

Friday 27 January 26, 2023

Dear Everyone



Last week saw the annual day of commemoration of the life of Martin Luther King Jr. He leaned heavily on the work of Mahatma Gandhi in his extolling of change through peaceful means.

Who is or are our Martin Luthers and Mahatma Gandhis of today? There are likely many contenders, but the world is different – noisier, and crowded with social media skewing any coherent ideas, and with the proliferation of channels it's less easy to hear those who might make a positive and lasting impact. While some political playwrights of the 20th century came to the view that there are no more great causes, it is ever more apparent that the causes of peace and poverty are more pressing than ever.

At the weekends I try to join the dots between news stories, and last weekend was disheartening. Davos folk are upbeat about the global economy, which is good news on the one hand, but I wonder about the means ends position taken to bolster the all-ready wealthy and powerful. On other pages, silhouettes of types of tank the West are sending to Ukraine suggest a different kind of means ends position, that is quickly becoming normalized.

In both cases, despite all the really ambitious ideas for a better and different future explored during lockdown, how far are we now just back to business as usual?



Martin Wolf, chief economics commentator at the FT, argues a position where democracy and capitalism are both complementary *and* opposites, but are also fragile and rely on consent for their legitimacy. He suggests, however, that this is now unstable as smaller numbers of people accrue astonishing wealth on a scale that is no longer in the interests of any but themselves. And with finance and technology both holding global powers in thrall, that doesn't bode well for democratic processes.

He suggests that what we need is a “political response rooted not in the destructive politics of identity, but of welfare for all citizens – that is, a commitment to economic opportunity and basic security for all.” Easy to suggest, yet seemingly impossible to achieve now that the imbalance of power is so extreme.

Back in Davos, one European industry minister commented that while economic heaven is less affordable, despite Russia's war on Ukraine, it is still affordable, as if conflict is a minor nuisance. In the run up to the last winter of discontent, 84% of the UK's wealth was secreted among 7% of the population, and gave rise to the name of agit-prop theatre company, 7:84.

The World Bank now estimates that 1% of the *world's* population has captured 63% of the wealth, up over 16% in just two years, and continues to rise. It would appear COVID concentrated wealth in a rare moment in history when it could easily have been more evenly distributed. With elected leaders in the news over tax bills that in themselves put them at the top end of the global 1%, we're in a funny old place.

Teachers are not meant to take a political position, left or right, so what are we supposed to say to children when counter arguments of the kind published by Oxfam last week, [Survival Of the Richest](#) make hardly a dent in the mainstream media.

I wonder if the Oxfam report is named after Douglas Rushkoff's 2022 book of the same. In an article by Gillian Tett, *Why Billionaires Are Obsessed With Bunkers*, (FT October 26, 2022) she notes, 'Rushkoff argues in his new book, *Survival of the Richest*, [since] these are the same people who have exacerbated problems such as climate change, social conflict and inequality. “They have this mindset that you become this sovereign individual, above everybody else,” he argues. Bunkers enable them to check out’.

In other corners, where we thought there might be better progress for women, there is some evidence to suggest that as big corporates begin to cut their work force, it can be women that are more expendable. Vulnerable parts of the business less able to demonstrate direct line impact on sales revenues are also areas that are more likely to be gendered at the less senior end, like HR and marketing. And for *senior* female leaders, who are more likely to give time and effort to support workforce wellbeing, their impact on the business can go unseen and under rewarded. In your firm, are bonuses gender transparent?

On January 25 this week, we celebrated the conversion of St Paul and the time when, after his experience on the road to Damascus, his worldview turned upside down. It seems to me that that we live in a world in need of thinkers, leaders and writers who are similarly prepared to change – to convert their ideologies – not to mention some new Luther Kings and new Mahatma Gandhis who seek to change the world peacefully.

To my shame, I only know a few of the names on this list.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_women_pacifists_and_peace_activists

And so the beat goes on.

Here's Buddy Rich's 12-year-old daughter Cathy singing Sonny Bono's hit song, *The Beat Goes On*. I doubt it was recorded with any sense of irony at the time, but it certainly seems so now. It is track 3 on the B side of *Big Swing Face*, (1967) one of the most driven swing albums ever recorded.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_JJaAkUwpc

Best wishes

Simon