



Our ultimate
2020
Manifesto!



*This World is
Built on Lies*



by Vladimir Rozhankovskiy

Vladimir Rojankovski

This World is Built on Lies

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=51936333

ISBN 9785449857217

Аннотация

This book is neither a fiction story nor your typical manual for how to get \$30 working from home or treat an incurable disease. Although it may look like something remotely addressing any types of our pragmatic needs, I hope this book will be more than leisure time spending. People around the world have been suffering from chaotic geopolitics and cooling economies for a dozen years, and will face a dozen more years of the same lukewarm ways of living unless we start changing them by ourselves.

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This World is Built on Lies

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ISBN 978-5-4498-5721-7

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Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion, too

*Imagine all the people
Living life in peace
You, you may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one*

(John Lennon "Imagine")

*It has become easier to influence events
than to understand what is going on.*

*(George Soros "Remarks Delivered
at the World Economic Forum", Davos, January 2020)*

For the longest time, we thought that as speech became more democratized, democracy itself would flourish. But in 2018, it is increasingly clear that more speech can in fact threaten democracy. In the digital age, when speech can exist mostly unfettered, the big threat to truth looks very different. It's not just censorship, but an avalanche of undistinguished speech – some true, some false, some fake, some important, some trivial, much of it out-of-context, all burying us.

(Zeynep Tufekci, Politico Magazine)

Gratitude

My special thanks to Brad Golding, my Australian friend and co-thinker who helped me sharpen my expressions and polish sentences. I am also thankful to my former mentor and true true true American friend Rebecca Baldrige, CFA. I want to pay special tribute to all my on- and offline friends – Andre Tkachenko, Michael Ermak, Ross Stukalov, Gennady Sorokopud, Elena Ryabova, Alex Rabinowitz as well as my son Ilya who have been by my side as this book progressed, and encouraged me to carry on.

This book is neither a fiction story nor your typical manual for how to get \$30 per hour working from home or treat an incurable disease. Although it may look like something remotely addressing any types of our pragmatic needs, I hope this book will be more than leisure time spending. People around the world have been suffering from chaotic geopolitics and cooling economies for a dozen years, and will face a dozen more years of the same lukewarm ways of living unless we start changing them by ourselves. In the era of the Internet and, consequently, better, faster and more meaningful methods of communication, there will be no place for propaganda and any kind of fakeness, and this will happen pretty soon. Are we ready to accept this new reality? How can we make our governments and politicians work to genuinely improve our lives rather than to aspire to their own

career ambitions? Are technocratic governments achievable, or is there is an alternative way to make the existing ones more efficient?

The head of the International Monetary Fund has recently warned that the global economy risks a return of the Great Depression, driven by inequality and financial sector instability. Speaking at the Peterson Institute of International Economics in Washington, D.C. in January 2020, Kristalina Georgieva said new IMF research, which compares the current economy to the “roaring 1920s” that culminated in the great market crash of 1929, revealed that a similar trend was already under way. While the inequality gap between countries had closed in the last two decades, it had **increased within countries**, the IMF found.

I am pretty certain that this book won't be welcomed by either the Russian mainstream or in the US mainstream establishments, and it will most likely evoke harsh criticism. Moreover, I expect many readers to quit at this line wondering what makes this guy entitled to spreading his judgment. In fact, starting an honest conversation about the chaotic nature of the changes the world is undergoing, is well overdue and can no longer be postponed, and this is where my contribution as a multicultural multilingual (yes, that includes the Ukrainian – the USSR republic where I was born – too!) would be somewhat appropriate and useful.

I invite you to a holistic discussion about something seemingly

less conspicuous but, at the end of the day, more important for each and every one of us. Thank you for being my loyal reader and God bless you!

Preface

When I was younger, I never followed international political events, because I considered politics to be inferior to the economy and finance. I was addicted to learning about world markets and the economy, but the global tug of war has been intensifying and more and more overshadowing everything to the extent that today we can no longer see the world markets and the principles of free trade in their original formats. Today the global markets are driven by rhetoric and, sometimes, the actions of top politicians more than at any time before, let alone by fair valuations.

Yet another reason for the change in my holistic worldview is the sad story of my cross-continental relationship with my parents and younger brother who now live in Nevada, and to whom our annual Christmas family-unity visits were, until recently, a no-brainer. Whereas for many people with same cross-destinations, this issue might be mostly economical, in my situation, although the ruble, along with my ruble-expressed income, devalued by 50% since the beginning of 2014, this is not the main obstacle. The diplomatic wars instigated by governments and the overall atmosphere of growing mutual mistrust are.

My valued prospective reader will most likely raise at least three questions addressing the issues of this book: a) why I think

I have something to say? b) given that, why is this book so short? c) assuming the far-flung conclusions, why is it so much country-specific?

“Why me” would be the most difficult question to tackle. I hope the evidence and concrete cases presented in this book will be very much intuitive and familiar to most of us, so my role here is not anything prominent, i.e. just to summarize stuff while avoiding, as much as possible, being opinionated. I feel eligible for this kind of work through my extensive periods of living and working in various countries around the world such as Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. I figured out that most people – even those who are fond of traveling – still prefer to settle somewhere to build their consistent careers assuming uninterrupted smooth CVs, but this is certainly not the case for me.

The reduced format of this book owes much to my own experience tackling finding time to read many masterpieces of various valuable authors. My Amazon Kindle app is stuffed with unfinished readings of books by Jeffrey Sachs, Thomas Palley, Madeleine Albright, Naomi Klein, Peter Schweiser and Stephen Roach. I feel upset with myself, but there is not much I can do about it: I hope to finish them when I am retired at the latest. So I have committed to respect the precious time of my respected readers, and not waste it for lengthy narration devoted to anything secondary beyond the essence. Since this is not a fiction book nor a biography per se, I will try to be as

concise as I can, merely following a classic reporting approach – let’s say, using a British business school template (one of which, the University of Kent, I had the honor to attend): Define objective, find information sources, collect and analyze data, present support cases and draw a conclusion.

Finally, it is, indeed, very country-specific. This book should have included more case studies from the US – China and the US – Europe (particularly the US – the UK), but there are lots of more knowledgeable authors out there, so I yield to their more ad hoc expertise. I hope it will still suffice.

Wherever I had an opportunity to live and work – be it Lviv, Moscow, London, New York or Los Angeles – I have always had great people around me who became my multilingual and multinational friends. These friendships weren’t built on formal handshakes or by waving hands through the windows of limousines. One of my greatest friends was a young man Hassan from Damascus who used to study with me at the Moscow Power Engineering Institute (now the Moscow State Technical University). I feel compelled to say how much I value these relationships that I have kept sound and rewarding through many years and hundreds or thousands miles that separate us from each other – especially thanks to the contemporary social networks.

Diplomatic Insulation vs. Diplomatic Isolation

As a result of the tit-for-tat reciprocal U.S.'s and Russia's diplomats expulsions in 2016, the ordinary cross-continental traveler is submerged in a sort of plague. This is a particularly useful example addressing the main theme of this book and showing how a fight of the political elites directly impacts basic rights of the ordinary people. The visa-issuance interviews now, as of the beginning of 2020, take several months of waiting time, but it's not the whole story. Quite unpleasant things are the U.S. border customs' increasingly stringent checkups and occasional randomly picked at-the-border interviews (I suspect this is also the case lately at the Russia's Sheremetyevo passport control – and it does look equally ugly to me) – those kind of happenings after the 22-hour transatlantic flights, as well as the ever-widening list of prohibited items, i.e. liquids, fruits and vegetables, anything beyond the ordinary such as optics and the telescope mounts, (I remember the old days when I used to carry my multicomponent floor top stereo system to and from the JFK's international flight terminals effortlessly with the only question ever asked of whether I planned to stay in the U.S. for longer than I declared), as well as inflation of the daily expenses (virtually undetectable for the native shoppers, but quite stingy

to foreigners). All this makes the whole U.S. travel vacation story all but a challenge. For this reason, my biggest worry is that one day I won't be able to see my dad or my mom in their final journeys.

But my circumstances are dwarfed by weight of growing suspiciousness threatening to transform into overt hostility. For example, Dennis Ortblad, a former career U.S. foreign service officer, and Krishen Mehta, a former partner with PricewaterhouseCoopers, who wrote in their November 5, 2019, *The National Interest's* article that "Those who are under thirty in Russia have known the freedom of travel and access to information in their new economy. It is this younger generation that U.S. policy cannot afford to lose with a sanctions policy that encourages them to believe that the West only seeks to undermine Russia and their futures".

Active student exchanges with the United States and Europe can help counter among the young this drift towards resentment. We found a decline of student and academic exchanges exist throughout Russia. In Irkutsk, university leaders lamented that the formerly active student exchanges with the United States had ceased. In Crimea, at Simferopol University, an academic dean explained that a traditional exchange with a large U.S. university ended because, besides sanctions, the Russophobic climate of opinion in the United States made it politically incorrect.

Despite general lack of trust toward the West, Russians (especially, Russian millennials) have adopted and frequently use countless English and American loanwords such as *implement*, *relevant*, *lifhack*, *chat*, even such food glossary words as *chicken* and *salmon*, although, naturally, there are full native language equivalents. This means the common interest to learning the English language (and Anglo-American culture in this respect), as opposed to learning of foreign geopolitical interests, has been on the rise no matter what.

Following the reciprocal closure of consulates, our Moscow embassy has been unable to meet the increased burden of visa applications. Students and academics now need to wait for months sometimes years for issuance. This needs to be corrected if we do not wish to lose the younger generations of Russians (Iranians, Cubans, Venezuelans, to name a few nations now out of favor) who can be our hopeful ambassadors for a better future. The simple diplomacy of reopening consulates on a reciprocal basis would engender confidence and relieve the log jam of visas.”

Ironically, many Russian entry visa applicants, in order to avoid visa interview jams were obliged to travel to the U.S. Consulate located as far as city of Vladivostok (distance from Moscow is about 9,000 kilometers) in order to be able to travel to New York (distance from Moscow is about 7,500 kilometers).

According to Bank of America research, there are now around 77 physical barriers that delineate international borders

compared with 15 in 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The World Trade Organization recently pointed to the fact that the pace of growth in international commerce fell below the rate of economic expansion in 2019 for the fifth time since the financial crisis.

The Ubiquitous “Reciprocity”

In 2011 some 222 thousand Russian tourists visited the USA. In May 2017 the number of tourist visas (B-1/B-2) issued to Russians plummeted to only 14 thousand (annualized 168 thousand). In October, this figure dropped to only 6.5 thousand (annualized 78 thousand), and for the first time travelers the U.S. embassy interview waiting time increased to between 85 and 300 days, which, in turn, further undermined the Russian travelers’ interest in visiting America. The reason for this was the September 2017 mutual visa restrictions due to the exchange of expulsions between the Russian and the US diplomats in the aftermath of exchange of sanctions between Russia and the United States.

As I mentioned above, another painful issue of artificial reciprocal alienation became the mutual hiking of the entry visa fees. In 1990, the price of the US single entry visa for Russians was only \$45 whereas at the highest point of the mutual diplomatic war it rose to a whopping \$303 per application!

From the beginning of 2019, Russian citizens were required to pay an additional fee for obtaining a multiple-entry visa to the United States. The U.S. entry visa price increased from \$160 to \$303. The changes badly affected demand for the business

and tourist trips to the U.S. The increased fee for a visa was based on the principle of “reciprocity” – the same amount is paid by American citizens for a visa of the Russian Federation. One thing to consider: Russian average monthly salary is \$450 per month, and the ruble exchange rate collapsed from 32 per dollar as of end-2013 to more than 60 per dollar as of end-2019.



We can't keep up with this doomed tug of war. Neither I, nor my parents across the ocean wish to endure such barbaric ways to carry out diplomatic disputes.

Now let's admit that the political scene is in no way better than the shaky state of the global economy. Thus, a highly repercussive article devoted to the widening gap between expectations and reality among the Russian post-millennials appeared on January 9, 2020 in the Financial Times. The material was entitled "Generation Putin: how young Russians

view the only leader they've ever known”.

It rightfully points out that “...Putin's Kremlin has sought to create a generation largely numb to politics, through the repression of opposition movements, a propaganda-heavy media machine and a cult of personality.”

Even more: “Those who seek change from Putin have found they must compete against not just the might of the Kremlin and the truncheons of the riot police but also the apathy common among the vast majority of their fellow youth – a generation raised on a strict diet of political indifference”.

The FT claims to have interviewed almost 50 young Russians, all aged between 18 and 25 who live in Moscow, St Petersburg, Siberia and beyond. So this must be quite a representative sampling.

Indeed, by most calculations, Russia's economy shrank by 60 per cent between 1991 and 1999, a bigger contraction than during WWII, and caused a huge domestic plunge in the birthrate, a spike in mortality and an emigration boost. There is only one remotely comparable example – the situation in Syria between 2010 and now.

End of the Cold War was a Time of Hope and Opportunity

In the last 30 years, naivety has been one single most important factor of the failed multicultural dialogue and the ruined careers of the internationalists. After the fall of the Iron Curtain under Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan, one of the first post-Cold-War “liberated” air flights from Moscow to New York in 1989 felt like some sort of an action movie: memorably, Irish Shannon Airport pilots and employees decided to form a sort of lineup applauding us as we went out to the transfer zone. It seemed to many that a wonderful fascinating road to the New Tops of Civilization was ahead of us all. Indeed, Russia had vast territory and natural resources, as well as military and medical technologies, and Europe had the best industrial technologies, which neither Russia nor China possessed back then. The U.S., which enjoyed, in various proportions, all of the above, took the path of rapid development of financial and investment technologies that were complementary to the status of the dollar as the world’s reserve currency. It would seem that a perfect macroeconomic shape was emerging: natural resources and heavy industrial technologies of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and some other countries of the former USSR should have given impetus to the acceleration of industrial technologies

in Europe, investments into which could be provided only by the USA with its powerful financial sector. The industrial revolution in China, in turn, brought a large number of inexpensive workers, who even without technology transfer, eyeing huge deferred demand for change and urbanization in this country, were ready to reduce the cost of the second technological breakthrough in Europe.

In reality, we have the following picture for 2020. Apart from the known “side effects” of the chronic monetary expansion (money printing by the world’s largest central banks) which led to slower growth and dwindling personal savings, Europe so far has never launched an independent space exploration expedition (although it was very close to it at the turn of the new millennium), and the automotive industry has unexpectedly moved away from its long time adherence to higher power and speed giving way to energy-saving technologies. Investments are stagnating due to the lack of new markets due to mutual sanctions and low returns on investment. As a result of the financial crisis of 2008, the United States locked up its financial and investment technologies to itself, while downplaying accelerating downfall of the manufacturing sector. At the same time, China has obtained not only the offshore assembly facilities it hoped for under best-case scenario, but also – as a surprise gift – technology, which allowed it to build its own powerful industry, including an ultra high-speed railroad network and aircraft manufacturing. Russia froze exploration and production of new

minerals and energy resources due to the lack of foreign markets and switched to the model of import substitution and preservation of technologies received from the West during another “thaw” from 1991 to 2006. Should we look for the party to blame here, and doesn't it make more sense to just reverse this detrimental process?

At least once in my life I felt like more than winning a lottery. In 1996 I was selected to participate in a Russia – United Kingdom government financial education and work program entitled The Chancellor's Financial Sector scheme. A London city job was part of an innovative scheme to assist the former Soviet Union in its transition to a free market economy – something that eventually yielded mixed results: although today certain sectors of Russia's economy, particularly, retail, largely comply with free market principles, lack of freedom for entrepreneurs – suggests Russia is still mainly a State-controlled highly centralized economy.

To say it was hard to get selected by the British Council by passing all the course work and arduous exams is to say nothing. Imagine a student whose English teachers have never been in a single English-speaking country and whose skills came solely from language classes conducted by the same kind of teachers who had never crossed a USSR border due to the iron curtain regime. How about preparing and passing the IELTS tests followed by a no-gimmicks pre-selection interviews with ‘real UK bankers’ (that was our real lifetime experience back then!)?

It really felt like Alice in Wonderland: learning self presentation skills (Soviet schools discouraged students from standing out of the crowd for “ethical reason”), sticking to polite but assertive attitudes, setting up pronounced goals and prognoses, developing patience and respect, always remembering to add “please” and many more. It sounds funny now, but back then it really wasn't.

I went to a final interview with a lot of enthusiasm but very limited English linguistic capacity and funny quasi-American accent caught during my recent trip to New York. Reading my first books in English gifted to me by my aunt living in Englewood Cliffs, NJ, I drew quite an interesting conclusion: the hard rock music was more ear-pleasing with the soft British accents (that's why, I thought to myself, most rock stars such as Mick Jagger, Elton John, David Bowie, Robert Plant, Ian Gillan and many others were originally from England), but to study English the American accent was easier for listening since it didn't swallow suffixes.

THE TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES

Good University Guide 2020

WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO STUDY



This world is built on lies

They lie to us while saying “none of our troops are there”. They lie to us suggesting that the modest opioid use is safe and carrying personal guns is good to protect our lives and homes. They lie to us when they say there is a capitalist system and a “communist” system, whereas in reality it’s THEIR system as opposed to OUR system. They lie to us saying that not all countries are equally involved in using performance enhancing drugs among their Olympic Olympletes. They lie to us when they say that electric cars kill the oil industry. They lie to us when they defend their own interests thousands of miles away calling them our national interests.

But even worse, they don’t simply lie, they want our engagement and endorsement of their lies. Having failed – partially or wholly – their internal agendas, they seek our approval and involvement in their external ones. Don’t they try to unify us (AKA “the voters”) around something that invariably won’t make our lives better?

Why is our typical headline news’ content so much focused on various sorts of propaganda, starting with international politics and ending with the mere advertisement urging us to buy some unnecessary items? Of course, in the era of smart TVs we are free to build the watch content by ourselves. However, no matter how hard we try to shift our priorities, in general

circumstances like a job interview, or just visiting a friend's party, all conversations usually start with either discussing various boring household topics or what our politicians have done recently "to fight our enemies".



People prefer negative news to positive news, as well as fake and conspiracy content to dry description content – this was one of the takeaways of Morgan Stanley analyst and venture capital investor Mary Meeker in her annual report called "Internet trends 2019".

There are several reasons why users tend to read fictional news and immerse themselves in conspiracy theories.

Social networks catalyze the distribution of "sizzling" content.

Sometimes it's easier and more interesting to get the news about, let's say, Donald Trump's jump in blood sugar levels than it is that the Federal Reserve System has changed its key interest rate. An average reader is unlikely to take time diving into the story about the Fed, although potentially it affects him or her more profoundly than the above-exemplified news about Trump's health.

As a result, struggling for readers' attention, news producers more and more migrate into a quasi-entertainment format, thereby losing objectivity and credibility. Fact-checking doesn't matter because it doesn't sell well anyway.

Most of us view the news as entertainment while lacking media literacy and expert knowledge. We are not used to reading between the lines, let alone looking for useful information in the news – we are just thirsty for sensations not always having time for a thorough review of what we consume and repost. Readers en-masse do not distinguish between info-noise and important news, which is usually more boring.

People want easy explanations of how the world works and the reason for what is happening to them. Given this, various conspiracy theories accommodating aliens, fortune, fate and the “world evil” – provide the most unconditional answers to all, and for this reason graciously kill anything boringly factual.

In this kind of environment there is a growing deficiency of a positive agenda. On top of that, doesn't it look strange that the politicians and various actors seek our sympathy in their

professional affairs inflating the importance of what they do for a living, at the expense of scientists, doctors, builders, writers, real estate agents and others who are not given similar opportunities to share the importance of what they do?

My sad contemplation isn't anything unique. Many blockbuster authors, at Amazon.com and beyond, raise the alarm of the extreme culmination of corruption, intolerance and mutual hatred lately. Thus, Peter Schweizer has been writing about partiality and corruption for years. There is a growing number of international authors who urge us to leave our comfort zones and identify our real, rather than imaginary, enemies – in order to start building a better future for our children.

The beauty of building new, positive, agendas is that the more people get involved in producing various clickable YouTube (and the likes) content the higher the chance that it will finally become real headline news for the hundred million watchers worldwide. Opportunity to get involved in various professional networks gives us clear added value of shifting our content from one that is very emotionally impactful, but equally disengaging, to one where we can be more proactive and efficient and, hence, satisfied.

In other words, we are in desperate need to become in charge of our own SEO (Search Engine Optimization), and since we live in a modern, highly interconnected and self-replicating, world, we are able to reclaim the right to live our own lives, rather than the lives of those who we see on our TVs.

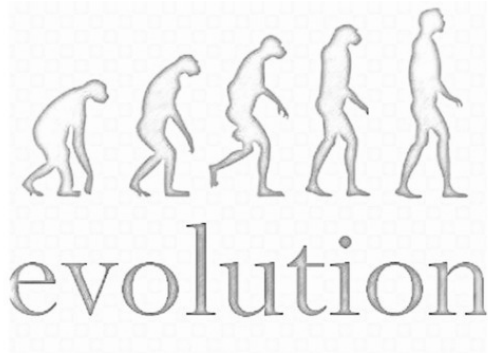
But...

Everything secret becomes apparent. And this relates not only to the power of thought but also the aura. ... Everything secret becomes apparent, and the people will not wait for scientists to confirm the materiality of thought and aura.

The greatest asset of all people is their team work. Our ancient forefathers used to hunt down mammoths and other edible mammals with primitive handheld tools, so what made them powerful was acting as a team; if they were on their own they would have become easy victims. That demonstrated the power of creative teamwork. People are naturally happy to see results of their creative joint efforts, and that is how they develop the much needed positive agenda. Unfortunately, modern politicians and lawmakers lack an opportunity to do something with their hands and literally put money where their mouths are. Instead, their present roles are to nourish their vanity and to be the “winners” (as opposed to disgrace of being the “losers”). This kind of dubious activity tends to leave imprints in our minds. This is how we become charged with the wrong ideas and false goals. This is how we all become unwillingly defrauded.

The modern world's craze

The modern world is changing so rapidly that our comfort zones no longer exist or have been visibly diminishing. Our typical daily chatters about, let's say, fairness of our mortgage and auto loan, monthly insurance payments, internet security, the value of our assets and the bank accounts – are more and more often replaced by the political and economic agendas, which become more and more intrusive, and in which we have little power of control. Many people – even those who still live comfortably – complain that “something bad is going on” around them. Supposedly, they are talking about the changing environment beyond their control, and not about anything they are personally responsible for. This is, in fact, very frustrating to feel constant stress and pressure to change something we can't.



Looking back over 20 years of rapid globalization which was, until recently, assumed an organic part of our existence, created lookalike cities around the world made of the same concrete and steel. Wherever we travel we see similar looking high rise buildings, almost identical coffee and souvenir shops and deja vu big multilevel multi-brand malls. Regardless of where in big cities they live, people in their lookalike cars spend hours in traffic jams, they fly by the same airplanes, they watch the same movies, they boast the same habits, aspirations and ambitions. Although it was mostly a positive experience for peoples and nations, it has created a sort of still waters – an environment where fewer and fewer of us would be able to stand out from the crowd. Those who are into intensive world traveling must admit this all these things happened in a relatively short period of time right in front of our eyes.

This may sound like a joke, but I remember a couple of decades ago something seemingly silly – Thai sweet chili sauce, a really tasty addition to any meal. It was available on sale, apart from in their countries of origin, only in the Thai and Philippine communities around New York, like the ones in Jersey City. Today it is available as a mass-produced pre-packaged sauce in any McDonald's outlet around the world, and it took only a decade for this tasty, but part of explicitly national cuisine to become a widespread international condiment. Another example. Russian cars have always been somewhat outdated and generally unappealing to own. Today one can hardly make a difference between taking a ride in a Mercedes van or in the latest model of a Russian van called a Gazelle. The latest model of a Gazelle even enjoys automatic door locks and retractable footsteps!

We go to work to similarly looking financial districts consisting of hundred storey skyscrapers – be it New York, London, Tokyo, Shanghai, Dubai or Moscow.

But, the strange thing is, the more uniformly people live around the world the more conflicting became international politics: rising geopolitical tensions, rapidly expanding government borrowing and the threat of more taxes and regulations to jeopardize our common future prospects.

One of the biggest problems is that the cost of living continues to outpace wages in many places. For example, someone earning the \$7.25-an-hour federal minimum wage would need to work almost 127 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom rental, or 103 hours a week to afford a one-bedroom rental, according to a report published this year by the U.S. National Low Income Housing Coalition.



As back in the late 1980's when the Iron Curtain was dismantled and one third of the world opened its welcoming markets to the prosperous and promising free economy, it began its countdown to the time when it has bumped straight into the apparent wall of further expansion. This outcome was easy to predict.

However, over these past thirty years we just enjoyed mutual

penetration of the markets and cultures but did almost nothing to sustain the pace of scientific and research progress. Thus the Internet was created in the late 80s— early 90s. Very popular nowadays electric cars were first invented, believe it or not, around the 1870s. The oil fracking technology tracks back to the early 1990s. What else can we mention? Smart phones and smart homes, perhaps? Yes, but one can argue that these innovations appeared as a result of further expansion of the information technologies, the foundation of which were laid out much earlier.

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