

# Indigenous Organizers In Alaska Lead The Way Toward Livable Climate Future



*Ruth Łchav'aya K'isen Miller*  
[nativemovement.org](http://nativemovement.org)

In the United States, the public and politicians are moving in opposite directions on climate change. Grassroots environmental activism is spreading on the local state, regional and national levels, while Congress generally continues with a “business-as-usual” approach, rejecting the foremost way to avoid the worst consequences of global warming: the Green New Deal.

While the Green New Deal remains aspirational in the U.S., it has been adopted by the European Union, and scores of countries around the world have committed to pursuing its goals.

Among the many organizations in the U.S. fighting for environmental sustainability and a just transition toward clean, renewable energy is Native Movement, an organization dedicated to building people power for transformative change and imagining a world without fossil fuels.

“There is no future at all with continued oil and gas extraction,” says Ruth Łchav'aya K'isen Miller, Native Movement’s climate justice director, in this

exclusive interview for *Truthout*. “We must eliminate fossil fuel extraction now through a just transition that guarantees justice for workers and for the lands.”

Miller is a Dena’ina Athabascan and Ashkenazi Jewish woman. She works toward Indigenous rights advocacy and is a member of the Alaska Just Transition Collective and the Alaska Climate Alliance.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Ruth, what does a just transition, from a Native and Indigenous perspective, look like in Alaska?*

*Ruth Miller:* A just transition is a journey of returning to economies, governance structures and social contracts that are not new, but built on Indigenous wisdoms and place-based knowledge to create a truly regenerative economy. A just transition will be built on a values framework of anti-racism and decolonization, deep reciprocity, and respect for all lands, waters and air.

Any just transition for Alaska must be rooted in Indigenous perspectives, because it is Alaska’s Native nations who have lived in harmony with these lands for over 30,000 years, and whose deep connections, encyclopedic knowledge and spiritual interconnectivity will heal the wounds of the past 100 years of colonization and extractive capitalism. For this reason, we refer to this shift in resource extraction, governance, labor practices and culture as “remembering forward,” first translated in 2020 in the Behnti Kengaga language as “Kohtr’elneyh,” and in 2022 in the Dena’ina language as “Nughelnik.”

In Alaska this takes many forms. It includes deep democracy, which actively seeks to incorporate minority voices as well as those in the majority and requires the diversification of elected leaders. It includes an end to all oil and gas extraction, as well as irresponsible mining and other development projects. It means a return to responsible land management practices, including timber and fisheries management, and it means returning stewardship of lands and waters back to their original and eternal caretakers. It includes supporting Alaska Native language and cultural revitalizations while supporting unimpeachable subsistence hunting and fishing rights. It means all workers will have their fair pay and rights protected through strong unions, while communities will be empowered to support themselves through mutual aid networks and non-predatory community loan funds for moving toward clean and efficient energy.

A just transition for Alaska means investing in regenerative industries like

sustainable mariculture and ocean-healing crops such as kelp, while also supporting culturally informed eco-tourism that elevates local business with local returns. As we have previously written for [Non-Profit Quarterly](#), “To achieve [a Just Transition], resources must be acquired through regenerative practices, labor must be organized through voluntary cooperation and decolonial mindsets, culture must be based on caring and sacred relationships, and governance must reflect deep democracy and relocalization.”

*Why is the complete elimination of fossil fuel extraction needed to secure a just transition?*

The simple truth is that the oil and gas industry is one of the largest contributors to climate change, spewing greenhouse gas emissions to the point at which we are now in the sixth great extinction — one which has been entirely caused by recent human activity. The Arctic, being bled dry for its non-renewable resources, is now experiencing a climate crisis at two to four times the rate as the rest of the globe.

In Alaska, thawing permafrost is not only destabilizing Arctic infrastructure, but the thawing of eons-old organic material leads to the accelerated release of methane, a gas more than 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere. The same thawing is leading to coastal and riverbed erosion, causing more and more communities to be forced to relocate. Already less Arctic sea ice returns in the winter than past generations remember, putting coastal communities at increased risk of damage by winter storms.

With a global temperature rise of 2.5 degrees Celsius or higher (which we are projected to reach within the decade without drastic international action now), it is expected we will have an entirely ice-free Arctic Ocean at least once every eight years. Beyond their climate effects, extractive projects are already causing extreme and irreversible devastation to lands, waters and food systems.

The ecological harm caused by such projects leaves toxic waste, pollution and contamination, harming the health of Alaska Native peoples who live closest with the land. Near the sites of extractive projects, high rates of cancers, birth defects, respiratory illnesses, and more health impacts have been observed for decades. Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit relatives suffer increased rates of homicide, disappearance and domestic violence [in and around the man camps](#)

that supply labor to extractive development projects.

There is no future at all with continued oil and gas extraction.... We must eliminate fossil fuel extraction now through a just transition that guarantees justice for workers and for the lands.

*What are the main obstacles for Alaska to overcome its oil extraction and how would this impact Alaskans?*

The dominant story of Alaska began as the “last frontier,” ready to be settled and exploited by colonizers. The same narrative now tells the public that the Alaskan economy is dependent on oil and gas, and that we would be left bereft if we challenged those industries. Dark money streams, particularly from the Koch brothers, flow into Alaska to purchase elections for extractive industries.

This is a hurdle we are poised to overcome. These stories are nothing more than myths meant to erase Indigenous history and excellence and undermine any visioning toward a truly regenerative economy for our state. Colonial distortions of history poison our education system and prevent real conversation about the past and future of our state and its people. We are seeking deep decolonization and truth-telling to confront the disempowerment and marginalization of Native people in the name of resource extraction. Ending oil extraction requires questioning the systems that rely on it and healing the wounds of our communities so we may envision a collective future together. As the boom-and-bust cycle of resource extraction continues to enrich the elite few at the cost of the public, Alaskans are awakening to the power and potential of a better economy — one that is just, regenerative and sustainable.

Already communities are showing ingenuity and resilience as they develop place-based economies that support livelihoods and healthy living — small-scale hydroelectric turbines in Igiugig village to move the community off diesel, high-tunnel greenhouses for year-round produce in the interior of Alaska, mariculture and kelp farming in the Southcentral and Southeast regions. Grassroots efforts across the state (many Black, Indigenous and people of color-led and in rural communities) are leading the way, through renewable energy, local food systems, eco-tourism, sustainable recreation, and much more. Strong unions like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers are already providing apprenticeship programs to invest in worker transition, while other groups like

the Fairbanks Women Carpenters Union, UNITE HERE are pursuing worker health and safety.

The burden of transformation is on the state of Alaska and the federal government to catch up to the progress already happening across Alaska. Alaskans are designing our collective future and taking our story into our own hands.

*What is the Alaska Just Transition Collective and who are the communities it is accountable to? How does it bring folks together in action to advance a shared vision for Alaska's future?*

The Alaska Just Transition Collective is a group of Alaska-based organizations with a spectrum of focuses working to support Alaska along a path toward a post-oil economy, an Indigenized Regenerative Economy. Alaska Just Transition facilitates intersectional collaboration to build critical thinking around economic and social transition. The Alaska Just Transition Collective is currently comprised of a number of organizations, including Native Movement, Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Native Peoples Action, The Alaska Center, Alaska Poor People's Campaign and Native Conservancy. However, the just transition community is significantly broader and ever-expanding.

In January of 2020, the first Alaska Just Transition Summit was held on the lands of the Lower Tanana Dené peoples. Kohtr'elneyh ("Remembering Forward" in Benhti kanaga) was a groundbreaking gathering in Alaska that brought together community organizers, tribal leaders, artists, union members, faith leaders, investors, elected officials, educators, small business owners, renewable energy industry leaders, and many more from critical sectors. Alaskans shared, brainstormed and strategized a collective path toward a post-oil economy built on just values frameworks with a home for all. We dived deep into the healing necessary to move toward decolonization, and centered Indigenous voices to move with place-based wisdom and ancestral imperative.

Once the pandemic was upon us, we shifted to online offerings that dove into the intricacies of just transition in a four-part webinar series, and later convened "Fireside Chats" to explore national policy options for Alaska, following the pillars of the THRIVE Agenda ([thriveagenda.com](https://thriveagenda.com)) and making the national approaches relatable and visible to Alaskans. Through these online gatherings we reengaged

with the hundreds of community members that joined us in person in 2020, as well as expanded our community and tended to new and exciting relationships with more sectors and local leaders.

This year we gather once more in person, on Dena'ina lands, proudly bearing the name Nughelnik ("It is remembered within us" in Dena'ina qenaga). This summit will work to address the pains of the past two years, while also diving deeper into real strategy and active examples of just transition already taking place in Alaska. A just transition does not exist without the leadership and sovereignty of the communities that are deeply impacted by economic transition. Without including the voices of Black, Brown, Indigenous, people of color, disabled, queer, immigrant communities, for example, we are missing key leadership in our path forward. We are working to elevate voices that were regrettably not as visible in our first summit, and to make invitations for all identities to feel stewardship and ownership over our collective space.

As organizers, we hope that the next iteration will be regional and local just transition plans that will ripple across the state and be stewarded by local community members. Through this approach, our partnered organizations will continue to offer support and convening space for community members to lead us forward.

*The Just Transition Collective is uplifting Indigenous place-based knowledge systems and ways of life while shaping regenerative economies, stewarding lands and waters, and building more just and equitable communities for all. Can you share the specific principles and aims guiding this vision?*

We as a collective honor the Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing, which in summation includes deep inclusion of all voices and identities; an emphasis of community-driven organizing, which means we engage when tribal sovereigns and communities most impacted by issues invite us; allowing people to speak for themselves; working together in solidarity and mutuality by understanding that we are deeply interconnected and must transform together; building just relationships among ourselves, modeling just workplace practices that reflect compassion and humanity; and commitment to self-transformation.

We also honor the [Defend the Sacred Alaska Principles](#), which describe a similar approach to community organizing:

- Unlearn, Dismantle, Heal, and Create: Decolonize.
- Organize from the “bottom-up.”
- Uplift a matriarchal, decentralized, and marginalized leadership.
- Grow an inclusive movement for all.
- Create space for people to speak for themselves.
- Work together in unity, solidarity, and accountability to each other.
- Strive to build just relationships in our organizing.
- Uplifting marginalized & oppressed voices that align with these values.
- Commit to a just and equitable transition away from an extractive, oppressive economy toward a regenerative, holistic, living worldview.
- Acknowledge that we exist in a tangible system of racial injustice and that it is our responsibility to dismantle it.
- Be soulful

While we carry these principles through all our work as organizations, our tangible vision for just transition is articulated through these goals of our recently held summit, which will shine the light toward future work:

- “Remember Forward through Grief and Celebration”: This means recognizing that for many communities, the pandemic surfaced previously unspoken imbalances wrought by capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy, while many other communities have been acutely aware of their struggle to survive and regain balance since the onset of colonization. As outlined in the [2022 Alaska Just Transition Guide](#), this goal is about our effort to “reconnect healing as an essential strategy, as we share tools and practices as we move through tumultuous times.”
- “Shape Community and Post-Pandemic Economy”: This means developing “a meaningful and reciprocal plan of action to support communities, extend care, and articulate long-term healing needed for Alaska’s economy and culture.”
- “Reimagine Community in a Post-Extractive Economy”: This involves creating a space for our community “to align around a shared vision for a fundamental transformation in Alaska and beyond” and to turn this vision into action by identifying goals and sharing strategies.
- “Weave Storytelling to Illuminate the Path”: This involves an effort to “highlight Alaskan stories of day-to-day challenges and celebrations on the path of visionary planning.”

*What strategies have you discovered work best for bringing grassroots and*

## *frontline perspectives to bear on national policies like the Green New Deal?*

Our theory of engagement with national policy requires translating policy into accessible formats but also empowering our Native frontline communities to speak back to national policy.

Policy work must be reflective of those it is meant to help but also must grow from the ground and answer the needs of communities while honoring their expertise. Therefore, our work is twofold: Firstly, as is the case with the Green New Deal, we were involved in early stages to edit initial drafts of National Economic Recovery Plan proposals to ensure that Alaskan interests were protected, but also that there was unique language that accommodated both our tribal sovereign governments and our complex social services distribution, often through Alaska Native corporations.

We worked with our national partners to ensure that Alaskans could see themselves in the proposals and had many opportunities for consultation. Concurrently, we also elevated examples of Alaskan leadership, where our local initiatives were not just supporting national policy but truly driving it with visionary action: We drafted the “Alaska’s Time to THRIVE” zine to illustrate how regenerative economy is already taking hold across our state, in all aspects of a just transition. This document and the accompanying “Fireside Chats” allowed for deep consultation on these policies from an abundance mindset, where Alaskans were already positioned to lead.

Additionally, we work diligently with community members to elevate local stories from the land, and to empower narrative sovereignty — the ability to tell one’s own story with integrity and authenticity. Through storytelling skills-building and video projects, stories from community members and from the land are able to speak for themselves. We can offer our organizations as conduits to uplift and share these stories widely, particularly within national and international decision-making spaces.

One example of this initiative was our Fall 2021 Indigenous Filmmakers Intensive. Native Movement partnered with the University of Alaska Fairbanks to offer an intense curriculum guided by faculty members and Indigenous film industry professionals, as well as filmmaking gear as students wrote, directed and produced stories of climate justice from their rural communities. These stories



were later showcased at the United Nations global climate negotiations at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, and will soon be shown at the Anchorage Museum. Through these techniques, we are able to deepen the sovereignty and self-determination of our communities while sharing their wisdom and leadership with national and international policy makers.

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*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, 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 over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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## **Biden Is Breaking His Climate**

# Promises. What Are The Consequences?



*Robert Pollin*

Although the war in Ukraine has put climate action on the back burner for many policy makers, the global climate crisis is spinning out of control. Various climate records [were smashed in 2021](#), and greenhouse gas emissions are on course to hit [record levels in 2023](#). In the face of such dramatic developments, political inaction on the climate front could portend an imminent environmental catastrophe.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned progressive economist Robert Pollin discusses the latest developments on the climate crisis, starting with Biden's broken promises to provide leadership in the fight against the climate emergency, and the problems of soaring energy costs and inflation. He also refutes the arguments in favor of nuclear energy, as well as the claims that there is very little we can do to stop the burning of fossil fuels. Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where he has authored many climate stabilization projects for different U.S. states. He is also the author of many books, including *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (co-authored with Noam Chomsky).

*C.J. Polychroniou: Bob, why did Biden break his promise on no new leasing on federal lands? Aren't there other ways to fight soaring energy costs besides a "drill, baby, drill" policy? And will record high gas prices actually be solved by*

*drilling more?*

*Robert Pollin:* The Biden administration announced last April 15 that it would lift the executive order it had established in January 2020 that imposed a temporary ban on auctioning off federal lands for oil and gas leasing. This is despite the fact that, as a presidential candidate, Biden [pledged](#), “And by the way, no more drilling on federal lands, period. Period, period, period.” So much for even Biden’s most emphatic campaign promises.

One excuse that the administration has given for Biden’s flip-flop is that a federal judge in Louisiana had struck down the January 2020 executive order. However, Biden could have easily delayed the awarding of new drilling permits indefinitely by fighting the judge’s order in court. Biden chose not to do this. The administration’s excuse here is that, in the immediate, Biden has had to focus on pushing down energy prices and overall inflation. The administration claims that opening up federal lands for drilling will increase oil and gas supply and thereby counteract the sharp oil and gas price increases that have prevailed since over the past year.

Specifically, the average retail price of gasoline has [risen nearly 150 percent](#) over the past year, from an average of \$1.77 per gallon over May 2021 to \$4.23 from May 1-23 this year. This spike in gasoline prices, along with rise in heating oil prices, has, in turn, been the single biggest driver causing overall U.S. inflation to rise by 8.3 percent over the past year, the [highest U.S. inflation rate in 40 years](#).

Without question, we face serious problems with surging oil and gas prices and overall U.S. inflation. But it is also obvious that expanding drilling on public lands will have precisely *zero impact* on oil prices over the next year or two, if at all. This is because any supplies that could be produced through new drilling on federal lands [will not become available](#) in the retail energy market for at least 1 to 2 years. In addition, the amount of new oil and gas supplies that could *ever* come onstream from these projects would be minuscule as a share of the overall global energy market.

The Biden administration certainly must know all this. Their policy reversal is therefore all about optics — they want to convey the impression that they are taking strong measures to fight high gas prices, even while, in fact, they are doing no such thing. This Biden strategy is especially damaging since, rather than

straining now so ineptly to manipulate public opinion, they could instead get serious to enact effective measures that can both fight climate change and protect people's living standards against the vagaries of the global oil market.

Getting serious has to begin with the recognition that if we are going to have any chance of meeting the goals of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for climate stabilization — i.e., a 50 percent reduction of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by 2030 and zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050 — then we have to maintain a hard commitment to phasing out fossil fuel consumption every year, with no backsliding permitted — i.e., “period, period, period.” This is because burning oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy is by far the largest source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions globally and therefore the biggest driver of climate change. At the same time, the world now depends on fossil fuels to meet 80 percent of global energy demand. We should therefore assume that short-term crises will regularly emerge in which, similar to the current situation, the imperatives of climate stabilization will appear less pressing than keeping energy supplies abundant and prices low. We need to be prepared to meet these inevitable short-term crises without ending up, each time, clinging to our current dependency on fossil fuels.

Within this context, any measure now to push fossil fuel prices back down would be moving us in the wrong direction, since lower fossil fuel prices will encourage greater fossil fuel consumption. Rather, on behalf of saving the planet, we actually need all fossil fuel prices to remain high, and indeed, if anything, to increase still further. This is because high prices for oil, natural gas and coal will discourage consumers from buying fossil fuels to meet their energy needs. High fossil fuel prices will also incentivize efforts to build a new energy infrastructure, whose two pillars will be high efficiency and renewable energy, in particular solar and wind power. A high-efficiency renewable energy-dominant infrastructure will, among other things, [deliver cheaper energy](#) than our current fossil fuel-dominant system. But that cannot happen in an instant. In the meantime, we cannot allow working class and middle-class people to experience cuts in their living standards right now through high fossil fuel prices while oil companies' profits explode. How can we effectively address these equally valid, though competing, considerations?

For the immediate, the federal government should provide people with energy tax rebates to compensate them against the impacts of any temporary spikes in energy prices. One specific proposal along these lines that has been introduced in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives is a [“windfall profits tax”](#) on

the oil companies' current levels of outsized profits resulting from the price spikes. Under the Senate version of this measure introduced by Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, the oil companies would be taxed at half the difference between the current retail oil prices and the average pre-pandemic price between 2015 and 2019.

The average price of gasoline between 2015 and 2019 was \$2.37 per gallon. Based on the average market price of \$4.23 per gallon between May 1-23, the Senate version of the tax would amount to 93 cents per gallon (i.e.  $(\$4.23 - \$2.37)/2 = \$0.93$ ). This calculation assumes no further adjustment for inflation). Over a year, the tax would generate a total of roughly \$130 billion based on current [gasoline consumption levels](#), according to my calculations. These revenues would then be channeled into compensating consumers for the spike in their energy bills. Every U.S. resident would receive nearly \$400 if revenues from the tax were distributed equally to everyone. A family of four, including, for example, an infant and a grandma, would therefore receive almost \$1,600 in rebates.

A still more basic solution here would be for the government to [take over](#) the U.S. fossil fuel industry. Under a nationalized fossil fuel industry, the necessary phaseout of fossil fuels as an energy source can proceed in an orderly fashion. The government could then set fossil fuel energy prices to reflect the needs of both consumers and the imperatives of the clean energy transition. At present, the U.S. government could purchase controlling interest in the three dominant U.S. oil and gas companies — Exxon/Mobil, Chevron and Conoco — for about \$350 billion. This would be less than 10 percent of the \$4 trillion that the Federal Reserve pumped into Wall Street during the COVID crisis. More generally, these costs should be understood as trivial because nationalization would end these corporations' relentless campaign of sabotaging the clean energy transition.

The economic and ecological logic of oil nationalization are straightforward. But clearly, the politics of actually pulling this off now are nearly impossible. By contrast, the windfall profit tax approach is within the outer reaches of current political feasibility.

*The war in Ukraine has generated interest in nuclear energy. In fact, the EU has opted to label nuclear, as well as gas, as green energy investments. While it takes a bizarre leap to label an energy source associated with risks as sustainable, what*

*about nuclear energy's economic aspects? Are there economic benefits?*

In terms of advancing a viable climate stabilization project, nuclear energy does provide the important benefit that it can produce electricity in abundance without generating CO2 emissions or air pollution of any kind. But even allowing for this benefit, we need to first consider the risks you mention with nuclear energy. Because these risks are so severe, addressing them [must supersede](#) any economic considerations.

These risks were brought into sharp focus in the early phases of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That is, in one of its first offensive operations on February 24, the Russian military seized control of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which is located about 60 miles north of Kyiv in Ukraine. In 1986, when Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union, Chernobyl was the site of the most severe nuclear power plant accident in history. An explosion blew the lid off of one of the plant's four operating nuclear reactors. This released radioactive materials into the atmosphere that spread throughout the region. Despite this disaster, the other three reactors at Chernobyl continued operating until 2000.

The other three reactors did cease operating in 2000. But the site still houses more than 20,000 spent fuel rods. These rods must be constantly cooled, with the cooling system operating on electricity. If the system's electrical power source were to malfunction, the spent fuel rods could become exposed to the air and catch fire. This would release radioactive materials into the atmosphere. Once released, the radioactive materials could again spread throughout the region and beyond, as they did in 1986. This is low-probability but [by no means a zero-probability scenario](#).

On March 3, the Russian military also took control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the largest in Europe. According to a [March 11 report on NPR](#), "Russian forces repeatedly fired heavy weapons in the direction of the plant's massive reactor buildings, which housed dangerous nuclear fuel." All military actions at or near the plant create further danger of the plant's operations becoming compromised. As with Chernobyl, this could then lead to radioactive materials being released into the atmosphere.

Nuclear disasters at both Chernobyl and Zaporizhzhia are therefore active threats right now. In addition, the war is compromising the security systems that operate



to protect both sites. The fact that both sites have become combat zones means that they are more vulnerable to attacks from non-state actors, including terrorist organizations of any variety. The aim of such organizations in breaching security at Chernobyl or Zaporizhzhia would almost certainly include gaining access to materials that would [enable them to produce homemade nuclear weapons](#). At the least, they would be positioned to threaten the release of radioactive materials.

Even given these unavoidable dangers, we still might want to prioritize nuclear energy as an alternative to fossil fuels if the economic benefits were overwhelming. In fact, [according to the U.S. Energy Department](#), the costs of generating a kilowatt hour of electricity from nuclear energy are now more than twice as high as those from solar panels or onshore wind. Moreover, the costs of renewables, especially solar, have been falling sharply over the past decade, with further large cost reductions likely. By contrast, nuclear is on a “negative learning curve” — i.e., the costs of nuclear energy have been rising over time. This is mostly because minimizing the risks with nuclear as much as possible requires spending billions of dollars on safety provisions for a single average-sized reactor. This is why the huge multinational firm Westinghouse, which, for decades, had been the global leader in building nuclear plants, was forced to file for bankruptcy in 2017.

In short, there is no viable economic case in support of nuclear energy as an alternative to building a new global energy system whose foundations are high efficiency and renewables. There are significant challenges to address in creating a high-efficiency and renewable-dominant system, starting with the problems created by solar and wind intermittency — i.e., the fact that wind doesn’t blow and the sun doesn’t shine all day at any given location. But none of these problems are insurmountable, and certainly none of them create anything like the existential risks that we inevitably face with nuclear energy.

*There are certain scientists out there who contend that it is unrealistic for the world to expect to halve emissions by 2030, as the latest UN climate report states that we must do if we are to avert catastrophic global heating. Is this really an unrealistic goal, as someone like Vaclav Smil claims it is? And what about the argument, made by Smil and others, that if we abandoned the use of fossil fuels, we would end up with a global energy crisis?*

*The New York Times* [recently published](#) an extensive interview with the

environmental scientist Vaclav Smil titled “This Eminent Scientist Says Climate Activists Need to Get Real.” By “getting real,” Smil argues that climate activists, and everyone else, need to face the fact that we will never hit the IPCC’s emission reduction targets — the 50 percent CO2 emissions cut by 2030 and reaching zero emissions by 2050. This is because, as Smil puts it, “People will eat pork bellies and drink a liter of alcohol every day because the joy of eating pork belly and drinking surpasses the possible bad payoff 30 years down the road.” And further: “There are billions of people who want to burn more fossil fuel. There is very little you can do about that. They will burn it unless you give them something different. But who will give them something different?”

Smil’s perspective gives no credence to at least two huge and obvious points, which makes it especially odd that the *Times* would give his views such prominence. The first is that the IPCC’s emissions reduction targets can hardly be considered as in any way analogous to lifestyle choices like eating pork bellies and drinking alcohol. The IPCC established these targets based on the body of scientific evidence, which concludes that the targets must be achieved for us, the human race, to have any chance of avoiding the most severe consequences of climate change. With daytime temperatures in parts of India and Pakistan [currently reaching 120-124°F Fahrenheit](#), do we need any more reminders of what we are facing right now with climate change?

The second point is that advancing a global clean energy transformation is certainly technically and economically feasible, as we have [discussed at length](#) many times.

It can be accomplished within a viable global Green New Deal project that can also deliver expanding decent work opportunities, rising mass living standards, and dramatic reductions in poverty in all regions of the world. It is true that we cannot eliminate fossil fuels immediately, given that they currently supply 80 percent of all global energy needs. But we can eliminate fossil fuels entirely within 20 to 25 years through the global Green New Deal. It is simply a matter of political will. To build that political will, we cannot be distracted by empty pronouncements from the likes of Vaclav Smil, just as we cannot permit politicians, starting with Joe Biden, to toss aside their promises on climate action whenever such promises become temporarily inconvenient.

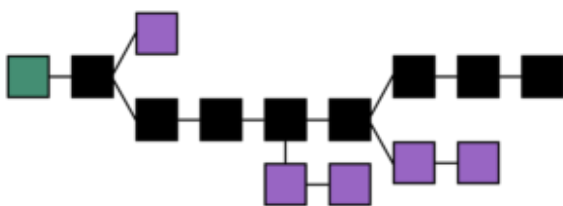
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*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, 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 over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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**Trust me (we'll get to know each other later) - Tagline: blockchain re-invents who and how we trust**



*Ills.: nl.wikipedia.org*

I've been mulling a wry title for this piece. The passage of deliberation punctuated by flocks of green avians (yes, parrots and in Amsterdam!) dissecting the blue, blue firmament on their screeching way to somewhere possibly exotic, only to pivot and rush back the way they had come mere moments later.

The struggle is to find the depth of pith required to compliment the hint of wit that will sustain attention beyond a headline. 'Trust me (again)' comes close as does 'Trust re-invented'. 'Trust 2.0' is potentially smirk worthy but only to those, perhaps, for whom Web 3.0 or Industry 4.0 elicit a familiar nod.

Trust me, this was the best I could do.

Most of us trust someone or something: a distant cousin on your mother's side, a company, an institution, or even the government. Agreed, it was not strictly necessary to add the word 'even' when mentioning the government and yet...

Trust runs through us like Brighton through rock. It's free and freely given. It's easily and frequently betrayed only to be given again.

And so...

We trust that the barber is no Sweeney Todd; that government will safeguard state pensions; that the late-night Uber driver is, honestly, just an Uber driver; that the limited-edition Warhol is not, on inspection, a Wharwhole; that the heating engineer can distinguish a water pipe from a gas pipe; that the eviction technician barring entry to Koooolers Nightclub will not sell the enforced copy of your ID to X-Ron3023, a denizen of the dark-web and a close associate of NightKnightBungie100-2; that the recently promoted (former) assistant VP now has access to the executive bathroom on the top floor.

We need trust. The moment maker. The oil in the works. What is there without trust? And I implore you to keep in mind that trust starts with truth and ends with truth, fear leads to more fear, and trust leads to more trust, and we must surely all concur that to be trusted is a greater compliment than being loved. Trust Hemmingway to weigh in with 'The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.'

All good. Not a jot of critique from my side. Old school trust. Built over decades, augmented by endorsements of others. The trusted and tested and true assured

reliance on character and values and judgement, our innate ability and strength to see the truth of someone or something leading us have confidence (unscientifically, some might say) that our best interests will be represented, or at the very least not compromised.

It's been a battle - a losing battle - to maintain my willingness to trust those making increasingly frequent requests for, yes, my trust. You can trust us with your profile data, they cry; you can trust our claim that the coffee-famer received a living wage in the production of this premium product; that the energy powering my microwave is not only green but the greenest; and that this cod was sustainably caught in the North Sea using the latest ecologically friendly gear and the discard (read: disposing of dead fish that you'd rather not have caught) was negligible.

Sceptical? Should you find a moment in your local supermarket to peruse the little letters and labels printed on the packaging en route past Dairy and Fresh to where Linda waits patiently at the checkout, you'll surely agree that the credibility of these claims is enhanced by cutting-edge keywords that include (but are not limited to) WiggleWobble certified, artisan organic, free range (define range) and farm fresh(ness) - whatever that means.

Further doubts may be placated by a plethora of QR codes and high-quality logos and, without a shred of hesitation on my part, I'd like to state for the record that many of these logos go way beyond clipart.

Look, we're a few paragraphs in and I've not mentioned blockchain which has not been easy. Don't ask or expect me to defend the many (but not all) justifiable claims that cast blockchain in a poor light. Decades must pass before blockchain's battered reputational half-life decays to the point of defying detection.

Blockchain. Disruptive? Disreputable? I need to move on as, otherwise, this post will assume book-length dimensions as I attempt to parry what many are thinking. My plea, humbly made, is that you will accept that blockchain is a 'thing' and that we'll save other discussion for later.

[Author's note: the remainder of this article contains numerous dangerous bends in train of thought, and a range of concepts and terms invented by nerds whose average age is twenty-three. Continue reading only under medical advisement].

How can blockchain replace old school trust? What could possibly supplant the handshake, the written agreement, the unshakeable faith in a bond handed down the generations?

The answer is that blockchain cannot replace any of these things.

Rather, blockchain facilitates alternative forms of trust. Trust between parties that have never met, who have not heard of one another, who do not like each other, who compete with each other and – I’m just putting it out there – do not trust each other. Blockchain facilitates trustless transactions where a distributed network of ‘verifiers of truth’ (nodes) guarantee both the execution of transactions between parties (liveness) as well as the integrity of transactions following agreement (consensus).

Furthermore, blockchain requires no mediating (meddling?) third-party as an enabler and, as a result, there is no centralised authority needed to deny or refuse or scrutinise or record any transaction or interaction between two parties. Humans are not involved in consensus forming and, as a result, there is no opinion-based influence and no ad-hoc bias. Given the same set of inputs, the blockchain will consistently resolve in the same manner each time of asking. Trust me on that.

In considering how blockchain helps reinvent trust, we need to first dispel the notion that blockchain and cryptocurrency are synonymous. The reputations of the former tarnished by the ponziness of the latter. Take transactions for example. The first and best-known blockchain network was named ‘Bitcoin’, while the first and best-known cryptocurrency was named ‘bitcoin’ (the branding agency has a lot of explaining to do). And the first transaction involved a bitcoin token on the Bitcoin network.

The term ‘transaction’ can also mislead. A transaction could, indeed, refer to a payment from one party to another. However, a transaction may involve the transfer of intellectual property, or of a digital work of art (NFTs are the new black, digital scarcity and ownership guaranteed), or the verification of a claim such as the right to drive, your age (remember Koooolers), relevant skills (remember the heating engineer), your academic credentials, certain rights (remember the former assistant VP), or sustainable fish (remember the cod).

Two examples suffused with a sprinkling of geek-speak will either pave the way to

your 'ah-ha' moment or reinforce existing beliefs that old-school trust is all you can trust.

### *Koooolers Nightclub*

You're at the door of Koooolers Nightclub. Midnight. The bouncer needs to see your ID. He turns to make a copy of your driving license on an ancient Xerox 1048 circa 1984. Copy? "Yes, mate. Company policy. Any other questions?" It's raining and you don't have any other questions. In order to gain entry to this den of partyness, you've just entrusted - to a stranger - your full name, your photograph, date of birth, place of birth, your driving license number, your social security number, how long you've had your licence, and an overview of the vehicles you are permitted to drive when all that is really required to enter Koooolers is a check on if you are old enough, not even how old you are. If we think this through, you've also given away your physical location confirming that you are not home, your preference for a down-market nightclub, and indicated your willingness to part with personal data at the request of someone wearing a tight suit. Self sovereign identity (SSI) is an approach to digital identity management gives individuals control of their digital identities using, often, blockchain to secure and protect privacy. SSI would change the above scenario as follows: a scan of your face would match against the blockchain secured and encoded biometrics of your ID document (this offers a proof that you are the holder of the ID based on the permission you've granted to perform this verification just once for this specific task). In this manner, you have verified yourself against a credential (your driving license) issued by a trusted party (the Government). You would also need to give permission to establish that your age is above the minimum age required to enter Koooolers. In this case, the same credential can be used as your date of birth is also an element of your driving license data secured on the blockchain. It checks out and moments later you are swapping stories with a retired wrestler while the barman inexpertly assembles a watery cocktail replete with maraschino cherry and tiny umbrella.

Cranking up the geek-factor a tad, the Koooolers scenario demonstrates an application of non-interactive zero-knowledge proofs that require no interaction between the issuer of a credential (the Government) and the verifier (Koooolers) to establish the veracity of a claim (you are old enough). Using SSI in combination with zk proof technology, you have been able to prove your claim without giving away any data that you'd rather keep private.

## *Supermarket.*

It's true. Sustainably caught cod tastes better than other cod. And even if it doesn't, it feels like it should and, as you've paid a premium for this ecologically friendly product, you'll exercise your deity-given right to believe whatever you want about the taste.

But let's move beyond the sustainability claims on the packaging: tiny letters, even smaller logos, certifications from bodies you've never heard off, a web address here, a QR code there. We are asked to trust in so many claims these days that, in order to determine which are genuine, something more is required. What follows is a cod-inspired thought experiment: a fishing boat in the North Sea. The captain, somewhat nervously, has deployed imaging and sensor-technology on his boat that captures 20 data points every thirty seconds. A trip of 16 hours would record 38400 micro-measurements on salinity, humidity, line tension, fuel consumption and a host of other metrics. Real-time processing of this data in the cloud using buzz-word compliant artificial intelligence, big data analytics, image recognition and other cool techniques provide two types of output. Firstly, actionable insights that benefit the captain immediately by suggesting, for example, adjustments to set ups, gear choice, and speed which positively impact the profitability of this trip; secondly, the cloud-based analytics will provide sustainability proofs. This latter output forms the basis of establishing verifiable sustainability claims that cod-fans can rely on. A boat can prove it has not strayed outside of mandated fishing grounds (without revealing where, specifically, it fished), that the weight of fish caught has not exceeded the amount of fish landed (without revealing how much was caught), that discard is within regulatory tolerance, that bycatch is limited, that the gear used did not damage marine ecology. These claims can be cryptographically secured on the blockchain and made available - at the captain's discretion - to those asking for proofs.

A picky point of clarification is required here. We are talking about proofs and the role of blockchain in creating trust in claims. We are not implying that blockchain is a synonym for database. More plainly stated, blockchain is not better at being a database than, say, a database. Blockchain offers an immutable, auditable (and often) public trust layer enabling claims to be verified. In this cod example, the data, outputs and insights are all owned and controlled by the boat captain. ZK technology, as used in the Koooolers example, allows for minimal reveal without giving away information a captain would rather keep confidential.

This means that (downstream), consumers can trust in sustainability claims. Furthermore, this means that (upstream), regulators can trust in claims of sustainable fishing practices and can act (regulate) based on traceability and verification rather than on aggregate modelling and assumption.

We started talking about trust and ended up with blockchain. How did that happen?

My hopes for readers that made it this far are two-fold. Firstly, that you (now) regard blockchain as a real and unstoppable and disruptive technology and, secondly, that trust in a technology that reinvents trust is more than purely tautological.

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*Mike Russell* is Senior Lecturer and Researcher at the Amsterdam University of Applied Science and at Northumbria University. Since gaining a PhD in man-machine interaction from the University of Wales, Russell has waited decades for blockchain's arrival. During this intervening period, he has pretended to be a software developer for ITT (Amsterdam), directed the European Management Lab for CTP (Amsterdam), dabbled as an invited researcher at Hitachi Central Research Labs (Tokyo), and taught informatics at Griffith University (Brisbane). Russell's current research interests relate primarily to blockchain and something: blockchain and defi, blockchain in the supply chain, blockchain and the metaverse, blockchain and philanthropy.

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# **Noam Chomsky: The Supreme Court Is Wielding Illegitimate Authority In The US**



*Noam Chomsky*

Former president Jimmy Carter deemed the U.S. as having become “[an oligarchy with unlimited political bribery](#)” in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s 2014 decision to strike down limits on campaign contributions, and the wielding of illegitimate authority within our political system has only grown more extreme in the eight years that have passed since then.

“Illegitimate authority” is often construed to be a trait of non-democratic societies and failed or collapsed states. In reality, however, illegitimate authority can be quite widespread in so-called democratic polities such as that of the United States.

The U.S. Supreme Court, for example, has the authority to issue judicial writs that go against the public interest and even violate human rights. Public policy is overwhelmingly affected by economic elites and powerful interest groups, with the general public having little or no independent influence as [scholarly research has shown](#). The legitimacy of political authority in the U.S. is indeed very dubious when we consider the dynamics of decision-making and the rules at play.

In the interview that follows, Noam Chomsky — a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure — gives us a real tour de force *exposé* of largely unknown facts in U.S. legal history while boldly revealing how many of our governing institutions and leaders wield illegitimate and undemocratic authority over much of the country’s contemporary political and economic landscape. Let’s keep in mind that we should assume that all authority is illegitimate, unless it can justify itself. Indeed, the burden of proof is on advocates of authority, not on those question it, as Chomsky often points out whenever he discusses the topic of authority.

In this interview, Chomsky shares his insights about activism and the urgency of undertaking a transition toward a sustainable future. Chomsky is institute



professor and professor of linguistics emeritus at MIT and currently laureate professor at the University of Arizona, and has published some 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and international affairs.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, over the past couple of decades, we've been witnessing a surge of illegitimate authority. And I am not thinking so much about the increasing influence of transnational corporations on democratic processes as about decisions made by a handful of appointed or elected individuals that affect the lives of millions of people. For example, a few people sitting at the Supreme Court were appointed for life by presidents that lost the popular vote, and they often enough issue decisions that go against the majority of voters' preferences. Another example is members of the U.S. Congress who block bills aimed at the improvement of the economic well-being of citizens and the protection of the environment, choosing instead to introduce legislation catered to the interests of powerful lobby groups. Can you comment about this most despairing state of affairs in the U.S. political landscape?*

*Noam Chomsky:* The Supreme Court has traditionally been a reactionary institution. There is some deviation, but it's rare. The Warren Court's major decisions greatly enhanced freedom and basic rights, but not in isolation: There were popular movements, primarily African American but joined by others to a degree, which made it possible for the Warren Court's rulings to be implemented. Today's reactionary Roberts Court is reverting to the norm with its dedicated efforts to reverse this deviation. And it can do so thanks in large measure to the conniving and deceit of the leading anti-democratic figure in the Republican organization — no longer an authentic political party: Mitch McConnell.

All of this is, or should be, well known. I'll return to a few comments about it.

Less well known is how far back this goes. Some of the story is familiar, but not all. It's familiar that the enormous power of the Supreme Court traces back to Justice John Marshall's decision in *Marbury v. Madison* to make the judiciary the arbiter of the meaning of the law, powers going well beyond what is granted in the Constitution. His appointment by John Adams, and his own immediate appointments and decisions, were designed to undercut the newly elected Jefferson administration.

Shades of McConnell.

Marshall's opinions had a major impact in shaping the constitutional order as it in fact is interpreted. His imprint on the court is unmatched.

All of that is again well known.

Much less well known are the assumptions that lie behind Marshall's major decisions. In fact, these have only recently been revealed in legal scholarship by the important work of Paul Finkelman, who did the first systematic study of Marshall's rulings on a central element of American history: slavery, which is likely to be expunged from history curricula if Republicans regain power and can implement their totalitarian initiatives to [determine what cannot be taught in schools](#).

Finkelman explores "Chief Justice John Marshall's personal and political commitment to slavery, as a lifelong buyer and seller of human beings, and his deep hostility to the presence of free blacks in America." He then proceeds to show that in his judicial rulings, Marshall "always supported slaveowners when blacks claimed to be free. Similarly, he consistently failed to enforce the federal prohibitions on American participation in the African slave trade or, after 1808, the absolute prohibition on bringing new slaves into the United States." As Finkelman points out, Marshall's harsh and brutal rulings were "[consistent with his lifelong personal and political support for slavery](#)."

Apart from the immediate impact on the lives of those treated as less than human in his day and throughout American history, Marshall was no ordinary justice. It is an understatement to say that he is "[perhaps the Supreme Court's most influential chief justice](#)."

This is not the place to review the long and often sordid history of the court. It's enough to remember that it hardly accords with the patriotic slogans we are enjoined to chant by the new totalitarians in Washington.

As for Congress, the story is mixed. One constant feature is service to the rich and powerful, relying on means of the kind you mention. Popular activism has sometimes proved to be an effective counterforce, with major effects on civilizing the country. The New Deal period from the '30s through the '60s is the most recent case. Though the business classes worked hard to whittle New Deal

measures away, they retained strong political support, including from the last authentic conservative president, Dwight Eisenhower. In [his view](#), “Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes you can do these things. . . . [But] their number is negligible and they are stupid.”

Eisenhower’s attitudes illustrate how far his party has declined in recent years, meanwhile defaming the term “conservatism.”

One current illustration of the drift of the party to the far right is its love affair with the racist “illiberal democracy” of Viktor Orbán’s Hungary. It is not confined to Tucker Carlson and the like but goes far beyond. As one illustration, the American Conservative Union “convenes in Budapest next month [June] to celebrate a European leader accused of undermining democracy and individual rights.” Justly accused, but Orbán regards it as praise, not accusation, and today’s “conservatives” appear to agree.

Eisenhower’s prognosis was wrong. The “splinter group” — which unfortunately was far from that — was not merely waiting in the wings. It was gnawing away at measures to benefit the public, often effectively. By the late Carter years, its influence was strongly felt. The Democrats had by then pretty much abandoned any authentic concern with working people, becoming increasingly a party of affluent professionals.

Reagan opened the doors wide to those whom Eisenhower had bitterly condemned, launching the powerful neoliberal assault on the general population of the past 40 years, which is still vigorously underway. This is not the place to review its impact once again. It is encapsulated in the Rand Corporation study that we have discussed, which found that these programs have “transferred” close to \$50 trillion from the middle and working classes to the ultrarich in 40 years, a pretty impressive feat of highway robbery.

Today’s Republican organization can barely control its enthusiasm at the prospect of carrying the assault further, concealed with cynical populist slogans.

All of this is transpiring before our eyes, quite openly. The congressional GOP virtually goose-steps in obedience to McConnell’s explicit and public orders, reprised from the Obama years. There is one and only one legislative priority:

regain power. That means ensuring that the country is ungovernable, and that any legislation that might benefit the general population must be blocked. Then failure to achieve anything can be blamed on Democrats — a few of whom participate in the sham.

The most striking current example is the Build Back Better program, a quite respectable initiative that would have greatly helped the population when it left Bernie Sanders's desk. Whittled away step-by-step under the McConnell principle, now not even shreds remain.

Meanwhile the GOP leadership established their red lines: (1) defund the IRS, so that it cannot interfere with the massive tax cheating by the prime GOP constituency, the very rich; (2) don't touch the one legislative achievement of the Trump years, what Joseph Stiglitz called "the donor relief bill of 2017," a massive giveaway to the very rich and corporate sector, stabbing everyone else in the back. This giveaway to the rich also hurt the right's own voters, whom the GOP has labored to keep in line since Nixon by diverting attention from its actual programs to "cultural issues" that appeal to Christian nationalists, white supremacists, Evangelicals, avid gun lovers, and segments of the working class devastated by neoliberal programs and long abandoned by the Democrats.

The court has played its role in reviving the ugliest elements of the history we are instructed to suppress. Probably the most egregious decision of the Roberts Court was to dismantle the Voting Rights Act on ridiculous grounds (*Shelby*), offering the South the means to restore Jim Crow. *Citizens United* extended the Buckley doctrine that money is speech — very convenient for the very rich particularly — to giving virtually free rein to those sectors in a position to buy elections.

Next on the chopping block is *Roe v. Wade*. The effects will be extreme. A right regarded by most women, and others, as solidly established is to be wiped out. That's almost unprecedented. Undermining of the right of Black people to vote by the *Shelby* decision is a partial precedent.

Justice Alito's leaked draft is based primarily on the principle that court decisions should give primacy to what is "deeply rooted in this Nation's history and tradition." And he is quite right that women's rights do not satisfy this condition. The founders adopted British common law, which held that a woman is property, owned by her father, ownership transferred to her husband. One early argument

for denying the vote to women was that it would be unfair to unmarried men, since a married man would have two votes, his own and his “property’s.” (The infamous three-fifth’s human provision granted that right to slaveowners.) It wasn’t until 1975 that the Supreme Court granted full personhood to women, granting them the right to serve on federal juries as “peers.”

This ultra-reactionary judicial doctrine is, like others, quite flexible. One illustration is Antonin Scalia’s *Heller* decision, which reversed a century of precedent and established personal gun ownership as Holy Writ. In his very learned opinion, Scalia succeeded in ignoring all of the rich “history and tradition” that lies behind the decree that “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

The history and tradition are hardly a secret, from the founders through the 19th century, though of course they have no relevance to American history since: (1) the Brits are coming; (2) militias are needed to attack, expel and exterminate the Indigenous nations once the British constraint on expansion was removed, arguably the primary reason for the revolution — though later they were displaced by a more efficient killing machine, the U.S. Cavalry; (3) slaves had to be controlled by force, a threat that was becoming severe with slave revolts in the Caribbean and the South; (4) before the constitutional system was firmly established, there was concern that the British model might be imposed (as Alexander Hamilton had suggested) and might lead to a tyranny that would have to be resisted by popular forces.

None of this “history and tradition” had any relevance by the 20th century, at least in semi-rational circles. But it was surely there in history and tradition, not just *there* but a central part of the history that is scheduled for cancellation as the GOP marches downwards. All of this proceeds with the help of the reactionary judiciary that has been constructed carefully by McConnell and allies, with the goal of imposing a barrier to anything like the deviation of Eisenhower for a long time.

Michael Waldman, president of the Brennan Center for Justice and a specialist on the Second Amendment, observes that since Scalia reversed long-standing precedent by ignoring history and tradition, the court has had little to say about the gun issue, much to the discomfiture of the extreme right on the court. But

that, Waldman suggests, may be about to change. The court is considering a case that might overturn a 1913 New York law that restricts carrying a concealed weapon in public places. From Alito's comments in oral argument, and Thomas's well-known positions, Waldman suspects that the 1913 ruling may be overturned. We'll then enjoy [a world in which concealed weapons are everywhere](#).

It's worth remembering that today's frenzied gun culture is largely the creation of the public relations industry, in fact one of its first great triumphs, a revealing history explored in depth by Pamela Haag in [The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture](#).

Guns were indeed used for definite purposes, those just described. And individual farmers could use an old musket to scare away critters attacking cattle. For them a gun was a tool, like a shovel. Arms manufacturers were meanwhile developing advanced weapons, but for armies, not the public, which had little interest in them.

By the late 19th century, a problem was arising. After the Civil War, the domestic market largely collapsed for advanced armaments. Peace in Europe undermined another market. The U.S. army was not engaged in major wars. The nascent PR industry was enlisted to the cause. It concocted an exciting image of a Wild West that never existed, with brave cowboys and sheriffs fast on the draw, and the rest of the familiar fantasies, later exploited by Hollywood and TV. The subtext was that your son is dying to have a Winchester rifle so that he can be a real man, and his sister must have a little pink pistol. It worked, brilliantly, as many of us can attest from childhood memories, if not beyond.

The mythology was later expanded as part of the awesome GOP propaganda campaign to divert attention away from their actual policies and commitments. Scalia's radical departure from "history and tradition" then turned the Second Amendment into the only part of the Constitution that is worshipped fervently, that is even known by much of the population.

*What are the boundaries of political authority? Why is there a surge of illegitimate authority in today's "democracies"? And how should concerned citizens disobey illegitimate decisions made by politicians and the Supreme Court?*

Class war never ceases. One participant, the business classes — the "masters of mankind" in Adam Smith's phrase — is constantly engaged in the conflict, with no

little passion in a country like the U.S. that has an unusually high level of business class consciousness. As Smith pointed out 250 years ago, they strive to control state policy and employ it for their own interests, commonly succeeding, though with occasional partial setbacks. If their victims are beaten down or retire from the struggle, they win enormous victories for themselves. We have just experienced that during the neoliberal regression, which undermined democracy along with the huge robbery. That's a basic factor in the surge of "illegitimate authority" in today's declining democracies, and in the pervasive anger, resentment and distrust of authority.

There is of course a lot to say about why and how this stunning victory was achieved, but that goes beyond the bounds of this discussion. We should, however, be aware of the fraudulence of standard shibboleths like "letting the market reign" and other phrases that barely count as caricatures.

The "boundaries" of this triumph of illegitimate authority can only be set by an engaged public, just as happened in the '30s and at other periods of history when the "masters" were somewhat tamed. There are no general answers to questions about appropriate measures. There are general guidelines and aspirations, but tactical decisions depend on circumstances. And they are not to be disparaged as "merely tactical." Those are the decisions on which people's lives depend — in the present era, even survival.

*Surveys reveal that an overwhelming majority of Americans want to see major changes to the country's political system. How can we fix the U.S. political system? What rules, for instance, need to be changed?*

I don't feel confident about what the majority want. Furthermore, what people want is shaped by the range of options they perceive. These, in turn, are largely structured by the reigning institutions, which are in substantial measure in the hands of the "masters of mankind."

For example, today the options are "get a job or starve," so getting a job is perceived to be one of the highest goals in life. In the early days of the industrial revolution, Americans regarded "getting a job" as an intolerable attack on human rights and dignity. They understood that it meant subordinating yourself to a master for most of your waking hours. And they had alternatives in mind. The slogan of the Knights of Labor, the first great labor organization, was that "those

who work in the mills should own them.” Anything less than that was intolerable.

Meanwhile farmers in what was then mostly an agrarian country sought to create a “cooperative commonwealth” in which farmers would work together, free from the northern bankers and market managers. That’s the authentic populist movement, which began to establish contacts with the Knights. Their efforts were crushed by state and private violence, another defeat of radical democracy. And “what people want” then changed, as the options they could envision reduced.

The task of organizers and activists is first of all to break the fetters of ideological control and to help people understand that there are ways of looking at the world that are different from those constructed by the masters and their ideological institutions. That will enable changes in what people want. Then come the crucial questions of what should be changed, and how.

*The climate crisis is intensifying. To take just a few random examples, heat waves are shattering records across major sections of the United States and a recent report on France’s drought shows that climate change is “spiraling out of control.” Unsurprisingly, climate protests worldwide have become more common and more aggressive. Do disruptive climate protests help or hinder the acceleration of a sustainable transition?*

Here we face difficult questions of tactics, which as always are of critical importance. What kinds of tactics will bring more people to become actively engaged in fending off the Sixth Extinction, and saving human society from the imminent disaster to which the masters are driving it? And what tactical choices will undermine this essential goal by alienating people? There’s no algorithm, no general answer. It has to be thought through carefully. There will be different answers in different places and times.

We cannot stress often enough, or intensely enough, how critical this matter is. We are hurtling to disaster at a terrifying rate, sharply accelerated by recent events. The Russian invasion of Ukraine had an enormously consequential effect on fossil fuel production, which will soon destroy us if not curbed. The war reversed the limited steps to avert the catastrophe. If that is permitted to continue, we are doomed.

*Is there a reason to suspect that the next stage of economic development, based perhaps on a green revolution, will actually have greater legitimacy and be more*



*democratic than the present socio-economic order?*

A prior question is whether there will be a next stage of economic development. Or, in fact, a next stage of human history at all aside from *sauve qui peut*: Grab what you can for yourself and maybe escape the destruction and chaos by hitching a ride on Elon Musk's last spaceship to Mars.

The next stage will be either that, or it will be a green revolution, a real one: no greenwashing, none of the fakery in which the fossil fuel and financial industries are highly skilled. We know what has to be done and can be done, feasibly. The means are available. What is in question is the will and commitment.

If we can make it that far, there are lots of reasons to expect that an authentic green revolution can lead to a much more humane social order, and a much better life.

Our choice, and not much time to delay.

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*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, 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 over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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# Alicia Garza: “The Shooter Wrote A Manifesto, And My Name Was Included In It”



*Photo: [aliciagarza.com](http://aliciagarza.com)*

The 18-year-old white supremacist who traveled to Buffalo to shoot Black shoppers at the local supermarket didn't only target the 10 Black people whom he killed. His hate-filled manifesto made clear that he aimed to target all Black people in the U.S. — and also mass organizing for racial justice.

“Black communities and Black families must once again grieve the loss of loved ones — mothers, fathers, partners, siblings, friends — at the hands of white supremacy and racialized violence,” Radical organizer and activist Alicia Garza, cofounder of Black Lives Matter and Principal of Black Futures Lab, told *Truthout* in the wake of the attack. “I am heartbroken and my heart extends to every family who lost a loved one in this weekend's senseless violence.”

Garza added: “The shooter wrote a manifesto, and my name was included in it. This is the second time in two years that this has occurred. The first time, I was

targeted along with several others in a plot to cause violence and destruction.”

According to the [New York Times](#), the manifesto published by the mass shooter, Payton S. Gendron, stated that he had decided to target east Buffalo “because it held the largest percentage of Black residents near his home in the state’s Southern Tier, a predominately white region that borders Pennsylvania.” The killer’s manifesto praised the white supremacist who [killed nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015](#) and also praised the [white supremacist shooter who killed 51 Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019](#).

The attack has spurred [renewed calls for mass organizing](#) across the country. Garza is also calling for swift action to curtail the proliferation of racial terror and broader participation in ongoing mass organizing efforts in the U.S. to push back against the emboldening of white supremacists nationwide.

Garza emphasizes that combatting the emboldened forces of white supremacy in the U.S. while simultaneously confronting other forms of inequality, poverty, climate crisis and environmental injustice will require building broad-based social movements with the power to significantly alter how capitalist institutions function and the strategic vision to initiate a transition toward a new socioeconomic order beyond capitalism. These have never been easy tasks, yet they are even more important in our own time as global neoliberalism has intensified economic and social contradictions and the climate crisis threatens to end organized human life.

In the interview that follows, Garza explains why racism continues to play such a critical role in our society, how to build independent Black political power, which is the mission of Black Futures Lab, and what is needed in the face of attacks like the white supremacist shooting in Buffalo.

*C.J. Polychroniou: What words would you like to offer up in this moment, as people absorb the horrifying news of the anti-Black mass shooting in Buffalo?*

*Alicia Garza:* White nationalist violence is escalating — and the leadership of this country refuses to do anything significant about it. For the last six years, the former president, his supporters and like-minded politicians have taken up a bullhorn to work up white nationalists, white supremacists and vigilantes. They have gained political capital by stoking the fears of people who fear demographic

change, and given political and moral cover to those who respond to these changes — and to their fear of and anxiety about this country's undeniable future — with violence. This is not new. We know the backlash that occurs when Black communities flex our power. The response has always been racialized terror and racialized violence, and it is being used on purpose.

While the president tours the country encouraging states to spend COVID dollars on expanding police forces, white supremacists are wreaking havoc in our government and in our lives. White supremacists are emboldened when they know that there are no significant consequences for their actions, and when they realize they have sympathizers and allies in our government. Which political party will take real action to save lives and to save this country? We don't need any more empty words, statements, or symbolic gestures. We need action, and we deserve real change.

Companies like Wikipedia and Facebook are also complacent, as they shelter and provide information that allows white nationalists to carry out racial terror. The existence of a profile I did not initiate has been leveraged to obtain sensitive information about myself and my family for the second time. Despite our safety being compromised, Wikipedia continues to refuse to do anything about it, ostensibly in the name of free speech and protecting "user generated content." But what happens when those users are white supremacists? I am not the only one Wikipedia will not protect — journalists and other activists are experiencing these same challenges on their site. They are just one of a few sites that excuse and condone the invasion of our privacy and leave us vulnerable to attacks from people who want to harm us because of the work we do.

Without swift and decisive action, we will continue to see racial terror proliferate, and more innocent lives will be stolen.

*You have been an organizer and a civil rights activist for over two decades. You are the co-creator of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and principal at Black Futures Lab (BFL). Could you share your thoughts on why racism remains a foundational feature of U.S. society?*

Racism remains a foundational feature of U.S. society because it is key in distributing power. Power is the ability to make the rules and change the rules, and racism helps to determine who gets to make the rules. Racism provides the

justifications for why some people have and some people don't, why some people live longer than others, have roofs over their heads and jobs, why some people can be doing really well while others are really struggling. Racism keeps us from fighting back, together, against these rigged rules, because racism helps to obscure that the rules are rigged in the first place.

*Tell us about Black Futures Lab. How did it come about and what are its primary aims and ultimate goals?*

The Black Futures Lab works to make Black communities powerful in politics, so that we can be powerful in the rest of our lives. We work to equip Black communities with the tools we need to undo the rules that are rigged against us, and to replace rigged rules with new rules that move all of us forward, together.

I started the Black Futures Lab, and another political organization, the Black to the Future Action Fund, to build independent Black political power — that means to put Black communities in a position to make the rules and change the rules, and to be a part of deciding who gets what, when, and why. At the Black Futures Lab, we have a few strategies that we employ to build Black political power. We collect recent and relevant data about who our communities are and what we want from our government — the Black Census Project is a part of that work.

With the Black Census Project, we are working to collect 200,000 responses from Black communities across the nation, to learn more about what we're experiencing every day, and what we want to see done about it. We do policy and legislative advocacy work, taking the information from our research and using it to inform policy that would improve the lives of Black communities. We also train our communities how to write, win and implement new rules that would improve our lives in cities and states. We design good public policy and work to get it passed in order to motivate and activate Black communities to vote. And we invest in our communities with the resources we need to be powerful. We provide resources for organizing that folk may not have access to otherwise.

Through our first Black Census Project, we provided Black organizations with resources to hire organizers, and the technology they needed to reach as many people as possible; we're doing the same with this year's Black Census Project. This year, we'll be moving about \$2 million to Black organizing work, to Black-led organizations across the country.

*The problem of low wages is considered to be the most pressing one among Black respondents who took part in a recent Black Census initiated by BFL. What do you consider to be the best strategies for raising wages and improving labor standards for people of color?*

In order to address the problem of low wages that are not enough to support a family, Black Census respondents favored raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour and increasing government participation in providing housing and health care. In the most recent Temperature Check polls run by the Black to the Future Action Fund, respondents want to see an extension of the COVID-19 stimulus bill in the form of monthly \$2,000 checks until the pandemic is over. Respondents indicate that they would use that stimulus check for matters of survival — rent/mortgage, utilities, healthcare. We also see a desire to strengthen unions and regulate workplaces and corporations in order to address labor standards and wages.

*Black communities and people in poverty have disproportionately high exposure to health and environmental risks. Given that environmental racism is very real in the U.S., what do you envision to be the role of Black Futures Lab in the struggle against environmental racism and in the broader task of building a global climate movement?*

Black communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental racism. We found in our Temperature Check Polls that Black people understood the environment to be about more than weather — it was also about having access to the things we need to live well. A third of our respondents said that lack of access to clean drinking water was a major concern for them, and 31 percent said that a lack of access to healthy food was one of their primary concerns related to environmental racism. Our role is to show the impact on Black communities, and ensure that the resolution to those impacts present themselves in public policy that we win and implement in cities and states across the country.

*Forging a common identity among people from diverse communities, with a shared worldview and a shared strategy in the pursuit of justice and radical social change, defined the mission of social movements worldwide during the 1960s and 1970s. I may be wrong, but I don't see this being the case with many of today's social movements, which seem to concentrate overwhelmingly on single issues and are indeed deprived of an overarching agenda for transforming our world. What are your own thoughts on this matter? Is it possible to build a broad and*

*inclusive social movement in the political, social, economic and cultural landscape of the 21st century that challenges the existing socioeconomic order while envisioning a future that works for all?*

I can completely understand why it feels like our movements are siloed — and I do think that there are and have been many efforts at creating and advancing an overarching agenda to change the world. Because so much of our work happens in nonprofit vehicles that are forced to rely on philanthropy and philanthropic dollars, our work begins to reflect the challenges we face in funding it. Philanthropy is largely divided into single issues, and if our movement is dependent on philanthropy to survive, it means we will likely be organized in this way as well. We also have to keep rebuilding our infrastructure to account for the attacks we experience from the state and, frankly, from inside our own ranks. History is not linear, and there are a lot of different factors that contribute to our state of being. But, from the Movement for Black Lives to Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, there are seeds being planted that aim to coalesce our movements into something coherent and cohesive and hopefully, one day, unstoppable. And that is something that gives me a lot of hope.

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*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, 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 over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

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# Attie S. van Niekerk & Sytse Strijbos (Eds.) - We cannot continue like this: Facing modernity in Africa and Europe



## *Synopsis*

The book is based on the view that the present trajectory of modern development cannot continue as it is now because it is ecologically unsustainable, it continues to enlarge the gap between rich and poor, and the decolonisation movement has drawn our attention again to the specific role of religion, culture and value in human affairs and the need for a robust element of indigenisation and

contextualisation. This book is strongly focused on the context of Africa, with two chapters that are written by authors from the Netherlands, for the purpose of presenting a North-South dialogue. The book contains reflection on approaches followed in building sustainable human communities in general and reflection on specific efforts to solve sustainability issues. It seeks to integrate academic reflection and insights gained from practical involvement with sustainability issues in local communities and low-income households, with contributions from Theology and Natural and Social Sciences.

*Download the book (open access):*

<https://books.aosis.co.za/index.php/ob/catalog/book/283>

## *Preface*

This book is the first result of a quite unique and emerging research collaboration between three organisations, NOVA, the International Institute for Development



and Ethics (IIDE) and the Centre for Faith and Community (CFC) that is housed at the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria. The central aim is to chart an innovative course in the debate on 'sustainability and development'. NOVA and IIDE are independent entities that both want to operate as an intermediate between the university and broader society.

### *The organisations at a glance*

#### *About NOVA*

NOVA Institute NPC1 is a not-for-profit company that was established in 1994. Our vision is a healthy household culture in Southern Africa. NOVA's overarching strategic goal is to be the professional partner of choice for households and other stakeholders working towards improving the quality of life of low-income communities. NOVA has more than 20 years of experience in co-creating solutions for everyday problems with low-income households in a trans-disciplinary research and development process, and in implementing such solutions on a large scale in a phased approach, as well as in monitoring and evaluating the impact of these solutions against a defensible project baseline.

#### *About the IIDE*

The early roots of the IIDE go back to 1995 when an international group of about 15 scholars, junior and senior researchers from different disciplines (philosophy, technology and engineering science, management and systems science) came together in Amsterdam. This meeting became the start of a formal cooperation between scholars affiliated with several universities and institutions in different countries and various cultural spheres of the world.

During its first phase, this cooperation has been active as a network under the name CPTS (Centre for Philosophy Technology and Social Systems). After a decade of operations, the CPTS was transformed in 2004 into the IIDE, registered in the Netherlands as a Public Benefit Organisation, in Dutch an Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling. With the aim of stimulating North-South exchange, an independent IIDE partner organisation has been established in South Africa and is housed at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.

#### *About the Centre for Faith and Community*

The CFC is based in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. Its vision is healthy communities through the formation of community and faith-based leaders. It works towards this through a bouquet of basic courses

and specialised programmes, aimed at grassroot practitioners and understanding theology as change-making. It also hosts various engaged research programmes, working in and with communities, in support of their emancipatory and transformational processes. Our research themes include faith in the city, pathways out of homelessness, social justice and reconciliation, doing theology with children, spirituality and healthcare and sustainable communities. We host the Urban Studio, using the city as classroom and focusing on six geographical sites in the City of Tshwane. We also manage the Unit for Street Homelessness, doing research on street homelessness locally and nationally, contributing to policy-making processes and facilitating the Pathways Operational Centre, supporting the city and NGOs in their evidence-based homeless interventions.

### *Charting the course*

The collaboration between NOVA, IIDE and CFC deliberately did not start with a sharply defined and detailed programme. To initiate the research process, it was decided to carry out an exploratory project, linking up to fieldwork of NOVA, IIDE and other partners in building sustainable communities. It is expected that by working together in a process of academic reflection as well as learning by doing, a programme will evolve, paving the way for the longer term. An important goal of the research is to enable local churches and other entities to get involved in their local communities in a meaningful way. This includes developing resources such as skills, knowledge, funds and networks.

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### *Chapters*

#### Introductory Part

#### Introduction

We cannot continue like this

Attie S. van Niekerk, Sytse Strijbos

## Chapter 1

Where do you feel Africa's heartbeat? The World Bank, Africa and the Christian mission

Attie S. van Niekerk

## Chapter 2

Re-Integrating Technology and Economy in Human Life: On the Disclosure of Society

Sytse Strijbos

## *Part 1: Issues*

## Chapter 3

Energy transition challenges in South Africa: A study of residential coal use practices

Kristy Langerman, Farina Lindeque, Montagu Murray, Christiaan Pauw

## Chapter 4

Towards a complementary approach in sustainable food production

Betsie le Roux, Mike Howard

## Chapter 5

Partnerships that flourish or fail: A case study of social entrepreneurship in the Eastern Free State, South Africa

Deidré van Rooyen, Willem F. Ellis

## Chapter 6

Stones, bricks and windows: Searching for a sacred place

Willem Jan de Hek

## *Part 2: Approaches*

## Chapter 7

From isolation to relation: A trans-disciplinary analysis of an improved cookstove project in Molati, South Africa

Pierre Reyneke

## Chapter 8

Decolonising the engineering curriculum at the university

Willem van Niekerk, Attie S. van Niekerk

## Chapter 9

Mobilising people to emerge as transformation agents for society building: A reflection on a missional team practice

Luc Kabongo

## Chapter 10

The quest of sustainability in this present 'wicked world': How to overcome Enlightenment modernity?

Sytse Strijbos

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