

Chomsky: Maintaining Class Inequality At Any Cost Is GOP's Guiding Mission



Noam Chomsky

The Republican Party has been steadily moving toward the extremely reactionary end of the scale over the past several decades. In some ways, Trump simply accelerated and finally cemented the GOP's transition into an anti-democratic, proto-fascist political organization — although the Trump phenomenon is, in other ways, singular in political history, and its impact on U.S. politics and society will undoubtedly be felt for many years to come.

In the interview that follows, world-renowned scholar and public intellectual Noam Chomsky offers a tour-de-force analysis of the evolution of the U.S. political setting and the vital role that class warfare and repression have played in making corporate culture the dominant force, turning American society into a neoliberal dystopia. Chomsky also sheds light on why today's GOP has turned U.S. politics into a culture war battle while pursuing policies that suppress social rights and strangle intellectual freedom, with Viktor Orbán's "racist Christian nationalist proto-fascist government ... hailed as the ideal for the future." In addition, he assesses the political situation in connection with the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act.

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C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the Republican Party has become an unabashedly anti-democratic political organization steering the U.S. toward authoritarianism. In fact, most GOP voters continue to support a political figure that sought to overturn a presidential election and seem to be enamored with Hungary's strongman Viktor Orbán, who dismantled democracy in his own country. It is also of little surprise the way Republicans have responded to the FBI raid on Mar-a-Lago. The rule of law is of no consequence to them, yet conservatives charge that it is the Democrats who are moving the country toward authoritarianism. What's shaping the character of the current Republican Party?

Noam Chomsky: What is unfolding before our eyes is a kind of classical tragedy, the grim conclusion foreordained, the march toward it seemingly inexorable. The origins are deep in the history of a society that has been free and bountiful for the privileged, awful for those who were in the way or cast aside.

A century ago, a stage was reached that has some similarity to today. In his classic study, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, labor historian David Montgomery writes that in the 1920s "corporate mastery of American life seemed secure.... Rationalization of business could then proceed with indispensable government support." Inequality was soaring, along with corruption and greed. The vibrant labor movement had been crushed by Woodrow Wilson's Red Scare, after decades of violent repression.

"Modern America had been created over its workers' protests," Montgomery continued, "even though every step in its formation had been influenced by the activities, organizations, and proposals that had sprung from working class life." In the late 19th century, it seemed possible that the Knights of Labor, with its demand that those who work in the mills should own them, might link up with the radical farmers movement, the Populists, who were seeking a "cooperative

commonwealth” that would free farmers from the tyranny of northeastern bankers and market managers. That could have led to a very different America. But it could not withstand state-corporate repression and violence.

A few years after the fall of the house of labor came the Great Depression. The labor movement revived and expanded, moving to large-scale industrial organization and militant actions. Crucially, there was a sympathetic administration, and a lively and often radical political environment. All of this laid the basis for the New Deal reforms that enormously improved American life and had repercussions in European social democracy.

The business world was split. [Thomas Ferguson’s research shows](#) that capital-intensive internationally oriented business accepted New Deal policies, while labor-intensive domestically oriented business was bitterly opposed. Their publications warned ominously of the “hazard facing industrialists” from labor action backed by “the newly realized political power of the masses,” topics explored in depth in Alex Carey’s *Taking the Risks out of Democracy*, which inaugurated the study of corporate propaganda.

As soon as the war ended, the business world launched a major assault on labor. It was impressive in scale, ranging from forced indoctrination sessions for the workforce even to taking over sports leagues. This was all part of the project of “[selling free enterprise](#),” while the salesmen were happily gorging at the public trough where the hard and creative work of constructing the new high-tech economy was on the account of the friendly taxpayer.

Violent repression was no longer adequate to restoring the glory days of the ‘20s. More subtle means of indoctrination were devised, including “scientific methods of strike-breaking,” by now honed to a high art with the support of administrations since Reagan that barely pay attention to such labor laws as still exist.

The business campaign was expedited by the attack on civil liberties called “McCarthyism,” which led to expulsion of many of the most effective labor activists and organizers. Unions entered into a compact with capital to gain benefits for members (though not the public) in return for abandoning any significant role on the shop floor.

The regimented capitalism of the early postwar years has been called the “golden

age of [state] capitalism,” with high and egalitarian growth. By the mid-‘60s popular activism was beginning to expose some of the long-concealed record of American history, and addressing some of its brutal legacy, again with the cooperation of a sympathetic administration.

By the early ‘70s, the established social order was tottering under the impact of the “Nixon shock” that undermined the postwar Bretton Wood system, stagflation, and not least, the growing threat of the popular movements that were civilizing the society. Elite concerns are well attested by major publications bracketing the mainstream spectrum of opinion.

At the left-liberal end, the liberal internationalists of the Trilateral Commission released their first publication, *The Crisis of Democracy*. The political flavor of the Commission is illustrated by the fact that the Carter administration was drawn largely from its ranks. The “Crisis” that concerned them was the activism of the ‘60s, which was mobilizing people to press their concerns in the political arena. These “special interests,” as they are called, were imposing too many pressures on the state, causing a crisis of democracy. The solution they recommended is more “moderation in democracy” by the special interests: minorities, women, the young, the old, workers, farmers, in short, the population, who are to be “spectators” not “participants,” in accord with liberal democratic theory (Walter Lippmann, Harold Lasswell, Reinhold Niebuhr, and other distinguished figures).

Unspoken is a crucial premise: the “special interests” are to be “put in their place,” as Lippmann advised, so that ample room is left for the “national interest” that is upheld by the “masters of mankind,” Adam Smith’s term for the business classes, who shape national policy so that their own interests are “most peculiarly attended to.” Smith’s words, which resonate loudly today.

Of particular concern to the Trilateral liberals were the failures of the institutions responsible “for the indoctrination of the young,” particularly the schools and universities. That’s why we see young people protesting for civil rights, women’s rights, ending a criminal war of aggression, and other diversions from the proper course of passivity and conformism. Here, too, a change of course is necessary for a proper social order to be sustained, tasks that were attended to in due course.

Another concern was the media, out of control and adversarial, threatening “democracy” by raising too many questions. The Commission advised that state

intervention might be necessary to overcome this crisis.

That is how “the time of troubles” was perceived at the left end of the mainstream spectrum. At the right end, positions were much harsher. The most important example is the Powell Memorandum, submitted to the Chamber of Commerce by corporate lawyer (later Supreme Court Justice) Lewis Powell. Written in apocalyptic terms, the Memorandum is a call to arms to the business world to defend the “American economic system” and “The American political system of democracy under the rule of law,” all “under broad attack” in a manner unprecedented in American history. The attack is so powerful that the very survival of the economic system and political democracy is at stake, as “no thoughtful person can question.”

Powell recommends that business rise from its traditional passivity and take strong measures to counter this “massive assault upon its fundamental economies, upon its philosophy, upon its right to continue to manage its own affairs, and indeed upon its integrity.”

The business world can easily take such measures, Powell reminds it. It holds the wealth of the country and largely owns the institutions that are bent on destruction of the business world, and American democracy and freedom with it.

The measures he outlines range widely. Thus “There should be no hesitation to attack the Naders and the Marcuses and others who openly seek destruction of the system. ... Perhaps the single most effective antagonist of American business is Ralph Nader, who — thanks largely to the media — has become a legend in his own time and an idol of millions of Americans.” The left that dominates the media is so incorrigible as to commend Nader’s efforts to make cars safer, an outrageous attack on our fundamental values.

Scarcely less dangerous is Herbert Marcuse, with his enormous sway over the college campuses. These far-left bastions are “graduating scores of bright young men who despise the American political and economic system” and who then move into media and government, institutions from which business and advocates of “free enterprise” are virtually barred. As every “business executive knows, few elements of American society today have as little influence in government as the American businessmen, the corporation, or even the millions of corporate stockholders” (who the left falsely believes are skewed toward the wealthy).

In this case Powell at last provides evidence, not just rants from rightwing screeds: "Current examples of the impotency of business, and of the near-contempt with which business's views are held, are the stampedes by politicians to support almost any legislation related to 'consumerism' or to the 'environment'," scare quotes for these absurd concoctions of the raging left.

It's not just the college campuses that must be "cured" of the pathology of despising everything American. The same holds for media, particularly TV, which must be carefully monitored and "kept under constant surveillance ... in the same way that textbooks should be." The monitoring should be carried out by neutral and independent advocates of the American way, as determined by the business world. It is of highest importance to monitor "the daily 'news analysis', which so often includes the most insidious type of criticism of the enterprise system."

Business has remained silent as this "assault on the enterprise system ... has gradually evolved over the past two decades." The innocents in corporate headquarters never even dreamt of developing programs to "sell free enterprise," contrary to what scholarship documents in extensive detail.

The harshly oppressed business community will find it "difficult to compete with an Eldridge Cleaver or even a Charles Reich for reader attention," or with the "ultraliberal Jack Newfield, who wrote in the journal *New York* that the root need in our country is 'to redistribute wealth'."

The horror, the horror!

The task of redistributing wealth even further to the very rich was undertaken soon after, in part influenced by Powell's memorandum, though the process was underway independently under the ideological leadership of Powell's major sources, notably Milton Friedman. The disarray of the '70s provided the opportunity for the neoliberal gurus to move beyond destroying the economy of Chile, as they were then doing (the crash came soon after), to applying their doctrines to the U.S. and U.K., and much of the world beyond.

Powell's Memorandum provides interesting insight into the Chamber of Commerce mentality. The basic stance is that of a spoiled 3-year-old who owns everything imaginable but has a tantrum if someone takes one of the marbles from a collection he had forgotten about. Having virtually everything is not enough. We cannot be deterred from the pursuit of the "Vile Maxim of the

masters of mankind: All for ourselves and nothing for other people,” a maxim that seems to hold “in every age of the world,” as Adam Smith observed.

It didn't take long for the assault of the masters to be understood. In 1978, UAW president Doug Fraser withdrew from a Carter-organized labor-management commission, condemning business leaders for having “chosen to wage a one-sided class war in this country — a war against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and even many in the middle class of our society,” and having “broken and discarded the fragile, unwritten compact previously existing during a period of growth and progress,” the golden age of fragile class collaboration.

And then on to the full-fledged class war of the neoliberal years.

The political parties adapted to the business assault and helped accelerate it. The Democrats abandoned their limited commitment to working people, becoming a party of affluent professionals and Wall Street. Moderate Republicans, who had barely been distinguishable from liberal Democrats, disappeared. Today they would not even be RINOs [Republicans In Name Only]. The Party leadership understood well that they cannot gain votes on their actual policies of abject service to the super-rich and the corporate sector and must therefore shift voters' attention to what are called “cultural issues.” That process began with Nixon's Southern Strategy, designed to switch southern Democrats to Republicans with racist dog-whistles, which under Reagan became open shouts. They also recognized that by pretending to strenuously oppose abortion they could pick up the Evangelical and Catholic vote. Then came guns, and all the rest of the current apparatus of deception. Meanwhile, behind the curtain, the Party pursued the Vile Maxim with a vengeance.

While the Democrats had delivered working people to their class enemy, still barriers to the assault remained. The Reaganites understood the need to deprive their enemy of any means of defense. Like Thatcher in England, their first act was a major attack on labor, opening the door for the corporate world to intensify the war against working people that had been resumed at the end of WWII. Clinton cooperated, with his policies of neoliberal globalization, designed to maximize corporate profits and undermine labor still further.

It shouldn't be necessary to review the consequences once again, from the

“transfer” of some \$50 trillion to the coffers of the top 1% to the wide range of other achievements of class war with few restraints. One revealing illustration is mortality: “from the 1980s onward, the U.S. started falling behind its peers” in mortality, [reaching over a million extra deaths by 2021](#). The increase in mortality in the past half-dozen years is without precedent apart from war and pestilence. It is also since about 1980 that U.S. health care costs began to diverge radically from comparable countries, [along with some of the worst outcomes](#).

Other dimensions reveal similar departures from the norm — incarceration, to mention only one. In the 1970s, U.S. incarceration rates were within the range of comparable countries. By now they are 5 to 10 times as high, another indication of social breakdown.

During these years the Republicans virtually abandoned any pretense of being a normal parliamentary party, to an extent that arouses amazement among long-time political analysts. Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute describe the former party as a “radical insurgency” that has abandoned normal parliamentary procedures. Some go further. The veteran political analyst of the London *Financial Times* Edward Luce writes that “I’ve covered extremism and violent ideologies around the world over my career. Have never come across a political force more nihilistic, dangerous & contemptible than today’s Republicans. Nothing close.” His comment is [endorsed by former CIA Director Michael Hayden](#).

Mann and Ornstein trace the sharp decline of the GOP to Newt Gingrich’s weaponization of the Party, turning it into an instrument to hold power by any means. The process accelerated under Mitch McConnell, barely concealed. Obama’s election provided new fodder for the white supremacist element of the campaign of diverting attention to “cultural issues,” fostering the grievances of “the Great Replacement.”

It is quite remarkable to see what has happened to the remnants of what was once an authentic political party. By now, qualifications for Congress are pretty much reduced to voting “No” on McConnell’s command and occasional trips to Mar-a-Lago to shine Trump’s shoes.

The popular base has been affected by the decline, particularly in the years of Trump worship. Some 70 percent believe that the 2020 election was stolen. Two-

thirds “[believe the country’s demographic changes](#) are being orchestrated by ‘liberal leaders actively trying to leverage political power by replacing more conservative white voters’,” the [Great Replacement theory](#) that not long ago was restricted to a neo-Nazi fringe. Half of Republicans think that “[Top Democrats are involved in elite child sex-trafficking rings.](#)” The almost unbelievable story goes on.

Most ominous is the marginal concern with global warming, a reflection of obedient leadership denialism since the Koch brothers’ juggernaut of 2009 that successfully terminated the mild deviation toward sanity under McCain. In this case, the shocking cowardice of the GOP leadership may do us all in if the GOP regains power — perhaps permanently, as a minority party, if their radical efforts to undermine democracy succeed. And with a deeply reactionary Supreme Court, they may.

If it does, we can guess what’s in store. Trump has been very clear about his intent to “drain the swamp” by destroying the nonpartisan civil service that is the foundation of anything resembling a democracy. The recent Budapest and Dallas conferences where the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) — the core of the GOP — was the star attraction made it clear enough where the organization is headed. Its guide is Viktor Orbán, whose racist Christian nationalist protofascist government was hailed as the ideal for the future. For the world, the Trump project of constructing an alliance of brutal reactionary states is likely to be consolidated. And worst of all, the world will careen to terminal disaster while profits flood the fossil fuel companies and the banks that invest in them.

Stepping back, U.S. political parties are mainly candidate-producing organizations, with little room for popular initiative, and participation limited to pushing a lever every few years.

The current primary season provides a good illustration. A candidate organizes an event in some town, appears, and says “here’s what I’m going to do for you.” Maybe a few even believe it. Then they go home and decide how to cast their vote.

Suppose we lived in a democratic society. The people in the town would have meetings in which they decided on their priorities for a coming election. They

might decide to invite some declared candidate to attend a town meeting to listen to the programs they had decided on, and either accept them or not. Acceptance might mean that the candidate is now considered.

More serious steps toward democracy would go far beyond the limited political sphere, but even such small steps as these are scarcely on the horizon.

Fortunately, significant changes are well within reach in what remains a very free society by comparative standards. But opportunities have to reach consciousness, and be grasped, firmly. We cannot overemphasize the fact that now survival is literally at stake.

Republicans are much less divided on culture than Democrats. Is this why the GOP is so keen on cultural and social fights in its attempt to return to power?

The GOP has had a problem since it shed its more liberal elements and adopted the Powell-Friedman et al., neoliberal project since the early '70s, gaining power with Reagan. Put simply, one can't approach voters saying, "I'm going to rob you blind and destroy all your support systems, so vote for me." Even a political operator like Trump can't carry that off. He has to pose with a banner in one hand reading "I love you," while the other hand stabs you in the back with the actual legislative programs.

The solution is culture wars to divert attention from policies. And it is clear enough what works with the targeted population: white supremacy, Christian nationalism, no abortion, lots of guns, no more public schools that disturb white children by teaching history or basic biology, no public education altogether because it's run by sex fiends and Marxists. Or whatever will be concocted next, perhaps by QAnon, increasingly the source of "ideas" for the organization.

It doesn't take much imagination to think up ideas that work. There's a substantial store that are deeply rooted in American tradition. That's understood by the thinkers on the Roberts Court. As Justice Alito observed in his decision reversing *Roe v. Wade*, there's little to support women's rights in American history and tradition. Certainly, they were of little concern to the Founders or authors of the 14th Amendment. So, the convenient forms of "originalism" that have recently become judicial doctrine provide no basis for the "egregiously wrong" *Roe* decision.

Same with much else. When I was a student at an Ivy League college 75 years ago, classes that brought up evolution would often begin by an admonition that you don't have to believe this, but you should know what some people think.

Recent polls have been welcomed by those who have been hoping for some progress in this domain, but the actual results tell a more complex story. One of the most detailed studies, commissioned by the pro-science People for the American Way Foundation, shows that "Among the majority of Americans favoring evolution, 20 percent say schools should teach only evolution, with no mention of creationism." But not evolution — or "evolution theory," as it's called. "[To put it simply, this poll shows](#) that most Americans believe that God created evolution," said Ralph G. Neas, president of the foundation.

In this and many other respects, the U.S. remains in many ways a pre-modern society, easily attracted to well-crafted "culture wars." That will very likely become even more so in the future as [the GOP pursues its totalitarian efforts](#) to restrict what children are allowed to read and what libraries are allowed to purchase, laws that have a broad chilling effect beyond their direct application.

Such efforts to strangle intellectual freedom are likely to be reinforced by the medieval proclivities of the current Supreme Court, revealed by recent decisions undermining the Establishment clause of the Constitution by [compelling adherence to religious doctrine](#).

These decisions effectively adopt [Justice Alito's conception](#) that the religious are a persecuted sector in our secular society, which has to be taught to respect freedom of religion.

Perhaps the religious are as severely persecuted as the business community in the American society of Justice Powell's vivid imagination.

The effort to eliminate public education has been a core part of the broader neoliberal effort to atomize the population and destroy social bonds. It has caused severe harm to what had been a major American contribution to democracy: mass public education. Much more than education is involved. Public schools establish communities of participation for the common good, helping to create a healthy democratic society. That is not what is sought by bitter class war.

A prime way of destroying a public institution is defunding. That leads inevitably

to failure and public discontent, hence susceptibility to privatization so that the institution will be under the control of unaccountable private power. With superb irony, this is called “handing the institution back to the people.”

Defunding reaches to teacher’s salaries. The Economic Policy Institute, which monitors such matters, reports that [“In 2021, the relative teacher wage penalty](#) — how much less teachers are paid than other college-educated professionals — grew to a record high of 23.5%. The financial penalty that teachers face discourages college students from entering the teaching profession. It also makes it difficult for school districts to keep current teachers in the classroom.”

That is by now no small problem. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that [“roughly 300,000 public school educators](#) and staff left the field between Feb. 2020 and May 2022. And an alarming 55 percent of educators indicated that they could be leaving their profession or retire early, according to a survey from the National Education Association.”

Harassment of teachers and school boards contributes its share to rendering the profession intolerable, and to the long-term goal of eliminating public education. That would be a further contribution to atomizing and dumbing down the population, leaving people more susceptible to control and to “indoctrination of the young,” thus reducing the threat of another crisis of democracy.

The left of the Democratic party contributes in its own way to the GOP exploitation of “cultural issues.” Class politics, workers’ rights, even social and economic issues have been rather generally sidelined in favor of identity concerns. These are important in themselves, but we should not be oblivious to the consequences of displacement of traditional left concerns, or to the effects on the general public of how legitimate concerns are sometimes manifested.

The Republican Party’s long-term relationship with Big Business is showing signs of deep friction over culture and social causes. How likely is it that we may become witness to a divorce between the two entities? And what might be the political ramifications of such decoupling?

Not very likely, in my opinion. I think the masters of mankind understand very well where their interests lie and will continue to support pro-business elements in both parties, disregarding rhetoric that they do not expect to be translated into policy. Such support can be lavish in the wake of Supreme Court decisions that

place few limits on buying elections (*Buckley v. Valeo, Citizens United*), only one of the means by which the masters can ensure that their own interests “are most peculiarly attended to.”

There has been class warfare in the U.S. for the last 40 years, and it's been a one-sided fight. However, there are political developments underway over the last few years indicating that it is no longer a one-sided class war. Do you agree with this overall assessment of class politics in the U.S.?

Class war is unceasing, but there are variations in how one-sided it is. For many historical reasons, the U.S. has had a highly class-conscious and unusually powerful business class, the underlying reason for the violence and brutality of its labor history and the lack of social benefits, by now extreme in comparative terms. The New Deal period was a break, lasting into the transitional 1970s, leading to resumption of class war in force. In the past few years there has been a renewed popular commitment to some form of social democracy, in part under Bernie Sanders's highly effective leadership, in part through popular movements that have arisen on their own. These developments have somewhat ameliorated the savagery of the neoliberal class war, but so far at least, there has not been a major breakthrough. Even such popularly supported initiatives as joining the rest of the world in providing health care, a bare minimum for a civilized society, have not been able to overcome relentless business pressures.

Such pressures sometimes reach astonishing levels. A current illustration is the legislation in GOP-run states to punish banks that seek to save human society from destruction by curtailing investment in fossil fuels. It is hard to find appropriate words for such cases of capitalist frenzy going totally berserk.

However reluctantly, segments of the business world are taking some measures that reflect popular concerns about survival. Still, I think it is not enough to cause a break between the masters and the political organization that has mostly loyally served them.

The Schumer-Manchin reconciliation bill, which Biden signed into law, reaffirmed the idea that transformational policies are extremely difficult under the two-party system even when Democrats are in control and humanity's future is at stake. On the other hand, of course, the U.S. remains in many respects a conservative nation to the point that Democrats believe that they have to be moderate

otherwise they will die. Your thoughts on the political situation in connection with the Inflation Reduction Act?

It was observed long ago that the U.S. is basically a one-party state: the business party, with two factions, Democrats and Republicans. Now there is one faction: the Democrats. The Republicans hardly qualify as an authentic parliamentary party. That's fairly explicit under McConnell's rule. When Obama took office, McConnell made it clear that his primary goal was to ensure that Obama could achieve virtually nothing, so that Republicans could return to power. When Biden was elected, McConnell reiterated that position even more strongly. And he's lived up to it. On virtually every issue, the GOP is 100 percent opposed, even when they know that the legislation is popular and would be very valuable for the population. With a handful of right-wing Democrats joining the uniform GOP opposition, Biden's platform has been cut down very sharply. Perhaps he could have done more, but he's being unfairly blamed, I think, for the failure of what would have been constructive programs, badly needed. That includes Biden's climate program, inadequate but far better than anything that preceded it, and if enacted, a stepping stone for going further.

There is a lot wrong with the whole electoral system, but in this case, I don't see how Biden had many options. The final bill — the Inflation Reduction Act — was passed with Joe Manchin's agreement, while he was laughing all the way to the bank. Kyrsten Sinema also had to throw in her two cents for the benefit of the mostly predatory private equity industry.

The act has some good features. It's better than nothing, perhaps much better, some credible analysts believe.

The political situation is ugly, and very likely to get much worse in November if the GOP manages to take over. It is likely to get so much worse that it will literally threaten survival, "as no thoughtful person can question," to quote the estimable Justice Powell.

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Howard Zinn, een sympathieke bemoelial



Howard Zinn - Photo: University of Iowa

In het voorjaar van 1971 bereikten in de Verenigde Staten de protesten tegen de oorlog in Vietnam een hoogtepunt. Ruim zestig procent van de Amerikanen was

tegen de oorlog, Washington werd bijna wekelijks overspoeld door massale demonstraties. Zo'n duizend Vietnamveteranen gooiden hun medailles over het hek bij het Capitool. Tijdens een van de demonstraties legden zo'n twintigduizend deelnemers het verkeer in Washington plat.

Een groepje gelijkgestemde vrienden dat te laat was om zich bij een demonstratie richting het Pentagon aan te sluiten, besloot toen maar op eigen houtje het verkeer op een kruispunt lam te leggen, nog onkundig van de massaal opgetrommelde politietroepen in de stad. Het groepje bestond uit een historicus, een docente aan de universiteit van Michigan, een Harvard- professor, taalkundige en filosoof Noam Chomsky, voormalig defensiemedewerker Daniel Ellsberg en historicus en activist Howard Zinn. Onder een wolk van traangas moest het groepje al gauw een zijstraat invluchten, waar het zich hergroepeerde en opnieuw een kruispunt blokkeerde, om vervolgens nog eens te worden verdreven. Het kat en muisspel duurde nog de hele middag.



Daniel Ellsberg, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Cindy Fredericks, and Marilyn Young at Mayday protests, May 3, 1971

Levensmotto

Het was geen uitzondering dat historicus Howard Zinn, professor in de politieke wetenschappen aan de universiteit van Boston, deelnam aan een demonstratie. 'You can't be neutral on a moving train', was zijn levensmotto. In de jaren zestig was hij deelnemer aan tientallen demonstraties tegen segregatie, zette hij studieprogramma's op voor kansarme zwarte studenten, en was hij actief in de burgerrechtenbeweging. Op 24 augustus was het honderd jaar geleden dat hij werd geboren.

Met een niet aflatende stroom boeken, artikelen, lezingen, commentaren en interviews, gaf hij decennia lang zijn mening over historische onderwerpen, maatschappelijke kwesties als burgerrechten, militarisme en oorlog, maar ook over zaken als onderwijs, recht, maatschappelijke onvrede, terrorisme en racisme. Hij volgde de Amerikaanse binnen- en buitenlandse politiek nauwlettend en kritisch. Voortdurend ageerde hij tegen onrecht in de samenleving. Zinn omschreef zichzelf als 'something of an anarchist, something of a socialist, maybe a democratic socialist.'



Zinn met collega's, Engeland 1945

Bombardementen

Zinn werd in 1922 geboren als kind van uit Oost-Europa afkomstige Joodse emigranten, woonachtig in de sloppenwijken van Brooklyn. Zijn ouders hadden het niet breed, in de crisisjaren dreef zijn vader een kleine snoepwinkel. In zijn jeugd jaren kon de leeshonger van de jonge Zinn maar moeilijk worden gestild, totdat zijn ouders hem een goedkope editie van het complete werk van Charles Dickens cadeau deden. Niet veel later stortte hij zich wonderlijk genoeg op het werk van Karl Marx. Op zijn zeventiende nam hij deel aan een antifascistische demonstratie op Times Square, georganiseerd door de Communist Party. Toen hij een jaar of twintig was vervulde hij allerlei baantjes, volgde een cursus creatief schrijven en kreeg uiteindelijk werk op een scheepswerf in New York. Door in het leger te gaan meende Zinn het fascisme effectief te kunnen bestrijden. Als tweede luitenant bij de Amerikaanse luchtmacht, nam hij tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog deel aan bombardementsvluchten vanuit Engeland op Berlijn en Tsjecho-Slowakije.

Napalm

Tegen het einde van de oorlog maakte hij deel uit van de eenheid die voor het eerst in de geschiedenis napalm inzette. Het Amerikaanse leger experimenteerde

in de nadagen van de oorlog al met napalm en bij wijze van proef werden terugtrekkende Duitse troepen in het Franse stadje Royan met napalm bestookt. Na de oorlog kreeg Zinn te horen dat bij deze aanval op Duitse eenheden ruim duizend burgers om het leven waren gekomen. Hij deed zijn oorlogsmedailles in een envelop, schreef er *Never Again* op en keek er nooit meer naar om.



Arrestatie van Zinn in Boston 1971

Na de oorlog bezocht hij Royan een aantal malen en deed er onderzoek naar de gevolgen van de bombardementen. Hij toonde aan dat deze strategisch van geen enkel nut waren geweest en dat de militaire autoriteiten hadden gelogen over het aantal burgerslachtoffers. De resultaten van zijn onderzoek publiceerde hij in *The Politics of History* (1970). Hierin bekritiseert hij scherp de geallieerde bombardementen op Dresden, Hamburg en Tokio tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog, waarbij vooral burgerslachtoffers vielen, en het werpen van de atoombommen op Hiroshima en Nagasaki. Meerdere malen veroordeelde hij de nutteloze bombardementen van de VS op Bagdad tijdens de inval in Irak en de acties in Afghanistan waarbij honderden burgers het leven lieten, net als tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog door de VS vergoelijkt met termen als 'collateral damage' en 'accidental'.

Burgerrechten

Na de oorlog ging Zinn geschiedenis en politicologie studeren. In 1958 werd hij hoofd van de geschiedenisfaculteit aan het Spelman College in Atlanta, een overwegend door zwarte vrouwen bezochte opleiding. De latere schrijfster Alice Walker was één van zijn leerlingen.

Hij raakte betrokken bij de strijd voor burgerrechten en sloot zich aan bij de Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), een organisatie die een

vooraanstaande rol speelde in de burgerrechtenbeweging. Hij schreef een aantal boeken over de achtergronden van de segregatie en over de SNCC, raakte echter door zijn steun aan de burgerrechtenbeweging in conflict met de leiding van Spelman en moest uiteindelijk zijn positie opgeven. In 2005 kreeg hij - eindelijk gerechtigheid - van Spelman College een eredoctoraat toegekend.



Howard Zinn en Noam Chomsky

Pentagon Papers

Na zijn aanstelling aan de universiteit van Boston raakte hij betrokken bij de antioorlogsbeweging. Zijn *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (1967) was één van de eerste boeken waarin gepleit werd voor een onmiddellijke en onvoorwaardelijke terugtrekking van Amerikaanse troepen uit Vietnam. Noam Chomsky noemt dit Zinns belangrijkste boek: 'He was the first person to say - loudly, publicly, very persuasively - that this simply has to stop; we should get out, period, no conditions; we have no right to be there...'

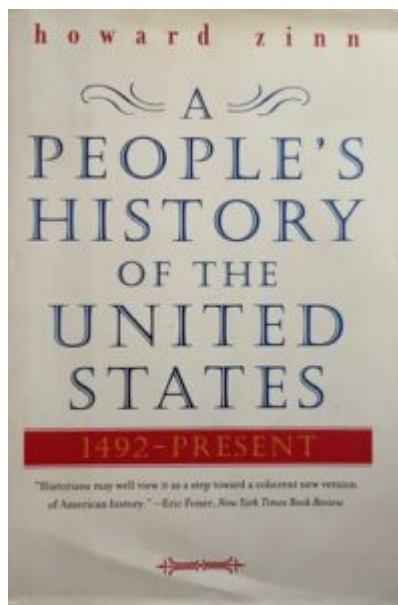
Gedurende het Tet-offensief bracht Zinn een bezoek aan Hanoi en slaagde hij erin drie Amerikaanse krijgsgevangenen vrij te krijgen.

Toen de Amerikaanse regeringsambtenaar Daniel Ellsberg in 1970 geheime regeringsdocumenten over de inmenging in Vietnam openbaar wilde maken, belandde een eerste pakket documenten in Zinns brievenbus. Hij redigeerde de documenten tot de uitgave van het boek *The Pentagon Papers*. De openbaarmaking betekende een flinke knauw in de reputatie van president Nixon.

Amerikaanse geschiedenis

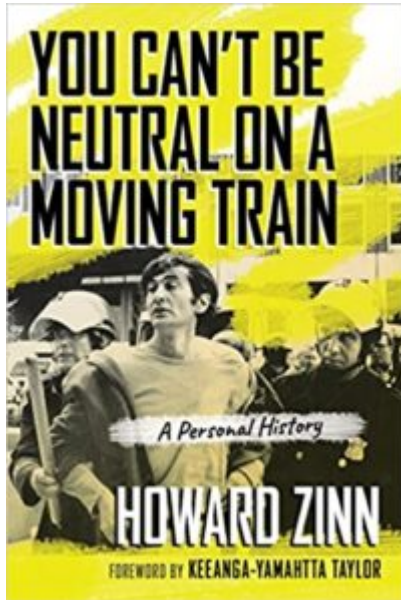
Zinn publiceerde tientallen boeken en honderden artikelen, onder meer in tijdschriften als *The Nation*, *Commonwealth*, *The Progressive* en *Ramparts*, over politiek, onderwijs, het Midden-Oosten, burgerrechten, ongelijkheid en

vakbondsstrijd. Als zijn belangrijkste werk geldt *A People's History of the United States: 1492 - Present* (1980). Daarin prikt hij de mythes door van de klassieke Amerikaanse helden en presenteert hij de geschiedenis van de werkelijke Amerikanen: de oorspronkelijke indianenbevolking, de Franse en Engelse immigranten in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw en de Europese arbeidersimmigranten in de negentiende eeuw. Zijn geschiedenis van de VS gaat niet over veldslagen, heldendom en presidenten, maar over strijd van de inheemse bevolking en arbeiders, strijd tegen armoede, verpaupering, crisis, militarisme en de macht van de staat, niet over de Pilgrimfathers, maar over boerenopstanden en vakbondsstrijd. In eerste instantie werd het boek uitgebracht in een oplage van vijfduizend exemplaren, maar inmiddels zijn er miljoenen exemplaren van verkocht. Het boek bracht een verschuiving teweeg in de wijze waarop tegen geschiedenis wordt aangekeken, in de manier waarop geschiedenis moet worden gepresenteerd en hoe het moet worden beoordeeld.



Geschiedenis is niet een opsomming van droge feiten die uit het hoofd geleerd dienen te worden, maar een aaneenschakeling van gebeurtenissen in het verleden, die doorwerken tot op de dag van vandaag. De actualiteit is onlosmakelijk gekoppeld aan het verleden, meende Zinn, en door het in die context te plaatsen, door lijnen uit het verleden naar het heden door terekken, helpt geschiedenis ons om een mening te kunnen vormen en ons handelen te kunnen bepalen. Het kreeg bovendien een vervolg in 2004 met *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, een boek met artikelen, toespraken, poëzie, songteksten, essays en

andere bijdragen van 'gewone' Amerikanen. Later verscheen opnieuw een vervolg: een dvd getiteld *The People Speak*, gewijd aan mensen die in opstand kwamen tegen onrecht en onrechtvaardigheid, met bijdragen van Zinn zelf, acteurs Matt Damon en Morgan Freeman, Eddie Vedder, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan en anderen.



Toekomst

In 2008 vertelde hij over de leidraad van zijn denken: 'We cannot create blueprint for future society now, but I think it is good to think about that. I think it is good to have in mind a goal.

It is constructive, it is helpful, it is healthy, to think about what future society might be like, because then it guides you somewhat what you are doing today, but only so long as these discussions about future society don't become obstacles to working towards this future society.'

Het werk van Zinn 'changed perspective and understanding for a whole generation,' stelde Noam Chomsky na het overlijden van Zinn in 2017. 'He opened up approaches to history that were novel and highly significant. Both by his actions, and his writings for fifty years, he played a powerful role in helping and in many ways inspiring the Civil rights movement and the anti-war movement.'

In 1988 nam Zinn afscheid van Boston University.

Zijn laatste college beëindigde hij een half uur eerder om bij een picket-line te kunnen zijn.

Hij nodigde zijn studenten uit mee te gaan. Een honderdtal deed dit.

Chomsky: Six Months Into War, Diplomatic Settlement in Ukraine Is Still Possible



Noam Chomsky

The war in Ukraine continues unabated. There are no visible signs of a conclusion to this tragedy, although it's hard to imagine the current situation remaining unchanged for much longer. The war has exposed dramatic weaknesses in Russia's armed forces, while Ukrainian resistance has surprised even military experts. In the meantime, it is more than obvious that the U.S. is fighting a "proxy" war in Ukraine, as Noam Chomsky underlines in the exclusive interview for *Truthout*, thus making it extremely difficult for Russia's military planners to make major advances.

From day one, Noam Chomsky established himself as one of the most important voices on the war in Ukraine. He condemned Russia's invasion as a criminal aggression while analyzing the subtle political and historical context surrounding Putin's decision to launch an attack on Russia's neighbor. In the interview that follows, Chomsky reiterates his condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, suggests that the situation over peace talks inevitably recalls the "Afghan trap," and talks about the exceptional form of censorship that is taking place in the U.S. through a systematic suppression of unpopular ideas over the war in Ukraine.

Chomsky is institute professor emeritus in the department of linguistics and philosophy at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Program in Environment and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the world's most-cited scholars and a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, Chomsky has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy and world affairs. His latest books are *The Secrets of Words* (with Andrea Moro; MIT Press, 2022); *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power* (with Vijay Prashad; The New Press, 2022); and *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (with C.J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: It's been six months since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, yet there is no end to the war in sight. Putin's strategy has backfired in a huge way, as it not only failed to take down Kyiv but also revived the western alliance while Finland and Sweden ended decades of neutrality by joining NATO. The war has also caused a massive humanitarian crisis, brought higher energy prices, and made Russia into a pariah state. From day one, you described the invasion as a criminal act of aggression and compared it to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Hitler-Stalin invasion of Poland, in spite of the fact that Russia felt threatened from NATO's expansion to the east. I reckon that you still hold this view, but do you think that Putin would have had second thoughts about an invasion if he knew that this military adventure of his would end up in a prolonged war?

Noam Chomsky: Reading Putin's mind has become a cottage industry, notable for the extreme confidence of those who interpret the scanty tea leaves. I have some guesses, but they are not based on better evidence than others have, so they have low credibility.

My guess is that Russian intelligence agreed with the announced U.S. government expectations that conquest of Kyiv and installation of a puppet government would be an easy task, not the debacle it turned out to be. I suppose that if Putin had had better information about the Ukrainian will and capacity to resist, and the incompetence of the Russian military, his plans would have been different. Perhaps the plans would have been what many informed analysts had expected, what Russia now seems to have turned to a Plan B: trying to establish firmer control over Crimea and the passage to Russia, and to take over the Donbas region.

Possibly, benefiting from better intelligence, Putin might have had the wisdom to respond seriously to the tentative initiatives of Macron for a negotiated settlement that would have avoided the war, and might have even proceeded to Europe-Russia accommodation along the lines of proposals by de Gaulle and Gorbachev. All we know is that the initiatives were dismissed with contempt, at great cost, not least to Russia. Instead, Putin launched a murderous war of aggression which, indeed, ranks with the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Hitler-Stalin invasion of Poland.

That Russia felt threatened by NATO expansion to the East, in violation of firm and unambiguous promises to Gorbachev, has been stressed by virtually every

high-level U.S. diplomat with any familiarity with Russia for 30 years, well before Putin. To take just one of a rich array of examples, in 2008 when he was ambassador to Russia and Bush II recklessly invited Ukraine to join NATO, current CIA director William Burns warned that “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin).” He added that “I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.” More generally, Burns called NATO expansion into Eastern Europe “premature at best, and needlessly provocative at worst.” And if the expansion reached Ukraine, Burns warned, “There could be no doubt that Putin would fight back hard.”

Burns was merely reiterating common understanding at the highest level of government, back to the early '90s. Bush II's own Secretary of Defense Robert Gates [recognized](#) that “trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overreaching, ... recklessly ignoring what the Russians considered their own vital national interests.”

The warnings from informed government sources were strong and explicit. They were rejected by Washington from Clinton on. In fact, on to the present moment. That conclusion is confirmed by the recent [comprehensive Washington Post study](#) of the background to the invasion. Reviewing the study, George Beebe and Anatol Lieven [observe](#) that “the Biden administration's efforts to avert the war altogether come across as quite lacking. As Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov put it during the weeks preceding the invasion, for Russia ‘the key to everything is the guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward.’ But nowhere in the *Post's* account is there any mention that the White House considered offering concrete compromises regarding Ukraine's future admission into NATO.” Rather, as the State Department had already [conceded](#), “the United States made no effort to address one of Vladimir Putin's most often stated top security concerns — the possibility of Ukraine's membership into NATO.”

In brief, provocations continued to the last minute. They were not confined to undermining negotiations but included expansion of the project of integrating Ukraine into the NATO military command, turning it into a “de facto” member of NATO, as [U.S. military journals](#) put it.

The glaringly obvious record of provocation is, presumably, the reason for the tacit rule that the Russian assault must be called “unprovoked,” a term otherwise

scarcely if ever used but required in this case in polite society. Psychologists should have no problem explaining the curious behavior.

Though the provocations were consistent and conscious over many years, despite the warnings, they of course in no way justify Putin's resort to "the supreme international crime" of aggression. Though it may help explain a crime, provocation provides no justification for it.

As for Russia's becoming a "pariah state," I think some qualifications are in order. It is surely becoming a pariah state in Europe and the Anglosphere, to an extent that has amazed even seasoned cold warriors. Graham Fuller, one of the top figures in U.S. intelligence for many years, [recently commented that](#):

- "I don't think that I've ever seen—in my entire life—such a dominant American media blitz as what we're seeing regarding Ukraine today. The U.S. isn't only pressing its *interpretation* of events — the U.S. is also engaging in full-scale *demonization* of Russia as a state, as a society, and as a culture. The bias is extraordinary — I never saw anything like this when I was involved in Russian affairs during the Cold War."

Picking up those tea leaves again, one might perhaps surmise that as in the required reference to the "unprovoked" invasion, some guilt feelings are not too well concealed.

That is the stance of the U.S. and to varying degrees its close allies. Most of the world, however, continues to stand aloof, condemning the aggression but maintaining normal relations with Russia, just as western critics of the U.S.-U.K. invasion of Iraq maintained normal relations with the (entirely unprovoked) aggressors. There is also considerable ridicule of the pious proclamations on human rights, democracy and "sanctity of borders" issued by the world champions in violence and subversion — matters the Global South knows about well from ample experience.

Russia claims that the U.S. is directly involved in the Ukraine war. Is the U.S. fighting a "proxy war" in Ukraine?

That the U.S. is heavily involved in the war, and proudly so, is not in question. That it is fighting a proxy war is widely held outside of the Europe-Anglosphere domain. It is not hard to see why. Official U.S. policy, open and public, is that the war must go on until Russia is so severely weakened that it cannot undertake

further aggression. The policy is justified by exalted proclamations about a cosmic struggle between democracy, freedom, and all good things vs. ultimate evil bent on global conquest. The fevered rhetoric is not new. The fairy tale style reached comical heights in the major Cold War document NSC 68 and is commonly found elsewhere.

Taken literally, official policy entails that Russia must be subjected to harsher punishment than Germany was at Versailles in 1919. Those targeted are likely to take explicit policy literally, with obvious consequences as to how they may react.

The assessment that the U.S. is dedicated to a proxy war is reinforced by common Western discourse. While there is extensive discussion of how to fight Russian aggression more effectively, one finds hardly a word about how to bring the horrors to an end — horrors that go far beyond Ukraine. Those who dare to raise the question are usually vilified, even such revered figures as Henry Kissinger — though, interestingly, calls for a diplomatic settlement pass without the usual demonization when they [appear in the major establishment journal](#).

Whatever terminology one prefers to use, the basic facts about U.S. policy and plans are clear enough. To me, “proxy war” seems a fair term, but what matters are the policies and plans.

As was to be expected, the invasion has also led to a prolonged propaganda war on the part of all sides involved. On that note, you said recently that, with the banning of RT and other Russian media venues, Americans have less access to the official adversary than Soviets had in the 1970s. Can you elaborate a bit on this, especially since your statement about censorship in the U.S. over the war in Ukraine was totally distorted, leaving readers to think that what you implied is that censorship in the U.S. today is worse than it was under communism in Russia?

On the Russian side, the domestic propaganda war is extreme. On the U.S. side, while there are no official bans, it’s hard to deny Graham Fuller’s observations.

Literal censorship in the U.S. and other western societies is rare. But as George Orwell wrote in 1945 in his (unpublished) introduction to *Animal Farm*, the “sinister fact” about free societies is that censorship is “largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban,” generally a more effective means of thought control

than overt force.

Orwell was referring to England, but the practice goes far beyond, in revealing ways. To take a current example, the highly respected Middle East scholar Alain Gresh was [censored by French TV](#) because of his critical comments on Israel's latest terrorist crimes in occupied Gaza.

Gresh observed that "this form of censorship is exceptional. On the question of Palestine, it is rarely presented in such an obvious manner." A more effective form of censorship is exercised by careful selection of commentators. They are acceptable, Gresh concludes, if they "regret the violence" while adding that Israel has "the right to defend itself" and stress the need to "fight extremists on both sides," but "it seems there is no room for those who radically criticise Israel's occupation and apartheid."

In the United States, such means of silencing unpopular ideas and keeping inconvenient facts dark have been honed to a high art, as one would expect in an unusually free society. By now there are literally thousands of pages documenting the practices in close detail. Fine organizations of media critique like *FAIR* in the U.S. and *Media Lens* in England pour out more on a regular basis.

There is also extensive discussion in print about the advantages of western models of indoctrination over the crude and transparent measures of totalitarian states. The more sophisticated devices of free society instill doctrines by presupposition, not assertion, as in the case Gresh describes. The rules are never heard, just tacitly assumed. Debate is allowed, even encouraged, but within bounds, which are unexpressed and rigid. They become internalized. As Orwell puts it, those subjected to subtle indoctrination, with a good education for example, have instilled into them the understanding that there are certain things "it wouldn't do to say" — or even to think.

The modes of indoctrination need not be conscious. Those who implement them already have internalized the understanding that there are certain things "it wouldn't do to say" — or even to think.

Such devices are particularly effective in a highly insular culture like that of the U.S., where few would dream of seeking foreign sources, particularly those of a reviled enemy, and where the appearance of limitless freedom offers no incentive to go beyond the established framework.

It's in this general context that I mentioned the case of banning of Russian sources such as *RT* — “exceptional” as Gresh pointed out. Though there was no time to elaborate in a few brief remarks in a long interview on other topics, the direct banning brought to mind [an interesting topic I had written about 30 years ago](#). Like much other work, the article reviewed many cases of the usual modes of silencing unpopular ideas and suppressing unwanted facts in free societies, but it also reported government-academic studies seeking to determine where Russians were getting their news in the '70s: the late Soviet period, pre-Gorbachev. The results indicated that despite the rigid censorship, a remarkably high percentage of Russians were accessing such sources as BBC, even illegal Samizdat, and may well have been better informed than Americans.

I checked at the time with Russian émigrés who related their own experiences of evading the intrusive but not very efficient censorship. They basically confirmed the picture, though they felt that the numbers reported were too high, possibly because the samples might have been skewed to Leningrad and Moscow.

Direct banning of the publications of adversaries is not only illegitimate but also harmful. Thus, it would be important for Americans to have been aware that immediately before the invasion, the Russian Foreign Minister was emphasizing that “the key to everything is the guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward” to Ukraine — the firm redline for decades. Had there been any concern to avoid horrible crimes and to move to a better world, this could have been an opening to explore.

The same is true of Russian government pronouncements when the invasion was already underway; for example, Lavrov's [statement on May 29](#) that:

- “We have goals: to demilitarise Ukraine (there should be no weapons threatening Russia on its territory); to restore the rights of the Russian people in line with the Constitution of Ukraine (the Kiev regime violated it by adopting anti-Russia laws) and the conventions (in which Ukraine takes part); and to denazify Ukraine. Nazi and neo-Nazi theory and practice have deeply permeated daily life in Ukraine and are codified in its laws.”

It might be useful for Americans to have access to such words by a flip of the switch on TV, at least those Americans with some interest in ending the horrors rather than plunging into the apocalyptic battle conjured up from the tea leaves to cage the rampaging bear before it devours all of us.

Peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine have stagnated since early spring. Apparently, Russia wants to enforce peace on its own terms, while Ukraine seems to have adopted the position that there can be no negotiations until Russia's prospects on the battlefield become dim. Do you see an end to this conflict any time soon? Is negotiating to end the war an appeasement, as those who oppose peace talks claim?

Whether negotiations have stagnated is not entirely clear. Little is reported, but it seems possible that [“Talks to end the war are back on the agenda: A meeting between Ukraine, Turkey and the UN shows that Kyiv may be warming to the idea of discussions with Moscow,”](#) and that “Given Russian territorial advances,” it may be that Ukraine “has softened its opposition to considering a diplomatic end to the war.” If so, it’s up to Putin to show whether his “avowed zeal for negotiations is really a bluff,” or has some substance.

What’s happening is obscure. It brings to mind the “Afghan trap” that we discussed earlier, when the U.S. was fighting a proxy war with Russia “to the last Afghan,” as Cordovez and Harrison put it in their definitive study of how the UN managed to arrange for a Russian withdrawal despite U.S. efforts to prevent a diplomatic settlement. That was the period when Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who claimed credit for instigating the Russian invasion, applauded the outcome even though it came at the cost of some “agitated Muslims.”

Are we witnessing something similar today? Perhaps.

No doubt Russia wants to enforce peace on its own terms. A negotiated diplomatic settlement is one that each side tolerates while relinquishing some of its own demands. There’s only one way to find out whether Russia is serious about negotiations: Try. Nothing is lost.

On the battlefield prospects, there are confident and sharply conflicting claims by military experts. I have no such credentials; I think it’s fair to conclude from the spectacle that the fog of war has not lifted. We do know what the U.S. position is, or at least was last April at the Ramstein Air Base conference of NATO powers and other military leaders that the U.S. organized: “Ukraine clearly believes it can win and so does everyone here.” Whether it was actually believed then, or is now, I don’t know, and know of no way to find out.

For what it's worth, I personally respect the [words of Jeremy Corbyn](#) published on the day after the Ramstein war conference opened, words that contributed to his being virtually expelled from the Labour Party: "There must be an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine followed by a Russian troop withdrawal and agreement between Russia and Ukraine on future security arrangements. All wars end in a negotiation of some sort — so why not now?"

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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).

Liberal States Like California Are

Also Failing To Make Progress On Climate



CJ

Polychroniou

California has a well-established reputation as a national and global climate leader, but despite its remarkable successes in cutting emissions between 2006 and 2016, it has recently begun showing signs of having lost its way.

California is increasingly falling behind on its emissions reduction targets, and its existing policies have now been deemed insufficient to hit its 2030 target of reducing carbon emissions 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, [according to new modeling](#) from the climate policy think tank Energy Innovation.

“Compared to historical trends, California will need to more than triple the pace of emissions reductions to hit its 2030 target of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030,” the Energy Innovation report states.

The report is disappointing news, representing a weakening of the climate action that began with California’s passage of AB 32 in 2006. Otherwise known as the Global Warming Solutions Act, AB 32 was a landmark program in the struggle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Up until 2006, the United States was the largest emitter of carbon dioxide emissions in the world, and California was the second highest state in terms of total greenhouse gas emissions.

Under AB 32, California was required to reduce statewide emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. It also required that California greenhouse gas emissions be reduced to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. The California Air Resources Board, established in 1967, became the agency responsible for the implementation of the law.

California met its goal to reach 1990 emissions levels by 2020 four years ahead of schedule. In 2016, lawmakers passed SB 32 as a follow up to AB 32. SB 32

requires the California Air Resources Board to ensure the state's greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to 40 percent below the 1990 levels by 2030.

Surprisingly enough, however, California's emission reduction efforts appeared to lose momentum after SB 32 was signed into law.

Unsurprisingly enough, an environmental group gave California a near failing grade on the climate crisis in 2021. This was the first time that California Environmental Voters, or EnviroVoters, gave a "D" mark to the state since the group began issuing its annual scorecard in 1973.

What explains California's woeful progress on climate solutions?

For one, California hasn't enacted any transformative climate bills over the past 4 years. Perhaps there is a connection between California's recent inaction on the climate crisis and the fact that fossil fuel companies "spent four times as much as environmental advocacy groups and almost six times as much as clean energy firms on lobbying efforts in California between 2018 and 2021," [according to Capital & Main](#).

Indeed, California lawmakers are failing to advance bills that include deep decarbonization initiatives. When a new bill AB 1395, a net-zero bill co-authored by Assembly Members Al Muratsuchi and Cristina Garcia, was introduced on the last day of last year's legislative session, it was [resoundingly defeated](#). It would have codified in law the state's pledge to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible and by no later than 2045. It was opposed by the oil and gas sector, the agricultural industry and business groups.

California's clean-air regulators are also relying on programs and strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that are of questionable nature, according to experts. The California Air Resources Board released in May a proposal called [a scoping plan](#) that ignores the need for immediate action and leans heavily on carbon dioxide removal technologies to reach the 2045 carbon neutrality target. "[The plan does California a disservice](#)," said one state advisor, while more than 70 environmental justice groups called the proposal "a setback for the state and the world."

Transformative pieces of legislation on the side of climate justice are also being ditched in a state with a reputation for progressive politics. Just recently, the

California Justice40 Act (AB 2419) introduced by Assembly Member Isaac Bryan, which would have ensured the equitable implementation of infrastructure investments, was killed in the Senate Appropriations Committee. The bill aimed to achieve environmental justice by investing at least 40 percent of federal climate and infrastructure funding on projects that provide “direct benefits” to low-income, indigenous, and rural communities and communities of color. The California Green New Deal Coalition and many other environmental organizations had expressed strong support for AB 2419.

This was a critical piece of legislation that would have benefitted directly the communities facing the greatest environmental burdens. Infrastructure policies in the U.S. have historically promoted and exacerbated racial and economic inequality. During the New Deal, for instance, the Federal Housing Authority provided low-interest mortgages to white families but refused to issue mortgages in African American neighborhoods. Communities of color were designated as “risky areas.” The 1956 Interstate Highway Act intentionally displaced hundreds of thousands of low-income families and communities of color. A landmark 1987 report, entitled “[Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States](#),” revealed that race was the most significant indicator for the location of toxic waste sites.

A [study released by the Gender Equity Policy Institute](#) found that, if enacted, AB 2419 “would powerfully advance gender and racial equality in California.” The report estimated that six in ten residents of the state could benefit from infrastructure investments targeted to low-income and disadvantaged communities. The bill would benefit women of color since they are more likely to live in polluted or low-income areas. Indeed, in the San Francisco Bay area, 1.3 million women of color would benefit from AB 2419’s targeted investments, and in southern California 3.2 million women of color who live in heavily polluted communities would benefit, the report said.

But to no avail. The bill was obviously too “radical” even for the Democratic members in the Senate’s Appropriations Committee.

California is proof that simply being a liberal state is not a sufficient enough factor to secure progress in the fight against the climate crisis. Money talks. Powerful interest groups can easily hijack the policy agenda. The role of bureaucrats also cannot be overlooked when it comes to issues of critical importance for the common good. The California Air Resources Board’s view on

carbon removal technology represents in reality a form of continued investment in the fossil fuel industry.

The irony is that California has at its disposal a comprehensive climate stabilization program that includes climate justice and economic growth, courtesy of a group of progressive economists at the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Robert Pollin and some of his coworkers produced last year a commissioned program that [demonstrates that California can achieve its official greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets by 2030](#) and reach zero emissions by 2045. They also showed that the program can serve as a powerful new engine of job creation and ensure a just transition for the state's fossil fuel workers and communities.

The project was embraced by the union movement in California. Some 20 unions across the state endorsed the program, including a couple representing thousands of oil workers, so it cannot be said that there are no sustainable transition projects available to California or that such projects lack the approval of labor unions. The only obstacles in California to a decarbonized future are politicians stuck in "piecemeal approach" mode and the influence of corporate lobbying on climate policies.

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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).

The Inflation Reduction Act Should Be Just The Beginning



CJ

Polychroniou

Without more direct intervention on the part of the public sector in combatting the climate crisis, what IRA will produce is a green capitalist industry with profit-making as the overriding concern.

The Schumer-Manchin reconciliation bill known as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which is expected to become law after it cleared the Senate on a party line vote and key House Democrats have already signaled that they will vote for it when it moves to the lower chamber of Congress, aims to boost the economy and fight the climate crisis. It will also extend the Affordable Care Act subsidies through 2024, lower a handful of prescription drug prices (for those who are on Medicare), boost IRS enforcement, and require large corporations to pay at least 15 percent of their total profits in taxes.

This reconciliation bill is a slim-down version of the Build Back Better Act. It's a compromise, and therefore hardly adequate to address the needs of American working-class people and confront the climate challenge. In fact, to call IRA a "historic piece of legislation" is an overstatement. But it is a step in the right direction, especially for a country where corporations and big business run roughshod over the common good.

First, forget inflation, in spite of the title that the bill carries. IRA would have no impact on inflation in 2022 and negligible effect in 2023, according to a report from the [Congressional Budget Office](#).

A major piece of the bill focuses on healthcare. There are some positive aspects in it, but, again, hardly enough to make anything beyond a moderate impact on the well-being of average Americans. It extends Affordable Care Act subsidies for the next three years, lowers somewhat healthcare cost for low-income families, and permits Medicare for the first time in its history to negotiate prices for some prescription drugs. Prescription drugs cost much more in the U.S. (in some instances by as much as over 400%, as in the case of Humira, which is used to treat many inflammatory conditions in adults) than in other developed countries, and the U.S. remains the only country in the developed world without a universal healthcare system.

As Bernie Sanders charged, "[this bill does nothing to address the systemic dysfunctionality of the American health care system.](#)"

IRA also seeks to address tax fairness and reduce inequality. It claims that it will create a more equitable United States by compelling corporations with more than \$1 billion in profits to pay a 15 percent minimum tax. Conservative democratic senator Kyrsten Sinema, who always sides with the rich and the corporations, first forced the removal of the carried interest tax provision from the bill and then delivered a gift to private equity firms by protecting them from the minimum tax aimed at large corporations.

Forcing corporations making more than \$1 billion in profits pay a minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent can hardly be considered a major step forward in addressing the issue of inequality. However, the corporate minimum tax in the Inflation Reduction Act has quite different rules from the global minimum tax. It is possible, but not likely, that corporations could end up facing both taxes, and that would indeed be a useful start towards tackling extreme inequality.

Energy and climate are what the Inflation Reduction Act is mostly all about. IRA would raise approximately \$739 billion over 10 years and spend \$433 billion on new investments over a decade, resulting in an overall deficit reduction of roughly \$300 billion. The big winners from this deal are indeed energy and climate as IRA pledges \$369 billion towards energy security and clean energy. The climate and

environmental measures included in the bill are expected to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

So, let's take a brief look at the energy and climate provisions included in the act.

There are dozens of clean energy provisions in IRA that would accelerate the deployment of clean energy technologies and reduce carbon emissions—all while continuing and even enhancing the reliance on fossil fuels. Indeed, the most striking aspect of the energy and climate provisions in IRA is the undeniably concerted effort on the part of its architects to balance climate protections with the interests of the fossil fuel industry. As such, there is no pathway in IRA towards a transition to a post-fuel economy.

First, there is a plethora of tax credits for energy produced from certain renewable sources as well as for projects designed for the installation of solar and wind facilities located in low-income communities. Direct air capture facilities are also eligible for generous credits provided that they capture at least 1,000 metric tons. Tax credits are also extended to biodiesel and alternative fuels, “green” hydrogen, and to residential and commercial energy efficient buildings.

The act also enhances the tax credit available for certain new clean vehicles, creates new incentives for clean energy investments, and establishes a credit for qualified sustainable transportation fuel.

There is financial assistance, in addition to tax incentives, for renewable energy, as well as for carbon capture systems, for rural and agricultural communities. [Rural America](#) will be the recipient of approximately \$40 billion in clean energy programs and climate change mitigation projects over the next ten years. There is also funding for the National Forest System and for state and private forestry conservation programs.

There are many positive but also negative aspects behind the climate investment initiatives included in IRA. The renewable-energy funding across the board is the foundation building block of a clean energy economy. However, without more direct intervention on the part of the public sector in combatting the climate crisis, what IRA will produce is a green capitalist industry with profit-making as the overriding concern. Worse yet, investing in unproven carbon capture technologies is a sure way to keep the fossil fuel industry in the game. Indeed, IRA provides no pathway to a post-fossil fuel economy and shies away from

tackling climate injustice.

As part of its goal to enhance energy protection, which in reality means protecting the long-term interests of the fossil fuel industry, IRA mandates new sales for oil and gas drilling in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico. It extends the definition of “outer continental shelf” to include land both within the exclusive economy zone of the U.S. and adjacent to U.S. territory, and essentially nullifies President Biden’s 9/8/20 memorandum withdrawing certain areas from leasing.

Currently, there are more than 9,000 approved, but unused, leases for drilling on federal and tribal lands, and IRA is throwing open even more public lands to oil drilling. In addition, IRA restricts the Department of the Interior from issuing a right-of-way for wind and solar energy development on federal land during the 10-year period after the bill is enacted.

Coal baron Joe Manchin also managed to secure a pledge from Democrats for his support of IRA that there would be no obstacles to the construction and operation of the controversial gas line known as the [Mountain Valley Pipeline](#).

His corruption, as in the case of Sinema, knows no boundaries.

In 2021, the U.S. committed itself to reducing carbon emissions to 50-52 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. IRA expects to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2030. Thus, it narrows but does not close the gap with the goal the Biden administration set under the Paris climate agreement. However, it is highly debatable whether the climate provisions included in IRA will actually reduce emissions by 40 percent by 2030.

Providing \$369 billion over 10 years to fight the climate crisis is not enough in itself to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent by 2030. It all depends on how much private investment in new energy supply infrastructure IRA will encourage.

Economist Robert Pollin of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst estimates that public spending on clean energy through IRA will encourage at least another \$600 billion in private spending, which will bring total public plus private clean energy spending from the IRA to approximately \$100 billion per year, or \$1 trillion over 10 years. In an interview at [Truthout](#), Pollin states the following: “By my own estimates and those by others, for the U.S. to reach the emission reduction targets set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

(IPCC)—i.e., 50 percent CO2 emissions cut by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050—will require about \$400 billion in today’s economy and an average of \$600 billion per year between now and 2050. So, the total amount of public and private clean energy spending generated by the IRA would deliver, at best, about 25 percent of the necessary funding level.”

And this is supposed to be the best-case scenario.

The Inflation Reduction Act should have been a transformational piece of legislation, but unfortunately it isn’t. It is a step though in the right direction, and clear proof that activism can initiate tangible change.

The struggle continues.

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Let’s Acknowledge Inflation Reduction Act’s Significance — And Its Inadequacy



Robert Pollin

The Schumer-Manchin reconciliation bill, called the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), is a massive piece of legislation that aims to boost the economy and fight the climate crisis. It passed the Senate on Sunday, and is expected to quickly pass the House. On the economic front, the bill will reduce the deficit, close critical tax loopholes exploited by big corporations, and create millions of new jobs over a decade through the implementation of numerous energy and climate measures. The IRA is the most important climate bill in U.S. history. Nonetheless, it is also a bill full of defects, and parts of it will actually make the climate crisis worse, says Robert Pollin, one of the world's leading progressive economists, in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*. Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and codirector of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He is the author of numerous books, including *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (coauthored with Noam Chomsky), as well as of scores of green economy transition programs for U.S. states (including California, Maine, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia) and different countries.

C.J. Polychroniou: The IRA is far less ambitious than what was originally envisioned in the Build Back Better Act, but still regarded as a step in the right direction. If it becomes law, it will address some outstanding concerns about climate, health care and corporate taxes. The agreement would raise approximately \$739 billion over 10 years and spend \$433 billion over a decade, which means it will reduce the deficit. However, the big winners from this deal will be climate and energy as the IRA pledges \$369 billion toward energy security and clean energy. The bill's supporters in Congress state that the climate and environmental measures included in the bill will reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. So, let's start with the climate details in the act. First, is the sum of \$369 billion spent over a decade big enough to address an

existential threat like global warming? In fact, will the climate and energy provisions incorporated into the bill, which include the requirement that the Interior Department offers at least 2 million acres a year for offshore oil and gas leases, even achieve the designated emissions-reduction target by 2030?

Robert Pollin: The Inflation Reduction Act is the most significant piece of climate legislation ever enacted by the U.S. government. It is also, in itself, not close to sufficient, to move the U.S., much less the global economy, onto a viable climate stabilization path. We need to be 100 percent clear on both points. This is the only way that we can, at once, take maximum advantage of the major resources the IRA will provide to fight the climate emergency while also recognizing the huge areas where the bill accomplishes little to nothing as well as where it actually contributes to worsening the crisis.

First, on the positive side, it is a big deal for the federal government to provide roughly \$400 billion over 10 years to fight climate change. To put this into perspective, this is exactly \$400 billion more than what had been on the table only three weeks ago. This level of federal support will also encourage at least another \$600 billion in private spending. The public funds will leverage private investment through, among other specific programs, tax credits for clean energy investments, consumer rebates for electric vehicle and heat pump purchases, loan guarantees that lower risks to banks for clean energy investments, and a national Green Bank underwritten by the federal government. This would bring total public plus private clean energy spending from the IRA to roughly \$1 trillion over 10 years, or about \$100 billion per year.

This is a huge sum of money, but also not nearly enough. Keep in mind that \$100 billion equals about 0.4 percent of current overall economic activity, i.e., GDP. By my [own estimates](#) and those by others, for the U.S. to reach the emission reduction targets set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — i.e., a 50 percent CO₂ emissions cut by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050 — will require about \$400 billion in today's economy and an average of \$600 billion per year between now and 2050. So the total amount of public and private clean energy spending generated by the IRA would deliver, at best, about 25 percent of the necessary funding level. Again, 25 percent is way better than 0 percent. But it is also way worse than 100 percent.

I want to emphasize that this is a best-case scenario. The main reason is because

of what Sen. Joe Manchin extracted from his fellow Democrats in exchange for his endorsement. Manchin agreed to support the IRA only if, in return, his fellow Democrats would [support the construction](#) of the 300-mile Mountain Valley natural gas pipeline that would run through West Virginia as well as Virginia.

The pipeline will likely create major environmental damage, including the contamination of rural streams and land erosion. But still worse is the obvious fact that building a new natural gas pipeline only makes economic sense if we are still burning natural gas to produce energy for the next 50 years or so. This is despite the fact that burning natural gas — along with burning oil and coal — to produce energy is, by far, the main cause of climate change. Support for the Mountain Valley pipeline in West Virginia is, unfortunately, fully consistent with the point you mentioned, that the IRA mandates the expansion of oil and gas exploration leases on federal land and water.

How can we possibly reconcile a supposedly transformative piece of climate legislation with building new natural gas pipelines? The only conceivable way to get there is to also support massive-scale deployment of carbon capture technology as a major component of the overall U.S. emissions-reduction program. Carbon capture technologies aim to remove emitted carbon from the atmosphere and transport it, usually through pipelines, to subsurface geological formations, where it would be stored permanently. To date, the general class of carbon capture technologies have not been proven to work at a commercial scale, despite decades of efforts to accomplish this. After all, carbon capture would be the savior for oil, coal and natural gas industries if the technology could be made to work commercially at scale. A major problem with most carbon capture technologies is the prospect for carbon leakages that result through flawed transportation and storage systems. These dangers will only increase to the extent that carbon capture does end up becoming commercialized and operates under an incentive structure in which maintaining safety standards cuts into corporate profits.

Matters become still worse to the extent that the IRA channels big-time funding into carbon capture, as could easily happen. Several of the major programs within the overall bill do not have fully specified mandates, including the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, the Clean Energy Investment and Production Tax Credits, and the Clean Energy Loan Guarantees. When push comes to shove — and, in particular, with oil companies and the likes of Senator Manchin doing the pushing

and shoving — big chunks of funding through these programs are likely to be channeled into carbon capture. This would then mean less money for solar and wind — where the money needs to go.

Another fundamental problem with the IRA is the major level of funding that it is slated to provide nuclear energy development. This support is coming at exactly the same time that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated, yet again, the unavoidable dangers that result through operating nuclear power plants. In the earliest stages of the war, the Russian military took control of both the inactive Chernobyl nuclear plant as well as the highly active Zaporizhzhia plant, the largest in Europe. As of just last week, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi [stated](#) that conditions at Zaporizhzhia are "completely out of control" underlying "the very real risk of a nuclear disaster." There is absolutely [no reason](#) to rely to any significant extent on nuclear energy when the prospect for disaster is staring us in the face, and when building a high-efficiency renewable-dominant energy infrastructure is a realistic, safe and low-cost alternative.

I need to highlight two other major defects with the IRA's climate program. One is the absence of any just transition support for the working people and communities in the U.S. that are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry. This includes about 2.5 million people throughout the country — about 1.7 percent of the U.S. workforce — employed in the oil, natural gas and coal sectors as well as several ancillary industries, including gas stations and pipeline construction. Implementing just transition policies for these workers and communities — including guaranteed reemployment at equal wages for displaced workers and high levels of clean energy investments in current fossil fuel-dependent regions — can be accomplished at very low costs. I [estimate](#) that, as an average through 2050, the costs would be about \$3 billion per year. That is about 0.5 percent of an adequate overall clean transition program. One possible explanation as to why there is not even a mention of such measures in the IRA is that phasing out fossil fuels is truly not part of its agenda, while carbon capture is right at its center.

The other major hole in the IRA is the total lack of support for a global clean energy transition. The U.S. and other rich countries are mostly responsible for causing the crisis. At the same time, the only way to move onto a viable stabilization path is if all countries stop burning fossil fuels to produce energy and build clean energy-dominant infrastructures. As a matter of simple fairness as

well as self-preservation, the rich countries need to deliver the bulk of funding for this global project. The fact that the IRA is silent on this issue means that we have to struggle to deliver the necessary financial support to the global community through other channels. One place to start would be to transfer a significant share of the nearly \$800 billion annual U.S. military budget into a global clean energy investment fund.

We also need to generalize this point. As I said at the outset, the IRA is, at once, the most ambitious climate program ever enacted in the U.S as well as being not close to adequate relative to the magnitude of the crisis. It is therefore critical that we organize as effectively as possible to use the IRA as a springboard through which we can overcome all of its many major failings. One simple but effective way to accomplish this is to set increasingly stringent fossil fuel consumption phase-out standards at the state and municipal government levels. This would not necessarily entail any significant government spending. One example would be a requirement for utilities to cut their fossil fuel consumption by, say, 5 percent per year every year, with CEOs facing major personal liability for noncompliance.

The agreement reached between Schumer and Manchin sets a new corporate minimum tax of 15 percent. Is this supposed to be a new principle of just taxation? Indeed, how does one respond to the claim of orthodox economists that the IRA is just a "tax increase bill?"

The IRA includes two new corporate tax measures: the 15 percent minimum tax on the domestic profits of large U.S. companies, and a 1 percent tax when corporations buy back their own shares in order to artificially boost their stock prices on Wall Street. Both of these are generally positive developments. The minimum corporate profit tax rate provision is designed to prevent corporations from using accounting tricks to cut their tax burden well below the 21 percent profit tax rate that is currently on the books and frequently avoiding taxes altogether. At least now, even if the accountants have figured out how to avoid the 21 percent standard corporate tax rate, the companies are still stuck with a minimum 15 percent tax bill.

Corporate executives' overall compensation is generally tied to their firms' stock market performance. Boosting share prices artificially through stock buybacks is therefore an easy way for CEOs to give themselves a raise. The 1 percent tax rate

on buybacks will certainly not end the practice. But it may encourage CEOs to spend a bit less of their working days worrying about goosing stock prices and a bit more time on operating a company that treats its employees and community well and creates good products.

The IRA is expected to strengthen the economy and create some new jobs by spurring major investments in renewables, energy storage and advanced grid technologies. You and some of your colleagues at the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst have in fact concluded a major report on the employment impact of the Schumer-Manchin agreement, which is drawing lots of attention. Can you highlight the job creation impact that the act is likely to have? Moreover, will all states benefit from the job creation and employment opportunities that it entails?

We have estimated that the average level of job creation through the combination of public and private spending resulting from the IRA will be about [912,000 jobs](#). Jobs will be generated across all sectors of the economy and in all parts of the country. This is a healthy, but not a massive, expansion within the overall U.S. labor force. It is equal to about 0.5 percent of the overall labor force. We cannot expect any greater impact when the level of spending will be about 0.4 percent of GDP. At the same time, this level of job creation will certainly refute the long-repeated climate deniers' mantra that advancing a viable climate stabilization program has to be a job killer. In fact, even the relatively modest IRA will generate far more jobs than those that would be lost every year through something like a 20-year fossil fuel industry phase out.

We can't yet say that these new jobs will necessarily offer high-quality opportunities that pay decently, offer good benefits and working conditions, and provide opportunities for workers to freely become union members. These are features that workers and organizers will need to fight for as the new wave of IRA investments emerge. The fact that the overall investment program will be heavily subsidized by the federal government means that the government will have the leverage to establish strong labor standards for any firms with their hands in the till for subsidies.

What about inflation? Will the act help reduce inflation?

The IRA will not have an impact immediately on inflation. But after a few years, it

will help to lower prices through two main channels. The most obvious is by lowering energy prices by substituting cheap renewables for expensive fossil fuel energy. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, the costs for producing electricity with fossil fuel energy in the advanced economies ranged between 5.5 to 14.8 cents per kilowatt hour as of 2020, with these figures rising in 2021 in the aftermath of the COVID lockdown. By contrast, the average prices for onshore wind and solar photovoltaics were 3.3 and 4.8 cents respectively in 2021. Moreover, the costs of solar and wind power fell sharply between 2010 to 2021, led by the massive 88 percent decline in solar PV. The [average costs](#) for solar and wind should continue to decline still further as advances in technology proceed along with the rapid global expansion of these sectors. What could, nevertheless, wipe out this opportunity to reduce inflationary pressures is if the U.S. does actually proceed with attempting to keep its fossil fuel industry alive through unproven and expensive carbon capture technologies.

The story is similar with nuclear. The U.S. Energy Information Administration [estimates](#) that generating a kilowatt of electricity through nuclear as of 2027 will cost 8.2 cents, more than twice the current figure for onshore wind and nearly double that for solar PV.

The other major way in which the IRA could be anti-inflationary is through the provisions of the bill on health care that we have not been discussing. In particular, under the IRA, the federal government will be empowered to negotiate the prices that the Medicare program pays to private pharmaceutical corporations to purchase prescription drugs. In the U.S. at present, the most widely used prescription drugs cost an average of roughly twice as much as what the exact same drug costs in other high-income countries. This is because, in the other countries, the governments negotiate prices with the pharma corporations, preventing them from extracting monopolistic profits. In the U.S., by contrast, the pharmaceutical companies regularly mark up drug prices far beyond what is needed to cover their costs. This is the main reason they have consistently been [the most profitable industry](#) in the U.S.

Overall, then, the IRA can contribute to reducing inflationary pressures in the U.S. to the extent that it succeeds in fighting the power now exercised by the giant oil and drug companies.

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