

Worldwide, fish is a more important source of animal protein than beef. But according to The Economist overfishing of the oceans is reaching catastrophic levels & according to the FAO 80% of the world's ocean fish stocks are now fully-, if not over-, exploited. One recent study said stocks of the big predatory species, such as tuna & swordfish, have fallen 90% since the 1950's, & another, published last January in the magazine Science, that extinction is now looming for many species. The crux of the problem is "the tragedy of the commons"<sup>1</sup>, the fact that when no one owns a resource no one has an interest in its rational management. This results in a 'race to the bottom' free-for-all in which individuals have a choice between taking their 'share' now or running the risk someone else will do so first & nothing will be left later. And overfishing is not limited to the open ocean; it is as much a problem in territorial (within 12 miles of a country's coast line)-, & economic zonal (up to 200 miles offshore)-, waters where governments, pressured by fishing lobbies more interested in tomorrow's profit than the next generation's fish stocks, set unrealistically high quotas & then are lax in enforcing them, or unable to do so because even those waters are vast & fishery patrol vessels small, few & far between. And if that wasn't enough, much of today's fishing technology isn't conducive to fish stock maintenance. 'Bottom trawling' (dragging nets over the sea bottom) has a bulldozing effect that destroys fish habitat. "Long lining" (the stringing of, sometimes miles-long lines with thousands of baited hooks dangling from them kills a lot of unwanted species, incl. seabirds such as albatrosses, only seven subspecies out of twenty-two are now not "vulnerable", or others that are "threatened", such as sea turtles & sharks. "Dynamite"-, or "cyanide"-, fishing by subsistence fishermen in the tropics deals with fish stocks in a way not unlike the "barrel bombs" used by the Syrian government against its own people to indiscriminately kill men, women & children. And the latest addition to short-sighted fishery practices, "krill fishery" prompted by the Omega-3 craze, attacks the very foundation of the marine food chain. And last, but not least, there is the perennial problem of "bycatch", the dumping back into the ocean of dead fish & other marine life caught-, but not wanted-, by commercial fishermen for "economic" (they have insufficient marketable value)-, or "regulatory" reasons (for being too small or a species that is "off limits")<sup>2</sup>; it ranges upward from 20% of the total catch to high double digit percentages. Of the world's 4MM fishing vessels, the main problem lies with the 1% that are "commercial" fishing vessels (of which China accounts for 60+%) more than 24 metres/80 feet long that operate on the open ocean for long periods of time far from their home base in 'fleets', like wolf packs, accompanied by 'mother ships' that process & freeze their catch.

Today 18 countries containing half the world's population are overpumping their aquifers, much of it to support irrigation farming (which is quite inefficient in its use of water; for the commonly used 'sprinkler' system can result in as much as two-thirds of the water used evaporating before it can do the plants any good; in fact, it does long-term harm since the evaporated water's salt content ends up in the soil, which over time can lead to the land becoming less suitable to growing crops). They include the world's three big grain producers, China, India & the US, and several large population countries like Iran, Pakistan & Mexico, with China & the US most at risk because, whereas aquifers closer to the surface will be replenished, albeit over time, from

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<sup>1</sup> After reading a Victorian era economist on the subject of overgrazing on community pastures, this term was coined in 1968 in the magazine Science by Garrett Hardin, a professor of Human Ecology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, to describe the situation when in exploiting a 'common resource' individuals, acting independently & rationally in their own interest, behave contrary to the best interests of their community by overexploiting it to the point of depletion.

<sup>2</sup> A Newfoundland friend once told me his first job as a teenager was to operate a machine on a fishing vessel that ground up tons upon tons of bycatch daily before spewing it back into the sea.

rainfall, these two countries have been increasingly tapping deep “fossil aquifers” that were filled over thousands-, if not millions-, of years & that won’t be replenished anytime soon). And Saudi Arabia that after the 1973 oil embargo decided it should become grain self-sufficient (so as not to leave itself vulnerable to a grain embargo) & therefore developed a highly subsidized irrigation wheat-growing industry, in 2008 announced it was ending this (so as to reduce the pressure on its aquifers) - *in time, this may create an opportunity for Brazil that has both the lion’s share of the world’s undeveloped farmland **and more** renewable water than much of Asia.*

The populations of the developed countries (& of China), are aging, & people are living longer. And the lion’s share of people’s lifetime healthcare expenses are incurred during their retirement years[; thus a study by Boston College’s Center for Retirement Research found that of the average US\$316,600 total lifetime healthcare costs, almost two-thirds was incurred after age 65, & *a disproportionate share thereof during the last 90 days of life* (& according to The Economist, 70% of Britain’s NHS spending is accounted for by long-term conditions like dementia, depression and diabetes). And the older old people get, the more non-medical lifestyle support they require; so it is interesting that last year a UK-based think tank, Respublica in a study of this problem found that the cost of sustaining an 82 year-old man suffering from depression could be cut by two-thirds if visits by doctors & nurses were replaced by county-run lifestyle support activities.

Following is the evolution of the average income tax rates for the highest income earners in the US in the post-WW II era (all numbers approximations; they were peeled off a chart) :

	Top 1%	Top 0.01%	Top Marginal Rate
1945	55%	60%	94%
1965	37%	40%	70%
1980	41%	46%	70%
1990	25%	25%	28%
1995	31%	31%	40%
2005	24%	20%	35%
2010	26%	24%	35%

It is likely not a coincidence that since the 1980s, when the above rates **all** experienced a dramatic drop, the US National Debt as a % of GDP has nearly tripled from its then 36% - *the above, however, should not be taken as proof that the solution to revenue shortfalls necessarily lies in ‘soaking the rich’; for it may less a function of the lately increasingly-vaunted “income inequality” than of a) the ‘I am entitled to my entitlements and my children & grandchildren can pay for it’ mindset that is now so pervasive in Western society, starting at the very top, & b) the failure to realize, and/or unwillingness to accept, that deficits are nothing more, & nothing less, than an reflection of the extent to which today’s tax payers, large & small, expect more from their governments than they are prepared to pay for from their taxes. Thus when a retired person was recently said to have pontificated he was into “paying back society”, he was stopped dead in his tracks when someone asked him “So, what is it you took out?” (the reality of life is that the Boomer generation, although its members don’t like to be told so, took out a great deal more, directly **and** indirectly, than they put in).*

The US is experiencing a “Vanishing Male Worker” phenomenon. For the recent years’ drop in the participation rate is solely due to men dropping out of the work force; thus, while in 1972 the rate was 79% among males over age of 16, by 2012 this had declined to 70% [as the number of ‘prime working age’ males (aged 25-54) not working tripled to 16%], while during the same period the share of women over age 16 in the work force went from 44% to 58% (peaking at 60% during the decade ended in 2008). Many reasons are given for this phenomenon. Women on average are now better educated than men. Men with few, if any, skills that are in demand (85% of those now in the work force are said to lack a college degree) deem low wage jobs not worth their while. Easy access to welfare benefits<sup>3</sup> is a factor. One-third of the men who have dropped out have criminal records that make it hard for them to find work. The breakdown of marriage has increased the number of, mostly female-headed, one-parent families, the male children in which are less likely to get an education. Many childless couples feel less need for a second income, especially when the female partner has greater earnings potential than the male. Even the Internet gets blamed, for reducing the isolation of stay-at-home males.

A chart produced by the FDIC shows that during the period January 1, 2008 & September 30, 2014, the US banks’ interest income declined 37% to US\$120BN while their net income grew by 16% to 110BN. This was made possible by the fact that, with depositors’ money being virtually cost-free, their interest expense declined 86% to just US\$14MM.

According to the WSJ US stock turnover is now in the 300+% range (i.e. annual trading volume is now 3x total market capitalization & the average length investor holding period four months) & that for ETFs 1,200+% (for a 29 day average holding period). And according to Goldman mutual fund managers are now the biggest buyers (& sellers) of ETFs (that it says now account for 25-30% of the stock market’s daily turnover) - *a surfeit short term-focused institutional gamblers creates a niche for contrarians who look beyond the end of their noses.*

According to bankruptcompaniesnews.com, in the First Quarter 26 listed companies with assets of US\$34BN filed for bankruptcy. This was the largest number of companies since the First Quarter of 2010's 27 with the most assets since the First Quarter of 2009's US\$102BN. Low commodity prices, incl. oil, & a more aggressive stance by lenders, as the value of collateral has risen, are being blamed (*although the Fed's low interest rate environment may have allowed at least some to limp along longer than they might otherwise have been able to*).

For the first time since 2002 large corporate pension funds are overweight in bonds over stocks (41% vs 37%) as they seek to match their returns to their future commitments (*the PV of which will, however, will shrink miraculously when interest rates, & hence the discount rate used in calculating PVs, start rising, another ‘unintended consequence’ of central banks keeping interest rates low.*

In the mid-1970's Perrier introduced North America to bottled water; since then, according to the New York City-based Beverage Marketing Corporation, consumption thereof has grown at an 8.6% CAGR to 12.3BN gallons last year (0.41 litres per capita per day) & it predicts that by 2020 it will become the top-selling bottled (non-alcoholic) drink in the US (up from No. 2 today). And

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In the five years after Bill Clinton signed the Republican-inspired Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation (PRWORA) Act of 1996 welfare case loads went from 5.5% to 2.1% of the population (although its detractors give more credit for that to the long economic boom period than to the Act, & say most of those who came off the welfare rolls only got ‘McJobs’). And from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 & August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 the number of people on food stamps grew 70% to 47.1MM (i.e. from 9% to 15% of the population), & has since only declined marginally, to 46.2MM)

while the US public thinks (*or has been brainwashed into thinking?*) that bottled water is safer/better than tap water, according to Peter Gleick<sup>4</sup>, author of Bottled and Sold : The Story Behind Our Obsession with Bottled Water, in reality 45% of all bottled water brands, incl. Coca Cola's Dasani & PepsiCo's Aquafina<sup>5</sup>, are sourced from municipal water systems.

The Starbucks-type coffee-on-the go craze is an example of clever modern marketing creating a 'want/need' where none existed before<sup>6</sup>. Following is the math done by an American based on Starbucks prices in his locality : a one pound bag of Starbucks coffee costs \$11.95. The Company says this will make 320 ounces of liquid coffee, i.e. enough for 16 venti-, 20 grande-, & 26 tall-, containers full of the stuff that generate revenues for Starbucks of \$49.28, \$55.00 & \$59.54 respectively. So buying their coffee & using it to make your own could save between \$37 & \$47 per pound of coffee - *few people realize that rent, labour & advertising are Starbucks' largest costs of doing business, & that its cost of coffee accounts for only about 8% thereof. And even fewer remember, or ever knew, that about a decade or so ago this litigious Company sued a supplier of its 'high quality' coffee for US\$75MM for having sold it inferior coffee (rather than just keeping quiet about having had the woll pulled over its eyes in its area of expertise).*

The City of Edmonton's Chief Economist is cheerily optimistic about the local economic outlook since 'One needs only to walk around the downtown core and do a crane count<sup>7</sup>'. On the other hand the Bank of Canada's noted in its April Monetary Policy Report that since mid-2014 65% fewer people have come to Alberta from elsewhere in Canada, the Conference Board that 2015 energy spending in Western Canada (most of it in Alberta) will be down 21% YoY to \$44BN (for Alberta about 3+% of its GDP) & the Alberta Sheriff's Office that in the ten months to February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 14,273 Personal Property Security Act (PPSA) files (that are a prelude to property seizures, most commonly early in a downturn personal vehicles) were started, vs .12,584 in the year ended March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 - *his optimism also seems at odds with the growing numbers of "For Lease" signs sprouting on premises that once housed small businesses, the fact that there have as yet been no significant provincial government layoffs (that will hit Edmonton harder than Calgary, which took the hit first in layoffs) & that, according to street people, discarded recyclable containers they can turn in for a deposit seem to have become a little scarcer.*

The wizzards in the Alberta Department of Education are introducing the latest in 'inquiry-based' learning, the "flipped class room", whereby students do home work assignments in the class room & are expected to get the instruction they traditionally had gotten in the classroom on line outside school hours. The theory behind this is that it will give teachers more time to deal with students on a one-on-one basis, & as such may have merit. But it is based on two questionable

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<sup>4</sup> With a Ph.D. in Energy & Resources from the University of California, Berkeley, he co-founded in 1987, & still works at, the Oakland, Cal.-based Pacific Institute that studies environmental issues.

<sup>5</sup> Despite their growing bottled water sales, both companies are continuing to lose ground in the total non-alcoholic drink market as sales of their traditional products flounder.

<sup>6</sup> To declare my own biases, I prefer making-, my own, made from branded coffee beans at a cost a 10 cents per 400 ml. mug.

<sup>7</sup> The downtown core is the subject of a remarkable apartment/condo-building boom that will be good for the city in the long term but that may cause vacancy rate issues in the short run while a few cranes are on the site where a new hockey rink cum entertainment centre is being constructed that some people fear could become a drain on the city's coffers in the years to come.

assumptions. One that students will have the self-discipline to put in the time on line outside school hours listening to the instruction they once had no choice but to endure in the class room, whether they liked it or not. And the other that teachers will in fact use their classroom time interacting with students, & not doing other things that are personally more satisfying or that, under the terms of their contract, they are expected to do outside class room hours (of which I observed ample examples during the two years I went to junior high, each day, all day long, with my two eldest grandsons).

Arthur Porter is a Sierra Leone-born medical doctor with both Canadian-, & US-, citizenship. Over the years he amassed a seemingly impressive North American educational & professional CV that led to him being hired, in 2004, as CEO of the McGill University Health Centre in Montreal. On his watch it launched a \$1.3BN upgrading project & in 2008 Prime Minister Harper appointed him to chair the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC) that oversees the activities of Canada's spy agency, & made him a Privy Councillor. But in 2011 he resigned from SIRC after revelations of having had business dealings with an Iranian-born, Jewish, Israel-educated, naturalized Canadian citizen arms dealer living in Montreal, and, shortly after that he resigned from the Health Centre position after allegations of underhanded dealings in the awarding of the contract for its upgrading contract through a Bahamas-based company he owned called Sierra Assets Management Incorporated. On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, while in transit from the Bahamas to St. Kitts, he was arrested at the Panama City airport, despite his protestations that, as a special ambassador for Sierra Leone, he had diplomatic immunity (which its government denied), pursuant an Interpol warrant on behalf of the Canadian & Québec governments alleging that he had accepted a \$22.5MM bribe to rig the contract for the McGill Health Centre upgrading. Ever since he has lingered in a Panama City, fighting extradition back to Canada while at the same time complaining about the inhumane conditions in the jail in which he is being held to the point of lodging a complaint with the UN that his human rights were being violated. Then, when he found out Prime Minister Harper would be in Panama City for the Seventh Summit of the Americas, he had the gall to invite him, via the press, to visit him in jail to see first-hand the deplorable conditions under which he said he had to live - *his was only one of several patronage appointments the Prime Minister made over the years that have backfired.*

The Canadian media are breathlessly covering the trial in Ottawa of Sen. Mike Duffy (one of three embarrassing Senate appointments by Prime Minister Harper), who is in the dock in what is scheduled to be a 41-day trial on 30+ bribery, fraud breach of trust charges, hoping that some of the ensuing mud flying around will somehow stick to the PM himself. This week, in seeking to minimize the relevance of one of the lesser charges, using taxpayers' money to pay for the framing of personal pictures, his lawyer asked whether the \$34.30 cost of having one of them framed was really worth all the fuss; this, of course, raises an interesting question as to whether anyone so cheap as to try & lay off a \$34.30 expense on the tax payers has any business being in a position of public trust.

RT is a Moscow-based 24/7 English language news service that aims to give the world a Russian perspective on global news. So when it recently reported, under the headline 'It's like war here : Saudi police raid defiant eastern province village amid wide conflict with Shias, that on Sunday April 5<sup>th</sup> 40 armoured vehicles had entered the town of Awamiya (pop. 25,000) in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, that gun fire hadn't stopped for 5½ hours in what it said was an attempt to subdue local Shia discontent & fight terrorists, and that 30 arrests had been made, it was hard to know whether to take this at face value. But digging deeper, a disconcerting picture emerges. While the Saudis are worried about external enemies & about Iran's growing influence in Iraq (& *Yemen?*), are building a state-of-the-art, hitech wall along its border with Iraq to keep (the nominally Sunni) ISIS out & are bombing Shiite Houthis in neighbouring Yemen,

they may have a far more dangerous “fifth column” problem at home. For of its nearly 29MM population (30% of them expats) 10+% are Shia Muslims (whom the Wahhabi strain of Sunni Islam dominant in Saudi Arabia considers “apostates”<sup>8</sup> & who, as a result, are the target of pervasive discrimination). But most Saudi Shiites live in the country’s Eastern province, the mother lode of its oil wealth. And Awamiya has long been a hot bed of Shia discontent, as evidenced by this very partial list of recent events in the region : in 2006 anti-Israel, pro-Hezbollah demonstrations were attended by thousands, in 2009 a local cleric threatened secession unless the country’s Shiites were better treated, in January 2014 a car carrying two German diplomats came under gun fire, and last December several local young men were sentenced to death for ‘terrorist activities’, one Saudi soldier was killed in the town, and 15,000 protesters attended the funeral of four young men killed by the security forces. And this could have serious global implications at some point because the town is surrounded on all sides with oil pipelines that carry 2 million barrels of oil **daily** to the nearby Ras Tanura refinery cum export terminal complex on the Persian Gulf.

Many young Chinese are said to be losing their character-writing skills by using their thumbs & smart phones.- *this is really not any different from North America where cursory writing is no longer taught in schools & the quality of some young people’s printing is simply appalling.*

Frank Langfitt is the Shanghai correspondent for Washington, D.C.-based NPR (National Public Radio). During his college days he drove a taxi in Philadelphia which, he says, taught him more about the city than he learnt during all the years he had lived there. That gave him the idea to plaster his car in Shanghai with signs saying he offers free rides because he “wants to chat” (as a way to interface with the hoi polloi & get leads to human interest stories). One thing he has learnt to date, rather counter-intuitively, is that Shanghai’s ‘Man/Woman in the Street’ is less suspicious of foreigners than they are of their fellow citizens. Another that one of the defining characteristics of the people of Shanghai is anxiety (about, among others, the quality of their food, water & air, and the pressure cooker environment their children are exposed to in school). And a third that the overwhelming ambition/dream of many is to emigrate, preferably to the US, Canada or the UK, where they think their quality of life will be better, *where they can have more than one child*, & where their child(ren) would be exposed to less pressure in school. This Chinese New Year’s just past, a time when the world’s largest human migration takes place each year as hundreds of millions of young Chinese working into the coastal cities return to the place of their birth in the inland countryside to visit with family & friends, he outdid himself by, after advertising his willingness to do so on Weibo, driving two young Chinese men, one of them a lawyer, & the lawyer’s fiancée, to their home village in Hubei Province, 500 miles & 14 hours driving away, for their marriages (noting that increasing numbers of young Chinese are now renting cars, rather traveling home by train, since it is less stressful as there are now many good highways, and because at home people will be impressed by the car, not knowing it is only a rental. So, according to Langfitt, he had to drive carefully since, while many Chinese are not experienced drivers, they don’t hesitate to pass slower traffic on the shoulder doing 75 mph.

In Europe Euribor (the European Interbank Borrowing Rate) is a benchmark interest rate often used to anchor floating rate home mortgages, especially in Spain, Portugal & Italy. But liquidity is now so plentiful that the rate has gone negative. And since the spread over Eurobor can be quite small, the bizarre situation has now arisen that at least one bank, Bankinter SA, Spain’s seventh-largest lender, is crediting the principal amount of some of its home mortgage loans

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Thus in April 2013 Saad al-Durhim, a Wahhabi sheik, tweeted that jihadist fighters in Iraq ((i.e. ISIS) should kill all Shiites they could find, incl. women & children..

with the amount of the negative interest the home owners have 'earned' on their mortgages - *another distortion in the global financial system central bankers' unorthodox policies of recent years have induced.*

According to Associated Press Greece's financial watch dog released on April 8<sup>th</sup> the results of its 2014 study on fraud & corruption in the awarding of public sector contracts : it had found that of the 4.6BN Euros spending it had reviewed, 1.5BN had been out & out fraudulent & another 2.6BN wasted, so that only about half a billion Euros had actually been put to their intended use - *this cannot help but make a Grexit in the near future even more likely.*

Brazil's NYSE-listed Vale is, among others, the world's largest producer of iron ore; so it is small wonder that, with the price of iron ore down 70% since 2011, & still falling, its share price has cratered from US\$36.15 in January 2011 to, at last report, US\$5.67.

**GLEANINGS II - 610SP**  
**Monday April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**PRUDENTIAL CHIEF ECHOES DIMON SAYING LIQUIDITY IS TOP WORRY**  
**(Bloomberg, William F. Flynn)**

- On April 8<sup>th</sup>, in a Letter to Shareholders, JPM CEO Jamie Dimon warned the next financial crisis could be exacerbated by a shortage of UST securities & that "at times of stress investors need to be able to sell quickly, and without liquidity prices can 'gap', fear can grow and illiquidity can quickly spread." He blames the new rules on market makers, incl. the "far higher" capital requirements, & says the inventory of Treasuries readily available for trading today is *just* US\$1.7TR, vs. US\$2.7TR in 2007<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>. A few days later in Tokyo, Prudential Investment Management CEO David Hunt (AUM of US\$934BN) said the No.1 concern of bond buyers is the rapid disappearance of global liquidity, calling it "one of the unintended consequences" of the central banks trying to prevent another financial crisis. And on April 13<sup>th</sup> New York Fed Executive Vice President & Head of its Capital Markets Group, Simon Potter, told a gathering of primary dealers<sup>11</sup> that the new bank rules & automated trading could sap the UST market liquidity & spur more volatility, and that central bank stimulus globally had created "fragility" that over time also will lead to more volatility in markets.

*Jamie Dimon is 'talking his own book' since trading for trading's sake, that generates little, if anything, of **real** economic value except for those involved, has been a big profit centre for his bank. Hunt's comments are more relevant; for being on the market's "Buy" side, he must create real economic value for his investors for them to continue to entrust him with their money; and he has 'voted with his feet'; for, while the size of his firm's bond portfolio waxed by US\$125BN (30%) to US\$543BN in the nine months to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014, this was due to purchases of*

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<sup>9</sup> In part because of UST paper the Fed has taken out of circulation by its QE operations.

<sup>10</sup> According to the New York City-, & Washington, D.C.-, based Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (SIFMA) as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 the size of the (*US government?*) bond market had grown by 23% while trading volume had declined by 28%.

<sup>11</sup> Financial institutions that can buy UST securities directly from the government at auction & are 'market makers'. They currently number 22, incl. Citi, GS, JPM, MS, & ML/BoA, two other US firms (CantorFitzgerald & Jeffries LLC) & 15 British-, Canadian-, French-, German-, & Japanese entities.

*corporate debt, especially non energy-related 'high yield' corporate debt, market sectors in which liquidity is a secondary consideration. And Simon Potter's observations bear the greatest weight (although the volatility risk could likely be ameliorated by a 'stroke of the pen' by ending the idiocy of applying "mark-to-market" valuation to investment-, as well as trading-, portfolios.*

### **HAS AMERICA LOST ITS MOJO? (NYT, Thomas B. Edsell)**

- Over the last three decades the American economy has become less vigorous. Until 2008 business startups exceeded business failures by about 100,000 a year; but that's no longer the case. More business regulation, often by government officials pressured by major corporations to stifle competition, has been a factor; so is the fact that it is increasingly difficult to do business without lobbying, campaign contributions & making deals with politicians. Labour mobility (*or rather the lack thereof?*) has been another. So has the lack of immigrants with high skill levels (*often those who came to the US from the Third World to study but stayed, for whom doing so is now more difficult and/or who now see greater opportunities back home*). The share of workers who now need a licenses to work in their field has grown six-fold in the past half-century from 5% in the early 50's to 29% in 2008 and now run the gamut from scrap recyclers in Louisiana to body artists in D.C., and includes cosmetologists, massage therapists, & auctioneers, &, when done on a state-by-state basis keep workers from moving to more productive employment out of state. And, while in the past the Department of Defense fostered innovation, more recently it has adopted procurement policies that shut out the small fry due to extensive lobbying by the big contractors that in 2012 spent over US\$132MM on over 900 lobbyists (i.e about 1.75 per law maker).

*The writer has long covered the national scene for among others the Washington Post, and since 2006 has been teaching journalism at Columbia & a weekly columnist for the NYT.*

### **REPUBLICANS' AND NETANYAHU'S WILDLY INCONSISTENT OPPOSITION TO THE IRAN DEAL (WP, Dana Milbank)**

- Recently Sen. Lindsey Graham (R.- SC) proposed on TV abandoning the framework agreement with Iran & & "keeping the 2013 interim deal in place that's been fairly successful and have a new crack at it that doesn't have the baggage of Obama." And yet in November 2013 he panned that deal because it "still allows 18,000 centrifuges to stay in place ... basically just suspends construction of the plutonium reactor ... gives the Iranians \$7 billion in cash, and ... leaves in place one of the most sophisticated enrichment programs in place." Also in November 2013 Sen. Bob Corker (R.-Tenn) was even more alarmist, saying "I think people are very concerned the interim deal becomes the norm" & called it a "total victory" for Iran' and yet as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he told CBS's Bob Schieffer recently that, if the Iran talks fail, "the interim deal ... could continue for some time ... although there is some sanctions relief for Iran." And Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), the author of the letter sent, cosigned by 46 other Republican Senators, to Iran's Supreme Leader seeking to scuttle the nuclear talks, asserted that "if Congress does not approve a deal, Congress will not approve a deal" (*which is largely incorrect*, for according to the non-partisan Congressional Research Service of the 18,500+ international executive agreements reached since 1789 (17,300 since 1939), only 1,100 were ratified by Congress).
- Moshe Yaalon, Israel's Defense Minister, wrote in the Post last week "the choice is not between this bad deal and war. The alternative is a better deal", although two months ago he had opined that "every deal that will be signed between the West and this

messianic and apocalyptic regime will strike a blow to Western and Israeli interests". And last but not least, after earlier having predicted that sanctions would not make a difference & then, in 2012, declared that the international sanctions regime had been "ineffective ... (and) hasn't worked" & had failed to deter Iran's nuclear progress, while recently criticizing the framework agreement Netanyahu said that sanctions had "proven effective" against Iran.

*The writer is a WP columnist who at various times has managed to upset both Republicans & Democrats. Thus, when he joined this paper in 2000 after covering the Clinton White House for the WSJ, Karl Rove, Bush 43's Deputy Chief of Staff, asked the paper to refrain from assigning him to the Bush White House beat. And in the 2008 election he was criticized for calling Obama 'presumptuous' & was let go by MSNBC, where he had long been a regular, for expressing too kind a view of one of John McCain's advisers.*

### **YOUNG PEOPLE STRUGGLE WITH STRESS (BB, Akani Otani)**

- A report published this month by workplace services firm Bensinger, Dupont & Associates (DPA) found that 30% of Millennials (born between 1978 & 1999) had work place anxiety vs. 26% of the Generation Xers (1965 & 1977) & 25% of the Boomers (1946 & 1964). This confirmed earlier studies that had found high rates of anxiety among the Millennials. One reason given is that work place anxiety tapers off with age. Another *seemingly more plausible* one that Millennials carry lots of student debt<sup>12</sup> & high unemployment risks, resulting in them skipping work and having more trouble staying at work & maintaining working relationships with co-workers, and getting disciplined.

*It may be politically incorrect to ask, but might the overriding reason for this be the poor dears were inadequately prepared at home &, more importantly, in school to face, & deal with, stress?*

### **WORLD'S LARGEST HYDROPOWER PROJECT PLANNED FOR TIBETAN PLATEAU (China Dialogue, Yang Yong)**

- Many of Asia's major rivers 'rise' on the Tibetan Plateau. The Yarlung Tsangpo (aka in India as the Brahmaputra), the world's highest river, first runs 600 or so miles West-East across it before turning South into Northeastern India & then West again until it joins the Ganges (which in due course empties into the Bay of Bengal). Its huge flow & drop in altitude (*it 'rises' 5,300 metres up in the Himalayas*) gives it great hydro power-generating potential. Hydropower experts say that a tunnel through the Namcha Barwa Mountain that had 2,000 cubic metres/second of water drop 2,000 metres could power a 50GW hydro power station<sup>13</sup> (the largest in human history). In total Beijing plans 11 hydro power stations on the river itself with a capacity of 60GW (one of which will start generating power this year), and a bunch more on its tributaries with a capacity of 65GW more. And in India public, & private, sector companies have plans for 168 hydro power stations with a capacity of 57GW.

<sup>12</sup> Due to the fact that for decades university administrators have allowed their budgets, and their tuition fees, to increase at more than twice the inflation rate in the belief students "can afford it", something which seems at odds with reality since, according to the Fed, at least report student loan debt (the only major debt category to have continued to increase to have steadily increased during the Great Recession) stood at US\$867BN, was more than 8x that a decade earlier.

<sup>13</sup> More than twice the capacity of the Three Gorges Dam & 20x that of Niagara Falls.

- But all this dam building could have disastrous ecological consequences. The gorge on the Tibetan Plateau the river flows through is an active geological formation subject to powerful geological stresses, with earthquakes & landslides a common occurrence, and *undue* human interference could have major ecological knock-on effects. Thus in April 2000 I personally witnessed a landslide in the region that first created a 4BN cubic metre barrier lake & then, 60 days later, when the barrier failed, floods that affected millions of people & paralyzed local transportation. And climate change is causing the Himalayan glaciers to retreat, which will, in due course, reduce the flow of water in the river (*with potential major consequences for Eastern India & Bangladesh*). To make matters worse, the ecosystem is already seriously stressed with the forests aging & not regenerating & the locals' traditional slash-and-burn farming practices causing soil erosion & landslides, and the once abundant wildlife in what was one of the most biodiverse regions of the world is struggling as human activity is restricting it to ever smaller, & *more isolated*, areas to roam in.

*China may well end up deciding, especially given the uncertainty of the future flow of the river, to give a higher priority to wind and solar. At last report it was on-third finished building a 20GW windfarm in Gansu province, Northern China & plans to build another five similar-sized ones elsewhere, and it must have significant solar power potential in at least five sparsely-populated provinces in which the annual hours of sunshine are close to, or exceed, Spain's 2,600+ (Xinjiang has a population density of 13 people per sq. km. & almost 3,000 hours of sunshine, with the corresponding numbers for Inner Mongolia being 21 & 2,800, for Gansu 56 & 3,000+, for Heilongjiang 85 & 2,800+, and for Ningxia Province almost 3,000). As far as India is concerned, its hydro power plans may be vulnerable on two counts, the uncertainty surrounding the river's future flows and, in time, Beijing's already well underway South-North water Diversion project that in due course is expected to start syphoning off some of the Brahmaputra's flow.*

### **INSIDE VLADIMIR PUTIN'S MIND ; LOOKING BACK IN ANGER** (World Affairs, Nina L. Kruschcheva)

- In March 2000, when *first* a presidential candidate, he told David Frost on BBC "Russia is part of the European culture. And I cannot imagine my own country in isolation from Europe & what we often call the civilized world. So it is hard for me to visualize NATO as an enemy". Eager to sit at the Western table, he became buddies with UK Prime Minister Tony Blair (whom he met *no fewer than* five times that year) & later with US President Bush 43 (after the latter had 'looked in Putin's soul & had found a fellow Christian'). But when they then took seven *former Soviet satellite* countries into NATO, he felt betrayed, or as Blair put it in his memoir, "Vladimir ... came to believe that the Americans did not give him his due place", lamenting in Time magazine that Russia's "generous heart" was misunderstood and that, instead of empathy, there had been a "purposeful attempt by some" to create an image of Russia as "a little bit savage still or they just climbed down from trees ... and probably need to have ... the dirt washed out of their beards and hair". So now he has turned into a Stalin (light?)-like figure and Russians have let themselves be imprisoned in a gulag of their own mind, reinventing the self-perception of a Great Nation & giving Stalin, who killed at least 25MM people during his 31-year tenure in the Kremlin, a nearly 50% popularity rating.

*This is long article well worth reading in its entirety. The writer is a great-granddaughter-, & adopted granddaughter-, of Nikita Krushchev (whom she interestingly enough says was, like many people in power, corrupted by it, turning from a domestic reformer in 1956 into a threat to world peace by 1962). In her early 50's, and with a degree in Russian from Moscow State University &*

a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Princeton, she now teaches International Affairs at the nearly century-old, Greenwich Village, New York City-based 'New School' University.

### **WE KNOW NOW HOW MUCH PLASTIC GOES TO THE OCEAN YEARLY** **(Epoch Times, Reid Scram)**

- The University of Georgia (UGA) has conducted a study on how much plastic is going into the oceans each year : between 4.8MM & 12.7MM tonnes in 2010 alone, with UGA scientist Jenna Jambeck, the lead author of the study & an Assistant Professor in its Faculty of Engineering saying “Eight million metric tons (*i.e. an amount less than the midpoint of the above range*) is the equivalent to finding five grocery bags full of plastic on every foot of coast line” (*in the world?*). Most of this comes from people living within 50 kilometres from the coast &, more specifically, from poorly managed landfills that allow lightweight plastics to be carried off by the wind, since, according to Prof. Jambeck, while “It is incredible how far we have come in environmental engineering-, advanced recycling-, & waste management systems to protect human health and the environment in a relatively short time ... these protections are unfortunately not available equally throughout the world.”
- Plastic use has dramatically increased year after year. In 2013 alone global plastic resin production to make items like bags & water bottles, was 299MM tons.

*In 1988 the NOAA first reported the existence of the “Great Pacific Garbage Patch” in the Pacific Ocean between Japan & California. Since then four others have been found, two in the North-, & South-, Atlantic, another one in the (South) Pacific & one in the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, because of the vastness of the world’s oceans, at least report the **average** amount of plastic in them was estimated to be still ‘only’ 5.1 kg per square kilometre of ocean.*