

There Is A Problem With The Infrastructure And Budget Bills — They're Too Small



Robert Pollin

The United States is an outlier among advanced democratic countries in terms of societal well-being. In the [2020 Social Progress Index](#) rankings, the U.S. is 28th, in the lower half of the second tier of nations, behind economic powerhouses Cyprus and Greece. The countries that perform best in the societal well-being index adhere to the social democratic model and have strong labor unions and a long tradition of left-wing parties.

The dismal performance of the United States in well-being, which includes having dilapidated and uneven infrastructure, could change in the next few years if the Democrats manage to get their act together and pass the infrastructure and reconciliation bills. These pieces of legislation, although hardly adequate in terms of size to address the country's urgent needs, would be undoubtedly a step forward in terms of changing the federal government's priorities, according to *Robert Pollin*, distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. But we have to see whether the so-called U.S. "moderates" (who would be seen as right-wingers in the European political spectrum) inside the Democratic Party can put the interests of the people ahead of those of big business, or whether the so-called "progressives" (who would be seen as "moderates" in most European multi-party systems) will even back the infrastructure bill if the accompanying spending

bill fails to get the necessary support. In U.S. politics, change rarely, if ever, comes from the top.

C.J. Polychroniou: After decades of political inaction on a dangerously overstretched infrastructure which lags far behind those of most other advanced countries, the U.S. Senate has finally approved a bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure package which is on a path to final passage in the House. Lawmakers have also agreed to a \$3.5 trillion budget process, although its status remains less certain as some moderate Senate Democrats find the total size of the budget to be too large. But let us first discuss the infrastructure bill whose current proposal targets spending over a five-year period. First, how does the world's leading economy end up with such poor infrastructure, and what can we expect to be the economic impact of the infrastructure bill?

Robert Pollin: Let's first be clear on the actual size of the bipartisan infrastructure bill. In fact, the version of the bill that passed in the Senate on August 10 allocates [\\$550 billion over 5 years for the infrastructure investments](#), not \$1 trillion, [as widely reported](#). The bill mostly supports investments in traditional infrastructure areas, such as roads, bridges, airports, rail, ports, water management and the electric grid. It does also provide funds, if to a generally lesser extent, to high-speed internet, public transportation, electric vehicles and charging stations, and climate resilience.

Of course, the total price tag sounds gigantic, but in fact it is quite small, along multiple dimensions. First of all, spread over five years, the total spending averages to \$110 billion per year. That is equal to less than one-half of one percent of current overall U.S. economic activity — i.e., U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In addition, this overall level of spending on upgrading the U.S. infrastructure falls far below what objective analysts have concluded is necessary to bring U.S. infrastructure up to a reasonable level. Specifically, the American Society of Civil Engineers recently concluded that the U.S. would need to spend an average of \$260 billion per year for 10 years to bring the U.S. only up to a “B” level of infrastructure quality from [its current “C-” level](#). So the bipartisan bill provides only about 40 percent of what the leading professional society of civil engineers says is needed for the U.S. to maintain an adequate infrastructure in traditional areas. Without the full funding in the range of \$260 billion per year, the civil engineers anticipate the U.S. infrastructure continuing its longstanding pattern of deterioration. Beyond that, this bill also provides only miniscule

amounts relative to what is needed to advance a viable U.S. climate stabilization project.

The U.S. infrastructure today is in poor condition today for the simple reason that under 40 years of neoliberalism, the idea of undertaking major public investments in strengthening the domestic economy was pushed to the bottom of the federal government's priorities. Virtually all Republican members of Congress have been doing this pushing, with enough congressional Democrats following along, regardless of whether a Democrat or Republican was in the White House. The top priorities of these members of Congress have been cutting taxes for the rich and continuing to expand the massive military budget. The military budget for 2021, at \$704 billion, is *nearly 7 times greater* than what would be allocated for all the infrastructure projects if the bipartisan bill were to pass. Passing this bill is certainly preferable than having no new support for infrastructure projects. It will also have a modest positive impact on jobs. But let's also be clear that this level of funding will produce none of the pressures on the federal budget or on inflation, as is being charged by critics. The funding level is just too small for that.

The \$3.5 trillion budget package, if enacted, will be a huge step toward a progressive reshaping of the federal government. It will be "the most consequential legislation for working people since the New Deal," according to Bernie Sanders, while it will also help to combat the climate crisis. Still, is the size of the reconciliation bill big enough to address the damage that 40 years of neoliberal policies have had on working people, the economy and our climate?

The \$3.5 trillion bill goes far beyond the \$550 billion bipartisan infrastructure bill in critical ways. First of all, obviously, just in terms of its size. This bill also devotes significant levels of funds to build a clean energy economy and stabilizing the climate. It also provides significant support in the areas of elder and child care, health care and housing. So let's call it the *climate and social infrastructure* bill. But the fact is that even this \$3.5 trillion proposal is not large relative to the size of the U.S. economy, much less relative to the country's pressing needs, both in terms of climate stabilization and advancing social justice. In other words, I don't agree with Bernie Sanders's assessment as to the historic magnitude of this bill as it is currently written. I certainly have a great deal of respect for what Bernie is trying to accomplish with this climate and social infrastructure bill. I wish I could agree with his assessment.

Here are the basics: The \$3.5 trillion in spending would be spread over 10 years. So that gets us to \$350 billion per year. Once again, the number sounds gigantic. But it amounts to about 1.5 percent of current U.S. GDP. About one-third of the total funding is devoted to fighting climate change — let's say around \$120 billion per year. That would be a huge boost relative to the paltry amounts being spent now by the federal government on what is, ever more obviously, an existential ecological crisis. But, in my view, it amounts to only about 25 percent of the \$500 billion per year that is needed to have a chance of reducing CO2 emissions in the U.S. economy by 50 percent as of 2030. In terms of a climate stabilization project, we would therefore still need to find around \$400 billion per year to build a clean energy economy. These funds would be separate from support needed to create much greater resiliency in the face of the increasingly severe climate disasters — i.e., the floods, wildfires, droughts and heat extremes that are now part of the everyday global news cycle. It would also be separate from the funding needed to provide a just transition for workers and communities that are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry.

The additional investment levels needed to create a zero-emissions energy system funding could possibly come from private investors, but realistically, only if the federal government enacts stringent regulations through which the fossil fuel industry is truly phased out over the next 20 to 30 years. So far at least, I am not aware of any federal initiative to impose any such stringent regulations, such as requiring that all fossil fuel companies cut their production and sales of oil, coal and natural gas by, say, 5 percent per year, every year, or face criminal liability.

In terms of other categories of spending, such as child and elder care, the climate and social infrastructure bill is a major breakthrough in recognizing these areas as vital to improving people's lives and creating a decent society. For example, this bill would support client-employed provider programs in the area of elder care, through which elderly people in need of care are able to stay in their homes and hire the home-based provider of their choice. Adult children, spouses, other family members, neighbors and friends would be eligible to be hired under this type of program. As it is, at present, most hours of elder care support are provided by family and friends on a voluntary basis. Providing financial support for a client-employed provider program would enable these voluntary providers to be paid for at least some of the hours of work they now provide voluntarily. These family members and friends would then be better able to concentrate their paid

working hours on care provision, rather than having to also be employed at separate paid jobs in order to earn sufficient income.

The problem with the bill, at 1.5 percent of GDP per year for 10 years, is that the funding level, again, is too small. In fact, we have right now an important benchmark against which to compare this climate and social infrastructure bill. This is the THRIVE Act, which is a bill introduced in Congress in April 2021, aiming to “Transform, Heal and Renew by Investing in a Vibrant Economy” — i.e., THRIVE — through a range of investments to rebuild the U.S. economy. The THRIVE Act was the work of the national Green New Deal Network, [a coalition of 15 grassroots organizations](#), including the Center for Popular Democracy, Climate Justice Alliance, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, Greenpeace, Indigenous Environmental Network, Indivisible, Movement for Black Lives, MoveOn, People’s Action, Right To The City Alliance, Service Employees International Union, Sierra Club, Sunrise Movement, US Climate Action Network, and the Working Families Party. The THRIVE Act was introduced in Congress by Sen. Ed Markey of Massachusetts and Congresswoman Debbie Dingell of Michigan.

The THRIVE Act proposes to provide over \$1 trillion in investments per year for 10 years — i.e., \$10 trillion in total — in four major areas: clean renewable energy and energy efficiency; infrastructure; agriculture and land restoration; and the care economy, public health and the postal system. On average then, the funding levels supported by the THRIVE Act are in the range of 2-3 times larger than the combined figures for the \$110 billion/year (over 5 years) infrastructure bill and the \$350 billion/year (over 10 years) climate and social infrastructure bill.

To see the type of impact the THRIVE Act could have on individual communities throughout the country, consider, for example, [the situation for the metropolitan area around Louisville, Kentucky](#). With THRIVE Act funding, solar panels could be installed on rooftops, over parking lots and on other artificial surfaces all over the city to provide over 10 percent of the area’s overall electricity demand. All public buildings could be retrofitted to raise energy efficiency levels significantly and save the city lots of money. Both the solar and building efficiency investments would contribute toward pushing down CO2 emissions in Louisville, to the point where reducing overall emissions by 50 percent as of 2030 becomes a realistic target.

In addition, there are about 10,000 elderly residents of the area who require

personal care. The THRIVE Act could enable all of these people to hire whomever they wanted — family members or friends — to support them and be paid decently for some of their hours of care. The THRIVE Act would also enable Louisville to address the fact that the city has become an “urban heat island” — i.e., a city in which summer temperatures can be up to 20 degrees F hotter than nearby rural areas, creating health hazards for the city’s population. Through THRIVE, the city could follow through on plans to expand the city’s tree canopy and create cool surfaces on roads and rooftops. Still further, Louisville could invest adequately in upgrading its sewer system. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has assessed the area’s flood protection system to be “high risk.”

Overall, investing in these and related projects through THRIVE would generate about 15,000 jobs in Louisville and surrounding communities, equal to about 4 percent of the area’s current employment level.

The THRIVE Act would have similar impacts in all communities throughout the country. The \$350 billion/year climate and social infrastructure bill could also deliver positive results in Louisville and elsewhere, but only at about one-third the level of the THRIVE Act. We then have to ask: which parts of the THRIVE Act do we sacrifice? Do we abandon the idea of advancing a climate stabilization program that has a serious chance of cutting U.S. emissions by 50 percent as of 2030? Do we give up the idea of supporting family members and friends who are providing critical elder care? Should Louisville’s summer temperatures be allowed to rise by, say, 25 degrees F relative to surrounding rural areas? And with expanding employment opportunities: should we be satisfied with creating 5,000 more jobs in Louisville when we could create 15,000 through THRIVE?

I want to emphasize again that I am not disparaging the climate and social infrastructure bill being advanced by Bernie Sanders and other Congressional Democrats. Without question, it is pushing in the right direction. But we also have to be clear-eyed as to the actual size of this measure and what its impact can be relative to the climate and social crises that we face. The grassroots activists throughout the country in the Green New Deal Network, who crafted the THRIVE Act, have established the standard that we need to be reaching for now as best we can.

Source:

<https://truthout.org/there-is-a-problem-with-the-infrastructure-and-budget-bills-th>

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).

Noam Chomsky: The US-Led “War On Terror” Has Devastated Much Of The World



Twenty years ago this week, the terrorist organization al-Qaeda, whose origins date back to 1979 when Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in the United States. Shortly thereafter, the

administration of George W. Bush embarked on a “global war on terror”: It invaded Afghanistan and, a year later, after having toppled the Taliban government, raised the specter of an “Axis of Evil” comprising Iraq, Iran and North Korea, thereby preparing the stage for more invasions. Interestingly enough, Saudi Arabia, whose royal family, according to certain intelligence reports, had been financing al-Qaeda, was not included on the list. Instead, it was Iraq that the U.S. invaded in 2003, toppling a brutal dictator (Saddam Hussein) who had committed most of his crimes as a U.S. ally and was a sworn enemy of al-Qaeda and of other Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organizations because of the threat they posed to his secular regime.

The outcome of the 20-year war on terror, which ended with the Taliban’s return to power, has been disastrous on multiple fronts, as Noam Chomsky pointedly elaborates in a breathtaking interview, which also reveals the massive level of hypocrisy that belies the actions of the global empire.

C.J. Polychroniou: Nearly 20 years have passed since the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. With nearly 3,000 dead, this was the deadliest attack on U.S. soil in history and produced dramatic ramifications for global affairs, as well as startling impacts on domestic society. I want to start by asking you to reflect on the alleged revamping of U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush as part of his administration’s reaction to the rise of Osama bin Laden and the jihadist phenomenon. First, was there anything new to the [Bush Doctrine](#), or was it simply a codification of what we had already seen take place in the 1990s in Iraq, Panama, Bosnia and Kosovo? Second, was the U.S.-NATO led invasion of Afghanistan legal under international law? And third, was the U.S. ever committed to nation-building in Afghanistan?

Noam Chomsky: Washington’s immediate reaction to 9/11/2001 was to invade Afghanistan. The withdrawal of U.S. ground forces was timed to (virtually) coincide with the 20th anniversary of the invasion. There has been a flood of

commentary on the 9/11 anniversary and the termination of the ground war. It is highly illuminating, and consequential. It reveals how the course of events is perceived by the political class, and provides useful background for considering the substantive questions about the Bush Doctrine. It also yields some indication of what is likely to ensue.

Of utmost importance at this historic moment would be the reflections of “the decider,” as he called himself. And indeed, there was an interview with George W. Bush as the withdrawal reached its final stage, in the *Washington Post*.

[In the Style section.](#)

The article and interview introduce us to a lovable, goofy grandpa, enjoying banter with his children, admiring the portraits he had painted of Great Men that he had known in his days of glory. There was an incidental comment on his exploits in Afghanistan and the follow-up episode in Iraq:

Bush may have started the Iraq War on false pretenses, but at least he hadn't inspired an insurrection that turned the U.S. Capitol into a combat zone. At least he had made efforts to [distance himself from the racists and xenophobes](#) in his party rather than cultivate their support. At least he hadn't gone so far as to [call his domestic adversaries "evil."](#)

“He looks like the Babe Ruth of presidents when you compare him to Trump,” former Senate Majority Leader and one-time Bush nemesis Harry M. Reid (D-Nevada) said in an interview. “Now, I look back on Bush with a degree of nostalgia, with some affection, which I never thought I would do.”

Way down on the list, meriting only incidental allusion, is the slaughter of hundreds of thousands; many millions of refugees; vast destruction; a regime of hideous torture; incitement of ethnic conflicts that have torn the whole region apart; and as a direct legacy, two of the most miserable countries on Earth.

First things first. He didn't bad-mouth fellow Americans.

The sole interview with Bush captures well the essence of the flood of commentary. What matters is *us*. There are many laments about the cost of these ventures: [the cost to us](#), that is, which “have exceeded \$8 trillion, according to new estimates by the Costs of War project at Brown University,” along with

American lives lost and disruption of our fragile society.

Next time we should assess the costs to us more carefully, and do better.

There are also well-justified laments about the fate of women under Taliban rule. The laments sometimes are no doubt sincere, though a natural question arises: Why weren't they voiced 30 years ago when U.S. favorites, armed and enthusiastically supported by Washington, were terrorizing young women in Kabul who were wearing the "wrong" clothes, throwing acid in their faces and other abuses? Particularly vicious were the forces of the arch-terrorist, [Gulbuddin Hekmatyar](#), recently on the U.S. negotiating team.

The achievements in women's rights in Russian-controlled cities in the late '80s, and the threats they faced from the CIA-mobilized radical Islamist forces, were reported at the time by a highly credible source, Rasil Basu, a distinguished international feminist activist who was UN representative in Afghanistan in those years, with special concern for women's rights.

Basu [reports](#):

During the [Russian] occupation, in fact, women made enormous strides: illiteracy declined from 98% to 75%, and they were granted equal rights with men in civil law, and in the Constitution. This is not to say that there was complete gender equality. Unjust patriarchal relations still prevailed in the workplace and in the family with women occupying lower level sex-type jobs. But the strides they took in education and employment were very impressive.

Basu submitted articles on these matters to the major U.S. journals, along with the feminist journal *Ms. Magazine*. No takers, wrong story. She was, however, able to publish her report in Asia: *Asian Age*, on December 3, 2001.

We can learn more about how Afghans in Kabul perceive the late years of the Russian occupation, and what followed, from another expert source, Rodric Braithwaite, British ambassador to Moscow from 1988 to 1992, and then chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, also author of the major scholarly work on the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Braithwaite visited Kabul in 2008, and reported his findings in the *London Financial Times*:

In Afghanistan today new myths are building up. They bode ill for current western policy. On a recent visit I spoke to Afghan journalists, former Mujahideen, professionals, people working for the 'coalition' — natural supporters for its claims to bring peace and reconstruction. They were contemptuous of [US-imposed] President Hamid Karzai, whom they compared to Shah Shujah, the British puppet installed during the first Afghan war. Most preferred Mohammad Najibullah, the last communist president, who attempted to reconcile the nation within an Islamic state, and was butchered by the Taliban in 1996: DVDs of his speeches are being sold on the streets. Things were, they said, better under the Soviets. Kabul was secure, women were employed, the Soviets built factories, roads, schools and hospitals, Russian children played safely in the streets. The Russian soldiers fought bravely on the ground like real warriors, instead of killing women and children from the air. Even the Taliban were not so bad: they were good Muslims, kept order, and respected women in their own way. These myths may not reflect historical reality, but they do measure a deep disillusionment with the 'coalition' and its policies.

The policies of the “coalition” were brought to the public in *New York Times* correspondent Tim Weiner’s history of the CIA. The goal was to “kill Soviet Soldiers,” the CIA station chief in Islamabad declared, making it clear that “the mission was not to liberate Afghanistan.”

His understanding of the policies he was ordered to execute under President Ronald Reagan is fully in accord with [the boasts of President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski](#) about their decision to support radical Islamist jihadis in 1979 in order to draw the Russians into Afghanistan, and his pleasure in the outcome after hundreds of thousands of Afghans were killed and much of the country wrecked: “What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some agitated Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?”

It was recognized early on by informed observers that the Russian invaders were eager to withdraw without delay. [The study of Russian archives by historian David Gibbs](#) resolves any doubts on the matter. But it was much more useful for Washington to issue rousing proclamations about Russia’s terrifying expansionist goals, compelling the U.S., in defense, to greatly expand its own domination of the region, with violence when needed (the Carter Doctrine, a precursor of the Bush Doctrine).

The Russian withdrawal left a relatively popular government in place under Najibullah, with a functioning army that was able to hold its own for several years until the U.S.-backed radical Islamists took over and instituted a reign of terror so extreme that the Taliban were widely welcomed when they invaded, instituting their own harsh regime. They kept on fairly good terms with Washington until 9/11.

Returning to the present, we should indeed be concerned with the fate of women, and others, as the Taliban return to power. For those sincerely concerned to design policies that might benefit them, a little historical memory doesn't hurt.

The same is true in other respects as well. The Taliban have promised not to harbor terrorists, but how can we believe them, commentators warn, when this promise is coupled with the outrageous claim by their spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid that there is "[no proof](#)" that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the 9/11 attack?

There is one problem with the general ridicule of this shocking statement. What Mujahid actually said was both accurate and very much worth hearing. In his words, "When Osama bin Laden became an issue for the Americans, he was in Afghanistan. Although there was no proof he was involved" in 9/11.

Let's check. In June 2002, eight months after 9/11, FBI Director Robert Mueller made his most extensive presentation to the national press about the results of what was probably the most intensive investigation in history. [In his words](#), "investigators believe the idea of the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon came from al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan," though the plotting and financing apparently trace to Germany and the United Arab Emirates. "We think the masterminds of it were in Afghanistan, high in the al Qaeda leadership."

What was only surmised in June 2002 could not have been known eight months earlier when the U.S. invaded. Mujahid's outrageous comment was accurate. The ridicule is another example of convenient amnesia.

Keeping Mujahid's accurate statement in mind, along with Mueller's confirmation of it, we can move towards understanding the Bush Doctrine.

While doing so, we might listen to Afghan voices. One of the most respected was Abdul Haq, the leading figure in the anti-Taliban Afghan resistance and a former

leader of the U.S.-backed Mujahideen resistance to the Russian invasion. A few weeks after the U.S. invasion, he had [an interview with Asia scholar Anatol Lieven](#).

Haq bitterly condemned the U.S. invasion, which, he recognized, would kill many Afghans and undermine the efforts to overthrow the Taliban from within. He said that “the US is trying to show its muscle, score a victory and scare everyone in the world. They don’t care about the suffering of the Afghans or how many people we will lose.”

Haq was not alone in this view. A meeting of 1,000 tribal elders in October 2001 unanimously demanded an end to the bombing, which, they declared, is targeting “innocent people.” They urged that means other than slaughter and destruction be employed to overthrow the hated Taliban regime.

The leading Afghan women’s rights organization, Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), issued a declaration on October 11, 2001, strongly opposing the “vast aggression on our country” by the U.S., which will shed the blood of innocent civilians. The declaration called for “eradication of the plague of the Taliban and al-Qaeda” by the “uprising of the Afghan nation,” not by a murderous assault of foreign aggressors.

All public at the time, all ignored as irrelevant, all forgotten. The opinions of Afghans are not our concern when we invade and occupy their country.

The perception of the anti-Taliban Afghan resistance was not far from the stance of President Bush and his Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Both dismissed Taliban initiatives to send bin Laden for trial abroad despite Washington’s refusal to provide evidence (which it didn’t have). Finally, they refused Taliban offers to surrender. As the president put it, “When I said no negotiations, I meant no negotiations.” [Rumsfeld added](#), “We don’t negotiate surrenders.” E.g., *we’re going to show our muscle and scare everyone in the world*.

The imperial pronouncement at the time was that those who harbor terrorists are as guilty as the terrorists themselves. The shocking audacity of that proclamation passed almost unnoticed. It was not accompanied by a call to bomb Washington, as it obviously implied. Even putting aside the world-class terrorists in high places, the U.S. [harbors and abets retail terrorists](#) who keep to such acts as blowing up Cuban commercial airliners, killing many people, part of the long U.S.

terrorist war against Cuba.

Quite apart from that scandal, it is worth stating the unspeakable: The U.S. had no charge against the Taliban. No charge, before 9/11 or ever. Before 9/11, Washington was on fairly good terms with the Taliban. After 9/11, it demanded extradition (without even a pretense of providing required evidence), and when the Taliban agreed, Washington refused the offers: "We don't negotiate surrenders." The invasion was not only a violation of international law, as marginal a concern in Washington as the anti-Taliban Afghan resistance, but also had no credible pretext on any grounds.

Pure criminality.

Furthermore, ample evidence is now available showing that Afghanistan and al-Qaeda were not of much interest to the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld triumvirate. They had their eyes on much bigger game than Afghanistan. Iraq would be the first step, then the entire region. I won't review the record here. It's well-documented in Scott Horton's book, *Fool's Errand*.

That's the Bush Doctrine. Rule the region, rule the world, show our muscle so that the world knows that "What we say goes," as Bush I [George H.W. Bush] put it.

It's hardly a new U.S. doctrine. It's also easy to find precursors in imperial history. Simply consider our predecessor in world control, Britain, a grand master of war crimes, whose wealth and power derived from piracy, slavery and the world's greatest narco-trafficking enterprise.

And in the last analysis, "Whatever happens, we have got, The Maxim gun, and they have not." Hilaire Belloc's rendition of Western civilization. And pretty much Abdul Haq's insight into the imperial mindset.

Nothing reveals reigning values more clearly than the mode of withdrawal. The Afghan population was scarcely a consideration. The imperial "deciders" do not trouble to ask what people might want in the rural areas of this overwhelmingly rural society where the Taliban live and find their support, perhaps grudging support as the best of bad alternatives. Formerly a Pashtun movement, the "new Taliban" evidently have a much broader base. That was dramatically revealed by [the quick collapse of their former enemies](#), the vicious warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, along with Ismail Khan, bringing other ethnic groups within the Taliban

network. There are also Afghan peace forces that should not be summarily dismissed. What would the Afghan population want if they had a choice? Could they, perhaps, reach local accommodations if given time before a precipitous withdrawal? Whatever the possibilities might have been, they do not seem to have been considered.

The depth of contempt for Afghans was, predictably, reached by Donald Trump. In his unilateral withdrawal agreement with the Taliban in February 2020, he did not even bother to consult with the official Afghan government. Worse still, [Bush administration foreign policy specialist Kori Schake reports](#), Trump forced the Afghan government to release 5,000 Taliban fighters and relax economic sanctions. He agreed that the Taliban could continue to commit violence against the government we were there to support, against innocent people and against those who'd assisted our efforts to keep Americans safe. All the Taliban had to do was say they would stop targeting U.S. or coalition forces, not permit al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations to use Afghan territory to threaten U.S. security and subsequently hold negotiations with the Afghan government.

As usual, what matters is *us*, this time amplified by Trump's signature cruelty. The fate of Afghans is of zero concern.

Trump timed the withdrawal for the onset of the summer fighting season, reducing the hope for some kind of preparation. President Joe Biden improved the terms of withdrawal a little, but not enough to prevent the [anticipated debacle](#). Then came the predictable reaction of the increasingly shameless Republican leadership. They were barely able to remove their gushing tributes to Trump's "[historic peace agreement](#)" from their web page in time to denounce Biden and call for his impeachment for pursuing an improved version of Trump's ignominious betrayal.

Meanwhile, the Afghans are again hung out to dry.

Returning to the original question, the Bush Doctrine may have been formulated more crudely than the usual practice, but it is hardly new. The invasion violated international law (and Article VI of the U.S. Constitution), but Bush's legal team had determined that such sentimentality was "quaint" and "obsolete," again breaking little new ground except for brazen defiance. As to "nation building," one way to measure the commitment to this goal is to ask what portion of the

trillions of dollars expended went to the Afghan population, and what portion went to the U.S. military system and its mercenaries (“contractors”) along with the morass of corruption in Kabul and the warlords the U.S. established in power.

At the outset, I referred to 9/11/2001, not just 9/11. There’s a good reason. What we call 9/11 is the second 9/11. The first 9/11 was far more destructive and brutal by any reasonable measure: 9/11/73. To see why, consider per capita equivalents, the right measure. Suppose that on 9/11/2001, 30,000 people had been killed, 500,000 viciously tortured, the government overthrown and a brutal dictatorship installed. That would have been worse than what we call 9/11.

It happened. It wasn’t deplored by the U.S. government, or by private capital, or by the international financial institutions that the U.S. largely controls, or by the leading figures of “libertarianism.” Rather, it was lauded and granted enormous support. The perpetrators, like Henry Kissinger, are highly honored. I suppose bin Laden is lauded among jihadis.

All should recognize that I am referring to Chile, 9/11/1973.

Another topic that might inspire reflection is the notion of “forever wars,” finally put to rest with the withdrawal from Afghanistan. From the perspective of the victims, when did the forever wars begin? For the United States, they began in 1783. With the British yoke removed, the new nation was free to invade “Indian country,” to attack Indigenous nations with campaigns of slaughter, terror, ethnic cleansing, violation of treaties — all on a massive scale, meanwhile picking up half of Mexico, then onto much of the world. A longer view traces our forever wars back to 1492, as historian Walter Hixson argues.

From the viewpoint of the victims, history looks different from the stance of those with the maxim gun and their descendants.

In March 2003, the U.S. initiated a war against Iraq as part of the neoconservative vision of remaking the Middle East and removing leaders that posed a threat to the interests and “integrity” of the United States. Knowing that the regime of Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, possessed no weapons of mass destruction and subsequently posed no threat to the U.S., why did Bush invade Iraq, [which left hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead](#) and may have cost more than \$3 trillion?

9/11 provided the occasion for the invasion of Iraq, which, unlike Afghanistan, is a real prize: a major petro-state right at the heart of the world's prime oil-producing region. As the twin towers were still smoldering, Rumsfeld was telling his staff that it's time to "go massive — sweep it all up, things related and not," including Iraq. Goals quickly became far more expansive. Bush and associates made it quite clear that bin Laden was small potatoes, of little interest (see Horton for many details).

The Bush legal team determined that the UN Charter, which explicitly bars preemptive/preventive wars, actually authorizes them — formalizing what had long been operative doctrine. The official reason for war was the "single question": Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. When the question received the wrong answer, the reason for aggression instantly switched to "democracy promotion," a transparent fairy tale swallowed enthusiastically by the educated classes — though some demurred, including 99 percent of Iraqis, according to polls.

Some are now praised for having opposed the war from the start, notably Barack Obama, who criticized it as a strategic blunder. Perhaps my memory is faulty, but I don't recall praise for Nazi generals who regarded Hitler's Operation Barbarossa as a strategic blunder: They should have knocked out Britain first. A different judgment was rendered by the Nuremberg Tribunal. But the U.S. doesn't commit crimes, by definition; only blunders.

The regime-change agenda that had defined U.S. foreign policy under the Bush administration was apparently behind NATO's decision to remove Muammar Qaddafi from power in Libya in the wake of the "Arab Spring" revolutions in late 2010 and early 2011. But as in the case of Iraq, what were the real reasons for dealing with the leader of an alleged "rogue state" that had long ceased being one?

The Libya intervention was initiated by France, partly in reaction to humanitarian posturing of some French intellectuals, partly I suppose (we don't have much evidence) as part of France's effort to sustain its imperial role in Francophone Africa. Britain joined in. Then Obama-Clinton joined, "leading from behind" as some White House official is supposed to have said. As Qaddafi's forces were converging on Benghazi, there were loud cries of impending genocide, leading to a UN Security Council resolution imposing a no-fly zone and calling for

negotiations. That was reasonable in my opinion; there were legitimate concerns. The African Union proposed a ceasefire with negotiations with the Benghazi rebel about reforms. [Qaddafi accepted it; the rebels refused.](#)

At that point, the France-Britain-U.S. coalition decided to violate the Security Council resolution they had introduced and to become, in effect, the air force of the rebels. That enabled the rebel forces to advance on ground, finally capturing and sadistically murdering Qaddafi. Hillary Clinton found that quite amusing, and joked with the press that, "We came, We saw, He died."

The country then collapsed into total chaos, with sharp escalation in killings and other atrocities. It also led to a flow of jihadis and weapons to other parts of Africa, stirring up major disasters there. Intervention extended to Russia and Turkey, and the Arab dictatorships, supporting warring groups. The whole episode has been a catastrophe for Libya and much of West Africa. Clinton is not on record, as far as I know, as to whether this is also amusing.

Libya was a major oil producer. It's hard to doubt that that was a factor in the various interventions, but lacking internal records, little can be said with confidence.

The debacle in Afghanistan has shown beyond any doubt the failure of U.S. strategy in the war on terror and of the regime-change operations. However, there is something more disturbing than these facts, which is that, after each intervention, the United States leaves behind "black holes" and even betrays those that fought on its side against terrorism. Two interrelated questions: First, do you think that the failed war on terror will produce any new lessons for future U.S. foreign policymakers? And second, does this failure reveal anything about U.S. supremacy in world affairs?

Failure is in the eyes of the beholder. Let's first recall that Bush II didn't declare the global war on terror. He re-declared it. It was Reagan and his Secretary of State George Shultz who came into office declaring the global war on terror, a campaign to destroy the "the evil scourge of terrorism," particularly state-backed international terrorism, a "plague spread by depraved opponents of civilization itself [in a] return to barbarism in the modern age."

The global war on terror quickly became a huge terrorist war directed or supported by Washington, concentrating on Central America but extending to the

Middle East, Africa and Asia. The global war on terror even led to a World Court judgment condemning the Reagan administration for “unlawful use of force” — aka, international terrorism — and ordering the U.S. to pay substantial reparations for its crimes.

The U.S. of course dismissed all of this and stepped up the “unlawful use of force.” That was quite proper, the editors of *The New York Times* explained. The World Court was a “hostile forum,” as proven by the fact that it condemned the blameless U.S. A few years earlier it had been a model of probity when it sided with the U.S. in a case against Iran.

The U.S. then vetoed a Security Council resolution calling on all states to observe international law, mentioning no one, although it was clear what was intended. I’m not sure whether it was even reported.

But we solemnly declare that states that harbor terrorists are as guilty as the terrorists themselves. So the invasion of Afghanistan was “right” and “just,” though ill-conceived and too costly. *To us.*

Was it a failure? For U.S. imperial goals? In some cases, yes. Reagan was the last supporter of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, but was unable to sustain it. In general, though, it extended Washington’s imperial reach.

Bush’s renewal of the global war on terror has not had similar success. When the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, the base for radical Islamic fundamentalist terrorism was largely confined to a corner of Afghanistan. Now it is all over the world. The devastation of much of Central Asia and the Middle East has not enhanced U.S. power.

I doubt that it has much impact on U.S. global supremacy, which remains overwhelming. In the military dimension, the U.S. stands alone. Its military spending eclipses rivals — in 2020, \$778 billion as compared to China’s \$252 billion and Russia’s \$62 billion. The U.S. military is also far more advanced technologically. U.S. security is unrivaled. The alleged threats are at the borders of enemies, which are ringed with nuclear-armed missiles in some of the 800 U.S. military bases around the world (China has one: Djibouti).

Power also has economic dimensions. At the peak of U.S. power after World War II, the U.S. had perhaps 40 percent of global wealth, a preponderance that

inevitably declined. But as political economist Sean Starrs has observed, in the world of neoliberal globalization, national accounts are not the only measure of economic power. His research shows that U.S.-based multinationals control a staggering 50 percent of global wealth and are first (sometimes second) in just about every sector.

Another dimension is “soft power.” Here, America has seriously declined, well before Trump’s harsh blows to the country’s reputation. Even under Clinton, leading political scientists recognized that most of the world regarded America as the world’s “prime rogue state” and “the single greatest external threat to their societies” (to quote Samuel Huntington and Robert Jervis, respectively). In the Obama years, international polls found that the U.S. was considered the greatest threat to world peace, with no contender even close.

U.S. leaders can continue to undermine the country, if they choose, but its enormous power and unrivaled advantages make that a hard task, even for the Trump wrecking ball.

A look back at the 9/11 attacks also reveals that the war on terror had numerous consequences on domestic society in the U.S. Can you comment on the impact of the war on terror on American democracy and human rights?

In this regard, the topic has been well enough covered so that not much comment is necessary. Another illustration just appeared in *The New York Times* Review of the Week, [the eloquent testimony](#) by a courageous FBI agent who was so disillusioned by his task of “destroying people” (Muslims) in the war on terror that he decided to leak documents exposing the crimes and to go to prison. That fate is reserved to those who expose state crimes, not the perpetrators, who are respected, like the goofy grandpa, George W. Bush.

There has of course been a serious assault on civil liberties and human rights, in some cases utterly unspeakable, like Guantánamo, where tortured prisoners still languish after many years without charges or because the torture was so hideous that judges refuse to allow them to be brought to trial. It’s by now conceded that “the worst of the worst” (as they were called) were mostly innocent bystanders.

At home, the framework of a surveillance state with utterly illegitimate power has been established. The victims as usual are the most vulnerable, but others might want to reflect on [Pastor Niemöller’s famous plea under Nazi rule](#).

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).

Tech “Solutions” Are Pushed By Fossil Fuel Industry To Delay Real Climate Action



CJ
Polychroniou

This month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world authority on the state of Earth's climate, [released the first installment of its Sixth Assessment Report](#) on global warming. It was signed off by 195 member governments. It spells out, in no uncertain terms, the stakes we are up against — and why we have no time to waste in taking dramatic steps to build a green economy.

The IPCC has been publishing reports on the state of the climate and projections for climate change since 1990. The first IPCC report surmised that human activities were behind global warming, but that further scientific evidence was needed. By the time the Fourth Assessment Report came out in 2007, the evidence for human-caused global warming was described as “unequivocal,” with at least a 9 out of 10 chance of being correct. The report confirmed that the warming of the Earth's surface to record levels was due to the extra heat being trapped by greenhouse gases and called for immediate action to combat the challenge of global warming.

The Sixth Assessment Report finally states in absolute terms that anthropogenic emissions are responsible for the rising temperatures in the atmosphere, lands and the oceans. In other words, the fossil fuel industry is destroying the planet. And, in a similar tone to some of its previous reports, the IPCC warns that time is running out to combat global warming and avoid its worse effects. Without sharp reduction in emissions, we could easily exceed the 2 degrees Celsius (2°C) temperature threshold by the middle of the century.

Of course, we are already in a climate crisis. Heat waves have broken records this summer in many parts of the world, including the Pacific Northwest of the United States and western Canada; wildfires [have ravaged](#) huge areas in southern Europe, causing “disaster without precedent” in Greece, Spain and the Italian island of Sardinia; and [deadly floods](#) have upended life in China and Germany. Global average temperatures stand now at 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. A global warming increase of 1.5°C would have a much greater effect on the probability of extreme weather effects like heat waves, floods, droughts and storms, and at 2°C, [things get a lot nastier](#) — and for a much larger percentage of the world's population.

At current trends, it's most unlikely that global warming can be held at 1.5°C. We have already emitted enough greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to cause 2°C

of warming, according to a group of international scientists who [published their findings](#) in *Nature Climate Change*. Even a 3°C increase or more [is plausible](#). In fact, the Network for Greening the Financial System (a group of central banks and supervisors) is already considering climate scenarios with over 3°C of warming, labeling it the “[Hot House World](#).”

Yet, in spite of all the dire climate warnings by IPCC and scores of other scientific studies, the world’s political and corporate leaders continue with their “business-as-usual” approach when it comes to tackling the climate crisis.

Almost immediately after the release of the new IPCC report, the Biden administration urged the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to increase oil production because higher prices threaten global economic recovery. In fact, Biden’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, actually [criticized](#) the world’s major oil producers for not producing enough oil. Naturally, Republicans responded by [demanding](#) that the Biden administration should encourage U.S. oil producers to boost production instead of turning to OPEC.

Preposterously, the Biden administration seems to think that the best way to tackle global warming caused by anthropogenic emissions is through increasing levels of combustion of fossil fuels.

This must also be the thinking behind China’s affinity for coal, as the world’s biggest carbon polluter is actually financing [more than 70 percent](#) of coal plants built globally.

Or perhaps this is all part of a framework that assumes, “We are doomed, so let’s get it over with quickly.”

In either case, one suspects that political inaction and the prospect of losing the battle against the climate emergency may be the reason why the new IPCC climate report has fully embraced the idea of carbon dioxide removal from the atmosphere with the aid of technology as a necessary strategy to contain global warming.

The need for carbon removal was also addressed in the IPCC’s 2018 special report on the 1.5°C temperature limit, both through natural and technological carbon dioxide removal strategies. And an IPCC [special report](#) on carbon dioxide

capture and storage (CCS) dates all the way back to 2005. But it seems that IPCC is now placing greater emphasis than before on innovation and carbon-removal technologies, especially through the process known as direct air carbon capture and storage (DACCS).

The actual rationale for the emphasis on a technological fix (geoengineering, by the way, which involves large-scale intervention in and manipulation of the Earth's natural system, is not included in the IPCC's latest report) lies in the belief that we can no longer hope to limit global warming to 1.5°C without carbon dioxide removal of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere, which will then be stored into underground geologic structures or deep under the sea.

Unfortunately, there is a long history of technological promises to address the climate crisis, and the main result is delaying action towards decarbonization and a shift to clean energy, as researchers from Lancaster University have so convincingly argued in a [published article](#) in *Nature Climate Change*.

As things stand, technological solutions to global warming are largely procrastination methods favored by the fossil fuel industry and its political allies. The [carbon removal industry](#) is still in its infancy, costs are extremely high, and the methods are unreliable. Nonetheless, both governments and the private sector are investing billions of dollars in the industry and attempts are being made to sell the idea to the public as a necessary step in avoiding a climate catastrophe. A Swiss company called Climeworks is just finishing the completion of a new large-scale direct air capture plant in Iceland, and a similar project is in the works in Norway with hopes that it would actually lead to the creation of "[a full-scale carbon capture chain](#), capable of storing Europe's emissions permanently under the North Sea." South Korea is also working on a carbon capture and storage project that may become [the biggest in the world](#).

In the U.S., Republican lawmakers have also been very aggressive in touting carbon capture and storage technologies [since the introduction](#) of the Green New Deal legislation by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Edward Markey in 2019.

It all adds up. Relying on technology to attempt to meet climate targets at this stage of the game is meant to obstruct the world from moving away from the use of fossil fuels. If we emphasize those false "fixes," we are simply quickening the

pace of a complete climate collapse with utterly catastrophic consequences for all life on planet Earth.

Our only hope to tackle effectively the climate crisis and save the planet rests not with technological solutions but, instead, with a Green International Economic Order. We need a Global Green New Deal (GGND) to reach net zero emissions by 2050. And this means a world economy without fossil fuels and the industry behind them that is destroying life on the planet.

Decarbonizing the global economy and shifting to clean energy is not an easy task, but it is surely feasible both from a financial and technical standpoint, as numerous studies [have shown](#). According to leading progressive UMass-Amherst economist Robert Pollin, we need to invest between 2.5 to 3 percent of global GDP per year in order to attain a clean energy transformation. Moreover, while 250 years of growth based on the use of fossil fuels have delivered (unequal) economic benefits to the world, a world economy run on clean energy will bring environmental, social *and* economic benefits. One major [study](#) released out of Stanford University shows that a GGND would create nearly 30 million more long-term, full-time jobs than if we remained stuck with what it calls “business-as-usual energy.”

The latest IPCC report, just like previous ones released by the organization, predicts disaster if we do not radically — and immediately — curb carbon dioxide emissions. But we know by now that we cannot rely on our political leaders to do what must be done to save the planet. Nor can we expect technology to solve the climate emergency. Carbon removal and carbon capture technologies won’t solve global warming in time, if ever. Only a roadmap calling for a complete transition away from fossil fuels will save planet Earth.

Pressures from below — led by those on the front lines, labor unions, environmental groups, civil rights movements and students — are our only hope for the necessary changes in the way we produce, deliver and consume energy.

And change is happening. We are moving forward.

Think of how a climate awareness protest by a Swedish teenager turned into a global movement. Or the impact that the Sunrise Movement has had on U.S. politics on account of its activism on the climate crisis within only a few years after it was founded. Or the fact that we have 20 labor unions in California

(including two representing thousands of oil workers) endorsing a clean [energy transition report](#) produced by a group of progressive economists at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Or of the great work that the [Labor Network for Sustainability](#) is doing in engaging workers and communities in the mission of “building a transition to a society that is ecologically sustainable and economically just.”

The future belongs to the green economy. It can happen. It will happen.

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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).

Chomsky And Pollin: We Can't Rely On Private Sector For Necessary Climate Action



Noam Chomsky

The new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) climate assessment report, released on August 9, has finally stated in the most absolute terms that anthropogenic emissions are the cause behind global warming, and that we have no time left in the effort to keep temperature from crossing the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold. If we fail to take immediate action, we can easily exceed 2 degrees Celsius by the middle of the century.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that while the IPCC report underscores the point that the planet is warming faster than expected, it does not directly mention fossil fuels and puts emphasis on carbon removal as a necessary means to tame global warming even though such technologies are still in their infancy.

In this exclusive interview for *Truthout*, Noam Chomsky, one of the world's greatest scholars and leading activists, and Robert Pollin, a world-leading progressive economist, offer their own assessments of the IPCC report. Chomsky and Pollin are co-authors of *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (Verso, 2020).

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the new IPCC climate assessment report, which deals with the physical science basis of global warming, comes in the midst of extreme heat waves and devastating fires taking place both in the U.S. and in many parts around the world. In many ways, it reinforces what we already know about the

climate crisis, so I would like to know your own thoughts about its significance and whether the parties that have “approved” it will take the necessary measures to avoid a climate catastrophe, since we basically have zero years left to do so.

Noam Chomsky: The IPCC report was sobering. Much, as you say, reinforces what we knew, but for me at least, shifts of emphasis were deeply disturbing. That’s particularly true of the section on carbon removal. Instead of giving my own nonexpert reading, I’ll quote the *MIT Technology Review*, under the heading “[The UN climate report pins hopes on carbon removal technologies that barely exist.](#)”

The IPCC report

offered a stark reminder that removing massive amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere will be essential to prevent the gravest dangers of global warming. But it also underscored that the necessary technologies barely exist — and will be tremendously difficult to deploy.... How much hotter it gets, however, will depend on how rapidly we cut emissions and how quickly we scale up ways of sucking carbon dioxide out of the air.

If that’s correct, and I see no reason to doubt it, hopes for a tolerable world depend on technologies that “barely exist — and will be tremendously difficult to deploy.” To confront this awesome challenge is a task for a coordinated international effort, well beyond the scale of John F. Kennedy’s mission to the moon (whatever one thinks of that), and vastly more significant. To leave the task to private power is a likely recipe for disaster, for many reasons, including one brought up by *The New York Times* [report on the idea](#): “there are risks: The very idea could offer industry an excuse to maintain dangerous habits ... some experts warn that they could hide behind the uncertain promise of removing carbon later to avoid cutting emissions deeply today.” The greenwashing that is a constant ruse.

The significance of the IPCC report is beyond reasonable doubt. As to whether the necessary measures will be taken? That’s up to us. We can have no faith in structures of power and what they will do unless pressed hard by an informed public that prefers survival to short-term gain for the “masters of the universe.”

The immediate U.S. government reaction to the IPCC report was hardly encouraging. President Joe Biden sent his national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, to censure the main oil-producing countries (OPEC) for not raising oil production

high enough. The message was captured in a headline in the London *Financial Times*: "[Biden to OPEC: Drill, Baby, Drill.](#)"

Biden was sharply criticized by the right wing here for calling on OPEC to destroy life on Earth. MAGA principles demand that U.S. producers should have priority in this worthy endeavor.

Bob, what's your own take on the IPCC climate assessment report, and do you find anything in it that surprises you?



Robert Pollin - Photo: UMass Amherst

Robert Pollin: In total, the IPCC's [Sixth Assessment Report](#) on the physical basis of climate change is 3,949 pages long. So there's a whole lot to take in, and I can't claim to have done more than initially review the 42-page "Summary for Policymakers." Two things stand out from my initial review. These are, first, the IPCC's conclusion that the climate crisis is rapidly become more severe and, second, that their call for undertaking fundamental action has become increasingly urgent, even relative to their own 2018 report, "[Global Warming of 1.50C.](#)" It is important to note that this hasn't always been the pattern with the IPCC. Thus, in its 2014 [Fifth Assessment Report](#), the IPCC was significantly more sanguine about the state of play relative to its 2007 [Fourth Assessment Report](#). In 2014, they were focused on a goal of stabilizing the global average temperature at 2.0 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, rather than the 1.5 degrees figure. As of 2014, the IPCC had not been convinced that the 1.5 degrees target was imperative for having any reasonable chance of limiting the most severe impacts of climate change in terms of heat extremes, floods, droughts, sea level rises and biodiversity losses. The 2014 report concluded that reducing global CO2 emissions by only 36 percent as of 2050 could possibly be sufficient to move onto

a viable stabilization path. In this most recent report, there is no equivocation that hitting the 1.5 degrees target is imperative, and that to have any chance of achieving this goal, global CO2 emissions must be at zero by 2050.

This new report does also make clear just how difficult it will be to hit the zero emissions target, and thus to remain within the 1.5 degrees of warming threshold. But it also recognizes that a viable stabilization path is still possible, if just barely. There is no question as to what the first and most important single action has to be, which is to stop burning oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy. Carbon-removal technologies will likely be needed as part of the overall stabilization program. But we should note here that there are already two carbon-removal technologies that operate quite effectively. These are: 1) to stop destroying forests, since trees absorb CO2; and 2) to supplant corporate industrial practices with organic and regenerative agriculture. Corporate agricultural practices emit CO2 and other greenhouse gases, especially through the heavy use of nitrogen fertilizer, while, through organic and regenerative agriculture, the soil absorbs CO2. That said, if we don't stop burning fossil fuels to produce energy, then there is simply no chance of moving onto a stabilization path, no matter what else is accomplished in the area of carbon-removal technologies.

I would add here that the main technologies for building a zero-emissions economy — in the areas of energy efficiency and clean renewable energy sources — are already fully available to us. Investing in energy efficiency — through, for example, expanding the supply of electric cars and public transportation systems, and replacing old heating and cooling systems with electric heat pumps — will save money, by definition, for all energy consumers. Moreover, on average, the cost of producing electricity through both solar and wind energy is already, at present, [about half](#) that of burning coal combined with carbon capture technology. At this point, it is a matter of undertaking the investments at scale to build the clean energy infrastructure along with providing for a fair transition for the workers and communities who will be negatively impacted by the phase-out of fossil fuels.

The evidence is clear that human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide are behind global warming, and that warming, according to the IPCC report, is taking place faster than predicted. Most likely because of the latter, the Sixth Assessment report provides a detailed regional assessment of climate change, and (for the

first time, I believe) includes a chapter on innovation and technology, with emphasis on carbon-removal technologies, which Noam, coincidentally, found “deeply disturbing.” As one of the leading advocates of a Global Green New Deal, do you see a problem if regional climate and energy plans became the main frameworks, at least in the immediate future, for dealing with the climate emergency?

Pollin: In principle, I don’t see anything wrong with regional climate and energy plans, as long as they are all seriously focused on achieving the zero emissions goal and are advanced in coordination with other regions. The big question, therefore, is whether any given regional program is adequate to the requirements for climate stabilization. The answer, thus far, is “no.” We can see this in terms of the climate programs in place for the U.S., the European Union and China. These are the three most important regions in addressing climate change for the simple reason that these three areas are responsible for generating 54 percent of all global CO₂ emissions — with China at 30 percent, the U.S. at 15 percent and the EU at 9 percent.

In the U.S., the Biden administration is, of course, a vast improvement relative to the four disastrous years under Trump. Soon after taking office, Biden set out emissions reduction targets in line with the IPCC, i.e., a 50 percent reduction by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. Moreover, the American Jobs Plan that Biden introduced in March would have allocated about \$130 billion per year in investments that would advance a clean energy infrastructure that would supplant our current fossil fuel-dominant system.

This level of federal funding for climate stabilization would be unprecedented for the U.S. At the same time, it would provide maybe 25 percent of the total funding necessary for achieving the administration’s own emission reduction targets. Most of the other 75 percent would therefore have to come from private investors. Yet it is not realistic that private businesses will mount this level of investment in a clean energy economy — at about \$400 billion per year — unless they are forced to by stringent government regulations. One such regulation could be a mandate for electric utilities to reduce CO₂ emissions by, say, 5 percent per year, or face criminal liability. The Biden administration has not proposed any such regulations to date. Moreover, with the debates in Congress over the Biden bill ongoing, the odds are long that the amount of federal government funding provided for climate stabilization will even come close to the

\$130 billion per year that Biden had initially proposed in March.

The story is similar in the EU. In terms of its stated commitments, the European Union is advancing the world's most ambitious climate stabilization program, what it has termed the European Green Deal. Under the European Green Deal, the region has pledged to reduce emissions by at least 55 percent as of 2030 relative to 1990 levels, a more ambitious target than the 45 percent reduction set by the IPCC. The European Green Deal then aligns with the IPCC's longer-term target of achieving a net zero economy as of 2050.

Beginning in December 2019, the European Commission has been enacting measures and introducing further proposals to achieve the region's emission reduction targets. The most recent measure to have been adopted, this past June, is the NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan, through which €600 billion will be allocated toward financing the [European Green Deal](#). In July, the European Commission followed up on this spending commitment by outlining 13 tax and regulatory measures to complement the spending program.

But here's the simple budgetary math: The €600 billion allocated over seven years through the NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan would amount to an average of about €85 billion per year. This is equal to less than 0.6 percent of EU GDP over this period, when a spending level in the range of 2 to 3 percent of GDP will be needed. As with the U.S., the EU cannot count on mobilizing the remaining 75 percent of funding necessary unless it also enacts stringent regulations on burning fossil fuels. If such regulations are to have teeth, they will mean a sharp increase in what consumers will pay for fossil fuel energy. To prevent all but the wealthy from then experiencing a significant increase in their cost of living, the fossil fuel price increases will have to be matched by rebates. The 2018 Yellow Vest Movement in France emerged precisely in opposition to President Emmanuel Macron's proposal to enact a carbon tax without including substantial rebates for nonaffluent people.

The Chinese situation is distinct from those in the U.S. and EU. In particular, China has not committed to achieving the IPCC's emission reduction targets for 2030 or 2050. Rather, as of a September 2020 United Nations General Assembly address by President Xi Jinping, China committed to a less ambitious set of targets: emissions will continue to rise until they peak in 2030 and then begin declining. Xi also committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2060, a decade

later than the IPCC's 2050 target.

We do need to recognize that China has made major advances in support of climate stabilization. As one critical case in point, China's ambitious industrial policies are primarily responsible for driving down the costs of solar energy worldwide by 80 percent over the past decade. China has also been the leading supplier of credit to support clean energy investments in developing economies. Nevertheless, there is no getting around the fact that if China sticks to its stated emission reduction plans, there is no chance whatsoever of achieving the IPCC's targets.

In short, for different reasons, China, the U.S. and the EU all need to mount significantly more ambitious regional climate stabilization programs. In particular, these economies need to commit higher levels of public investment to the global clean energy investment project.

The basic constraint with increasing public investment is that people don't want to pay higher taxes. Rich people can, of course, easily afford to pay higher taxes, after enjoying massive increases in their wealth and income under neoliberalism. That said, it is still also true that most of the funds needed to bring global clean energy investments to scale can be made available without raising taxes, by channeling resources from three sources: 1) transferring funds out of military budgets; 2) converting all fossil fuel subsidies into clean energy subsidies; and 3) mounting large-scale green bond purchasing programs by the U.S. Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the People's Bank of China. Such measures can be the foundation for tying together the U.S., EU and Chinese regional programs that could, in combination, have a chance of meeting the urgent requirements for a viable global climate stabilization project.

Noam, I [argued recently](#) that we should face the global warming threat as the outbreak of a world war. Is this a fair analogy?

Chomsky: Not quite. A world war would leave survivors, scattered and miserable remnants. Over time, they could reconstruct some form of viable existence. Destruction of the environment is much more serious. There is no return.

Twenty years ago, I wrote a book that opened with biologist Ernst Mayr's rather plausible argument that we are unlikely to discover intelligence in the universe. To carry his argument further, if higher intelligence ever appears, it will probably

find a way to self-destruct, as we seem to be bent on demonstrating.

The book closed with Bertrand Russell's thoughts on whether there will ever be peace on Earth: "After ages during which the earth produced harmless trilobites and butterflies, evolution progressed to the point at which it has generated Neros, Genghis Khans, and Hitlers. This, however, I believe is a passing nightmare; in time the earth will become again incapable of supporting life, and peace will return."

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

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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).

Average Global Temperature Has Risen Steadily Under 40 Years Of Neoliberalism



Prof.dr. Robert Pollin

Since the advent of neoliberalism 40 years ago, societies virtually all over the world have undergone profound economic, social and political transformations. At its most basic function, neoliberalism represents the rise of a market-dominated world economic regime and the concomitant decline of the social state. Yet, the truth of the matter is that neoliberalism cannot survive without the state, as leading progressive economist Robert Pollin argues in the interview that follows. However, what is unclear is whether neoliberalism represents a new stage of capitalism that engenders new forms of politics, and, equally important, what comes after neoliberalism. Pollin tackles both of these questions in light of the political implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, as most governments have implemented a wide range of monetary and fiscal measures in order to address economic hardships and stave off a recession.

Robert Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and author of scores of books, including *Back to Full Employment* (2012), *Greening the Global Economy* (2015) and *Climate Crisis and the Global Green new Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (co-authored with Noam Chomsky, 2020).

C.J. Polychroniou: Neoliberalism is a politico-economic project associated with

policies of privatization, deregulation, globalization, free trade, austerity and limited government. Moreover, these principles have reigned supreme in the minds of most policymakers around the world since the early 1980s, and continue to do so. Is neoliberalism a new stage of capitalism?

Robert Pollin: Let's first be clear on what we mean by "neoliberalism." The term neoliberalism draws on the classical meaning of the word "liberalism." Classical liberalism is the political philosophy that embraces the virtues of free-market capitalism and the corresponding minimal role for government interventions. According to classical liberalism, free-market capitalism is the only effective framework for delivering widely shared economic well-being. In this view, only free markets can increase productivity and average living standards while delivering high levels of individual freedom and fair social outcomes. Policy interventions to promote economic equality within capitalism — through, for example, taxing the rich, big government spending on social programs, or regulating market activities through, for example, decent minimum wage standards and regulations to prevent financial markets from becoming gambling casinos — will always end up doing more harm than good, according to this view.

For example, establishing living wage standards as the legal minimum — at, say \$15 an hour or higher — would cause unemployment to rise, since, according to classical liberalism, employers won't be willing to pay unskilled workers more than what the free market determines they are worth. Similarly, regulating financial markets will inhibit capitalists from undertaking risky investments that can raise living standards. Classical liberals will argue that the Wall Street Masters of the Universe are infinitely more qualified than government bureaucrats in deciding what to do with their own money. And if the Wall Street investors make dumb decisions, then so be it; let them fail. In that way, [classical liberalism says] the free market rewards smart decisions and punishes bad ones, all to the greater benefit of the whole society.

Now to neoliberalism: Neoliberalism is a contemporary variant of classical liberalism that became dominant worldwide around 1980, beginning with the elections of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. and Ronald Reagan in the United States. At that time, it was certainly a new phase of capitalism. Thatcher's dictum that "there is no alternative" to neoliberalism became a rally cry, supplanting what had been, since the end of World War II, the dominance of Keynesianism and social democracy in global economic policymaking. In the high-income

countries of Western Europe and North America along with Japan, in particular, this Keynesian/social democratic version of capitalism featured, to varying degrees, a commitment to low unemployment rates, decent levels of support for working people and workplace conditions, extensive regulations of financial markets, public ownership of significant financial institutions and high levels of public investment.

Of course, this was still capitalism. Disparities of income, wealth and opportunity remained intolerably high, along with the social malignancies of racism, sexism and imperialism. Ecological destruction, in particular global warming, was also beginning to gather force over this period, even though few people took notice at the time. Nevertheless, all told, Keynesianism and social democracy produced dramatically more egalitarian as well as more stable versions of capitalism than the neoliberal regime that supplanted these models.

It is critical to understand that neoliberalism was never a project to replace social democracy with true free-market capitalism. Rather, contemporary neoliberals are committed to free-market policies when they support the interests of big business and the rich as, for example, with lowering regulations in the workplace and financial markets. But these same neoliberals become far less insistent on free market principles when invoking such principles might damage the interests of big business, Wall Street and the rich.

An obvious example is the [historically unprecedented](#) levels of support provided during the COVID recession to prevent economic collapse. Just in 2020 in the U.S. for example, the federal government pumped nearly \$3 trillion into the economy, equal to about 14 percent of total economic activity (GDP) to prevent a total economic collapse. On top of that, the U.S. Federal Reserve injected nearly \$4 trillion — equal to about 20 percent of GDP — to avoid a Wall Street meltdown. Of course, pumping government money into the U.S. economy, at a level equal to roughly one-third of total GDP, all in no more than one year's time, completely contradicts any notion of free-market, minimal government capitalism.

How would you assess the effects of neoliberal practices on the U.S. economy and society at large?

How neoliberalism works in practice, as opposed to rhetoric, was powerfully illustrated over the past year during the COVID-19 pandemic and recession. That

is, due to the public health emergency, employment and overall economic activity throughout the world fell precipitously, since major sections of the global economy were forced into lockdown mode. In the U.S., for example, nearly 50 percent of the entire labor force filed for unemployment benefits between March 2020 and February 2021. However, over this same period, the prices of Wall Street stocks — as measured, for example, by the Standard and Poor's 500 index, a broad market indicator — rose by 46 percent, one of the sharpest one-year increases on record. Similar interventions throughout the world achieved similar results elsewhere. Thus, [according to the International Monetary Fund](#), overall economic activity (GDP) contracted by 3.5 percent in 2020, which it describes as a “severe collapse ... that has had acute adverse impacts on women, youth, the poor, the informally employed and those who work in contact-intensive sectors.” At the same time, global stock markets rose sharply — by 45 percent throughout Europe, 56 percent in China, 58 percent in the U.K. and 80 percent in Japan, and with Standard & Poor's Global 1200 index rising by 67 percent.

But, of course, these patterns of relentless rising inequality didn't begin with the COVID recession. Consider, for example, the relationship between corporate CEOs and their workers over the course of neoliberalism. As of 1978, just prior to the rise of neoliberalism, the CEOs of the largest 350 U.S. corporations earned \$1.7 million, which was 33 times the \$51,200 earned by the average private-sector nonsupervisory worker. As of 2019, the CEOs were earning 366 times more than the average worker, \$21.3 million versus \$58,200. Under neoliberalism, in other words, the pay for big corporate U.S. CEOs has increased more than tenfold relative to the average U.S. worker.

Of course, there are real lives hovering behind these big statistical patterns. For example, recent research by Anne Case and Angus Deaton has documented powerfully an unprecedented rise, pre-COVID, in what they term “[deaths of despair](#)” — i.e., a decline in life expectancy through rising increases in suicide, alcoholism and drug addiction among white working-class people in the U.S. Case and Deaton explain this rise of deaths by despair to the decline in decent-paying and stable working-class jobs that has resulted from neoliberalism. In short, neoliberalism is fundamentally a program of champagne socialism for big corporations, Wall Street and the rich, and “let them eat cake” capitalism for almost everyone else.

Amid our current summer of unprecedented wildfires and flooding, the

consequences of global warming are now everywhere before us. But we need to be clear on the extent to which global warming and the rise of neoliberal dominance have been intertwined. Indeed, as of 1980, the year Ronald Reagan took office, the average global temperature was still at a safe level, equal to that of the preindustrial period around 1800. Under 40 years of neoliberalism, the average global temperature has risen relentlessly, to where it is now 1.0 degrees Celsius [above](#) the preindustrial average. Climate scientists have insisted that we cannot allow the global average temperature to exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial level. Moreover, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) just released its [Sixth Assessment Report](#), which projects we will be breaching this 1.5-degree threshold by 2040 unless we enact fundamental changes in the way the global economy operates. Step one must be to stop burning oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy. Under neoliberalism, we have allowed fossil fuel companies to continue profiting off of destroying the planet.

Large-scale government interventions are considered an anathema to neoliberal policymakers. Yet, as you and your colleague Jerry Epstein have argued, neoliberalism seems to rely extensively on the state for its own survival. Can you talk a bit about the connection between neoliberalism and government support?

The extraordinary bailout policies that were enacted during the COVID recession were by no means an aberration from what has been standard practice throughout the 40 years that neoliberalism has dominated global economic policymaking.

Indeed, it was only 13 years ago, in 2008, that Wall Street hyper-speculation brought the global economy to its knees during the Great Recession. To prevent a 1930s-level depression at that time, economic policymakers throughout the world — including the United States, the countries of the European Union, Japan, South Korea, China, India and Brazil — all enacted extraordinary measures to counteract the crisis created by Wall Street. As in 2020, these measures included financial bailouts, monetary policies that pushed central bank-controlled interest rates close to near-zero and large-scale fiscal stimulus programs financed by major expansions in central government deficits.

In the United States, the fiscal deficit reached \$1.4 trillion in 2009, equal to 9.8 percent of GDP. The deficits were around \$1.3 trillion in 2010 and 2011 as well, amounting to close to 9 percent of GDP in both years. These were the largest

peacetime deficits prior to the 2020 COVID recession. As with the 2020 crisis, the interventions led by the Federal Reserve to prop up Wall Street and corporate America were even more extensive than the federal government's deficit spending policies. Moreover, this total figure does not include the full funding mobilized in 2009 to bailing out General Motors, Chrysler, Goldman Sachs and the insurance giant AIG, all of which were facing death spirals at that time. It is hard to envision the form in which U.S. capitalism might have survived at that time if, following true free-market precepts as opposed to the actual practice of neoliberal champagne socialism, these and other iconic U.S. firms would have been permitted to collapse.

Bailout operations of this sort have occurred with near-clockwork regularity throughout the neoliberal era, starting with Ronald Reagan. Thus, in 1983 under Reagan, the U.S. government reached a then peacetime high in the U.S. for federal deficit spending, at 5.7 percent of GDP. At the time, the U.S. and global economy were still mired in the second phase of the severe double-dip recession that lasted from 1980 to '82. Reagan was also facing a reelection campaign in 1984. Of course, both as a political candidate and all throughout his presidency, Reagan preached loudly that big government was always the problem, never the solution. Yet Reagan did not hesitate to flout his own rhetoric in overseeing a massive fiscal bailout when he needed it.

If neoliberalism is bad economics and there is a continued need to bailout the current system from recurring crises and disasters, why is it still around after 40 or so years? What keeps it in place? And how likely is it that the return to "emergency Keynesianism" may spell the end of the neoliberal nightmare?

Neoliberalism is not "bad economics" for big corporations, Wall Street and the rich. To the contrary, neoliberalism has been working out extremely well for these groups. The regular massive bailout operations have been neoliberalism's life-support system. It is due to these bailouts, first and foremost, that neoliberalism remains today as the dominant economic policy framework globally. But it is also true that neoliberalism can be defeated, and supplanted by a policy framework that is committed to high levels of social and economic equality as well as ecological justice — which is to say, a project that has a reasonable chance of protecting human life on earth as we know it. Many people, including myself, like the term "Global Green New Deal" to characterize this project. It's fine if other people prefer different terms. The point is that this project will obviously require

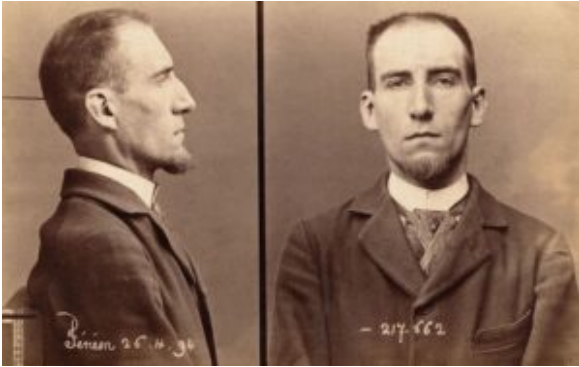
massive and sustained levels of effective political mobilization throughout the world. Whether such mobilizations can be mounted successfully remains *the* open question moving forward. I myself am inspired by the extent to which the environmental and labor movements, in the U.S. and elsewhere, are increasingly and effectively joining forces to make this happen.

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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).

Félix Fénéon, kunstcriticus en

anarchist



Félix Fénéon

Dat de Franse dichter Laurent Tailhade behalve zijn avondmaaltijd een oog moest missen, was een meer dan sneu gevolg van de bomaanslag die kunstkenner en -criticus Félix Fénéon op 4 april 1894 pleegde op het restaurant van Hôtel Foyot aan de Rue de Tournon in Parijs.

Het was vooral sneu omdat Tailhade Fénéon persoonlijk kende en ook diens anarchistische opvattingen deelde. Zijn verwondingen weerhielden Tailhade er echter niet van in de jaren daarna in zijn werk het anarchisme volop uit te dragen.



Vallotton - Félix Fénéon

Ministerie

Félix Fénéon (1861-1944) groeide op in de Bourgogne maar vertrok al snel naar Parijs. Op zijn twintigste kreeg hij een baan als klerk op het Ministerie van Oorlog. Hij zou er dertien jaar blijven werken. Daarnaast redigeerde hij voor uitgeverijen werk van Arthur Rimbaud en Lautréamont. Met zijn dandyachtige voorkomen - puntbaard, wandelstok, zwarte cape - was hij in kunstkringen een

opvallende verschijning. Wekelijks bezocht hij de populaire kunstsalon van Stéphane Mallarmé. Naast zijn baan op het ministerie werd hij kunstcriticus bij het tijdschrift *La Libre Revue*. Ook schreef hij gezaghebbende artikelen over kunst en literatuur voor bladen als *La Vogue* en *La Revue wagnérienne*. Hij was de ontdekker van de schilder Georges Seurat en was bevriend met de schilder Paul Signac, die hem op een schilderij vereeuwigde. Ook de kunstenaars Toulouse-Lautrec en Félix Valleton maakte portretten van Fénéon. Hij was een onvermoeibaar promotor van het werk Seurat en Signac, die beiden gezien worden als de wegbereiders van het pointillisme. Voor deze stijl en andere daaraan gelieerde kunststromingen bedacht Fénéon de term neonimpressionisme.



Émile Henry

Anarchisten

Fénéon kreeg eveneens contacten in anarchistische kringen en hij ging schrijven voor het toonaangevende anarchistische tijdschrift *L'En-Dehors* van de anarchist Zo d'Axa en voor *Revue anarchiste*. Toen Zo d'Axa zijn toevlucht zocht in Londen nam Fénéon de redactie van *L'En-Dehors* over. Aan het tijdschrift werd onder meer meegewerkt door Octave Mirbeau, Jean Grave, Sébastien Faure, Bernard Lazare, Tristan Bernard en de Belgische anarchist Émile Verhaeren. Hij raakte bevriend met de Nederlandse anarchist Alexander Cohen en met 'anarchist van de daad' Émile Henry, die later de beruchte bomaanslag op het Café Terminus zou plegen. Soms logeerde Henry bij Fénéon of bij Cohen thuis. Al eerder had Fénéon Henry al eens aan een jurk geholpen, om in vermomming de politie te kunnen ontlopen.

Aanslagen

De uit Leeuwarden afkomstige Cohen (1864-1961) was na een redacteurschap bij

Recht voor Allen van Domela Nieuwenhuis overhaast naar Parijs verhuisd. In Nederland werd hij gezocht wegens majesteitsschennis. Tijdens een rijtour van Koning Willem III had hij geroepen: 'Leve Domela Nieuwenhuis! Leve het socialisme! Weg met Gorilla!'.

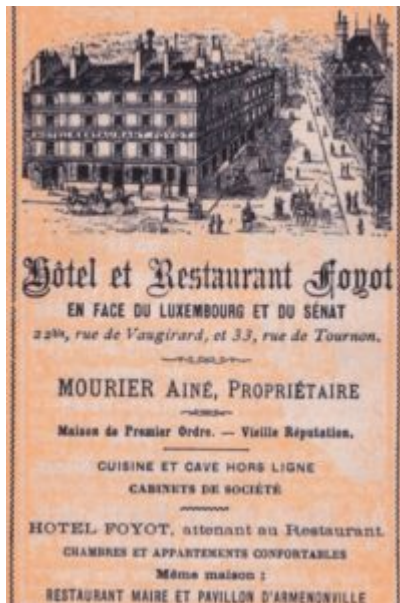


Alexander Cohen

In Parijs ging hij schrijven voor de anarchistische bladen *L'En-Dehors* en *Le Père peinard* en werd hij correspondent voor *Recht voor Allen*. In de Franse hoofdstad werden Fénéon en Émile Henry zijn beste vrienden.

Henry wilde in 1892 de eisen van stakende mijnarbeiders bij de Carmoux mijnmaatschappij kracht bijzetten en plaatste een bom bij het kantoor van de maatschappij in Parijs. De bom werd echter ontdekt en meegenomen naar een politiebureau in de Rue des Bons-enfants. Daar ontplofte de bom alsnog waarbij vijf politiemannen om het leven kwamen.

Zijn volgende aanslag was een wraakneming voor de executie van de anarchist Auguste Vaillant, ter dood veroordeeld wegens het plegen van een bomaanslag op de Chambre des Députés, de Kamer der Afgevaardigen. Op 12 februari 1894 plaatste Henry een bom onder een tafeltje in het drukbezochte Café Terminus bij het Gare St. Lazare. Eén persoon kwam om het leven en twintig mensen raakten gewond. Henry werd gearresteerd en in mei 1894 terechtgesteld.



Restaurant

Fénéon, die vond dat zijn eigen schriftelijke bijdragen aan het verkondigen van de anarchistische boodschap niet voldoende effect hadden, nam zich voor de vertegenwoordigers van de bourgeoisie in het hart te treffen. Op 4 april 1894 verstopte hij een bom in een bloempot en toog ermee naar de zetel van de Franse senaat, gevestigd in het paleis in de Jardin du Luxembourg. Daar bleek hij echter niet in de buurt van het bewaakte gebouw te kunnen komen, waarop hij besloot de bom te plaatsen bij het tegenover gelegen Hôtel Foyot, een door veel parlementariërs bezochte

eetgelegenheid. Hij plaatste de bloempot in de vensterbank van het restaurant, stak de lont aan en wandelde rustig naar de Place de l'Odéon, waar hij op de bus richting Clichy sprong. Door de ontploffing sneuvelden ramen en stortten kroonluchters van het plafond omlaag. Alleen de dichter Tailharde raakte gewond, het kostte hem een oog.



Hôtel Foyot na de aanslag

Huiszoeking

Vanwege zijn anarchistische activiteiten werd Fénéon al enige tijd door de politie in de gaten gehouden. Een dag na de aanslag doorzocht de politie zijn woning maar kon daar geen verdachte aanwijzingen ontdekken. De huiszoeking moest wel op een misverstand berusten, concludeerde de politie-inspecteur en bood excuses aan. Op het politiebureau ondertekende Fénéon een verklaring waarin hij ontkende aanhanger van het anarchisme te zijn, en vertrok naar zijn kantoor op het Ministerie van Oorlog. Daar bewaarde hij in een la van zijn bureau een fles kwikzilver en enige ontstekers – hem door Henry in bruikleen gegeven – die echter door de politie werden ontdekt. Dit en zijn anarchistische activiteiten

waren voldoende om hem te arresteren. Met de aanslag op het Hôtel Foyot is hij echter nooit meer in verband gebracht.



Proces

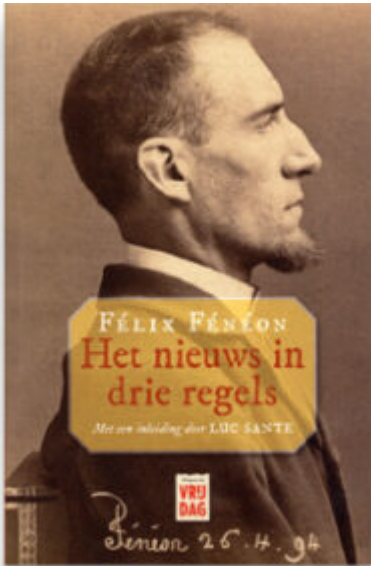
De Franse regering was de aanslagen beu en vaardigde een serie strenge wetten uit waarbij iedere anarchistische activiteit strafbaar werd gesteld. Dertig vooraanstaande anarchisten werd 'organisatie van criminele activiteiten' ten laste gelegd, onder wie Sébastien Faure, Jean Grave, Paul Reclus, Félix Fénéon en

Alexander Cohen. Voor de Franse staat draaide dit 'Procès des trente' echter uit op een mislukking. Slechts acht beklaagden werden veroordeeld, vier van hen bij verstek, onder wie Reclus en Alexander Cohen. De laatste had inmiddels de wijk naar Londen genomen. Pas in 1899 zou hij naar Parijs terugkeren.

Tijdens het proces wist Fénéon op vaak humoristische wijze aanklachten tegen hem te pareren. Bij een beschuldiging van een 'nauw contact' met de Duitse anarchist Kampfmeyer, antwoordde hij: 'Ik spreek geen Duits en Kampfmeyer spreekt geen Frans. Hoe nauw moet dat contact dan geweest zijn?' En toen hij beticht werd een vooraanstaande anarchist te hebben gesproken 'achter een gaslantaarn', was zijn antwoord: 'Neem me niet kwalijk, Monsieur le Préfet, maar wat is de achterkant van een gaslantaarn?' Fénéon werd vrijgesproken maar zijn baan op het ministerie moest hij wel opgeven.

Drie regels

Als redacteur kon hij aan de slag bij het vooraanstaande kunsttijdschrift *La Revue Blanche*. Ook daarin vestigde hij voortdurend de aandacht op het werk van Seurat en Signac en in 1900 organiseerde hij de eerste overzichtstentoonstelling van schilderijen van Seurat. In het tijdschrift publiceerde hij ook werk van Marcel Proust, Appolinaire, Paul Claudel en vertaalde hij Jane Austen en brieven van Edgar Allen Poe.



In 1906 ging hij voor de krant *Le Matin* de dagelijkse pagina *faits divers* samenstellen: berichten uit stad en provincie, die -zo was de opdracht - in de krant niet langer dan drie regels mochten zijn. Nieuwtjes over inbraken, ongelukken, crimes passionnel, moorden, branden en ander leed, werden door Fénéon geminimaliseerd tot gevatte beschrijvingen van het gebeurde, vaak met een kwinkslag of woordspeling, soms met kort commentaar. Hij puzzelde met woorden, zoals een dichter of liedjesschrijver. Ieder bericht vormt een verhaal op zich en roept vragen op over het hoe en waarom. Intrigerende, vermakelijke of

hilarische, tragische of ontroerende berichten die in veel gevallen de aanzet tot een roman zouden kunnen zijn. De berichten zijn te vergelijken met de collages die Picasso en Braque jaren later uit gescheurde kranten samenstelden, maar doen ook denken aan de collages van Kurt Schwitters en aan de wijze waarop William Burroughs in de jaren vijftig kranten verknipte en omsmeed tot een roman. Dankzij het knipwerk van Fénéons vriendin zijn twaalfhonderd stukjes bewaard gebleven en in 2009 in boekvorm verschenen. Fénéon schreef de stukjes om in zijn onderhoud te voorzien, maar wellicht vond hij ook voldoening bij het in kaart brengen van het verval in de Franse samenleving. De lezer kon zelf zijn conclusie trekken.

In Rouen heeft M. Colombe zich gisteren met één kogel gedood. In maart had zijn vrouw hem er drie in het lijf geschoten en de echtscheiding was op handen.

Met haar tachtig jaren werd Mme Saout uit Lambézellec stilaan bang dat de dood haar zou overslaan. Toen haar dochter even de deur uit was, knoopte zij zich op.

In Falaise verwelkomde oud-burgemeester M. Ozanne de deurwaarder Vieillot met geweerschoten om zich, na één treffer, het leven te benemen.

Jacquot, eerste bediende bij een kruidenier in Les Maillys, heeft zich en zijn vrouw om het leven gebracht. Hij was ziek, zij niet.

Zittend in de vensterbank van het open raam, reeg G. Laniel, negen, uit Meaux haar laarsjes dicht. Bijna. Tot zij achterover op de keien smakte.

(uit: Félix Fénéon, *Het nieuws in drie regels*, Antwerpen 2009)

Geruchten

Jarenlang deden nog geruchten de ronde dat de aanslag bij Hôtel Foyot het werk van Fénéon was geweest. Fénéon zelf heeft er nooit in het openbaar over gesproken en besteedde er geen aandacht aan. Slechts eenmaal bevestigde hij dat hij de dader was, in een gesprek met Kaya Batut, de vrouw van Alexander Cohen.

Noot

1. Vorig jaar werd in het Moma in New York een grote tentoonstelling aan Fénéon gewijd, waarop onder meer werk van Seurat en Signac te zien was.

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