



CONVERSATION



PHOTO: AFP

Veritable Uprising or the (Faux) Real Thing?

Greta and Climate Activism in a wilderness of projections

KENN ORPHAN AND PHIL ROCKSTROH

Phil Rockstroh, Germany-based poet, lyricist, and philosopher, and Kenn Orphan, a writer, artist, and activist from Halifax, discuss the sterilising powers of capitalism-driven green movements, and the threats they pose to Greta Thunberg as a poster-child for climate change.

Phil Rockstroh: Kenn, recently, this observation of mine provoked ire: street demonstrations, even large ones, are apropos of nothing as long as they are manifested as de facto state sanctioned protests. A march proceeds, chants are cast into indifferent air, speechifying comes to pass by the usual gasbags then the assembled head home and carry on as usual.

Capitalist colonisation has been internalised to such a saturating degree that demonstrations are, in the neoliberal era, designed to be toothless and non-threatening in regard to the structures of capitalist power. Conversely, a strike translates to stopping the flow of capital — otherwise it amounts to enabling business as usual.

Kenn Orphan: It seems that the colonisation of consciousness in Western society has become completely seamless that here, in 2019, most of us have been conditioned to accept a modified and sanitised version of dissent. How many remember Kony 2012? These are forms of acceptable dissent to the status quo ruling class and even act to suit their goals. Of course, climate change and the environment are broader issues that reach beyond that kind of thing, but the same actors are at play in their manipulation.

Throwing a wrench into the gears actually gets attention and action. It also shows how brutal and ruthless the

current order is against anyone who stands against the status quo in this manner. Occupy and Standing Rock are a couple of those examples. A flood of violence and intimidation washed over those uprisings. There has been a flurry of laws since those protests that seek to criminalise dissent and maintain boundaries, even branding certain activities or associations as terrorism.

The Mouvement des Gilets Jaunes, or Yellow Vest Movement, in contrast to today's climate demonstrations reveal how the neoliberal state treats those who dissent in a way that upends power structures. I am not referring to Yellow Vests in Canada or some other places which have taken on a racist, fascistic, or xenophobic character, but in France where working people took to the streets, walked out of jobs, and shut down the machinery of society. It was met with breath-taking violence by Macron's government, and scant mass media coverage. So, without a doubt, when people confront actual power structures they will be met with the aggressive repression of the state, not be escorted and protected by police because they got the right permits for free speech zones on the weekends. And their struggle will not get put in glossy photos on the cover of corporate owned magazines.

So now we come to the demonstrations surrounding climate change taking place in cities around the world. Most of

these are coordinated, many have NGO support, and all of them are impressive, but very little is disrupted in a way that causes any meaningful discomfort to the forces of capital. Not yet, anyway. There are some indications that groups like Extinction Rebellion are reaching out to workers, but it remains to be seen how this will unfold, especially since there are some questionable financial backers of this loose knit organisation.

What I find troubling, though, is that there is this a demand from many in these demonstrations for governments to "do something." It is these very governments, at the behest of the corporations and the military industrial complex who run them, who have caused our crisis to begin with. For instance, little is said to address the enormous military footprint. The US military alone uses 4,600,000,000 gallons of oil every single year. It pollutes the oceans without any consequences and uses sonar that harms sea mammals and fish. This is not to mention the tremendous human and environmental costs of endless war. And as these climate demonstrations are taking place, the American war machine is ramping up to defend Saudi oil fields. So if there are no demands for the dismantling of this planet killing institution then it will end up a sham.

Continued to page 7