How Prehistoric Humans Discovered Fire Making

Deborah Barsky

05-29-2024 ~ Of all the pivotal technologies discovered by humans, fire making was the one that gifted our species with power beyond all others.

An ancient Greek myth tells the story of Prometheus, who, after molding humans out of clay and teaching them the fine arts of civilization, defied the Olympian Gods by stealing the secret of fire and offering it to humans. Prometheus paid dearly for this act of transgression that doted humankind with unprecedented technological know-how ultimately transforming their condition into one of great power.

The moral behind the Promethean archetype is a cautionary one, intended to warn us about the risks attached to the unbridled pursuit of technology that can inadvertently result in catastrophic scenarios. The Prometheus myth underscores not only the formidable power that individuals may come to possess by defying authority in the quest to develop science and technology but also suggests that anyone who does so will suffer the consequences.

It is significant that the Greeks chose fire as the subject to deliver this warning. Without a doubt, the capacity to produce and control fire stands out among the most transformative technological feats achieved by our prehistoric ancestors; one that ultimately consolidated human planetary domination. But how, when, and where did early humans harness the technologies necessary to master fire making? What does the archeological record tell us about how they finally

obtained the Promethean secret of fire making?

Like other milestones marking the human evolutionary pathway (like perfecting stone axes or mastering advanced hunting practices), the know-how required to make, use, and control fire evolved progressively, encouraged by human ingenuity and, probably also, by trial and error. Fire making techniques were perfected over time and transmitted socially, while different human groups explored the multifaceted revolutionary potential offered by controlling it. Before truly mastering fire making, early humans may have experienced a precedent phase during which they used fire passively, gathering, preserving and even transporting brazes ignited by natural causes (lightning, spontaneous combustion, etc.), prior to learning how to actively generate and control it. In the meantime, curiosity led them to explore the mysterious properties of fire, while also inspiring them to seek ways to master its secrets.

While looking back in time, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when our ancestors began to control fire-making technologies. Recognizing intentionally ignited and sustained fires in archeological contexts poses challenges since the simple presence of burned bones and stones or localized areas of charred soils are not sufficient to prove that hominins were actively producing fire. Before 1 million years ago, sparse evidence from some African sites could suggest that hominins were opportunistically harvesting fire from naturally kindled blazes; rather than practicing truly operative fire making. However, a multidisciplinary study from the Wonderwerk Cave in South Africa reports convincing evidence for intentional burning in a controlled archeological context dated to 1 million years old.

While such early signals of fire making are rare and difficult to recognize and interpret, globally, the *ability to set fire at will* is heralded as a major groundbreaking accomplishment attributed to the *Homo erectus* lineage who lived during the Lower Paleolithic period. This group of hominins is known to have produced an impressive array of tools belonging to the so-called Acheulian industrial complex that emerged in Africa 1.75 million years ago. Fire making is not the only groundbreaking achievement marking the 1.4 million-year-long reign of the Acheulian peoples. Throughout this time, hominins invented and came to master highly complex technological achievements, documented archeologically in the form of stone and (sometimes) bone tools. These technologies facilitated the expansion of *H. erectus* populations into Eurasia, where they continued to perfect and diversify the toolkits that afforded them adaptive advantages;

improving their ability to multiply and flourish.

Aside from their broadening cultural repertoire, parallel processes of social development (more difficult to recognize in the archeological record) were also taking place. Rising demography is manifest in both Africa and Eurasia from the exponential increases in the number, density, and variety of archeological sites: a phenomenon that must in turn have generated more frequent interpopulational encounters, assuring reproductive viability and offering opportunities for cultural transmission at various levels. Acheulian hominins began to organize themselves into functional collective units that allowed them to more effectively share and exchange their newfound skills: a strategy that would ultimately favor their survival.

It is only after the 1-million-year mark that the global repercussions of the consolidation of fire-making technologies become more clearly visible in some archeological contexts outside of Africa. At the Acheulian site of Gesher Benot Ya'aqov, in the Jordan Valley, for example, compelling evidence some 780,000 years old confirms that hominins were not only *making fire at will*but were also deliberately cooking fish. Meanwhile, as far away as China, but in a similar timeframe (800,000 to 600,000 years ago), there is proof in the famous multi-leveled Acheulian cave site of Zhoukoudian that individuals belonging to an Asian strain of *H. erectus* were also successfully experimenting with controlled burning in occupational settings.

Despite these rare and ancient occurrences, indications that hominins were actively generating and controlling fire became more ubiquitous only thousands of years later, toward the end of the Acheulian phase (after around 400,000 years ago), and then even more frequent as we move into the Eurasian Middle Paleolithic and African Middle Stone Age. Technological and behavioral diversity multiplies exponentially from this time forward, as toolkits differentiate to form complex formal manifestations of culture. Importantly, dwellings (often in caves) become recognizable *provisioned home bases*, where hominins returned regularly (or seasonally) over many generations. For the first time, organized living spaces can be identified within base camp settings that were structured around easily recognizable combustion structures, or hearths.

So, while *H. erectus* is credited with initiating the fire-making revolution sometime during the early phases of the Acheulian, it is only much later that the

Pre-Neandertals and other forms of pre-modern and modern *Homo*thriving in Eurasia at the end of this period began to more intensively experiment with the enormous potential offered by the Promethean gift of fire. Around 350,000 years ago, on the eve of the shift from the Lower to the Middle Paleolithic, the prevalence of hearths within prehistoric living spaces signals important changes taking place in hominin lifestyles.

Making fire was interwoven with many social, technological, and behavioral developments that triggered major changes that would shape humanity from that point onward. While (rather surprisingly) fire does not seem to have been a requirement for hominins expanding to territories situated in higher latitudes, it would have helped facilitate their capacity to take root in areas dominated by harsh or unstable climatic conditions. In terms of hunting, fire-wielding hominins would have had huge advantages over other kinds of carnivores with whom they competed for resources; fire also guaranteed the safety and protection of their own communities.

Besides taking advantage of these benefits, our ancestors experimented extensively with fire over thousands of years and grasped the significance of its power to transform the properties of other materials available in the landscape. They eventually learned to use fire to improve their weaponry (like heating flint to improve its knapping quality) and to assemble composite implements by hafting pointed stone tools onto branches using adhesives prepared with heat—such as tar and ocher. In addition, cooking food must radically have transformed the hominin diet, reducing the likelihood of contracting bacterial diseases and parasites from meat and other foodstuffs, while opening up innovative pathways toward enlarging the paleo diet (boiling, smoking, drying, etc.).

But among all of the spectacular changes afforded to prehistoric humans by the mastery of fire perhaps the most important and most difficult to assess archeologically is the social impact it must have had. With fire, humans were finally able to dompt the darkness and linger with confidence into the night, gathered together in proximity to hearths that afforded them warmth, light, and comfort. This leads us to postulate a variety of socially related activities, like storytelling or other communal rituals. While it is impossible to measure the impact of this complex series of events that so indelibly affected human evolution, we can still discern how technology and culture were interwoven to catalyze the advancement of symbolic communication within the developing brains of our

ancestors, finally grouped into distinct territorial social units.

Later still, during the Middle and Upper Paleolithic periods, our human predecessors used firelight to venture into deep cave systems to perform ritual activities and create art on the cave walls, bringing it to life with the play of torchlight. Toward the end of the Paleolithic, humans continued to explore the powerful transformative qualities of fire, eventually learning to obtain and maintain the high temperatures necessary to transform clay into pottery and, later, to melt metal ores into usable items that would, once again, revolutionize the human story.

Even today, fire remains a powerful force whose symbolic meaning is deeply rooted within our collective unconsciousness. Though Prometheus was eventually delivered from his torment, his transgression still resonates as a lesson to humankind's defiant striving to master transformative technologies without heeding the looming dangers posed by the unforeseen consequences of such actions.

By Deborah Barsky

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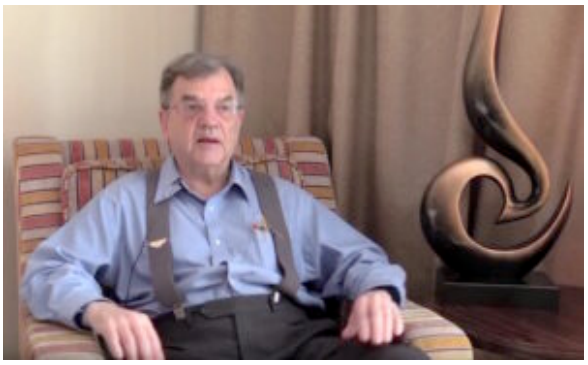
Some Myths Regarding The

Genesis Of Enterprise



Michael Hudson

05-22-2024 ~ Not only were "modern" elements of enterprise present and even dominant already in Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC, but the institutional context was conducive to long-term growth.

If a colloquium on early entrepreneurs had been convened in the early 20th century, most participants would have viewed traders as operating on their own, bartering at prices that settled at a market equilibrium established spontaneously in response to fluctuating supply and demand. According to the Austrian economist Carl Menger, money emerged as individuals and merchants involved in barter came to prefer silver and copper as convenient means of payment, stores of value, and standards by which to measure other prices. History does not support this individualistic scenario for how commercial practices developed in the spheres of trade, money and credit, interest, and pricing. Rather than emerging spontaneously among individuals "trucking and bartering," money, credit, pricing, and investment for the purpose of creating profits, charging interest, creating a property market and even a proto-bond market (for temple prebends) first emerged in the temples and palaces of Sumer and Babylonia.

The First Mints Were Temples

From third-millennium Mesopotamia through classical antiquity the minting of precious metal of specified purity was carried out by temples, not private suppliers. The word *money* derives from Rome's temple of Juno Moneta, where the city's coinage was minted in early times. Monetized silver was part of the Near Eastern pricing system developed by large institutions to establish stable ratios for their fiscal account-keeping and forward planning. Major price ratios

(including the rate of interest) were administered in round numbers for ease of calculation [1].

The Palace Forgave Excessive Debt

Instead of deterring enterprise, these administered prices provided a stable context for it to flourish. The palace estimated a normal return for the fields and other properties it leased out, and left managers to make a profit—or to suffer a loss when the weather was bad or other risks materialized. In such cases shortfalls became debts. However, when the losses became so great as to threaten this system, the palace let the agrarian arrears go, enabling entrepreneurial contractors with the palatial economy (including ale women) to start again with a clean slate. The aim was to keep them in business, not to destroy them.

Flexible Pricing Beyond the Palace

Rather than a conflict existing between the large public institutions administering prices and mercantile enterprise, there was a symbiotic relationship. Mario Liverani [2] points out that administered pricing by the temples and palaces vis-à-vis *tamkarum* merchants engaged in foreign trade "was limited to the starting move and the closing move: trade agents got silver and/or processed materials (that is, mainly metals and textiles) from the central agency and had to bring back after six months or a year the equivalent in exotic products or raw materials. The economic balance between central agency and trade agents could not but be regulated by fixed exchange values. But the merchants' activity once they left the palace was completely different: They could freely trade, playing on the different prices of the various items in various countries, even using their money in financial activities (such as loans) in the time at their disposal, and making the maximum possible personal profit."

Mesopotamian Institutions Boosted the Commercial Takeoff

A century ago it was assumed that the state's economic role could only have taken the form of oppressive taxation and overregulation of markets, and hence would have thwarted commercial enterprise. That is how Michael Rostovtzeff [3] depicted the imperial Roman economy stifling the middle class. But A.H.M. Jones [4] pointed out that this was how antiquity ended, not how it began. Merchants and entrepreneurs first emerged in conjunction with the temples and palaces of Mesopotamia. Rather than being despotic and economically oppressive, Mesopotamian institutions and religious values sanctioned the commercial takeoff

that ended up being thwarted in Greece and Rome. Archaeology has confirmed that "modern" elements of enterprise were present and even dominant already in Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC, and that the institutional context was conducive to long-term growth. Commerce expanded and fortunes were made as populations grew and the material conditions of life rose. But what has surprised many observers is how much more successful, fluid, and more stable economic organization was as we move back in time.

Ex Oriente Lux

Growing awareness that the character of gain-seeking became economically predatory has prompted a more sociological view of exchange and property in Greece and Rome (e.g., the French structuralists, Leslie Kurke[5] and Sitta von Reden[6], and also a more "economic" post-Polanyian view of earlier Mesopotamia and its Near Eastern neighbors. Morris and Manning[7] survey how the approach that long segregated Near Eastern from Mediterranean development has been replaced by a more integrated view[8,9] in tandem with a pan-regional approach to myth, religion,[10,11] and art works.[12] The motto *ex oriente lux* now is seen to apply to commercial practices as well as to art, culture, and religion.

Individualism Was a Symptom of Westward Decline

For a century, Near Eastern development was deemed to lie outside the Western continuum, which was defined as starting with classical Greece circa 750 BC. But the origins of commercial practices are now seen to date from Mesopotamia's takeoff two thousand years before classical antiquity. However, what was indeed novel and "fresh" in the Mediterranean lands arose mainly from the fact that the Bronze Age world fell apart in the devastation that occurred circa 1200 BC. The commercial and debt practices that Syrian and Phoenician traders brought to the Aegean and southern Italy around the eighth century BC were adopted in smaller local contexts that lacked the public institutions found throughout the Near East. Trade and usury enriched chieftains much more than occurred in the Near East where temples or other public authority were set corporately apart to mediate the economic surplus, and especially to provide credit. Because the societies of classical antiquity emerged in this non-public and indeed oligarchic context, the idea of *Western* became synonymous with the private sector and individualism.

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Defending Privacy In The Surveillance State And Fragmenting Internet

John P. Ruehl – Source: Independent Media Institute

05-20-2024 ~ *Governments and private entities have steadily eroded privacy on the internet. The trend toward internet functions centralizing within national borders and fragmenting internationally reinforces the need to safeguard both openness and security in cyberspace.*

Following the reapproval of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) on April 20, 2024, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer proudly declared that "bipartisanship has prevailed here in the Senate." Despite the increasing rarity of bipartisanship in recent years, support for government surveillance continues to unite large majorities across party lines. Established in 1978, FISA allows

government surveillance and data collection of individuals suspected of espionage or terrorism within the U.S., marking one of the many mechanisms aiming to ensure total federal oversight of communications.

Governments ranging from democracies to dictatorships, socialist to capitalist have all developed policies and bureaucracies for maximum data collection and mass surveillance as their populations become digitized. The centralized nature of modern communications grids facilitates many forms of surveillance. As internet services centralize domestically and the internet fragments internationally, countering government and private sector abuse of surveillance or developing alternative systems will require steady public pressure and some ingenuity to attain real enforcement.

One of the takeaways that a review of the history of modern surveillance, from the early days of the telephone to so-called privacy apps like Signal, tells us is that efforts to escape, undermine, and subvert the surveillance efforts of governments tend to be counterproductive. They are often originated by states themselves as part of a dialectic process that enables more comprehensive surveillance in a series of stages or just produces greater surveillance infrastructure in response to the attempt to develop alternative communications systems.

In the pre-internet era, authorities would tap into telegraph and later telephone lines to intercept communications, often requiring access to the physical infrastructure of the networks. Mail sent by post could meanwhile be intercepted and opened. As communication systems evolved, so too did government techniques to surveil them. The switch from copper wire phone systems to fiber optic cables and the spread of the internet initially threatened the NSA's ability to monitor communications, for example, until the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act (CALEA) in 1994. Communications companies were required to build back doors for the NSA to monitor remotely, while the NSA also clandestinely worked on developing technologies to monitor communications.

U.S. domestic surveillance powers have been routinely updated during the 21st Century, including the enactment of the 2001 PATRIOT Act, the 2015 Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act (CISA), and the 2018 FISA reauthorization. The 2013 Snowden Leaks revealed the NSA asked for funding to "insert vulnerabilities into commercial encryption systems", and it is constantly pushing for backdoors into encryption software to access communications and

devices. Major mobile carriers acknowledge the inclusion of preinstalled surveillance and data mining technology in devices supported by Google, Apple, and Microsoft, while the NSA's PRISM program extracts data from all major technology companies with or without their consent.

U.S. companies primarily cooperate with the U.S. government under the banner of "surveillance capitalism," allowing them to capitalize on their data and surveillance capabilities both for government and private endeavors. Similar to other countries, most of the U.S. internet traffic now flows through a handful of large entities rather than numerous smaller ones. Furthermore, U.S. user data is also more available to the private sector compared to that of EU citizens, with companies like Facebook and Google even compiling dossiers on non-users to enhance targeted advertising.

In addition to ad monetization, lax privacy laws also play a role in security. Established in 1976, the third-party doctrine allows U.S. law enforcement to access user data without a warrant. The Ring video system, acquired by Amazon in 2018, created hundreds of partnerships with U.S. police departments to help them gain access to user recordings, while numerous other companies actively provide law enforcement agencies with access to user data.

The issue extends beyond monetization and law enforcement. Political actors have recognized the potential of data to shape politics. In 2018, Facebook faced scrutiny when it was revealed that private company Cambridge Analytica was permitted to access user data and target them with political ads to influence their voting behavior. Moreover, anti-abortion groups have caused controversy by using location data to send ads to those who visited Planned Parenthood centers.

Of similar concern is the abuse of data by employees. In 2017, reports surfaced of employees of Ring doorbell company spying on female users, while Amazon's Alexa retained recordings of children long after parents requested their deletion. Hackers have also accessed user data and feeds of Ring customer cameras across the U.S.

Alongside extensive domestic surveillance and data collection methods, the expansion of the internet in the 1990s led to a surge in global U.S. surveillance and data collection capabilities. Despite the promotion of a "global multi-stakeholder model of internet governance", U.S.-based Organizations like the

Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), and Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C), allowed Washington considerable control over the governance, standards-setting, and the activities of major internet actors. While these advantages for Washington may have declined since the 1990s, the rise of Big Tech and other factors guarantee the U.S. ongoing influence over much of the internet.

The disclosure of ECHELON in the 1990s exposed a global signals intelligence (SIGINT) network operated by the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Five Eyes), while the Snowden leaks in 2013 uncovered further aspects of the surveillance alliance. Significant data sharing also occurs between the U.S. and European countries, often facilitated through organizations like NATO.

The 2022 interception of a British citizen's Snapchat message about a potential plane bombing, leading to the escorting of the plane by the Spanish air force, demonstrates strong Western data and surveillance collaboration. Multilateral efforts are supplemented by national measures like France's Intelligence Act and the UK's "Snooper's Charter."

Nonetheless, the U.S.-led internet faces mounting challenges as various blocs and countries impose restrictions and tighten control over their networks. The Snowden leaks exposed the ability of the Five Eyes to circumvent their domestic spy laws and even target high-profile officials like the German chancellor. Partly in response to the leaks, the EU introduced the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018 to limit data intrusion by foreign states and corporations and improve regulations on data collection.

Countries more hostile to Washington are also asserting greater autonomy over their data and communications networks, leading to more apparent cracks in the global internet. The Russian government's takeover of Russian social media site VKontakte in 2014 and increasing pressure on Telegram and Yandex in recent years have helped reinforce the Kremlin's concept of a "sovereign internet." The Russian government has conducted several trial runs of disconnecting the country from the global internet, while its efforts to centralize control and quell dissident opinion have intensified since the launch of the war in Ukraine, including blocking access to Western sites.

Moscow has also been re-establishing surveillance and data-sharing agreements

with Central Asian states since the Soviet collapse, using these arrangements to target Russians who fled abroad after the invasion of Ukraine. China's autonomy from the U.S.-dominated internet infrastructure is more advanced, and in Central Asia and other regions, Chinese companies vie with Russian counterparts for the export of surveillance and data collection technologies.

Notably, Western companies have played an influential role in assisting authoritarian governments to enhance their communications control and reduce dependence on U.S.-led internet infrastructure. U.S. corporations like Cisco helped build the "Great Firewall of China" and domestic surveillance capabilities, while Palantir assisted the United Arab Emirates. Nokia meanwhile contributed to Russia's development of its System for Operative Investigative Activities (SORM), which has also been replicated across Central Asia.

In response to concerns over decreasing privacy from government surveillance and private sector data collection, various initiatives have emerged in the decades since the internet appeared. These range from underground forums to marketplaces for illicit goods and servers, as well as blockchain technology, a decentralized method of storing and sharing data through computers. Search engines like DuckDuckGo position themselves as untraceable, while virtual private networks (VPNs) encrypt internet traffic to provide users with anonymity and data security. Tor, a software that reroutes and encrypts internet traffic through several to protect user identities, went public in 2002. A follow-up app, Signal is internationally believed to be a viable encrypted and private messaging platform.

Together, these components constitute what users are told is the Dark Web or darknet, an obscured part of the internet that is perceived as a means to evade government surveillance and control. But many of them have their roots in the same surveillance world that their marketers claim to be opposed to. Meanwhile, DuckDuckGo's privacy has been questioned, VPNs can be compromised, and flaws in Tor's code are found regularly. Early U.S. government involvement and funding in both Tor and Signal suggest they are less secure than promoted. Tor was originally developed by the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory in the mid-1990s before it went public, while Signal was partly funded by the government-sponsored Open Technology Fund (OTF), which has ties to the U.S. intelligence community.

The appointment of Katherine Maher to the chairman of Signal's board in 2023, who previously worked for the National Democratic Institute and Foreign Affairs Policy Board, has also raised questions about the app's security. Other anti-surveillance projects developed partly by the OTF, including Open Whisper Systems, CryptoCat, LEAP, and GlobaLeaks, have also had their authenticity questioned.

Dark Web-affiliated systems are also used by states. Russian authorities began cracking down on VPN services, Tor, and other services just before the war in Ukraine, but a year later, they cautiously permitted the expansion of these closely monitored channels to circumvent sanctions. The Iranian government also has a long history of using the dark web to more effectively evade U.S. oversight, while also striving to prevent its citizens from using it to undermine state authority. Even the CIA has developed its own Tor website for communication.

To avoid the dilemma of choosing between a government-monitored internet in collaboration with Big Tech and a lawless Dark Web of dubious anonymity, a middle ground termed Web 3.0 has emerged. Characterized by buzzwords like decentralization and blockchain technology, its proponents seek a more community-driven and peer-to-peer internet landscape with less surveillance and control by the current arbiters of the internet.

However, without true anonymity, these transparency efforts will make surveillance easier. Governments not only develop national and international communication systems but also support private initiatives and those developed by Academia to maintain control over all potential communications systems, including Web 3.0. If certain systems emerge that threaten government surveillance measures, they are either shut down, like the Silk Road, or compromised by various methods including operatives in both U.S. and foreign companies. Instead, Web 3.0 may be more useful in preserving the more open and connected aspect of the internet, though it will still be widely monitored.

Computer hardware and operating systems enable these apps to function inside devices that permit an overlay of surveillance on user activity, no matter the alleged privacy capabilities promised to users. The U.S., Australia, and other countries' efforts to ban Chinese-made Huawei devices highlight the ease of data collection and surveillance through such technologies, revealing similar capabilities in U.S.-made devices, despite the alleged security provided by privacy

apps and other measures. The escalating rivalry between the U.S. and China in developing massive new undersea internet cables shows the intensifying efforts of rival blocs to secure their own communications and surveil others.

Without the ability to create an alternative system not dominated by governments and Big Tech, stronger public oversight over their surveillance and data collection methods is essential for personal privacy. The 34 Senators who voted against FISA's reauthorization in April demonstrated bipartisan support exists for reducing the government's surveillance and data collection powers, while 15 U.S. states have so far adopted stronger data privacy laws for consumers in recent years.

Creating a clear and enforceable punishment system for both government agencies and private companies for data and surveillance abuse will be essential for any attempt to establish greater privacy safeguards. Increasing public awareness of the overt surveillance capabilities of devices and apps, even amidst the massive growth of the privacy protection industry, is a quick way to advance this cause.

By John P. Ruehl

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PVV Blog 8 ~ The Party For Freedom Really In Power Now: A Black Day

05-19-2024 ~ On May 16, 2024, four political parties in the Netherlands reached an agreement to form a new government. The largest of these four parties is the Party for Freedom, a populist party that has now, for the first time, landed at the center of power in the Netherlands.

In my opinion, this has pushed Dutch democracy to its absolute limits.

For me, May 16, 2024, is a black day.

The new coalition's government program contravenes Article 1 of the Constitution, which stipulates that every citizen in the country must be treated equally under equal circumstances. There is a significant devaluation of the rights of asylum seekers and status holders. In this blog, I will revisit the roots of the Party for Freedom and examine how it has grown into a tree of substantial proportions and what these developments mean for the future of our country.

The Cradle of the Party for Freedom
In his 2010 book De schijn-elite van de valse munters, founding party member and current parliament speaker Martin Bosma describes his own development within the party and that of the Party for Freedom itself. Party leader Geert Wilders is, of course, also mentioned in a history that Bosma characterizes as a mission requiring struggle and commitment: "We must function like a kind of semi-underground resistance organization." And about Geert Wilders: "He will never see his house again" (after the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, after which Wilders has been under permanent protection to this day).

Bosma recounts setbacks: "Silently, we look out the window. We still have a long way to go" after a disappointing campaign evening in the Dutch city of Den Bosch.

There is tension: “All your blood, sweat, and tears have been shed in the weeks and months before; now it is a matter of waiting”, on the evening of the November 22, 2010,
parliamentary elections.

There are triumphs: “The looks on the faces of people from the other political parties speak volumes: we are the party crashers, the unwanted intruders. What are we here for?” during the election victory on the same date.

There is a spirit of sacrifice: “I will never forget how Geert says: ‘This is exactly why we are here. Even if we keep one seat in parliament, this is our task’”, during the commotion surrounding the film Fitna, made by Wilders, in which he heavily criticizes Islam and the Quran.

There is *relief*: “These moments make up for a lot. The Netherlands is beginning to understand our message better and better”, after reactions from people in the Dutch municipalities of Volendam and Drachten who voted for the Party for Freedom.

There is a *corporate spirit*: “The Party for Freedom has grown into a gathering of cheerful patriots. People who oppose ‘those who call evil good and good evil, who turn darkness into light and light into darkness, who turn bitter into sweet and sweet into bitter.’”

And a sense of *history*: “A hundred years from now, people will remember Geert Wilders as someone who had the moral clarity to tell the truth that needed to be told.”

The Party for Freedom in Power
The semi-underground resistance organization of people who have shed blood, sweat, and tears, the party crashers and unwanted intruders, the cheerful patriots who know what is good and evil, what is sweet and bitter—these people are now at the center of power. After nearly twenty years of opposition, of agitating, maneuvering, stirring, and insulting, the Party for Freedom has managed to become the largest party in the country and is now steering the state.

Scenario
I think the following scenario will unfold. The coalition has plans to reduce migration that cannot be justified legally or positionally and will be challenged

and rejected by the Dutch courts or by the European Union in Brussels. The coalition parties are well aware of this, but they still put forward these proposals. They do so for two reasons, I believe. Firstly, they anticipate that Dutch judges and Brussels will torpedo the plans. Then the parties can say they did everything to honor their voters' wishes and point fingers at the judges and Brussels: "It wasn't our fault." Meanwhile, they will try to implement the unjust migration policy as much as possible. Time is on their side. They will apply the same tactic to dossiers on nature and agriculture, the nitrogen policy: "It wasn't our fault." They will say: "It's the judges' and Brussels' fault that it didn't work."

European Context

Then there is another development that will stimulate the realization of the coalition program, which is the rise of populist parties in the European arena. In the upcoming

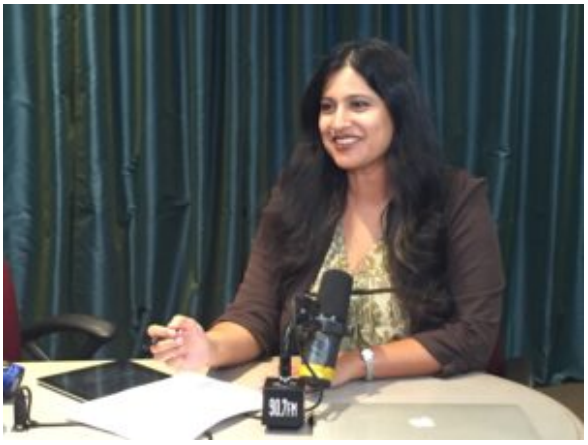
European elections in June, it is expected that these parties will make significant gains. They will become more powerful and closer to the center of European power. They will use similar tactics at the national level: they will demand things that are legally untenable while trying to implement their populist policies on the ground as much as possible, stalling the legal scrutiny. Time is on their side. Polls indicate gains for the Rassemblement National in France and the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany.

A Savior in the Coalition?

The Party for Freedom has succeeded in reaching the center of power, and I deeply regret that. The only party in the new coalition and the person who can influence a positive

outcome is party leader Pieter Omtzigt and his party Nieuw Sociaal Contract. It would not surprise me if his sole motivation for joining this unfortunate coalition is inspired by his desire to defend, maintain, and strengthen the rule of law. Will he succeed in implementing this defense against Wilders and ensuring that democracy becomes the democracy it should be? Time will tell, but until then, we must watch as the "cheerful patriots" devour and dismantle democracy.

Why Corporations Choose Lawlessness To Fight Unions



Sonali Kolhatkar

05-19-2024 ~ *Workers at companies like Apple and Starbucks face armies of union-busting lawyers advising employers to repeatedly violate labor laws.*

Workers in Towson, Maryland, have earned the distinction of becoming the first Apple retail workers in the nation to vote to strike over failed union negotiations with their employer. The approximately 100 Apple workers were also the first in the nation to successfully form a union. They did so in 2022, as the Coalition of Organized Retail Employees (CORE), joining the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM). Two-thirds of the store's workers voted to join the union, a resounding success at a company that has long staved off union activity.

Apple could have embraced the Towson store union, respecting the legal right of its workers to bargain collectively for their rights. Instead, the company chose a depressingly familiar path of using its economic power to break labor laws and resist the union at all costs.

Among Apple's earliest tactics, a bold one even by corporate standards, was to offer all but the Towson store workers new educational and medical perks, saying that the nascent union would have to negotiate for those perks while nonunion workers would be able to enjoy them immediately. The IAM CORE members claimed it was a "calculated" move by Apple, timed just ahead of a second retail

union vote at a store in Penn Square, Oklahoma, ostensibly as a warning to those workers, and any others considering union drives, that they could lose out. The National Labor Relations Board, which under President Joe Biden has tended to adhere to its mandate by actually protecting workers more often than not, accused the company of violating the workers' labor rights. Luckily, the bid failed and a majority of Penn Square's Apple workers chose to unionize.

Apple's ugly maneuver echoed that of Starbucks corporation a year later. The coffee giant increased hourly pay for all but its union workers. The NLRB also ruled against Starbucks.

Both Apple and Starbucks may have learned such machinations from Littler Mendelson P.C., the notorious union-busting firm that both corporations have retained to counter worker organizing. Starbucks alone has made use of the services of 110 of the law firm's attorneys to aggressively resist organized labor at their stores. A former National Labor Relations Board attorney Matthew Bodie called the massive army of anti-union lawyers "unprecedented." On its website, Littler boasts of the work it has done to "shape workplace practices in a direction that is favorable to employers."

Union busting is lucrative, raking in more than $400 million in revenues a year for anti-union law firms like Littler Mendelson and Morgan Lewis (which is Amazon's go-to union buster). It's no wonder that a large part of their work is advising corporate employers on how best to break laws. Starbucks, for example, is a repeat offender. And so are Apple and Amazon.

The practice of labor law violations in countering unionization is so widespread that the Economic Policy Institute found in 2019 that "Employers are charged with violating federal law in 41.5 percent of all union election campaigns." Given that these are officially deemed violations that have gone through the process of reporting and adjudicating, the number is likely an underestimate.

The reason these major corporations choose lawlessness is that often it works to their benefit. A company like Apple may well see millions of dollars toward union-busting lawyers as money well spent. After all, breaking the law costs very little, with fines for labor law violations capped at meager amounts. There are likely cold, hard calculations behind the cost-benefit analysis of breaking labor laws versus allowing workers to organize for what they want.

Even though workers in two Apple stores have successfully unionized, Apple prevailed in Short Hills, New Jersey where workers organized under the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and failed to win a union vote. Ahead of the vote, CWA accused Apple of illegal anti-union retaliation against one of the Short Hills employees leading the union drive. To Apple, such illegal behavior was likely worth the price. While individual employees have their livelihoods at stake, the company has nothing to lose but a few thousand dollars.

It's not just about money but also power (which ultimately translates into more money). Workers wanting union representation aren't just fighting for better pay and benefits but for humane treatment. Corporate profiteering is built on worker insecurity, the ability to hire and fire at will, and offering unpredictable shifts that best serve the company. Indeed, shift scheduling is a key sticking point in IAM CORE's negotiations with Apple for its Towson store workers who voted to strike.

There are good reasons why corporations fight unions: hundreds of studies point to the negative impact that unions have on corporate profits. Conversely, there is a clear correlation between unions and higher wages, benefits, and worker protections. Even more encouragingly, unions lead to better wages even for non-union employees, putting upward pressure on employers to compete with unionized workers.

Many modern corporate employers who fight unions market themselves as having liberal values and being pro-worker. Apple touts itself as one of the biggest job creators in the U.S., responsible for 2 million jobs in all 50 states, and boasts that "unlike with many companies, both full- and part-time employees are eligible for such benefits as health insurance, matching retirement contributions, and an employee stock purchase plan."

But, when forced to live up to their stated ideals, such corporations transform into profit-hungry gangsters. "Progressive-branded companies therefore offer free, built-in leverage to worker organizing campaigns," wrote labor journalist Hamilton Nolan. "There is nothing that will force an employer to live up to all the stuff it said about caring for employees faster than a demand for union recognition."

Some companies choose to lean into their stated liberal values, most notably Ben and Jerry's ice cream, which refreshingly decided to embrace the newly formed

Scoopers United union instead of unleashing union-busting law firms on its workers.

Even Microsoft, a major tech company that has a history of being what the New York Times called a "poster child for corporate ruthlessness," is seemingly choosing the path of union acceptance. The company's vice chair and president, Brad Smith announced in 2022 that Microsoft would work collaboratively with unions.

The Times speculated that Microsoft's decision to embrace unions was an attempt to appease the pro-labor Biden administration ahead of a corporate acquisition of a video game company. Regardless of its reasoning, working with organized labor instead of against it is good for society, even if it's bad for individual corporate bottom lines.

The good news is that in spite of union membership rates continuing to drop precipitously, the percentage of people who see unions in a favorable light has increased to 71 percent, and among young people a whopping 88 percent. The number of workers petitioning to join unions has jumped, as has strike activity. The only thing standing in the way of converting the union dreams of Apple workers and others into reality is corporate willingness to break labor laws.

By Sonali Kolhatkar

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Procter & Gamble, Mondelēz, And Nestlé Are Among 10 Of The Leading Consumer Brands Driving Global Deforestation

05-19-2024 ~ *Despite corporate commitments, deforestation rates remain high, and community land conflicts continue.*

Since the turn of the century, there has been a consistent average annual loss of 3 to 4 million hectares (7.4 to 9.9 million acres) of tropical forest globally. This puts us far from reaching the goal of zero deforestation by 2030, a target embraced in 2021 by 145 countries during the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow. Besides damaging the local environment, deforestation threatens our societies and economies by elevating carbon emissions and exacerbating the climate crisis. Land use change—mainly deforestation—contributes as much as a fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions. So, solving the climate crisis means ending rampant deforestation. And while national commitments are essential, the climate solution can only come from a collaboration between all stakeholders, and that includes, importantly, the private sector.

“Though countries need to take the lead, solving the climate crisis is not up to them alone. Non-state actors—industry, financial institutions, cities, and regions—play a critical role in getting the world to net zero no later than 2050. They will either help scale the ambition and action we need to ensure a sustainable planet, or else they strongly increase the likelihood of failure. The planet cannot afford delays, excuses, or more greenwashing,” said Catherine McKenna, chair of the UN Secretary-General’s High-level Expert Group on the

Net Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities, in a 2022 report that explored, in part, the role of business in achieving net zero emissions.

However, big multinational brands pose a major problem. Despite commitments to improve their supply chains, deforestation—as well as violence against those people defending land rights—remains increasingly high worldwide.

Deforestation rose 3.2 percent worldwide in 2023, according to a report published in April 2024 by Global Forest Watch, a forest monitoring project of the World Resources Institute, a Washington-based nonprofit research organization.

In 2020, 227 lethal attacks on land and environmental defenders were recorded by Global Witness, an international NGO that investigates the links between natural resource exploitation and human rights abuses.

Major Consumer Brands Are Failing

"Keep Forests Standing," a 2023 report by my organization, Rainforest Action Network (RAN), a nonprofit environmental group, revealed that many companies are still profiting from destructive practices, failing to bridge the gap between their public promises and their harmful actions.

Our report identified ten multinational corporations as significant contributors to deforestation and human rights abuses through their supply chains: Colgate-Palmolive, Ferrero, Kao, Mars, Mondeléz, Nestlé, Nissin Foods, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble, and Unilever. While some progress has been made, particularly with policies like No Deforestation, No Peatlands, No Exploitation (NDPE), implementation remains incomplete, especially in regions like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Producing a 'scorecard' for each brand, we urged them to take concrete actions to protect forests and communities. The scorecard uses rigorous criteria to assess policies and transparency in reporting. Unfortunately, in 2023, none of the evaluated brands achieved an 'A' grade, with Procter & Gamble, Mondeléz, Ferrero, and Nissin Foods performing the worst.

These brands wield considerable economic power, influencing global markets for 'forest-risk commodities,' particularly agricultural products such as palm oil, soy, cocoa, coffee, wood, pulp and paper, and beef.

Effective government regulations certainly help reduce the effects of climate change. However, global brands must move beyond empty promises and take decisive steps to address their role in driving deforestation and human rights violations. We need a genuine commitment and meaningful action from business leaders to protect forests and communities for future generations. Consumers and all of civil society play a crucial role in holding these brands accountable and demanding action to halt deforestation and rights abuses.

Trends and Developments

In the early 2020s, alarming environmental data highlighted the escalating crises facing our planet: 2022 saw forest loss equivalent to the size of Switzerland, and in 2023, record-breaking temperatures occurred, with over a million species teetering on the edge of extinction. Amidst these enormous challenges, some hope has emerged from regulatory developments and corporate claims—albeit with reservations.

The European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) represents a potentially pivotal shift in accountability for forest-risk commodities. Mandating traceability to land plots and imposing fines for deforestation carried out after 2020, the regulation demands robust due diligence from importing companies. Even so, major brands lag in compliance, exposing investors to significant risks. There remains substantial room for improvement when it comes to achieving true transparency and genuine corporate support for the EUDR.

Meanwhile, brands such as Mars, Nestlé, and Ferrero asserted they had achieved or were approaching 100 percent deforestation-free supply chains. Presenting limited evidence and overlooking loopholes, these assertions carry little weight. Their claims lacked independent verification, often relying on consultants with vested interests. Unilever stood out as the only brand demanding independent verification from its suppliers, though it falls short in its non-compliance protocols. Other brands relied on self-reported data or flawed certification systems, raising doubts about the credibility of their claims. This is classic greenwashing.

False assurances, if accepted at face value and with a lack of public transparency, allow brands to sidestep accountability and avoid finding systemic solutions. Genuine progress requires expanded reporting, particularly with third-party verification, to ensure adherence to ecological and human rights standards. As

the world grapples with environmental crises, private-sector brands must demonstrate a tangible commitment to halting deforestation and respecting human rights. Otherwise, their claims ring hollow.

Corporations have been slow to accept responsibility for upholding human rights and land rights. Unilever's comprehensive policy to protect Human Rights Defenders sets a precedent by acknowledging the need for corporations to combat violence against those defending land rights. Other major brands lack clear commitments in this regard.

While investments in landscape initiatives are increasing, particularly in palm oil production, only a fraction prioritize securing land-tenure rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. In the Indonesian district of Aceh Tamiang, growers, buyers, and end consumers of palm oil have united behind the local government to help make the entire jurisdiction a sustainable source of commodities, thereby protecting the Leuser Ecosystem, an ancient Indonesian forest ecosystem known as the "world's orangutan capital." Initiatives like this show promising results in reducing deforestation but underscore the need for broader enforcement of policies throughout supply chains.

Despite many companies adopting No Deforestation, No Peatlands, No Exploitation (NDPE) policies, challenges persist in translating these commitments into tangible outcomes. Deforestation rates remain high, and community land conflicts continue, especially in areas of logging and agribusiness expansion.

Critical reforms are necessary to truly bridge the gap between corporate policies and real-world impact. NDPE policies must become mandatory across all supply-chain tiers, covering all forest-risk commodities, and enforced at the corporate group level. Setting ambitious targets and independent verification of compliance are essential steps toward credible corporate responsibility.

Consumer awareness is growing, and consumers increasingly care about how brands behave. A 2020 survey by McKinsey & Co. found that "[a]lmost two-thirds of consumers are self-proclaimed 'belief-driven buyers' who will choose, switch, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues." The survey also found that three in four millennials consider sustainability when buying goods.

With a growing global awareness of environmental and human rights issues, consumers, investors, and activists have the power to hold brands accountable

and drive meaningful change toward sustainable and equitable supply chains.

Essential Elements of a Robust Forest-Risk Commodity Policy

In the early 21st century, a collective effort by communities, consumers, and international NGOs revealed how major global brands were driving deforestation and human rights abuses. Pressure from these groups has led many companies to adopt the NDPE policy standard. However, claims of reduced deforestation rates, particularly in places like Indonesia, are disputed, and as late as 2024, not all forest-risk sectors had implemented NDPE policies.

To ensure credible change, NDPE policies must address all elements of forest protection, prohibiting deforestation, forest degradation, and human rights violations. Deadlines for halting these activities must be clearly defined and observed. Furthermore, adopting cross-commodity NDPE policies is crucial, as threats to forests and communities often stem from commodities used in manufacturing products.

For instance, a chocolate bar has several ingredients, such as palm oil, cocoa, and sugar, each with its own environmental impact. A brand may have policies addressing palm oil but lack them for cocoa. Forest-risk commodities are all linked to deforestation and ecosystem degradation, and as such, they all require attention.

Multinationals can transform forest-risk commodity supply chains by setting comprehensive and cross-commodity NDPE policies. Only then can they take concrete steps toward mitigating environmental harm and respecting human rights. This collective effort is crucial for preserving forests and the communities that depend on them for generations to come.

The fight against deforestation and human rights abuses involves tracing the intricate web of connections between powerful corporations and the destruction they cause. While many big brands have adopted NDPE policies, their commitments often fail to effect real change. A key issue is the lack of enforcement across corporate conglomerates, allowing destructive practices to persist unchecked.

RAN’s approach focuses on holding conglomerates accountable for their actions despite attempts to deflect responsibility. By scrutinizing ownership structures, we can identify those truly responsible for deforestation. Even with such scrutiny,

though, corporations can find loopholes. For example, they can source from one arm of a corporate group. At the same time, another is actively involved in forest destruction and claims innocence because the two arms operate under different names.

To ensure credibility, NDPE policies must encompass all elements of sustainability and set ambitious, time-bound targets for compliance. Unfortunately, many brands lack such targets, relying on insufficient action plans or certification systems. Ambiguities in "Net Zero" approaches further complicate matters, potentially enabling greenwashing and delaying real progress.

Ultimately, achieving real change requires transparent and accountable policies enforced across entire supply chains. Without meaningful action, forests and communities remain at risk, highlighting the urgent need for corporate responsibility and genuine commitment to ending deforestation and human rights violations.

Evaluation of Brands

As mentioned above, RAN's "Keep Forests Standing" scorecard assesses ten major global brands in terms of their efforts to combat deforestation and human rights abuses in their supply chains. The 2023 evaluation included new criteria such as supply chain transparency and advocacy for regulations to end deforestation-linked commodities. Grades were nuanced with pluses and minuses, with a top score of A+ for brands that scored 24 points out of 12 evaluated elements.

Despite the urgent need for action amidst climate chaos and ecological damage, no brand had yet earned an 'A' grade. The worst performers, including Procter & Gamble, Mondeléz, Ferrero, and Nissin Foods, received an 'F.' Unilever led the pack, while Nestlé, PepsiCo, Kao, Colgate-Palmolive, and Mars showed moderate progress.

However, Ferrero, Mondeléz, Nissin Foods, and particularly Procter & Gamble were labeled as laggards, with Procter & Gamble even weakening its supplier requirements in its new policy. The brands were categorized into leaders, middle-of-the-pack, and laggards, emphasizing the need for significant improvement across the board.

Overall, while some brands had made strides, significant gaps persisted,

especially in ensuring third-party verification and comprehensive NDPE policies. Here are the brands and the grades they received:

Unilever: C

By strengthening its policies and investing in landscape programs, Unilever maintained its leadership position.

Mars: D

Mars lacked third-party verification but issued guidance on land rights.

Nestlé: D

Nestlé claimed progress in achieving deforestation-free supply chains but lacked third-party verification.

PepsiCo: D

PepsiCo committed to human rights defenders and disclosed palm oil refineries but awaited verification.

Kao: D

Kao clarified its NDPE policy, disclosing monitoring systems.

Colgate-Palmolive: D

Colgate-Palmolive improved its NDPE policy, emphasizing supplier adherence.

Ferrero: F

Ferrero remains a laggard without NDPE policies for high-risk commodities.

Nissin: F

Nissin Foods revised its procurement policy but missed setting NDPE practices as a requirement.

Mondelēz: F

Mondeléz also lagged, lacking comprehensive NDPE policies.

P&G: F

Procter & Gamble regressed with weaker protections in its wood pulp supply chain.

Recommendations
Major brands driving deforestation and human rights abuses need to drop empty promises and clean up their act. They must outline basic policies enforcing cross-commodity NDPE practices across all supply chains, setting a standard for others to follow. Grievance disclosure is improving, yet transparency on actions against violators like Royal Golden Eagle Group in Indonesia still needs to be improved. Forest Positive Coalition's investments in landscape programs are crucial.

Increasingly, consumers worldwide are demanding tangible actions, not just promises. A 2020 survey by Boston Consulting Group found a notable increase in environmental consciousness, with approximately 70 percent of individuals more aware of the link between consumption habits and environmental decline since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, 87 percent of respondents expect corporations to play a role in addressing environmental concerns, with 77 percent saying that public subsidies should be contingent upon such efforts.

Still, as of 2023, despite worsening climate crises, all the brands we evaluated had yet to address their role in deforestation and rights violations adequately.

To survive in an increasingly aware consumer market that values sustainability and environmental protection, brands must establish ambitious traceability targets and transparent monitoring systems. Human rights monitoring and community consent require credible verification beyond mere certification.

In 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres issued a "code red for humanity" following the release of a worrisome report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk. Global heating is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible," he warned.

"The viability of our societies depends on leaders from government, business, and civil society uniting behind policies, actions, and investments … We owe this to

the entire human family, especially the poorest and most vulnerable communities and nations that are the hardest hit despite being least responsible for today's climate emergency."

By Laurel Sutherlin

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