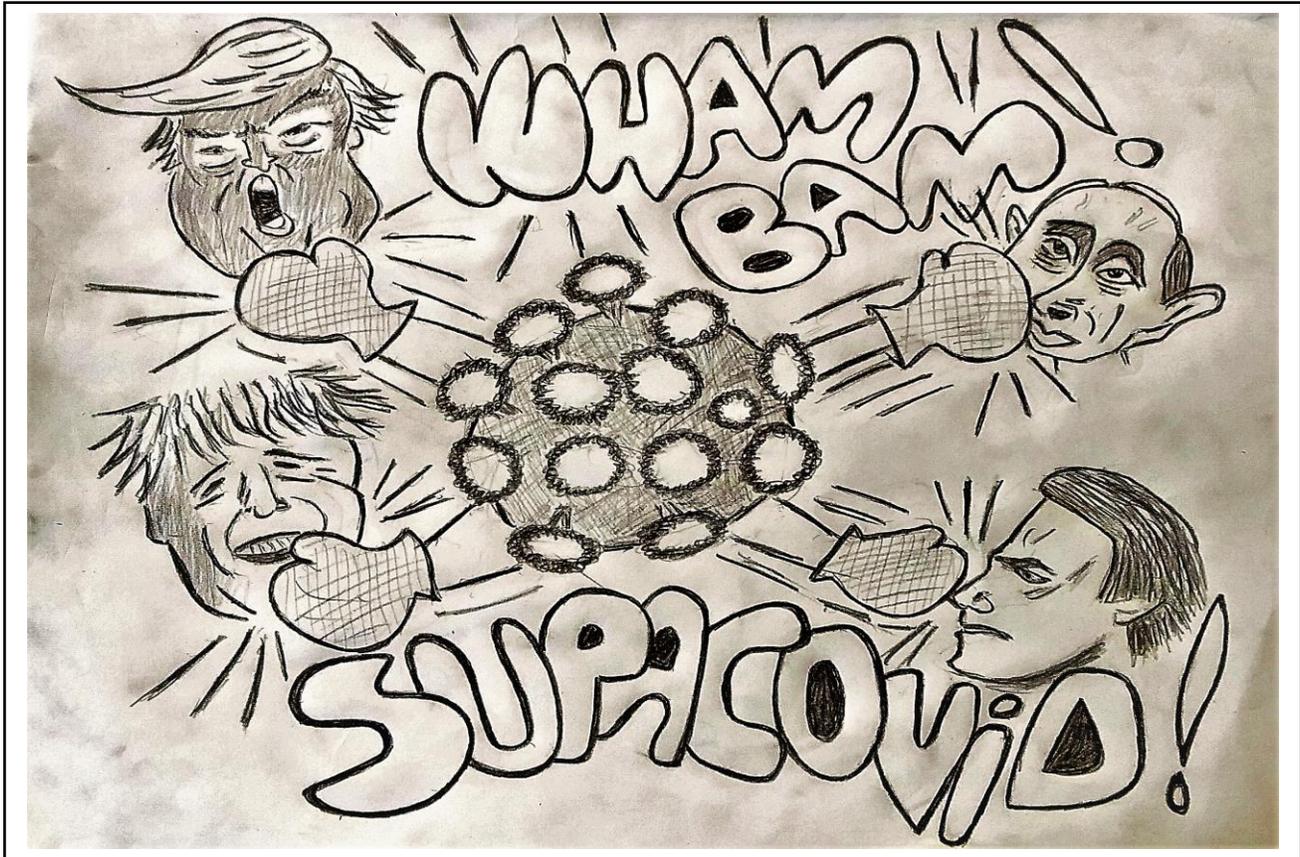


Cartoon by Duncan Gregory



## Can the Covid-19 pandemic bring rational thinking back into vogue?

Egomaniacs are everywhere and probably it has always been that way. The main difference in today's web-world is that they get instant airplay for outlandish ideas. But in this current climate of Covid-19 it has become something of a paradox, that however much they splash their untruths and irrational ways across media and social platforms, rather than working in their favour, the virus appears to strive, more-and-more, to bring them down.

These oddballs that society seems to enjoy elevating to the pinnacle are playing out the *Emperor with no Clothes* fable, as a real-life drama. Before Covid-19, the front-men that we know so well from non-stop media coverage, were able to get away with all their personal preferences: dismantling peace treaties, warmongering and invasion,

debilitating sanctions, trade-destroying tariffs and adding to the dilemma of climate change; all were fair game for these mega-rich and seemingly invincible rulers. But now Covid is chopping away at their invisible clothing, layer by layer by layer, to reveal the truth for all to see: that there was actually no clothing; that their power was simply a well-manipulated myth that has managed to fool most of the people for most of the time.

But as the saying goes, 'you cannot fool all the people all the time'. At some stage something has to give, and perhaps one drop of positivity, from a whole sea of tragedy, is that the pandemic has been able unfrock these ego-maniacs and call them out for what they really are: sparsely-educated power-seekers, in office for their own self-interest, which has very little to do with the interests of the people they were elected to serve.

But let's go back to the starting point: what are the boundaries for rationalism and where does behavior become outlandish? Immediately there are grey areas: potential points for confrontation, which the irrational like to exploit, and in doing so, underscore the fact that all points on the grid are up for grabs, no matter how bizarre. That is the way self-aggrandizers play their game. No methodology can be ruled 'out of bounds'.

Is it rational to build physical walls that separate people? Is it reasonable to let innocent children suffer and die because of warped adult ideologies? Is it logical to support fossil-fueled growth in a climate-changing world? Rational-thinking people would answer a resounding 'NO' to all three of the above. Faced with this type of straight-forward questioning, about issues deemed complex by warring parties, it becomes much easier to separate the rational from the irrational: to make decisions that are balanced, coherent and beneficial to the populace as a whole. Yet, in the recent world of 2019 we seemed to have lost the ability to do this: to confront the irrational and control the outlandish. Now, the coronavirus has offered us the chance to redeem ourselves; given us the key to retrieve lost ground, and so unlock the cupboard of rationality.

Here and now in 2020 we could also add a number of very pertinent questions. Is it coherent policy to advocate unproven (and potentially lethal) cures for Covid-19? Is it sensible to disown the global health body, WHO, at the very time it is trying to coordinate a global approach to controlling the pandemic? Is it wise to prioritise national interests in the face of an all-consuming global challenge? The answer again from rational thinkers would of course be a forthright 'NO!'.

The 2020 questions have a more direct meaning for most of us, compared to the more obtuse questions on building walls, the plight of children in war zones, and climate change, mentioned earlier. This resonance with reality, which the Covid pandemic brings about now enables the majority to identify bogus leaders for what they really represent: poor guidance and poor policies, built on non-scientific untruths, fake news and unrestrained nationalism. This is how Covid-19 - that tiny little bug! - is able to show us that we should dismiss these irrational leaders as fakes and in so doing, bring a new rational thinking back into vogue.

Seventy years ago, Europe was torn apart at the seams by rampant nationalism; while just fifty years ago, our planet faced the grim prospect of nuclear holocaust. In those days of looming disaster, we had right-thinking rulers who put the needs of the majority ahead of their own self-image. Yet today we find leaders who seem hell-bent on reviving the very conditions which spawned those tumultuous times. The conservatives in Britain have thrown scorn on the unity of Europe, built up over decades. Trump's administration in the USA appears hell-bent on ripping apart inter-country agreements that were designed to build peace and harmony. Both the USA and the UK, along with Russia, China, Brazil, Turkey, and many others, have turned to unbridled nationalism as their modus operandi, whether supported by economic, political, technological or military clout.

If Covid-19 can pull the wool from the eyes of people supporting the rise to power of individuals such as Trump, Putin, Bolsinaro and Johnson - as well as all the other similar, misguided male leaders - the tiny virus will have brought about at least one positive service for our current world ... and for the future world that our children inherit. ■