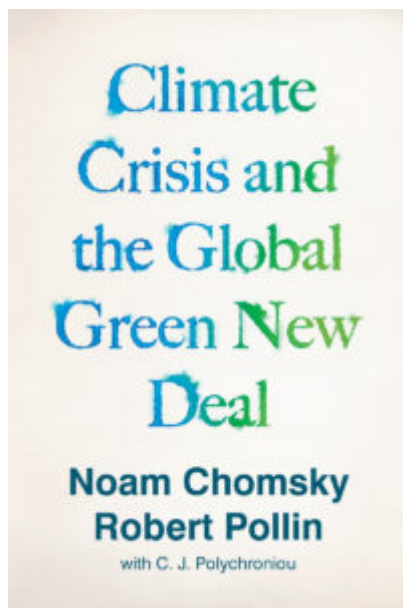


A Global Green New Deal Project



The position of the Academies of Science from more than 80 countries and scores of scientific organizations is that global warming is human-caused through the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, natural gas, oil) to generate power. In fact, scientists have known for decades how carbon dioxide traps heat in the atmosphere and contributes to global warming, with nuclear weapons physicist [Edward Teller](#) actually warning the oil industry all the way back in 1959 how its own activities will end up having a catastrophic impact on human civilization.

Naturally, the petroleum industry went on to bury under the rug Teller's scientific explanation of the impact of carbon dioxide on climate change, along with many other scientific reports on the same topic that came to its attention in the years thereafter. Of course, over the years, there has been an explosion of scientific studies about climate-change impacts on all aspects of civilized life. Most of them are produced by leading university and research centers around the world, but also from NASA, the US Department of Defense, the Federal Reserve, and the Bank of England. [The evidence](#) for global warming is indeed compelling.

Nonetheless, we live in an age where the discovery of truth through reason and science has come under attack by far too many in the present-day world, including elected officials, especially in a country like the United States where religiosity is prevalent and only 40% of its citizens place [much confidence](#) in the scientific community.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, climate change denialism is still quite prevalent in some parts of the world, especially in the United States among conservatives, which undoubtedly explains why at the Republican National Convention (August 24-27, 2020) the climate change threat was never even mentioned. For Donald Trump (and many of his followers), climate change is a "hoax" and, as the president said during his visit to California in mid-September, "science doesn't know" what's causing wildfires. But he does: they are caused by "exploding trees"

and poor forest management.

The climate crisis is real, and the only question is how to deal with this truly existential threat. Stopping fossil fuel emissions and moving to clean, renewable sources of energy is the obvious and most widely accepted solution, and the game-changer is the idea of a Green New Deal. “Some form of a Green New Deal is essential to ‘save the planet,’” says Noam Chomsky in the newly published book *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (Verso, 2020). But which form, as there are several different schemes of the Green New Deal?

Robert Pollin, co-author of the aforementioned book, outlines a detailed (Global) Green New Deal project which the world’s most revered public intellectual (Noam Chomsky) endorses wholeheartedly. Pollin’s Global Green New Deal project to tackle the existential threat of climate crisis is all-encompassing as it addresses virtually every question associated with the transition to a “green economy.” Unlike other Green New Deal proposals, it is short on generalizations and extensive on specifics, supported with ample of economic data and cost accounting assessments. In fact, Pollin has designed several state-level Green New Deal proposals, including for Puerto Rico. And his take on the transition to a “green economy” is quite different from some of the other Green New Deals that have been proposed by various other progressives, including Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, Bernie Sanders, and Naomi Klein.

Here, I wish to highlight some very specific items and ideas that are included in Robert Pollin’s detailed Global Green New Deal project, which are rarely covered by the various Green New Deal proposals in circulation.

1. Applying the insurance option to climate change: To skeptics about the complete accuracy of the scientific predictions to climate-change impacts, Pollin suggests that “we should think of a global Green New Deal as exactly the equivalent of an insurance policy to protect ourselves and the planet against the serious prospect – thought not the certainty –that we are facing an ecologic catastrophe.” The only question is how much climate insurance we should purchase. Indeed, most homeowners are willing to buy homeowners insurance even if there is only 1% or less risk of a loss caused by “perils” (fire, lightning strikes, etc.). Isn’t it therefore irrational to suggest that we should not take measures to safeguard the planet from the potential impacts of global warming?

2. Irrational and unrealistic to expect capitalists on their own to get us out of the climate crisis: To those who wish to rely on capitalism and market-oriented solutions to climate change, Pollin argues convincingly that just because capitalism got us into the climate change mess, it is absurdly naïve to believe that capitalist entrepreneurship is the way out of a potential climate change catastrophe. “Forceful forms of government intervention,” as in the case of the Great Depression, where the Roosevelt administration assumed direct role in the management of the economy, such as by embarking on massive public investment projects and ownership of critical industries, are absolutely essential for stopping fossil fuel emissions and making a transition to a clean and renewable sources of energy, argues Pollin. In this context, market-driven plans for combatting global warming, such as the carbon tax plan advocated by many mainstream economists who are still clinging tightly onto the straightjacket of neoliberal discourse, are highly inadequate, if enforced without other provisions and regulations, to make an impact on the containment of the climate crisis.

3. Public ownership of the energy industry is also not the way out. 90 percent of the world’s fossil fuel assets are already publicly owned, thus it’s obvious that public ownership of energy companies is not the solution. While it is true that publicly owned fossil fuel enterprises do not operate under exactly the same profit incentives as capitalist firms, their incentive structures are approximately equivalent – with careers, promotions, salaries, prestige all wrapped up in selling fossil fuels and generating maximum revenues. Also, fossil fuel revenues are the big source of government revenues to fund everything. The more general point on this matter, according to Pollin, is that we need to think about a variety of public and private ownership forms being given the opportunity to flourish—including small-scale cooperative ownership and similar innovations.

4. Reducing global carbon dioxide emissions to net zero by 2050 is feasible. Pollin’s Global Green New Deal project aims to meet the targets of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on global net carbon dioxide emissions, which amount to 45 percent reductions by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. For net zero emissions to be reached by 2050, Pollin has estimated that it would require committing something in the range of 2.5 percent of global GDP per year to investment spending in areas designed to improve energy efficiency standards across the board (buildings, automobiles, transportation systems, industrial production processes) and to massively expand the availability of clean

energy sources.

With regards to clean energy transformation, Pollin estimates that it would require investments in the range of \$2.6 trillion in the first year of the Global Green New Deal project. Assuming that the project gets under way in 2024, and lasting until 2050, average spending would be around \$4.5 trillion per year. The total amount for the 27 year investment cycle would come to approximately \$120 trillion, and this figure include investment spending on both the public and private sectors.

If the above figures sound overwhelming, no need to worry. Pollin says that the clean energy investment project which lies at the heart of the Green New Deal, will “pay for itself in full over time” by delivering “lower energy costs for energy consumers in all regions of the world,” and he has worked out the actual math behind this claim.

Even so, there undertakings need to be complemented other policy objectives, such as stopping deforestation and embarking on afforestation. The most recent data by IPCC reveals that deforestation alone is responsible for about 12 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, Pollin points out, upon review of the existing literature, that we cannot rely on geoengineering to get out of the climate crisis. Carbon capture technologies have yet to prove that they are realizable at a commercial level, and, according to some expert assessments highly unlikely that they can be adequately introduced before the second half of the century. As for the nuclear power option, which appears to be attractive by the mere fact that it does not generate carbon dioxide emissions, Pollin stresses out that there are too many risks associated with reliance on nuclear energy on a global scale, which range from the problem of radioactive wastes to nuclear reactor meltdowns and of course political security issues.

5. Financing the Global Green New Deal and Standards of Fairness. Financing the Global Green New Deal is not an especially challenging problem to solve, says Pollin, and shows how it can be done through primarily four large-scale funding sources: (1) a carbon tax, with 75 percent of the revenues going back to the public but 25 percent channeled into clean energy investment projects; (2) transfer funds out of military budgets; (3) a Green Bond lending program introduced by the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank; (4) the elimination of all fossil fuel subsidies and the transfer of 25 percent of those funds

into clean energy investments. In *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*, Pollin spells out the details for each one of these funding sources for his Global Green New Deal, while ensuring at the same time that they meet basic standards of fairness by subjecting them to scrutiny.

6. Shifting to clean energy resources would create new jobs and encourage growth. Fear of job losses associated with the elimination of the fossil fuel industry keeps many people away from supporting the Green New Deal. Yet, Pollin shows that such fears are completely unwarranted and the only question is how many new jobs will be created through the creation of a green economy, and correspondingly, how many will be lost. Undoubtedly, there will be job losses and community impacts from the contraction of the fossil fuel industry, which is why just transition policies, spelled out by Pollin in a detailed fashion, are absolutely essential. But job creation and the implementation of just transition policies lie at the heart of the Global Green New Deal project. Based on research that Pollin has conducted with others on this question, involving countries with significant differences in levels of development, he says that all countries will experience significant gains in job creation. In India, for example, it's estimated that "increasing clean energy investments by 2 percent of GDP every year for twenty years will generate an average net increase of about 13 million jobs per year."

7. Actions to combat global warming by individual countries still matters. While a Global Green Deal is absolutely essential and critical for avoiding a climate change catastrophe, Pollin points out that every place matters in the struggle to secure the target of zero net global carbon emissions by 2050. For if we add up China, the United States, and the European Union (EU), the combined carbon dioxide emissions amount to only 52 percent of the global total. In other words, we are still only half way to global net zero emissions even if China, the United States, and the EU were to get to zero tomorrow. Thus, as Pollin forcefully makes the point, there can be no exception to the application of the Green New Deal. He brings this point home by mentioning India, which, if it is excluded from a Green New Deal, and continues to rely on the burning of oil, coal, and natural gas for its economic growth, its carbon dioxide emissions would have increased by 5,5 billion tons under a baseline scenario of 3 percent annual growth through 2050. With this scenario at work, the global economy will be nowhere close to hitting the target of zero net emissions by 2050.

8. Degrowth as a strategy to combat climate change leads to a dead end. Pollin

takes issue with the proponents of degrowth by arguing that it does not provide “a viable stabilization framework.” As with practically everything else around his Global Green New Deal project, he makes the case against degrowth on the basis of economic data and analysis – and actually basic arithmetic. He points out that global carbon emission need to drop from their current 33 billion tons, according to estimates in the IPCC report, to zero within thirty years. Assuming that under a degrowth strategy for the purpose of reducing carbon emissions global GDP shrinks by 10 percent over the next thirty years (a contraction four times larger than what we experienced during the global financial crisis of 2007-09), the effect on carbon dioxide emissions would be a reduction of 10 percent—in other words, from 33 to 30 billion tons. In the meantime, the global economy would have faced massive job losses on account of the contraction and huge declines in the standard of living for average working people and the poor.

In sum, a growing global economy under the banner of a detailed Global Green New Deal project is the only viable way to combat climate emergency and to ensure a sustainable and more equitable economic future, argues Pollin ever so convincingly in his newly published co-authored book with Noam Chomsky.

As far as this commentator is concerned, who may be somewhat biased on account of having conducted the interviews with Pollin and Chomsky included in *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy to Save the Planet*, the only question around Pollin’s Global Green New Deal project is how quickly can we get the international community to act on it before the die is cast.

—

Previously

published: <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/07/10/2020/global-green-new-deal-project>

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, the political economy of the United States and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout*’s Public Intellectual Project. He has published several books and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into

several foreign languages, including Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish. He is the author of [*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books.