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PAINTING

NATIONALISM GREEN?

IN THE SURREAL dénouement of a recent episode of the *New York Times* podcast ‘The Daily’, Doug Hurley, one of three US astronauts currently orbiting 250 miles above the Earth aboard the International Space Station, suggested that civilian space travel might prove a balm for global ills like ‘the pandemic and the strife in the cities’ following the police killing of George Floyd:

When you look out the window, when you see the planet below, you don’t see borders. You don’t see the strife. You see this beautiful planet that we need to take care of. And hopefully, as technology advances and as this commercial space travel gets going, more people will get that opportunity. Because I think if you get the chance to look out the window from space and look back on our planet . . . you’ll realize that this is one big world, rather than all these different little countries or cities or factions that we have on the planet. And I think it will make it a better place.¹

If this startling plug for the utopian promise of space tourism—its commodified experience of sublimity prompting epiphanies about the artifice of territorial divisions and activating a latent eco-consciousness, thus saving the planet one cosmic sightseer at a time—represents an extreme version of one kind of environmentalism, which envisions the transcendence of national boundaries through an enlightened recognition of our collective embeddedness in the ecosphere, Anatol Lieven takes the diametrically opposite view. His latest book *Climate Change and the Nation State* argues that the self-interest of nation-states should not be suppressed in pursuit of global solutions to anthropogenic climate change, but doubled down on.²

That nation-states, rather than intergovernmental bodies or some emergent supranational sovereign, will—if anyone will—be the vanguard of response to the climate crisis is not the central claim of Lieven’s book; their ongoing centrality as political units and global actors is assumed rather than lengthily argued for. The question animating Lieven’s contribution to green strategizing is rather about what will compel nation-states to act, and what will motivate their increasingly polarized electorates to rally behind some version of a Green New Deal (GND), of which Lieven is firmly in favour.³ The way Lieven formulates his version of this cardinal climate question—what is to be done?—is conditioned by his diagnosis of the current impasse. Nation-states’ negligence hitherto, Lieven argues, proceeds not from a lack of capacity, financial or technological—an uncontroversial claim, given the immense resources mustered by governments in response to the pandemic—but ‘the lack of mobilization of elites all over the world, and of voters in the West’.

Climate Change and the Nation State is thus an appeal to ‘sensible and patriotic policymakers’ everywhere but is ‘mainly directed at audiences in the Western democracies’—and the US in particular, which is predictably the nation-state with which Lieven is primarily concerned. This bias is in some ways justified—aside from its hegemonic status and outsized influence on global affairs, the US emits more carbon per capita than any other country in the world—but also seems a contingent effect of timing: the book is palpably inflected by the looming US presidential election. In Lieven’s view, one of the reasons climate change has remained lethally low on the official political agenda in the US and elsewhere is that environmentalism has become excessively associated with ‘cultural liberalism’, alienating the conservative voters who most need to be won to the planetary cause.⁴ Particularly in the US, the climate crisis

¹ ‘Counting the Infected’, The Daily podcast, *New York Times*, 8 July 2020.

² Anatol Lieven, *Climate Change and the Nation State: The Realist Case*, London 2020. Hereafter CCNS.

³ ‘One version or another of a Green New Deal is the only way to go’, CCNS, p. 92.

⁴ Lieven’s mapping of this liberal-conservative opposition onto the Democratic and Republican parties is at best anachronistic. Lieven presents ‘cultural liberalism’—a rubric he never defines, but under which he groups such ‘ideological luxuries’ as ‘open borders, free migration’, ‘identity politics’, ‘the Woke movement’, ‘the Me Too movement’—as spanning seemingly any political affiliation to the left of the GOP. He refers to Democrats, liberals, ‘the left’, or even ‘the Greens’ (glossing over right-wing environmentalists) interchangeably—collapsing these political distinctions on the apparent assumption that, whatever their differences on the economy, for example, they converge on social or cultural issues, as well as on the climate crisis: CCNS, p. xxv.

has become an identitarian issue, which precludes its emergence as a bipartisan one. According to the Pew Research Center, in the US ‘partisanship is a stronger factor in people’s beliefs about climate change than is their level of knowledge and understanding about science’; a 2018 Pew survey found that 83 per cent of Democrats regard climate change as a major threat compared to only 27 per cent of Republicans—a 56-point difference.⁵ As Lieven puts it, disbelief in or disregard for the devastating consequences of burning fossil fuels has become a matter of conservative ‘communal culture; like owning guns or attending church’. The climate-sceptic right says ‘Not “We are not *convinced* by the evidence of climate change” but “We aren’t *the kind of people* who believe in climate change”’. This partisanship is a major impediment to the creation of ‘a new national dispensation in national politics akin to the original New Deal’, which Lieven believes will be necessary to deliver green parties ‘sweeping majorities’ in ‘repeated elections’.⁶

What, then, does Lieven propose to overcome the liberal ideological monopoly on ecological concern? His first concrete proposal for transforming the climate crisis into a solid national priority in the US and other Western democracies is to discursively reframe global warming as an imminent threat to national security: ‘the US military needs to throw its full weight behind the Green New Deal’. ‘Securitizing’ global warming would at once depoliticize the issue—‘remove it from the natural sphere of politics’—and render it more consonant with conservative political cultures, since enlisting military figures in the rhetorical detoxification of the topic would, Lieven hopes, have particular influence with Republicans, military functionaries being among the few experts who command respect across the political spectrum.⁷

Lieven worked for the FT and *The Times* in the mid-80s and 90s, covering first Afghanistan and Pakistan—the subject of his *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (2011)—and then the former Soviet Union. In the early 2000s, he began writing about international relations and security for US research centres; since 2006, he has taught at Georgetown’s Qatar

⁵ A similar pattern exists in Europe, though to a lesser degree, with supporters of the AfD, UKIP and Rassemblement National respectively 28, 22 and 21 per cent less likely to view climate change as a major threat than non-supporters. See the Pew Research Center: Cary Funk and Brian Kennedy, ‘How Americans See Climate Change and the Environment in 7 Charts’, 21 April 2020; and Moira Fagan and Christine Huang, ‘A Look at How People Around the World View Climate Change’, 18 April 2019.

⁶ CCNS, pp. 132, 10, xiv.

⁷ CCNS, p. 7.

campus.⁸ Lieven's 'securitization' idea has its origins in a minor professional crisis, narrated in the introduction, which confers on the ensuing book a winning atmosphere of sincerity. Reflecting on the full meaning of the climate crisis prompted him to realize 'the comparative irrelevance of most of the issues on which I have been working in the areas of international relations and security studies'. Researching the escalating tensions between the US and China over the atolls of the South China Sea, the thought dawned on him that in the long term 'these places will be meaningless for both sides', since 'rising sea-levels and intensified typhoons will have put the sources of these tensions under water again'. Noting the absurdity of such territorial spats and geopolitical rivalries, as well as their 'destructive effects' on 'international co-operation against climate change', not to mention the environmental havoc wrought by militarization more generally, Lieven appeals to political elites to realize that 'the long-term interests of the world's great powers are far more threatened by climate change than they are by each other'. This sounds straightforward—a policy shift prompted by a sober consideration of the terrifying consequences of unchecked carbon emissions—but it would involve a radical reboot of national priorities. For one of the primary techniques for protecting national security as it is currently conceived is pursuing energy self-sufficiency or 'resource independence' by using increasingly invasive technologies to unearth domestic fossil-fuel reserves.

Asymmetrical impacts

In what sense does climate change immediately threaten the national security of Western states? Unlike India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, for example—first, second and fourth on HSBC's 2018 report ranking countries' vulnerability to climate change—and notwithstanding Californian wildfires and the vulnerability of Eastern coastal cities to rising sea-levels and worsening storms, the US is not imminently existentially threatened

⁸ One can piece together much of this professional history from scattered references in *Climate Change and the Nation State*, which give the book a pleasing personal feel. Lieven's casual allusions to the impressive geographical range of his career also serve as a rhetorical demonstration of worldliness. Anecdotal experience is used to substantiate specific claims—his time in Qatar, for example, which 'has the most restrictive' naturalization laws in the world, convinced him of the incompatibility of a universal basic income with too much migration—and cumulatively, to empirically corroborate his 'realist' sensibility; his conclusions do not derive from ideological predilections, but arise organically from his wide experience: CCNS, pp. xvi–xvii, 49, 51, 132, 135.

by the physical consequences of a warming planet. Lieven's case for redefining climate change as a pressing national-security concern is thus founded on anticipating its socio-political fallout, rather than its immediate material effects, and on his elaboration of the ways in which, even if disastrous changes to the natural environment are relatively localized, their human and political consequences are not. The endangered world with which *Climate Change and the Nation State* is most concerned is thus not the natural one of forests and rivers and irreplaceable wildlife, but the political order of states and societies; the horizon upon which Lieven's gaze is fixed is not some ecological apocalypse or mass-extinction event, but the demise of democracies and societal collapse that he thinks will come first: without something like a Green New Deal, 'Western liberal democracies won't last long enough to be overwhelmed by the direct effects of climate change'.⁹

Lieven's appeal to 'securitize' the climate crisis touches on the aspect of the problem that can make it seem so hopelessly insoluble. While some countries have marshalled impressive resources and political will in response to the pandemic, the differences between the virus and climate change are suggestive. Unlike COVID-19, which rapidly spread to virtually every corner of the planet, the exact interaction between global warming and meteorological cycles, as with carbon emissions and their longer-term visible effects, is complex and contested, while impacts are uneven across regions and classes. As has widely been noted, the places most at risk from rising sea-levels, floods, storms, drought and other catastrophic natural events and processes, and least able to prepare for and recover from them, are mostly located in developing countries with little geopolitical clout, and whose national contribution to global emissions is negligible compared to many of the less vulnerable high-emitting countries.¹⁰ Aside from its evident injustice, this asymmetry of cause and effect is also a serious obstacle to the mobilization of elites in the global North: whereas COVID-19 infected affluent globe-trotters first,

⁹ CCNS, p. 115.

¹⁰ The Philippines and Bangladesh, for example—3rd and 4th on HSBC's climate vulnerability ranking—were responsible for 0.35 per cent and 0.24 per cent of the 36.2 billion tonnes of carbon emitted in 2017 respectively. China and the US, meanwhile—ranked 26th and 39th by the HSBC report—emitted 27 per cent and 15 per cent of the global carbon total. See the visualization, 'Who emits the most CO₂?' using data from the Global Carbon Project, in Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, 'CO₂ and Greenhouse Gas Emissions', May 2017, published at ourworldindata.org; and Ashim Paun, Lucy Acton and Wai-Shin Chan, 'Fragile Planet: Scoring Climate Risks Around the World', HSBC Global Research Report, March 2018.

including heads of state and their ministers, before percolating through lower-income and minority communities, over-represented in the service and care sectors and disproportionately killed by the virus, the last to be affected by climate change will likely be those with the most capacity but least immediate interest in mitigating it.

Lieven does not squarely acknowledge this dynamic, but it is implicitly conceded by the burden of his case, which is to square the circle of national and global interest by showing that climate change poses an ‘indirect’—but immediate—existential threat to the West. The linchpin of Lieven’s reconciliation of Western self-interest with planetary welfare—or rather, of the developing world’s bearing on Western political calculation—is mass migration: ‘the single most important threat posed by climate change to the security of the Western states and Russia is likely to be an indirect one: further increases in migration’.¹¹ There is evidence to suggest that Lieven’s forecast of the mass displacement of populations is not scare-mongering. According to one recent report, with the desertification of semiarid regions, ‘hundreds of millions of people from Central America to Sudan to the Mekong Delta’ whose land has failed them ‘will be forced to choose between flight and death. The result will almost certainly be the greatest wave of global migration the world has seen’. By 2070, the extremely hot zones that now account for less than 1 per cent of the earth’s land surface could cover nearly a fifth of it, ‘potentially placing one of every three people alive outside the climate niche where humans have thrived for thousands of years’.¹² Internal displacement, as rural communities deprived of their agricultural livelihoods move to cities in search of increasingly scarce waged work, and emigration to proximate countries will initially be more prevalent than intercontinental migration, which is often treacherous and requires a financial capacity that most lack.¹³ But the scale of the crisis—‘with every degree of temperature increase, roughly a billion’ will be pushed outside

¹¹ CCNS, p. 35.

¹² Abrahm Lustgarten, ‘The Great Climate Migration’, *New York Times Magazine*, 26 July 2020.

¹³ Of the roughly 13 million people displaced by the Syrian civil war—the ‘refugee crisis’ that Lieven repeatedly invokes to warn of the ‘widespread populist radicalization and political destabilization’ he believes rapid, mass migration to the West will inevitably cause—roughly half remained within Syria’s borders, with a further 5 million displaced to neighbouring countries in the Middle East and North Africa, numbers which dwarf the 1 million who found asylum in Europe: Phillip Connor, ‘Most Displaced Syrians Are in the Middle East’, Pew Research Center, 29 January 2018.

the ‘climate niche’, and according to the UN global temperatures are on course to rise by as much as 3.9 degrees by 2100—suggests displacement will not be confined to the environs of impacted regions.¹⁴

Lieven foresees that the unprecedented magnitude and rapidity of this displacement will, alongside resource scarcity, exacerbate existing tensions, including ethnic conflicts, destabilizing whole regions, with many devolving into war, and potentially precipitating the collapse of states. ‘Climate change will feed into other factors of environmental degradation and social tension, producing more conflicts like the Syrian civil war’—a conflict Lieven relates to the droughts in grain-growing countries in the years preceding it: he points to the steep rise in bread prices and ensuing economic discontent across the Middle East as an important context for the Arab Spring.¹⁵ Mass migration, in other words, is Lieven’s answer to the question of how, as Mike Davis puts it, to effect ‘the transmutation of the self-interest of rich countries and classes into an enlightened “solidarity” with the poorer countries and classes most vulnerable to the environmental devastation already being wrought by untrammelled energy use in the global North.’¹⁶

Types of nationalism

Declaring the climate crisis a firm priority among security establishments is one tactic for focusing elite minds and neutralizing the issue among sceptical voters. But the larger, and more contentious, part of Lieven’s scheme for turning climate-stabilization into a bipartisan popular cause is nationalism—‘the most powerful source of collective effort in modern history’. *Climate Change and the Nation State* is in this sense a partial misnomer; *Climate Change and Nationalism* would be more accurate—though one can understand why Lieven preferred the former, since nationalism has, to put it mildly, a mixed reputation, as well as a highly uneven environmental record. Lieven acknowledges this, noting ‘the melancholy examples’ of Trump’s enthusiastic rolling back of environmental regulations and Bolsonaro’s commitment to hastening the deforestation of the Amazon. To impose some moral order on this protean ideology, Lieven makes the standard move of distinguishing

¹⁴ Lustgarten, ‘The Great Climate Migration’; Matt Stieb, ‘“Bleak” UN Climate Report: World on Track for Up to 3.9 Degrees Warming by 2100’, *New York Magazine*, 26 November 2019.

¹⁵ CCNS, pp. 36, 41.

¹⁶ Mike Davis, ‘Who Will Build the Ark?’, *NLR* 61, Jan–Feb 2010, p. 37.

between ethnic and civic nationalisms: the former is ‘an attempt at re-creating a state based on a narrow and closed ethnic and cultural identity’—which is ‘obviously not desirable for any country containing large ethnic or religious minorities’ and ‘will in the end point toward fascism’—while the latter is ‘based on a much stronger idea of common citizenship giving a common sense of identity to all citizens’, irrespective of race or creed.¹⁷

Lieven draws on myriad historical examples to attest the progressive achievements of nationalism but is most inspired by the ‘social imperialists’ of Western Europe at the turn of the 20th century and Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive movement in the US, both of which, in Lieven’s telling, successfully combined patriotism with welfarism. Lieven, whose electoralist horizon means he conceives of the durable popularity required to forge a new, eco-friendly national consensus as an artefact of bipartisanship achieved through a kind of depoliticization, is perhaps also attracted to the ecumenical politics of the British social imperialists: they were ‘drawn mainly from the imperialist wing of the Liberal Party’ but included ‘Fabian socialists’ and “one nation” Conservatives’, as well as ‘the more farsighted sections of the military elites’. What united this ‘eclectic bunch’ was an enthusiasm for Empire, anticipation of a ‘coming world war in which national unity would be tested to the limit’, ‘professional middle-class contempt’ for Britain’s aristocratic ruling class, and a ‘deep fear of revolution, class warfare, and social disintegration’. To either forestall or prepare for these multiple threats, the social imperialists believed the British state ‘needed to be thoroughly reformed and given increased powers, including to shape and guide the economy’; their vision ‘extended beyond social insurance to urban planning, public health, and educational reform’. Despite plunging the Continent into the First World War, and regrettable ‘parallels with the European tendencies that contributed to fascism’ after it, ‘the social imperialists contributed to the growing national consensus that eventually created the British welfare state after 1945’. Today’s ‘task’ is thus ‘to develop a new version of social imperialism without the imperialism, racism, eugenics, and militarism’. In the US the same mix of progressive taxation, a more energetic and compassionate state, and pride in one’s country animated Theodore Roosevelt’s ‘new Nationalism’, the 1912 platform of the fleeting Progressive Party. This beneficent form of nationalism helped to create basic social welfare, regulating ‘the wild

¹⁷ CCNS, pp. xv, 84–5.

capitalism of the “Gilded Age”—attacking ‘the power of special interests and monopolies’ and holding executives ‘personally responsible for the crimes of their corporations’—and modernizing government.¹⁸

How convincing a strategy is Lieven’s counter-intuitive call to recast the planetary crisis in nationalist terms? Its presupposition—that nation-states ‘are not going away’, and are the only agents with the legitimacy and resources to respond at the speed and scale required to stabilize the climate—seems increasingly self-evident, notwithstanding their inertia on climate action to date and the globalized nature of the climate activist movement. Intergovernmental bodies—from the UN’s IPCC to the WHO—can issue warnings and guidance, arrange conferences and aggregate expertise, and perhaps in some cases exert pressure; but without territorial sovereignty or democratic legitimacy, they are comparatively powerless to act or compel action. As for the traditional alternative to the state—the market—even the *Economist* admits that its invisible hand is not up to the task of spontaneously decarbonizing the economy in time.¹⁹

Lieven’s delineation of the theoretical fit between nationalism and environmentalism is often compelling. ‘If climate change and other challenges are to be met, then the states of the 21st century will have to be strong’, Lieven contends, and the ‘greatest source of a state’s strength is not its economy or the size of its armed forces, but legitimacy in the eyes of its population’. There are various sources of state legitimacy—from sheer longevity to administrative competency—but one of the ‘greatest and most enduring’ has been nationalism. By fortifying and legitimizing states, nationalism eases the implementation of ‘painful reforms’ and demands for collective sacrifice—in the form of higher taxes, including unpopular fuel levies, which Lieven believes will be a necessary part of greening the economy.²⁰ Nationalism is also, Lieven argues, predicated on a concern for the future and so ready-made for the ‘long-term thinking’ required for climate action: unlike its ephemeral individual citizens,

¹⁸ CCNS, pp. 96–101.

¹⁹ Whereas past energy transitions were slow—‘it was not until the 1950s, a century after the first commercial oil well was drilled’ in Pennsylvania that ‘crude oil came to represent 25 per cent of humankind’s total primary energy’—the switch to cleaner energy sources needs to happen improbably fast. ‘Private capital will follow’ public policy, but governments ‘need to make the signals clear’: ‘Not-so-slow burn’, *Economist*, 23 May 2020, pp. 53–4.

²⁰ CCNS, p. 76.

permanence is constitutive of the idea of a nation. Since it draws on an attachment to place—to local landscapes and heritage—nationalism is well suited to conservation efforts too.

But aside from these thought-provoking affinities, what does Lieven's 'civic' nationalism amount to in practice? In his final chapter, 'The Green New Deal and National Solidarity', Lieven turns his attention to the optics of actually existing green programmes in Europe and the US. Other than briefly lambasting the French Green Party for advocating the abandonment of nuclear energy—which he regards as wildly irresponsible based on a comparison of the lethality of runaway climate change versus a nuclear accident ('at least nine *million* human beings die every year as a direct result of air pollution'; '*Nobody* died as an immediate result of the Fukushima accident')—Lieven's main criticism of the French Greens is their stance on migration, which Lieven claims all European Green parties share. 'Since elsewhere in the party manifesto there is a call for the distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants to be abolished', their pro-asylum policy 'is in effect a call for open borders. Such a programme would tear France apart'.²¹ Note that Lieven makes his case against what he construes as hazardously liberal migration policies on impeccably ecological grounds: climate change will cause mass migration, and the arrival of millions fleeing the heat will in turn make taking action to mitigate climate change more difficult by increasing 'populist chauvinism'—a synonym for the malign 'ethnic' nationalism Lieven is keen to distinguish from his progressive 'civic' kind—'political radicalization, polarization, and state paralysis in Western democracies'. Lieven argues that as electorates become more deeply divided and ecologically obtuse far-right populists surge, the stable parliamentary majorities necessary for sustained government action on climate change will become a 'mathematical impossibility'.

Lieven reckons that if 'migration to the West can be kept within reasonable limits, and without sudden massive spikes like the Syrian refugee crisis', then 'there is a good chance' migrants can be 'successfully integrated', but worries that too much migration too fast will undermine the social cohesion he thinks will be vital for the acceptance of unpopular ecological reforms and state resilience in the face of worsening climate-related traumas.²² The latter argument is predicated on the

²¹ CCNS, pp. 117–8.

²² CCNS, p. 56. Lieven doesn't specify what these 'reasonable limits' would be, nor does he spell out the optimal criteria for assessing asylum claims.

idea—derived from David Goodhart, whose *The British Dream* (2013) appears frequently in the footnotes of *Climate Change and the Nation State*—that stable societies with functioning and generous welfare states tend to be relatively culturally homogeneous, and that influxes of foreigners undermine social solidarity and with it, citizens' willingness to contribute taxes to support public services and fund green infrastructure, or to make sacrifices on behalf of the wider community, including its future generations.

Valences of migration

Lieven's vision of divided and paralysed democracies involves a strangely unmediated conception of the relation between migration and its political upshot. 'The continued flow of illegal immigration to the United States', he writes, has done 'much to infuriate sections of the white population and to elect Donald Trump.' Or: 'The result of mass migration in the generation before 2016 was the disaster of Brexit.'²³ Omitted in these analyses of 2016's political shocks is the way ideas about migration—ideas, moreover, that are not simply naturally arising, but deliberately propagated and instrumentalized for particular ends—condition people's reaction to it.²⁴ In step with Lieven's elision of what might be termed the ideological field, in which understandings of experience and material reality are always partly defined and constructed, is an equivocation in his analysis of the social and economic impact of mass migration, which, he argues, will—in combination with 'two other critical challenges for Western societies: automation and artificial intelligence'—wreck labour markets. Discussing the possible inclusion of a universal basic income (UBI) in green platforms, Lieven couches his claims that this would be at odds with 'open' migration policies in a kind of intellectual ventriloquy of the anti-immigrant perspective. A UBI would be 'incompatible with continued high levels of migration' not necessarily because migrants put a strain on the public purse—the evidence suggests they make a net fiscal contribution—but because a UBI would allow citizens to calculate the exact cost of migration: 'fears about added strains on social welfare, health, housing, and school systems have been among the chief causes of opposition to migration' but 'the evidence for

²³ CCNS, pp. 24, 60.

²⁴ For an alternative, see Maya Goodfellow: 'The disinclination to confront myths, and indeed the eagerness to reinforce them, cultivated anti-immigration politics in the UK and would ultimately help to produce the Brexit vote', *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats*, London and New York 2020, p. 8.

these costs has always been somewhat difficult to pin down’, whereas ‘under a UBI system’, ‘anyone with a pocket calculator could work out how much his or her basic income would drop for every given new percentage of migrants’.²⁵

Is a UBI incompatible with high levels of migration because migrants really do stretch states’ welfare capacities, or is the salient fact just that many voters believe this to be so? Likewise, should green parties adopt a more stringent position on migration because migrants destabilize societies and incapacitate political systems—thus impeding concerted action to address one of the causes of such migration—or simply because pro-asylum policies are bound to alienate right-wing voters? It is on account of this equivocation that one is left with the feeling that the historically informed defence of nationalism that constitutes much of the body of *Climate Change and the Nation State* is merely a theoretical embellishment of the Machiavellian electoral calculation with which it ends. This impression is reinforced by Lieven’s discussion of the Democrats’ 2019 Green New Deal Resolution too, where his larger theme of how to unleash the progressive ecological potential of nationalism tapers off into the rather less impressive, if still important, question of how to sell the Green New Deal to Republicans, which in turn seems at times to morph into the more cynical question of how to instrumentalize jingoistic and racist habits for environmental ends. For as Lieven does not shy away from saying: the irony of the right’s climate-denial and ardent fossil-fuel consumption is that it is helping to precipitate the waves of migration they so detest and fear; their xenophobia alone should convert them to the planetary cause.

Referring to the wording of their GND Resolution, Lieven writes that ‘the Democrats cannot afford to be tainted by the atmosphere of blanket hatred of core American traditions that suffuses their most radical supporters.’ He doesn’t elaborate on what these ‘core American traditions’ are—such indeterminacy enhances the euphemistic force of the phrase—but goes on to lament the way ‘the resolution is framed in the language of “Green Intersectionality”’ and then quotes the offending passage: climate change has ‘exacerbated systemic racial, regional, social, environmental, and economic injustices’ by ‘disproportionately affecting indigenous peoples, communities of colour, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, the poor, low-income

²⁵ CCNS, p. 51.

workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth'. Lieven goes on to say that intersectionality downplays social and economic (as opposed to sexual and racial) disadvantage and so classes 'the most economically and socially disadvantaged white males among the privileged oppressors'. 'Why, for example, did the resolution have to slip in a completely gratuitous (and in spirit, mendacious) insult to the white working classes by claiming "a difference of 20 times more wealth between the average white family and the average black family"?' 'This sort of language is politically disastrous because it gives yet more opportunities to the Republicans to tell white working-class voters that the Democrats are not interested in them.' Lieven then claims that these 'hard-line cultural liberal positions' are 'not even popular with most Democrats' and uses a 2018 poll about political correctness to substantiate his point: 'almost 80 per cent of both blacks and whites in the United States dislike political correctness'.

'Of course', Lieven goes on, 'Democrats have a civic duty genuinely to *help* minorities who will vote for them anyway or not vote at all, but they need to pitch their electoral appeal to public voters who will *not* vote for them without considerable effort.' 'Climate change activism', he concludes, 'has become associated with the cultural liberals' sacralization of different ethnic and cultural identities and gratuitous attacks on conservative cultural symbols in recent decades, and this has necessarily alienated conservatives who might otherwise have recognized the threat of climate change to their nations.'²⁶ Here, Lieven's carefully defined civic nationalism seems heedlessly to slide into meaning something quite different. As with 'core American traditions', Lieven doesn't explain what he means by 'conservative cultural symbols', but the strong implication is that the symbols and traditions that are being 'attacked' or 'insulted' by allusion to the way ethnicity inflects class inequalities are specifically white. This closing descent into a discussion that has the feel of a rant undoes Lieven's carefully prepared distinction between the inclusionary, acceptable, progressive kind of nationalism and its reactionary, racist counterpart.

But if *Climate Change and the Nation State's* crescendo is morally weak, it is also strategically underwhelming. Given the heterogeneity of the contemporary working class, the sociological or empirical basis of Lieven's 'realism'—and his impatience with any references to communities of

²⁶ CCNS, pp. 129–32.

colour, migrants, women and so on as impolitic ‘fetishization of identity politics’—seems questionable.²⁷ Moreover, despite Lieven’s thoughtful, often persuasive tracing of the ideological overlap between nationalism and environmentalism, his central recommendations are decidedly cosmetic, confined to the level of discourse.²⁸ To ‘securitize’ the climate crisis, for example, Lieven advocates ‘strong public recognition by the military of the threat of climate change to the United States’, or what he calls ‘a speech act in the area of security’.²⁹ Such discursive shifts are not without material power, of course—Lieven’s Austinian term ‘speech act’ suggests as much—but, as with his urging the omission of divisive stances on migration and racism, they can seem a rather thin basis upon which to pin one’s hopes for the planet.

Lieven’s characterization of the GND Resolution’s mention of race as ‘political correctness’—as if, again, to ventriloquize a right-wing retort—also suggests a shaky intellectual grasp of this position. To carry off the mediatory role between ‘cultural liberals’ and conservatives in which Lieven casts himself requires an understanding of the nuance of, and differentiation within, each side’s perspective. This means avoiding caricature or treating fringe positions as if they are representative. The ‘idea of a borderless state with a completely open identity’, as Lieven puts it, has libertarian supporters on both the left and the right, but it is not the position of the Congressional Democrats who proposed the Green New Deal. Sanders, for example, is committed to an immediate moratorium on deportations; reuniting families, reinstating and expanding DACA; and welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, including those displaced by climate change. *Mutatis mutandis*, Corbyn’s policies were similarly reformist; *Climate Change and the Nation State* doesn’t indicate which of these demands should be dropped to attract anti-immigrant voters. But Lieven’s reductive approach extends beyond the thorny question of migration: he at one point suggests that ‘most Greens’ are opposed ‘to even researching’ ‘carbon removal’ because ‘this would remove one argument for the elimination of capitalism’.³⁰ Some eco-socialists may harbour suspicions about technological fixes, but the idea that ‘most Greens’ would be against exploring any solutions that would obviate

²⁷ CCNS, p. 57.

²⁸ A scattering of more substantial policy preferences emerges from the book—a ‘small tax on financial transactions rigorously enforced’, ‘much higher fuel prices’, ‘tough action to raise money from the elites’, including stamping out tax evasion and stricter regulation of the banks—but these are incidental to its main argument.

²⁹ CCNS, p. 7.

³⁰ CCNS, p. 120.

the need for more fundamental political change—i.e., that solicitude for the planet is merely an indifferent instrument for furthering an anti-capitalist agenda—strains credulity. Lieven’s exegesis of the Democrats’ GND Resolution is similarly hyperbolic. Its ‘sacralization of different ethnic and cultural identities’ is a minor part of the text: mention of the ‘racial wealth divide’ and ‘gender earnings gap’ are bottom of a long list of ‘related crises’, topped by declining life expectancy, stagnant wages, low socio-economic mobility, the erosion of workers’ bargaining power, income inequality and so on. Lieven wishes Democrats would talk of ‘elite privilege’ or ‘corporate privilege’ instead of ‘white privilege’, but the phrase ‘communities of colour’ appears only twice in the Resolution, while ‘worker’ is mentioned eleven times.³¹ Lieven understands himself to be presenting a challenge to the ecologically concerned left who can’t get their priorities straight—or as Adam Tooze parses the now-overfamiliar provocation: ‘Will we sacrifice our ideological hobby-horses for the sake of doing whatever it takes to prevent climate catastrophe?’³² But some of Lieven’s claims about the left’s positions give one reason to doubt this self-understanding—that is, to wonder whether Lieven is really posing the question, or challenge, he thinks and says he is.

All ‘realists’ to some extent circumscribe the reality to which their ‘realism’ corresponds—that is, a ‘realist case’ rests on a prior definition of what ‘being realistic’ is. To Lieven, the reality is that taking action to mitigate climate change means GND-supporting political parties winning repeated national elections. Few would dispute the legitimacy of this electoralist framework given the urgency of the circumstances—2030, by which time, according to the Democrats’ GND Resolution, carbon emissions need to be down by 40 per cent, is only a couple of presidential terms away—but others of Lieven’s ‘givens’ are more open to question. His unmediated conception of the relationship between the fact of migration and the prevalence or virulence of xenophobia, for example, suggests an exaggerated sense of the fixity of ideas—the implication is that the only way to overcome anti-immigrant sentiment, presumed to be an inevitable reaction to the presence of migrants, is to reduce migration. This overrating of the permanence of ideas—an aspect of the elision of the ideological field—is paradoxically dependent on an under-estimation of the material conditions in

³¹ The text of the Resolution ‘recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal’ is available at [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov).

³² Adam Tooze, ‘Politics for the End of the World’, *New Statesman*, 1 April 2020.

which they take hold. For in the same way that climate denialism is not merely a conservative cultural habit formed in reaction to loud liberal moralizing about capitalism's destructive plundering of the planet's resources, but the result of determined and well-resourced campaigns by fossil-fuel companies and their lobbyists, antipathy is not a spontaneous response to migration but partly an ideological reaction to wider material circumstances—economic insecurity, for example—as well as to the top-down dissemination and validation of such ideas.³³

A warming globe and mass migration may be intractable facts about our future, but is hostility to migrants a similarly inevitable aspect of pre-political reality? As Stuart Hall wrote following Labour's general election defeat in 1987, 'Politics does not reflect majorities, it constructs them.'³⁴ Lieven's strategy is in some ways a call for a more class-based politics rooted in the social ruins left by 'free-market capitalism run amok', which Lieven thinks presents an electoral opportunity: 'The growing immiseration of large sections of the white working classes is opening up important new political possibilities across racial lines—if the Democrats know how to use them.'³⁵ Yet a spirit of togetherness achieved through appealing to a sense of nationhood that tactfully avoids acknowledging the existence of heterogeneity seems a rather shallow attempt to reflect perceived majorities, rather than to construct a more durable unity, grounded in the recognition of the diversity of experience.

The rhetorical function of Lieven's self-described 'realism' is to present his arguments as derived from an unblinking confrontation with the facts, unencumbered by anything as compromising and impractical as ideological commitment or moral priorities. The same goes for the way the neat reciprocity of his case against mass migration—climate change causes mass migration, which hinders political efforts to address climate change—skirts moral questions. But notwithstanding this siphoning off of such 'extraneous' concerns from strategic ones in the name of realism, one can still ask: what are the moral consequences of Lieven's strategy, or to what ends does its logic point? Posing this question about whether nationalism is an appropriate or acceptable ideological

³³ Lieven does pay lip-service to 'the power and determination of opposition to reform from the banking and energy sectors' on a couple of occasions, but this passing acknowledgement does not essentially inform his analysis of the current deadlock, nor his strategy for overcoming it: CCNS, pp. 105, xiv.

³⁴ Stuart Hall, 'Blue Election, Election Blues', *Marxism Today*, July 1987.

³⁵ CCNS, p. 134.

instrument for popularizing the Green New Deal reveals a weakness in Lieven's conception of nationalism, which could be summarized as excessively voluntaristic.

One can observe the influence of Tom Nairn—whom Lieven cites as one of the 'leading thinkers who have helped to inspire this book'—in Lieven's conviction that nationalism can be a positive, modernizing force. In Nairn's sophisticated, humane characterization in 'The Modern Janus', nationalism appears as a beleaguered and defensive ideology, but also as resourceful, and animated by a will to survive that is propulsive, life-affirming and future-oriented rather than nihilistic. But whereas Nairn's nationalism appears, above all, as a natural phenomenon, analogous to pathology in individuals—this is what makes his insistence on its moral and political ambiguity so convincing—Lieven's version of nationalism is improbably deliberate: 'the *choice* then is between stupid, short-sighted versions of nationalism and intelligent, far-sighted ones'.³⁶ This means that he does not properly account for the possibility that once nationalism's formal force has been summoned, its content may not be 'controllable', as Nairn puts it: 'In the social trauma as in the individual one, once these well-springs have been tapped there is no real guarantee that the great forces will be "controllable" (in the sense of doing only what they are supposed to do, and no more)'.³⁷

Lieven does not address the possibility—the likelihood even, given the *prima facie* solipsism of nationalism—that, as Mike Davis writes:

growing environmental and socio-economic turbulence may simply drive elite publics into more frenzied attempts to wall themselves off from the rest of humanity. Global mitigation, in this unexplored but not improbable scenario, would be tacitly abandoned—as, to some extent, it already has been—in favour of accelerated investment in selective adaptation for Earth's first-class passengers. The goal would be the creation of green and gated oases of permanent affluence on an otherwise stricken planet.

The 'transmutation of the self-interest of rich countries and classes into an enlightened solidarity'" only seems realistic, Davis continues, if it can be shown 'that greenhouse gas mitigation can be achieved without major sacrifices in northern hemispheric standards of living'.³⁸ Defining

³⁶ CCNS, p. xvi. My emphasis.

³⁷ Tom Nairn, 'The Modern Janus', *NLR* 1/94, Nov–Dec 1975, pp. 17, 19.

³⁸ Davis, 'Who Will Build the Ark?', pp. 37–8.

the climate crisis as a national security threat in the West does not solve the problem of how to prevail upon elites to impose sacrifices on their own populations on behalf of those residing beyond their borders; it circumvents it. Indeed, part of the substance of Lieven's 'realism' rests on the grim calculus that it is only as a threat to Western stability that electorates and elites can be convinced to behave *as if* they care about others' plight. But once solidarity and altruism have been wholly discarded as principles of action, what can guarantee that this accidental collision of self-interest and Other-interest will endure?

Exploiting the anti-immigrant backlash with which contemporary forms of nationalism seem so entwined for the sake of the planet may swing some voters, but likely in both directions; and what might the human cost of this electoral strategy be for the populations who are already fleeing or will need to flee even if we reach net-zero by 2050? *Climate Change and the Nation State* is useful for its broad reminder that building political coalitions means finding ways to communicate with the unconverted, and that the case for an egalitarian green stimulus programme is not universally self-evident but needs making with strategic intelligence. The challenge, however, is to devise alternative senses of what 'being realistic' is by forging new expectations about what reality can and should be like—to redefine 'commonsense', not tailor GND PR to its existing, pernicious forms. Moreover, given that much of the heating predicted by climate scientists in the coming decades is not preventable but guaranteed, domestic reform to mitigate climate change in the high-emitting countries of the global North—through eradicating fossil fuels, expanding clean transportation networks, improving agricultural practices, retrofitting homes and so on—needs to happen in combination with adaptation, including migration and development policies that do not trap impoverished populations in unliveable regions, whether this is *sensu stricto* in their 'national' interest or not.