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There is Nothing Left to do but Take Care of Each Other

For a Society in Collapse Local Remedies Are Our Best
Hope

Dirk Burhans

2025

In 2024, I obtained a new job at an art museum that has an extensive collection of classical antiquities, and it prompted some related reading. I read a book by historian Eric Cline called 1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed. The book is about the late Bronze-age collapse that ensued in a dark age of the Mediterranean world some five centuries before the age of Socrates, Pericles, and Classical Greece.

During this early period, civilizations across the region went from a flowering time under powerful leaders like Egypt's Ramesses III to a collapse that resulted in the disintegration of almost all of them; "No more Minoans or Mycenaeans. No more Trojans, Hittites, or Babylonians... the thriving economy and cultures of the late second millennium B.C., which had stretched from Greece to Egypt and Mesopotamia, suddenly ceased to exist, along with writing systems, technology, and monumental architecture." The conventional historical wisdom had been that

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“Sea Peoples,” whoever they were, set things off by an unsuccessful invasion of Egypt that nonetheless threw the region into a cascade of disruption. Cline’s analysis is comprehensive, however, and doesn’t stop there, but lays out alternative hypotheses that support a systemic Mycenaean-age collapse. It seems that many things happened at the same time – not only were there invasions, but there were crop failures, earthquakes, and breakdowns in international trade, and all of these factors interacted with each other.

Did these things happen by chance to create that cliched, random “perfect storm” that led to international collapse? No, not by chance; by the end of the book, Cline concludes that the baseline causal event was a change in climate leading to drought that in turn fomented resource-based invasions and trade disruptions. Stochastic events like earthquakes merely twisted the knife, dumping further insult onto a situation that was already unstoppable and unmanageable. An excerpt from a sequel by Cline captures its intensity – a 200-year drought – and a pervasiveness that started with weather and affected everything from food to daily work:

...we now have evidence that the drought, which we can now trace via proxy data from Italy all the way to Iran, and which I believe was one of the primary stressors resulting in the Late Bronze Age Collapse, finally hit Egypt at about this time. This occurred because the flow of the Nile was reduced when rainfall decreased on the Ethiopian peninsula, a situation that lasted for 200 years. This, not surprisingly, led to a food crisis and thus famine in Egypt, as well as to related economic problems, including nonpayment of wages, which culminated in a strike and demonstration by workers at the Deir al Medina in Ramses’s twenty-ninth-year on the throne – possibly one of the first pieces of industrial action in history.

Significantly, Cline published his book in 2014, before Trump’s first presidency, but even then, Cline proposed parallels between the sad events leading up to 1177 BCE and the sad events looming ahead back in 2014. Now, eleven years later, everyone (with the

exception of conspiratorial thinkers) knows that we are entering a period of climate degradation that has within it the power to foster worldwide collapse.

As with the ancient world of 1177 BCE, politics now are inextricably linked with external forces like climate. By 2025, even many liberals have admitted that Trumpism is a symptom, and not a cause, of the physical and economic travails that produce social & cultural upheaval in their wake; even the well-meaning-but-comes-up-short Robert Reich, a liberal pundit who – always – will hold out for reform rather than systemic overhaul (revolution), acknowledged this year that Trump is a symptom rather than a cause of what we see now. As climate change goes on, will liberals realize that society will likely devolve into a cascade of compounding events that are immune to their beloved institutional solutions? Yes and no. While Reich and the liberals have now acknowledged that what we are living through is larger than Trump, most of them fail yet to grasp that institutions like elections, courts, and politics as they know them won't remedy it.

And so the flagrancies fall like the rains in Texas. The IRS will no longer regulate church political endorsements; FEMA and the NWS will not have the person-power to warn about or to mitigate natural disasters; the USDA will not be able to regulate food safety; as vaccine experts are removed from the CDC, kids will get measles; and millions will lose Medicaid benefits, but the effects of these won't be felt until after the 2026 elections; meanwhile ICE shows off troops in armored cars in city parks, as open-air concentration camps spring up in Florida and military training facilities are repurposed into detention camps in Indiana. The Marxist Richard Wolff talks about how, in the years ahead, society will have to undergo RE-regulation as people die from measles, from Salmonella in uninspected food, from poor storm forecasting, from slowed disaster prevention & remediation, from lack of Medicaid funding; his view, however, assumes that something central will exist to re-implement the regulations.

And the good people wonder: What Is To Be Done?

We on the “true” left warn that fair elections will likely not take place in the US again; we remind the good people that Democrats pushed globalism via NAFTA, that Biden advanced mandatory-minimum sentencing, that Clinton not only implemented NAFTA but dismantled welfare and abolished Glass-Steagall; that Obama failed to punish the banks, bailed out Chrysler, failed to protect Zuccotti Park, and instigated warrantless wiretaps; that Harris & Biden funded the Gaza genocide, and that ICE arrests under Biden were worse than during Trump 1.0. As we remind them of these things, the DSA offer alternatives with candidates like Zohran Mamdani and Omar Fateh; others talk of a general strike in 2028, and the RCA (Revolutionary Communists of America) ever valiantly attempt to reach alienated working class Americans without using obscure alienating language.

Did the “good trouble” in the form of Hands Off and No Kings accomplish anything? We’re waiting to see but it seems highly unlikely. As “edgier” protest activities like skateboarding and live-streaming become outlawed, so might protests altogether soon become outlawed. As things continue to cascade, combinations of armed state actors, whether ICE or active-duty troops or the National Guard, increasingly undertake cooperative efforts; state and municipal police might at first participate on the sidelines as they did in LA to manage crowd control, but over time local LEO will join ICE, and they will injure protesters.

What happens after that? Earlier this year Atlantic Magazine kinds of pundits talked about the 53 days that it took for Hitler to dismantle democracy in Weimar Germany, but it’s hard to compare the two timelines, because the list of USA things so far is pretty mild, whereas within the half-year in Germany after the Reichstag fire the Communist party was outlawed, the Reichstag was suspended, the free press was eliminated, protests were outlawed, Communist party leaders & members were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and killed; SPD (the milquetoast Social

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Democratic Party analogous to today's US Democratic party) leaders & members were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and killed; and the first German concentration camp was opened to imprison Hitler's leftist political opponents. In the US at the time of this writing (184 days into the Trump presidency), while we do indeed have the first concentration camp in the Florida Everglades and the mainstream press is almost thoroughly co-opted by wealthy men, contrary opinions can still be published – I can read pieces from Mother Jones, Rolling Stone, Politico, Truthout, Teen Vogue, It's Going Down, and Unicorn Riot – it's not yet unlawful to assemble; no political parties have been outlawed, and opposing party leaders have not been imprisoned and tortured simply for being in an opposing party.

But sometime – and it's hard to say when or in response to what – occurrences like the ones listed for Nazi Germany above could happen. The nascent police state who promenaded into MacArthur Park in July with their lusty desire for a “get loud” showdown haven't gotten their wish yet, but when that happens – after it happens – the Enabling Act of the USA will allow LEO to apprehend not only undocumented aliens but naturalized citizens, and soon “regular” white people, on a routine basis. Aging gatekeeping liberal protest leaders will implore their base to keep emailing Josh Hawley and John Thune; aging gatekeeping liberal protest leaders will beseech their base to conduct nonviolent local protests – please implement the nonviolent ones, because the system, which they apparently want to keep, is designed to accommodate nonviolence. Pundits like Chris Hedges will continue to maintain that activists shouldn't be violent because violence is alienating to the base, but it's a base that is furious compared to the aging gatekeeping protest leaders... a base so radicalized and angry by now that feckless politicians like Hakeem Jefferies and Chuck Schumer find their social media feeds ratioed to the hilt. It's a base who are waiting to be led by the left, but who just don't know it yet. Might elections of DSA candidates to national public office save us and save

the system? While it's worthwhile to vote and to support such alternatives, I don't hold out hope that polite people working through what's left of the system will make meaningful inroads prior to the cataclysm the Republicans wish to unleash upon us. As happened after Watergate and Vietnam in the US and after World War II in Germany, afterwards there will be a welcoming time for reconciliation and support for systemic institutional change, change that we hope might look more revolutionary than reformist. But that's afterwards, after bad things have happened.

Meanwhile, through it all, those of us with Anarchist leanings will continue to espouse and conduct Mutual Aid and Direct Action at the local level. Normally it might seem that power at higher scales overwhelms power at lower levels – the nation-state is over the region, the region is over the city, the city is over the neighborhood. But under a shifting collapse, even with the feudal network state rising in the distance, this pyramid can be inverted. After the far right's hidden longings fully emerge, and even if we are living for a time in medieval hovels, we will still have community; we will still have the ability to take care of us. This is something in which I firmly believe.

Cline authored a sequel to 1177 BC, titled *After 1177 B.C.: The Survival of Civilizations*. He details the losses; a system of writing called Linear B, used by Mycenaean scribes to record economic transactions, was lost, and it took centuries for writing to return to Greece. Most catastrophic is evidence that there was an up to 60% population decline of humans throughout the Mediterranean. But while some of the great bronze-age civilizations did disappear – the Mycenaeans, the Hittites, the Minoans – others, including the Egyptians and the Assyrians, remained. There was also evidence for continuity of some languages, the smelting of iron was developed, and Classical Greece eventually emerged from the ruins. Significantly, peoples of the time also engaged in Mutual Aid – emergency shipments of grain were sent from Ugarit in Syria to Cilicia in southeastern Turkey.

We still have time to prepare between here and there. While we still have time, we can work toward an operational mentality based on action outside of politics and outside of our failing institutions. We can build the fire where we stand by making urban and rural resistance cells, clandestine where necessary, with internally-secure comms and disciplined, preset tactics. As the matching funds, grants, and government programs dry up and people become unemployed and unable to afford medical care and food, the Mutual Aid initiatives we already know how to accomplish, like the food & goods distros and brackelight clinics we've run in the past, can be modified and scaled up. We can implement community defense to keep neighbors protected from things like ICE raids, harassments, and abductions.

At first it will overwhelm us. But we will build connections with the newly radicalized, with other local people who we may not know well at first, but who over time will become trusted comrades who will have each other's backs. Those of us already exhausted will continue to be exhausted, but, like the airplane passengers who put their mask on before their children's, we will take care of our own by also building Internal Mutual Aid. And we will be invigorated by the newly radicalized, the ones who told us to vote harder when we mentioned Mutual Aid ten years ago, but who get it now... and we will be invigorated by the younger ones who were kids when all this started.

Because by then they will have learned, as those of us already in the work have already learned, that even when almost everything else is gone, community is what we will still have. Indeed, perhaps community was always the best thing we ever had.

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