

## Bye, bye American pie



By Nate Smelle

It is just before midnight on Jan. 19 and I am trying to put the anxiety I am feeling about the next four years into words. In 12 hours and three minutes the next American president will be sworn in, and, like it or not the world we have been living in will change. For better or worse, well, at this stage some more optimistic folks might say it's too early to tell; however, if the writing on the wall still means anything—and even that in itself is up for dispute these days—we are about to enter the next phase of the so called “post-truth” era.

With a convicted con-man for a Commander-In-Chief occupying the “highest” office in the “free world”, and the “richest”, most demented white nationalist in the world pulling his strings, we, the working class are about to start experiencing the consequences of buying into the biggest lie in history. Unfortunately, when it comes to a democracy, everyone—including those who voted for a different candidate, party, or ideology, and even those who didn't vote at all—must face the music from the next band to take the stage.

No matter where one finds themselves on the political spectrum these days, there is no disputing the fact that we are living in the age of disinformation and division. Over the past decade the “powers that be” have been working overtime to ensure that the working/middle class is focused on fighting each other instead of on whether it is logically in our best interests as a species to allow a single human being to hoard \$433.9 billionUSD, while: more than 4.5 billion people do not have access to basic health-care services; two billion do not have access to clean drinking water; and, approximately 783 million people do not have enough to eat.

Despite the grossly successful efforts of the uber-wealthy to unnecessarily divide, conquer, and steal our personal and planetary health and well-being for their own advantage, for the past five years, my friend the un-German anti-fascist artist Arne Roosman and I have been discussing this twisted reality confronting us on almost a weekly basis. We recently revisited the subject of the ever-increasing wealth gap again over the holidays, as we sat in his kitchen catching up on the news of the week.

As we sat there probing through the headlines and our notes on global and local affairs during the year behind us, we soon found ourselves talking about the U.S. president-elect's threats to “take” Canada using “economic force”, as well as Greenland and the Panama Canal by “military force.”

“It's a badly written fairytale, but he's bloody serious,” Arne said. “It's unbelievable!”

'Now that he has the 'richest' man in the world funding his madness, he could actually try to make it happen. What I don't understand is how any working class person, especially now as a Canadian, could support these billionaires who clearly only care about themselves.'

Acknowledging how both the incoming U.S. president and Adolf Hitler proclaimed their 'love' of the uneducated, Arne said 'This is where you get into these kind of caricatures talking about the 'stupid masses.' But, speaking with a totally straight vocabulary, isn't it ridiculously stupid to have this kind of system that allows these kind of greedy characters running things?'

'I don't get it. To strange times!?' I said, raising the mug of beer in front of me.

'To strange times my friend!?' he said as we clinked glasses.

Continuing to go over our notes as we sat there sipping our way through the Christmas six pack we were sharing, I came across some statistics from an article published in Forbes magazine back in November of 2021. The article by Chase Peterson-Withom, entitled 'Led By Elon Musk's Crazy Gains, American Billionaires Have Added Nearly \$2 Trillion To Their Fortunes During The Pandemic', revealed that 'On New Year's Day 2020, before Covid-19 swept the U.S., the nation's billionaires held a collective \$3.4 trillion in wealth'; and, how less than two years later 'U.S. billionaires have gotten more than \$1.8 trillion richer since the pandemic began.'

'No one has gotten richer than Elon Musk, who became the first person to ever cross the \$300 billion mark earlier this week,' Peterson-Withom declared. 'Worth an estimated \$320.3 billion, he's an astounding \$293.7 billion wealthier than he was before the pandemic began. That's more money than Bill Gates and Warren Buffett have'combined.'

'When is enough enough?' Arne asked after I presented him with the stats. 'Do any of these guys need that much? There should be a limit.'

'I know! Even if we set it at \$100-million'more than anyone would ever need to live a happy, healthy life'we would be able to make sure everyone is fed, housed, educated, has access to good water, etc.'?

'But they always need more!?' Arne laughed.

The conversation continued for another few hours as we polished off the remaining libations.

Although we agreed that it appears as if the mistakes of history that Arne experienced firsthand as an un-German child growing up inside Nazi Germany during the Second World War were about to be repeated, we clinked our glasses together one last time that day to our shared hope for a better brighter future beyond the dark times ahead.

Thinking about our conversation the next morning as I enjoyed my first coffee of the day while watching a pair of Gray Jays dart in and out of the tall spruce tree outside my living room window, I opened my email inbox to see what had come in over night. As I filed a pair of letters to the editor that were waiting for me, it hit me that the barrage of letters from the Maple MAGA clan which flooded my inbox before and immediately after the election in early November had disappeared as soon as their messiah started talking about taking over Canada.

Could it be that people are starting to realize that these billionaire con-men cosplaying as dictators are not looking out for them, us, or anyone but themselves? Maybe I'm being too optimistic, but for now at least, I will take this silence as a sign of hope.