

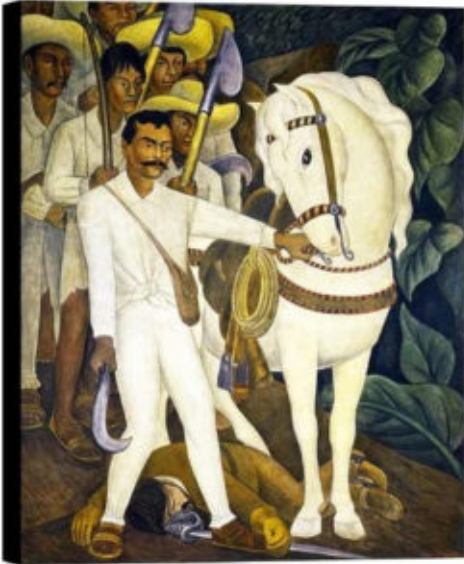
George Orwell - Politics And The English Language

“Politics and the English Language” (1946) is an essay by George Orwell that criticised and ended the “ugly and inaccurate” written English of his time and examines the connection between political orthodoxies and the debasement of language.

The essay focuses on political language, which, according to Orwell, “is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind”. Orwell believed that the language used was necessarily vague or meaningless because it was intended to hide the truth rather than express it. This unclear prose was a “contagion” which had spread to those who did not intend to hide the truth, and it concealed a writer’s thoughts from himself and others. Orwell encourages concreteness and clarity instead of vagueness, and individuality over political conformity.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_and_the_English_Language

Revolutie in galop - De onmisbare rol van het paard in de Mexicaanse Revolutie



Diego Rivera - Emiliano Zapata

De Mexicaanse kunstenaar Diego Rivera maakte in 1932 een litho van de legendarische Mexicaanse boerenleider Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919). Niet zonder reden beeldde hij deze af staand naast zijn witte paard. Zapata was niet alleen een groot paardenliefhebber, maar Rivera symboliseerde hiermee de rol van het paard in de zapatistische revolutie. Hij realiseerde zich dat Zapata en zijn boerenlegers onmogelijk zonder paarden hun revolutionaire strijd hadden kunnen voeren. Dat gold eveneens voor Zapata's evenknie tijdens de Mexicaanse Revolutie, Pancho Villa (1877?-1923). De tactische strijdmethodes die door beide legerleiders werden toegepast waren alleen mogelijk dankzij een grootschalige inzet van paarden.

Strijdtoneel

Wie wel eens een speelfilm over de Mexicaanse Revolutie (1910-1920) heeft gezien, kent de beelden: in opstuiwend zand stormen legers te paard een stad binnen en mannen met sombrero's, behangen met kogelgordels, schieten schijnbaar doelloos alle kanten op. In de meeste gevallen geven deze films een nogal geromantiseerd beeld van de revolutie en van de leiders Zapata en Villa.[1] Authentieke filmbeelden van Zapata en Villa uit de revolutie hebben echter wel degelijk de basis gelegd voor de uit Hollywood afkomstige clichébeelden.

Over de Mexicaanse Revolutie zijn honderden boeken geschreven.[2] Daarin wordt uitgebreid aandacht besteed aan de door Zapata en Villa toegepaste guerrillatechnieken.

In tegenstelling tot de Franse Revolutie van 1789 en de revoluties in de

negentiende eeuw (1848 en de Commune van Parijs in 1871) die plaatsvonden in een stedelijk decor, was de Mexicaanse Revolutie de eerste grootschalige revolutie waarbij steden niet het strijdtoneel vormden. De revolutie speelde zich af in een diversiteit van landbouw- en veeteeltgebieden, woestijn, plattelandsdorpen en bergen.

Zonder gebruik te maken van het paard als vervoermiddel en strijdmiddel, zou deze revolutie in de ontstane vorm nooit hebben plaatsgevonden. De vanzelfsprekende, onmisbare rol van het paard in het dagelijks leven van de meeste Mexicanen - als vervoermiddel en op boerenbedrijven - ontwikkelde zich bijna vanzelfsprekend naar die van essentieel hulpmiddel in de strijd om een beter bestaan.



Emiliano Zapata

Hacendados

Emiliano Zapata, geboren in de zuidelijke Mexicaanse staat Morelos, behoorde niet tot de armste klasse in Mexico. Zijn familie had een klein boerenbedrijf. In Morelos leden de kleine boeren voortdurend onder de misdaden van de grote landeigenaren, de *hacendados*. Deze eigenden zich land, waterbronnen en soms hele dorpen (*pueblos*) toe om hun suikerplantages te kunnen uitbreiden. De hacendados voelden zich gesteund door de Mexicaanse dictator Porfirio Díaz, die regeerde van 1876 tot 1911. De kleine landeigenaren en onafhankelijke boeren stonden volgens Díaz de vooruitgang van Mexico in de weg. Zapata wierp zich op als hun vertegenwoordiger en protesteerde voortdurend bij de lokale autoriteiten tegen de handelswijze van de hacendados. Dit had geen enkel resultaat. Zij zagen

Zapata als een vervelend obstakel voor hun belangen. Om hem uit de streek weg te krijgen, wist men hem over te halen dienst te nemen in het leger. Daar viel hij op door zijn vakmanschap in de omgang met paarden. Na een half jaar hield hij het leger voor gezien en keerde hij terug naar zijn dorp waar hij als burgemeester werd gekozen. Al voor 1910 begon hij met medestanders stukken land die door de hacendados waren ingepikt, terug te veroveren.



Aanhangers van Madero

Landhervormingen

In 1911 moest Díaz onder druk van presidentskandidaat Francisco Madero het land verlaten.[3] Madero had plannen tot landhervorming en zocht daarvoor steun bij lokale leiders. In de noordelijke staat Chihuahua vond hij de plaatselijke bandiet Doroteo Arango, beter bekend als Pancho Villa, aan zijn zijde. Zapata steunde weliswaar de plannen van Madero, maar vanwege diens achtergrond als grootgrondbezitter, bleef hij hem wantrouwen.

Eenmaal president, kwam van de landhervormingen van Madero niets terecht. Zapata keerde zich tegen Madero en kwam met een eigen plan voor landhervorming, het *Plan de Ayala*. Zapata wilde de landerijen van de grootgrondbezitters onteigenen en teruggeven aan de kleine boeren en aan de pueblós. Zapata heeft zich nooit anarchist genoemd maar was in belangrijke mate beïnvloed door de anarchistische ideeën van de broers Enrique en Ricardo Flores Magon en door de geschriften van Kropotkin. In 1915 wist hij na verovering van grote delen van Morelos het gebied te herverdelen zoals hij in zijn plan had voorgesteld en tegelijk de levensstandaard voor de boerenbevolking aanzienlijk te verbeteren.

Madero benoemde de meedogenloze generaal Victoriano Huerta tot legerleider, om zo Zapata te kunnen bestrijden. Huerta liet Madero vervolgens uit de weg ruimen en benoemde zichzelf tot president. Het jaar 1914 werd gekenmerkt door een felle strijd tussen het federale leger en de opstandelingen. Het boerenleger

van Zapata in Morelos en de troepen van Villa in het noorden, bestookten voortdurend het Mexicaanse leger. Aanvankelijk steunde Villa weliswaar Huerta, maar al snel keerde hij zich van hem af. Villa wilde in de eerste plaats de macht van de grootgrondbezitters doorbreken.



Derde van rechts: Pancho Villa

Paarden

Zapata en Villa waakten ervoor geen grootschalige confrontaties met het federale leger aan te gaan. Vaak werd een hinderlaag opgezet of werden snelle verrassingsovervallen uitgevoerd op kleine legereenheden in het veld of op dorpen en kleine steden die in handen waren van het leger. Omsingelde legereenheden werden tot overgave gedwongen of men ging de strijd aan.

Soldaten die zich aan Zapata overgaven werd de keuze gegeven zich bij hem aan te sluiten of de wapens in te leveren en naar huis te gaan. Officieren werden in de meeste gevallen geëxecuteerd. Na de inname van een stad of dorp werd het stadhuis in brand gestoken waarna men weer verdween. Expedities van het leger op zoek naar de *zapatistas* bleven meestal zonder resultaat. Na een snelle terugtocht naar eigen gronden, verdwenen de *zapatistas* geruisloos in de anonimiteit van het dagelijkse boerenleven.



Generaal Huerta inspecteert zijn troepen

Verrassingsaanvallen

Het leger van Zapata bestond uit zo'n drie- tot vijfduizend man, meestal opererend in groepen variërend van tientallen tot enkele honderden. Een belangrijke voorwaarde om snel tot actie te kunnen overgaan, was al vervuld: vrijwel alle soldaten hadden voor hun dagelijks werk al de beschikking over een paard. Wel was het voor Zapata aanvankelijk lastig om aan voldoende wapens te komen. Door *haciendas* van landeigenaren te overvallen werd het wapenbezit aangevuld. Het doel van Zapata's guerrillatactiek was door telkens verrassingsaanvallen uit te voeren, de vijand te verzwakken. Daarbij was het zaak de eigen verliezen zo laag mogelijk te houden. Bij voorkeur vielen de zapatistas te paard aan op voor hen bekend terrein, ongeschikt voor de inzet van grote vijandige legers of infanterietroepen. Doorslaggevend voor de successen van de zapatistas was dat de soldaten geworteld waren in de lokale bevolking en er deel van uitmaakten. Zowel met voedselvoorziening als logistiek met de toelevering van paarden, werden de zapatistas door de lokale bevolking ondersteund. Het federale leger bestond uit vijftwintigduizend man, veelal gelegerd in garnizoensplaatsen. Van daaruit beperkte het zich vooral tot het controleren van de omgeving.

Met weliswaar de beschikking over kanonnen, was het vooral gericht op een negentiende eeuwse, Europese wijze van oorlog voeren, zoals tijdens de Napoleontische oorlogen en de Frans-Duitse oorlog van 1870: een massale inzet van infanterietroepen die slag konden leveren met een soortgelijke tegenstander. Het Mexicaanse leger kon daarom niet effectief reageren op tegenstanders die van guerrillatactieken gebruik maakten. Met name in woestijngebieden en de bergen bleek het leger niet doeltreffend te kunnen opereren.



Pancho Villa voert zijn leger aan

Treinen

Door eveneens guerrilla-aanvallen uit te voeren kon Pancho Villa met zijn leger - variërend van vijf- tot zestienduizend man - in de staat Chihuahua een groot gebied bestrijken. Villa paste graag een overrompelingstactiek toe op zijn tegenstanders, door massaal met zijn manschappen, in volle galop al schietend de vijand tegemoet te treden. Dezelfde aanvalstactiek werd al eerder door de Noord-Amerikaanse Comanche- en Apache-indianen toegepast.

Villa vergroete zijn mobiliteit aanzienlijk door gebruik te maken van gekaapte treinen. Zo kon binnen enkele dagen honderden kilometers verderop een aanval worden uitgevoerd. De paarden van de soldaten werden in de trein gestald, de mannen namen plaats op de daken van de wagons. Met een tweede trein volgden de vrouwen van de soldaten. Villa hechte er aan dat de echtgenotes en vriendinnen van de soldaten gedurende een veldtocht altijd in de nabijheid waren. Zo werd de desertie van *villistas* beperkt en de kans op verkrachtingen in veroverde pueblos verkleind. Vrouwen zorgden meestal voor de maaltijden en verzorgden de gewonden. Sommige vrouwen, de *soldaderas*, reden en vochten in de voorste linies mee.[4]

In het leger van Zapata was het zeker niet ongewoon wanneer een vrouw een officiersrang vervulde.[5]

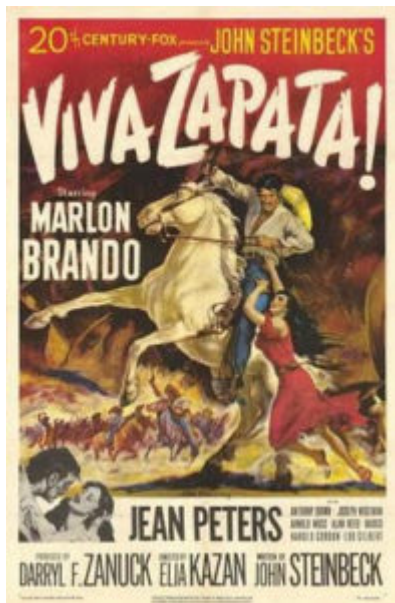
Van Villa wordt beweerd dat hij zo nu en dan een trein kaapte achter de vijandelijke linies, deze volstopte met explosieven en vervolgens op de vijand liet inrijden. Bekend is dat Villa meerdere malen verslagen tegenstanders zonder pardon liet executeren.



Bankbiljet met Zapata 1994

Triomf en dood

Zapata en Villa hadden geen presidentiële ambities. Hun grootste symbolische triomf was het moment waarop beide mannen in 1914 onder het gejuich van tienduizenden, gezamenlijk Mexico City binnenreden, nadat ze tegenstanders Carranza en Obregón hadden verslagen. In de jaren twintig kwam de *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, voortgekomen uit de revolutie, aan de macht. Enkele punten uit het Plan de Ayala werden weliswaar gerealiseerd, maar de landhervormingen werden niet doorgevoerd op de wijze zoals Zapata ze zich had voorgesteld. Nog steeds is de Partido Revolucionario Institucional de toonaangevende partij in Mexico, maar deze is vervallen tot een brede sociaaldemocratische beweging zonder revolutionair elan. Zapata heeft in Mexico nog steeds een legendarische status. In 1919 werd hij in een ingewikkeld complot in een val gelokt. Bij het oprijden van het dorpsplein van Chinameca, werd hij door veronderstelde medestanders doodgeschoten. Pancho Villa trof in 1923 hetzelfde lot. Nadat hij bij een plaatselijke bank goud had opgenomen, werd hij in de hoofdstraat van het plaatsje Parral door tegenstanders onder vuur genomen. Opmerkelijk detail: Villa was niet te paard, maar reed op dat moment in zijn auto, een Dodge.(6)



Noten

[1] De bekendste film is *Viva Zapata!* (1952) van regisseur Elia Kazan, naar een scenario van John Steinbeck, met Marlon Brando als Zapata, helaas een wat minder goede film van Kazan.

Pancho Villa is in veel Hollywoodproducties meestal vervallen tot een karikatuur, zoals in *Villa Rides* (1968) met Yul Brynner als Villa, of in *Pancho Villa* (1972) met Telly Savalas in de hoofdrol. Villa was een ijdele man en niet wars van publiciteit. Een aantal malen werden zijn acties vastgelegd door Amerikaanse filmploegen en in drie films speelde Villa zichzelf.

Een uitstekende documentaire over de Mexicaanse Revolutie en haar betekenis, *The Storm that Swept Mexico* (2011), is te vinden op Youtube en bevat veel authentieke filmopnames uit de revolutiejaren. *Zie hieronder*.

[2] Op het verloop van de revolutie kan in het bestek van dit artikel slechts kort worden ingegaan. Enkele titels over de Mexicaanse Revolutie: Ronald Atkin, *Revolution! Mexico 1910-1920* (1969); Adolfo Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution* (1983), Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution 1914-1915* (1960). Over Zapata zijn o.a. verschenen: Peter E. Newell, *Zapata of Mexico* (1979); Robert P. Millon, *Zapata* (1969); John Womack Jr., *Zapata and The Mexican Revolution* (1969). De Amerikaanse auteur John Reed (de latere schrijver van *Ten Days that Shook the World*) reisde enige tijd mee met de troepen van Pancho Villa en deed daarvan verslag in zijn boek *Insurgent Mexico* (1914).

[3] Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915) sleet zijn laatste jaren in Parijs. Hij ligt begraven op Cimetière du Montparnasse (15 e Division) in Parijs.

[4] Tijdens de revolutie ontstond het volksliedje *La Adelita*. Het lied is een eerbetoon aan de soldaderas en wordt in Mexico nog steeds gespeeld.

[5] Zo werd de onderwijzeres Dolores Jiménez y Muro (1848-1925) in 1914 brigadegeneraal in het leger van Zapata. Ze werkte mee aan het opstellen van het *Plan de Ayala* en was redactrice van de krant *La Voz de Juárez*.

[6] De auto waarin Villa werd gedood is te bezichtigen in het Francisco Villa Museum in Chihuahua, Mexico. Zie

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Villa_Museum

The Storm that Swept Mexico

Why Trump's Racist And Neo-Fascist Campaign Strategy Resonates In 21st Century America



CJ

Polychroniou

With the November election just around the corner, Donald Trump is raising the level of his racist and fascist rhetoric to new heights, fully aware that his hate speech and authoritarian overtures resonate with a large segment of white Americans in 21st century who, as surreal and obscene as this may sound, would have preferred that time stood still, stuck either in the era of the plantation system or at least at a time when whites in this country felt so superior to minorities that they could discriminate and oppress the "Other" without fear of getting into trouble with the law, let alone become witness to public outcries over police brutality, systemic racism, and demands for gender and racial equality.

Indeed, it is the awareness of the existence of a very large segment of white Americans in 21 st century who wish to roll back the clock on account of their growing insecurities and fears about the[ir] future that prompts Trump to sound ever more racist and project ever more the image of a strong man as time moves closer to election time. In doing so, his hope is that even moderate white voters might be stirred into feeling the need to join in on what he obviously hopes they may come to recognize and appreciate, just like his traditional base of white supremacists does, as an urgent "patriotic" campaign on the part of the "Great White Leader" to save [white] America's soul. As for his rich supporters, he doesn't care one way or another about the impact of his rhetoric on them because he knows they will continue supporting him as long as he maintains a

steadfast course of lavishing them with gifts, such as huge tax cuts, deregulation policies, etc.

Trump's attempt to outdo himself was most evident at his Minnesota rally a few days ago- perhaps the most extreme example so far of how far the "Great White Leader" is ready and willing to go in order to spread fear and promote hate as tactical means of securing another electoral victory in a country sharply divided into different political tribes.

And make no mistake about it: reliance on fear, hate, and violence have always been the political tools of fascists of all stripes.

Trump declared to Minnesotans that Biden would turn their state into a "refugee camp." He warned them of "sleepy Joe Biden's extreme plan to flood" Minnesota with refugees from Somalia, while denigrating at the same time the election of Rep. Ilhan Omar, who came to the United States as a child refugee from Somalia, calling her an "extremist". To this insidious racist rhetoric, his fanatical base from below responded by screaming "send her back."

Trump's racist rhetoric hit a crescendo when he let his crowd know that they are supporting him because of their "good genes." And to further upgrade his neo-fascist profile with his adoring crowd, he said it was "a beautiful thing" when journalist Ali Velshi got struck by a rubber bullet while covering a peaceful protest.

All in all, Trump's performance at the Minnesota rally on September 18 was an act stolen from the electoral campaign of Hitler and his Nazi party. The only thing he fell short from saying was that anyone who did not support him should be deprived of civic rights and sent to prison or concentration camps.

No rational human being can fail to see that Trump is a racist with strong fascist impulses, but even critics of Trump fail to see or properly acknowledge that the "Great White Leader" employs the rhetoric of racism and fascism because there is a huge market for it in 21 st century America!

As such, it is a big mistake to think that what the United States is experiencing in the age of Trump is an "aberration." Trump's rise to power is the culmination of the long history of racism, violence, and extreme nationalism in US society. To argue otherwise would compel one to see the Cold War and the establishment of a

war economy in the aftermath of the Second World War also as “aberrations” in the historical evolution of the US political culture; or the phenomenon of McCarthyism from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s; or the genocidal campaign against the Vietnamese people; or the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., and of Malcolm in the 1960s.

Unfortunately, these episodes were no more “aberrations” in the evolution of US political culture than is the US love affair with guns. Although the military strategy changed, scores of massively destructive wars followed the Vietnam debacle, and systemic racism (the assumption of white superiority on both individual and institutional levels) continued to operate all over society, with the law enforcement community and the judicial system acting often enough as keepers of racial hierarchy.

The recent blows dealt to an already highly flawed system of democratic governance (the US is the only democracy in the world where the principle of the one person-one vote rule does not count, and where money is usually the determinant factor in the outcome of elections) by the various institutions of the US political system, including the Supreme Court (think of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* and *Shelby County v. Holder*)) and the resurgence of voter suppression are also not “aberrations” in the evolution of the US political culture.

And lest we forget, Donald Trump’s “law and order” politics dates all the way back to slavery and Jim Crow, and virtually every postwar Republican president before Trump harped on “law and order” in campaign speeches.

Of course, that’s one face of the United States - i.e., a country with a deep and profound racist and violent culture, one that, incidentally, has been at war 225 out of 243 years since 1776.

The other face of the United States is one of constant struggle among decent and courageous people aiming to move the country in the direction of peace and justice.

Undoubtedly, the history of the United States is at one and the same time of social struggles, resistance, and resiliency. From the Stono Rebellion of 1739 to Shays’ Rebellion in 1786, and from the May 1, 1886 industrial workers’ strike to the Black Lives Movement of today, US political history is filled with chapters of

heroic and noble struggles against the kind of social order envisaged by Trump and his supporters.

Virtually at every juncture in the evolution of a racist and oppressive system, down to this day, there were brave souls standing up to it and challenging it — a Frederick August Washington Douglas (aka Frederick Douglass), a Harriett Tubman, a Paul Robeson, an Angela Davis, a Howard Zinn, and a Noam Chomsky, along with millions of unknown activists.

But the critical question that remains to be answered is this: why do political Neanderthals and other “nice people” (racists, sexists, homophobes, anti-science, religious fundamentalists and climate change denialists) abound in the world’s richest and most powerful nation in the world, thereby allowing someone with the political instincts of Donald Trump to destroy democracy and potentially civilized life on planet earth with his anti-environmental and nuclear policies, respectively?

Let’s be clear about this, and have no illusions to the contrary. Trump did not create his fanatical base, especially in rural America. It was already there when he stepped into the political spotlight. He merely exploited it, quite brilliantly, by tapping into the psyche of its members, appealing to their subconscious emotions (fear, hate, anger, frustration) and provincial mentality. In this context, he succeeded in drawing political support from the sort of people that Trump himself wouldn’t be caught dead being in their midst.

Indeed, few demagogues in the course of history can lay claim to such a masterful political achievement.

The economic policies of neoliberalism of the past forty or so years, coupled with the presence of a traditionally weak developmental state, lie at the heart of any attempt to explain why political divisions in the US, which, incidentally, have been present from the very origins of the early republic (think, for example, of the ferocious conflict between Federalists and Anti-Federalists, or the animosity between the political camps represented by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, respectively), have turned over the last twenty or so years into sharp political polarization that is literally tearing the country apart. But it’s not enough to make real sense of the ongoing political polarization.

As in pretty much the rest of the world, neoliberalism intensified existing economic inequalities in the United States by creating tremendous gaps between

the haves and the have-nots through the destruction of the country's industrial base and the failure of wages to grow for average workers, while shifting wealth at the same time not only from the poor to the rich but also from those who produce new goods and services to those who control existing assets. In other words, under neoliberalism and the ensuing financialization of the economy, the balance of power in the ever present, sometimes overt, sometimes covert class struggle of a capitalist economy shifted overwhelmingly toward the side of financial capital. Labor and productive capital ended up both on the losing side.

Growing economic inequalities, job insecurity, and declining standards of living led in due time to growing levels of frustration and discontent among America's white working-class. In their minds, the American dream was becoming a thing of the past, especially as manufacturing jobs were going overseas in pursuit of cheap labor. The elites, as far as they were concerned, had taken over the government and the economy, a view which seems to have gained much currency following the bailouts of banks and Wall Street in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007-08, while millions of homeowners lost their homes.

In a very perverted sense, the elite theory of US democracy, which used to be at the heart of the radical interpretation of the way the domestic political system functions from the moment that C. Wright Mills had conceived it, seems to have captured the imagination of many average citizens in recent times, absent of course the intellectual nuisances regarding the workings of a capitalist economy and the complex relationship between economics and politics. To be sure, the formation of a view of elite dominance in contemporary US society and economy was materialized primarily, if not exclusively, through conspiratorial thinking.

Rural communities, always lagging behind urban communities, and with social and cultural settings still not very different from those that Alexis Tocqueville had witnessed during his visit to the United States in 1832 (he was struck by the absence of science and the country's intense religiosity, along with the presence of a deeply rooted culture of individualism), grew especially disdain of "big government." academic elites, science and media alike, and far more prone therefore to embrace the extremist rhetoric of someone like Donald Trump.

Of course, rural America was always conservative, but the shift towards the GOP has intensified over the past decade not merely because of political and economic reasons, but, perhaps more important, because of cultural reasons. It is true that

the economic agenda of the Democratic party is seen by most rural Americans, who are primarily home owners and self-employed, as being against their interests. They hate “big government” because they associate it with corruption and high taxes used to fund a welfare state which they think is there in order to give out handouts to lazy and unworthy people, mostly blacks and immigrants. But, aided by the deliberative and systematic attempts of conservative media to spread views intent on serving a highly reactionary political agenda (“patriotism”, “god”, and “guns”), rural America has also turning increasingly Red because of its aversion to what it perceives to be the cosmopolitan, multicultural, and even anti-American leanings of the liberal establishment, and of course because of fear that liberals will take away from decent folks their “sacred right” to have access to guns.

The anti-immigrant and an-elite sentiments expressed by Trump in his 2016 electoral campaign were crucial to his winning the rural vote, but there is plenty of evidence (see Identity Crisis by John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck) to indicate that the anti-immigrant sentiment was the more critical factor, which is why the “Great White Leader” is doubling down on the anti-immigrant rhetoric in his re-election campaign.

In a nutshell, the political divides between rural and urban America are much more deeply cultural than they are economic. And this cultural divide isn’t only being masterfully exploited by Donald Trump through his racist and fascist rhetoric, but is highly unlikely to close in the near future. In fact, the more the rest of the country changes, the more likely it is that white conservative voters will keep digging deeper into the power of nostalgia, reminiscent of the time when America was still great because white superiority was in their view unchallenged and everybody else knew their station in life.

Moreover, given the fact that the electoral system favors disproportionately the rural vote, however sparsely populated the urban regions may be, the future of the GOP may very well lie with the continuation of political extremism masterminded by the “Great White Leader” himself. In fact, we may very well get a taste of the permanent damage caused by Trump’s rise to power, even if he loses the November election, in the event that the next Supreme Court Justice is nominated before the election.

Either way, the struggle to eradicate systemic racism, overcome gross inequalities, and change the course of the country towards the direction of peace,

social justice and a sustainable future has a long way to go in 21st century America. At least half of the country is clearly moving forward, while a good chunk of it wants to return to a “golden era” of white supremacy and outdated social values and cultural norms, perceptions and sentiments which provide ample ground for the flourishing of ideas that feed the racist and neo-fascist beast associated with the politics of Donald Trump.

In this context, the major task for progressives, regardless of whether it is Trump or Biden in the White House in 2021, is to search for creative ways that will alter public consciousness in the United States about the devastating effects of a political culture engulfed in the flames of racial strife, violence, militarism, and climate change denialism. The mission is as much cultural and educational as it is political.

The Political Economy Of Saving The Planet. An Interview With Noam Chomsky & Robert Pollin



Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:

What needs to be done to advance a successful political mobilization on behalf of a global Green New Deal—a program that includes emissions reductions, expands renewable energy sources, addresses the needs of vulnerable workers, and promotes sustainable and egalitarian economic growth? Political scientist C. J. Polychroniou spoke with *Noam Chomsky* and economist *Robert Pollin*, who has been at the forefront of the fight for an egalitarian green economy for more than a decade, to discuss prospects for change, the connections between climate and the COVID-19 pandemic, and whether eco-socialism is a viable option for mobilizing people in the struggle to create a green future.

This conversation was adapted from Chomsky and Pollin's new book [*Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*](#).

C. J. Polychroniou: How does the coronavirus pandemic, and the response to it, shed light on how we should think about climate change and the prospects for a global Green New Deal?

Noam Chomsky: At the time of writing, concern for the COVID-19 crisis is virtually all-consuming. That's understandable. It is severe and is severely disrupting lives. But it will pass, though at horrendous cost, and there will be recovery. There will not be recovery from the melting of the arctic ice sheets and the other consequences of global warming.

Not everyone is ignoring the advancing existential crisis. The sociopaths dedicated to accelerating the disaster continue to pursue their efforts, relentlessly. As before, Trump and his courtiers take pride in leading the race to destruction. As the United States was becoming the epicenter of the pandemic, thanks in no small measure to their folly, the White House cabal released its budget proposals. As expected, the proposals call for even deeper cuts in healthcare support and environmental protection, instead favoring the bloated military and the building of Trump's Great Wall. And to add an extra touch of sadism, [the budget](#) promotes a fossil fuel 'energy boom' in the United States, including an increase in the production of natural gas and crude oil."



Robert Pollin

Meanwhile, to drive another nail in the coffin that Trump and associates are preparing for the nation and the world, their corporate-run EPA weakened auto emission standards, thus enhancing environmental destruction and killing more people from pollution. As expected, fossil fuel companies are lining up in the forefront of the appeals of the corporate sector to the nanny state, pleading once again for the generous public to rescue them from the consequences of their misdeeds.

In brief, the criminal classes are relentless in their pursuit of power and profit, whatever the human consequences. And those consequences will be disastrous if their efforts are not countered, indeed overwhelmed, by those concerned for “the survival of humanity.” It is no time to mince words out of misplaced politeness. “The survival of humanity” is at risk on our present course, to quote a leaked [internal memo](#) from JPMorgan Chase, America’s largest bank, referring specifically to the bank’s genocidal policy of funding fossil fuel production.

One heartening feature of the present crisis is the rise in community organizations starting mutual aid efforts. These could become centers for confronting the challenges that are already eroding the foundations of the social order. The courage of doctors and nurses, laboring under miserable conditions imposed by decades of socioeconomic lunacy, is a tribute to the resources of the human spirit. There are ways forward. The opportunities cannot be allowed to lapse.

Robert Pollin: In addition to the fundamental considerations that Noam has emphasized, there are several other ways in which the climate crisis and the coronavirus pandemic intersect. One underlying cause of the COVID-19 outbreak—as well as other recent epidemics such as Ebola, West Nile, and

HIV—has been the destruction of animal habitats through deforestation and human encroachment, as well as the disruption of the remaining habitat through the increasing frequency and severity of heat waves, droughts, and floods. As the science journalist Sonia Shah [wrote](#) in February 2020, habitat destruction increases the likelihood that wild species “will come into repeated intimate contact with the human settlements expanding into their newly fragmented habitats. It’s this kind of repeated, intimate contact that allows the microbes that live in their bodies to cross over into ours, transforming benign animal microbes into deadly human pathogens.”

It is also likely that people who are exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution will face more severe health consequences than those breathing cleaner air. Aaron Bernstein of Harvard’s Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment [states](#) that “air pollution is strongly associated with people’s risk of getting pneumonia and other respiratory infections and with getting sicker when they do get pneumonia. A study done on SARS, a virus closely related to COVID-19, found that people who breathed dirtier air were about twice as likely to die from the infection.”

A separate point that was raised over the worst months of the COVID-19 pandemic was that the responses in the countries that immediately handled the crisis more effectively, such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, demonstrated that governments are capable of taking decisive and effective action in the face of crisis. The death tolls from COVID-19 in these countries were negligible, and normal life returned relatively soon after governments imposed initial lockdowns. Similarly decisive interventions could successfully deal with the climate crisis where the political will is strong and the public sectors are competent.

There are important elements of truth in such views, but we should also be careful to not push this point too far. Some commentators have argued that one silver lining outcome of the pandemic was that, because of the economic lockdown, fossil fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions plunged alongside overall economic activity during the recession. While this is true, I do not see any positive lessons here with respect to advancing a viable emissions program that can get us to net zero emissions by 2050. Rather, the experience demonstrates why a degrowth approach to emissions reduction is unworkable. Emissions did indeed fall sharply because of the pandemic and the recession. But that is only because

incomes collapsed and unemployment spiked over this same period. This only reinforces the conclusion that the only effective climate stabilization path is the Green New Deal, as it is the only one that does not require a drastic contraction (or “degrowth”) of jobs and incomes to drive down emissions.

A genuinely positive development of the pandemic and recession is that progressive activists around the world have fought to include Green New Deal investments in their countries’ economic stimulus programs. It is critical to keep pushing the development and success of these initiatives.

In support of that end, we must seriously consider how to best maximize both the short-term stimulus benefits and long-term impacts of Green New Deal programs. I know the importance of such considerations from personal experience working on the green investment components of the 2009 Obama American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, in which \$90 billion of the \$800 billion total was allocated to clean energy investments in the United States. The principles underlying these investment components were sound, but the people who worked on the program in its various stages, including myself, did not adequately calculate the time necessary to execute many of the projects. We knew that it was critical to identify “shovel-ready” projects—ones that could be quickly implemented on a large scale and provide an immediate economic boost. But relatively few green investment projects were truly shovel-ready at that time, as the green energy industry was still a newly emerging enterprise. Therefore, the backlog of significant new projects was thin. It is only moderately less thin today.

This means that people designing Green New Deal stimulus programs must identify the subgroup of green investment projects that can realistically roll into action at scale within a matter of months. One example that should be applicable in almost every country would be energy efficiency retrofits of all public and commercial buildings. This would entail improving insulation, sealing window frames and doors, switching over all lightbulbs to LEDs, and replacing aging heating and air conditioning systems with efficient ones (preferably heat pumps). These programs could quickly generate large numbers of jobs for secretaries, truck drivers, accountants, construction workers, and climate engineers. They could also save energy and reduce emissions quickly and relatively cheaply. Building off of such truly shovel-ready projects, the rest of the clean energy investment program could then accelerate and provide a strong foundation for

economies moving out of recession and onto a sustainable recovery path.

CP: Eco-socialism is becoming a major tenet of the ideological repertoire of green parties in European countries and elsewhere, which may be the reason for their increasing appeal with voters and especially the youth. Is eco-socialism a cohesive enough political project to be taken seriously as an alternative for the future?

NC: Insofar as I understand eco-socialism—not in great depth—it overlaps greatly with other left socialist currents. That being said, I don't think we're at a stage where adopting a specific "political project" is very helpful. There are crucial issues that have to be addressed, right now. Our efforts should be informed by the kind of future society that we want, and the kind that can be constructed within our existing society. It's fine to stake out specific positions about the future in more or less detail, but for now these seem to me at best ways of sharpening ideas rather than platforms to latch on to.

A good argument can be made that inherent features of capitalism lead inexorably to the ruin of the environment, and that ending capitalism must be a priority of the environmental movement. But there's one fundamental problem with this argument: time scales. Dismantling capitalism is impossible in the time frame that we have for taking urgent action, which requires national and international mobilization if severe crisis is to be averted.

Furthermore, the whole discussion around eco-socialism is misleading. The two efforts—averting environmental disaster, and dismantling capitalism in favor of a freer and more just society—should and can proceed in parallel. One example is Tony Mazzocchi's efforts to forge a labor coalition that would not only challenge owner-management control of the workplace, but also be at the forefront of the environmental movement while attempting to socialize major sectors of U.S. industry. There's no time to waste. The struggle must be, and can be, undertaken on all fronts.

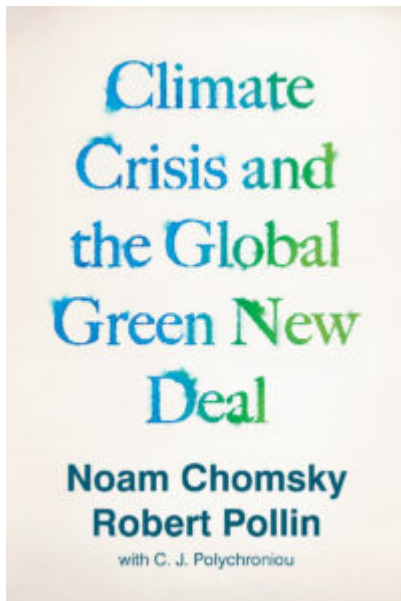
CP: Bob, in your view, can eco-socialism coexist with the Green New Deal project? And, if not, what type of a politico-ideological agenda might be needed to generate broad political participation in the struggle to create a green future?

RP: In my view, details of rhetoric and emphasis aside, eco-socialism and the Green New Deal are fundamentally the same project. The Green New Deal, as we have discussed the term, offers the only path to climate stabilization that can also

expand good job opportunities and raise living standards in all regions of the world. It defines an explicit and viable alternative to austerity economics on a global scale. My coworkers and I have worked on this issue—advancing the Green New Deal as an alternative to austerity economics—in different country settings over the past few years, including in Spain, Puerto Rico, and Greece. In my view, the Green New Deal is the only approach to climate stabilization also capable of reversing rising inequality and defeating global neoliberalism and ascendant neofascism.

Beyond the Green New Deal, I don't know what exactly "eco-socialism" could mean. Does it mean the overthrow of all private ownership of productive assets for public ownership? As Noam suggested, do people seriously think that this could happen within the time frame we have to stabilize the climate, that is, within less than thirty years? And are we certain that eliminating all private ownership would be workable or desirable from a social justice standpoint—i.e. from the standpoint of advancing well-being for the global working class and poor? How do we deal with the fact that most of the world's energy assets are already publicly owned? How, more specifically, can we be certain that a transition to complete public ownership would itself deliver zero net emissions by 2050? To me, the overarching challenge is trying to understand alternative pathways to most effectively building truly egalitarian, democratic, and ecologically sustainable societies—putting all labels aside and being willing, as Marx himself insisted, to employ "ruthless criticism" toward all that exists, including all past experiences with Communism and Socialism. And, for that matter, being open to criticizing all authors, including Marx himself. Indeed, my favorite quote from Marx is "I am not a Marxist."

We have only briefly touched on "planetary boundaries" besides the climate crisis, including air and water pollution, as well as biodiversity losses. I understand that the eco-socialist movement gives substantial attention to these critical environmental issues. I share their concerns and welcome the focus they bring to these issues. We have concentrated here on the climate crisis for the simple reason that it is the matter of greatest urgency.



CP: Europe’s civil disobedience movement, led by Extinction Rebellion protesters as a strategy to tackle the climate crisis and create a just and sustainable world, is growing by leaps and bounds, especially among young people, but it also seems to annoy many citizens and may even be alienating the general public. Noam, can you share with us your thoughts on the strategy of massive civil disobedience as a way to tackle the climate emergency?

NC: I was involved in civil disobedience for many years, sometimes intensely, and think it’s a reasonable tactic—sometimes. It should not be adopted merely because one feels strongly about the issue and wants to display that to the world. That tactic can be proper, but it’s not enough. It’s necessary to consider the consequences. Is the action designed in a way that will encourage others to think, to understand, to join? Or is it more likely to antagonize, to irritate, and to cause people to support the very thing being protested? Tactical considerations are often denigrated— “that’s for small minds, not for a serious, principled guy like me.” Quite the contrary. Tactical judgments have direct human consequences. They are a deeply principled concern. It’s not enough to think, “I’m right, and if others can’t see it, too bad for them.” Such attitudes often cause serious harm.

But I don’t think there is a general answer to your question. It depends on the circumstances, the nature of the planned action, and the likely consequences as best we can ascertain them.

CP: Bob, where do you stand on this question?

RP: I would just add that any and all tactics that might move us closer to solving the climate crisis should be considered seriously. This includes civil disobedience. But we also have to consider the negative effects of civil disobedience’s success. For example, if roads or public transportation systems are shut down on weekdays, then people can’t get to work, parents can’t pick up their kids at daycare, and sick people can’t make it to the doctor’s office. Such consequences will only reinforce the view that already exists—whether fair or unfair—that

climate activists don't care about the lives of ordinary people. Actions that strengthen this view in the general public are politically disastrous.

As it is, this view is already nurtured when climate activists don't show genuine commitment to transition programs for the workers and communities that will be hurt by the shutdown of the fossil fuel industry. This view is further strengthened when climate activists favor carbon taxes without 100 percent rebates for most of the population, starting with lower-income people. These rebates compensate people for the cost-of-living increases they will face simply by driving their cars or using electricity in their homes. The Yellow Vest movement that emerged in France in 2018 to oppose the diesel tax proposals of the thoroughly tone-deaf President Emmanuel Macron is one obvious example here.

Civil disobedience should certainly be included as a tactic if it becomes clear that it will be truly effective. By "effective" I mean helpful to advancing a Green New Deal project capable of delivering a zero emissions global economy by 2050.

CP: As we have discussed, neoliberalism is still dominant, and even more dangerous neofascist social movements are on the rise. In this context, the prospects of energizing voters in order to demand fundamental levels of political mobilization to confront the climate crisis do not appear particularly promising. In fact, it seems that it is mainly the youth who are insisting that we address climate change with the level of urgency it demands. In that context, what do you think it would take to turn things around and elevate climate change to the very top of the public agenda worldwide? Noam, let's start with you.

NC: It has become almost de rigueur these days to cite Gramsci's observation, from Mussolini's prison, that "the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

Neoliberalism may remain the dominant elite mantra, but it is visibly tottering. It has delivered a harsh impact to the general population almost everywhere. In the United States, nearly half the population has negative net worth, while 0.1 percent hold more than 20 percent of wealth—as much as the lowest 90 percent. Moreover, obscene wealth concentration is increasing along with its direct impact on the decline of functioning democracy and social welfare. In Europe the impact is in some ways worse, even if somewhat cushioned by the residue of social democracy. And morbid symptoms are everywhere: anger; resentment; increasing

racism, xenophobia, and hatred of scapegoats (immigrants, minorities, Muslims, etc); the rise of demagogues who stoke these fears and exploit the social pathologies that surface in times of confusion and despair; and, in the international arena, the emergence of a reactionary international headed by the White House and incorporating figures such as Jair Bolsonaro, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Benjamin Netanyahu, Narendra Modi, Viktor Orbán, and the rest. But such morbid symptoms are countered by rising activism. The new has not yet been born, but it is emerging in many intricate ways and it is far from clear what form it will take.

Much is unpredictable, but there are a few things that we can say with confidence: unless the new that is taking shape confronts the twin imminent threats to survival—nuclear war and environmental catastrophe—and does so quickly and forcefully, it won't matter what else happens.

CP: Bob, what are your thoughts on the matter?

RP: I will start with another apt aphorism from Antonio Gramsci: “Pessimism of the mind; optimism of the will.” That is, if we take climate science seriously and then examine where the world is today, the odds of us moving the world onto a viable climate stabilization path—specifically, of hitting the IPCC’s stated target of net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050—are shaky at best. On the other hand, to invoke Margaret Thatcher’s famous dictum, “there is no alternative” to doing everything possible to accomplish these goals.

With respect to “optimism of the will,” we can point to the rapidly growing tide of climate activism that has delivered major breakthroughs. Most emphatically, this includes the September 2019 global Climate Strike, led by the remarkable Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. Estimates place between 6 and 7.5 million people participating in 4,500 locations in 150 countries.

The Climate Strike reflects equally significant, if less visible, developments around the world. One example is the successful movement in the western Mediterranean countries, including Spain, France, and Italy, to outlaw new oil and gas exploration and drilling, as well as to phase out existing projects. These very recent political breakthroughs started around 2016. In Spain, from 2010 to 2014—with the country then suffering from the aftershocks of the global financial crisis and Great Recession—government officials signed more than one hundred

permits with oil companies to start new exploration and drilling projects throughout the country. But environmental activists joined forces with business owners in the tourism industry to mount a successful resistance against fossil fuel development as an economic recovery plan. The government's efforts to counter the economic crisis by opening the country to oil exploration and drilling were "a bad dream," in the [words](#) of one municipal official from the Spanish island of Ibiza. "We luckily woke up," he said.

This type of grassroots climate activism throughout Western Europe has also led the European Commission to officially establish its European Green Deal project. The overarching aim is for the entire continent to achieve the IPCC's goal of net zero emissions. As of early 2020, both legislative bodies of the EU, the European Council and European Parliament, had voted to endorse the project. Of course, legislative bodies passing resolutions is the easy job. Whether European residents have the will to follow through on these commitments remains an open question.

Similar movements are gaining momentum in the United States, despite the buffoonish climate denialism of President Donald Trump. In June 2019, New York state passed the most ambitious set of climate targets in the country, including carbon-free electricity by 2040 and a net zero emissions economy by 2050. The [New York initiative](#) follows similar measures, if somewhat less ambitious measures to date, in California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, New Mexico, and Maine. One major factor in these U.S. state-level developments is the increasing participation of the mainstream labor movement. Union members have assumed major leadership roles in some cases. These state-level measures now need to incorporate substantial and just transition programs for workers and communities whose livelihoods currently depend on the fossil fuel industry. These people and communities are facing major hits to their living standards in the absence of generous transition programs. By bringing just transition considerations to the forefront of the climate movement, the unions are building on the legacy of the visionary labor leader Tony Mazzocchi that Noam discussed earlier.

Climate movements remain at modest levels throughout most low- and middle-income countries, but there is a reasonable chance that will change quickly. Activism is growing, alongside coalitions among environmentalists, labor groups, and business sectors. One reason for mobilization is that air pollution is rendering virtually all the major cities in low- and middle-income countries unlivable, including Delhi, Mumbai, Shanghai, Beijing, Lagos, Cairo, and Mexico City. Aman

Sharma, a young Climate Strike activist in Delhi, [told the Guardian](#) in September 2019, “We are out here to reclaim our right to live, our right to breathe and our right to exist, which is all being denied to us by an inefficient policy system that gives more deference to industrial and financial objectives rather than environmental standards.”

A critical factor in advancing this movement, in developing countries and elsewhere, is demonstrating how climate stabilization coincides with the expansion of decent work opportunities, raising mass living standards, and fighting poverty in all regions of the world. This must be recognized as the core proposition undergirding the global Green New Deal. Advancing a viable global Green New Deal should therefore be understood as the means by which “optimism of the will” comes alive in defining the political economy of saving the planet.

Originally

published:

<http://bostonreview.net/science-nature-global-justice/noam-chomsky-robert-pollin-c-j-polychroniou-political-economy-saving>

Climate Change Intensifies Inequality: An Interview With Gregor Semieniuk



Gregor Semieniuk

This is part of [PERI's economist interview series](#), hosted by C.J. Polychroniou.

[Read Gregor's bio here.](#)

C.J. Polychroniou: You studied International Relations in Germany, at the Technische Universität Dresden, but ended up pursuing graduate studies in economics in the USA. What drew you into the “dismal science?”

Gregor Semieniuk: In Dresden, the program's content spanned economics, public law and political science. What intrigued me about economics was that on the one hand it seemed necessary to grapple with the most intractable global issues of the time: for instance, why it was so difficult to increase most countries' material affluence, how renewable energy could quickly replace the existing energy supply, and of course how the 2007-08 financial crisis and ensuing economic turmoil could be explained. On the other, my economics classes tended to provide straightforward answers to questions that were obviously more multi-faceted, like that a minimum wage was (categorically) to be discouraged because it diminished welfare. From my political science classes I knew that it was good practice to seek out contending theories to analyze the same problem through different lenses so as to gain a deeper understanding. I wanted to learn about contending theories also in economics, but there seemed to be only one theory, so-called neoclassical economics, and its strengths and weaknesses weren't explicitly discussed. My search for a program that satisfied my curiosity led me to look to the USA, and ultimately to the New School for Social Research, with its famous teaching of a plurality of theoretical approaches. So I went there for my graduate studies. Of course, one thing I learned soon enough was that neoclassical economics and its offshoots can be more nuanced in their assumptions and conclusions. Yet, this does not replace the more variegated approaches and points

of analytical departure that the full gamut of ideas in economics (in history and present) has to offer.

CJP: Your primary research areas are in environmental and ecological economics and in economic growth. Can you briefly spell out the connection between climate change and the economy? And, more specifically, in what ways does climate change threaten economic stability and growth?

GS: Climate change is driven by greenhouse gas emissions, that are mainly caused by combusting fossil fuels and from changes in land use (think intensive agriculture or deforestation). Fossil fuels in particular have been historically tightly interlinked with economic growth. Their qualities and quantities are arguably a key factor behind the industrial revolutions in today's rich countries. Luckily, however, while energy is a fundamental input into any economic activity, there are increasingly good alternatives to fossil fuels to supply that energy without or with much lower emissions, such as modern solar and wind energy, and a growing variety of devices compatible with the electricity they supply, such as electric vehicles and heat pumps.

At an abstract level, the interaction of economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions can be thought of as economic growth causing greenhouse gas emissions to rise. The resulting climate change "dampens" or eventually reverses economic growth through negative impacts on productivity, profitability, capital stock and human lives. More concretely, climate change poses difficult problems and threatens human wellbeing and livelihood in many ways. There are direct impacts, such as lower agricultural productivity or sea level rises. More indirect impacts intensify social problems and conflicts. To give you one example, up to two thirds of Bangladesh's population are at risk of being impacted by sea level rise by the mid-21st century. This does not mean permanent inundation but increased exposure to flooding and salinity that make it harder to earn a living on agriculture, or risks destroying coastal non-agricultural production sites and homes. The resulting increased migration from coastal to inland communities can exacerbate social conflicts and urban poverty there, ultimately threatening social and economic stability. In the USA, up to 40 million people could be exposed to such hazards by 2100.[1] Of course, here there are much more resources available that could be used to protect communities from these impacts, so the context in which climate change impacts occur matters.

CJP: It's been argued that climate change has worsened global economic inequality. Does climate change reinforce inequalities? How does it do that?

GS: There are good reasons to believe that climate change increases existing inequalities. Here it is useful to distinguish between inter-country inequality and interpersonal and group inequalities, whether within a country or globally. Just like in the current COVID-19 crisis, rich countries can mount more sophisticated responses, and rich or otherwise privileged people everywhere can protect themselves better and face lower rates mortality than their poorer counterparts, so climate change tends to hit people already in lower-income countries and on the lower rungs of the wealth and privilege distribution harder. For instance, as mentioned in my previous answer, U.S. responses to flooding are likely to rely much more on protection, while in Bangladesh more people could lose their livelihoods and be left with no choice but to retreat. And richer people can pay higher prices for food and other amenities or invest in adaptive measures (like insulation and air conditioning) while poorer people may not be able to do so.

Interestingly, climate change mitigation is also sometimes criticized for exacerbating inequality. Between countries, the worry is that if developing countries curtail their expansion of fossil fuel powered electricity in order to install (more costly or less effective) renewables supply instead, that harms their economic growth and hampers the important task of improving the material conditions of the vast majority of the global population living in these countries. Encouragingly, renewable power from new powerplants, like a wind farm, is now increasingly cheaper than continuing to operate existing coal power plants so that trade-off looks less painful by the day. <https://www.irena.org/publications/2020/Jun/Renewable-Power-Costs-in-2019>

Of course, these renewables have to be integrated into an electricity grid and appropriate and affordable end-use devices, like electric cars, also have to be available, but overall the falling costs make this a more and more feasible proposition.

Between people, the biggest worry is that policies penalizing emission intensive activities disproportionately hurt the poor. The 'yellow vest' movement in France is pointed to as an example that interpersonal inequality even in rich countries would be exacerbated and made unbearable by carbon taxes. For instance, if you can't afford to rent in a city and you move to the lower-rent countryside, you are

more reliant on a greenhouse gas emitting car, and so would be harder hit by a tax. That was the case in France for many people. However, it is entirely feasible to design policies that make them less unequal or even progressive. For instance, if affordable electric transport was provided alongside taxes that increase fossil fuel prices, then it would be easier to switch by swapping your old car for a new electric one at a subsidized price + availability of charging infrastructure. And my colleague Jim Boyce has shown that when combined with progressive (i.e. income inequality reducing) rebates financed by at least part of the money accruing to the government, carbon taxes or auctioned-off emissions permits can contribute to progressive redistribution. Key is that richer people will pay much more for consuming carbon in absolute terms, which is money that can be redistributed, it just amounts to a lower share of their income. Examples, such as the carbon tax in British Columbia, show that it can be done and that people come to accept the carbon tax.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301421515300550>

On the whole, it seems to me that it's much more straightforward to deal with inequality resulting from climate change mitigation, than with inequality that results from climate change itself.

I want to point out one more, perhaps less obvious dimension of inequality between countries. Someone needs to produce all of these new technologies, and there is good evidence that the green technology leaders are concentrated in high income countries and - for some activities - in China. The economic development discourse emphasizes the need for industrial upgrading and acquiring capabilities. So far, the low-carbon transition does not look to be a leveler of the inequalities, but rather to reinforce them. For instance, among the top wind and solar panel manufacturers, only a few countries are represented. And more advanced technologies such as low-carbon steel making tend to be developed in rich countries. Unless a green transition can be shown to offer good economic opportunities for all world regions, coherent, effective climate change mitigation policy could be complicated also by inequality in this dimension, and risk increasing exposure of people to climate change in the unequal ways discussed above.

CJP: Some versions of a Green New Deal have been advocated by many economists as a means of halting global climate change. In your view, what should be the key components of a "Green New Deal"? How should we finance

these initiatives?

GS: A Green New Deal should ensure a transition to a low-carbon economy that is timely, just and stabilizes the economy. Timely means the transition occurs so as to reduce emissions and stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases at levels compatible with low average global warming, such as by 1.5°C. Just means that the transition does not impose undue burdens on communities that are most vulnerable to this change, such as workers in fossil-fuel intensive industries. Of course, the transition would also be a welcome moment to reduce inequalities that are high already before the transition. Finally, rapid structural change risks destabilization. In her interview with you in this series, my colleague Isabella Weber points out how rapid price changes destabilized the formerly socialist countries. Poorly coordinated structural change could lead to similar destabilization. Currently, the policy focus is on “transition risks” to high-carbon industries that could destabilize the financial system through sudden declines in assets prices and debt defaults. But of course underlying such risks is the destabilization of the input-output structure of the real economy itself. So the structural change must be coordinated not only in the low-carbon “sunrise” but also high-carbon “sunset” industries.

In rich countries, financing the necessary investments in sunrise industries is in my view a question of political will more than anything else. While many commentators on this topic like to stress that the public sector cannot take on the investments needed by itself, and that greater private investment flows must first be mobilized, the current COVID-19 related stimulus packages show that what the public sector can and cannot do is relative. If governments decided to throw their weight behind the necessary low-carbon investments - not just renewable energy supply with storage but also transport, building retrofits and green hydrogen to power industrial processes - and commit to keep it there permanently, they could certainly do so. Moreover, the resulting fast learning, cost declines and policy certainty would see private investors line up to participate anyway. I think a stronger public leadership role is needed in the transition financing now that can well be carried out by strengthened versions of existing development banks and investment agencies and funds with their capacity to identify good projects and structure deals. To the extent that the private sector can initially add to these funds and investment facilitation expertise, that is great. In the medium term, as we already see in the power supply sector, private actors will be keen to take on

the lion's share of arranging and supplying investment, lured by healthy returns. I believe such an approach requires careful planning and audacious political decisions, but is eminently feasible.

In less affluent countries, there can be binding constraints on the public sector's ability to stem the financing. Here, priorities for what is done could be aligned with industrial policy to partake in the green manufacturing boom that is caused by the rise in investments. In a happy scenario, rich countries and international organizations would also recognize that they'd be better off supplying sufficient stable finance and stimulating green manufacturing activity abroad for a Global Green New Deal.

CJP: With decarbonization becoming the ultimate goal in the transition to a green economy, shouldn't this mean that economic growth as an objective would have to take a back seat, at least temporarily? If so, is this an argument in support of degrowth?

GS: This is partly a question of priorities, partly of how much the two goals, decarbonization and economic growth, are compatible. On the first, as long as we are living in a capitalist economy with rivaling political systems (rather than with a fabled enlightened world government that could solve all the international coordination problems in an intelligent and just way) I think the ultimate goal remains accumulation of capital, which tends to produce some sort of economic growth, in the sense of increasing profits and having to maintain certain socially negotiated living standards for at least some people. If the green transition can be made compatible with this goal, it has a good chance of success within the current system.

But the more interesting practical question I think is about compatibility. A well-executed Green New Deal would increase aggregate demand without destabilizing the economy while increasing international cooperation, and so in all likelihood usher in a Golden Age of "green" capitalism, just like the period in the mid 20th century for the then capitalist economies. Due to the high unemployment rates now caused by COVID-19 and the continuous supply of workers displaced from high-carbon industries but retrained under just transition initiatives such as those proposed by PERI itself, this demand expansion should be falling on an unconstrained supply side and not lead to 'overheating'. From that perspective, I would argue the opposite: the conventional approach to a

decarbonization through investment is an argument in support of high growth.

The degrowth perspective comes into play when asking whether this high-growth scenario, that may effectively mitigate climate change, is not unsustainable in other dimensions. The now famous 'planetary boundaries' concept reminds that greenhouse gases are only one environmental problem at the global scale that requires attention. Others may be exacerbated by the mitigation response. Surely, the debate about the feasibility of economic growth will stay with us throughout the green transition and beyond, but my personal view is that unless degrowth was a very radical global phenomenon, it would not be an effective way to mitigate climate change. It's relatively straightforward to reduce emissions by a few or perhaps 10 percent through degrowth as COVID-19 shows (it also shows that this imposes significant hardships on large swathes of the global population). But to go beyond that while keeping people provisioned and alive, is - in my view - an even more ambitious and unresolved policy challenge than a Green New Deal, as my colleague Bob Pollin discusses in a recent article in *The New Left Review* <https://newleftreview.org/issues/II112/articles/robert-pollin-de-growth-vs-a-green-new-deal>

CJP: Are you optimistic about the prospects of a Green revolution before we see temperatures rising beyond 1.5°C?

GS: The prospects depend on a lot of factors. My worry is a lack of audacity in tackling the transition in the face of detracting other and more immediate problems, a fracturing international scene and lack of empathy within countries for those that are not the elites, all of which is further exacerbated by an intellectual climate fueled also by the discourse in economics that has at least since the 1980s discouraged ambitious direction-setting programs by what must ultimately be national governments. In that sense, I am not optimistic. But I think there are good reasons for Green New Deal-type programs that should be made in an attempt to win the argument and attract support.

While the US Green New Deal proposal introduced in Congress has been criticized as being too far-reaching or not well thought through, I think that misses its most powerful and inspiring message. By tackling climate change head on, other seemingly more pressing issues could be addressed as well and from the present onwards. This includes economic inequality but also the environmental injustice that is now causing members of ethnic minorities to die from COVID-19

in disproportionate numbers. The hope is that a political window of opportunity arises that allows making progress, which then becomes self-sustaining thanks to a broad coalition of public support fueled by the demonstration that such a Deal both addresses current injustices and generates employment and profits for many. Here, the fast pace at which low-carbon technologies become competitive with incumbents is very encouraging. This cost-reducing trend would only be reinforced from the economies of scale, learning and other network externalities as well as the reduced uncertainty that a sustained Green New Deal-type initiative would entail.

Note:

[1] To read more about flooding in Bangladesh, the US and atoll island nations, see: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43017-019-0002-9>

Isabella Marie Weber - The Peculiarities Of China's Economic Model



Isabella Weber - PERI Research

*Associate and Research Leader
in China Studies; Assistant
Professor of Economics*

This is part of PERI's economist interview series, hosted by C.J. Polychroniou. The Series: <https://www.peri.umass.edu/peri-economist-interview-series>

[*Read Isabella Weber's bio here.*](#)

C.J. Polychroniou: How did you get into economics?

Isabella Maria Weber: I got into economics through my interest in politics, in particular global questions. I realized that the political is inherently economic and the economic inherently political. If we want to understand how we can work towards positive change politically, we have to understand the material foundations of our society. If we want to make sense of the major shifts in our global political system, we have to understand the long-term economic dynamics. Coming from this angle, economics for me must take the form of political economy.

CJP: What do you consider to be the main issue in your research?

IMW: The broad question that motivates my research is how we can make sense of the major changes in the global economy that are unfolding in front of our eyes - at a dramatically accelerated pace since the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century, we have lived in a world of a globalizing capitalist economic system, first under British than under U.S. hegemony. This phase is coming to a close with the gradual rise of China - not necessarily to one of dominance but to a more eye-level position. In my research, I pursue two related questions that aim to make a small contribution to this broad challenge: First, I have studied the intellectual foundations behind China's economic reforms that set the country on the path of its current ascent. Second, I am leading a [research project](#) in which we examine the long-term evolution of global export patterns across the last and present era of globalization. The aim here is to understand path dependency and path defiance in the global division of labor. This theme grew out of earlier work on the US-China trade imbalance. In a third strand of my research, I have been investigating foundational questions of the nature of money and the driving forces of international trade for the purpose

of placing my work on firmer theoretical grounds.

CJP: Why did you choose to specialize on the Chinese economy?

IMW: I am answering your questions as we watch the global economy collapse under the threat of COVID-19. There is no question that the political and economic power relations between the U.S. and China are changing. Many people in the U.S. and Europe alike are reacting to this uncertain dynamic with fear and, unfortunately, with increasingly racist, anti-Chinese sentiments. In order to work toward a peaceful navigation of the deep structural changes in the world economy, I believe that there is an urgent need for a better understanding of the logic of China's political economy. Instead of measuring China's system against the European or American experiences or some standard economics model, we need to study China's path on its own grounds, while taking into account at the same time its global connectedness. I have specialized in the Chinese economy for the very purpose of making some kind of a contribution to this project.

CJP: How real is the so-called Chinese economic miracle?

IMW: The Oxford English Dictionary defines a "miracle" as a "marvelous event not ascribable to human power." China's economic development of the last four decades is certainly astonishing and as such marvelous. But it is by no means the result of some overnight wonder created by supernatural agency or luck. According to Maddison estimates of 2001, China accounted for about one third of the world's GDP in 1850. Its share had fallen to below 5 percent in 1950, when China was one of the poorest countries in the world. Today China is responsible for about a fifth of the world's GDP. These are rough measures, but the trend is obvious. China's Communist revolution was about much higher aspirations than economic development. But it was clear from the beginning that industrialization and higher living standards were core requirements. Of course, China gave up long ago on Mao's vision of revolution. But the pursuit of economic progress has continued across dramatically different political phases since 1949. China's gradual return to a more prominent position in the world economy is not the result of a miracle, but of decades of hard work and heterodox economic policymaking. In a forthcoming book of mine, I argue that China's economic leaders learned key lessons from the history of economic warfare in the 1930s and 1940s. At the heart of this strategy is the articulation of clear broad goals which are being pursued by flexibly utilizing prevailing economic dynamics and

structures.

CJP: How did China manage to liberalize its economy while avoiding shock therapy, which is pretty much what happened in virtually all transition economies in Eastern Europe, Russia, and Latin America?

IMW: We often imagine of China's gradual economic reforms as having been without an alternative. In fact, the 1980s marked a crossroads in the recent history of China and of global capitalism, as I show in my forthcoming book "How China Escaped Shock Therapy." China too had very concrete plans for far-ranging overnight liberalizations. Had China implemented the policy of "shock therapy," it would most likely have generated the same devastating results that we have observed elsewhere, but on a much larger scale. China would have mirrored Russia's fall, but starting from a much lower level.

The basic premise of shock therapy is that all institutions of direct state control over the economy must be destroyed to make space for the market. Instead, China pursued a strategy of market creation that utilized the institutions of the planned economy. It kept the core of the planned industrial economy working, while transforming the old institutions into market players by first allowing for market activities on the margins. This strategy is manifested in the dual-track price system. Under this system, state-owned enterprises and farmers had to deliver the state-set quotas at a state-set price, but if they managed to produce more, they could market their surplus at market prices. In this way, China's economy was gradually marketized under active bureaucratic guidance by reorienting its core economic institutions from the plan to the market. Non-essentials were liberalized first. Surpluses as well as sectors producing non-basic goods were non-essentials. They could be completely marketized without immediately endangering the stability of the whole system. Yet, the marketization of these non-essential areas unleashed a dynamic that fundamentally transformed the whole political economy, including its core.[\[1\]](#) As a result of this strategy, China kept much closer control over core sectors of the economy, such as energy, steel, finance and infrastructure. This has allowed China to respond in a fine-grained and targeted way to the 2008 global financial crisis, and to the current economic collapse in light of COVID-19.

CJP: Could/should the Chinese model be emulated by other developing countries?

IMW: China had a very different starting point from most other developing countries today. From a *longue durée* perspective, China could build on a very long history of bureaucratic market creation and participation. Tools derived from the statecraft of playing the market were utilized during the revolutionary struggles and again in the reform era. Considering the more immediate context, the Mao era had laid strong foundations for China's take off in terms of education, literacy, public health and basic industrialization. Most developing countries do not have those preconditions. It would therefore not make sense to simply copy China's model. But there is a deeper reason for not copying China's model that emerges from China's own experience. It is extremely important to realize that China, too, did not simply copy foreign models. Chinese researchers and officials, in collaboration with international partners, studied carefully the experience of various other countries and drew lessons for the country's own specific situation, adapting the insights to its concrete conditions, often with major problems in the process. This approach of careful study of the prevailing local condition and adaptation of foreign experiences is what other developing countries can learn from China. But there is no panacea that works for all. The Beijing Model should not replace the Washington Consensus. The lesson is that there is no easy universal solution, no policy package that can fix it all.

CJP: What's your view on Trump's trade war with China? More generally, do you think the Chinese economy poses threats to the U.S. economy and other countries' economies? If so, should they do anything about it?

IMW: I think that the trade war is an extremely dangerous policy. If any further proof was needed - and I don't think there is, COVID-19 is demonstrating in a morbid fashion just how closely integrated the world is with China, and vice versa. In the 1980s China retreated from its revolutionary ambitions and embarked on a path of reform using its state capacity to reintegrate into the global market. Since the 1990s, we have been living through a second peak of globalization in modern times. The last globalization ended with the First World War. The present one is collapsing as I am writing. In such a situation, we need international collaboration, not war of any kind. I don't think the Chinese economy, taken by itself, poses a threat to the U.S. or to other countries. Crises of this historical moment don't have a nationality; they lie in the nature of the global system. The real threat results from the exploitation of this crisis by nationalists and racists. To confront this threat, we have to improve our understanding of

China, instead of feeding into scapegoat narratives.

Reference:

[1] I spell this out in greater detail in this interview:
<https://www.peri.umass.edu/economists/isabella/item/1206-the-making-of-china-s-economic-reforms>