

The great submission

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To the Editor,

There's a video going around You Tube called the "The Great Realization." The video is done by a group called Tom Foolery productions and it's a heart-warming four minutes of what appears to be a father telling his son a bedtime story in a post virus world. In this new post-virus world we had all woken up, presumably during quarantine, to realize how lousy the pre-virus world was, it shows pictures of people dancing, smiling, and even has a little turtle scuttling on a rocky beach. The air has cleared, the earth was healing and people were kind to one another. In what appears to be some fatherly knowledge the man tells his son to go to sleep and dream of tomorrow and if he dreams hard enough maybe some of those dreams will come true. The main premise is that we as humans had to get sick before we started feeling better or in other words we needed a crisis to shake us out of our complacency. Unfortunately, this video is nothing more than a bunch of emotional fluff that has no bearing on reality and what it takes to actually change the capitalist system. As Barbara Tuchman has observed, "Crisis does not necessarily purge a system of folly, old habits and attitudes die hard." Those old habits and attitudes are still out there just waiting for us as I have seen no new habits or attitudes waiting to take their place. That's not to say that there are no good substitutes, but they are not in sufficient number politically and are too easily divided to make any difference. If we look back to the last great crisis of capitalism, not 2008, but 1929 what did it take to bring about the changes that came to be known as the "New Deal"? First, it's important to point out that the leaders of both Canada and the U.S., President Herbert Hoover and Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, spent most of their time in denial that there was anything wrong with the economy or that there was even a depression. As Ronald Edsforth has observed, "Despite evidence to the contrary American elites persisted in the belief that there were no serious flaws in American capitalism." In the words of one advertising executive, "We didn't know that the depression was going on." Despite massive strikes, farm holidays, hunger strikes, hunger marches, farmer uprisings, riots, people literally dying in the streets, the elites maintained a stoic view of economics called economic fatalism. It's not that they didn't know about the suffering, they did, but they accepted it as a natural part of the economic cycle and as the price that the average person must pay to have rich elite people walk amongst them. The Hoover administration even went so far as to send in the troops to remove a group of First World War veterans, called "the Bonus Army," who were asking for relief. This should be a lesson to those who are being called "heroes" today, because in reality, if you start to make demands for better working conditions, the government and the elites will have no problem reminding you that you are still just peasants. In the 1930s it was only after mass sustained pressure that a change was able to be made politically and economically to the system of capitalism. Even though change eventually came in the form of the New Deal, it was by no means certain as one Iowa farmer observed, the dominant feelings at the time were not rebellion, but something more paralyzing, "The dominant thing was this helpless despair and submission. There was anger and rebellion among a few, but by and large, that quiet desperation and submission." Even though the dominant feelings were desperation and submission there was still hope for the future as linguist, author, and professor Noam Chomsky points out when he describes his experience during the Great Depression, "After the first few years, by the mid-1930s although the situation was objectively much harsher than it is today nevertheless, the spirit was quite different. There was a sense that 'we're gonna get out of it,' even among unemployed people, including a lot of my relatives, a sense that 'it will get better.' It's quite different now. For many people in the United States, there's a pervasive sense of hopelessness, sometimes despair." This makes perfect sense in an individualist oriented system that constantly tells us that our success or failure depends entirely on our own behaviour and choices, but as Franklin Roosevelt observed, "We know now from bitter experience that the theory that a nation could lift itself up by its boot straps was not sound." This is a fact echoed by Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman who observed that, "The causes of long-term unemployment clearly lie with macroeconomic events and policy failures that are beyond any individual's control." We have returned to the failed boom-bust economic policies of the roaring '20s. A system that led to the worst depression the world has ever seen, the rise of fascism and eventually the Second World War. Boom-bust economic policy's were supposed to have been eliminated [after the Second World War], but boom-bust cycles have proved to be a harder habit to break for the elites. Ever since the New Deal was implemented the elites have been trying to dismantle it and now it has been replaced by neo liberalism which has made an enormous amount of wealth for a few people. As Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman points out regarding boom-bust economics, "for a long time they worked very well, not for the nation as a whole but for a handful of very wealthy, very influential people." If we are to make any lasting changes to the system of capitalism

as it exists today we will have to go back to the tactics used by labour and farmers during the Great Depression. We will have to aim our anger outward in productive ways as opposed to succumbing to shame and self-blame by giving into hopelessness and despair. If we are to truly have a great realization, it will take action, sustained, long-term coordinated action aimed at eliminating the income inequality that is at the heart of the economic fatalism which dominates current accepted thought. Most importantly if we are to have a great realization we must accept as FDR pointed out in the '30s that, "No one who is out of work today can rightfully feel that he or she is personally responsible for having lost his or her job." Failure to do this means the great realization will just become the great submission to economic fatalism and the acceptance of "a diminished, embittered future." Bill Kilpatrick Bancroft