

De rode loper naar Peking



'Harde acties, die kunnen verschillen van het opsluiten van een directeur van een bedrijf, het bezetten van een fabriek, om het kapitalistische systeem in desorganisatie te brengen. Dat zou ook kunnen door sabotage bij belangrijke bedrijfsafdelingen, denk aan Philips.'
- Willem Oskam, televisie-interview

Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal, jaren negentig

De Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal in Amsterdam, begin jaren negentig. Achter de kassa van Modern Antikwariaat Van Gennep staat een norse man met het postuur van de Dokwerker.

Zijn enige politieke activiteit is nog het afrekenen van verramsjte boektitels over China, de Sovjet-Unie en van marxistische denkers als Antonio Gramsci en Alexandra Kollontai. Ooit was hij letterlijk en figuurlijk als voorzitter het boegbeeld van de Rode Jeugd, de revolutionaire jongerenorganisatie die in de tweede helft van de jaren zestig en begin jaren zeventig aan de stoelpoten van de gevestigde orde in Nederland knaagde. Willem Oskam heet hij, bijgenaamd Rooie Willem, of Dikke Willem. Zijn politieke activiteiten heeft hij achter zich gelaten en ingeruild voor een fervent supporterschap voor Ajax.

Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal, 14 juni 1966

Amsterdam, de Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal, 14 juni 1966. Een dag eerder is in Amsterdam het Bouwvakkersoproer uitgebroken. Bouwvakker Weggelaar sterft tijdens een demonstratie.

Getroffen door een steen, gegooid uit eigen gelederen, zo meldt *De Telegraaf*. Vanwege deze - onjuiste - berichtgeving proberen woedende bouwvakkers de volgende dag met emmers zand het gebouw van de krant binnen te dringen. Het zand moet in de persen, het drukken van de krant moet gestopt worden. Een vrachtauto en rollen krantenpapier worden in brand gestoken. Op dat moment

rijdt Willem Oskam in het busje van zijn baas over de Nieuwezijds.

Hij parkeert het busje langs de kant en dringt te midden van bouwvakkers het gebouw binnen. Telegraafmedewerkers proberen de bouwvakkers tegen te houden. Ver komen de mannen niet, de persen zijn onbereikbaar. Wanneer Oskam later die dag het busje aflevert bij zijn baas, krijgt hij te horen dat hij de volgende dag niet meer terug hoeft te komen.



Willem Oskam

Havenarbeider

Willem Oskam (1943-2000) was de zoon van een havenarbeider uit een communistisch nest. Zijn vader was lid van de communistisch georiënteerde Eenheids Vakcentrale. Thuis werd trouw *De Waarheid* gelezen. Zijn jeugd offerde hij naar eigen zeggen op aan zijn ideaal: het communisme.

Oskam vertelde later dat hij tijdens zijn fanatieke, revolutionaire jaren iets weg had van een Jehova's Getuige. Ook tijdens zijn meest fanatieke jaren woonde hij bij zijn ouders op zolder en voor 'lonende relaties met het andere geslacht' had hij simpelweg geen tijd. Hij werkte in Amsterdam als havenarbeider, als chauffeur en later op het Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG). Hij was actief in de CPN en maakte propaganda voor het communisme. Hij zorgde dat hij politiek geschoold werd door de werken van Lenin, Stalin en Mao Zedong te lezen en bouwde zo een indrukwekkende kennis over het marxistisch- leninistisch gedachtegoed op.

Spruitjeslucht

Tot diep in de jaren vijftig was Nederland een betrekkelijk ouderwets land. Men

bleef over het algemeen trouw aan de tradities en gewoonten die al voor de Tweede Wereldoorlog hadden gegolden. Hoge geboortecijfers en frequent kerkbezoek werden in stand gehouden door de gevestigde katholieke en protestantse zuilen. De lonen waren relatief laag, arbeidsonrust was er nauwelijks en van emancipatie hadden nog weinigen gehoord. Weinig vrouwen werkten buitenshuis. De vaderlandse politiek leek zich tijdens de wederopbouw grotendeels volgens het vooroorlogse stramien te herstellen. In de jaren zestig echter ontstonden maatschappelijke en politieke bewegingen die zich wilden ontdoen van de benauwende spruitjeslucht en het maatschappelijke patroon van de jaren vijftig. Hoewel betere onderwijskansen, zorg en ouderdomsvoorzieningen voor iedereen een zorgeloze toekomst beloofden, bleken vooral jongeren zich niet altijd meer te kunnen vinden in de voorgespiegelde toekomst met een huis, gezin, werk, auto en televisie. Het vooruitzicht een leven te leven net als je ouders, met ingebakken omgangsvormen - een eentonig en gezapig bestaan - leek velen toch niet zo aantrekkelijk.

Verzet

Halverwege de jaren vijftig bood de rock-'n-roll zulke jongeren een uitlaatklep. Door te genieten van andere muziek dan waar je ouders naar luisterden, ontstond de mogelijkheid je af te zetten tegen de leefwijze en opvattingen van ouders en andere opvoeders. Een andere haardracht en andere kleren onderstreepten dat gevoel. In de jaren zestig werkte de popmuziek als een soort slinger om het aanwakkerende verzet tegen de opvattingen van ouders, leraren, gezagsdragers, dominees en priesters, te verwoorden.

Mede onder invloed van de Koude Oorlogsdreiging en de oorlog in Vietnam ontstond in de jaren zestig onder jongeren het streven naar een andere inrichting van de samenleving. Het was vooral de beweging Provo die uiting wist te geven aan het groeiende besef dat de samenleving fundamenteel anders ingericht moest worden.



Maoïsten

Maar ook in de traditionele linkse politieke partijen in Nederland rommelde het. Binnen de Communistische Partij Nederland (CPN), die altijd klakkeloos de lijn van Moskou had gevolgd, ontstonden zelfs dissidente stromingen.

Willem Oskam, lid van de CPN, was in 1966 betrokken bij *De Rode Vlag*, een kritisch communistisch tijdschrift, wat de vreedzame overgang naar het socialisme zoals Moskou die voorstond, afwees. Men zag het Chinese communisme als het enige zuivere

richtsnoer van het communisme. Volgens Moskou volgde Peking te dogmatisch de marxistisch-leninistische leer. Terwijl Peking vasthield aan de stalinistische lijn, had Moskou deze juist opgegeven.

Naar aanleiding van de ideologische breuk tussen China en de Sovjet-Unie voerde Paul de Groot, partijleider van de CPN, in 1964 de 'neutraliteitspolitiek' in. Door de CPN werd voortaan Moskou noch Peking gevolgd, 'maoïstische elementen' werden geroyeerd en aan de leden rond *De Rode Vlag* werd gevraagd te kiezen voor een publieke schuldbekentenis en braaf partijlid te blijven of op te stappen. China-gezinde partijleden kozen voor het laatste of werden geroyeerd.



Rode Garde

In de zomer van 1966 werd uiteindelijk na meerdere pogingen de Chinees-gezinde communisten te herenigen, in het gebouw De Valk aan de Valkenburgerstraat in Amsterdam de Rode Jeugd opgericht. Al gauw volgde ook een tijdschrift met dezelfde naam. Willem Oskam was een van de initiatiefnemers en werd voorzitter van de Rode Jeugd. Anders dan *De Rode Vlag*, richtte de Rode Jeugd zich nadrukkelijk op werkende jongeren. Want werd in het maoïstisch gedachtegoed tijdens de Culturele

Revolutie, niet actief de verbinding met de jeugd gezocht? Jongeren, met name studenten en scholieren, zouden de motor achter de revolutie kunnen vormen, net zoals de Rode Garde in de Volksrepubliek ten tijde van de Culturele Revolutie. De

Rode Jeugd omschreef zichzelf als een 'offensieve verzetsorganisatie' uitgaand van marxistisch-leninistische gedachtegoed. Het uiteindelijke doel: de vernietiging van het kapitalisme. De aanhang van de Rode Jeugd bestond uit scholieren, werkende jongeren en studenten. Op haar hoogtepunt had de beweging tussen de twee- en driehonderd leden in verschillende afdelingen in het land. Met de leuze 'Jeugdloon is diefstal' werd actie gevoerd voor een betere rechtspositie en een betere betaling van werkende jongeren.

Politiek toerisme

De Rode Vlag werd in het geheim politiek en financieel gesteund door de Chinese Communistische Partij, de Albanese Communistische Partij en de maoïstische Kommunistische Partij van België onder leiding van Jacques Grippa. Al voor de oprichting van de Rode Jeugd was Oskam een regelmatig bezoeker van de Chinese ambassade in Den Haag. De oprichting van de Rode Jeugd is in wezen het startsein van Oskams' politieke toerisme. Voor de voorzitter van de Rode Jeugd werd door Peking de rode loper uitgerold. Oskam bezocht de Volksrepubliek een aantal malen, maar een kritiekloze volgeling van Mao Zedong was hij niet. In literatuur over de Rode jeugd wordt hij wel getypeerd als maoïst, maar correct is dat niet. Ideologisch volgde hij de lijn van Lin Biao, tweede man van China, defensie-minister en de man achter de Mao-cultus in de jaren zestig. Bovendien de bedenker van het *Rode Boekje* van Mao. Lin Biao stond een andere communistische koers voor dan Mao.



Voorhoede

Mao streefde naar een communisme binnen één staat, tot stand te brengen met een gewapende strijd, in combinatie met een massale mobilisatie van boeren. De Sovjet-Unie stelde juist het industrieproletariaat centraal in haar strijd.

Lin Biao ging uit van de 'omsingelingstheorie'. Het kapitalisme en imperialisme van de industrielanden moest op een offensieve manier vanuit de derde wereldlanden bestreden worden. Elk land zou een eigen communistische theoretische leider moeten hebben. Essentieel is vervolgens de oprichting van een Rode Garde, evenals bijscholing van de jeugd. De zo gecreëerde voorhoede van westerse revolutionairen moet dan

onrust en chaos creëren, iets waar de machthebbers de handen vol aan hebben. Juist op dat moment beroven revolutionaire strijders in de derdewereldlanden de westerse mogendheden van de pijlers van het wereldimperialisme, namelijk goedkope grondstoffen en arbeidskrachten. Door het wegvallen van deze twee belangrijke steunpilaren zou het imperialisme wereldwijd ineenstorten.

Vernieling

De Rode Jeugd richtte zich echter niet alleen op de jongeren. In het zesde nummer van de eerste jaargang richtte Oskam zich tot de arbeiders: 'We kunnen wel door blijven gaan met het opsommen van verdovende middelen, waardoor de arbeider in een comatoestand komt te verkeren [...] De bourgeoisie heeft het rotte systeem zo gekamoufleerd, dat vele arbeiders het idee krijgen, dat het allemaal nog niet zo slecht is.'



Het werd volgens Oskam tijd dat ook de 'oudere arbeiders hun TV verlieten en zich bij de reeds demonstrerende, actieve, Rode Jeugd voegden'. Maar het waren met name het Amerikaanse imperialisme, de oorlog in Vietnam en het kapitalisme die het in de opruiende artikelen in *De Rode Jeugd* moesten ontgelden. De eerste pamfletten van de beweging riepen op tot vernieling van vestigingen van Amerikaanse bedrijven en het Amerikaanse consulaat. Niet verwonderlijk dat door deze felle agitatie de groepering al gauw de aandacht trok van de politieke inlichtingendienst PID, de binnenlandse

veiligheidsdienst BVD en de militaire inlichtingendienst. Na een demonstratie waarbij de politie nadrukkelijk aanwezig was, schreef Oskam in een artikel: 'Verschillende opvallend onopvallende figuren, aan wier intelligent snuitwerk het duidelijk te zien was, dat zij 'stillen' waren, hielden zich druk bezig met foto's maken vanaf het trottoir of vanuit wagens die niet direct als politiewagens te herkennen waren.'



Opruiing

De aandacht in de media voor de Rode Jeugd was vooral terug te voeren op de arrestatie van enkele redacteuren. Dit naar aanleiding van een als 'opruierend' gekwalificeerd pamflet.

Waarschijnlijk was een column van Volkskrant-columnist Godfried Bomans de oorzaak. Bomans had op 10 juni 1966, vermoedelijk hoogstpersoonlijk door Willem Oskam, een 'slordig gedrukt en slecht geschreven' pamflet in handen gedrukt gekregen. Op de zaterdagse voorpagina van 18 juni 1966 sloeg hij alarm en opende hij de aanval op de 'raddraaiers'.

Aangezien in het pamflet het redactieadres Kloveniersburgwal 18 was vermeld, kostte het de politie geen moeite de schrijvers van het pamflet te achterhalen en te arresteren wegens opruiing. Willem Oskam kreeg tien dagen cel, evenals redactielid Joost van Steenis en een fikse boete van enkele duizenden gulden. Bekende linkse intellectuelen als Renate Rubinstein, Han Lammers en Harry Mulisch betuigden hun steun aan de Rode Jeugd.



Scholingsavonden

Eind 1967 verbrak de Rode Jeugd definitief haar banden met de Rode Vlag. De connecties die Oskam al had met de Chinese ambassade werden aangehouden. De ambassade zag de Rode Jeugd als een maoïstische voorhoede en schroomde niet de beweging financieel te ondersteunen en de leiding te fêteren op reizen naar de Volksrepubliek.

Naast de talloze acties waaraan hij deelnam - soms ook voor Provo - gaf Oskam scholing over China, het marxisme-leninisme en Lin Biao, op scholingsavonden in Ons Huis in de Amsterdamse Rozenstraat.

Drie keer bezocht Willem Oskam de Volksrepubliek China. Hij behoort tot een van de weinige Nederlanders die eerste minister Zhou Enlai nog de hand hebben geschud. In 1965, nog voor de Culturele Revolutie, ging hij voor de eerste maal met een delegatie naar China.

Ze bleven er zes weken. 'Daar werd je, bekaf van de reis, door mannen met walkie-talkies op het vliegveld naar zo'n Oostenwindlimousine geloodst en linea recta naar de voetbalwedstrijd Volksrepubliek-Albanië gereden. Enfin, dat was

uiteraard alleen maar goed bedoeld,' schreef Oskam later.



Kommunistische filosofie

Tegen het einde van de zomer van 1966 bereikte de Culturele Revolutie in China het hoogtepunt. Ambtenaren en intellectuelen werden massaal naar werkkampen op het platteland gestuurd om daar 'de oorspronkelijke communistische mentaliteit op te doen', miljoenen werden geëxecuteerd en de jeugd werd door Mao gemobiliseerd in de Rode Garde. In de *Rode Jeugd* (1966, no. 4), juicht Oskam Mao's initiatieven toe: 'Deze partij onder leiding van Mao heeft er dan ook voor gezorgd, dat de hongersnood een onbekend verschijnsel is

geworden in China en dat er een betere en gelukkigere samenleving aan het ontstaan is. In de werken van Mao Tse-tung vindt men de grondslagen van de kommunistische filosofie en zonder deze is er geen ideale kommunistische samenleving mogelijk.' En hij vervolgt: 'De westerse machthebbers zijn bang voor deze filosofie en daardoor gebruiken ze allerlei methoden om deze te belabberen, zodat de westerse mens zich deze ideeën niet eigen zal gaan maken. De berichten over de Rode Garde in de Westerse pers zijn voor een groot deel van twijfelachtige waarde.'

Stalinisme

In de maatregel van Mao een Rode Garde op te richten en de jeugd te mobiliseren zag Oskam veel hoop. In het vierde nummer van de *Rode Jeugd* kondigde de redactie, in navolging van een groepering in Parijs, als eerste in Nederland, de oprichting van een Rode Garde aan. Doel: optreden tegen de burgerlijke invloeden in Nederland. De eerste oefening stond gepland voor zaterdagmiddag 28 januari 1966, 14.00 uur op de Dam. Zelfs scherpschutters en BVD-ers waren welkom. Wel op vertoon van een legitimatie, zo meldde een pamflet.

De schattingen van het aantal slachtoffers van de Culturele Revolutie loopt uiteen van achthonderdduizend tot vijf miljoen. Vermoedelijk was de Rode Jeugd zich bewust van het grote aantal slachtoffers en vervolgden van de communistische regimens. Maar Oskam schrijft over 'de verbazing der gehele wereld die het Stalinisme heeft doen oproepen' en noemt Stalin vooral 'een realist'. Dit realisme van Stalin heeft weliswaar noodzakelijkerwijs soms een afstotende hardheid,

schrijft hij. Zijn conclusie is dat het belangrijker is dat dit realisme een element van stabiliteit in de Russische boerenmassa's heeft gebracht en bovenal de felbegeerde bolsjewistische revolutie heeft gerealiseerd.

Wat zijn de methoden en taken voor ons in het nieuwe jaar?

1. Democratie Vietnam intensiver, desnoods twee keer per maand, veel meer door arbeidersparties, ook zonder toestemming.
2. Meer anti-amerikaanse activiteiten. Amerika is n.l. de grootste vijand van alle volkeren van de wereld.
3. Meer acties bij bedrijven. (bij ontlagen enz.)
4. Versterking van de Rode Jeugd.
 - a. Organisatie
 - b. Meer leden; ledenwerving.
 - c. Samenwerking met andere jongerenorganisaties.
 - d. Samenwerking met de arbeidersklasse.
 - e. Meer films, boeken en tijdschriften over China, Vietnam, Albanie.
 - f. Meer activiteit onder scholieren, studenten, kunstenaars, militairen betreffende Vietnam.
 - g. Bij grote manifestaties pamfletten uitdelen. (Bijv. voertuilen, Theater)
 - h. Oprichting van een vereniging van jongeren Nederland-Vietnam.

Dit waren enkele tips en taken die volgens mij door ons gezamenlijk kunnen worden volbracht in 1967.

Willem Oskam.

Machtsstrijd

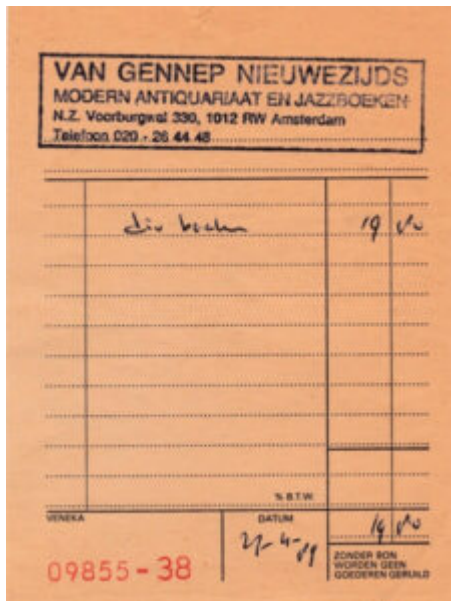
In de hete zomer van 1971 vertrok Oskam opnieuw voor drie maanden naar China, het zeskoppige landelijk bestuur van de Rode Jeugd reisde mee. Het zou zijn derde bezoek aan China worden. Twaalfduizend gulden reisgeld kreeg het bestuur mee, een gift van de Chinese ambassade.

Dankzij zijn hechte band met de ambassade werd de delegatie ondergebracht in het luxueuze Peking Hotel. Andere concurrerende delegaties moesten het doen met het Vriendschapshotel. Opnieuw stonden bezoeken aan sportwedstrijden op het programma, maar ook aan katoenfabrieken en scheepswerven.

Willem Oskam is altijd achter de Culturele Revolutie, China en ook Mao blijven staan.

Hoewel zijn denkbeelden naar eigen zeggen in de loop der jaren aan verandering onderhevig waren, sprak hij met afschuw over de revisionistische verkwanseling die Deng Xiaoping met de denkbeelden van Mao had doorgevoerd. Zelfs de machtsstrijd die zich tussen Lin Biao en Mao had afgespeeld bracht geen verandering in zijn visie. Het neerstorten van het vliegtuig met Lin Biao onder verdachte omstandigheden wat daarop volgde, evenmin. Ook de 'vriendschapsband' tussen de Amerikaanse president Richard Nixon - 'die het heldhaftige Vietnamese volk belaagde'- en Mao Zedong niet.

Maar na 1971 bezocht Oskam China nooit weer. Hij had geen enkele behoefte 'een nering van Kentucky Fried Chicken het Plein van de Hemelse Vrede te zien ontsieren,' zo vertelde hij later.



Stamkroeg

In 1971 splitste de Rode Jeugd zich op in een legale en een illegale tak. Er volgden geruchtmakende bomaanslagen op Amerikaanse en Turkse instanties, een Philips vestiging en andere imperialistische doelwitten. Eind 1973 hief de Rode jeugd zich op. Met de Rode Hulp, de organisatie die voortvloeide uit de 'geweldstak' van de Rode Jeugd, en die zich tot een heuse polder-stadsguerrilla ontwikkelde, had Willem Oskam geen bemoeienis meer.

Zijn laatste jaren sleet hij achter de kassa van Van Genneps Modern Antikwariaat, waar hij menige boekenkoper met zijn barse woorden 'papiertje of tasje?' schrik aanjoeg. Vaak was hij te vinden in zijn stamkroeg De Engelse Reet, waar hij met gemak vijftien pils en tien jenever achterover sloeg en geregeld rondjes gaf aan de hele zaak. Iets wat niet te rijmen viel met het bescheiden salaris van een boekverkoper. Na een aantal incidenten in de winkel werd hij ontslagen. Van Rob van Gennep kreeg hij een fikse ontslagvergoeding mee.

In 2000 werd hij op 57-jarige leeftijd op de vervuilde zolder van zijn ouderlijk huis, omringd door boeken, ordners, pamfletten en brochures, dood aangetroffen.

Literatuur en bronnen

- Frans Dekkers, Daan Dijkman, *'n Hollandse stadsguerrilla. Terugblik op de Rode Jeugd*, Amsterdam 1988
- Guus Meershoek, *De Groep IJzerman*, Amsterdam 2011
- Maarten van Riel, *Zaterdagmiddagrevolutie. Portret van de Rode Jeugd*, Amsterdam 2010
- Antoine Verbij, *Tien rode jaren. Links radicalisme in Nederland 1970-1980*, Amsterdam 2005
- Geke van der Wal, *Rob van Gennep, uitgever van links Nederland*, Amsterdam 2016
- *De rode jaren*, documentairefilm van Leo de Boer, 2005
- Nummers van het tijdschrift *De Rode Jeugd*



Josef Meri - Pilgrimage To The Prophet Ezekiel's Shrine In Iraq: A Symbol Of Muslim-Jewish Relations



*Ezekiel's Tomb,
located in Al Kifl,
Iraq Photo:
en.wikipedia.org*

Prior to the founding of modern nation states and the evolution of nationalist thought among Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, pilgrimage to shared shrines was a ubiquitous phenomenon up until the 20th

century. However, today one still finds Jews making pilgrimage to shrines of the Talmudic sages and saints (z. addiqim) in Israel, particularly in the Galilee and Beer Sheva, and in Morocco, and Muslims to shrines associated with the prophets, and the Companions and Followers of the Prophet Muhammad as well as other holy persons, particularly in Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Iraq and Jordan.

This article will not deal with the theological dimensions of the veneration of holy persons or the arguments for permitting or prohibiting visiting the shrines of holy persons but rather with an aspect of saint veneration which historically attracted mainly Muslims and Jews: the veneration of the Prophet Ezekiel (Arab. H. izqīl, Dhū'l-Kifl) in Iraq.

Pilgrimage to Ezekiel's shrine in Iraq is unique in that some of the most detailed historical accounts concerning it have been preserved.

The shrine of Ezekiel is found in the village of Kifl which lies 77 miles south of Baghdad in a largely Shi'i region and was one of the most significant places of pilgrimage for Jews and Muslims, especially Shi'is until the first half of the 20th century. As is commonly the case with other prophets and holy persons, multiple shrines were dedicated to Ezekiel. A second shrine existed in Babylonia and a third in Persia. Yet neither was as well documented as the shrine at Kifl, owing to the fact that it was a regional pilgrimage centre attracting Jews and Muslims from as far away as North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, drawn there by the sanctity of the place and its reputation for the fulfilment of supplication and the curing of various illnesses.

Read more:
https://www.academia.edu/Pilgrimage_to_the_Prophet_Ezekiels_Shrine

**Chomsky: We Need Genuine
International Cooperation To**

Tackle The Climate Crisis



Noam Chomsky

Global warming is accelerating, bringing the world close to the edge of the precipice. Heat waves, floods and deaths are major news, and as *Truthout* has [reported](#), “this summer’s record-breaking temperatures caused by a climate catastrophe that, until recently, even the most pessimistic climatologists thought was still two or three decades out.” Yet, as Noam Chomsky points out in the interview below, corporate media devoted [almost as much coverage](#) in one day to a space cowboy than it did the entire year of 2020 to the biggest crisis facing humanity.

Is the world losing the war against climate change? Why is there still climate crisis denial and inactivism? The choice is clear: We need global action to tame global warming or face apocalyptic consequences, says Chomsky, a globally renowned public intellectual who is Laureate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Arizona and Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and is the author of more than 150 books on topics such as linguistics, international affairs, U.S. foreign policy, political economy and mass media.

C.J. Polychroniou: Climate emergency facts are piling up almost on a daily basis — extreme heat waves in various parts of the U.S. and Canada, with temperatures rising even above 49 degrees Celsius (over 120 degrees Fahrenheit); deadly floods in western Europe, with close to 200 dead and hundreds remaining unaccounted for in the flooding; and Moscow experienced its [second-hottest June](#). In fact, the extreme weather conditions even have climate scientists surprised, and they are now wondering about the accuracy of prediction models. What are

your thoughts on these matters? It appears that the world is losing the war against global warming.

Noam Chomsky: You probably remember that three years ago, Oxford physicist Raymond Pierrehumbert, a lead author of the just-released Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, wrote that “it’s time to panic.... We are in deep trouble.”

What has been learned since only intensifies that warning. An IPCC draft report leaked to *Agence France-Presse* in June 2021 listed irreversible tipping points that are ominously close, [warning](#) of “progressively serious, centuries-long and, in some cases, irreversible consequences.”

Last November 3 was a narrow escape from what might well have been indescribable disaster. Another four years of Trump’s passionate racing to the abyss might have reached those tipping points. And if the denialist party returns to power, it may be too late to panic. We are indeed in deep trouble.

The leaked IPCC draft was from before the extreme weather events of summer 2021, which shocked climate scientists. Heating of the planet “is pretty much in line with climate model predictions from decades ago,” [climate scientist Michael Mann observed](#), but “the rise in extreme weather is exceeding the predictions.” The reason seems to be an effect of heating of the atmosphere that had not been considered in climate studies: wobbling of the jet stream, which is causing the extreme events that have plagued much of the world in the past few weeks.

The frightening news has a good side. It may awaken global leaders to recognition of the horrors that they are creating. It’s conceivable that seeing what’s happening before their eyes might induce even the GOP and its *Fox News* echo chamber to indulge in a glimpse of reality.

We have seen signs of that in the COVID crisis. After years of immersion in their world of “alternative facts,” some Republican governors who have been mocking precautions are taking notice, now that the plague is striking their own states because of lack of preventive measures and vaccine refusal. As Florida took the lead nationwide in cases and deaths, Gov. Ron DeSantis backed way ([only partially](#)) from his ridicule — eliciting charges of [selling out](#) to the enemy from party stalwarts and perhaps endangering his presidential aspirations. A shift which might, however, be too late to influence the loyal party base that has been

subjected to a stream of disinformation.

Possibly the sight of cities drowning and burning up may also dent GOP-Fox loyalty to the slogan “Death to intelligence, Viva death,” borrowed from the annals of fascism.

The denialism of environmental destruction naturally has an impact on public opinion. According to the [most recent polls](#), for 58 percent of Republicans, climate change is “not an important concern.” A little over 40 percent deny that humans make a significant contribution to this impending catastrophe. And 44 percent think that “climate scientists have too much influence on climate policy debates.”

If there ever is a historical reckoning of this critical moment in history — possibly by some alien intelligence after humans have wrecked this planet — and if a Museum of Evil is established in memory of the crime, the GOP-Fox dyad will have a special room in their honor.

Responsibility is far broader, however. There is no space to review the dismal record, but one small item gives the general picture. The indispensable media analysis organization *FAIR* [reports a study](#) comparing coverage on morning TV of the climate crisis with Jeff Bezos’s space launch: 267 minutes in all of 2020 on the most important issue in human history, 212 minutes on a single day for Bezos’s silly PR exercise.

Returning to your question, humanity is quite clearly losing the war, but it is far from over. A better world is possible, we know how to achieve it, and many good people are actively engaged in the struggle. The crucial message is to panic now, but not to despair.

One of the most worrisome developments regarding the climate crisis is that while virtually all of the published climate science shows the impacts of global warming are increasingly irreversible, climate skepticism and inactivism remain quite widespread. In your view, is climate crisis denial motivated by cultural and economic factors alone, or is there possibly something else also at work? Specifically, I am wondering if there is a connection between postmodern attacks on science and objectivity and climate science denial and inactivism.

There was a skeptical crisis in the 17th century. It was real, a significant moment in intellectual history. It led to a much better understanding of the nature of empirical inquiry. I'm not convinced that the postmodern critique has improved on this.

With regard to your question, I doubt that the postmodern critique has had much of an impact, if any, outside of rather narrow educated circles. The major sources of climate science denial — in fact much broader rejection of science — seem to me to lie elsewhere, deep in the culture.

I was a student 75 years ago. If evolution was brought up in class, it was preceded by what's now called a trigger warning: "You don't have to believe this, but you should know what some people believe." This was in an Ivy League college.

Today, for large parts of the population, deeply held religious commitments conflict with the results of scientific inquiry. Therefore, science must be wrong, a cult of liberal intellectuals in urban dens of iniquity infected by people who are not "true Americans" (no need to spell out who *they* are). All of this has been inflamed by the very effective use of irrationality in the Trump era, including his skillful resort to constant fabrication, eroding the distinction between truth and falsehood. For a showman with deeply authoritarian instincts, and few principles beyond self-glorification and abject service to the welfare of the ultrarich, there's no better slogan than: "Believe me, not your lying eyes."

The organization that Trump now owns, which years ago was an authentic political party, had already moved on a path that provided a generous welcome to such a figure. We've [discussed previously](#) how the brief Republican flirtation with reality on environmental destruction during the McCain campaign was quickly terminated by the Koch brothers' campaign of intimidation. The last time Republican leaders spoke freely without obeisance to Trump, in the 2016 primaries, all were loyal climate denialists, or worse.

Scientists are human. They're not above criticism, nor their institutions. One can find error, dishonesty, childish feuds, all of the normal human flaws. But to be critical of *science* as such is to condemn the human quest to understand the world in which we live. And truly to abandon hope.

Many discussions on the climate crisis revolve around "equity" and "justice." Leaving aside the question of "climate equity vs. climate justice," especially in the

context of the Paris Agreement, how much importance should we assign to these debates in the context of the overall goal of decarbonizing the global economy, which is obviously the only way to tackle the existential crisis of global warming?

It shouldn't be overlooked that it is the small, very affluent minority, most of them in the rich countries, who have overwhelming responsibility for the environmental crisis, in the past and right now. Decarbonizing and concern for equity and justice, therefore, considerably overlap. Beyond that, even on narrow pragmatic grounds, putting aside moral responsibility, the major socioeconomic changes required for the necessary scale of decarbonization must enlist committed mass popular support, and that will not be achieved without a substantial measure of justice.

Robert Pollin has been making the case for a Global Green New Deal as the only effective way to tackle global warming, and the two of you are co-authors of the recently published work, Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet. No doubt, we need internationalism in the fight against climate breakdown because, as you have so aptly put it yourself, it is either "extinction or internationalism." My question to you is twofold: Firstly, how do you understand "internationalism" in the current historical juncture where, in spite of all of the globalizing processes under way in the course of the past 40 or 50 years, the nation-state remains the central agency? And, secondly, what system changes are required to give "internationalism" a real fighting chance in the war against the apocalyptic consequences of global warming which are already knocking at humanity's door?

There are many forms of internationalism. It's worthwhile to think about them. They carry lessons.

One form of internationalism is the specific kind of "globalization" that has been imposed during the neoliberal years through a series of investor-rights agreements masquerading as free trade. It constitutes a form of class war.

Another form of internationalism is the Axis alliance that brought us World War II. A pale reflection is Trump's sole geostrategic program: construction of an alliance of reactionary states run from Washington, including as one core component the Middle East Abraham Accords and its side agreements with the Egyptian and Saudi dictatorships, taken over by Biden.

Still another form of internationalism has been championed on occasion by workers' movements, in the U.S. by the "Wobblies," the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Other unions, too, have the term "international" in their names, a relic of commitment to true internationalism.

In Europe, the most eloquent spokesperson for this form of internationalism was Rosa Luxemburg. The conflict between internationalism and chauvinism came to a head with the outbreak of World War I. Chauvinism conquered. The Socialist International collapsed. [In Luxemburg's acidic words](#), the slogan, "Proletarians of all countries united" was abandoned in favor of "Proletarians of all countries cut each other's throat."

Luxemburg held true to the internationalist vision, a rare stance. In all countries, intellectuals across the political spectrum rallied enthusiastically to the chauvinist cause. Those who did not were likely to find their way to prison, like Luxemburg: Karl Liebknecht, Bertrand Russell, Eugene Debs. The IWW was crushed by state-capital violence.

Turning to the present, we find other manifestations of internationalism. When the COVID pandemic broke out in early 2020, the rich countries of central Europe at first managed to get it more or less under control, a success that collapsed when Europeans chose not to forego their summer vacations.

While Germany and Austria were still in fairly good shape in early 2020, there was, however, a severe pandemic in northern Italy a few miles to their south, within the Europe Union. Italy did benefit from true internationalism — not on the part of its rich neighbors. Rather, from the world's one country with internationalist commitments: Cuba, which sent doctors to help, as it did elsewhere, extending a record that goes far back. Among others, Panama received assistance from Cuba, but the U.S. took care of that. In its final 2020 report, Trump's Department of Health and Human Services proudly announced that it had successfully pressured Panama to expel Cuban doctors to protect the hemisphere from Cuba's "malign" influence.

The malign influence, spelled out in the early days of Cuban independence in 1959, was that Cuba might infect Latin America with its "successful defiance" of U.S. policies since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. To prevent this threat, the U.S. launched a major campaign of terror and economic strangulation, following the

logic spelled out at the State Department in 1960 by Lester Mallory. He recognized, as U.S. intelligence knew, that the “majority of Cubans support Castro,” and that the “only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship.” Therefore, “it follows that every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba ... to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.”

The policy has been rigorously followed with bipartisan fervor in the face of unanimous world opposition (Israel excepted). The days of “decent respect for the opinions of mankind” have long faded to oblivion, along with such frivolities as the UN Charter and the rule of law. It is astonishing that Cuba has survived the relentless assault.

The successes of the policy of strangulation and torture are reported with no little exuberance, an unusual exhibition of sadistic cowardice. Among the many popular protests underway in Latin America, one is front page news: in Cuba, giving Biden an opportunity to slap even more sanctions on the “villain” for its resort to abusive measures to suppress the demonstrations, which appear to be mostly about “economic dissatisfaction and hardship,” and failures of the authoritarian government to respond in timely and effective fashion.

Cuba’s unique internationalism is also undermined, freeing the world from any departure from the norm of self-interest, rarely breached in more than the most limited ways.

That must change. It is by now broadly understood that hoarding of vaccines by the rich countries is not only morally obscene but also self-destructive. The virus will mutate in countries with nondominant economies, and among those refusing vaccination in the rich countries, posing severe dangers to everyone on Earth, the rich included. Much more seriously, heating of the planet also knows no borders. There will be nowhere to hide for long. The same is true of the growing threat of nuclear war among major powers: the end.

Rosa Luxemburg and the Wobblies sketched the kinds of “system changes” toward which humanity should strive, in one or another way. Short of the goals they envisioned, steps must be taken toward engaging an informed and concerned public in international institutions of solidarity and mutual aid, eroding borders,

recognizing our shared fate, committing ourselves to working together for the common good instead of “cutting each other’s throats.”

Copyright © Truthout. May not be reprinted without [permission](#).

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, climate change, the political economy of the United States, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout*’s Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books, and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Arabic, Croatian, Dutch, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are [Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books; *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).

Capitol Attack Inquiry Reveals The Extraordinary Influence Of White Supremacist Ideology



*CJ
Polychroniou*

Without racism running deep in their DNA, Trump's supporters would not have listened to a raving maniac president encouraging violence in order to remain in power.

As the Capitol attack inquiry began with emotional testimony by police officers who came face-to-face with Trump's racist and proto-fascist mob, one cannot help but draw the conclusion that what happened on January 6, 2021, a day that will also live in infamy, is that the chickens came home to roost.

The racist system that has prevailed for nearly 250 years got for a taste of its own medicine on that day as a large crowd of white Americans attacked the very foundation of the country. Calling white police officers "traitors" and using racial slurs against black officers speak volumes about the mentality of Trump's mob, which today has completely taken over the Republican party.

Make no mistake about it. Without racism running deep in their DNA, Trump's supporters would not have listened to a raving maniac president encouraging violence in order to remain in power.

Trumpism is above all a racist movement, with strong proto-fascist principles, that compares favorably well to the political movement that dominated life in South Africa from 1948 through the 1990s.

Of course, the history of the United States, just like that of South Africa, has been locked in century-old patterns of bigotry, racism, and discrimination.

Lest we forget, even Hitler and the Nazis were inspired by America's racist laws, as James Q. Whitman's outstanding work *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton University Press, 2008) has so powerfully revealed. Whitman argues that Nazi race theorists were not only impressed by America's racist legislation and used it as a model for the Nuremberg Laws which were enacted in 1935, but even found some U.S. race

laws to be too extreme!

In this context, any attempt to ignore or conceal the history of racism in the United States must be interpreted as beyond whitewashing history. Indeed, it should be treated as an explicit effort to keep in its place racial ideology and hegemonic whiteness.

And this is how Trump and his supporters should be treated: first, as 21st century racists who are bent on turning back the hands of time as America is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse than in the past; and, secondly, as proto-fascists who are willing to do anything, including the use of violence, in order to halt progressive political reform from taking place “in the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Donald Trump’s “Big Lie” (a technique originally used by Adolph Hitler himself) was and remains a politically devious scheme to delegitimize democratic procedures and ensure in the process of doing so that conservative and reactionary America maintains power and keeps its values intact.

Unsurprisingly perhaps given America’s deep traditions of racism and nativism, the “Big Lie” is working exactly in the manner perceived by Joseph Goebbels: “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.” More than two-thirds of Republicans believe in Trump’s “Big Lie” that the election was stolen, and it is absolutely clear that the most reactionary party in the advanced world today is more than willing to destroy what is left of American democracy to retake power.

As the testimony of the police officers at the first hearing of the Capitol attack inquiry has reaffirmed, there are very dark forces out there, and thus there is no room for complacency simply because Trump is out of office.

Also, one hopes that sooner or later Trump will eventually be charged with treason for inciting an insurrection against the United States government. But this is highly unlikely given what the orange maniac represents. Indeed, America still has along way to go before accepting the plague of racism in past and present. White supremacist ideology is still alive and kicking as testimony at the first January 6 hearing is making abundantly clear.

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/capitol-attack>

Our work is licensed under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). Feel free to republish and share widely.

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His latest books are [*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*](#) and [*Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*](#) (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors)

The Middle East Union Festival - Mehrsprachiges Literaturfestival (Englisch, Deutsch, Arabisch, Hebräisch) Berlin, 12. bis 15. August 2021



Kann und darf man aus dem heutigen Berlin einen in Frieden und Gleichheit geeinten Nahen Osten imaginieren?

Das MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival lässt, online und verteilt auf

Veranstaltungsorte in der ganzen Stadt, diese Vision zum Greifen nah erscheinen - mit Literatur, Diskurs und Musik, mit Performance, Poesie und feministischen und queeren Diskussionen.

Kuratiert von den israelischen Schriftsteller*innen *Mati Shemoelof* und *Hila Amit* und der palästinensischen Umweltaktivistin *Alaa Obeid* wagt das Festival ein mutiges künstlerisch-politisches Experiment: die Proklamation einer kulturellen Vereinigung des diffus kartierten Nahen Osten.

Auf die Eröffnung im BABYLON mit einem Gründungsauftakt, einer Diskussion und dem Konzert einer iranisch-israelischen Musikgruppe folgen in den darauffolgenden Tagen zahlreiche Veranstaltungen - online, im Literarischen Colloquium Berlin und in der Novilla - mit namhaften und brillanten Denker*innen, Künstler*innen und Aktivist*innen, die sich mit dem Grundgedanken des Projekts kreativ auseinandersetzen: *Yehouda Shenhav-Sharabani*, *Ella Shohat*, *Amro Ali*, *Amina Maher*, *Udi Aloni*, *Maryam Abu Khaled*, *Nael Eltoukhy*, *Steve Sabella* und viele mehr haben der Teilnahme zugesagt.

Das musikalische Programm - mit den Ensembles von *Sistanagila*, *Eden Cami* und das *Kayan Project* oder *Rasha Nahas* mit Band - bietet die Möglichkeit, eine gemeinsame Zukunftsvision auch rhythmisch und melodisch zu erkunden. Das besondere Highlight des Festivals ist ein Konzert religiöser jüdisch-arabischer Musiktraditionen mit dem Kantor *Assaf Levitin* und dem Ud-Spieler *Mazen Ragheb Mohsen* in der Synagoge am Fraenkelufer.

Bietet die kulturelle Zukunftsvision des MIDDLE EAST UNION Festivals eine Antwort auf die verhärteten Fronten und heutigen Konfliktlinien? Und wie könnte sie über die Utopie hinaus zur Wirklichkeit werden?

Finden Sie es mit uns heraus!

Für weitere Informationen und das vollständige Programm:
<https://middle-east-union.de/>

The MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival

c/o Berliner Literarische Aktion e.V., Kastanienallee 2, 10435 Berlin

info@berliner-literarische-aktion.de, www.berliner-literarische-aktion.de

Kurator*innen: Hila Amit, Mati Shemoelof, Alaa Obeid

Projektleitung: Martin Jankowski

CEO: Lars Jongeblod

Pressekontakt: Birger Hoyer (presse@middle-east-union.de)

Ein Projekt der Berliner Literarischen Aktion nach einem Konzept von Hila Amit und Mati Shemoelof, gefördert durch den Hauptstadtkulturfonds.

The MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival - Multilingual Literature Festival (English, German, Arabic, Hebrew) Berlin, August 12th - 15th, 2021

Can and may we imagine a Middle East unified in peace and equality, in present-day Berlin? The MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival makes this vision seem within reach - with literature, discussions, and music, with performance, poetry and feminist and queer discussions, featured online and scattered across venues throughout the city.

Curated by the Israeli writers *Mati Shemoelof* and *Hila Amit* and the Palestinian environmental activist *Alaa Obeid*, the festival dares a bold artistic-political experiment: the proclamation of a cultural unification of the diffusely charted Middle East.

The Union launches with the opening at BABYLON and a discussion followed by a concert of an Iranian-Israeli band which will be followed by numerous events - online, at the Literary Colloquium Berlin and at the Novilla - with renowned and brilliant thinkers, artists and activists who creatively engage with the underlying idea of the project: *Yehouda Shenhav-Sharabani*, *Ella Shohat*, *Amro Ali*, *Amina Maher*, *Udi Aloni*, *Maryam Abu Khaled*, *Nael Eltoukhy*, *Steve Sabella* and many others are participating.

The music program - which will feature performances by *Sistanagila*, *Eden Cami* and the *Kayan Project* and *Rasha Nahas* with band - offers the possibility to also explore a common vision of the future through rhythm and melody. The highlight of the festival is a concert of religious Jewish-Arabic musical traditions with the cantor *Assaf Levitin* and the Ud player *Mazen Ragheb Mohsen* in the Fraenkelufer Synagogue.

Does the MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival's cultural vision of the future offer an answer to today's hardened fronts and lines of conflict? And how could it go beyond the idea of utopia to become reality? Join us to find out!

For more information and the full program: <https://middle-east-union.de/>

The MIDDLE EAST UNION Festival

c/o Berliner Literarische Aktion e.V., Kastanienallee 2, 10435 Berlin
info@berliner-literarische-aktion.de, www.berliner-literarische-aktion.de
Curators: Hila Amit, Mati Shemoelof, Alaa Obeid
Project manager: Martin Jankowski
CEO: Lars Jongebloed
Press contact: Birger Hoyer (presse@middle-east-union.de)

A project of the Berliner Literarische Aktion based on a concept by Hila Amit and Mati Shemoelof, funded by the Hauptstadtkulturfonds.

Medicare For All Rallies In 50 Cities Show Big Support For Universal Health Care



The United States is one of the richest countries in the world, yet its poverty rates are higher and its safety nets are far weaker than those of other industrialized nations. It is also the only large rich country without universal health care. In fact, as Noam Chomsky argued in *Truthout*, the U.S. health system is an “[international scandal](#).”

Why is the U.S. an outlier with regard to health care? What keeps the country from adopting a universal health care system, which most Americans have supported for many years now? And what exactly is Medicare for All? On the eve of scheduled [marches and rallies](#) in support of Medicare for All, led by various organizations such as the Sunrise Movement, Physicians for a National Health

Program, the Democratic Socialists of America and concerned citizens throughout the country, the interview below with Peter S. Arno, a leading health expert, sheds light on some key questions about the state of health care in the United States.

Peter S. Arno is senior fellow and director of health policy research at the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and a senior fellow at the National Academy of Social Insurance. Among his many works is his Pulitzer Prize-nominated book, *Against the Odds: The Story of AIDS Drug Development, Politics & Profits*.

C.J. Polychroniou: U.S. health care is widely regarded as an outlier, with higher costs and worse outcomes than other countries. Why are health care expenditures in the U.S. significantly higher than those of other industrialized countries? And how do we explain poor health outcomes, including life expectancy, compared to most European nations?

Peter Arno: The short answer as to why the U.S. has the highest health care expenditures in the world is simply that, unlike other developed countries, we exercise very few price constraints on our health care products and services, ranging from drugs, medical devices, physician and hospital services to private insurance products. On a broader level, the corporatization and profits generated from medical care may be the most distinguishing characteristics of the modern American health care system. The theology of the market, along with the strongly held mistaken belief that the problems of U.S. health care can be solved if only the market could be perfected, has effectively obstructed the development of a rational, efficient and humane national health care policy.

Despite the U.S.'s outsized spending on health care, its relatively poor health outcomes are beyond dispute. For example, in 2019, [the U.S. ranked 36th in the world in terms of life expectancy at birth](#) — behind Slovenia and Costa Rica, not to mention Canada, Japan and all the wealthy countries in Europe. This is not solely, as one might at first think, a function of [racial and ethnic health disparities](#), as dramatic as they are in the U.S. A recent [study](#) found that even white people living in the nation's highest-income counties often have worse health outcomes on infant mortality, maternal mortality, and deaths after heart attack, colon cancer and childhood leukemia than the average citizens of Norway, Denmark, and other wealthier countries.

The relatively poor health outcomes in the U.S. require a more nuanced explanation based on income, wealth and power inequalities. These factors drive inadequate and inequitable access to health care. But they also undermine many of the social determinants of health, particularly for poor and vulnerable populations, which fall largely outside the health care sector. These include, for example, higher income, access to healthy food, clean water and air, adequate housing, safe neighborhoods, etc.

Given the above facts, it's important to ask: Why doesn't the U.S. have universal health coverage?

The simple answer is that the economic and political forces that profit greatly from the status quo are opposed to universal health coverage. It's certainly not too complicated to implement such a system — nearly every wealthy country in the world has figured out how it can be done. Many academics and pundits point to surveys indicating that Americans are fearful of change and are satisfied with the status quo, in particular with their employer-based health insurance (which covers more than 150 million workers and their families). In part, these attitudes are understandable. Most people are healthy and thus are not faced with the inequities and indignities that befall those who become ill and must deal with the private insurance industry and a dysfunctional health care system. Additionally, the true costs of health care are often hidden from workers who receive their insurance through jobs in which insurance premiums are automatically deducted from their paychecks. Even less well understood is the fact that we all [subsidize employers' contributions to workers' health insurance with more than \\$300 billion of our tax dollars](#) (employer contributions are not taxed but are considered a line item in the federal budget). But public sentiment is changing as [health care expenditures continue to outpace earnings](#). Over the past 10 years, insurance premiums have risen more than twice as fast as earnings, while deductibles rose more than six times as fast. And the even more rapidly rising price of prescription drugs has particularly captured the [public's attention](#). This is likely because [prescription drug prices rose by 33 percent](#) between 2014 and 2020, [and the average price of new cancer drugs now exceeds \\$100,000 per year](#). There is also an increasing public recognition of the massive and growing medical debt burden. One recent [study](#) estimated that nearly 1 out of 5 individuals in the U.S. collectively had \$140 billion worth of medical debt in collections in June 2020.

You have done outstanding research on the economics and politics of AIDS. How did your background in AIDS research shape your views on health care and social insurance?

My background in AIDS research, which began in the mid-1980s as the epidemic exploded around the country, highlighted a central weakness of American health care — if you become ill and lose your job, you frequently lose your health insurance. Thus, at the point when you need it most, you lose access to health care. This was driven by the private health insurance profit-maximizing model, the reliance on employment-based insurance and the lack of recognition of health care as a human right. The Affordable Care Act provided some mitigation but, with tens of millions uninsured today, these issues are still with us.

Another dimension of American health care that came into sharper focus for me was the sheer power of dominant stakeholders, such as the pharmaceutical companies, to extract profits with little restraint. The clearest example of this is perhaps the relentless increase in drug prices, which one could argue began when the first AIDS drug, AZT, was marketed at \$10,000 per year in 1987; today we have cancer drugs sold at more than 10 times that price.

Medicare for All is now gaining traction in the U.S. What exactly is Medicare for All and how would it work?

The term “Medicare for All,” as it is commonly known and described in congressional bills such as the Medicare for All Act of 2021 ([H.R. 1976](#), which currently has 117 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives), is a short-hand expression for a universal, single-payer health care system. Essentially, this means that health care will be provided to all U.S. residents and a single payer — the federal government — will pay all bills. The Act’s summary states in part:

Among other requirements, the program must (1) cover all U.S. residents; (2) provide for automatic enrollment of individuals upon birth or residency in the United States; and (3) cover items and services that are medically necessary or appropriate to maintain health or to diagnose, treat, or rehabilitate a health condition, including hospital services, prescription drugs, mental health and substance abuse treatment, dental and vision services, and long-term care.

The bill prohibits cost-sharing (e.g., deductibles, coinsurance, and copayments) and other charges for covered services. Additionally, private health insurers and

employers may only offer coverage that is supplemental to, and not duplicative of, benefits provided under the program.

The “single payer” aspect of Medicare for All has several crucial virtues. First, it would do away with the thousands of private claim processes that currently exist to service the private insurance industry, thereby reducing an enormous amount of bureaucratic waste that is estimated to be in the [hundreds of billions of dollars](#) each year. At the same time, with the negotiating power given to the federal government, prices for pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and other medical expenditures could be brought under control. But most importantly, the single-payer approach is the most realistic approach to providing health care to all Americans.

Medicare for All marches and rallies are taking place in scores of cities across the country on Saturday, July 24. In fact, there is ample evidence that most Americans already support universal health care. But can we have health care reform without reforming the political system?

There is no doubt that the road to Medicare for All is an uphill struggle, given the array of political and economic forces that benefit from the status quo. However, the more than 50 marches and rallies around the country on July 24 reflect not only public support for transformative change in our health care system, but the type of movement building that is necessary to carry out this change. A complementary strategy, which could ignite a national consensus, would be a breakthrough success for a Medicare for All-type program at the state level, particularly in large states such as California or New York, where organizing efforts have been underway for several years. This could well have a cascading effect on other states and ultimately at the federal level. The common strategic thread for success at the state or federal level, is building a strong, popular social movement demanding universal health coverage for all.

Copyright © Truthout. May not be reprinted without [permission](#).

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, climate change, the political economy of the United States, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is

a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books, and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Arabic, Croatian, Dutch, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are [*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books; *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).