Why Capitalism Cannot Finally Repress Socialism

Richard D. Wolff

Socialism is capitalism's critical shadow. When lights shift, a shadow may seem to disappear, but sooner or later, with further shifts of light, it comes back. Capitalism's ideologues have long fantasized that capitalism would finally outwit, outperform, and thereby overcome socialism: make the shadow vanish permanently. Like children, they bemoan their failure when, in the light of new social circumstances, the shadow reappears clear and sharp. Recent efforts to dispel the shadow having failed again, the contest of capitalism versus socialism resumes. In the United States, young people especially applaud socialism so much recently that think tanks like PragerU and the Hoover Institute at Stanford University urgently recycle the old anti-socialist tropes.

In fact, the capitalism-versus-socialism contest does not really resume because it never really stopped. As changing social conditions changed socialism—a process that took time—it sometimes seemed to wishful thinkers that the systems struggle had ended with capitalism's victory. Thus the 1920s saw anti-socialist witch hunts (especially the Palmer raids by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Sacco and Vanzetti persecution) that many believed at the time would extinguish U.S. socialism. What had happened in Russia in 1917 would not be allowed to sneak into the United States with all those European immigrants. The grossly unfair Sacco and Vanzetti trial (recognized as such even by the state of Massachusetts) did little to prevent—and much to prepare for—subsequent similar anti-socialist efforts by government officials in the United States.

With the 1929 crash, socialism revived to become a powerful movement in the

United States and beyond during the 1930s and 1940s. After World War II ended, the political right and most major capitalist employers tried once again to squash capitalism's socialist shadow. They fostered McCarthy's "anti-communist" crusades. They executed the Rosenbergs. By the end of the 1950s, once again, many in the United States could indulge the thought that capitalism had vanquished socialism. Then the 1960s upset that indulgence as millions—especially young people—enthusiastically rediscovered Marx, Marxism, and socialism. Shortly after that, the Reagan and Thatcher reaction tried a bit differently to resume anti-socialism. They simply asserted and reasserted to a receptive mass media that "there is no alternative" (TINA) to capitalism any longer. Socialism, where it survived, they insisted, had proved so inferior to capitalism that it was fading in the present and possessed no future. With the 1989 collapse of the USSR and Eastern Europe, many again believed that the old capitalism versus socialism struggle had finally been resolved.

But of course, the shadow returned. Nothing more surely secures the future of socialism than the persistence of capitalism. In the United States, it returned with Occupy Wall Street, then Bernie Sanders's campaigns, and now the moderate socialists bubbling up inside U.S. politics. Each time Trump and the far right equate liberals and Democrats with socialism, communism, Marxism, and anarchism, they help recruit new socialists. Socialism's enemies understandably exhibit their frustration. With so little exposure to Hegel, the idea that modern society might be a unity of opposites—capitalism and socialism both reproducing and undermining one another—is not available to help them understand their world.

Handling life's contradictions has always, for many, entailed pretending they are not there. Very young children do something like that when they encounter a scary dog, cover their eyes with their hands, and believe so doing makes the dog vanish. With time, the children mature and grasp that the dog is still there despite hand-covered eyes. With time, too, adults will grasp that making the socialist other/shadow vanish is a capitalist project sure to fail. One effect of that failed project over the last 75 years is widespread ignorance of how socialism was continuing to change.

Over the last two centuries, as socialism spread from Western Europe across the globe, it interacted with very diverse economic, political, and cultural conditions. Those interactions yielded multiple, different interpretations of socialism. For

some, it was an evolving critique of capitalism, especially its injustices, inequalities, and cyclical instability. For others, it became the ongoing construction of an alternative economic system. More broadly, millions were brought to socialisms that aimed to change basic social institutions (family, city, government) that capitalism had subordinated to its needs. The different, multiple socialisms debated and influenced one another, accelerating change within them all.

One kind of socialism that became prominent in the 19th and 20th centuries (and still exists) focuses on economics and government. It criticizes how governments are captured by the capitalist class and serve its social hegemony. It strategizes that using mass struggle (and eventually universal suffrage) can free the state from its subordination to capitalism and use it instead for transition beyond capitalism to socialism. In the 20th century, this kind of socialism offered a framework for constructing a socialist economic system alternative to capitalism. Such a socialist system entails the continuance of traditional capitalism: enterprises owned and operated mostly by private capitalists, individuals, or corporate groups. What it adds that makes it socialist is a government (often but not necessarily run by a socialist party) that closely regulates and supervises markets and enterprises.

Such socialist governments aim to moderate key effects of private capitalism including its very unequal distributions of income and wealth, extreme business cycles, and unaffordable access by the general population to healthcare, education, and much else. Progressive taxation typifies socialist governments' means of intervening in otherwise private capitalism. Moderate socialisms of this sort are found in many European nations, in the programs of many socialist parties around the world, and in the statements and writings of socialist individuals.

Another kind of socialism shares moderate socialism's focus on government and economics but differs from it by transforming many or all privately owned and operated enterprises into state-owned-and-operated ones. Often referred to as Soviet socialism—because the Soviet Union adopted it a decade after the 1917 revolution—this kind assigned greater powers to the state: to set prices, wages, interest rates, and foreign trade parameters according to a state plan for the economy.

Because socialists around the world split over World War I and the Russian Revolution, one side (more aligned with the USSR) took the name "communist" while the other retained "socialist." Soviet socialism was thus organized and operated by a state apparatus governed by the communist party of the USSR. Variations of soviet socialism in other countries (Eastern Europe and beyond) were established and operated similarly by communist parties there. The Soviet and other communist parties always referred to the Soviet Union as a socialist system. It was mostly the enemies of socialism—or those simply uninformed—that persisted in referring to the USSR as an example of "communism."

A third kind of socialism, comprising a hybrid form of the first two, is how the People's Republic of China organizes its economy. There the Chinese Communist Party oversees a strong state apparatus that supervises a mixed economy of both state-owned-and-operated enterprises (on the Soviet model) and private capitalist enterprises (on the moderate socialism model). It is roughly a 50-50 split between state- and privately owned-and-operated enterprises in China. China had experimented with both moderate and Soviet socialisms since the 1949 revolution brought its Communist Party to power. Based on its critiques of both prior socialist models and the stunningly rapid economic growth achieved by the hybrid, a focus on fine-tuning the hybrid model seems settled policy in China today. The criticisms and opposition from both the Trump and Biden administrations have not changed that.

A fourth model is newly important in and for this century even though examples of its way of organizing the production and distribution of goods and services exist throughout human history. People have often organized their collaborative production and distribution of goods and services as self-conscious communities within larger societies. Sometimes such productive communities were organized hierarchically with governing groups (councils of elders, chiefs, kings, lords, and masters) paralleling how they organized residential communities. At other times, they organized productive communities more horizontally as democratic cooperatives. A rapidly rising concept of socialism in the 21st century differs from the three basic models discussed above in its focus on and advocacy for the organization of workplaces as democratic, productive communities functioning within society.

This fourth model emerges from a socialist critique of the other three. Socialists have acknowledged the lesser inequalities and greater economic growth achieved

by the other models. However, socialists have also faced and considered when excessive powers were accorded to and abused by states and parties. Among critical socialists' analyses, some eventually reached the conclusion that previous socialisms focused too much on the macro-level of capitalist society and too little on the micro-level. Socialism cannot only be about the balance between private and state enterprises, about "free" versus state-regulated markets, and about market versus state-planned distributions of resources and products. That limitation can and should be broken. Failures at the macro level had causes at a micro level that socialists had too often neglected.

When socialisms left the internal organizations of production and distribution enterprises inherited from capitalism largely unchanged, they made a major error. They left in place human relationships that undermined chances for enterprises in socialist economies to reach socialism's goals. A truly democratic society cannot be built on a foundation of productive enterprises whose internal structure is the opposite of democratic. The employer-employee capitalist model is that foundational opposite. Capitalist employers are neither chosen by nor genuinely accountable to their employees. In worker cooperatives, by contrast, the employer-employee division is ended and replaced by a democratic community. The employees are likewise and collectively the employer. Their one-person-one-vote decisions, by the majority, govern what gets produced: how, where, and when. They likewise decide democratically what to do with the fruits of their collective labor, how enterprise revenues will be distributed among individual workers, and as investment funds and reserve funds.

This fourth kind of socialism repairs the other three kinds' relative neglect of the micro-level transformation of capitalism into socialism. It does not reject or refuse those other kinds; it rather adds something crucial to them. It represents an important stage reached by prior forms of and social experiments with socialism. Previous socialisms changed because of their results, good and bad. Those results provoked self-awareness, self-criticism, and determination to improve the emerging, new forms of socialism. Capitalism's critical shadow returns again to challenge capitalism by inspiring a powerful new alliance of its victims with its critics. That has been, after all, the goal all along: to empower and inform social change beyond capitalism, to realize the slogan, "We can do better than capitalism."

By Richard D. Wolff

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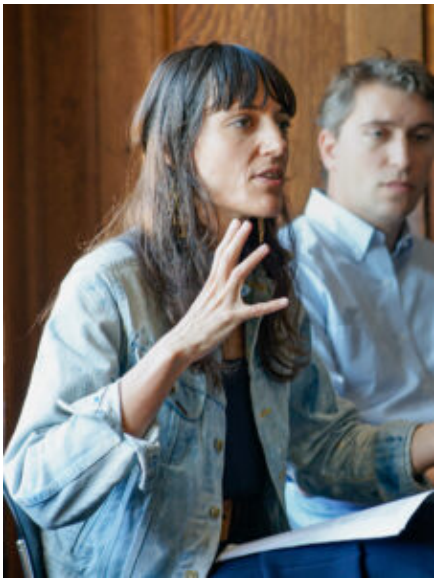
Source: Independent Media Institute

Credit Line: This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Insecurity Is A Feature, Not A Bug, Of Capitalism. But It Can Spark Resistance



Astra Taylor – Photo: en.wikipedia.org

Debt abolitionist Astra Taylor discusses how capitalism's manufactured insecurity can feed movements for radical change.

Capitalism is a socioeconomic system that depends upon exploitation and generates inequality. In a recently published book titled, *The Age of Insecurity: Coming Together as Things Fall Apart*, filmmaker, writer and political organizer Astra Taylor also describes capitalism as an inherently insecurity-producing machine.

From education and home ownership to workplace surveillance, capitalism manufactures insecurity, argues Taylor, a co-founder of the Debt Collective. This insecurity makes us increasingly vulnerable to economic uncertainty, which the system weaponizes in turn against us.

Yet, Taylor argues in the exclusive interview for *Truthout*, the system's manufactured insecurity can also band people together to demand radical reforms, although insecurity in today's world seems to be drawing people increasingly toward authoritarian political leaders.

C. J. Polychroniou: It is often said we live in strange and dangerous times. Indeed, there are crises in place which threaten human survival; there is continuous growth in economic inequality since the 1980s and authoritarianism is on the move as democracy weakens. In this context, in your recently published book aptly titled, The Age of Insecurity: Coming Together as Things Fall Apart, you

have described insecurity as a "defining feature of our time" and an essential feature of the capitalist system. Now, capital reigns, to be sure, and capitalism exploits insecurities, but isn't occasional insecurity also a natural part of life? Why make insecurity a driving force behind today's economy and politics? Why not resentment, or protest actions, which are growing throughout the world, although some studies indicate that the same thing is happening with political apathy?

Astra Taylor: Insecurity relates to the many intensifying and intersecting crises we face today — unaffordable housing, rising debt, toxic media, worsening mental health, an emboldened far right, climate catastrophe, Artificial Intelligence and Big Tech, the list goes on.

I wouldn't say that I "make" insecurity a driving force behind today's politics. I'd argue that it just is one. That's because, as I show in the book, insecurity is a defining component of capitalism — one as essential as the profit motive. To paraphrase your question, capitalism not only *exploits* insecurities; more fundamentally, it generates them.

Insecurity, in other words, isn't just an unfortunate byproduct of our current competitive economic order. It's a core product. If you aren't insecure, you don't keep buying, hustling, accumulating. Insecurity is the stick that keeps us scrambling and striving.

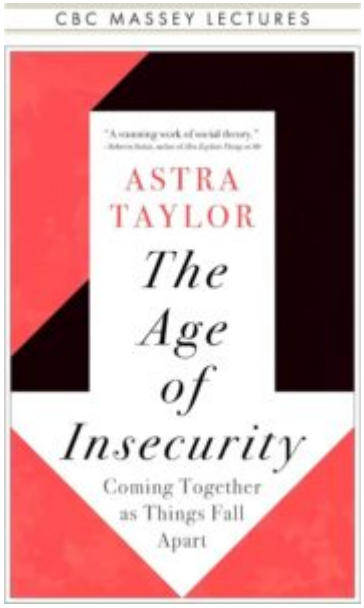
And yet, as you note, insecurity is also a natural part of life.

In the book, I distinguish between two kinds of insecurity. First there is *existential insecurity*, or the kind of insecurity that is inherent to human life and that stems from the fact we are mortal creatures who can't survive without the care of others. Then there is what I call *manufactured insecurity*, and this is the kind of insecurity that is essential to the functioning of a market society.

Looking back over the centuries to the dawn of the industrial era, I show how capitalism began by making people insecure in this modern sense — by severing people from their communities and traditional livelihoods so they had nothing to sell but their labor. We see this dynamic playing out today, as officials pursue monetary policies explicitly designed to weaken the hand of workers. That's the manufactured insecurity at work.

This might all sound rather heavy, but I really tried to write the book with a light

touch — drawing on history and economics while also incorporating myth, psychology and even some humorous memoir elements. And there's hope. Right now, our society is structured to worsen rather than tend to our insecurities and vulnerabilities. But we can always arrange things differently.



The notion of insecurity as a feature in today's world might lead people to assume that it leads to despair and inaction. Yet, you argue that insecurity can indeed be a step toward creating solidarity for the purpose of challenging and eventually transforming the system. Is this a theoretical statement behind the purported symbiotic relationship between capitalism and insecurity, or one based on actual empirical evidence? In other words, can you describe how insecurity translates into collective action and what form, in your own view, collective action needs to take for the system to be transformed?

In the book, I argue that insecurity can cut both ways. It can spur defensive and destructive compulsions, or it can be a conduit to empathy, humility, belonging and solidarity. We see this all the time. The right wing knows this and is dedicated to inflaming people's insecurities, encouraging them to misdirect their rage toward the even-more-vulnerable — rather than toward the economic system and the elites who profit from the status quo.

One example I give is how workers and the unemployed organized during the Great Depression. We forget it today, but "insecurity" was actually a critical concept in the battle for the New Deal. Franklin Roosevelt called insecurity "one of the most fearsome evils of our economic system" and made the concept of security a cornerstone of the welfare state. I certainly see insecurity — shame, fear, anxiety about the future — transformed into solidarity in my work with the Debt Collective, the union for debtors that I helped found.

In today's economic climate, the rental housing crisis has become particularly acute in thoroughly neoliberal societies like the United States, but rents have also exploded across Europe and more and more people are facing precarious living conditions. Are there innovative solutions for the rental housing crisis? For example, can Vienna's social housing policy be duplicated in countries like the

United States?

Absolutely. I spend some time on the example of Austrian social housing in the second chapter of the book. It's a fantastic example of how to eradicate a form of material insecurity that is now depressingly endemic across North America.

In the book, I return again and again to a core paradox. As I write, "Today, many of the ways we try to make ourselves and our societies more secure — money, property, possessions, police, the military — have paradoxical effects, undermining the very security we seek and accelerating harm done to the economy, the climate, and people's lives, including our own."

Housing really is a prime example. In the U.S., a paltry 1 percent of housing is provided on a non-market basis. The commodification of housing ensures that huge numbers of people will be priced out and perpetually insecure and also unhoused. The very thing that we are told will finally guarantee us security — a mortgage on a one-family unit — also helps drive the destabilization of our communities. Ever-appreciating values and rents push working-class people out of their towns and neighborhoods. Single-family, car-dependent fiefdoms are ecologically wasteful. Not to mention the way the financial sector and the rise of Wall Street landlords are further enriched by this model, further contributing to volatility. Social housing is the only way out of this conundrum, and the only way to ensure real housing security for all.

The Biden administration has made inroads on student debt, but student debt cancellation is still far from becoming a reality, largely because of the Supreme Court's ultraconservative majority. First, I would like you to explain to readers why the Debt Collective, which you co-founded in 2014 and which happens to be the first union for debtors, talks about "debt cancellation" and rejects the term "debt forgiveness," and then whether you remain optimistic that an ultimate victory for student-loan borrowers is going to happen at some point down the road.

We reject the idea of "debt forgiveness" because debtors did nothing wrong. People don't need to be forgiven for pursuing an education — for wanting to learn or to better their lives. This is why the Debt Collective prefers to speak of debt "cancellation," "relief" or "abolition."

Our small-but-mighty movement has come a long way in a decade. I believe that

we will win — if people get off the sidelines and join us. One easy way people reading can do that is by taking 10 minutes to submit a dispute to the Department of Education using our new Student Debt Release Tool. Anyone with federal loans can do so. The tool will send a former letter demanding relief to the top brass at the Department of Education. The more applications they receive, the more pressure we can apply.

We've had victories, we've had setbacks, and then more victories and setbacks. I've been in the trenches long enough to know that's how movements go. The arc of justice is, sadly, rather crooked and sometimes loops back on itself. But this is not a moment to throw up our hands — it's one to keep holding the president's feet to the fire. The movement for debt abolition is just getting started.

C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair*: *Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*: *The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice*: *Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left*: *Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

“Capitalism Is an Insecurity Machine”: Astra Taylor on Student Debt & Our Radically Unequal World

As the COVID-19 era pause on federal student debt payments comes to an end and some 40 million Americans will resume payments next month, we speak with Debt Collective organizer Astra Taylor about Biden’s new Saving on a Valuable Education, or SAVE, plan and her organization’s new tool that helps people apply to the Department of Education to cancel the borrower’s debt. Taylor also discusses her new book, The Age of Insecurity: Coming Together as Things Fall Apart, in which she writes, “How we understand and respond to insecurity is one of the most urgent questions of our moment, for nothing less than the future security of our species hangs in the balance.” She notes organizing is about “the alchemy of turning our vulnerabilities, turning our oppression, turning our insecurities into solidarity so that we can change the structures that are undermining our self-esteem and well-being.”

The Case For Protecting The

Tongass National Forest, America's 'Last Climate Sanctuary'

Tongass National Forest. – Photo: en.wikipedia.org

The "lungs of North America," the Tongass National Forest is the Earth's largest intact temperate rainforest. Protecting it means protecting the entire planet.

Spanning 16.7 million acres that stretch across most of southeast Alaska, the Tongass National Forest is the largest national forest in the United States by far and part of the world's largest temperate rainforest. Humans barely inhabit it: About the size of West Virginia, the Tongass has around 70,000 residents spread across 32 communities.

A vast coastal terrain replete with ancient trees and waterways, the Tongass is a haven of biodiversity, providing critical habitat for around 400 species, including black bears, brown bears, wolves, bald eagles, Sitka black-tailed deer, trout, and five species of Pacific salmon.

The Tongass is a pristine region that supports a vast array of stunning ecosystems, including old-growth forests, imposing mountains, granite cliffs, deep fjords, remnants of ancient glaciers that carved much of the North American

landscape, and more than 1,000 named islands facing the open Pacific Ocean—a unique feature in America's national forest system.

The Tongass "is the crown jewel of America's natural forests," declared then-Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) during Senate deliberations of Interior Department budget appropriations in 2003. "When I was up there, I saw glaciers, mountains, growths of hemlock and cedar that grow to be over 200 feet tall. The trees can live as long as a thousand years."

The National Forest Foundation calls the Tongass National Forest "an incredible testament to conservation and nature." But since the 1950s, the logging industry has prized the forest, and the region has been threatened by companies that seek to extract its resources—and the politicians who support these destructive activities.

America's Largest Carbon Sink

Carbon sinks absorb more carbon from the atmosphere than they release, making them essential to maintaining natural ecosystems and an invaluable nature-based solution to the climate crisis. Between 2001 and 2019, the Earth's forests safely stored about twice as much carbon dioxide as they emitted, according to research published in 2021 in the journal Nature Climate Change and available on Global Forest Watch.

The planet's forests absorb 1.5 times more carbon than the United States emits annually—around 7.6 billion metric tons. Consequently, maintaining the health of the world's forests is central to humanity's fight against climate change. But rampant deforestation and land degradation are not only removing this invaluable climate-regulating ecosystem service and supporter of biodiversity but also disturbing a healthy, natural planetary system that has existed for millennia.

"There is a natural carbon cycle on our planet," said Vlad Macovei, a postdoctoral researcher at the Helmholtz-Zentrum Hereon in Germany. "Every year, some atmospheric carbon gets taken up by land biosphere, some by the ocean, and then cycled back out. These processes had been in balance for the last 10,000 years."

Carbon sinks like the Tongass are vital environmental protectors by sequestering carbon dioxide and preventing this greenhouse gas from entering the atmosphere, where it can fuel global warming. And because "it contains the [Earth's] largest intact stands of coastal temperate rainforest," the Tongass acts

as one of the world's most effective carbon sinks. In this way, the Tongass provides a key "ecosystem service"—a benefit humans receive from nature that helps sustain life—not just for the U.S. but also for the entire planet.

"Basically, when you go through an old-growth forest, you're walking through a stick of carbon that has been built up into the forest for many, many decades, [even] centuries," said Dominick DellaSala, chief scientist at Wild Heritage, a project of Earth Island Institute, a nonprofit environmental organization based in Berkeley, California. DellaSala was part of a research team that found that the Tongass holds approximately 44 percent of all carbon stored by U.S. national forests. The team's research was published in 2021 by the Woodwell Climate Research Center, based in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

"[T]he largest trees in those forests store about 50 percent of the above-ground carbon, so they are enormously important from a carbon standpoint," said DellaSala.

These undisturbed forest lands are increasingly scarce and, therefore, increasingly valuable ecosystems. "While tropical rainforests are the lungs of the planet, the Tongass… [acts as] the lungs of North America," DellaSala told PBS in 2020. He calls the Tongass "America's last climate sanctuary."

"The Tongass National Forest provides us with the greatest opportunity in the nation, if not the world, for protecting temperate rainforest at the ecosystem scale, in the face of climate change," according to Audubon Alaska, a nonprofit conservation organization. "It sequesters more carbon than any other type of forest on Earth, providing a much-needed opportunity for climate solutions that can simultaneously bolster regional economies."

Unfortunately, as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency points out, "ecosystem services are important to environmental and human health and well-being… [but they are] often taken for granted."

Impact of Logging

Jerry Melillo, a scientist at the Ecosystems Center of the Marine Biological Laboratory at the University of Chicago, noted, "[o]ver the past 8,000 years, humans have cleared up to half of the forests on our planet, mostly to make room for agriculture." This has hampered the Earth's natural ability to regulate the climate, allowing more greenhouse gases to escape into the atmosphere, thus

exacerbating global warming.

“Cutting down or burning forests releases the carbon stored in their trees and soil and prevents them from absorbing more CO2 in the future,” he wrote. “Since 1850, about 30 percent of all CO2 emissions have come from deforestation. Deforestation can also have more local climate impacts. Because trees release moisture that cools the air around them, scientists have found that deforestation has led to more intense heat waves in North America and Eurasia.”

In the 1950s, the Forest Service contracted with two U.S. timber companies to build pulp mills near Ketchikan and Sitka. As part of the agreements, the agency promised to sell the firms a total of 13.5 billion board feet of Tongass timber over a 55-year period. These contracts massively accelerated logging in the region.

Since these contracts were signed, “more than 1 million acres of the Tongass have been clearcut,” according to the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council. Adding economic insult to ecological injury, the federal government consistently loses money from logging contracts in the Tongass. According to a 2020 report by Taxpayers for Common Sense, an independent, nonpartisan advocacy group, the Forest Service has lost more than $1.7 billion on Tongass timber sales since 1980. “It actually costs taxpayers millions to ‘sell’ timber that we collectively own, which makes no sense,” said Autumn Hanna, the group’s vice president.

“Scientists have long understood that logging old-growth forests triggers a cascade of negative effects on wildlife, eroding the biodiversity of places like the Tongass,” wrote Rebecca Bowe of Earthjustice, a nonprofit environmental organization headquartered in San Francisco, in 2021. “Clear-cutting old-growth… transforms ancient forests into carbon emitters.”

Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network, International (WECAN International) is a climate activist group that works with Earthjustice to end the destruction of old-growth logging in the Tongass. “The Tongass has been called ‘America’s Climate Forest’ due to its unsurpassed ability to mitigate climate impacts,” said Osprey Orielle Lake, WECAN’s executive director, in 2021. “For decades, however, industrial-scale logging has been destroying this precious ecosystem and disrupting the traditional lifeways, medicine, and food systems of the region’s Indigenous communities.”

World’s Largest Wild Salmon Population

The Tongass ecosystem supports some of the world's largest remaining wild salmon populations. The lakes, rivers, and streams of the Tongass produce some 50 million salmon every year—more wild salmon than all of the other U.S. national forests combined.

"One of the things that the Forest Service is interested in doing is estimating the value of the different activities and services that national forests provide," said J. Ryan Bellmore, a biologist who co-authored a 2019 study, the first of its kind, that estimated the value of the Tongass and the Chugach National Forests to the commercial salmon industry in Alaska. "And the Tongass and the Chugach provide a lot of salmon."

According to the study, the wild salmon born within the boundaries of the Tongass and the Chugach make up around 25 percent of Alaska's commercial Pacific salmon catch and 16 percent of the total commercial value of salmon caught in the state every year. Commercial fishermen caught an average of 48 million "forest salmon" in Alaska yearly during the 10-year-long study period. That amount of salmon translated to an annual average commercial value of $88 million.

What these Alaskan fisheries provide goes beyond their quantifiable and significant economic benefit and food source for the people of Alaska and beyond. The salmon have also been part of the traditional way of life for the Indigenous Tribes of the region for millennia. "For over 9,000 years, the [I]ndigenous people of the region have survived because of the salmon," wrote Brian Footen, a fish biologist who has worked with Tribal, federal, and state fishery departments in Washington state for over two decades. And the fish are also critical for the survival of wildlife, supporting healthy populations of bald eagles, wolves, and brown bears, which in turn, support the entire web of life across the region.

Importance to Indigenous Tribes

The Tongass contains the traditional homelands of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples, and its well-being is essential to these groups' traditional way of life, health, and cultural identity. Even the name of the forest itself is wrapped up in Indigenous identity: Translated, "Tongass" means ??"Sea Lion Tribe," one of the main divisions of the Tlingit people living at Portland Canal, located at the border between southeastern Alaska and British Columbia.

Joel Jackson, president of the Organized Village of Kake Tribal Council, noted that these Indigenous groups are "tied to our lands that our ancestors walked on thousands of years ago. … The land still provides food security—deer, moose, salmon, berries, our medicines. The old-growth timber is important in keeping all these things coming back year after year," Jackson said, adding, "especially our salmon, because the trees keep our streams cool." Maintaining these plentiful resources season after season requires a healthy Tongass.

"I identify my ancestry through descent-based kin groups indigenous to the Tongass Forest and recognize that we are all tied to each other—not independents," said Wanda "Kashudoha" Loescher Culp, a Tlingit activist, in a statement to federal lawmakers in 2019 urging increased protections for the Tongass.

"Our food gathering and all other resource harvesting methods seriously involve the thanking of the recognized life we are taking for our benefit. We successfully use every 'resource' the Tongass offers wisely, efficiently, without waste, and in gratitude," said Culp, who is also the coordinator for WECAN Tongass.

n addition to being a year-round natural "supermarket," the Tongass is a powerful spiritual place for the Tribes who have called it home for generations.

Importance to Jobs and Economy
Because of its natural beauty and opportunity for outdoor recreational activities like camping, boating, canoeing, fishing, hiking, and birdwatching, the Tongass is home to a vigorous and ever-expanding tourism industry.

The Tongass welcomes more than 2.8 million visitors each year, which generates "more than $380 million in spending and over 5,000 jobs," according to the USFS. In particular, the cruise industry provides vital economic inputs to the local economies across southeast Alaska. "The vast majority of visitors to Southeast Alaska are cruise ship passengers," according to the USFS.

"Hundreds of thousands of tourists visit the Tongass each summer in the hopes of experiencing its magnificence: 200-foot-tall spruce and 500-year-old cedar trees soaring overhead," states Alaska Conservation Foundation, the only public foundation dedicated solely to conservation in Alaska. "Amid the lush ferns and mossy remnants of fallen trees, one might see a brown bear ambling its way to a salmon stream, in search of its next meal. There is simply no place else like it."

Tongass Timber Reform Act of 1990

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTRA), which was crafted as an amendment to the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980, a federal law signed by President Jimmy Carter that established protection for more than 100 million acres of federal land in Alaska from development by designating "conservation system units," including national parks, national wildlife refuges, and designated wilderness areas.

The main goal of the TTRA—which enjoyed massive congressional support, passing in the Senate 99 to 0—was to increase the protection of the Tongass National Forest from the ecological harms of industrial logging by designating approximately 856,000 acres as roadless areas so that large swaths of old-growth forest would "retain their wildland character." Specifically, the act was intended "to protect certain lands in the Tongass National Forest in perpetuity, to modify certain long-term timber contracts, [and] to provide for [the] protection of riparian habitat."

Following the law's enactment, Alaska Pulp Corporation and Ketchikan Pulp Company, two industrial pulp mills located in southeast Alaska, ended their operations in 1993 and 1997, respectively. Alaska's congressional delegation blamed the closures on environmentalists, the TTRA, and the Clinton administration "for destroying an industry that had been the region's largest private employer," wrote Rich Moniak, in a column for Juneau Empire in which he called that narrative a "fiction."

The "TTRA was not a substantial factor—indeed, no factor at all—in the closure of the pulp mill and the resulting termination of the contract," concluded Lawrence M. Baskir, the U.S. Court of Federal Claims judge who presided over the lawsuit that Alaska Pulp Corporation filed in 1994, a year after it closed its mill, in part due to declining demand for softwood pulp.

Bart Koehler, the executive director of Southeast Alaska Conservation Council from 1984 to 1991 and from 1995 to 1999, who was part of the grassroots effort to pass the Tongass Timber Reform Act, called the law "the most significant piece of conservation law signed by President George H.W. Bush."

The Roadless Rule of 2001

In 1999, President Bill Clinton instructed the USFS to develop regulations to protect the nation's roadless areas. The administration aimed to protect the nation's biodiversity, air and water quality, opportunities for public recreational activities, and local economies. "In the final regulations, the nature and degree of protection afforded should reflect the best available science and a careful consideration of the full range of ecological, economic, and social values inherent in these lands," Clinton stated at the time.

Issued in 2001, the Forest Service's "Roadless Rule" is a federal regulation prohibiting most timber cutting and road building in specific forest lands known as "Inventoried Roadless Areas." The Roadless Rule protects 58.5 million acres or 31 percent of lands within the federal National Forest System (NFS), which together amounts to about 2 percent of the total land base of the United States.

"Inventoried roadless areas provide benefits to over 220 wildlife specieslisted as either threatened, endangered, or proposed by the Endangered Species Act—approximately 25 percent of all animal species and 13 percent of all plant species," according to the USFS. "The intent of the 2001 Roadless Rule is to provide lasting protection for inventoried roadless areas within the National Forest System," the agency states.

Trump Administration Rollback of Roadless Rule

The 2001 Roadless Rule designates and manages as inventoried roadless areas more than half of the Tongass National Forest—around 9.2 million acres. On October 29, 2020, in the final days of his presidency, Trump repealed the Roadless Rule from the Tongass, opening up a section of the forest to road-building and industrial activity. Trump's USDA issued a notice saying that the final plan would open up 186,000 acres for timber production.

GOP leaders welcomed the decision.

Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who was at the time the chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, noted that Trump's repeal of the Roadless Rule would help the state develop not only public infrastructure to help connect the isolated communities in the area but also cheaper sources of energy.

Industry groups also supported the decision. "There's a handful of small operators that are working on the Tongass, harvesting timber," Tessa Axelson of the Alaska

Forest Association, a timber industry group, told Alaska Public Media. “In order to continue to survive, those businesses are dependent on a predictable supply of timber.”

Frank Bergstrom, a mining consultant in Juneau, said the rollback could attract investors to mineral exploration in the region. “There’s no roadmap to these things,” he said. “Maybe it’ll lead to a little more optimism. … This is one obstacle that has at least been diminished.”

Environmental groups decried the move. “Logging the Tongass is an unconscionable leap in the wrong direction,” said Jennifer Rokala, executive director for the Center for Western Priorities, a nonpartisan conservation advocacy group.

“Americans already pay $30 million annually to subsidize commercial logging operations on the portion of the Tongass not covered by the roadless rule. This proposed decision would increase the costs to taxpayers by opening the most remote areas of the forest to clear-cutting,” said Ken Rait, project director for U.S. public lands and rivers conservation at Pew Charitable Trusts. “The Tongass is a global gem. Once these pristine forests are gone, they’re gone forever.”

The Trump administration rollback went against overwhelming public opposition: Only 1 percent of public comments submitted to the federal government during the U.S. Forest Service’s environmental review supported lifting the existing safeguards on the Tongass.

Statewide polling in Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—all battleground states—conducted in 2020 also revealed strong opposition to the Trump administration’s decision to lift longtime environmental protections and open the Tongass to expanded logging operations.

Following the poll’s release, J.D. Hayworth, a Republican former member of Congress who represented Arizona from 1995 to 2007 and spent the majority of his six terms in office on the House Resources Committee, warned the Trump campaign months before Trump’s decision to lift the Roadless Rule in the Tongass was finalized that the move would hurt his chances at reelection.

“Now, with less than 75 days until election day, the Trump campaign needs to listen to the concerned voices of their base whose wavering support for Trump

could be pushed further into the Biden camp if Trump moves forward with lifting protections in America's largest and most important national forest," Hayworth wrote in an opinion piece published by Bloomberg Law in August 2020.

After Trump lost the 2020 presidential election, his revocation of the Roadless Rule would remain for about two more years. The Roadless Rule was important enough to the incoming Biden administration that on his first day in office, Biden committed to reviewing the 2020 Alaska Roadless Rule of his predecessor as one "that may conflict with important national objectives including protecting the environment." Still, reinstating the 2001 rule would still take around two years, as the Biden administration went through the lengthy federal review process, including months of allowing the public to comment. In addition, there was an ultimately failed lawsuit filed by the resource industries and the state of Alaska attempting to maintain Trump's rollback that had to make its way through the court system.

Biden Administration Reinstatement of the Roadless Rule

In July 2021, six months after he took office, President Biden froze old-growth timber sales in the Tongass as the administration began the lengthy process to reinstate the Roadless Rule. "The announcement that large-scale, old-growth logging is going to be ceased is very positive… because those mass clear cuts are not going to occur here anymore," said Marina Anderson, Tribal administrator for the Organized Village of Kasaan on Prince of Wales Island.

Finally, in January 2023, the Biden administration was able to reinstate the Roadless Rule on Alaska's Tongass National Forest, which brought back the 2001 protections that had been in place. The decision made constructing roads and harvesting timber inventoried roadless areas illegal, with limited exceptions.

"As our nation's largest national forest and the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world, the Tongass National Forest is key to conserving biodiversity and addressing the climate crisis," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "Restoring roadless protections listens to the voices of Tribal Nations and the people of Southeast Alaska while recognizing the importance of fishing and tourism to the region's economy."

In a press release issued on January 25, 2023, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said that the reinstatement of the Roadless Rule in the Tongass was "based on the

multiple ecological, social, cultural, and economic values supported by roadless areas on the Tongass, and… [followed] months of engagement with Tribes, rural communities, and partners." The agency noted that the majority of the approximately 112,000 comments that the Forest Service received from organizations and individuals during the public comment period (from November 2021 to January 2022) were in favor of the reinstatement of the Roadless Rule, adding that the USDA consulted with the Tribal Nations of Southeast Alaska before the decision was made.

This executive order protects not only a pristine, climate-protecting ecosystem and source of economic stability and growth for Alaska but also the traditional and customary hunting, fishing, and gathering areas for future generations of Southeast Alaska Tribes. It also protects an attraction for the millions of visitors whom it welcomes every year from across the nation and the globe. In addition to securing important wildlife and fish habitat, opportunities for recreation, and traditional and sacred sites, roadless areas in the Tongass will prevent the kind of intensive industrial development and resource extraction that have destroyed forests worldwide, many of which are damaged beyond repair.

As mentioned, preventing roads from being built in the Tongass has widespread popular support. According to the USFS, 96 percent of the 1.6 million letters and comments submitted during 600 public meetings supported the roadless initiative in the Tongass. Notably, most Alaskans were in support of maintaining roadless areas.

Republicans Denounce Reinstatement

Unsurprisingly, several leading Alaskan Republicans were quick to slam the Biden administration's decision to reinstate the Roadless Rule in the Tongass.

"The Roadless Rule should never have applied to the Tongass, and the Biden administration's decision to reinstate it is federal paternalism at its worst," said Senator Murkowski. "Roughly 80 percent of the Tongass is already protected through existing law, land use designations, and the forest planning process, and there is no threat of large-scale development from timber harvesting or any other activity."

This, of course, is not true. In fact, the reinstated rule does not stop public road-building or other necessary projects. Since 2009, the USFS received and

approved 59 project proposals under the Roadless Rule that support power generation, access between communities, and other priorities.

Road-building of any sort is a direct threat to wildlife habitat. While much of the Tongass does have federal protection, what Murkowski fails to recognize is that existing manmade structures in the forest have already hampered the ability of wildlife to live in their natural state. Manmade road-stream crossings, including bridges and culverts, have fragmented natural aquatic habitats that impeded fish migrations. As of 2019, according to the USFS, 1,120 fish stream crossings—30 percent of the total surveyed within the Tongass—fail to meet current standards for fish passage. Adding noncritical roads would only increase this kind of wildlife habitat fragmentation and add undue stress to many species.

Indigenous Tribes Welcome Reinstatement of Roadless Rule

The return of Roadless Rule protections to the Tongass represents a commitment from the USFS not only to address the climate crisis but also to respect the natural integrity of the ancestral homeland of Southeast Alaska Tribes, who—like so many Indigenous groups across the globe—continue to be disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Following the Biden administration's reinstatement of the Tongass Roadless Rule in 2023, a coalition of Southeast Alaska Tribal leaders—including the Organized Village of Kake, the Organized Village of Kasaan, the Ketchikan Indian Community, the Skagway Traditional Council, the Organized Village of Saxman, the Hoonah Indian Association, the Craig Tribal Association, and the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska—issued cautious praise for the move, making sure they were afforded agency in decisions that would impact the future of the region.

"As the Forest Service works to repair relationships with Southeast Tribes," the leaders wrote in a press statement sent to the Independent Media Institute on January 25, 2023, "it is critical that the federal government ensure that the Southeast Tribal leaders be integral partners in creating a future for the Tongass that is guided by Indigenous values, a genuinely sustainable economy, and a healthy ecosystem—all of which will sustain the Tongass for future generations."

In January 2023, following the reinstatement of the Roadless Rule, a group of Tribal leaders from the Tongass region issued a statement that said, in part, "We

have engaged tirelessly throughout the Roadless Rule process—some of us for more than 20 years—to bring Tribal concerns to the forefront of the conversation through consultation and legal means."

"Throughout time, many of our concerns fell on deaf ears," said the Organized Village of Kake's Joel Jackson in a statement emailed to the Independent Media Institute on March 21, 2023. "Now that the U.S. Forest Service is listening to Tribal concerns and reinstating the Tongass Roadless Rule, we are optimistic that we will be able to create long-term protections."

"The return of 2001 Roadless Rule protections [to the Tongass also] signals a commitment from the… [U.S. Forest Service] to address the climate crisis and finally listen to the Southeast Tribes that will continue to be most impacted by climate change effects," said Jackson.

These federal protections include possible co-management compact agreements "for areas inherent to our traditional and cultural uses through our Administrative Procedures Act Petition to Create a Traditional Homelands Conservation Rule," the leaders' statement said. Tribes also support the 2021 Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS). The strategy will end large-scale old-growth timber sales in the Tongass National Forest. It will instead focus on forest restoration, recreation, and resilience while identifying opportunities for investments through meaningful consultation with Tribes.

Going even further, Southeast Alaska Tribes will continue working toward permanent forest protection. The Roadless Area Conservation Act was introduced in the House in 2021 to put these protections in place.

The seesaw of the Roadless Rule between presidential administrations shows that executive orders can be issued and rescinded. The only way to prevent this back-and-forth policy would be for lawmakers to enshrine protections for the Tongass in state and federal law or for the judiciary to clarify the Roadless Rule's original intent to protect the Tongass.

"The uncertainty with the Roadless Rule has been a debilitating factor for the last 20 years, and I do not see that ending unless the courts put a stop to it—the political revolving door will keep it in play as long as there are elections," wrote Robert Venables, executive director of the Southeast Conference. This southeast Alaska regional economic development group supported the Roadless Rule

revision in 2020.

Global Pledge to End and Reverse Deforestation
Leaders at the November 2021 COP26 climate talks in Glasgow signed a pledge to end and reverse deforestation and land degradation by 2030, with 144 nations joining. The commitment, titled the "Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use," collectively includes at least 90 percent of the Earth's forests—amounting to more than 13 million square miles—and is supported by a $19 billion investment fueled by both private and public funds.

Conserving our forests and other critical ecosystems is… an indispensable piece of keeping our climate goals within reach," said U.S. President Joe Biden at the Glasgow conference. "If we all work together to make sure these precious resources are conserved… forests have the potential to reduce… carbon globally by more than one-third… So, we need to approach this issue with the same seriousness of purpose as decarbonizing our economies. That's what we're doing in the United States."

Biden went on to mention the Tongass specifically, saying, "We have put in place protections for the Tongass Forest in Alaska, the world's largest intact temperate rainforest." He also announced a "new plan to conserve global forests, which will bring together a full range of U.S. government tools—diplomatic, financial, and policy—to halt forest loss, restore our critical carbon sinks, and improve land management. Through this plan, the United States will help the world deliver on our shared goal of halting natural forest loss and restoring at least an additional 200 million hectares of forests and other ecosystems by the year 2030."

That is a massive amount of land. To put that figure into context, 200 million hectares is about 770,000 square miles—eclipsing the size of the state of Alaska by more than 100,000 square miles. The area is bigger than many nations, including Mongolia, Indonesia, and Mexico.

Environmental advocates cheered the move. Darci Vetter, global head of policy and government relations at the Nature Conservancy, an environmental nonprofit, called Biden's executive order "a clear recognition of the critical role forests play for our climate and our communities. This science-based, cooperative approach to forest conservation and restoration is a smart strategy we should accelerate and amplify."

Conclusion

Based on scientific evidence, it is clear that the Tongass National Forest is an important carbon sink not just for the United States—where it stores more than 40 percent of all the carbon stored by all the national forests—but also for the world at large, being the Earth's largest remaining temperate rainforest.

The Tongass is also home to a rich diversity of plant and animal species, many of which are unique and found nowhere else in the world. It is a refuge for numerous endangered and threatened species, including the iconic bald eagle and the Alexander Archipelago wolf. Preserving this habitat ensures the continuation of these species and maintains the ecosystem's delicate balance.

If the Tongass were subject to large-scale development, irreversible damage would be inflicted upon this unique ecosystem. Deforestation and infrastructure projects could lead to habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity, and disruption of critical ecological processes.

Additionally, the Tongass National Forest is a significant driver of Alaska's sustainable economy, particularly fishing, tourism, and recreation. The forest attracts visitors worldwide, drawn to its stunning landscapes, abundant wildlife, and outdoor recreational opportunities. The commercial fishing industry, which heavily depends on the health of the forest's rivers and streams, also benefits from its protection.

Crucially, the forest is deeply woven into the cultural fabric of Indigenous communities like the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples, who have relied on its resources for millennia. It holds spiritual, cultural, and traditional values, making its preservation essential for respecting the rights and heritage of these native groups.

Following the Biden administration's reinstatement of the Roadless Rule in January 2023, Dr. Homer Wilkes, the USDA under-secretary for natural resources and environment, said, "Protecting the Tongass will support watershed protection, climate benefits, and ecosystem health and protect areas important for jobs and community well-being—and it is directly responsive to input from Tribal Nations."

In their January 2023 statement, Southeast Alaskan Tribal leaders said, "As the USDA works to repair its relationship with our Tribal governments and

communities on the ground, the agency will continue to be an integral partner in creating a future for the Tongass that is guided by collaboration, Indigenous leadership and values, the needs of future generations, and sustainable economies that will heal the divisions of the past."

Preserving the integrity of Tongass National Forest is crucial for the Earth's well-being. By safeguarding this irreplaceable ecosystem and awe-inspiring landscape, humanity can achieve many positive outcomes, from combatting the impacts of the climate crisis and protecting biodiversity to honoring Indigenous cultures and sustainably supporting local economies. As the Tongass is part of the United States, it is the responsibility of all Americans to act as stewards of this natural treasure, ensuring that future generations can continue to benefit from its immense ecological and cultural value.

Reynard Loki

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Source: Independent Media Institute

Credit Line: This article was produced by Earth | Food | Life, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Why China's New Map Of Its Borders Has Stirred Regional Tensions

John P. Ruehl – Source: Independent Media Institute

10-17-2023 ~ *China's release of its standard map has produced outrage and alarm in several countries, yet Beijing remains steadfast in continuing its historical approach toward its borders.*

In the waning days of August 2023, closely following a BRICS summit and mere days ahead of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and G20 meetings, Beijing revealed its latest seemingly innocuous "standard" map. Having been released regularly since at least 2006, China's standard maps are aimed to

eliminate “problem maps” that do not affirm China’s territorial integrity. But the 2023 edition invited ripples of condemnation throughout China’s near abroad and beyond, as it repeated Beijing’s claims on divisive territorial disputes with its neighbors—including the Philippines, which has seen its struggle with China over a small shoal in the South China Sea escalate significantly over recent weeks.

The release of China’s map, coupled with its aggressive border strategies, has created enormous uncertainty across the Indo-Pacific. In a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, various actors are wrestling with how to effectively counter China’s actions.

China’s perception of maritime and international laws as products of Western customs has underpinned its level of adherence to them. “Stealthy compliance” allows China to ambiguously accept international law while interpreting it flexibly to advance its territorial claims. Beijing will also explicitly reject international law, exemplified by its dismissal of a tribunal in The Hague that challenged China’s assertions in the South China Sea in 2016. Regularly publishing maps helps assert China’s claims to domestic and international audiences, without putting Beijing in a position where it has to enforce them simultaneously.

Beijing’s strategy has effectively thwarted regional and Western responses and prevented the outbreak of major conflict. Inflaming territorial disputes serves as a bargaining chip in bilateral negotiations and lays the groundwork for potential future claims as China’s strength is expected to increase. Channeling nationalist sentiment outward has also bolstered the Chinese government’s domestic legitimacy and diverted attention from contentious issues like Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong.

However, the response to China’s 2023 map reveals growing backlash to Beijing’s approach to its border issues and questions over its long-term sustainability.

China has periodically unveiled its nine-dash line map for decades, delineating its claims in the South China Sea. The mystery shrouding whether these claims pertain to water rights, land features, or both, has kept the region on edge. Regardless, they symbolize China’s desire to reduce U.S. control over regional shipping lanes, secure rights over natural resources, and project power beyond its first island chain into the expansive Pacific.

China’s latest map took a bold step by reintroducing a tenth dash east of

Taiwan—a largely dormant claim since 2013. The move not only reaffirmed China's ownership of Taiwan but also extended China's reach beyond Taiwan's recognized territorial waters, a direct challenge to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Reasserting this claim may point to growing confidence in Beijing of being able to impose its various claims in the region. China's map also continued to emphasize China's rights to the Senkaku Islands, disputed with Japan. Both Taipei and Tokyo vehemently criticized China for the map's release.

China and ASEAN had meanwhile been negotiating a code of conduct for the South China Sea, reaching an agreement in July to accelerate the process. The release of the 2023 map just days before the ASEAN summit in Indonesia naturally triggered swift rejection from member states such as Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, which have longstanding wariness of Chinese maritime territorial ambitions.

China occupied the Paracel Islands, contested by Vietnam, in 1974 and engaged in a brief skirmish with Vietnam over the Johnson South Reef in 1988. The Philippines was meanwhile forced to concede Mischief Reef to China in 1995 but later stranded a warship on the Second Thomas Shoal in 1999 to enforce its claims there. Chinese forces steadily took control over the Spratly Islands (including by creating artificial islands) over the last decade, while the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff saw China gain effective control over a shoal against the Philippines. Malaysia has also seen increasing naval confrontations with China in recent years.

Under former Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte, Manila pursued a more hospitable approach to China and its territorial claims. But since 2022 under President Bongbong Marcos, the Philippines has taken a renewed confrontational strategy in confronting China, including blocking Chinese attempts in recent weeks to deny resupply efforts to the Filipino warship on the Second Thomas Shoal. Vietnam has also drawn closer to the U.S. in recent years, largely in response to China, and the 2023 map may also convince Malaysia to do so as well.

However, not all ASEAN states are willing to coordinate with the U.S. and confront Beijing. Indonesian officials downplayed the 2023 map's significance, and days later inaugurated a China-backed high-speed rail project. Similarly, Brunei raised limited objections to the map, reflecting its pledge with China made

in July 2023 for greater cooperation. Many other ASEAN member states maintain substantial trade ties with China, tempering their willingness to take a firm stance even amid the release of another provocative Chinese map.

China's coast guard, navy (now the world's largest), and militarized fishing fleets also deter countries from escalating disputes in the South China Sea. However, resisting China's territorial claims is complicated because many countries are also embroiled in disagreements with one another. Taiwan, for instance, claims Japan's Senkaku Islands, while Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines have their own disputes. By inflaming its own border disputes, China often exacerbates other existing conflicts, and other countries may opt to avoid involvement because they fear it could lead to more tension with their other neighbors.

China's land border disputes were also thrust into the spotlight with the unveiling of its 2023 map. Longstanding border issues with ASEAN member Myanmar persist, but Myanmar's internal strife and economic reliance on China have rendered moot any serious opposition to Chinese border policies.

Instead, China's most serious border dispute is with India, involving a poorly defined 2,100-mile international border that was never demarcated. China and India both claim sovereignty over Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. In 2020, the two countries had their first deadly skirmish in 45 years, with another violent clash in 2022. Beijing and New Delhi have also authorized infrastructure projects in the disputed regions to solidify their claims and ease logistical issues. India lodged an official diplomatic protest against China for its 2023 map, extinguishing any hopes for a potential thaw in India-China relations that had been suggested after the BRICS summit in South Africa in August.

India has also supported Bhutan in its territorial disputes with China. Bhutan requested and received Indian assistance in 2017 to repel Chinese troops and construction workers that had entered Bhutan, while China made new territorial claims in Bhutan in 2020. But in a surprising turn of events in April 2023, Bhutan appeared to partially acquiesce to China and explore concessions by agreeing to a joint technical team with China to address their territorial issues.

India's attempt to rally regional opposition against China has also been complicated by Nepal, which has territorial disputes with both China and India.

Nepal's protest against China's 2023 map also criticized the inclusion of several territories as part of India which it claims as its own. Beijing has consistently accused India of encroaching on Nepalese territory to undermine New Delhi's territorial claims and take away attention from its own dispute with Nepal.

China's 2023 map further stirred controversy by reviving a settled dispute with Russia. Although both countries resolved longstanding border disputes in the 1990s and 2000s, China's latest edition claimed a small island that was divided between the two countries in 2005. Russian officials dismissed the map's claims, stating the issue had already been resolved.

Marking the island as such may have been a retaliatory gesture by China in response to a Russian map from 2022 showing Aksai Lachin and Arunachal Pradesh in India. It also likely appealed to nationalist elements within China critical of Russia's territorial gains from unequal treaties during the 19th and 20th centuries. But China's assertiveness also serves as a signal to Russia as its dependence on China has grown since its invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin's tepid response reflected its increasing unwillingness to confront Beijing.

Barely three weeks after the release of China's map, China and Syria, an important Russian ally, announced the formation of a strategic partnership. Together with competing Chinese and Russian interests in Central Asia, the 2023 map marks another subtle but notable test for the Sino-Russian no-limits partnership announced in February 2022.

China's assertions are also bolstered by the United States' historical wavering on international law. The U.S. was accused of breaking international law by the International Court of Justice by mining Nicaraguan harbors and supporting rebels in the country in the 1980s. Furthermore, the U.S. has yet to ratify the UNCLOS, a significant maritime framework. Washington's inability to mediate the 2012 dispute between the Philippines and China encouraged Beijing to test the United States' willingness to defend the region. As the U.S. seeks to rally countries into conducting freedom of navigation exercises in the region, China will increasingly aim to disrupt them and establish squatter's rights.

Concordantly, Beijing will continue to block attempts to "internationalize" its territorial disputes, opting for multilateral or bilateral talks where it can leverage its strengths. Keeping these disputes ongoing (or reigniting them) puts pressure

on its neighbors and fuels nationalist sentiment in China, with claims likely to escalate if Beijing perceives its position as stronger.

However, China's increasingly aggressive foreign policy under President Xi Jinping runs the risk of turning the country into a regional antagonist. Central Asian states, which also solved their territorial disputes with China, are also likely increasingly nervous. The riots in China against Japanese businesses during heightened tension over the Senkaku Islands in 2012 serve as a stark reminder of how exploiting nationalist sentiment can spiral out of control and damage China's reputation as an attractive place for investment. For the U.S., successfully rallying the region becomes much easier when it can highlight China's self-interested actions.

China's enigmatic and assertive border strategies have far-reaching implications for regional and global stability. While its tactics have yielded short-term benefits, they carry the risk of escalating disputes into conflicts and generating significant international backlash. The current geopolitical landscape remains dynamic, with major powers and smaller countries grappling to find an effective response to Chinese calculations.

By John P. Ruehl

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Source: Globetrotter

G7 Versus BRICS: Power Struggles Are Not Class Struggles

Richard D. Wolff

Class struggles interact with but are different from power struggles. The ancient conflicts between city-states Athens and Sparta were power struggles, while within each, slaves and enslavers engaged in class struggles. Britain and France were absolute monarchies in late European feudalism fully engaged in power struggles. At the same time, class struggles between lords and serfs internally agitated both "great" powers. Now, after slavery and feudalism have largely ended and capitalism prevails globally, great power struggles exist between the G7 and BRICS and among their member nations, as well as other nations. At the same time, class struggles exist between employers and employees in all nations. Power and class struggles condition and shape one another. Both have been and remain core aspects of history; so too have ideological habits of confusing and conflating them.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany's monarch, said in 1914 as World War I began, "I no longer recognize [political] parties, I recognize only Germans." He used nationalism to unify a class-divided Germany to help win the war. The Kaiser had been shaken by more than the increasingly serious struggles among world powers over colonies, world trade, and foreign investment. He was stunned too by the rise of Germany's Marx-inspired Socialist Party across the decades before the war. Germany's class of capitalist employers had been similarly shaken and stunned. For a country increasingly and deeply split between labor and capital, German nationalism was the employer class's strategy both to thwart socialism and win the war. Key to that strategy was getting people to think (and self-identify) in terms of national and ultimately military struggles, and not class

struggles.

Germany's strategy failed. It lost World War I, the monarchy ended, and its Socialist Party became Germany's postwar government. Socialism emerged from the war far stronger in Germany than it had ever been. Much the same was true for World War I's other combatant nations. More or less all of them had used nationalism to mobilize their war efforts and to undermine and displace class consciousness. For the war's winners, nationalism may have served its purpose for them to achieve victory. Yet, it did not vanquish or banish socialism. Instead, socialism captured its first government (Russia) and split into socialist and communist wings that each drew mass attention and engagement. Both wings spread globally and quickly in the 1920s and even more in the 1930s as capitalism imposed its worst crash ever on most nations across the world.

Now, a century later, power struggles intensify and sharpen across global capitalism. The power of the United States, hegemonic during the Cold War, is now declining. The earlier decline of Europe, punctuated by the loss of its colonies and two deeply destructive world wars, continues. Both Europe and the United States face the stunning, unprecedented speed of China's economic growth and concomitant rise to global power status. Already, China's network of alliances, especially the BRICS, confronts the United States and its alliances, especially the G7. The rise of China and the BRICS adds to their power struggles with the United States and the G7. That rise is also realigning power relations between the Global North and Global South and, in one way or another, among all nations and within international organizations.

Class struggles have likewise continued in all societies, thereby evolving in different forms and foci. Most importantly, socialists now focus decreasingly on the struggle between private property and free markets as capitalism, versus state property and state planning as socialism. Many socialists reacted to 20th-century experiences with state power in the USSR and the People's Republic of China by shifting their focus. State power and planning, while not dismissed as socialist goals, were seen increasingly as insufficient by themselves. Something more or different was needed to yield the post-capitalist system that socialists could and would embrace. Socialists refocused their priorities on the transformation of workplaces. Based on a critique of the capitalist hierarchy inside factories, offices, and stores—and its social effects—socialists increasingly stress proposals to democratically reorganize production there. Each worker in an

enterprise will have an equal vote to decide what, where, and how to produce as well as how to dispose of the product (or net revenues where the product is marketed). The democratization of all workplaces (households as well as enterprises) becomes a central thrust of what socialism has come to mean.

This kind of socialism grew out of but also challenged the macro, state-focused socialisms of the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, where state-owned-and-operated enterprises continue to organize production around the employer-employee dichotomy, they invite socialists' criticisms much as private-owned-and-operated enterprises do. The same applies to democratic socialisms or social democracies where enterprises remain privately owned and operated but are subject, along with markets, to heavy state supervision, taxation, and controls. Enterprises' private versus state forms, important as their differences are for other reasons, often do not differ in class terms. Both typically display the employer/employee internal organization of production. If going beyond capitalism to socialism means a transition to micro-level workplace organizations that are democratic, then such transitions apply to both public as well as private enterprises.

This newly emerging socialist focus challenges both the United States and China, the G7 and BRICS, despite the different balances of state and private enterprises among them. Further, the now fast (and thus dramatically) changing power relations among them have impacts on every nation's class struggles. For example, G7 sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine war, and their inflationary impacts on Europe and the United States, have sharpened employer versus employee struggles as a result of those inflationary and anti-inflationary policies in many nations across the world. One of those policies—sharp interest rate rises by the U.S. Federal Reserve—is squeezing nations with large dollar-denominated external debts. The squeezed nations' employers and employees react in ways that often intensify their class struggles.

One major past and present problem has been the widespread tendency to confuse or conflate power and class struggles or else to see one and be blind to the other. Partly, these problems resulted from nationalist efforts, like Kaiser Wilhelm II's, to repress class consciousness. While other problems emerged when cultures refused or rejected class consciousness perhaps because of their mass media's dependence on capitalist owners and advertisers. Often both socialists and anti-socialists contributed to the confusion and blindness. That happened when the Cold War (1945-1990) and its lasting legacy effectively persuaded many

on both sides to equate socialism, communism, and the USSR as one pole versus capitalism, democracy, the United States, and the "West" as the other pole.

In today's newly emerging international economic order, contending nationalisms are again strong. Power struggles once again capture headlines: U.S. versus Russia and China, the G7 versus BRICS, and the Global South versus Global North. Power categories not only displace class categories from analytical debates about major world affairs but that displacement also invades discussions about nations' internal affairs. Power struggles are routinely mistaken for class struggles. Or class and class struggles disappear altogether from discourses.

The rise and struggles of the BRICS against the G7 should not be confused with class struggles. No government among them is committed to replacing capitalism with socialism in the sense of transition beyond the employer-employee mode of internal workplace organization. Nor is any government among them committed to replacing capitalism in the older senses of moving systemically from private to public enterprise ownership and from markets to planning. Yet within all of them, there are groups and movements that are committed to replacing capitalism with socialism in accordance with one of its definitions.

Karl Marx and others saw the conflict between the British Empire and its North American colony, culminating in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, as primarily a power struggle, and not a class struggle. Those wars did not pit slaves against enslavers, nor serfs against lords, nor employees against employers; they were power struggles. However, within them, moments of such class struggles did occur. The Napoleonic wars were power struggles, yet within them too, struggles of serfs against lords often occurred. The Napoleonic wars among feudal powers both weakened them all and stimulated capitalist classes to push for an end to feudalism across Europe. In the last two centuries of wars against colonialism and neocolonialism—power struggles—there were many class struggles interwoven with them.

The power struggles now between the G7 and BRICS will interact with the class struggles going on within both blocs. The leaders, ideologues, and mass media of both blocs focus chiefly on those power struggles. The advocates of class change must clearly differentiate power from class struggles if they are to focus mass consciousness and activism on the latter. Thus, the BRICS bloc is surely challenging the G7's and the U.S.'s hegemony in the world economy. The power

struggle of competing blocs is not, however, a socialist movement challenging capitalism. Nor is China or the Global South now mounting such a challenge. The power struggles of China, BRICS, and the Global South against the U.S., the G7, and the Global North may provoke new class struggles as well as influence all those already underway. How they do so will depend in part on how we understand and engage with the difference between power and class struggles.

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Source: Independent Media Institute

Credit Line: This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.