant sector of the

foot soldiers of the ruling apparatus that's the police and the military, essentially, defect or refuse to protect the regime. That was certainly what happened in Eastern Europe when a Honaker the communist dictator in East Germany wanted to crush the protests. in Leipzig, which was the epicenter of the East German uprising, he sent down an elite paratroop division. And when they got there, because all of the Communist officials had their children and relatives in the streets of Leipzig, they refused to deploy and Honaker was out of power within a week. The same thing happened in the Russian Revolution for all of the violence, largely anarchist violence that took place, which by the way, Lenin who I can, I'm willing to concede was utterly amoral. But Lenin was very vehemently opposed to it. It was only when the divisions and Petrograd to affect it. That essentially all was lost. And it's interesting there, the police didn't effect so you had soldiers firing on the police who were universally hated in Czarist Russia. So and that was true in the Iranian Revolution. It was after the Shah fled the country and then the head of the Armed Forces said they wouldn't use force to defend the regime. And, and so in essence, if you go back to the French Revolution, it was also the same that was those defections that essentially set the stage for the overthrow of the monarchy. So and Cuba too, by the way, Cuba's history has been completely rewritten largely by Che and Fidel on the whole "foco" theory, which is, and somebody mentioned the Weather Underground. So the Weather Underground read this stuff, which was all garbage. It was complete garbage. The idea that you build an armed "foco" and then the country, you know, this creates an uprising and it was the national strikes in Cuba that brought down the government and Fidel and the bar Boulos had to climb into their trucks and spend three or four days racing to Havana. Now they had the guns and so they could take power, which is exactly what Lenin and the Bolsheviks did. But the revolutions do not happen. And Crane Brinton, "Anatomy of a revolution", Jeffrey Davies, other theorists have written about this. Unless there is enough defections within the ruling apparatus to create paralysis. And that's done through non violence. It's done through an appeal to conscience. So you had for instance, in the Russian Revolution, Russian workers going out and fraternizing with the Cossacks and with soldiers and because of World War One, every village had sons or husbands or fathers in the army. So yeah, non violence just doesn't work it you know, I covered different types of conflicts. I covered as I said, the civil wars in Central America. I covered the first Gulf War, which was largely between mechanized units in the desert. And, and then I covered occupations like Gaza. And occupations are always, you know, you can't win them in the end because the end, the entire populace as soon as you leave the wire the perimeter is viewed with some justification as hostile. You never rarely see your enemy; it's IEDs and ambushes they melt away and snipers. You start taking casualties you lash out incoherently at the civilian population which exacerbates the problems what happened in Vietnam. So...there are moments...Sarejavo was one, when you know we were surrounded by the Serbs by the Bosnian Serb forces they were dropping 2000 shells a day on the city and these were..since you all were in the military. These were...this wasn't 60 millimeter

mortars. These were 90 millimeter tank rounds, Katyushas, 155 or the Soviet equivalent of 155 Howitzer. It's big, big stuff and they built a trench system around the city. It was like World War One and every once in a while, some crazy Bosnian commander would like fire starbursts up in the middle of the night, you'd hear yelling, and these guys would run forward like it was the Somme and all get mowed down by machine guns. But we knew what would happen if the Serbs broke through that perimeter, they slaughter a third of the city and the rest would be driven into refugee or displacement camps, a women would be put in rape camps for a few weeks before they were executed. Because that's what they've done in Vukovar, in the Drina Valley and everywhere else. So at that point, you pick up a weapon. I mean, you're, you're facing a truly existential threat. But again, you know, it empowers the worst elements within a society. The original defenses in Sarajevo were run by gangsters who already had access to weapons and a penchant for violence. And when they weren't holding off the Serbs, they were going into the apartments of ethnic Serbs and robbing them and often executing them. So you know, there are periods when violence becomes a matter of self preservation. But once you start speaking that language, you know, the worst elements of society rise, I think to the top. So, non violence is the only tactic, just from a practical point of view that we have. And then from a moral point of view, having been around a lot of violence, I'm just not willing to, to engage in that kind of activity. As far as Antifa, these are juvenile kids, largely white male, middle class kids alienated, who show up in places like Oakland with \$600 worth of kneepads and stuff and throw rocks through windows. I mean, they're they're a gift to the security state, especially since they cover their faces. They drive away those who you know, might want to join the movement. They allow the state to demonize the movement. I think anybody who wants to carry out acts of civil disobedience or resistance would do well to read...they're all public: counterinsurgency manuals, because usually you look at how counterinsurgency operations work. And I watched five years of it in El Salvador. And Antifa is just a gift to those people that want to shut down widespread protest. But a Black Bloc lets Antifa split between, you know, people who embrace the kind of an archaic violence of the Black Bloc, and those who don't, so we can't quite get all of Antifa but the you know, the fact is, if you want to confront people with long barreled weapons, you better have long barreled weapons of your own. Rocks don't really count for much.

K

Keagan Miller 39:03

Kind of going along in that vein I, I'm a pretty big fan of Gene Sharp. So I totally agree with what you're saying. non violence, like is really the only way to like, get people to focus on the violence of the state for sure. And so like, going along with that a lot of non violence. I mean, it doesn't always require big movements of people, but in a lot of ways it does. And since we can't congregate in really big groups of people right now, how can we, you know, how can we do this? How can we organize and do all that stuff while we're

social distancing? Because that seems to make it really hard.



Chris Hedges 39:46

So we're gonna have all sorts of de facto strikes, because people don't have money. So pretty soon, people aren't going to be paying. I mean, what's going to happen? You know, of course, we privatized all our utilities. They're going to shut everyone Water off? Are they going to shut everyone's electricity off? I mean, they're that heartless and callous and greedy. They might. And that's stupid. What's going to happen to all the renters can't pay their rent, what's going to happen to the big banks that own the student debt? What's going to happen to the credit card companies? So that is going to be a de facto form of resistance, even for people who aren't even conscious of resisting. That's the next step. And that's gonna drive the state nuts. They may try more bailouts but I've lived through hyperinflation in Argentina and Nicaragua, Yugoslavian that once you have hyperinflation, which means your money is largely worthless. I mean, we're in Nicaragua, we remember carried around also true in Argentina. paper bags full of money that you know to buy a loaf of bread or something. That is, all the credibility of the state instantly evaporates and I'm not an economist, so I'm not going to tell you that's where we're headed. But if that happens, if they just keep printing money, they're certainly flirting with hyperinflation. And if hyperinflation happens then then you get into a kind of Weimar situation where the ruling elites which don't have much credibility, by the way, anyway, are just pushed aside not often what comes next is really ugly. That's what happened in fascist Germany or Italy. We were saved by people say we were saved by Roosevelt. No, we were saved by the Communist Party, which has kind of been written out of American history. The Progressive Party, the militant unions, like the CIO, and Roosevelt in his private correspondence, which I've read to his brother published after his death. He uses the word revolution. He said, If we don't respond, there will be a revolution. And Roosevelt supposedly said that his greatest achievement was that he saved capitalism, which is right. But we don't have a Roosevelt. Now, we have a Donald Trump and a Joe Biden who wants to I hear put Jamie Dimon as the treasury secretary. So we're in deep, deep trouble. And the capitalists, the capital, corporate capitalist class, which not only destroyed the radical movements that put pressure on the liberal class, I mean, the best writer on when I wrote my book death of the liberal class, I told Noam Chomsky, I probably should have put you down as a co author, because everything I've learned about the nature of liberal institutions, and how they function comes from Chomsky. But Chomsky, you know, elucidated for me that the function of the liberal class, which is to as a kind of safety valve, that it ameliorates the most greediness activities of the capitalist class to essentially stifle or hold at bay, any kind of real dissent, or resistance, and then it's allowed its peculiar position in the capitalist society, because it is used to discredit radicals who question the system itself. So I mean, I've been a victim of this when I was

very vocal about the call to invade Iraq on the day of the invasion. I had 15 minutes on NPR, I think was on fresh air. I can't remember the show. And the other 15 minutes was given to actually know him. He was a friend, Michael Ignatieff. And so Michael played his liberal credentials. I oppose the Vietnam War, humanitarian intervention...we have to liberate the people of Iraq. And you know, that's why he was the head of the car center. Harvard and given you know ample space to write long magazine pieces defending empire which he did in the New York Times Magazine, so, but the the capitalist class after destroying the radical movements disavow the liberal establishment itself so you end up with these faux liberals like Clinton or Tony Blair, who speak in the feel your pain language of liberalism, but assiduously serve corporate power and that, of course has created the political crisis, that and economic crisis that we are currently facing. So, hyperinflation would definitely be the deathblow that then it's all over then none of the ruling elites no matter what their political position is, given any credibility or support, and it's very quickly pushed aside but but, you know, Europe and the 1930s went one way we went another, but given the configurations of American society, I don't I don't see the pressure points by which we can respond rationally to the crisis. You know, we're already enveloped by the kind of magical thinking that characterizes totalitarian societies. Trump does it at every press briefing that he has, not that I watched them. And we have built within the system of fascistic movement, the Christian right, who are Christian heretics who have fused the iconography and language of American patriotism with a Christian religion just like the German Christian church did. Under Naziism was a fusion of Naziism with Christian symbols and has created educational systems and broadcast systems that we don't need a lot of us don't watch it, but I had to watch it for two years. Everybody should watch it because it's really frightening. And that, you know, fascism when it arises in a country always dresses itself and kind of comforting native garb if you know Italian fascism was very different from German fascism. That was not by the way, anti semitic at the beginning and never virulently anti semitic, the way the Nazis were. But for Mussolini was about the recreation of the whole of the Roman empire that he was, you know, the new Augustus and our fascism will become rat will come wrapped in, you know, the Christian cross and the Pledge of Allegiance. It already is, it's already out there and it is rapidly filling Trump's ideological void all these figures like Pence and Betsy DeVos and Eric Prince, Betsy DeVos' his brother, who founded Blackwater and runs these for profit, mercenary armies. We just saw the New York Times expose about how they infiltrated teachers union. I mean, these are their version of the brown shirts. So there's a lot in place to very quickly turn this country into an overt police state.

D

Danny Sjursen 47:17

Well, you know, one of the things that's been tossed around and you know, Keagan kind of mentioned is this general strike. In my home borough on Staten Island, for my sins, the

only borough of course, that voted for Trump totally unsurprising given my brief time in the you know, Eric Garner protests down there when I was teaching at West Point, a whole other thing but uh, you know, Christian Smalls, this guy led really more of a protest than, than a strike and, and yet the threat for to Amazon was just so intense that, that he's fired within two hours.

C Chris Hedges 47:54
Right.

D Danny Sjursen 47:54
And he was basically, you know, he was crying on Jimmy Dore but you know, Jimmy Dore Whatever one thinks of him calls essentially for a general strike. And so building on Kagan's question about, you know, in a time of social distancing, I mean, is this time for a general strike and what would that look like?

C Chris Hedges 48:13
Well, it's hard to strike if you don't have work. I think that...I mean, will there be a general strike? I mean, I suppose low wage workers, the people like who work at Amazon who work at fast food, I mean, yes, I mean that it is certainly time. But you have huge sectors of the working class who are all at home they're not at work. They're not. The businesses are shut down. I suppose a general strike if it is held at like places like Whole Foods which they had a one day walkout is important. But I think that what's going to truly cripple the economy is going to be the lack of revenue that they can extract from the population 70% of the US economy is driven by consumption. And people not only aren't consuming, you know, they're reaching an economic point where they can't consume and that becomes a kind of, again, a de facto strike. But I, you know, other than those kind of low wage workers who are delivering our packages and and cooking and tearing it out Well, I think that that if I mean, I think those strikes will tend to be more localized. I mean, for instance, Whole Foods if they want to, they can finally deal with it. But I think given the significant percentage of the American workers class that just isn't going to have work, it's going to take more than a general strike to bring these people down.

D Danny Sjursen 50:09
Yeah, that's a great point. But one of the things that has struck me is, I mean, the degree of leverage that for all the mismatch, the degree of leverage that demand in itself, consumption and demand provides the working class or just the masses, but you know,

we've taken a bunch of your time so I just want to like pivot to probably one last thing and it involves your background to a certain extent. You know, you came out of Divinity School, empathy and ethical sense really do seem to permeate all of your work. You know, here Fortress On A Hill, we discuss broad issues but tend to focus on the warfare state the Empire as to ethics this morning, you know, brutal plug, but this morning at anti war calm, essentially declared war on half of my former institution, quite frankly, friends, some of whom I imagined I may lose. The surface topic was the firing of Captain Crozier. But really what I'm arguing is that the time for polite fiction of you know, intellectual and moral equivalency on these matters of war and peace and broader really ought to be behind us. So I'm thinking specifically of you know, America's escalatory war in Iraq or the calls for it from Pompeo and Esper both classes at six, of course, West Point, and the broader Middle East as well as like the crippling sanctions regime that seems to be tightening. So I guess what I want to ask is, you know, what do you see as the ethical implications of the Pentagon and other power structures, response to this, you know, what I would call COVID, opportunism?



Chris Hedges 51:38

Well, it's interesting. I mean, having been with a combat unit, in a good combat unit, first battalion first Marines, both the CO the XO, and the sergeant major, all Vietnam vets. This was in the first Gulf War. I saw good leadership. I mean, this Colonel Fallon Lieutenant Colonel Fallon. He was a great commander and because I learned very early on covering war, the higher up you go and the the structure of the military, the more bullshit you were fed because the more careerist they were till you got to generals who are very good at doing what they were told but not very good at thinking. So I spent most of my time with privates and Lance corporals and sergeants, and I remember Fallon asking me. I liked him quite a bit and asked asking me, because I was, you know, spent a lot of time with his grunts what they what they thought of him. And I said, well, Colonel Fallon, they hate officers. But they all say Colonel Fallon cares about his men. And he teared up, and he said, that's all I care about. And then when we got over when we were in Kuwait, I actually went on to Basra for the Shiite uprising by myself, and then was taken prisoner by the Iraqi republican guard. Look and guard but we had the stay platoon to the sniper and surveillance squad that went over first and they got very badly shot up. We have seven wounded one quite seriously. And then when the division came over, the Iraqis threw down their weapons and didn't want to fight. But when I said goodbye to him, you know, I told him I said, You are like Crozier, you care about your men, you are and women in the case of Crozier, and that is the essence of a good leader, whether it's in the military or anywhere else, and he's found said to me, I'm taking all my men home, and again, a tear rolled down his face. And so I did find the Crozier thing kind of interesting, because here was an example of leadership of you know, when you know, and a lot of officers don't

care about their men or women. You know, they can't, they'll set them out to some firefight, which is unnecessary and gets people harmed so so they can have a Taylor rush in and so a combat Infantry Badge on their uniform. And they're quite willing to sacrifice their men or women for their own advancement, like anywhere else in the military is not immune to that. So, Petraeus would be a good example of that. So that I did find that thing about Crozier interesting, because it was an example of the military punishing what is good leadership. And what is vital, especially once you go into combat. The people they want to know that, that that you actually do care and they know they know. Yeah, I mean, in terms of empathy, I mean the disease of empire is that it, and this would be the disease of militarism or violence is that it you have to dehumanize the other in order to kill them. And so built into any kind of nationalist rhetoric is always, or nationalism itself is really colored by racism. It's about the elevation of us over them. It's about the dehumanization of the other. And this makes you utterly tone deaf and makes you mean the fact that we went into countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, and I, again, spent seven years not in Afghanistan, but in the Middle East. And a lot of time in Iraq. I speak Arabic, and you're just culturally, linguistically, religiously illiterate. You can't even speak the language. Then you respond. you communicate the only way you can, which is through force and violence. And again, going back to our discussion of occupation that becomes counterproductive. I mean, you get some frightened kid 10 year old kid who's been shot at in a village and he's got it in his hands a belt fed saw. And he's just blasting away at these mud hobbles. So, you know, when nobody goes back to check to see what has happened to the people inside by you just created, you know 100 new insurgents, and this is what we did in Vietnam. It's what the French did in Algeria. It's using wholesale violence as the only way to communicate when you're occupying other countries is is deeply counterproductive and that's of course what we've done. And and why we are eventually going to have to leave the Middle East and humiliation.

D

Danny Sjursen 56:50

Well, Chris, I tacitly promised an hour and for once in our pocket mean mine mostly immense verbosity, it seems that we're, we're pretty close. So, you know, we're gonna let you go and wrap up, which is amazing that we're at 59 minutes. But I just want to say that, you know, first of all, people should check out America: The Farewell Tour. Are you are you working on a book right now?

C

Chris Hedges 57:19

Yeah, I'm writing a book on because, you know, I teach and I've been teaching in prisons for 10 years through Rutgers, so I'm writing a book on prisons. Yeah.

D

Danny Sjursen 57:29

That's awesome and incredible work and something we need because clearly the, the prison industrial complex is so much part of Eisenhower's more simplistic analysis of the military industrial complex, but you know, definitely check out the forthcoming book, his recent his recent work on America the farewell tour as well as the RT show, something I just want to say and listeners to the pod. We have a bunch but a lot of them are veterans naturally and credibility of experience, it really shouldn't be necessary, but it just shines through with you. I mean, even just the little things like, you know, using the acronym saw for machine guns and understand the difference between a 60 millimeter small bang and a 155, large bang, I mean, it's just gonna shine through, which means a lot to folks who are listening and demonstrates that the value of journalism and analysis to to the military structure and it's so easily dismissed. But uh, you know, your modesty may not countenance this particularly well, but the fellows and I were talking on our last pod, which will release probably today or tomorrow. And just the other day, about, you know, how Noam Chomsky who you mentioned, although he's as lucid and poignant as ever amazingly well into his 90s, can't possibly, God forbid, stick around forever and just given the quality of your work and your connections with folks like Cornel West, now we all agreed and I think it's safe to say that you know, you along with precious few others will And already have sort of begun to take up his mantle. So, once more. Thanks for taking the time, Chris. I know our listeners are going to be excited to hear your thoughts and we wish you and yours as much health and happiness as possible in this moment.

C

Chris Hedges 59:13

Great. Well, thanks for doing it, Danny.

D

Danny Sjursen 59:15

Glad to and hopefully we can talk again soon. Okay,

C

Chris Hedges 59:19

hopefully we'll set up that archery thing whenever they can do it.

D

Danny Sjursen 59:22

Oh, yeah, that'd be great. I'm looking forward to it for sure. plenty to talk about, I imagine as always,



Chris Hedges 59:27

okay. All right. Take it easy.



Danny Sjursen 59:30

Talk soon.