

COP28 Gave Us Another Agreement Full of Loopholes for Fossil Fuels



Pictured is the logo for the 28th United Nations' Climate Change Conference, or COP28, being held from Nov. 30 to Dec. 12, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (Image from cop28.com)

12-20-2023 It's further proof that sustained activism, not fossil fuel diplomacy, is our only hope for tackling the climate crisis.

The outcome of global climate summits has barely changed since the United Nations held the first Conference of the Parties (COP) in Berlin in 1995. Reaching an international consensus on climate action that might avert the worst effects of global warming and put the planet on a sustainable track has always been an elusive goal due to the power of the fossil fuel industry and political short-termism. In the end, “fossil fuel diplomacy” always prevails over the interests of humanity and the planet. Yet, somehow, congratulatory statements are always made at the conclusion of every COP. In the meantime, the business of the fossil fuel industry goes on uninterrupted and carbon emissions remain on an unsustainable growth trajectory despite clean energy’s growth.

[COP28](#), hosted by the autocratic and oil-rich United Arab Emirates, concluded on December 13, with countries that were signatories of the Paris Agreement pledging to contribute to “transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems.”

COP28 president Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, said that this is “a [robust action plan](#) to keep 1.5 degrees Celsius within reach.”

Hogwash. The deal reached at COP28 is not a plan, let alone a robust one, to keep the world from breaching the 1.5C climate threshold set by the Paris Agreement in 2015. An action plan includes specific, measurable and time-bound steps. The [agreement](#) of “transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems” is a climate pledge that does represent a progression beyond previous pledges, but it is still merely a pledge, i.e., a non-legally binding promise. President Joe Biden’s campaign was full of pledges on climate change and environmental justice but, since he entered the White House, his policies have been nothing short of a real [boost](#) for fossil fuels. Rich countries have failed to deliver on [funding pledges](#) to poor nations. And most countries are failing to transform their [climate commitments](#) into action. So much for pledges.

Adding insult to injury, “it is a plan that is led by the science,” said the very same oil man who just recently declared that there is “[no science](#)” to phasing out fossil fuels. The science is clear: Fossil fuels must go. But the term “phaseout” was rejected by petrostates like Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates and by the world’s two biggest climate polluters — the United States and China.

The COP28 agreement also incorporated into the final text extremely feeble language toward the dirtiest of all fossil fuels — coal. Countries recognized the need to accelerate “efforts toward the phasing-down of unabated coal power,” which is language used in previous global climate summits, but the deal is silent on limiting new coal-fired power plants. China, in fact, is moving forward with new coal-fired power construction even as it pledges to reduce the use of coal during its next five-year plan. Moreover, the term “[unabated](#),” when it comes to fossil fuels, “means doing nothing to reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas” and is actually associated with [carbon capture and storage technologies](#).

Indeed, indicative of the litany of loopholes included in the final COP28 text that essentially offer the fossil fuel industry major escape routes is the emphasis on unproven technologies like carbon capture and utilization and storage. The utilization of such technologies for an allegedly lower-emission future will only guarantee that fossil fuels remain around for the indefinite future. In fact, as

India's leading business newspaper, *The Economic Times* put it, the takeaway from COP28 is that fossil fuels are "[here to stay](#) for years."

In sum, to label the outcome of the COP28 global climate summit — a non-binding pledge based on feeble wording that doesn't even set any limits on the production of oil, gas and coal — a "historic" deal is simply preposterous.

But there is more to the failure of COP28. The deal operationalized the loss and damage fund to help vulnerable countries cope with the devastating impacts of global warming, but the financial pledges of around \$790 million [fall way short](#) of "the trillions eventually needed to support developing countries with clean energy transitions, implementing their national climate plans and adaptation efforts," according to the UN. The [economic cost](#) of loss and damage that developing countries need has been estimated to be greater than \$400 billion a year.

We are in a race against time to stop global warming. COP28 failed to rise to the occasion in a big way. "This agreement contains major industry escape hatches for disastrous gas expansion, plastics proliferation and dangerous climate scams like carbon capture and storage," Jean Su, director of the Energy Justice Program at the Center for Biological Diversity, told *Truthout*. "It also fails to offer both the needed financial support to developing countries and meaningful commitment from rich countries to move first. Getting 'fossil fuels' into the final decision is a win in process, but not in the practical fight for survival of life on Earth."

COP28 should be seen as a "historic" failure instead of a "historic," game-changing agreement. A historic climate agreement would be one that includes unwavering commitments to end fossil fuel subsidies; ban banks from funding new fossil fuel projects, as they have pumped trillions of dollars into oil, gas and coal since the Paris Agreement was adopted; wipe off the debt of all lower-income countries, which now spend several times more on serving debt than dealing with the devastating effects of global warming; and promote a coordinated plan to finance the [Global Green New Deal](#).

We are, of course, very far from the realization of such lofty expectations. In fact, COP28 confirmed what we already knew, which is that "fossil-fuel diplomacy" can never be expected to break out of the business-as-usual approach to climate change. Activism remains our only true hope. This is why it is more than crucial that the struggle to force governments to listen to the voices of their citizens not

only continues but intensifies, as the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference is less than a year away. (COP29 will be held in Azerbaijan — yet another autocratic and fossil-fuel-funded regime.) Indeed, as Su said, “People power has gotten us here and the momentum is stronger than ever. The fight to end oil, gas and coal must now be taken up at the country level with the United States leading the way by halting new fossil fuel project approvals and setting a strong nationally determined contribution for next year’s COP29.”

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Don't Dismiss Marx. His Critique Of Colonialism Is More Relevant Than Ever



*Marcello Musto -
Photo: York
University*

12-15-2023 Contrary to liberal misinterpretations, Marx was a fierce critic of colonialism, says Marxist scholar Marcello Musto.

During the last couple of decades, we have been witnessing a resurgence of interest in the thought and work of Karl Marx, author of major philosophical, historical, political and economic works — and of course, of *The Communist Manifesto*, which is perhaps the most popular political manifesto in the history of the world. This resurgence is largely due to the devastating consequences of neoliberalism around the world — unprecedented levels of economic inequality, social decay and popular discontent, as well as intensifying environmental degradation bringing the planet ever closer to a climate precipice — and the inability of the formal institutions of liberal democracy to solve this growing list of societal problems. But is Marx still relevant to the socio-economic and political landscape that characterizes today's capitalist world? And what about the argument that Marx was Eurocentric and had little or nothing to say about colonialism?

Marcello Musto, a leading Marxist scholar, and professor of sociology at York University in Toronto, Canada, who has been a part of the revival of interest in Marx, contends in an exclusive interview for *Truthout* that Marx is still very much

relevant today and debunks the claim that he was Eurocentric. In the interview that follows, Musto argues that Marx was, in fact, intensely critical of the impact of colonialism.

C.J. Polychroniou: In the last decade or so there has been renewed interest in Karl Marx's critique of capitalism among leftist public intellectuals. Yet, capitalism has changed dramatically since Marx's time and the idea that capitalism is fated to self-destruct because of contradictions that arise from the workings of its own logic no longer commands intellectual credibility. Moreover, the working class today is not only much more complex and diverse than the working class of the industrial revolution but has also not fulfilled the worldwide historical mission envisioned by Marx. In fact, it was such considerations that gave rise to post-Marxism, a fashionable intellectual posture from the 1970s to the 1990s, which attacks the Marxist notion of class analysis and underplays the material causes for radical political action. But now, it seems, there is a return once again to the fundamental ideas of Marx. How should we explain the renewed interest in Marx? Indeed, is Marx still relevant today?

*Marcello Musto: The fall of the Berlin Wall was followed by two decades of conspiracy of silence on Marx's work. In the 1990s and 2000s, the attention toward Marx was extremely scarce and the same can be said for the publication, and discussion, of his writing. Marx's work — no longer identified with the odious function of *instrumentum regni* of the Soviet Union — became the focus of a renewed global interest in 2008, after one of the biggest economic crises in the history of capitalism. Prestigious newspapers, as well as journals with wide readerships, described the author of *Capital* as a farsighted theorist, whose topicality received confirmation one more time. Marx became, almost everywhere, the theme of university courses and international conferences. His writings reappeared on bookshop shelves, and his interpretation of capitalism gathered increasing momentum.*

In the last few years, there has also been a reconsideration of Marx as a political theorist and many authors with progressive views maintain that his ideas continue to be indispensable for anyone who believes it is necessary to build an alternative to the society in which we live. The contemporary "Marx revival" is not confined only to Marx's critique of political economy, but also open to rediscovering his political ideas and sociological interpretations. In the meantime, many post-Marxist theories have demonstrated all their fallacies and ended up

accepting the foundations of the existing society — even though the inequalities that tear it apart and thoroughly undermine its democratic coexistence are growing in increasingly dramatic forms.

Certainly, Marx's analysis of the working class needs to be reframed, as it was developed on the observation of a different form of capitalism. If the answers to many of our contemporary problems cannot be found in Marx, he does, however, center the essential questions. I think this is his greatest contribution today: he helps us to ask the right questions, to identify the main contradictions. That seems to me to be no small thing. Marx still has so much to teach us. His elaboration helps us better understand how indispensable he is in rethinking an alternative to capitalism — today, even more urgently than in his time.

Marx's writings include discussions of issues, such as nature, migration and borders, which recently have received renewed attention. Can you briefly discuss Marx's approach to nature and his take on migration and borders?

Marx studied many subjects — in the past often underestimated, or even ignored, by his scholars — which are of crucial importance for the political agenda of our times. The relevance that Marx assigned to the ecological question is the focus of some of the major studies devoted to his work over the past two decades. In contrast to interpretations that reduced Marx's conception of socialism to the mere development of productive forces (labor, instruments and raw material), he displayed great interest in what we today call the ecological question. On repeated occasions, Marx argued that the expansion of the capitalist mode of production increases not only the exploitation of the working class, but also the pillage of natural resources. He denounced that "all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker but of robbing the soil." In *Capital*, Marx observed that the private ownership of the earth by individuals is as absurd as the private ownership of one human being by another human being.

Marx was also very interested in migration and among his last studies are notes on the pogrom that occurred in San Francisco in 1877 against Chinese migrants. Marx railed against anti-Chinese demagogues who claimed that the migrants would starve the white proletarians, and against those who tried to persuade the working class to support xenophobic positions. On the contrary, Marx showed that the forced movement of labor generated by capitalism was a very important

component of bourgeois exploitation and that the key to combating it was class solidarity among workers, regardless of their origins or any distinction between local and imported labor.

One of the most frequently heard objections to Marx is that he was Eurocentric and that he even justified colonialism as necessary for modernity. Yet, while Marx never developed [his theory of colonialism](#) as extensively as his critique of political economy, he condemned British rule in India in the most unequivocal terms, for instance, and criticized those who failed to see the destructive consequences of colonialism. How do you assess Marx on these matters?

The habit of using decontextualized quotations from Marx's work dates much before Edward Said's *Orientalism*, an influential book that contributed to the myth of Marx's alleged Eurocentrism. Today, I often read reconstructions of Marx's analyses of very complex historical processes that are outright fabrications.

Already in the early 1850s, in his articles (contested by Said) for the *New-York Tribune* — a newspaper with which he collaborated for more than a decade — Marx had been under no illusion about the basic characteristics of capitalism. He well knew that the bourgeoisie had never “effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation.” But he had also been convinced that, through world trade, development of the productive forces and the transformation of production into something scientifically capable of dominating the forces of nature, “bourgeois industry and commerce [would create] these material conditions of a new world.” These considerations reflected no more than a partial, ingenuous vision of colonialism held by a man writing a journalistic piece at barely 35 years of age.

Later, Marx undertook extensive investigations of non-European societies and his fierce anti-colonialism was even more evident. These considerations are all too obvious to anyone who has read Marx, despite skepticism in some academic circles that represent a bizarre form of decoloniality and assimilate Marx to liberal thinkers. When Marx wrote about the domination of England in India, he asserted that the British had only been able to “destroy native agriculture and double the number and intensity of famines.” For Marx, the suppression of communal landownership in India was nothing but an act of English vandalism, pushing the native people backwards, certainly not forwards.

Nowhere in Marx's works is there the suggestion of an essentialist distinction between the societies of the East and the West. And, in fact, Marx's anti-colonialism — particularly his ability to understand the true roots of this phenomenon — contributes to the new contemporary wave of interest in his theories, from Brazil to Asia.

The last journey that Karl Marx undertook before he died was in Algiers. Can you highlight his reflections on the Arab world and what he thought of the French occupation of Algeria?

I have told this story — so little known — in my recent book, *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography*. In the winter of 1882, during the last year of his life, Marx had a severe bronchitis and his doctor recommended him a period of rest in a warm place like Algiers, in order to escape the rigors of winter. It was the only time in his life that he spent outside Europe.

Owing to his ill health, Marx was unable to study Algerian society as he would have liked. In 1879, he had already examined the French occupation of Algeria and had argued that the transfer of landownership from the hands of the natives into those of the colonists' had a central aim: "the destruction of the indigenous collective property and its transformation into an object of free purchase and sale." Marx had noted that this expropriation had two purposes: to provide the French as much land as possible; and to tear away the Arabs from their natural bonds to the soil, which meant to break any danger of rebellion. Marx commented that this type of individualization of landownership had not only secured huge economic benefits for the invaders but also achieved a political aim: "to destroy the foundation of the society."

Although Marx could not pursue this research further, he made a number of interesting observations on the Arab world when he was in Algiers. He attacked, with outrage, the violent abuse from the French, their repeated provocative acts, their shameless arrogance, presumption and obsession with taking revenge — like Moloch in the face of every act of rebellion by the local Arab population.

In his letters from Algiers, Marx reported that when a murder is committed by an Arab gang, usually with robbery in view, and the actual miscreants are in the course of time duly apprehended, tried and executed, this is not regarded as sufficient atonement by the injured colonist family. They demand into the bargain

the “pulling in” of at least half a dozen innocent Arabs: “A kind of torture is applied by the police, to force the Arabs to ‘confess,’ just as the British do in India.” Marx wrote that when a European colonist dwells among those who are considered the “lesser breeds,” either as a settler or simply on business, he generally regards himself as even more inviolable than the king. And Marx also emphasized that, in the comparative history of colonial occupation, “the British and Dutch outdo the French.”

Do these reflections shed any light on Marx’s general perspective on colonialism?

Marx always expressed himself unambiguously against the ravages of colonialism. It is a mistake to suggest otherwise, despite the instrumental scepticism so fashionable nowadays in certain liberal academic quarters. During his life, Marx closely observed the main events in international politics and, as we can see from his writings and letters, he expressed firm opposition to British colonial oppression in India, to French colonialism in Algeria, and to all the other forms of colonial domination. He was anything but Eurocentric and fixated only on class conflict. Marx thought the study of new political conflicts and peripheral geographical areas to be fundamental for his critique of the capitalist system. Most importantly, he always took the side of the oppressed against the oppressors.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/articles/dont-dismiss-marx-his-critique-of-colonialism-is-more-relevant-than-ever/>

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Myanmar's Instability Deepens As The World Watches Silently



*John P. Ruehl - Source:
Independent Media
Institute*

12-13-2023 Militant groups are increasingly threatening Myanmar's military government. But other non-state actors, as well as China, are playing powerful roles in the divided country.

Myanmar's stability has eroded significantly since [the 2021 military coup](#). But the

coordinated attack by multiple separatist and pro-democracy groups in [October](#) and [November](#) 2023 has seen military outposts, villages, border crossings, and other infrastructure overrun. While the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military, clings to control in central and coastal regions populated by the country's [ethnic majority](#), much of the country's border areas are increasingly slipping into anti-government control.

This current turbulence is not an aberration but deeply rooted in Myanmar's history. Since gaining independence from British rule in 1948, the country has grappled with what is commonly described as the world's [longest-running civil war](#). Initial experiments with democracy witnessed limited clashes between Myanmar's central government and [Ethnic Armed Organizations](#) (EAOs.) Following a military coup in 1962 that established the junta, more EAOs [emerged to challenge government power](#).

[Infighting and splintering](#) among EAOs, coupled with their [growing antagonism](#) toward the Burma Communist Party (BCP), itself waging a war on the central government, allowed the junta to implement fragile ceasefires in exchange for limited autonomy. By the end of the Cold War, democratic protests [in 1988](#), the collapse of the BCP [in 1989](#), and free elections [in 1990](#) all suggested Myanmar was cautiously embracing a peaceful future.

Despite losing the elections in 1990, however, the junta did not relinquish power, drawing international condemnation. EAOs and other groups like the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), [which split from the BCP](#), then continued their struggle for two decades until the junta ceded some powers to a civilian administration [in 2011](#). Elections in 2015 and 2020 saw landslide victories for the National League for Democracy (NLD), as well as [some progress toward reconciliation](#).

But in 2021, the Tatmadaw reestablished the junta and plunged the country back into destabilization, culminating in the 2023 autumn offensive by anti-junta forces. In addition to EAOs and a [reorganized BCP](#), the junta has also been forced to contend with [People's Defense Forces](#) (PDFs), loose armed organizations backed by the [National Unity Government](#) (NUG), set up by lawmakers and politicians in the aftermath of the coup. Additionally, the [role of the Burman ethnic majority](#) and [grassroots civil defense forces](#) in opposing the junta has also complicated its response to unrest.

The junta has proven adept at managing its restive elements before, and can also rely on its [Border Guard Forces](#) (BGFs) and other pro-government militia groups. But the broad swathes of Myanmar's society fighting against it have made the junta's traditional policy of divide and rule far less effective. Myanmar's Acting President Myint Swe has said the country could "[split into various parts](#)", prompting Myanmar military officials to retreat [to the capital](#), Naypyidaw, a planned city completed in 2012 that effectively serves as a fortress located near the most restive regions.

China's role in Myanmar has undergone significant shifts since the latter's independence. Despite Chinese support for the [BCP](#) and other communist groups, [Myanmar grew closer to China](#) after its isolation from the West in the 1990s. Beijing supported the junta to stabilize Myanmar and prevent adversaries from establishing a foothold on China's southern border. Other interests included maintaining access to Myanmar's raw materials and natural resources, as well as infrastructure development to turn Myanmar [into a strategic gateway](#) to the Bay of Bengal through the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China [maintained ties](#) to the junta, democracy advocates, and ethnic groups from 2011 to 2021. However, the 2021 coup [disrupted development projects](#) and led to attacks on Chinese-run facilities [by rebel groups](#), and the junta's inability to protect infrastructure exacerbated historical tension between it and Beijing. Four Chinese civilians were killed [in 2015](#) after a Myanmar military airstrike hit across the border into Yunnan, while the junta burned down a Chinese-owned factory and killed Chinese and Myanmar civilians [in 2021](#).

China's [ongoing support](#) to some militia groups, such as the [United Wa State Army](#) (UWSA) and [MNDAA](#), provides Beijing leverage over the junta and a say in the ceasefire processes. Chinese firms also [often work](#) with armed groups in "special economic zones" near the border, and some of the anti-junta groups regularly cross the border to China to escape the junta and its proxy forces. Beijing's tacit approval of their activities may also be partially fueled by wariness that rebel groups [were becoming closer to the U.S.](#) prior to the new offensive.

Beijing has nonetheless attempted to sustain a balancing act, arresting a UWSA deputy military chief [in October](#) 2023 and initially [ignoring calls for assistance from the rebels](#) after the launch of their offensive. But following the steady string

of defeats suffered by the junta, China has since altered its outlook. China's affiliates now form some of the most powerful groups operating in Myanmar, and China's foreign ministry has [called for a ceasefire](#).

Myanmar's porous borders have not only allowed armed groups to flourish but also facilitated the expansion of organized crime networks. Increased cooperation between militant and criminal groups in recent decades, known as the [terror-crime nexus](#), has elevated the power of these groups worldwide.

American efforts to counter communism inadvertently helped develop drug networks in Myanmar [during the early Cold War](#), while transnational organized crime in Southeast Asia [burgeoned in the 21st Century](#). The COVID-19 pandemic [further established Myanmar as a hub of criminal activity](#), expanding the funding networks available to the country's armed groups. Both local and international criminal networks operate in Myanmar's special economic zones, [engaging in](#) human and wildlife trafficking, slavery, cybercrimes, money laundering, communication fraud, illegal casinos, and online gambling centers.

The relationships between these entities and governments are intricate, with [shifting alliances](#) commonplace. Beijing and [transnational Chinese gangs play central roles in Myanmar's heightened criminal activity](#). The junta has also had close ties to criminal networks for decades, and since the 2021 coup has [become increasingly reliant on criminal activity](#) to finance itself and offset international isolation.

China, while entangled in Myanmar's criminal underworld, has [grown steadily more concerned](#) with rising illicit activity on its border with Myanmar and the willing and unwilling participation of Chinese citizens. China's signals to the junta to address the forced-labor networks [since May](#) 2023 went unheeded, leading to China issuing [arrest warrants for junta allies](#) and the [UWSA to raid](#) online [scam compounds](#) and trafficked labor centers in border regions.

However, the resilience of regional criminal groups became evident after the NLD [failed to disrupt their activities](#) during the decade of partial democratic rule from 2011 to 2021, and they have only grown financially stronger since. And despite their interweaving with regional elites, criminal networks and their militant partners have developed newfound agency and an ability to act independently from governments since the 2021 coup.

Additionally, while the junta styles its current campaign as a counterinsurgency, Myanmar's armed groups possess significant military capabilities. Minority groups such as those belonging to the Karen ethnic group were [prominent](#) in Myanmar's armed forces during the British colonial administration, gaining valuable experience. [As in Ethiopia](#), certain ethnic groups have developed and maintained well-equipped forces capable of both insurgency and conventional warfare.

Like other anti-government forces around the world, Myanmar rebel groups have also embraced new technologies and strategies in recent years. This includes crowdfunding initiatives, [which have expanded significantly since 2021](#), to offset the junta's control over the central bank and other national economic levers. Large-scale application of drone warfare has also made a marked difference on the battlefield, [even before](#) the current offensive by the rebels.

Myanmar's militant groups have also worked with European criminal groups [to obtain weapons](#), and groups like the UWSA have proven capable of [manufacturing weapons](#) since 2008. The [use of 3D-printed guns](#) by Myanmar rebel groups, just ten years after the first 3D-printed gun was produced, also marks a distinctive feature of the current conflict. The NUG has meanwhile been busily setting up local civic administration and public services and People's Administrative Teams (PATs) in PDF-controlled or contested areas, indicative of their state-building capabilities.

Hindered by international isolation, increasingly powerful rebel groups, and a growing dependence on a Chinese leadership willing to support multiple sides, the junta's outlook appears bleak. But it does maintain some other allies abroad. Russia [grew closer to the junta](#) throughout the 2010s and despite being tied down in Ukraine, Moscow has offered more support for Myanmar [since the coup](#), including the first ever Russia-Myanmar joint naval exercise [in November 2023](#). Bordering states Laos and Thailand also maintain [friendly ties to the junta](#), and Laos, holding the chairmanship of ASEAN since September 2023, has shielded Myanmar from greater institutional isolation.

Myanmar's other neighbors, India and Bangladesh, are also wary of additional instability and the potential emergence of a failed state on their borders. India has already seen tens of thousands of refugees (as well as soldiers [from the junta](#)) cross the border [since 2021](#), while Bangladesh has seen close to one million

Rohingya refugees enter the country [since 2016](#), and India has recently shown it is still [willing to engage](#) with the junta despite its vulnerability.

Efforts to further unite anti-government forces meanwhile face obstacles due to differences in strategies, objectives, and allegiances. Several organizations have been set up to [encourage greater coordination](#), but [infighting](#) is still common. [Some EAOs](#), like the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), are still open to adhering to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) while others consider a federal system a viable alternative to complete independence. Perceived indifference to the [Rohingya crisis in 2017](#) on behalf of the democratic government at the time also reveals the persistent ethnic tensions among Myanmar's population despite alternative leadership.

Convincing criminal and militant groups to give up their lucrative illicit networks, as well as [untangling their links to the junta-dominated economy](#), will also prove challenging. And with the U.S. diplomatically tied down in Ukraine and Israel and [ASEAN's divided approach to the crisis](#), China enjoys relative freedom to manipulate the situation on its border. Yet despite positive relations across Myanmar's political spectrum, Beijing's reluctance to intervene more directly only amplifies the persistent uncertainty surrounding Myanmar's future.

By John P. Ruehl

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Source: Globetrotter

Dubai Is A Fitting Host For The Climate Circus



Sonali Kolhatkar

12-12-2023 *A host nation that promises progress but relies on regressive policies is revealing just how seriously fossil fuel interests have coopted UN climate talks.*

In January 2023, nearly a year before the latest United Nations climate conference began, there was [deep concern and alarm](#) over the head of one of the world's largest oil companies being appointed president of the [COP28 summit](#). The climate talks taking place in December 2023 were hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and overseen by Sultan Al Jaber, a man who happens to be in charge of the UAE's national oil company Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. It's a fitting illustration of an old idiom that the fox is in charge of the hen house.

Al Jaber's appointment was such a clear conflict of interest that a group of United States lawmakers, including House Representatives Barbara Lee, Rashida Tlaib, and Jamaal Bowman, and Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, sent a scathing [letter](#) on January 26th denouncing it. "Having a fossil fuel champion in charge of the world's most important climate negotiations would be like having the CEO of a cigarette conglomerate in charge of global tobacco policy," wrote the lawmakers.

Their warning fell on deaf ears and yet their fears proved to be correct months later when [The Guardian newspaper](#) published Al Jaber's revealing remarks made at a November 2023 online climate meeting. Climate justice leader and former

President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, rightly pointed out that the climate crisis was hurting women and children, and that Al Jaber had the power to do something about it. The oil company head angrily retorted that her comments were “alarmist,” and asserted that, “There is no science out there, or no scenario out there, that says that the phase-out of fossil fuel is what’s going to achieve 1.5C.”

He went on to [say](#), “Show me the roadmap for a phase-out of fossil fuel that will allow for sustainable socioeconomic development, unless you want to take the world back into caves.” Sounding defensive and cornered, Al Jaber added, “Show me the solutions. Stop the pointing of fingers. Stop it.”

Adding (fossil) fuel to the fire, the [BBC published an exposé](#) days before COP28 began revealing that “The United Arab Emirates planned to use its role as the host of UN climate talks as an opportunity to strike oil and gas deals.” UAE authorities did not deny the reports and instead responded with shocking hubris that “private meetings are private.”

Such shenanigans reveal the futility of relying on the UN’s annual COP meetings to phase out fossil fuels in order to stave off catastrophic climate change. Whereas earlier COP meetings fixated on the goal of “net zero emissions”—a phrase that climate activists rightly denounced as [greenwashing and propaganda](#)—the favorite phrase at this year’s COP28 appeared to be a “[phase down](#)” of fossil fuels.

The idea is that oil and gas producers may consider, someday in the far future, to start producing fewer fossil fuels than they do now. “Phase down” is a clever dilution of “phase out.” It is a sleight of hand intended to assuage concern over the warming climate all while remaining on a path to climate destruction.

The first draft of the COP28 agreement spelled out the two terms as interchangeable, referring to a “[phasedown/out](#).” Al Jaber reflected this equation of two different words even as he sought to maintain his credentials as head of COP28, saying that he has maintained “over and over that the phase-down and the phase-out of fossil fuel is inevitable.”

That Al Jaber would engage in trickery to protect fossil fuels is hardly surprising given his role as head of the Abu-Dhabi-based oil firm. In his [leaked remarks to Robinson](#), he proclaimed that phasing out oil and gas was not feasible, “unless

you want to take the world back into caves.”

But it is precisely the continued use of fossil fuels that may take us back to the stone age. We may all be living in caves someday, seeking high ground from the rising waters of the warming oceans, all while Al Jaber and his ilk are ensconced in the [luxury bunkers of the wealthy](#).

It is an image that reflects the reality of Dubai, a [gleaming, futuristic city](#) where the Emirates pays lip service to climate progress as host of COP28, while simultaneously conspiring to secure oil and gas deals on the side. It's a city that is defined by yet another idiom: trying to have your cake and eat it too.

I know, because I was born and raised in Dubai, a child of Indians who emigrated in 1970 to a land known as the [Trucial Sheikhdoms](#)—one year before they formally emerged as a single sovereign nation called the United Arab Emirates. My parents' tenure in the UAE was older than the nation itself and while they toiled for more than 50 years as part of an immigrant workforce that outnumbers [Emiratis 9 to 1](#), they were never afforded citizenship, as were none of their three children born there.

The Emirates, with the blessing of its former colonial master [Britain](#), and its newer imperial partners, the [U.S.](#) and [Israel](#), has presided over an [oil-funded project](#) fueled by [exploited immigrant labor](#) to emerge as one of the most [important trading hubs](#) in the world: a [seductive tourist trap](#) dotted by [massive shopping malls](#) and [billboards](#) beneath which teeming [labor camps](#) invisibly keep the wheels of capitalism turning. It touts a liberalism that allows [women](#) to work, drive, and even hold limited leadership, all while suppressing the rights of low-wage [female domestic workers](#). It [pledges](#) sustainability while marketing itself to global investors.

It is hypocrisy manifested; a pretty façade of a promising future built on an age-old model of serfdom, a nation that celebrates the freedom to consume, but clamps down on the freedom to speak. In other words, it is a capitalist's wet dream. What better place for fossil fuel promoters to pretend they care about the future of the planet?

The COP meetings have been a [disastrous distraction](#) from the urgent need to end fossil fuel production and consumption. Even [Christiana Figueres](#), former executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change, who is considered the architect of the 2015 Paris climate accord, is so disgusted by the state of proceedings that she called the COP “[a circus](#).”

Having Dubai host the largest annual international climate gathering is a desperate bid by a dying industry to maintain relevance. [Energy forecasting predictions](#) point to a grim future for petrostates like the UAE. It’s no wonder Al Jaber has publicly tied himself into knots of contradictions. His nation’s future depends on the continued flow of oil and gas, while our world’s future depends on an immediate termination of the poisonous fuels.

By Sonali Kolhatkar

Author Bio:

Sonali Kolhatkar is an award-winning multimedia journalist. She is the founder, host, and executive producer of “[Rising Up With Sonali](#),” a weekly television and radio show that airs on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations. Her most recent book is [Rising Up: The Power of Narrative in Pursuing Racial Justice](#) (City Lights Books, 2023). She is a writing fellow for the [Economy for All](#) project at the Independent Media Institute and the racial justice and civil liberties editor at [Yes! Magazine](#). She serves as the co-director of the nonprofit solidarity organization the [Afghan Women’s Mission](#) and is a co-author of [Bleeding Afghanistan](#). She also sits on the board of directors of [Justice Action Center](#), an immigrant rights organization.

Source: Independent Media Institute

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Will COP28 End Up As The

Greatest Flop In Global Climate Diplomacy Thus Far?



*James K. Boyce - Photo:
jameskboyce.com*

12-11-2023 Environmental economist James K. Boyce analyzes the roadblocks to climate action at the COP28 climate summit.

Global climate summits have rarely produced tangible results. More than anything, they have proven to be nothing less than platforms for verbose empty promises and extensive lobbying for the fossil fuel industry. COP28, currently underway in Dubai, may very well end up as the greatest flop so far in global climate diplomacy. Aside from the fact that it is presided over by the CEO of the United Arab Emirates' state-run oil company, global leaders like Joe Biden and Xi Jinping have decided to skip the conference.

In the exclusive interview for *Truthout* that follows, leading environmental economist [James K. Boyce](#) discusses the main roadblocks to climate action facing COP28 and argues for the need to introduce global carbon pricing as an essential policy towards decarbonization. Boyce is emeritus professor of economics and senior fellow at the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is the author of numerous books, including *The Political Economy of the Environment* (1972), *Economics for People and the Planet: Inequality in the Era of Climate Change* (2019) and [The Case for Carbon Dividends](#) (2019).

C. J. Polychroniou: COP28 President and United Arab Emirates climate chief

Sultan Al Jaber said there is [“no science”](#) behind demands for phasing out fossil fuels; in addition, he expressed doubts that there is a road map for the phase out of fossil fuels that would allow sustainable development, “unless [we] want to take the world back into caves.” Isn’t this already sufficient evidence that COP28 will be yet another global climate summit flop? Indeed, why would any country serious about tackling the climate crisis agree to a global climate summit that is hosted by a global leader in the oil and gas industry and whose vested interests are therefore in a product that puts the whole planet at risk? Be that as it may, what are the biggest roadblocks to climate action facing COP28?

James K. Boyce: Look, there is a reason these things are called negotiations. And there is something to be said for taking the fight to the heart of the beast.

There are powerful people who profit greatly from fossil fuel extraction. We’re talking here about big corporations as well as oil fiefdoms. But the vast majority of us, and the generations to come, will benefit far more by phasing them out. So there are opposing interests at play, and the issue is who will prevail.

It is ironic, of course, to see a climate summit happening in the Emirates. But the big roadblock isn’t where the summit is held. It is the vested interests worldwide who want to keep us hooked on fossil fuels as long as they can. This is a transnational alliance among people whose commitments to any particular place are weaker than what bonds them together: the pursuit of self-interest. Rising temperatures could make the Emirates uninhabitable in coming decades, but billionaires can buy safe landings in a more salubrious place. It is the people around the world who are more attached to the places they live and work, people who cannot easily move, who are at greatest risk.

It is important to realize that the climate crisis is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon. We have already entered an era of crisis, and this will intensify in the years ahead. The real question is how bad it will get. And that depends on what we do today. There is never a point where all is lost, because it can always get worse. Nothing could be more irresponsible than to throw up our hands and say, “Game over.”

The head of the International Monetary Fund said at the COP28 climate summit that decarbonization cannot proceed without carbon pricing. Could carbon pricing policies that incentivize reduced use of fossil fuels do enough to hold

global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius? The projections say that fossil fuels — oil, coal and natural gas — will continue to provide the bulk of our energy needs for the foreseeable future. So, how effective can a carbon tax be in transforming pathways to reach zero emissions?

She did not say that decarbonization cannot proceed at all without carbon pricing. What she said was that it will not happen fast enough. She is right, but only partially right: We need a carbon price as part of the policy mix, but not just any carbon price. The price must be anchored to a hard emissions-reduction trajectory.

As I have written elsewhere ([here](#), for example), there is a straightforward way to do this: Any country that is serious about tackling climate change could put a strict limit on the amount of fossil carbon — carbon embodied in oil, natural gas and coal — that is allowed to enter its economy. This limit would decline — the cap would tighten — year by year, on a path to net-zero emissions by a specific date, say 2050.

A hard limit is different from a carbon tax. A tax puts a price on carbon and lets the quantity of emissions adjust. A hard limit sets the quantity and lets the price of fossil fuels adjust. The carbon price that results from this limit drives a wedge between the price paid by fossil fuel users and the price received by fossil fuel producers. The first goes up as the supply of fossil fuels is curtailed, while the second goes down as the market contracts.

The higher price to consumers of fossil fuels is not a bug of the policy, it's a feature: It helps steer the consumption and investment decisions of firms and individuals away from use of fossil fuels toward alternative fuels and energy efficiency. Like it or not, prices matter. They matter a lot. Most investment in the world economy — about three-quarters of the total — is private, not public. And private investment responds above all to price signals.

The problem, of course, is that higher fuel prices on their own would hit consumers, including working families who already struggle to make ends meet. For this reason, many politicians — even those who are not on the take from the fossil fuel lobby — have been reluctant to embrace carbon pricing in any form. But there is a straightforward way to solve this problem, too.

First, auction off the permits to bring fossil carbon into the economy. Don't give

them away, as often is done in “cap-and-trade” systems. For fossil fuel suppliers, the permit price becomes part of the cost of doing business. It’s passed on to final consumers in the prices of goods and services in proportion to the amount of fossil carbon used in their production and distribution.

Second, return most or all of the money from the permit sales straight back to the people as equal dividends to everyone in the country. Low-income households, who consume less than average amounts of carbon for the simple reason that they don’t have much purchasing power, get back more than they pay in higher prices. Wealthy households pay more than they get back. The middle class more or less breaks even, but most of them come out ahead, too, because the dividends are pulled up by the outsized carbon footprints of the rich. So the majority of the people benefit from this policy in straight pocketbook terms, not even counting the benefits of a more stable climate and cleaner air. This is not a pipe dream. Canada already has a carbon dividend policy; they call it the [Climate Action Incentive payment](#). The Canadian system did not materialize overnight; it was the product of grassroots [activism](#), careful [preparation](#) and committed political [leadership](#). In the U.S., Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Maryland) has introduced landmark [legislation](#) that would place a hard limit on carbon emissions and rebate the money from permit auctions as dividends, coupled with an environmental justice guarantee that mandates cuts in air pollution in overburdened communities.

Some argue that carbon offsetting is more effective than carbon pricing. Can carbon offsets have a significant impact on global carbon emissions?

Offsets let polluters keep polluting if they pay for things that supposedly compensate for their emissions, like planting trees. Efforts to increase carbon sequestration — in soils and forests, for example — will be an important part of the climate solution, too. But offsets are a deeply flawed way to promote this goal for three reasons: It is hard to verify that the offsetting activities really happen; where verified, it is hard to know whether they add to what would have happened without the offsets; and even where verified and additional, it is impossible to know how long they will last. For these reasons, carbon sequestration should be promoted separately from emissions reductions, not as a substitute for them.

What about the argument that carbon pricing, with its emphasis on “market vs. regulation,” frames the issue of climate change as a market failure instead of a

fundamental system failure which requires, in turn, a systematic transformation?

This is a false dichotomy. Many regulations affect prices. The policy I outlined is an example: It regulates the amount of fossil carbon entering the economy, and this affects the price of fossil fuels. Prices and regulations are core elements of economic systems. And any policy that weans economies off fossil fuels is a pretty big systematic transformation.

There are some 70 different approaches to carbon pricing around the world, but setting up a global carbon pricing system doesn't seem to have much support among politicians. In fact, the U.S. doesn't even have a carbon tax on a national level. How likely is it that global leaders would agree to a proposal of setting up a global pricing system at the COP28 or any time in the near future?

What I am proposing here is a strict limit on the amount of carbon allowed to enter the economy, a side effect of which is a carbon price emerging from permit auctions. You could have a carbon tax alongside it that acts as a floor price in permit auctions, providing certainty that the minimum price will rise over time.

This does not require agreement on a global pricing system. It is something that countries can adopt independently. We do not have a global government that could implement a global carbon limit or tax. We have national governments. The key is to craft a policy that can win durable support from the country's people, regardless of what other countries do. The policy I sketched does exactly that: The majority, including working people, come out ahead financially as well as environmentally. Rather than holding national policies hostage to an international agreement, individual countries can forge ahead and inspire others to do the same.

You were among the first economists to address the political economy of the environment — in fact, even before climate change became a prominent issue in the international political agenda. Have the dynamics of environmental degradation changed in any meaningful way since you first started researching and writing about the problem?

The core of the issue is that big inequalities of wealth and power allow those on top to benefit from activities that harm the environment while shifting the costs onto others. For this reason, efforts to protect the environment must go hand in hand with efforts to build more just and equitable societies. Oligarchy is the

enemy of the environment.

In this respect, I would say that the dynamics of environmental degradation have not changed. What *has* changed is the extent to which people understand the problem. When I started working on this, there was a widespread view that inequality had little or nothing to do with the environment. Indeed, some alleged that the poor were the main drivers of environmental destruction, and that the rich would be our enlightened saviors. It was bullshit then, and it is bullshit now. What has changed is that fewer people believe it. The environmental justice movement helped to lead the way. Today more and more people are connecting the dots.

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Why The World's Most Popular Herbicide Is A Public Health Hazard



Caroline Cox - Photo:
LinkedIn

Known by its brand name Roundup, glyphosate is a clear and present danger to human health.

Glyphosate, known by its famous brand name, Roundup, is a widely used herbicide (a pesticide designed to kill plants). It is a broad-spectrum herbicide that kills or damages all plant types: grasses, perennials, vines, shrubs, and trees. Glyphosate has been sold as an herbicide since 1974. Its use dramatically [increased](#) in the 21st century as its patents expired and genetically modified crop varieties that tolerated exposure to glyphosate became popular.

Experts now believe it is the “[most heavily](#)” used herbicide globally. In 2015, the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) [classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen](#).

Glyphosate: Widespread Use and Exposure

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [estimated](#) glyphosate usage in 2019—based on data collected between 2012 and 2016—and concluded that

almost 300 million acres of farmland were treated with about 280 million pounds of glyphosate yearly. Another [24 million pounds](#) of the herbicide is used every year in home yards, roadways, forestry, and turf, according to a 2020 analysis by the agency.

Given this enormous use of glyphosate in the United States, it is perhaps unsurprising that exposure to it is widespread. A unit of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did the largest and most comprehensive [study](#) to determine glyphosate exposure using urine collected from a sample of Americans selected between 2013 and 2014 to accurately represent the entire population. Researchers found that more than [80 percent](#) of participants, who were six years and older, had been exposed to glyphosate. In discussing the results, the CDC suggested that [food was an important source of exposure](#) to the chemical. “Participants who had not eaten for eight or more hours had lower levels of glyphosate in their urine.”

The Salinas Study: Liver Diseases and Diabetes

A growing number of studies link exposure to glyphosate with [various human health problems](#) other than the cancer hazard that IARC [evaluated](#). Typically classified as epidemiology, this research does not formally determine cause and effect but is more realistic and often [more compelling than research done using laboratory animals or cell cultures](#).

One example of an epidemiology study comes from the agricultural town of Salinas, California. Starting in 1999, the University of California, Berkeley, scientists recruited pregnant mothers and then their children as volunteer participants in a study [called](#) the Center for the Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas (CHAMACOS), which was conducted over a period of more than 20 years. These [“480 mother-child duos”](#) mostly belonged to farmworker families in the Salinas area. The mothers provided their blood and urine samples and other health information during pregnancy, while the samples from children were collected when they were 5, 14, and then 18 years old. All of this data was used to answer essential questions about glyphosate exposure.

The CHAMACOS [study](#) compared teens with higher-than-average exposure to glyphosate as children to those with lower exposure. Teens with higher exposure to glyphosate and its primary breakdown product, aminomethylphosphonic acid (AMPA), were more likely to show signs of liver inflammation, meaning they had a

higher risk of developing liver disease. They were also more likely to have metabolic syndrome (high blood pressure, high blood sugar, low levels of “good” cholesterol, and several other health problems), which could make them more susceptible to [serious](#) health concerns such as liver cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes, later in life.

The study had several other interesting results. In the early years of the study (2000-2002), glyphosate exposures in children were infrequent and low. Most participants did not have glyphosate in their bodies. This changed dramatically as time went on. Glyphosate and AMPA were found in 80 to 90 percent of the 14-year-old participants. The researchers note that this mirrors the [national and global increase in glyphosate use](#).

In addition, the Salinas study showed that glyphosate exposures in this agricultural farmworker community were similar to exposures across the country in people who were not farmworkers. According to the researchers, this suggests that the primary source of glyphosate exposure was [food](#), concluding that “diet was a major source of glyphosate and AMPA exposure among... study participants... as indicated by higher urinary glyphosate or AMPA concentrations among those who ate more cereal, fruits, vegetables, bread, and in general, carbohydrates.”

American Women: Pregnancy Problems

Another example of epidemiology showing glyphosate hazards comes from a study of pregnant women living in California, Minnesota, New York, and Washington. This study found that more than 90 percent of these women were exposed to glyphosate and that higher exposures to glyphosate and AMPA during the second trimester were linked to shorter-than-normal pregnancies. The [study participants](#) represented all American pregnant women in terms of race, ethnicity, economic status, and urban versus suburban families. The report concluded that exposure to glyphosate “may impact reproductive health by shortening length of gestation.”

Canadian Study: Glyphosate in Food

A detailed evaluation of glyphosate exposure comes from a [study](#) of about 2,000 pregnant women in 10 cities across Canada between 2008 and 2011. Based on urine analysis and questionnaires, the researchers concluded that food was a more likely source of glyphosate exposure than household pesticide use or pesticide drift. The foods linked to higher glyphosate exposures were spinach,

whole grain bread, soy and rice beverages, and pasta. The strongest link was “between consumption of whole grain bread and higher urinary glyphosate concentrations.”

Government Testing

Government agencies in North America have tested foods for glyphosate contamination. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration [started testing food for glyphosate in 2016-2017](#). In [more recent testing](#) of more than 2,000 samples from 2020, the FDA found relatively high levels of glyphosate in lentils (up to 20 parts per million, or “ppm”), garbanzo beans (up to 12 ppm), and black beans (up to 1 ppm). The U.S. Department of Agriculture tested corn (unprocessed grain) for glyphosate in 2021. Glyphosate was found in about [35 percent](#) of the samples tested. The highest contamination level was relatively low at 0.14 ppm.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) [tested](#) a much wider variety of foods (almost 8,000 samples) between 2015 and 2017. More than 40 percent were contaminated with glyphosate. Consistent with the FDA data, CFIA found relatively high levels of glyphosate in beans (up to 8 ppm), chickpeas (up to 3 ppm), and lentils (up to 3 ppm).

The researchers found other [commonly eaten foods with relatively high glyphosate levels](#), including couscous (up to 1 ppm), pasta (up to 1 ppm), pearl barley (up to 2 ppm), oatmeal (up to 1 ppm), infant oatmeal (up to 2 ppm), and rye flour/flakes (up to 6 ppm). [Two foods](#) with somewhat lower concentrations, but important because they are eaten often, were flour (77 percent of the samples were contaminated; with levels up to 0.8 ppm) and pizza (90 percent of samples contaminated; with levels up to 0.5 ppm). The research by CFIA [found](#) that “The highest glyphosate levels were observed in pulses and wheat products.”

Consumer Advocacy Group Testing

Several nonprofit organizations have also conducted testing of popular foods for glyphosate contamination. This testing is beneficial because the results identify brands contaminated with the herbicide, which would typically not be part of the government agency testing. Some [2022 results](#) from the Detox Project, a research platform, provide details about glyphosate residue levels for brands such as Village Hearth’s 100% whole wheat bread (1 ppm), 365 Whole Foods Market’s whole wheat bread (1 ppm), and Quaker Oats (0.5 ppm).

In some good news, the Environmental Working Group reported in 2023 that glyphosate contamination of oat cereals and other oat-based products has [decreased](#), with the highest levels found in Quaker Oatmeal Squares (less than 0.5 ppm).

Organic Farming

Certified organic farmers [do not use glyphosate](#) or most other synthetic pesticides. Buying and eating organic food is an excellent way to reduce glyphosate exposure. For example, a 2020 peer-reviewed study found that glyphosate exposure in four U.S. families was reduced by [70 percent](#) within six days after they switched to an organic diet. In the CFIA [study](#) of glyphosate contamination of Canadian foods, testing of more than 1,000 organic items found that 75 percent were free of glyphosate, and most of the remaining organic products had only small amounts of the chemical. [Organic products can be contaminated](#) by drift, contaminated water, or contaminated equipment, but these levels are typically low.

The amount of organic farmland in the U.S. was [almost five million acres](#) in 2021, and organic food sales topped [\\$60 billion](#) for the first time in 2022, according to a 2023 [survey](#) by the Organic Trade Association.

“Organic has proven it can withstand short-term economic storms. Despite the fluctuation of any given moment, Americans are still investing in their personal health, and, with increasing interest, in the environment,” [said](#) Organic Trade Association CEO Tom Chapman, according to a May 2023 press release.

If organic farming continues to expand and is made accessible to consumers across the U.S., a future with glyphosate-free food seems within reach.

By Caroline Cox

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Caroline Cox is a retired pesticide scientist. She was a staff scientist at the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides from 1990 to 2006 and a research director and senior scientist at the [Center for Environmental Health](#) from 2006 to 2020. She has been writing about glyphosate hazards since the 1990s. She is a contributor to the [Observatory](#).

Source: Independent Media Institute

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