

Dimitri Lascaris - One Handshake At A Time



Dimitri Lascaris

Dimitri Lascaris was one of Canada's [leading](#) plaintiff-side securities class action litigators, representing plaintiffs in class actions against multimillion dollar companies before he retired at the age of 52 to devote the remainder of his life to peace and social justice activism. Mr. Lascaris is a member of the Green Party of Canada, and in 2020, he finished second in the party's leadership race. In April 2023, Mr. Lascaris visited Moscow and Russian-occupied Crimea and engaged in a fact-finding expedition to better understand the views of Russians in the context of their country's recent invasion of Ukraine. Shortly after Lascaris returned to Canada, at the behest of the Canada-Wide Peace and Justice Network, he engaged in a nationwide peace tour, calling for his government to stop fueling the war in Ukraine. In this interview with Pitasanna Shanmugathas, Lascaris discussed the views of the Russians he spoke to and his experiences during his trip to Russia. He also explained why he subsequently engaged in a Canada-wide peace tour, shared his thoughts on the censorship and ridicule he faced for his decision to visit Russia and embark on the Canada-wide peace tour, and offered advice to the social justice minded law students.

This interview has been edited for the purposes of flow and concision.

Pitasanna Shanmugathas: *Mr. Lascaris, on April 1, 2023, you landed in Moscow for the first time in your life. Ten days later you were on a train heading to Russian-occupied Crimea. To readers who might be curious, explain why a Canadian born and educated man like yourself decided to visit Russia especially in the context of the country's recent invasion of Ukraine.*

Why I went there was not for personal profit. I paid money out of my own pocket to travel there—I was not paid a dime for anything that I did or said while I was there or after I came back to Canada. All the articles I have written about my time in Russia, I do not even solicit donations on my [website](#), nor have I accepted any for the writing of those articles. I went there for one purpose and one purpose only: because I feel we are living through the most dangerous moment in human history. We are on course for a nuclear war. And by the way, a [poll](#) that just came out showed that most Canadians agree with me that we are on trajectory for a nuclear war with Russia. And I, as a matter of conscience, felt I had to do something to try to facilitate a dialogue with this country with which we are at war, and that's why I went. I don't purport to be able to solve this war; I am just one citizen; I am one voice. But I thought, I am in a position to go and try and stimulate some sort of a peace dialogue and if I can do that, I am going to do it.

What were some of the takeaways you had while in Moscow, as well as other parts of the country, in terms of the views Russians held with respect to their country's invasion of Ukraine? Are Russians supportive of Putin's invasion of Ukraine?

First, let me say, I didn't conduct any kind of a poll. I did speak with dozens and dozens of people from across the socioeconomic strata of Russia—people who were university professors, people who were journalists, volunteers in charitable organizations, just people I met on the ground. But, of course, I don't have any kind of scientific polling data to offer you. I can only relay to you what I heard. And, of course, it may be that some of these people didn't feel free to speak, although they were speaking to me in a private setting, not publicly. So, my feeling was that, for the most part, people were telling me how they really felt. What I heard consistently was that NATO is at fault for this, NATO constitutes an existential threat to Russia, this war is an existential threat to Russia. This is not primarily a war between Russia and Ukraine; it is primarily a war between NATO and Russia which is being fought on Ukrainian soil.

The people doing the fighting and dying on behalf of NATO are overwhelmingly of

Ukrainian origin, effectively [being used as] cannon fodder for a NATO war. That was the view expressed to me over and over again.

Interestingly, I never encountered hostility. No one expressed hostility to the peoples of the West. What they feel is that the governments of the West are acting in ways that are profoundly contrary, not only to the interests of the people in Russia, but [also to the interests of] the people of the West themselves. [They believe] this is going to end very badly if people don't come to their senses.

Overwhelmingly, I heard support for what the Russian Federation's government has done, which is reflected by the way in polls. You go to the polling of the [Levada Center](#) website, which is, by the way, very critical of Vladimir Putin, their polls show that currently support for the President is in excess of 80 percent in Russia. If there was criticism of Russian President Vladimir Putin, it is first and foremost that he should've acted sooner rather than wait until NATO built up the Ukrainian military into a formidable fighting force. And secondly, that the military under his command was not being aggressive enough in bringing this war to a rapid and successful conclusion for Russia.

I am sure there is anti-war sentiment in Russia. I am sure there are people there very critical of Vladimir Putin and do not support this invasion. But those people are frankly a minority based on everything I heard, everything I saw, and based upon the polling done.

During your trip to Russia were any of your preconceived notions about the country, in general, challenged?

I should say, I was born in the early 60s, so I am a child of the Cold War. The image that I had of Russia was a grey, drab, dilapidated country, unclean, heavy police presence, oppressive atmosphere, privation—grocery store shelves lightly stocked or not stocked at all, people standing in lines waiting for things—those are the images I grew up with of Russia—a very menacing country. I saw none of that when I was there.

I should preface what I am saying by acknowledging the limitations of my experience. I was only in central Moscow and then I took a train from central Moscow to Crimea.

And I went all over Crimea but the vast majority of that vast country I did not see. So, I am just talking about what I saw. What I saw in central Moscow and Crimea

is a society that is very well organized, clean, I saw very little police presence, uniformed police, the metro system in Moscow was world class, the traffic was very orderly, the buildings were majestic, the grocery store shelves were full, the department store shelves were full, I saw no signs of economic crisis, and people were friendly. I think I was bit of an oddity for them because there are so few people from the West in the country nowadays. People from the West are basically avoiding Russia like the plague—so it was unusual for a lot of people to suddenly find themselves sitting across the table from or meeting in the street somebody from North America and people were curious as to why I came to Russia in the current circumstances. But certainly, there was no hostility—which is something I anticipated, I would be met with at least some hostility, but they were very warm, very gracious, very open to talking about the situation in their country.

During your trip, you met some pretty interesting people such as [Sokol](#), a sniper within the Wagner PMC, a Russian-state funded paramilitary organization, as well as [Genadi](#), a Russian veteran of the Ukraine war. I imagine it takes a great deal of bravery to interact with such characters. Talk about what were some insights you gained from speaking with these military individuals.

They were two very different experiences. Genadi, this interview was setup for me by my translator, whom I hired in Crimea. She is a partner of an American documentary filmmaker by the name of Regis Tremblay, who now lives in Yalta, Crimea. She asked me if I wanted to interview somebody who volunteered and had gone to fight for the pro-Russian rebels in the southeast of Ukraine. I said, "Sure." So, I sat down with him for half an hour. The interview I conducted with him took place at a school for disabled children because his daughter is disabled. With the help of my translator, I asked him why he went to fight. He said, "I'm sixty years old. I served in the military decades ago, but I hadn't served in many years [since] the Soviet era." He said that when the invasion began in February of last year, he sat down with his wife and discussed how he could help. He underwent some military training and enrolled in the territorial defense force in the Donbass. He clarified that he didn't go right up to the frontline but was in the trenches, helping to defend the territory of the Donbass. He said, "I did this because I feel that these people, to me, are Russians living in the southeast of Ukraine who are fighting against the Ukrainian military, and they are under threat. I felt I could help in some way. I don't regret having done it. I felt it was my duty, and it saddens me to see what is happening. I don't think there is any

prospect of the Ukrainian military winning this war. I view Ukrainians as my brothers and sisters, but their comedian President [Zelensky] is bringing ruin upon their country, and I hope that stops.” Interestingly, I asked him what he would say to the peoples of the West if given an opportunity to speak to them, and he said that people look at Russia as a threat since it has recovered economically and politically since the devastating Yeltsin era, but they shouldn’t view Russia as a threat. “If Russians feel there is an existential threat on their border, they have no alternative but to act.”

My experience with Sokol was a different experience. I was on a train travelling from Crimea to Moscow and wasn’t anticipating it was going to be full of Russian soldiers.

For some 28 hours, I found myself on a train with Russian soldiers of all stripes and shapes and ranks. There was a dining car and I went into the dining car. I sat down in a booth designed for four people. There was one person sitting—a young man, late 20s maybe early 30s, he gestured at me to come sit down with him. He was drinking some Armenian brandy and looked kind of drunk. He started speaking to me in Russian. I can’t speak a word of Russian. He got up, approach me, and whispered in my ear two words, [in English], Wagner and sniper. I did a sort of double take when he said that to me and then he sat back down. As soon as he sat down a young woman sitting two booths away from us, happened to speak fluent English and was Russian. I decided to interview him—and since the woman was fluent in English—I asked her if she would be prepared to translate if I interview this man. She said, “Yes.”

I asked [Sokol] how he came to be in Wagner. He told me he was in the middle of serving a sixteen-year prison sentence in a Russian penitentiary for unspecified crimes he committed in the Russian mafia. One day last year Yevgeny Prigozhin, the titular head of Wagner, came to his prison and took the hardened criminals, gathered them in the courtyard, and there Prigozhin made him an offer. The offer was you can come and do six months of military service in Wagner, you might end up dead, you might end up wounded, or you might end up unscathed and leave a free man or you can stay in prison and serve out your sentence. If you come to fight for Wagner, not only will you be a free man, but you will be paid well for your efforts and you will potentially be regarded as a hero and will have an opportunity to pay your debt to society in an honorable way. Sokol said that he took up the offer not only because he wanted to defend his country but also

because the money was good—he was candid about that.

So, he said that he went to the front, was a sniper in Bakhmut. At that point in time, when I spoke to him, Bakhmut was on the verge of falling to the Russians. It has since fallen to the Russians, but it was still being heavily contested and, by all accounts, it has been to date the bloodiest battle of the war—unimaginable casualties and destruction has been visited by the combating sides in that particular battle. He said that what he saw there was unimaginably horrible—the violence and destruction were beyond his contemplation. He didn't want to tell me in much detail what he saw.

Although he did tell me one thing, which I have no way of verifying whether it is true, he told me that he had seen children whose throats had been slit by Ukrainian soldiers—I have no way of verifying whether this is true—but that was the one gruesome detail he was willing to share with me.

As I was talking to him and he was telling me all of this, there were four very large Russian soldiers sitting in the booth next to us, one of whom was apparently a senior officer in the Russian military, and they became agitated at the fact that I was speaking English and asking this man questions. One of them looked at Sokol and said to him in Russian, “You talk too much, shut up.” At that point, he stopped talking, and the conversation ended.

Your decision to visit Russia, to engage in this fact-finding expedition, was met with a great deal of vilification and denunciation from a number of Canadians. Elizabeth May, the current leader of the Green Party of Canada, to which you belong, took to [Twitter](#) to denounce your decision to visit Russia, claiming it does not reflect the views of the Green Party. Additionally, The National Post, a prominent conservative publication in Canada, interviewed you and published [a front-page hit piece](#) about you and the nature of your visit to Russia. Talk about your thoughts on the vilification you faced from Canadians due to your choice to visit Russia.

I saw that tweet by Elizabeth May. First of all, I don't speak for the Green Party, I never purported to speak for the Green Party. I speak for myself and only myself. Whenever I say something, some criticism of Canadian government foreign policy, somebody from the mainstream or the right of the political spectrum will tag me on Twitter and often times say this man finished second in the Green Party leadership race in 2020, and immediately I will point out that I do not speak for the Green Party. I speak for myself and only myself. So, I have no problem with

Elizabeth May saying that Mr. Lascaris does speak for the Green Party. I say that myself. But when she went onto say that we do not agree with him going to Russia at a time of war [my response to her](#) on Twitter was have you gone to the United States in the past twenty years? Of course, you have. You have probably gone there repeatedly. Did you think that you shouldn't go to the United States after Bush launched a criminal war of aggression in Iraq, engaged in torture at Guantanamo and in black sites around the world? And then Obama comes along and says I'm not going to hold any of these people accountable and himself embarks upon a murderous drone war where countless number of civilians, including children, were killed by American drones. She went to the United States, without question, she did that and so did millions of Canadians who would take a dim view of anybody who travels to Russia. So, this is the height of hypocrisy, there is no reason why you should get criticized for going to Russia at a time of war any more than a Canadian who goes to the United States when it is waging a war of aggression. I categorically reject that criticism.

What is really sad and troubling and alarming about the things being said about me in the media is that fundamentally what I am trying to impress upon my fellow Canadians is that we are at risk of nuclear Armageddon to a degree that is more worrisome than at any point during the nuclear era. And if we are truly interested in survival and the future of our children, we have to at least make an effort to find a negotiated solution to this war because it is spiraling out of control. There should be millions of people out in the street demanding an end to this war by negotiated solution. My message is fundamentally one of peace. You could disagree with my political analysis of the situation. You may say Lascaris is wrong to suggest that this war was provoked. You may say Lascaris is wrong to say Russians have some legitimate grievances. You may say Lascaris is overestimating the degree of nuclear danger but fundamentally nobody should contest that what motivates me to say these things is because I want peace. And why should anybody delivering a message of peace at an extraordinarily dangerous moment be subjected to the kind of abuse, vilification, and de-platforming I have had to endure?

Shortly after returning to Canada, at the behest of the Canada-Wide Peace and Justice Network, you made the decision to embark on a Canada-wide [speaking tour](#) titled "Making Peace with Russia One Handshake at a Time." What did you hope to achieve by embarking on this tour?

It was about breaking a taboo. It is a taboo in the mainstream to say that Russia does have some legitimate grievances. Yes, the war and invasion were a violation of the UN Charter and as such it should be condemned but it was also provoked, and the war did not begin in February of last year but began in 2014 when the United States government [helped](#) to orchestrate the violent overthrow of a democratically elected Ukrainian President who was trying to maintain good relations with both Russia and Europe. These are things that cannot be said in the mainstream discourse, and somebody has got to break the taboo in order for these discussions to take place in our society and I happen to be well positioned to do that. Why am I well positioned to do that? Because I am essentially retired from the practice of law. I practiced law for over thirty years. I am financially secure, so I do not have to worry about the economic consequences such as losing my job over saying these things. Secondly, I am a litigator, and as such, I learned how to examine evidence and explain evidence, particularly complicated evidence, to people in ways that are readily comprehensible.

I know how to defend a position. I have a lot of experience in understanding Canadian foreign policy because I have followed it closely for many years, so I am in a position to help break these taboos and if we don't break these taboos, I am afraid we are all going to end up dead because of a nuclear war.

On July 4th , you formally concluded your Canada-wide speaking tour. Talk about what you learned while traveling across the country speaking to Canadians. Furthermore, how did the attendees of your speaking engagements respond to your presentations?

The Canadians I met were overwhelmingly receptive to the message of peace and deeply concerned about what was going on and highly skeptical about what they were being told, because they know Western governments have habitually lied to us about war—they lied to us about the Vietnam War, they lied to us about the Iraq War, they lied to us about the Afghanistan War and so forth. The media cannot be trusted to tell us the truth about war, that is something a lot of Canadians already understand.

In terms of how I was received, virtually every venue was either full, sold out, or closeto full. This is in circumstances where we had to be very careful about disclosing the location of the venue, and the identity of the venue, because we knew that people would pressure the venue to cancel us. Because of our limited budget, in terms of advertising for the tour, there was very little we could do. It

was just word of mouth and social media. And the mainstream media completely ignored us—we put out multiple press releases in the hopes that somebody from the mainstream media would write about this tour. Despite this, we got extremely good turnout. In some venues, it was standing room only and sold out. The people who came out were, for the most part, highly appreciative of the presentation and felt it was an indispensable discussion that had to take place.

Over and over again, people were saying they didn't know a lot of the things I said in my presentation. When I made my presentation, I was very careful to rely on mainstream Western sources for things I am saying so I will pull up articles from Reuters, the Guardian, statistics from the World Bank, the IMF, and I did that deliberately because I didn't want anybody saying my sources are suspect.

Some people who showed up for my presentation were from the Ukrainian community, a minority of them were very supportive. Most of them were hostile. And they asked questions like anybody else, we didn't vet any questions, we conducted a vigorous Q&A. And we managed to engage with each other in a spirited manner.

During your speaking tour, you discussed six ways Canada should respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Talk about the six ways Canada should respond to the war.

1. Robust humanitarian aid for the innocent victims of this war—delivered to them, not through the Ukrainian government, which is hopelessly corrupt but through non-governmental independent organizations that do this kind of work.
2. Robust protection and sanctuary for people who have fled this war.
3. An arms embargo on both sides to the war. We should not be providing weapons, nor should we be providing real time battlefield intelligence, as we are doing for Ukraine, to either side of the conflict.
4. We should not impose sanctions on any country—whether it be the Russian Federation or any other country—that has not been approved by the UN Security Council
5. We should ban our citizens from participating in the war as combatants. We have effectively done that for those who may wish to fight on the Russian side, for example, Canadians of Russian origin. But we have not banned people from fighting for the Ukrainian side—our government has encouraged that and there are Canadians fighting and dying for the Ukrainian side.
6. We should be offering our services as a mediator to try to bring the parties

together to negotiate a mutually acceptable compromise. As long as we are in this war up to our necks, we are waging a war against Russia, we have no hope of being viewed by both sides to the conflict as a neutral mediator. If we want to do that, we have to adopt the first five steps I have outlined, in my view.

If you look at the Economist, which is virulently anti-Russian and strongly pro-NATO, its intelligence unit has developed a [map](#) which shows the countries that are sending weapons to Ukraine and which countries are imposing sanctions on Russia. Those countries are almost exclusively from the West. Almost nobody in Latin America is doing this, including Mexico, almost nobody in Africa, nobody in the Middle East, almost nobody in Asia—in other words, the vast majority of countries, representing the vast majority of the human population, are not arming Ukraine, are not sending people to fight on the side of Ukraine, and are not imposing sanctions on Russia. So, what I am suggesting is mainstream on a global level, it is only in the West the position I have articulated is arguably an outlier.

I agree with everything you have said principally. However, I would suggest modifying one of your points. Because it is kind of counterintuitive to call for sanctions only if they are implemented by the UN Security Council because Russia is a member of the UN Security Council, so they are going to veto any sanctions. Wouldn't a better modification be no sanctions at all and just pursue the track of diplomacy?

If the UN Security Council felt this was an appropriate step to take, I would support it.

But they wouldn't [support it] because Russia would veto it, right?

Of course, they would. But who has used the veto on the UN Security Council the most? The United States government. The United States has gone hog-wild on using the veto in order to protect its own nefarious agenda so the problem here is that the veto power enjoyed by a select group of states is obstructing the collective action to keep the global peace. If the UN Security Council would never approve of sanctions because of the Russian veto, then we need to fix the UN Security Council. What we should not do is take the law into our own hands and start imposing potentially devastating economic sanctions to suit our own geopolitical agenda, which is what the West has been doing, in Cuba, Venezuela, they are doing it all over the world.

If we had a proper functioning Security Council, in other words, nobody has a veto, and it was just majority voting and they said we think this is an appropriate case for sanctions—I would support that. Absent that stamp of approval from the UN Security Council, we shouldn't be imposing sanctions—we are taking the law into our own hands, and when we do that, we invariably do it for the wrong reasons.

The venues which were set to host your speaking engagements in Winnipeg, Halifax, Montreal and Toronto cancelled your speaking engagement. I believe in Montreal and Toronto, the venues had to [cancel](#) your speaking engagement last minute because they were being pressured by a segment of the Ukrainian Canadian population. The venues [expressed](#) concerns about the potential for violence.

This is rare in modern Canada, the only other time I ever heard of such suppression of free speech, in an anti-war context, was in the 1950s when Canadians that were opposing their country's involvement in the Korean War were [stifled](#), partly due to the Cold War hysteria at the time. Could you please discuss the challenges and suppression you encountered during your speaking tour?

If you manage to whip the public up into enough of a hysteria, you can get them to tolerate a shocking degree of censorship. We are now in a position where the most fundamental right to free speech is under assault. It's not only about peace. If we manage to survive this war, which I think is highly questionable, given the trajectory we are now on—we need to go about the business of defending our right free speech and reviving the right to free speech because it is under assault, and we are on the verge of losing it.

We were canceled in Winnipeg, Halifax, Montreal and Toronto. Two venues canceled on us in Winnipeg. The local organizers were just amazing throughout this country.

They managed to find a third venue in Winnipeg at the 11 th hour, so the event did actually go ahead. In Halifax, Professor Judy and Larry Haiven, they are professor emeriti at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, [organized an event at the university], and the President himself canceled on us eight hours after they made the booking.

There as well, the organizers managed to find an alternative venue. The Montreal venue was inundated with hostile messages, and they canceled at the 11th hour.

We were fortunate enough, the weather was reasonably good, so we took all the attendees to a nearby park. I wasn't able to do my PowerPoint presentation, but I did a 45-minute presentation over the shouting and insults of pro-Ukrainian protestors who were about fifty meters away, separated from us by the police. The only place where the [organizers] weren't able to find an alternative venue was in Toronto. The President of the Ontario Public Services Union, JP Hornick, canceled us at the last minute. Even though the tour was scheduled to conclude on July 4th, the local organizers in Toronto were so determined to make it happen they said come back to Toronto we are going to get you a speaking venue at the Toronto Public Library. They got me a venue there and I spoke at the Toronto Public Library on July 8th.

Now that you have wrapped up your speaking tour, what lies ahead on the horizon for you in your mission for peace?

The first thing I am doing right now is writing an [article](#) about the de-platforming. I'm identifying the culprits, I have a pretty good idea who they are, how they went about doing this, I've been gathering the details diligently over the past several weeks and I will tell the story of how a message of peace was repeatedly put under an assault by the enemies of free speech.

After that, frankly, I just need a break.

You were one of Canada's [leading](#) plaintiff-side securities class action litigators, representing plaintiffs in class actions against multimillion dollar companies. Despite still being relatively young, you chose to retire early from that extremely lucrative career to devote yourself fulltime to the cause of peace. What is some advice that you have for law students who are social justice minded?

You are going to be tempted to sell your soul to the devil. And most people who enter the profession with the best of intentions end up selling their souls to the devil, that's just the sad truth. I will tell you a story about my first year on Wall Street, the firm I worked for, I was a brand-new lawyer, just learning the ropes, and I took this job on Wall Street. Like many just out of law school, I had a desire to contribute to social justice, and the firm I was at, this is typical of big New York firms, they encouraged pro-bono work. They don't do this in Canada, by the way. In Canada, no significant law firm, to my knowledge, actively encourages pro-bono work for its lawyers, it is all about making money. I took on this pro-bono

case with two other lawyers representing an inmate in New York state who had been beaten savagely by prison guards for no reason. And we took that case to trial, we brought it up under federal civil rights legislation, and we won after the trial. I put in 500 hours, and the lawyers I did it with were people who their entire adult lives pursued the cause of social justice and were determined to contribute to social justice as lawyers. These two lawyers, seven years later, were both partners in major Wall Street firms and were no longer committing themselves at all to social justice. They became completely committed to making as much money as possible. Once you get into the legal profession you will be tempted to, for example, not speak out about injustice in this world—like what is being done to the Palestinian people, or this crazy NATO proxy war that we are pursuing, and to abandon your commitment to social justice in deference to the God of money. I cannot stress enough to young people in law school today that you will be entering into a perilous moral universe, and it will be a challenge to maintain your commitment to social justice and peace in this world. This moral battle is one you will have to fight.

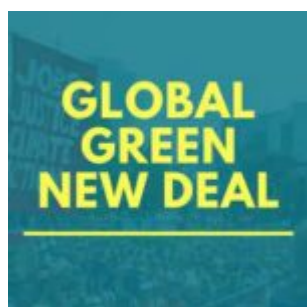
At the age of 52, I was in a position, because of the success I was fortunate enough to have as a class actions lawyer, I didn't need to make money anymore. So, I said to myself I have an obligation to give back now. I could not live with myself if I enjoyed the profits because of my success as a lawyer but wasn't committing myself passionately towards the cause of justice and peace in this world. I just couldn't live with myself.

Byline

Pitasanna Shanmugathas was born and raised in Canada. Pitasanna's interest in foreign policy first came from reading the works of progressive thinkers such as Noam Chomsky and Yves Engler. While completing his post-graduate education at the University of Toronto in global affairs, Pitasanna decided to embark on a three year documentary journey starting in 2019 to explore the role of Canada's foreign policy in the international arena. Pitasanna has also worked in multiple organizations advocating for peace and disarmament.

<https://www.truthtothepowerless.com/about-the-crew/>

A Global Green New Deal Is The Best Way To Save The Planet



What is urgently needed is a political platform that embraces a sound climate stabilization plan which ensures a just transition, creates a plethora of new jobs, reduces inequality, and promotes sustainable growth.

Another summer is upon us and [heatwaves](#) are scorching many parts of the world, smashing thousands of temperature records. Even the world's [ocean surface temperature](#) is off the charts, reaching unprecedented levels, while [sea ice level in the Antarctic](#) has set a record low for the second year in a row.

Indeed, planet earth is screaming because "[climate change is out of control](#)" as U.N. General-Secretary António Guterres recently put it. Yet the global community's response to the greatest existential threat facing humanity continues to be not merely unacceptably slow but borders on criminal negligence.

We know the reasons why.

Fossil fuels supply about 80% of the world's energy, and contemporary politics is trapped in the short term, with little evidence that it can be repaired. Across the world, politicians continue to make enormous compromises to short term interests in the name of energy security. China and the U.S. are the world's biggest carbon polluters. Yet President Joe Biden has signed off on a series of major fossil fuel projects, and China is building more new coal plants than the rest of the world. This is even while both countries are also pursuing aggressive clean energy transition policies—indeed they are competing with one another on these.

To add insult to injury, governments continue to subsidize fossil fuel production. In 2022, subsidies worldwide for fossil fuel consumption rose above \$1 trillion,

according to the [International Energy Agency](#). And the world's biggest banks have provided [\\$5.5 trillion](#) in finance to the fossil fuel industry over the past seven years.

As for global climate conferences, they have turned out to be not only ineffective but something of a cruel joke. They function in the absence of an "enforcement mechanism," and empty words and promises are their hallmark feature. [Greta Thunberg](#) was indeed right on the mark when she chastised global leaders at the [Youth4Climate](#) event in Milan for their failure to address the climate emergency, dismissing their rhetoric as "blah, blah, blah."

Moreover, data has shown that [fossil fuel lobbyists](#) attending the negotiations in climate conferences outnumber almost every national delegation. There were more than 500 fossil fuel lobbyists at the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, and more than 600 at the COP27 summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. As for COP28, which will take place this year from November 30 until December 12, the host is the United Arab Emirates, one of the world's major oil and gas producers, and will be presided by Sultan al-Jaber, the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Company. At this global climate summit, [fossil fuel companies are expected to have an even bigger voice](#). And their main focus is to promote carbon capture technologies. These technologies have yet to demonstrate their capacity at scale, while also offering their own dangerous side effects.

This is all pretty understandable. It's capitalism at work.

But we should also be asking ourselves an additional question: Why is it that populations are not motivated enough to address the climate crisis? Not only that, but far-right and right-wing populist parties, which are hostile to climate and carbon-low energy, are growing in prominence and influence. The rise of far-right movements is felt not only in Europe and the United States, but also in Eurasia and South Asia, while right-wing platforms remain popular across Latin America in spite of the fact that the region has shifted to the left over the past two decades.

The reasons for this unfortunate and disturbing development are a bit more complicated. Demagogues are the worst enemies of the laboring populations, yet the working class and poor people are easy targets. In our own era, neoliberal policies (deregulation of the economy, privatization, suppression of wages, and

shifting the orientation of the state as far away as possible from redistribution and a socially-based agenda) had led to extremely harmful consequences, including poverty, mass unemployment, income inequality, deficits in decent work and labor rights, social exclusion, and overall decline in the standard of living.

In Europe, home to the majority of the richest countries in the world, in 2022, more than 95 million European Union citizens, representing close to 22% of the population, were [at risk of poverty and social exclusion](#).

In the U.S., more than 51 million workers currently make less than \$15 an hour—nearly one-third of the workforce—according to data compiled by [Oxfam](#), and the [official poverty rate](#) with nearly 38 million people is considered by many experts to be based on a vastly inaccurate measurement of poverty in the United States. For example, the [MIT living wage model](#) uses a cost of living estimate that far exceeds the federal poverty thresholds.

At the heart of the neoliberal vision is a societal and world order based on the prioritization of corporate power and free markets and the abandonment of public services. The neoliberal claim is that economies would perform more effectively, producing greater wealth and economic prosperity for all, if markets were allowed to operate without government intervention. This claim is predicated on the idea that free markets are inherently just and can create effective low-cost ways to produce consumer goods and services. By extension, an interventionist or state-managed economy is regarded as wasteful and inefficient, choking off growth and expansion by constraining innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit.

However, the facts say otherwise. During the period known as “state-managed capitalism” (roughly from 1945-73, and otherwise known as the classical Keynesian era), the Western capitalist economies were growing faster than at any other time in the 20th century and wealth was reaching those at the bottom of the social pyramid more effectively than ever before. Convergence was also far greater during this period than it has been during the last 45 years of neoliberal policies. Moreover, under the neoliberal economic order, Western capitalist economies have not only failed to match the trends, growth patterns, and distributional effects experienced under “managed capitalism,” but the “free-market” orthodoxy has produced a series of never-ending financial crises, distorted developments in the real economy, elevated inequality to new historical heights, and eroded civic virtues and democratic values. In fact, neoliberalism has

turned out to be the new dystopia of the contemporary world.

Under the neoliberal socio-economic order and its effects, which provoke fear, insecurity, and indignation, it is not difficult to see why the laboring populations might fall under the spell of right-wing demagogues who know how to exploit societal divisions and resort to deception and manipulation with a political repertoire based on xenophobic nationalism and law and order. It is also not hard to see why concerns about climate breakdown might become far less of a priority for them when they are struggling to make ends meet. Putting food on the table, paying the rent, and fears of losing a job are what may keep average folks awake at night—not climate breakdown, even when they do recognize it as a major threat. Indeed, climate change, surely among U.S. voters, remains “a lower priority than issues such as strengthening the economy and reducing healthcare costs,” according to a recent [Pew Research Center](#) survey. And France’s “yellow vest” movement speaks volumes about the political risks of green taxes, in conjunction with tax cuts for the wealthy, while living standards are moving in the wrong direction.

This is where radical collective social and political action ought to come in, as it is the only hope we have for a sustainable future. But today’s left has failed so far to convince the laboring populations that it has a viable political agenda which can effectively address their immediate concerns as well as tackle the climate crisis. Today’s left, particularly in Europe, has an economic agenda which pays lip service to social transformation and lacks a concrete action plan for addressing the climate crisis through sustainable development strategies. Throughout the advanced industrialized world, existing climate plans remain insufficient and proceed alongside national plans to increase energy security through reliance on new oil, gas, and petrochemical infrastructure projects.

Make no mistake about it. “Oil and gas projects are back in a big way,” as a recent [New York Times](#) article put it. And climate protests alone cannot stop global warming. They do have a positive impact on public opinion, though “extreme action protests” can also backfire, [according to some studies](#).

Moreover, some bad ideas, such as that of degrowth, have begun to gain ground, distracting attention away from real solutions to the climate crisis and to the ills of neoliberalism.

What is urgently needed is building long-term progressive power around a vision of left-wing politics that is energized by the pressing need to tackle the climate crisis by radically accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels while at the same time pushing for a structural transformation of present-day economies. In other words, a political platform that embraces a sound climate stabilization plan which ensures a just transition, creates a plethora of new jobs, reduces inequality, and promotes sustainable growth. Of course, this is what the [Green New Deal](#) (GND) is supposed to be all about, except that there are a number of different versions of a GND policy plan, including one adopted by the European Union. But Europe's green ambitions (they call it the "European Green Deal" and the aim is for the E.U. to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050) are contradicted by European countries' quest for new fossil fuel supplies. In addition, and this is typical of poorly formulated GND policy plans, the European parliament has voted in support of E.U. rules labeling natural gas and nuclear energy as green investments.

Even so, the movement for the Green New Deal is growing and is making a positive impact on several fronts. Several states and over 100 cities in the United States have committed to 100% clean energy. The Inflation Reduction Act may not qualify as a GND, but it is still a historical piece of legislation, especially given the existing political climate in the country.

Still, one might say that what we really need in order to save the planet is a comprehensive GND, formulated as a worldwide program. But we do have such a blueprint in place, courtesy of the American economist [Robert Pollin](#), and fully endorsed by the world's greatest intellectual alive, namely [Noam Chomsky](#).

Degrowth is not the answer. As Robert Pollin has argued powerfully and persuasively, cutting back on economic growth will have little to no impact on the task at hand, which is ["delivering a zero-emissions global economy."](#) More precisely, if we depend on reducing gross domestic product (GDP) to reduce emissions, then it follows that we can only reduce emissions by the same number we reduce growth. For example, if GDP shrinks by 10%—a massive global recession—it will succeed in cutting emissions by only 10%. We need emissions down to zero.

Moreover, the idea of shrinking rather than growing economies is, politically speaking, a self-defeating proposition. All that degrowth will accomplish is more

pain for working class people and will most likely fuel further support for the far-right.

Of course, degrowth advocates argue that this is a project targeted at the Global North, not a path for the Global South. However, are we to assume on the basis of such claims that the developed countries are void of class inequalities and have somehow escaped the sort of socio-economic ills that accompany the implementation of ruthless neoliberal policies? Are we to believe that there is no need to improve living conditions, reduce poverty rates, and increase employment opportunities for the Western masses? Perhaps such notions do lie behind degrowth, which is why some, if not most, of its advocates reject the idea of economic planning and by extension of the GND. In this sense, I think it's quite fair to say that degrowth is in fact working in service of neoliberalism while doing nothing to stop global warming. Committed socialists should have nothing to do with degrowth policy proposals.

Pondering radical proposals for saving the planet and humanity from the effects of global warming should be welcomed as they may generate opportunities for creative forms of political and social action. But degrowth is neither a radical alternative nor is it based on sound economics. Furthermore, it is a rather dangerous political idea as it will hurt mostly the laboring classes and deliver them straight into the arms of the far-right.

For all practical intents and purposes, radical politics in the age of climate breakdown goes through a (global) Green New Deal—not through degrowth rhetoric, which is in full display in the current issue of [Monthly Review](#). It is up to the socialist left to embrace it and see that its vision turns into reality.

Author Bio:

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His latest books are *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (A collection of interviews with Noam Chomsky; Haymarket Books, 2021), and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (Verso, 2021).

Source: <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/global-green-new-deal>

Cuba Reaffirms Socialism While It Reckons With Its Private Sector



Manolo De Los Santos

Seventy years have passed since Fidel Castro and a daring group of young Cubans launched an assault on the Moncada Barracks in eastern Cuba, aiming to topple the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. Despite the military failure of that attempt, it served as the catalyst for the revolution that has now held power in Cuba for more than 63 years. Today, a new generation of revolutionaries is grappling with the challenges of meeting the needs of the Cuban people while fostering a socialist project within a global economy marked by crisis. They are doing all this under an intense campaign of maximum pressure from the Biden administration.

The United States' agenda of global hegemony has [continually](#) clashed with Cuba's pursuit of independence and sovereignty and more intensely since the revolution's victory in 1959. The Kennedy administration [initiated](#) a blockade against Cuba in 1962, launching a relentless campaign of starvation and deprivation against the island's 11 million inhabitants. However, despite [enduring](#) the longest embargo in modern history, Cubans have managed to build world-renowned public education and health systems, as well as an innovative biotech industry, and have [secured](#) a higher quality of life for its citizens than many developing countries.

Yet, the U.S. has intensified its blockade against Cuba over the past six years, starting with former President Donald Trump who implemented [243 new sanctions](#), reversing the normalization process [initiated](#) by former President Barack Obama in 2014. Despite campaign [promises](#) of a more balanced approach toward Cuba, President Joe Biden has amplified pressure on the nation.

In 2017, the U.S. [accused](#) the Cuban government of deploying sonic attacks against its embassy officials, a claim that was later proven false. However, this accusation served as a pretext to freeze relations with Cuba, causing a [collapse](#) in tourism and leading to revenue loss as more than 600,000 annual U.S. visitors [ceased](#) their travels to the island. Under Trump's sanctions, Western Union [halted](#) operations in Cuba in 2020, disrupting remittances. Visa services were suspended by the U.S. Embassy in Havana in 2017, sparking the [largest](#) wave of irregular migration since 1980.

Cuba's economy has suffered under this extensive blockade, with the country's GDP [shrinking](#) to a staggering 15 percent in 2019 and 11 percent in 2020 as the government and other entities found themselves unable to purchase basic necessities due to banking restrictions imposed because of the blockade. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Cuba's robust health care system was pressured by the sanctions as the number of Delta variant cases surged and the country's only oxygen plant was rendered [nonoperational](#) due to its inability to import spare parts. Even as Cuban patients struggled to breathe, Washington refused to make exceptions, only offering U.S.-made vaccines after most Cubans had been [vaccinated](#) with domestically developed vaccines.

In his last week in office in January 2021, former President Trump [put](#) Cuba on the state sponsors of terrorism list, making it nearly impossible for Cuba to engage in normal financial transactions necessary for trade. During President Biden's first 14 months in office, the Cuban economy [lost](#) an estimated \$6.35 billion, preventing Cuba from making crucial investments in its aging energy grid or purchasing food and medicine. With the economy shrinking but the government persevering with its commitment to provide employment, inflation rocked the Cuban peso, devaluing what was already considered low government wages. While the country's rationing system provided everyone with a subsistence diet, this was a level of deprivation that hadn't been felt by Cubans since the Special Period in the 1990s, with no immediate solutions in sight. The Cuban government turned to alternative avenues for growth and development.

In 2020, Cuba began relying more heavily on the private sector to meet its basic needs due to the increasing scarcity of goods. With the private sector on track to [import](#) \$1 billion of goods in 2023, and more than 8,000 small and medium-sized businesses having registered since 2021, the economy is slowly [growing](#) at a rate of 1.8 percent. The rise of the private sector introduces new challenges for any socialist project.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel [expressed](#) his vision for Cuba's future, emphasizing the government's commitment to providing essential services to its citizens but also nodding toward changes in the future. He argued that social justice is not merely about welfare or equality but also about a fair distribution of income, where those who contribute more earn more and those who are unable to contribute are assisted by the government.

In this journey, the Cuban government faces an uphill task. While the rise of the private sector has boosted supplies and provided badly needed goods, it in turn also creates new income disparities, which stands in contrast to Cuba's historic emphasis on equitable wealth distribution. Moreover, if the government's new policies succeed in bringing back economic growth and more efficiently delivering needed supplies via the private sector—at a time when the state is essentially blocked from doing so—it will create a new social counterweight to the state itself. This changing dynamic will define Díaz-Canel's second and final term as president as the government manages the balance between the private sector's growth and maintaining the socialist principles that are central to Cuba's identity.

So far, the leadership of the Cuban Revolution, while recognizing the necessity of wealth creation, has been committed to ensuring that the benefits of this wealth are shared among all its citizens. Díaz-Canel insists that the government will safeguard the socialist project—guaranteeing essential services, some free of charge and others at the lowest possible cost—while resisting the calls from friends and foes alike to embark on any major privatization efforts.

Over the years, Cuba has faced considerable economic and political challenges. Beyond an economic blockade, natural disasters such as Hurricane Ian [caused](#) more than \$1 billion in damages and left more than 100,000 families without homes. The crises provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic eliminated tourism, the country's number one industry.

While Western governments never lose an opportunity to criticize Cuba on both economic and political grounds, many in the Global South continue to support it as an example of resilience and independence. Faced with numerous challenges, Cuba has chosen a path of resistance, continually adapting and innovating in the face of adversity rather than succumbing to external pressures.

Amid the challenges of a global economy marked by crisis, Cuba strives to maintain its socialist project, meet the needs of its people, and assert its independence. Despite facing the longest embargo in modern history, the nation has made significant strides in public education, health care, and sustainable development, outperforming many advanced economies. The future may be fraught with challenges, but Cuba's dedication to its people and its independent path shines as a beacon of hope in a world still unable to answer the many dilemmas of humanity. Indeed, that is why Fidel Castro's daring mission at the Moncada Barracks 70 years ago continues to have such a hold on the Cuban imagination. Despite the temporary setbacks, Cubans survive and live to fight the next battle.

Byline:

[Manolo De Los Santos](#)

Author Bio:

This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

Manolo De Los Santos is the co-executive director of the [People's Forum](#) and is a researcher at [Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research](#). He co-edited, most recently, *Viviremos: Venezuela vs. Hybrid War* ([LeftWord Books/1804 Books](#), 2020) and *Comrade of the Revolution: Selected Speeches of Fidel Castro* ([LeftWord Books/1804 Books](#), 2021).

Source:

Globetrotter

The Eco Collapse We Were Warned About Has Begun



José Seoane

In 2023, different climatic anomalies have been recorded that set new historical records in the tragic progression of climate change at the global level.

Thus, in June, the surface temperature in the North Atlantic reached the maximum increase of 1.3 degrees Celsius with respect to preindustrial values. In a similar direction—although in lower values—the average temperature of the seas at the global level increased. On the other hand, the retraction of Antarctic ice reached a new limit, reaching the historical decrease of 2016, but several months earlier in the middle of the cold season.

The combination of these records has led scientists who follow these processes to warn of the danger of a profound change in the currents that regulate temperature and life in the oceans and globally. The heat waves recorded on the coasts of a large part of the world—in Ireland, Mexico, Ecuador, Japan, Mauritania, and Iceland—may, in turn, be proof of this.

These phenomena, of course, are not limited to the seas. On Thursday, July 6, the global air temperature (measured at two meters above the ground) reached 17.23 degrees Celsius for the first time in the history of the last centuries, 1.68 degrees Celsius higher than preindustrial values; last June was already the warmest month in history. Meanwhile, temperatures on the continents, particularly in the North, also broke records: 40 degrees Celsius in Siberia, 50 degrees Celsius in Mexico, the warmest June in England in the historical series that began in 1884.

And its counterpart, droughts, such as the one plaguing Uruguay, where the shortage of fresh water since May has forced the increasing use of brackish water sources, making tap water undrinkable for the inhabitants of the Montevideo metropolitan area, where 60 percent of the country's population is concentrated. This is a drought that, if it continues, could leave this region of the country without drinking water, making it the first city in the world to suffer such a catastrophe.

But the stifling heat and the droughts also bring with them voracious fires, such as the boreal forest fire that has been raging across Canada for weeks, with more than 500 outbreaks scattered in different regions of the country, many of them uncontrollable, and the widespread images of an apocalyptic New York darkened and stained red under a blanket of ashes.

This accumulation of tragic evidence, against all the denialist narratives, makes it undeniable that the climate crisis is already here, among us. It also indicates the absolute failure of the policies and initiatives adopted to reduce the emission or presence of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. In this direction, in May of 2023, the levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) [measured](#) at NOAA's global reference observatory in Hawaii reached an all-time high of 424 parts per million (ppm), becoming more than 50 percent higher than before the beginning of the industrial era and, those of the period January—May 2023, 0.3 percent higher than those of the same period of 2022 and 1.6 percent compared to that of 2019. According to the latest [report](#) of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the global surface temperature has risen faster since 1970 than in any other 50-year period for at least the last 2,000 years, the same period in which international agreements and national initiatives to combat the causes of climate change were deployed. The failure of these policies is also reflected, in our present, in the persistence and strength of a fossil capitalism and its plundering and socio-environmental destruction.

Not only have these so-called mitigation policies failed, but also the so-called adaptation policies aimed at minimizing the foreseeable impacts of climate change are weak or even absent.

In the same vein, the annual [report](#) of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO, *Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update*) released in May 2023 warned that it is very likely (66 percent probability) that the annual average global

temperature will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius in at least one year of the next five years (2023-2027), it is possible (32 percent probability) that the average temperature will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius, and it is almost certain (98 percent probability) that at least one of the next five years, as well as the five-year period as a whole, will be the warmest on record; The IPCC has estimated serious consequences if this temperature is exceeded permanently.

How close to this point will the arrival of the El Niño phenomenon place us this year and possibly in the coming years? El Niño is an event of climatic origin that expresses itself in the warming of the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean and manifests itself in cycles of between three and eight years. With antecedents in the 19th century, in 1924 climatologist Gilbert Walker coined the term “Southern Oscillation” to identify it and in 1969 meteorologist Jacob Bjerknes suggested that this unusual warming in the eastern Pacific could unbalance the trade winds and increase the warm waters toward the east, that is, toward the intertropical coasts of South America.

But this is not simply a traditional meteorological phenomenon that recurs in irregular annual periods. It is not a natural phenomenon; however many attempts are made, time and again, to make invisible or deny its social causes. On the contrary, in recent decades, the dynamics of the climate crisis have increased both in frequency and intensity. Already in early 2023, the third continuous La Niña episode concluded, the third time since 1950 that it has extended over three years and with increasing intensity. Likewise, in 2016, El Niño led to the average temperature record reached by the planet. And different scientists estimate today that this Super El Niño may be repeated today with unknown consequences given the levels of greenhouse gases and the dynamics of the current climate crisis.

The banners of a change inspired by social and climate justice and the effective paths of this socio-ecological transition raised by popular movements are becoming more imperative and urgent today. It is possible to propose an emergency popular mitigation and adaptation plan. But to make these alternatives socially audible, to break with the ecological blindness that wants to impose itself, it is first necessary to break the epistemological construction that wants to inscribe these catastrophes, repeatedly and persistently, in a world of supposedly pure nature, in a presumably external field, alien and outside human social control.

This is a matrix of naturalization that, while excluding social groups and the mode of socioeconomic organization from any responsibility for the current crises, wants to turn them into unpredictable and unknowable events that only leave the option of resignation, religious alienation, or individual resilience. The questioning of these views is inscribed not only in the discourses but also in the practices and emotions, in responding to the catastrophe with the (re)construction of bonds and values of affectivity, collectivity, and solidarity—indispensable supports for emancipatory change.

Byline:

[José Seoane](#)

Author Bio:

This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

José Seoane is a professor and researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences (FCSoc) at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), where he is a member of the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Group (GEAL) at the Institute of Latin American and Caribbean Studies (IEALC). He is also a researcher at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research.

Source:

Globetrotter

World Hunger And The War In Ukraine



Vijay Prashad

On Monday, June 17, Dmitry Peskov, the spokesperson for Russia's President Vladimir Putin, [announced](#), "The Black Sea agreements are no longer in effect." This was a blunt statement to suspend the Black Sea Grain Initiative that emerged out of intense negotiations in the hours after Russian forces entered Ukraine in February 2022. The Initiative went into effect on July 22, 2022, after Russian and Ukrainian officials [signed](#) it in Istanbul in the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Guterres [called](#) the Initiative a "beacon of hope" for two reasons. First, it is remarkable to have an agreement of this kind between belligerents in an ongoing war. Second, Russia and Ukraine are [major producers](#) of wheat, barley, maize, rapeseed and rapeseed oil, sunflower seeds and sunflower oil, as well as nitrogen, potassic, and phosphorus fertilizer, [accounting](#) for twelve percent of calories traded. Disruption of supply from Russia and Ukraine, it was felt by a range of international organizations, would have a catastrophic impact on world food markets and on hunger. As Western—largely [U.S.](#), [UK](#), and [European](#)—sanctions increased against Russia, the feasibility of the deal began to diminish. It was suspended several times during the past year. In March 2023, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova responding to the sanctions against Russian agriculture, [said](#), "[The main] parameters provided for in the [grain] deal do not work."

Financialization Leads to Hunger

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said](#) that his country regrets Russia's "continued weaponization of food" since this "harms millions of vulnerable people around the world." Indeed, the timing of the suspension could not be worse. A United Nations [report](#), "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023" (July 12, 2023), shows that one in ten people in the world struggles with hunger and that 3.1 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. But the report

itself makes an interesting point: that the war in Ukraine has driven 23 million people into hunger, a number that pales in comparison to the other drivers of hunger—such as the impact of commercialized food markets and the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2011 [report](#) from World Development Movement called “Broken Markets: How Financial Market Regulation Can Help Prevent Another Global Food Crisis” showed that “financial speculators now dominate the [food] market, holding over 60 percent of some markets compared to 12 percent 15 years ago.”

The situation has since worsened. Dr. Sophie van Huellen, who studies financial speculation in food markets, [pointed](#) out in late 2022 that while there are indeed food shortages, “the current food crisis is a price crisis, rather than a supply crisis.” The end of the Black Sea Grain Initiative is indeed regrettable, but it is not the leading cause of hunger in the world. The leading cause—as even the European Economic and Social Committee [agrees](#)—is financial speculation in food markets.

Why Did Russia Suspend the Initiative?

To monitor the Black Sea Grain Initiative, the United Nations set up a Joint Coordination Centre (JCC) in Istanbul. It is staffed by representatives from Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Nations. On several occasions, the JCC had to deal with tensions between Russia and Ukraine over the shipments, such as when Ukraine [attacked](#) Russia’s Black Sea Fleet—some of whose vessels carried the grain—in Sevastopol, Crimea, in October 2022. Tensions remained over the initiative as Western sanctions against Russia tightened, making it difficult for Russia to export its own agricultural products into the world market.

Russia put three requirements on the table to the United Nations regarding its own agricultural system. First, the Russian government [asked](#) that the [Russian Agricultural Bank](#)—the premier credit and trade bank for Russian agriculture—be reconnected to the SWIFT system, from which it had been cut off by the European Union’s [sixth package of sanctions](#) in June 2022. A Turkish banker [told](#) TASS that there is the possibility that the European Union could “issue a general license to the Russian Agricultural Bank” and that the Bank “has the opportunity to use JP Morgan to conduct transactions in U.S. dollars” as long as the exporters being paid for were part of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Second, from the first discussions about the Grain Initiative, Moscow put on the table its export of ammonia fertilizer from Russia both through the port of Odesa

and of supplies held in Latvia and the Netherlands. A central part of the debate has been the reopening of the Togliatti-Odesa pipeline, the world's longest ammonia pipeline. In July 2022, the UN and Russia signed an [agreement](#) that would facilitate the sale of Russian ammonia on the world market. The UN's Guterres went to the Security Council to [announce](#), "We are doing everything possible to... ease the serious fertilizer market crunch that is already affecting farming in West Africa and elsewhere. If the fertilizer market is not stabilized, next year could bring a food supply crisis. Simply put, the world may run out of food." On June 8, 2023, Ukrainian forces [blew up](#) a section of the Togliatti-Odesa pipeline in Kharkiv, increasing the tension over this dispute. Other than the Black Sea ports, Russia has no other safe way to export its ammonia-based fertilizers.

Third, Russia's agricultural sector faces challenges from a lack of ability to import machinery and spare parts, and Russian ships are not able to buy insurance or enter many foreign ports. Despite the "carve-outs" in Western sanctions for agriculture, sanctions on firms and individuals have debilitated Russia's agricultural sector.

To counter Western sanctions, Russia placed restrictions on the export of fertilizer and agricultural products. These restrictions included the ban on the export of certain goods (such as [temporary bans](#) of wheat exports to the Eurasian Economic Union), the increase of licensing requirements (including for compound fertilizers, [requirements](#) set in place before the war), and the [increase](#) of export taxes. These Russian moves come alongside strategic direct sales to countries, such as India, which will [re-export](#) to other countries.

In late July, St. Petersburg will host the Second [Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum](#), where these topics will surely be front and center. Ahead of the summit, President Putin called South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa to inform him about the problems faced by Russia in exporting its food and fertilizers to the African continent. "The deal's main goal," he [said](#) of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, was "to supply grain to countries in need, including those on the African continent, has not been implemented."

It is likely that the Black Sea Grain Initiative will restart within the month. Earlier suspensions have not lasted longer than a few weeks. But this time, it is not clear if the West will give Russia any relief on its ability to export its own agricultural products. Certainly, the suspension will impact millions of people around the

world who struggle with endemic hunger. Billions of others who are hungry because of financial speculation in food markets are not impacted directly by these developments.

Author Bio:

This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).

Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian, editor, and journalist. He is a writing fellow and chief correspondent at Globetrotter. He is an editor of [LeftWord Books](#) and the director of [Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research](#). He has written more than 20 books, including [The Darker Nations](#) and [The Poorer Nations](#). His latest books are [Struggle Makes Us Human: Learning from Movements for Socialism](#) and (with Noam Chomsky) [The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power](#).

Source:

Globetrotter

Why Capitalism Is Leaving The U.S., In Search Of Profit



Richard D. Wolff

Early U.S. capitalism was centered in New England. After some time, the pursuit of profit led many capitalists to leave that area and move production to New York and the mid-Atlantic states. Much of New England was left with abandoned

factory buildings and depressed towns evident to this day. Eventually employers moved again, abandoning New York and the mid-Atlantic for the Midwest. The same story kept repeating as capitalism's center relocated to the Far West, the South, and the Southwest. Descriptive terms like "Rust Belt," "deindustrialization," and "manufacturing desert" increasingly applied to ever more portions of U.S. capitalism.

So long as capitalism's movements stayed mostly within the U.S., the alarms raised by its abandoned victims remained regional, not becoming a national issue yet. Over recent decades, however, many capitalists have moved production facilities and investments outside the U.S., relocating them to other countries, especially to China. Ongoing controversies and alarms surround this capitalist exodus. Even the celebrated hi-tech sectors, arguably U.S. capitalism's only remaining robust center, have invested heavily elsewhere.

Since the 1970s, wages were far lower abroad and markets were growing faster there too. Ever more U.S. capitalists had to leave or risk losing their competitive edge over those capitalists (European and Japanese, as well as U.S.) who had left earlier for China and were showing stunningly improved profit rates. Beyond China, other Asian, South American, and African countries also provided incentives of low wages and growing markets, which eventually drew U.S. capitalists and others to move investments there.

Profits from those capitalists' movements stimulated more movements. Rising profits flowed back to rally U.S. stock markets and produced great gains in income and wealth. That chiefly benefited the already rich corporate shareholders and top corporate executives. They in turn promoted and funded ideological claims that capitalism's abandonment of the U.S. was actually a great gain for U.S. society as a whole. Those claims, categorized under the headings of "neoliberalism" and "globalization" served neatly to hide or obscure one key fact: higher profits mainly for the richest few was the chief goal and the result of capitalists abandoning the U.S.

Neoliberalism was a new version of an old economic theory that justified capitalists' "free choices" as the necessary means to achieve optimal efficiency for entire economies. According to the neoliberal view, governments should minimize any regulation or other interference in capitalists' profit-driven decisions. Neoliberalism celebrated "globalization," its preferred name for capitalists'

choosing to specifically move production overseas. That “free choice” was said to enable “more efficient” production of goods and services because capitalists could tap globally sourced resources. The point and punchline flowing from exaltations of neoliberalism, capitalists’ free choices, and globalization were that *all citizens benefited when capitalism moved on*. Excepting a few dissenters (including some unions), politicians, mass media, and academicians largely joined the intense cheerleading for capitalism’s neoliberal globalization.

The economic consequences of capitalism’s profit-driven movement out of its old centers (Western Europe, North America, and Japan) brought capitalism there to its current crisis. First, real wages stagnated in the old centers. Employers who could export jobs (especially in manufacturing) did so. Employers who could not (especially in service sectors) automated them. As U.S. job opportunities stopped rising, so did wages. Since globalization and automation boosted corporate profits and stock markets while wages stagnated, capitalism’s old centers exhibited extreme widening of income and wealth gaps. Deepening social divisions followed and culminated in capitalism’s crisis now.

Second, unlike many other poor countries, China possessed the ideology and organization to make sure that investments made by capitalists served China’s own development plan and economic strategy. China required the sharing of incoming capitalists’ advanced technologies (in exchange for those capitalists’ access to low-wage Chinese labor and rapidly expanding Chinese markets). The capitalists entering the Beijing markets were also required to facilitate partnerships between Chinese producers and distribution channels in their home countries. China’s strategy to prioritize exports meant that it needed to secure access to distribution systems (and thus distribution networks controlled by capitalists) in its targeted markets. Mutually profitable partnerships developed between China and global distributors such as Walmart.

Beijing’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics” included a powerful development-focused political party and state. Conjointly they supervised and controlled an economy that mixed private with state capitalism. In that model private employers and state employers each direct masses of employees in their respective enterprises. Both sets of employers function subject to the strategic interventions of a party and government determined to achieve its economic goals. As a result of how it defined and operated its socialism, China’s economy gained more (especially in GDP growth) from neoliberal globalization than

Western Europe, North America, and Japan did. China grew fast enough to compete now with capitalism's old centers. The decline of the U.S. within a changing world economy has contributed to the crisis of U.S. capitalism. For the U.S. empire that arose out of World War II, China and its BRICS allies represent its first serious, sustained economic challenge. The official U.S. reaction to these changes so far has been a mix of resentment, provocation, and denial. Those are neither solutions to the crisis nor successful adjustments to a changed reality.

Third, the Ukraine war has exposed key effects of capitalism's geographic movements and the accelerated economic decline of the U.S. relative to the economic rise of China. Thus the U.S.-led sanctions war against Russia has failed to crush the ruble or collapse the Russian economy. That failure has followed in good part because Russia obtained crucial support from the alliances (BRICS) already built around China. Those alliances, enriched by both foreign and domestic capitalists' investments, especially in China and India, provided alternative markets when sanctions closed off Western markets to Russian exports.

Earlier income and wealth gaps in the U.S., worsened by the export and automation of high-paying jobs, undermined the economic basis of that "vast middle class" that so many employees believed themselves to be part of. Over recent decades, workers who expected to enjoy "the American dream" found that increased costs of goods and services led to the dream being beyond their reach. Their children, especially those forced to borrow for college, found themselves in a similar situation or in a worse one. Resistances of all sorts arose (unionization drives, strikes, left and right "populisms") as working-class living conditions kept deteriorating. Making matters worse, mass media celebrated the stupefying wealth of those few who profited most from neoliberal globalization. In the U.S., phenomena like former President Donald Trump, Vermont's independent Senator Bernie Sanders, white supremacy, unionization, strikes, explicit anti-capitalism, "culture" wars, and frequently bizarre political extremism reflect deepening social divisions. Many in the U.S. feel betrayed after being abandoned by capitalism. Their differing explanations for the betrayal exacerbate the widely held sense of crisis in the nation.

Capitalism's global relocation helped [raise](#) the total GDP of the BRICS nations (China + allies) well above that of the G7 (U.S. + allies). For all the countries of the Global South, their appeals for development assistance can now be directed to

two possible respondents (China and the U.S.), not just the one in the West. When Chinese entities invest in Africa, of course their investments are structured to help both donors and recipients. Whether the relationship between them is imperialist or not depends on the specifics of the relationship, and its balance of net gains. Those gains for the BRICS will likely be substantial. Russia's adjustment to Ukraine-related sanctions against it not only led it to lean more on BRICS but likewise intensified the economic interactions among BRICS members. Existing economic links and conjoint projects among them grew. New ones are fast emerging. Unsurprisingly, [additional](#) countries in the Global South have recently requested BRICS membership.

Capitalism has moved on, abandoning its old centers and thereby pushing its problems and divisions to crisis levels. Because profits still flow back to the old centers, those there gathering the profits delude their countries and themselves into thinking all is well in and for global capitalism. Because those profits sharply aggravate economic inequalities, social crises there deepen. For example, the wave of labor militancy sweeping across nearly all U.S. industries reflects anger and resentment against those inequalities. The hysterical scapegoating of various minorities by right-wing demagogues and movements is another reflection of the worsening difficulties. Yet another is the growing realization that the problem, at its root, is the capitalist system. All of these are components of today's crisis.

Even in capitalism's new dynamic centers, a critical socialist question returns to agitate people's minds. Is the new centers' organization of workplaces—retaining the old capitalist model of employers vs. employees in both private and state enterprises—desirable or sustainable? Is it acceptable for a small group, employers, exclusively and unaccountably to make most key workplace decisions (what, where, and how to produce and what to do with the profits)? That is clearly undemocratic. Employees in capitalism's new centers already question the system; some have begun to challenge and move against it. Where those new centers celebrate some variety of socialism, employees will more likely (and sooner) resist subordination to the residues of capitalism in their workplaces.

Author Bio:

Richard D. Wolff is professor of economics emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a visiting professor in the Graduate Program in International Affairs of the New School University, in New York. Wolff's weekly

show, "Economic Update," is syndicated by more than 100 radio stations and goes to 55 million TV receivers via Free Speech TV. His three recent [books with Democracy at Work](#) are *The Sickness Is the System: When Capitalism Fails to Save Us From Pandemics or Itself*, *Understanding Socialism*, and *Understanding Marxism*, the latter of which is now available in a newly released 2021 hardcover edition with a new introduction by the author.

Source:

Independent Media Institute

This article was produced by [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.