

World Focus – November 19, 2017
Blase' Commentary on Thanksgiving

Well folks, there's a lot to be thankful for. I'd like to thank Theresa Bonpane for the great work of *Don't Mourn, Organize*. The campaign started after the election of 2016. It came out of the progressive labor movement of the early 20th century. Before his execution by the state of Utah, labor organizer Joe Hill had written to Bill Haywood, a founder of International Workers of the World. "Don't waste any time mourning. Organize!" Despite strong government resistance to the work of the IWW, Joe Hill tirelessly worked as a labor organizer and activist, defending the rights of workers. Thank you, Theresa, for this book, which is available from the Office of the Americas.

We find this one of many things to be very happy about this Thanksgiving. Last week we talked about the Bible. Some people believe it's the inspired work of God, some don't. Excellent scholars have dedicated their lives to understanding this book, which remains a best seller. Last week we spoke of one of the most difficult books of the Bible, the highly symbolic and confusing Book of Revelations, also known as the Apocalypse. Help me to find one credentialed scholar of biblical writings who will not accept the message of revelations. The message is very clear: the worldly empire will be totally destroyed. Many see it as a message that a new kingdom of peace on earth and good will for everyone will follow. Well, in 2017, the only real empire has troops in over a hundred nations, and which *demand full spectrum dominance* of the planet. That's our little country, which has four percent of the world's people.

So its chief of state remains a clear and present danger of the planet earth. But white evangelicals and Roman Catholics and Roman Catholic Bishops simply don't get it. Their theology is either flawed or malicious. It can be found in the Vatican and storefront churches. What is their objective? Money, power, idol worship? It began with the Council of Nicea which gave a visible church the force of the Roman Empire as its protector. It's used that power as a client state of Rome to carry on bloody crusades, inquisitions, conquests, including the law of discovery, which gave the church the power to enslave, convert or kill in the name of God. And today, as in former centuries, many nominal Christians are catering to empire the same way. We look and see that 81 percent of Christian evangelicals voted for Trump, and 43 percent of the Catholics voted for Trump. So history is allowed to repeat itself because it's been ignored.

So what is there to be thankful about? Everything. People are more conscious than before. The democratic party appeals for more military spending, and gets rebuked for doing so. Nancy Pelosi said she'd be open to a ground invasion of North Korea. That's even after a recent congressional research service report said that a US war with North Korea would cause up to 300,000 civilian casualties in the first day. We need her voice to speak for peace. Not for war. We don't need two military industrial parties. We don't need one. And we need to tell Nancy Pelosi that we don't need to go to war with North Korea.

With regard the whole nuclear thing, we have the problem of the use of nuclear weapons. I'm happy to see in today's LA Times there's a headline: *"Refuse the president's nuclear strike order."* And they quote General John Hidden, the head of the strategic command. He said he would tell Trump that they would not carry out an illegal strike. This is something we've been reflected on for the past few weeks. General Keller, who served as the head of Strategic Command previously, said "we are obligated to follow legal orders - not illegal ones." He said he would never obey an illegal order. And this applies not only to the generals. This also applies to enlisted personnel and lower ranking officers. We had General Smedley Butler, the most awarded general in the history of the US, who said War is a Racket. And another general, the head of the strategic air command, who said nuclear weapons should never, ever be used. So we have quite a history here of opposition to nuclear weapons coming from the generals themselves. I think that's a tremendous plus in favor of peace and survival. It's so extremely important at this time.

What we see when we look out there: why is no one cheering our great war for democracy in Yemen? No one is cheering. Everyone is saying get out of there. Hundreds of groups are saying get out of there. The congress even has a motion to get out of there. That's something to be thankful for. No one is thankful for our friendship with the vicious dictatorship in Saudi Arabia. We're thankful that no one is in favor of nuclear genocide in North Korea. There's lots of be thankful.

So why did religious groups back Trump? I think it may have to do with what they hear about abortion in church. They hear about the evil of abortion, but don't seem to hear about the evils of nuclear warfare in church. That is, with some exceptions. So we're happy about a series that came out called "No Choice." He wrote about the history of abortion and what's at stake. Anti-abortion activists are continuing a five-year assault on abortion rights. Doctors are fighting for our constitutional rights. Americans hold a variety of opinions about abortion, but we should all rely on the same facts. And they have numbers that give a snapshot of abortion in the US. The stigma attached to abortion makes it hard for those who have had one to share their stories. So we want to make it easier for them. Well, six out

of ten women who get abortions are parents already. Abortion is made legal by Row v Wade in 1973, but since 1976 congress has restricted access to abortion by refusing to allow federal dollars to cover abortion services. So all of this will be covered by Moyers' series, which is extremely important.

Hundreds of state laws passed in recent years forced many abortion clinics to close. While a 2016 Supreme Court decision overturned some laws, many remain.

Abortion is a medical issue, and should remain one. It should not be messed with by people who think they're speaking on behalf of God. That would be a mistake. And it is a mistake. So it's a psychological issue as well, and it's up to professionals and the woman herself, of course, to decide on these issues. They should not be micromanaged by people who think they know something about the divine when they may not know much at all. It's extremely important to see that.

We have a lot to be thankful for - conscious people who do their homework and know that military is the largest polluter on the planet. We can reflect on the fact that there are people speaking about climate change without identifying the military as the culprit. To ignore the fact that the greatest polluter on the earth should have no influence over environmental policy.

We're so grateful that many people see patriotism as the last refuge of scoundrels. People who reverence the flag and hate millions of people who live on our streets. I'm thankful that so many people see our justice system, which is not a single justice system at one - there's one form of justice for the affluent and white, and there's another entirely different system of justice for people of color and people living in poverty. Anyone who studied law and cannot see this should be expelled from the profession together with a rejection if they receive a lifetime appointment as a federal judge.

People recognize the grotesque wealth divide in this country. For four people to own as much wealth as 50 percent of our citizens ought to be illegal. We can find plenty of back up to this in the Bible. Distributive justice is key in biblical literature. It's so key you couldn't miss it unless you wanted to - and maybe a lot of people want to. We have the mother of Jesus speaking of a messianic era and about how the hungry will be filled with good things and the rich will be sent away empty, the mighty deposed from their thrones. That's certainly the anti-imperial statement coming from the mother of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. And also, distributive justice is so strong in some of the other references. Here's John the Baptist saying that "people have to learn how to share." Sharing is what it's all about. If you have two coats, give one to someone who has none. And he says do the same with food. If you have food, and others don't, share. That was the message, and it is a very powerful message throughout the Bible.

What do you call these people? A great group of communists? Well, they sound like it. How did they live? They lived together, shared all things in common, sold their property and good and shared with each other as each had need, they met at the temple and they broke bread together in their homes every day. With joyful and sincere hearts, they took their meals in common and praising God and winning the praise of all the people. Yes, they lived communally. If you wish to call them early age communists, that's fine. The acts of the apostles were the same: the community of believers worked for one mind and one heart. They didn't claim anything of their own; everything was held in common. They continued to testify with great power. They earned respect. Those who owned property or houses would sell them and give the money to the apostles, and distributed to anyone who might be in need. Distributive justice - four people with more money than half the population. My goodness.

Maybe we can learn some of those things, and we are thankful that there are reflections on this today. Many people are speaking about these things. The prophets wanted the swords turned into plowshares. Dr. King rightfully identified the devils as militarism, racism and poverty. And you'll see that so well reflected in the new film *Mudbound*. Do see it. You'll understand militarism, racism and poverty being the evil forces that they are. It's hard to find a better dramatization of that than in this new film.

The walls of sectarianism and nationalism and tribalism were broken by the prophet Jesus. He didn't go along with sectarianism. In fact, he opposed it. He was almost killed in his own place of worship when he spoke of the spirit acting among the Syrians. That might even be true today. He was speaking on behalf of those who were not in the accepted religious order. Those who were the outcasts, the Samaritans, the Syrians.

So Mark Twain - also a prophet - spoke in his *War Prayer* of the denunciation of holy violence. He also formed the anti-imperialist league, because understood very well what the scholars of scripture understand - the message in the scripture is anti-imperial, and those who try to marry imperialism with their religion understand neither the spirit nor the state. Mark Twain watched how President McKinley spoke, how he prayed to God for the Christianization of the Philippines. He was ready to destroy the country. And in his ignorance didn't know that he was talking about a country that was at that time and today primarily Christian.

Well, we reached historic and climatic times. We can turn the planet over to the cockroaches, beetles and worms, or we can become rational human beings, which I hope we will do.

It was just last month that the Vatican accepted a visit from the Secretary General of the United Nations and five Nobel Peace Laureates. Nobel laureate McGuire of Ireland addressed the conference, and had some special words for us at this time. She said:

People are tired of armaments and war. They have seen that they release uncontrollable forces of tribalism and nationalism. We need to acknowledge that our common humanity and human dignity are more important than our different traditions. We can solve our problems without killing each other. We need to accept and celebrate diversity and otherness. We need to give and accept forgiveness, and choose non-killing and non-violence as ways to solve our problems.

You'd think that everyone would understand what she's saying here. She talking about our destruction of the planet on which we live. We have to deal with this and ask them to step down. Even the New York Times seems to be very concerned about this. Their editorial board said:

“It will be the largest famine the world has seen for many decades,” Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, told the media late Wednesday, after briefing the Security Council.

Following Wednesday's meeting, the UN Security Council demanded that Saudi Arabia open all borders into Yemen and allow humanitarian aid deliveries into the country.

Italian Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi, whose country holds the council presidency, told reporters that all council members, including Saudi Arabia's US and British allies, expressed concern about the "dire humanitarian situation in Yemen" and stressed "the importance of keeping all of Yemen's ports and airports functioning.”

Here we are, overeating - at a time when people are starving to death, and this is truly a tragedy for all of us. We have to think about the megadeath we are helping to cause. A good writer on this is William Boardman, who write for Reader Supported News. William M. Boardman has over 40 years' experience in theatre, radio, TV, print journalism, and non-fiction, including 20 years in the Vermont judiciary. He has received honors from Writers Guild of America, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Vermont Life magazine, and an Emmy Award nomination from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

“Let me be clear. The use of starvation as a weapon of war is a war crime. Then Secretary of State John Kerry says, “People are dying, children are suffering, not as an accident of war, but as a consequence of an intentional tactic. And that tactic is directly contrary to the laws of war.

As Americans get ready for Thanksgiving 2017 over-eating, their government is on the verge of successfully starving millions of Yemenis to death by siege warfare. The US naval blockade of Yemen has been unrelenting since March 2015. The US Navy is an essential element of this perpetual war crime, this endless assault on a civilian population of about 25 million. This is the kind of collective punishment of innocents that we once put Nazis on trial for at Nuremberg. The US Department of Defense Law of War Manual, however, advises (section 5.20.1, page 315) that: “Starvation is a legitimate method of warfare.” So now the US is a blithe mass-murdering state with impunity, qualities hardly ever mentioned in the world’s freest media (with one remarkable exception in Democracy NOW, where coverage of Yemen has been excellent at least since 2009).

Well, never mind, at least Taylor Swift’s reputation is soaring and everyone gets to throw figurative rocks at Roy Moore, Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, and other serial predators. Predator is also the name of one of the US drones that the US President sends to assassinate people who may or may not have done anything wrong, but who showed up at the wrong time on the wrong list, and what more due process do those un-white foreign people deserve anyway? You don’t hear Congress complaining, do you? Or mainstream media? Or the courts? This is beyond bipartisan thrill killing, this is national consensual mass murder.

OK, to be fair, there has been some tepid, insincere, sporadic objection to wiping out millions of innocent people. Why, just as recently as October 10, The New York Times ran an op-ed article – NOT an editorial – that began with a pretty fair summary of the carnage being visited on Yemen by the US and its allies:

Imagine that the entire population of Washington State — 7.3 million people — were on the brink of starvation, with the port city of Seattle under a naval and aerial blockade, leaving it unable to receive and distribute countless tons of food and aid that sit waiting offshore. This nightmare scenario is akin to the obscene reality occurring in the Middle East’s poorest country, Yemen, at

the hands of the region's richest, Saudi Arabia, with unyielding United States military support that Congress has not authorized and that therefore violates the Constitution.

The headline on this op-ed piece is "Stop the Unconstitutional War in Yemen," which is something of a deception since the war is truly criminal by any standard of international law and its "unconstitutionality" is but one aspect of its overall criminality. Like the Times, the authors of the op-ed have yet to face the raw criminality of the aggressive war on Yemen. The authors are three members of Congress, two Democrats, Ro Khanna of California and Mark Pocan of Wisconsin, together with a rare Republican of some integrity, Walter Jones of North Carolina. But they do not call out the gross criminality of American siege warfare against Yemen, they come hat in hand arguing that the war is unconstitutional because Congress hasn't approved it formally. Congress has approved it with silence. No party leadership on either side has joined with these three in their gentle effort to "Stop the war." These three Congress members, with Republican Thomas Massie, were the original sponsors of the House resolution introduced September 27, as a hint "to remove United States Armed Forces from unauthorized hostilities in the Republic of Yemen." The resolution has so far gathered an additional 42 co-sponsors (one more Republican) from the House's 435 members. One measure of where we are as a country is that something as bland and incomplete as this resolution is seen somehow as a radical act that gets little support in Congress or coverage in the media, *where the forced starvation of millions of people is not a big issue.*

Yemen is a nation under siege from the air with daily bombings. The Saudis and their allies control the air over Yemen, which has almost no air force and almost no air defenses. Nothing flies in or out of Yemen without Saudi permission, which is rarely given, even for food or medical supplies. The Saudi air force could not function without American support. US military forces select targets, provide intelligence, re-fuel Saudi jets in mid-air and repair them on the ground. Every bomb that falls on Yemen has American fingerprints on it, especially the cluster bombs (another war crime) made in America.

Yemen is a nation under siege from the water, where the US Navy enforces a blockade not only of food, medicine, and other humanitarian relief coming in. The US Navy also turns back Yemenis trying to flee, essentially reducing their choices to risking drowning or starvation. And thanks to the effectiveness of the blockades, there is a massive risk of cholera in Yemen as well, as the US and its allies deliberately wage biological warfare in Yemen as well.

Yemen is a nation under siege on the ground. The Saudis control Yemen's northern border, which has been under dispute between the two countries for decades. Nothing crosses the border into Yemen without Saudi permission, mostly granted to artillery fire. Little effectual return fire comes from Yemen. Yemen's eastern border is with Oman, which is a friendly state. In between Oman and Yemeni population centers in the west, the territory is mostly controlled by al Qaeda and ISIS, with the Saudi-backed puppet regime tucked in around Aden. All of those forces oppose the Houthis in control of the northwest, which has been their homeland for centuries. Just to be clear: the US is deliberately starving a population that is fighting al Qaeda and Isis.

With its recent governmental purges, Saudi Arabia maybe have become the second most dangerous nation in the world. Not to worry, the USA is still Number One. But the US/Saudi axis can hardly be much better news for the region than it is for Yemen.

On November 8, the United Nations and some twenty international relief agencies issued a statement of alarm at and opposition to the US/Saudi-enforced siege on Yemen. The human cost of two and a half years of US/Saudi aggression is already unforgivably punishing and cruel. Now the US/Saudi siege threatens unprecedented catastrophe:

There are over 20 million people in need of humanitarian assistance; seven million of them are facing famine-like conditions and rely completely on food aid to survive. In six weeks, the food supplies to feed them will be exhausted. Over 2.2 million children are malnourished, of those, 385,000 children suffer from severe malnutrition and require therapeutic treatment to stay alive. Due to limited funding, humanitarian agencies are only able to target one third of the population (7 million)... outbreaks of communicable diseases such as polio and measles are to be expected with fatal consequences, particularly for children under five years of age and those already suffering from malnutrition ... the threat of famine and the spread of cholera ... deadly consequences to an entire population suffering from a conflict that it is not of their own making.

Also on November 8, the day of the statement of alarm, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock briefed the UN Security Council on the crisis in Yemen. The briefing was secret, on the request of Sweden. After the briefing, Lowcock met with reporters. He warned that, unless there is a significant, massive humanitarian response soon:

There will be a famine in Yemen. It will not be like the famine that we saw in South Sudan earlier in the year where tens of thousands of people were affected. It will not be like the famine which

cost 250,000 people their lives in Somalia in 2011. It will be the largest famine the world has seen for many decades, with millions of victims.

The aggression against Yemen has been a nexus of war crimes from the beginning, when it was sanctioned by the Obama administration to appease Saudi peevishness over international peacemaking with Iran on nuclear development. For almost three years, Yemen has been a holocaust-in-the-making, with this difference: turning most of the country into a death camp, with America's blessing and collusion. Repubs will choose to confirm 300 unqualified judges before they'll choose to intervene in one criminal war, and mostly Democrats will not seriously object to either choice.

If the United States doesn't kill you, it's perfectly happy to let you die (what health care?). The question – with hope embedded – is whether most Americans support the legal reign of terror that is Pax Americana. Given US treatment of Americans from Ferguson to Flint to Standing Rock to Puerto Rico, the prospect is grim.

We're grateful for William Boardman and Reader Supported News for dealing with the megadeath from America. Yemen is the worst case among many.

And friends - are we happy to be paying for that? No, I think we would be happy *not to pay for that*. We need to return to the slogan Taxation without representation is tyranny. We're grateful that so many people understand the journey. The congress does not represent the vast majority of the people in this country. That's why they voted for the angriest candidate they could find. Their wages haven't been increased since 1970. They are victims of job insecurity. Their healthcare is being taken away from them; the rest of the developed world provides complete coverage to their citizens. The warfare state consumes all. We have the great work of Nicholas Davies, the author of *Blood on our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*. Outstanding work on what it means to be a renegade nation, which we have become. We have to give thanks to some of our people, those who are conscious of the fact that our funds and our treasure and our treasury is being used for one of the great holocausts in world history with a threat of destroying the planet itself. We have to rectify this, and we're very happy about people who are conscious of what is going on, including people like Nicholas Davies of Consortium News who makes it very clear what we're dealing with.

Seventy-seven million people in North and South Korea find themselves directly in the line of fire from the threat of a Second Korean War. The rest of the world is recoiling in horror from the scale of civilian casualties such a war would cause and the unthinkable prospect that either side might actually use nuclear weapons.

Since the first Korean War killed at least 20 percent of North Korea's population and left the country in ruins, the U.S. has repeatedly failed to follow through on diplomacy to establish a lasting peace in Korea and has instead kept reverting to illegal and terrifying threats of war. Most significantly, the U.S. has waged a relentless propaganda campaign to discount North Korea's legitimate defense concerns as it confronts the threat of a U.S. war machine that has only grown more dangerous since the last time it destroyed North Korea.

The North has lived under this threat for 65 years and has watched Iraq and Libya destroyed after they gave up their nuclear weapons programs. When North Korea discovered a U.S. plan for a Second Korean War on South Korea's military computer network in September 2016, its leaders quite rationally concluded that a viable nuclear deterrent is the only way to guarantee their country's safety.

What does it say about the role the U.S. is playing in the world that the only way North Korea's leaders believe they can keep their own people safe is to develop weapons that could kill millions of Americans?

The Changing Face of War

The Second World War was the deadliest war ever fought, with at least 75 million people killed, about five times as many as in the First World War. When the slaughter ended in 1945, world leaders signed the United Nations Charter to try to ensure that that scale of mass killing and destruction would never happen again. The U.N. Charter is still in force, and it explicitly prohibits the threat or use of military force by any nation.

It was not just the scale of the slaughter that shocked the world's leaders into that brief moment of sanity in 1945. It was also the identities of the dead. Two-thirds of the people killed in the Second World War were civilians, a drastic change from the First World War, only a few decades earlier, when an estimated 86 percent of the people killed were uniformed combatants. The use of nuclear weapons by the United States raised the specter that future

wars could kill an exponentially greater numbers of civilians, or even end human civilization altogether.

War had become “total war,” no longer fought only on battlefields between soldiers, but between entire societies with ordinary people, their homes and their lives now on the front line. In the Second World War:

–Fleets of warplanes deliberately bombed cities to “dehouse” civilian populations, as British officials described their own bombing of Germany. “As I write this,” George Orwell wrote from London in 1941, “Highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me.”

–Submarines sank hundreds of merchant ships in an effort to starve their enemies into submission. General Carter Clarke, who was in charge of interpreting Japanese intelligence for President Truman, said in a 1959 interview that Japan surrendered because it faced mass starvation due to the sinking of its merchant shipping, not because of the gratuitous U.S. nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was estimated that 7 million more civilians would die of starvation if Japan fought on until 1946.

–Genocidal mass extermination campaigns killed civilians based only on their political affiliation or ethnicity. Under cross-examination by a young American prosecutor, Benjamin Ferencz, SS Gruppenfuhrer Dr. Otto Ohlendorf explained patiently to a courtroom in Nuremberg why he found it necessary for the “preemptive defense” of Germany to order the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians. He explained that even children had to be killed to prevent them too becoming enemies of Germany when they grew up and found out what happened to their parents.

Despite the U.N. Charter and international efforts to prevent war, people in countries afflicted by war today still face the kind of total war that horrified world leaders in 1945. The main victims of total war in our “modern” world have been civilians in countries far removed from the safe havens of power and privilege where their fates are debated and decided: Yugoslavia; Afghanistan; Iraq; Somalia; Pakistan; Yemen; Libya; Syria; Ukraine. There has been no legal or political accountability for the mass destruction of their cities, their homes or their lives. Total war has not been prevented, or even punished, just externalized.

But thanks to billions of dollars invested in military propaganda and public relations and the corrupt nature of for-profit media systems, citizens of the countries responsible for the killing of millions of their fellow human beings live in near-total ignorance of the mass killing carried out in their name in these “red zones” around the world.

People in ever-spreading war zones are living under the very conditions of total war that the world recoiled from at the end of the Second World War. Like Orwell in London in 1941, they hear highly civilized human beings flying overhead trying to kill them, human beings who know nothing about them beyond the name of the city where they live and its strategic value in wars that offer them, the victims, nothing but death or destitution.

In the case of drones, the human beings trying to kill them from the other side of the world are so highly civilized that they can hop into cars and drive home to have dinner with their families at the end of their shifts, while another “team member” efficiently takes over the “joy-stick” and carries on killing.

People in Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya have been subjected to hunger and starvation under sieges and naval blockades that are as brutally effective as German and American submarines were in World War Two. Millions of people in Yemen face an imminent danger of starvation under the U.S.-backed naval blockade and Saudi and Emirati bombing of Yemeni ports.

In retaliation for one missile fired at Riyadh, the Saudi capital, last week, the U.S.-backed coalition completely closed all Yemen which have been basic principles of customary international law since the Nineteenth Century, lie buried in the graveyards of Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Friends, these are hard words to hear. It's hard to talk about. But what we're happy to say is that the consciousness of our people is rising. People are getting sick and tired of our endless wars that are bringing us nothing but destruction, that are destroying the United States of America and is intimately linked to the worst drug addiction epidemic in our history, the opioid crisis.

Wars are being ignored by much of the mass media. You can see the TV news at night, and you wouldn't think there were any wars at all.

We get questions like: is the US using genocide? Well, the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq quickly adopted divide and rule strategies that targeted Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Sunni Arabs in Iraq. The question is easy to answer.

Friends, these are the realities of our time. We are grateful for those who are aware of it. We are grateful for masses of people who perhaps are still too silent. But those coming out of the great and wonderful demonstration in front of the Saudi Embassy in Washington DC this last week. So we're proud of the people who are involved in opposing this reality. And we are grateful to you for joining us today on World Focus.

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