

Chomsky And Pollin: Protests Outside Of COP26 Offered More Hope Than the Summit



Noam Chomsky

The legacy of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this fall was perhaps best encapsulated by its president, who bowed his head and — close to tears — actually apologized for the process, which ended with a last-minute watering-down of participants’ pledges on coal.

“May I just say to all delegates I apologize for the way this process has unfolded and I am deeply sorry,” said Alok Sharma, the British politician who served as president for COP26. The conference ended on November 13 with a disheartening “compromise” deal on the climate after two weeks of negotiations with diplomats from more than 190 nations.



Robert Pollin

In the interview that follows, leading public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin offer their assessments of what transpired at COP26 and share their views about ways to go forward with the fight against the climate crisis. Chomsky — one of the most cited scholars in history and long considered one of the U.S.’s voices of conscience — is Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and currently Laureate Professor of Linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Agnese Nelms Haury Program in Environment and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. He is joined by one of the world’s leading economists of the left, Robert Pollin, who is Distinguished Professor and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Chomsky and Pollin are co-authors of the recently published book, *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy to Save the Planet*.

C.J. Polychroniou: COP26, touted as our “last best hope” to avert a climatic catastrophe, has produced an outcome that was a “compromise,” according to United Nations Secretary General António Guterres, while activists conducted a funeral ceremony at the Glasgow Necropolis to symbolize the failure of the summit. Noam, can you give us your analysis of the COP26 climate agreement?

Noam Chomsky: There were two events at Glasgow: within the stately halls, and in the streets. They may have not been quite at war, but the conflict was sharp. Within, the dominant voice mostly echoed the concerns of the largest contingent, corporate lobbyists; rather like the U.S. Congress, where the impact of lobbyists, always significant, has exploded since the 1970s as the corporate-run neoliberal assault against the general population gained force. The voice within had some nice words but little substance. In the streets, tens of thousands of protesters, mostly young, were desperately calling for real steps to save the world from looming catastrophe.

The outcome of this conflict will determine the course of history — or more precisely, will determine whether future human history will be “nasty, brutish and short” (to lift philosopher Thomas Hobbes’s words) or full of promise and opportunity.

The conflict is nicely encapsulated in [a report of Brazil’s National Institute of Space Research](#). It is dated October 27, just a few days before COP26 opened, offering space for fine words and eloquent promises about saving the Amazon

forests, a precious resource for Brazil's future, and the world's.

The Institute reported that "the area deforested in Brazil's Amazon reached a 15-year high after a 22% jump from the prior year, [an outcome that] flies in the face of [the Jair] Bolsonaro government's recent attempts to shore up its environmental credibility," to put it politely.

It was put less politely by spokespersons for Brazilian and international environmental organizations. One [said](#), "We are seeing the Amazon rainforest being destroyed by a government which made environmental destruction its public policy." Another [said](#): "This is the real Brazil that the Bolsonaro government tries to hide with fantastical speeches and actions of greenwashing abroad. The reality shows that the Bolsonaro government accelerated the path of Amazon destruction."

Within the halls there were many "fantastical speeches," while the outside world revealed much that "flies in their face." Within, there was great enthusiasm about the \$130 trillion that will be provided by financial institutions to rescue us. U.S. chief negotiator John Kerry was exultant that the market is now on our side.

He might be right, if we understand the phrase "the market" to refer not to the "fantastical" concept that is conjured up in public discourse but to the real world market: What Robert Pollin and Gerald Epstein call the neoliberal "bailout economy."

How the holy market works in this case is [outlined by political economist Adam Tooze](#). Lending by the holders of the rescue package of \$130 trillion "will not be concessional," he writes.

"The trillions, Kerry insisted to his Glasgow audience, will earn a proper rate of return. But how then will they flow to low-income countries? After all, if there was a decent chance of making profit by wiring west Africa for solar power, the trillions would already be at work. For that, Larry Fink of BlackRock, the world's largest fund manager, has a ready answer. He can direct trillions towards the energy transition in low-income countries, if the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are there to 'derisk' the lending, by absorbing the first loss on projects in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Even more money will flow if there is a carbon price that gives clean energy a competitive advantage."

“It is a neat solution,” Tooze adds: “The same neat neoliberal solution that has been proffered repeatedly since the 1990s. The same solution that has not been delivered.” And won’t be delivered unless the friendly taxpayers (excluding the rich, who are granted ways to exempt themselves) perform their neoliberal duty in the “bailout economy.”

Others added their own interpretation of the lofty rhetoric within the halls. Not least Washington. “We must seize this moment,” President Joe Biden declared in Glasgow. On returning home, he “[opened the largest oil and gas lease sale in U.S. history](#),” carrying out a program set in motion by former President Donald Trump.

In defense, the administration held that it was obligated to proceed because of “a preliminary injunction issued by a federal judge in June, saying that its proposed pause on new leases would be illegal.” Environmental groups point out a variety of options, but the main conclusions stare us in the face: The reigning institutions, whether federal or judicial, are unwilling to take the steps needed to save us from catastrophe.

Threats will mount when, as seems likely, the denialist party storms back into power, having successfully blocked government programs that would help the population but bolster their political opposition, along with a flood of lies about saving innocent little children from the “critical race theory” villains who are teaching them that they are by nature brutal oppressors, and whatever other hysteria they can whip up.

As Trump took over sole possession of the Republican Party, the percentage of Republicans who regarded global warming as a “serious problem” [declined from 49 percent to 39 percent](#) while, “The proportion of Democrats who see climate change as an existential threat rose by 11 points to 95 percent over seven years.” It’s not hard to imagine how the wrecker and his minions will gleefully exploit the renewed opportunity to race as quickly as possible toward irreversible tipping points, while enriching their corporate masters.

The “last, best hope” in Glasgow was not the conference of 120 world leaders, but the competing event that was taking place in the streets outside. They are the ones who can compel the powerful in government and corporate headquarters to act expeditiously to use the options available to avert the race to destruction and to create a better world.

Can we draw hope from the promise made by the countries meeting in Glasgow to “revisit and strengthen” new plans by the end of 2022, or should we interpret this pledge as another way on the part of world leaders to just keep kicking the can down the road?

Chomsky: There were a few positive developments within the halls in Glasgow, though far short of what is urgently needed. The question of how to interpret the pledge brings to mind Karl Marx’s [11th thesis on Ludwig Feuerbach](#): The task of those committed to decent survival is not to interpret the pledge but to act to ensure that it is more than pious verbiage.

Bob, first what’s your own assessment of the key outcomes from COP26, and what do you make of the position of those countries which were fiercely opposed to calls for the inclusion of fossil fuels in any final agreement and phasing out coal and fossil fuel subsidies?

Robert Pollin: The first thing to say about the COP26 conference is that it demonstrated, yet again, the breathtaking capacity of high-level diplomats to discuss issues of human survival almost entirely disconnected from reality. For example, it was considered an achievement of the conference that, for the first time, the burning of fossil fuels to produce energy was officially recognized as a cause of climate change. The only way that we can consider this progress is in relationship to the flat-out absurdity that the previous 25 COP agreements had all failed to acknowledge the long-established reality that burning fossil fuels is responsible for producing about 75-80 percent of the greenhouse gases causing climate change.

Beyond this measure of “progress,” the COP26 diplomats still wrangled over whether they objected, *full stop*, to governments providing fossil fuel subsidies or rather, whether they objected only to fossil fuel subsidies that are “inefficient,” whatever that means. Not surprisingly, the final document ended up only opposing “inefficient” subsidies. Similarly, at the very end of the meetings, China and India [managed to substitute a reference](#) to “phasing *down*” coal rather than the original text that referred to “phasing *out*” coal.

Amid such word-parsing exercises, the underlying reality is that, even with all the pledges made at the last major COP conference, COP21 in Paris in 2015, almost nothing has been accomplished in terms of reducing CO2 emissions. Thus, in its

2021 “World Energy Outlook,” the International Energy Agency (IEA) [projects that](#), according to its “stated policies” scenario — i.e. a scenario that takes account of all government pledges made at Paris along with what they have actually accomplished relative to these pledges — global CO₂ emissions will not fall *at all* as of 2030 and will fall by less than 6 percent as of 2050, from 36 billion tons of emissions today to 33.9 billion tons as of 2050. This, again, is within the context of the Paris agreements, in which all 196 countries committed to stabilizing the global average temperature at 1.5 degrees Celsius (1.5°C) above pre-industrial levels. To succeed in stabilizing the global average temperature at 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has established that global CO₂ emissions must fall by 45 percent by 2030 and reach zero emissions by 2050.

All of this tells us that we will never move on to a viable climate stabilization by relying on the words or pledges agreed to in any such diplomatic documents. The only way to move seriously onto a viable climate stabilization path is through grassroots political organizing that forces governments to take actions that they will otherwise never take. If there was any good news out of COP26, it is that political organizers were in the streets in Glasgow in full force and could not be ignored.

Their presence did force some concessions into the final document: About half of the nearly 200 country delegations agreed to cut methane emissions by 30 percent as of 2030. The full body pledged to end deforestation by 2030. The full body also acknowledged “with deep regret” that the rich countries that are responsible for the climate crisis have not fulfilled their financial pledges to support green transition programs in low-income countries. It remains an open question as to whether this “deep regret” will lead to serious financing commitments that will actually be met.

Why is the transition to clean energy so slow? Is it a question of lack of investments and technological know-how, or something else?

Pollin: By some metrics, the transition to clean energy is proceeding fairly quickly. For example, as of 1985, solar energy [provided less than 0.01 percent](#) of the world’s electricity supply. By 2020, that figure is up to 3.3 percent. This is an increase of nearly 3,000 percent in 35 years. Of course, we are starting in 1985 with a miniscule base of solar production. More importantly, the level of solar

supply can't remain stuck in the range of 3 percent of electricity in order to meet the climate goals. It rather needs to be in the range of 60-70 percent as of 2050.

A major factor that had prevented the expansion of clean renewable energy from expanding more rapidly had been cost. As recently as 2010, the average cost globally of producing a kilowatt of electricity through solar energy was 38 cents. As of 2020, the average cost had fallen to less than 7 cents. Meanwhile, the comparative average cost for fossil-fuel-generated electricity has remained stable over this decade at between 5-15 cents per kilowatt hour. In other words, solar is now fully cost-competitive with fossil fuels, which had not been true previously. Both onshore and offshore wind are also [now fully cost-competitive](#) with fossil fuels. As such, when we include energy efficiency investments along with those for renewable energy, the overall result is that this clean energy infrastructure can deliver both a zero emissions economy and lower energy costs.

Even with renewable energy costs dropping sharply, several critical issues still remain outstanding. One is the intermittency of solar and wind power supply — that is, the sun doesn't shine at night and wind doesn't blow all day everywhere. So transmission and storage questions do need to be addressed — for example, how to deliver wind-powered electricity reliably and at low cost from a farm in Western Pennsylvania to the center of Philadelphia? A lot of progress is being made toward resolving these issues. But also keep in mind that we don't need to solve them completely right now, before we can proceed with the clean energy transition. We aren't going to eliminate the use of fossil fuels next week, no matter what. We have roughly two decades to develop the transmission and storage technologies that we will need to operate the global economy on 100 percent renewable energy supply.

Another challenge with building the renewable energy infrastructure is land use. This is a serious question that has emerged in many places. Where do we site the wind turbines and arrays of solar panels without wrecking neighborhoods or natural environments? Part of the solution is to make as much use as possible of artificial surfaces — such as putting solar panels on rooftops or building solar canopies in parking lots. Such measures are becoming increasingly viable, with the costs of even residential solar installations now also reaching cost parity with both fossil fuels as well as utility-scale solar farms. A similar pattern is also occurring with offshore wind platforms.

Broadly speaking then, the technology, intermittency and land use issues are being addressed effectively despite inadequate levels of government support. Still, we need to find the funds to build this global clean energy infrastructure. That is going to require something like 2.5-3 percent of global GDP per year, i.e., about \$2.5 trillion next year, then averaging about \$4.5 trillion per year between now and 2050, according to figures in our book, *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*.

What was clear from COP26 is that government funding at sufficient levels will never be forthcoming without political struggles. This is despite the fact that the 2.5 percent of GDP that is required can be provided readily through some financing combinations that we have discussed previously. For example, converting all existing fossil fuel subsidies into clean energy subsidies, transferring only 5-10 percent of military spending into clean energy investments, or having the major central banks purchasing global green investment bonds. Such bond purchases could be in the range of 2 percent of the bailout injections that the Federal Reserve injected into Wall Street to prevent a financial collapse brought on by the COVID recession.

Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said that people shouldn't expect international climate summits like COP26 or governments to solve the climate crisis, but at the same time defended the Green New Deal plan. How do we realize the goals of the Green New Deal from below? This is a question addressed to both of you.

Chomsky: How was the New Deal realized, or any other step forward in human history? Virtually without exception by dedicated persistent activism. This time will not be different.

Elements are there. Thanks in no small part to Bob Pollin's active engagement, backed by sound analytic work, unions are taking up the cause. That includes the United Mine Workers, proceeding well ahead of coal baron Sen. Joe Manchin, a congressional champion-in-receiving-funding-from-fossil-fuel-industries who is cooperating with rock-solid Republican opposition to steps to reverse the race to destruction.

There's ample precedent for organized labor taking the lead, as it did in bringing the New Deal to fruition. One of the earliest environmental activists was Tony

Mazzocchi of the Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, workers who are the most immediate victims of poisoning the atmosphere. His efforts to form a Labor Party failed, and it's not easy in the rigidly monopolized U.S. political system, but there are ways to progress even in this domain. There are encouraging signs that labor is reviving from the bitter 40-year neoliberal assault. The mass refusal to return to rotten and dangerous jobs is only one sign. The malaise that is leading to an unprecedented wave of "deaths of despair" in the white working class can, and must, be overcome and directed to the kind of militant labor action that 90 years ago created a base for social democracy in the U.S. while Europe was descending into fascist horror.

A third of Americans, overwhelmingly Republicans, don't even regard global warming (let alone the much broader crisis of environmental destruction) as a "serious problem." All must come to recognize, soon, that it is not only a serious problem but an urgent one, and that how we deal with it, right now, will determine the fate of human life as well as that of the countless species we are casually destroying. To achieve that essential goal requires major educational and organizational efforts, omitting no sector of the society, including those in thrall of Trump-style malevolence.

In Congress, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey have reintroduced a 2019 resolution calling for a comprehensive Green New Deal along the lines of the detailed work of Robert Pollin and his colleagues and, with somewhat different models from economist Jeffrey Sachs, now also backed by the IEA. Local and state-level initiatives are underway. There are major international actions, mostly by the young.

That's the barest sample. There's lots of work to do. This is not the time for musing on the sidelines.

Pollin: We need to be organizing at all levels of society to advance the global Green New Deal project. This means fighting to stop any and all communities and institutions from relying on burning fossil fuels to provide energy and to build a zero-emissions energy infrastructure through investments in both energy efficiency and clean renewables. Note that this is distinct from demanding that institutions divest their ownership shares of fossil fuel stock and bonds. The divestment movement has played a critical role in raising consciousness about the climate crisis. But its effectiveness is limited by the reality that if, say, a

university sells its stocks in Exxon-Mobil, those stocks are getting purchased by hedge funds that are happy to buy the stocks at reduced prices. The hedge fund will then [continue to earn dividends from their fossil fuel stocks](#) as long as people continue to consume oil, coal and natural gas to meet their energy needs. So the Green New Deal program must start with the project of ending reliance on fossil fuels. And we certainly can't wait for the next COP conference to settle the matter.

We then need to be clear that the case for the Green New Deal is overwhelming, at many levels: It is the way through which we can realistically get to zero emissions by 2050. The investments to build the clean energy infrastructure will be a major engine of new job opportunities, in all regions of the world. My co-workers and I have estimated that clean energy investments at about 2.5 percent of GDP per year would generate, for example, about [4-5 million jobs per year in the U.S.](#) and about [20 million jobs in India](#). Creating these new jobs will also open opportunities to increase union organizing and raise the pay and benefits associated with these jobs. Building the clean energy infrastructure will also create new possibilities for small-scale public, private and cooperative ownership of renewable energy assets. It will eliminate the largest sources of outdoor air pollution, thus significantly raising public health standards. The Green New Deal must, critically, also be committed to just transition for the workers and communities that are currently dependent on the fossil fuel industry that will need to be phased out.

In combination, these various features of the global Green New Deal provide a powerful platform for committed and effective organizing. The diplomats that argued last week over what may constitute "inefficient" fossil fuel subsidies will then be forced into finally seeing the reality before their eyes.

Note: This transcript has been lightly edited.

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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

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Climate Diplomacy Failed Again. Only Movements From Below Can Save The Planet



CJ

Polychroniou

The outcome at COP26 doesn't bode well for the future of the planet, but then again, no one remotely aware of the history of international climate talks should have expected anything but a failure at Glasgow.

As a matter of fact, given what we already know about the science of climate change (fossil fuels are the primary culprits behind global warming), and, in light of our experience with the catastrophic effects of global warming (heat waves, wildfires, floods, droughts, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, habitat loss and species extinction), COP26 must be regarded as a "[monumental failure](#)."

Indeed, it is quite shocking to see [reports](#) and [commentaries](#) from certain quarters trying to convince the public that COP26 represents a step forward in the fight against the climate crisis.

Why? Because for the first time in nearly three decades the world “coal” was used in a COP climate agreement? Or because of the pledge to end deforestation by 2030? Or could it be because world leaders agreed to end “inefficient” subsidies for fossil fuels?

Hypocrisy reigned supreme at COP26 in Glasgow. Leaving aside the presence of the fossil fuel industry with a bigger delegation than any country, most world leaders were there to defend their national economic interests rather than the sustainability of the planet.

Let’s start with President Joe Biden. He argued that “there is no more time to hang back or sit on the fence,” and then sought to convince everyone present that the U.S. will “lead by example” in the fight against global warming. How? By [leasing over 80 million acres of public waters](#) in the Gulf of Mexico to fossil fuel companies for oil and gas extraction immediately after his rhetorical posture at COP26.

And let’s not forget [his urgent plea to OPEC](#) just a few months ago to increase oil production.

Perfect samples of leading by example!

How about Australia, whose current government [vows to keep using and selling coal](#) for decades to come?

Countries such as China, Russia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, to name just a few, worked hard during the negotiations to weaken as much as possible the final COP26 pact.

Of course, wealthy nations, which are primarily responsible for the climate crisis, bear the vast majority of the blame for climate impasse.

Their failure to honor a pledge of \$100 billion in climate financing a year to poor nations, which are hit hardest by the consequences of global warming, speaks volumes of their commitment to the transformation of a sustainable and just future. So does their position on the issue of financing for “losses and damages” at COP26, which was deliberately couched in very vague terms and was left to be

addressed in future climate talks.

But that's what international climate diplomacy amounts to in the end: governments fighting for a climate agenda that won't harm the specific interests and needs of their own ruling classes. This is exactly the reason why world leaders have been kicking the can down the road for nearly three decades now when it comes to taking drastic measures to combat global warming.

The truth of the matter is that whatever progress has been made so far in our fight against the climate crisis has been greatly due to activism on the part of individuals and a wide array of organizations such as community groups, labor unions, non-governmental organizations, and Indigenous groups. Youth voices on the climate crisis have been, of course, most instrumental in raising public consciousness and building momentum for the formation of a global climate movement, which is our only hope left towards securing the goal of sustainability for all life on Earth.

The irony is that actually no sober and rational thinking human being could possibly have any illusions about the challenge humanity faces in the 21st century. It requires an indubitably high level of ignorance, in conjunction with a heavy dose of misanthropy, to pass over the fact that the world is faced with a titanic struggle over how to save the planet.

Moreover, there is no mystery about how humanity can avoid a possible collapse of civilized order as we have known it. A global Green New Deal is our only hope to save the planet from the disastrous effects of global warming caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Decarbonization in conjunction with natural climate solutions such as reforestation are key to making sure that humanity doesn't get trapped in a conundrum the "the gates of hell are locked on the inside."

There is no other choice at the present juncture. It is still not clear to what degree technology can be part of the solution at some point in the future, and we surely have no luxury in waiting to find out whether emerging technologies can solve the climate crisis.

Also, let's have no illusions about the global Green New Deal project. This is not some sort of a utopian dream, as its opponents seem to suggest. The research, for instance, conducted by economists at the renowned Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst shows with

unquestionable clarity that the implementation of the Green New Deal project will not only spare us from the worsening effects of global warming, but will also ensure sustainable development and a just transition.

But, perhaps more important, there are already scores of organizations in places all over the world working hard to turn the Green New Deal vision into reality. For example, ReImagine Appalachia, a collection of individuals and organizations seeking to “built a sustainable 21st century Appalachia,” is restoring damaged lands and water, refashioning the electric grid, building a sustainable transportation system, reforesting the region, while at the same time promoting union rights and ensuring that workers in extractive industries remain vital elements of the workforce in the post-fossil fuel economy.

Mass organizing is central, of course, to the attainment of the goals set forth by ReImagine Appalachia. Amanda Woodrum, Senior Researcher, Policy Matters Ohio, and Co-Director, Project to ReImagine Appalachia, says ReImagine Appalachia “reaches out and engages a wide variety of stakeholders - labor, faith, enviro, racial justice, criminal justice reform advocates, local electeds and others.”

Indeed, participation from below is the key to ensuring a societal transformation towards sustainability. As Amanda Woodrum so eloquently expressed to *Truthout*, this is the only way that “Appalachia stays on the climate table, otherwise it will be on the menu.”

In addition, ReImagine Appalachia appears to have developed a very effective local elected outreach strategy, which, according to Amanda Woodrum, “has secured a number of endorsements from local electeds and passed community resolutions in several communities.” Equally important, the organization has launched BLAC, the Black Appalachian Coalition, an initiative led by Black women, as [Black Appalachians have been hit hardest](#) by the downward mobility of the neoliberal project since the 1980s.

The outcomes of international climate summits are very discouraging, but the work done at the grassroots level by researchers and activists alike in the fight against humanity’s greatest existential crisis is quite inspiring.

So, yes, the struggle ahead promises to be hard and brutal, but the “[general will](#)” can always prevail in the end even under the most gruesome of circumstances if

people are willing to fight for the right cause. And no cause can be more sacred than saving planet Earth.

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Activism, Not Global Climate Summits, Is The Answer To The

Climate Crisis



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Polychroniou

In response to COP26, C. J. Polychroniou argues that we cannot rely on summits to solve climate change. Instead, radical and legal activism are the best hopes for our future.

The outcome of international climate summits hasn't changed over the last few decades. The task of forging a global consensus on transformative mitigation strategies to the climate emergency somehow always eludes the participating parties, and the result is to keep kicking the can down the road as if to say, "let future generations take care of the problem."

Unfortunately, in spite of being touted as "our last best hope," the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow ended up being just another big flop, thus confirming the position of Democratic US Rep Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez that people shouldn't expect international climate summits like COP26 or governments to solve the climate crisis.

Indeed, the only hope for solving humanity's greatest existential crisis lies with our ability to mobilize people behind the global climate movement.

The outcome of COP26, a great "compromise" between moderates and reactionaries, does very little to slow the pace to the precipice. The final document, called the Glasgow Climate Pact [cma3_auv_2_cover_decision \(unfccc.int\)](#), made no progress with regard to existing national plans to cut emissions by 2030, which are highly inadequate to limit warming to 1.5C. In fact, as things stand, the planet is headed to a disastrous 2.4C of heating. And only very naïve souls can gain comfort from the fact that the pact obliges countries to return to next year's COP with revised targets.

Fossil fuels, which supplied 84 percent of global energy in 2020 [Fossil Fuels Still Supply 84 Percent Of World Energy — And Other Eye Openers From BP's Annual Review \(forbes.com\)](#), will continue to dominate global energy consumption. The

power of the fossil fuel producers is apparently too strong to counter in diplomatic negotiations over the future of the planet.

Moreover, nothing was done in relation to the issue of climate finance, and rich countries have failed to honor their pledge of providing \$100 billion each year by 2020 to help the poor nations deal with the threats of global warming. In the meantime of course, climate debt [grows exponentially](#).

In sum, decarbonization remains a distant dream in spite of the pressing need to do so almost immediately in order to keep temperatures from rising “well above 2C.” At COP26, amazingly enough, even coal, the dirtiest of the fossil fuels and the single largest source of global temperature increases, received a mere slap in the hand as India, with the backing of China, succeeded in changing the wording of an earlier draft from “phase out” coal to “phase down.”

All this while there is a near unanimous consensus among scientists that global warming is caused from human-produced greenhouse gas emissions and that the climate crisis represents humanity’s largest existential crisis.

If COP26 participants were really serious about solving the climate crisis they should have made, at a minimum, the following pledges:

1. Eliminate all fossil fuel subsidies, which according to a recent IMF study amounts to \$5.9 trillion in 2020;
2. Ban banks from funding new fossil fuel projects;
3. Make ecocide an international crime similar to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes;
4. Demand the cancellation of debt for lower income countries, which now spend several times more on servicing debt than dealing with the challenges of global warming;
5. Create large-scale funding sources to assist with the transition to a green economy.

Instead, we got mostly a lot of “blah, blah, blah” and more inertia.

But why the persistent failure among governments in putting the world on a sustainable climate pathway?

Yes, the existential crisis of global warming must be addressed in a world

occupied by mainly egoistic and highly imperfect creatures; where the nation-state remains the primary political unit; and with an economic system in place that is driven by the maximization of profit and the exploitation of natural resources. Under neoliberalism, in particular, nature is being destroyed at [unprecedented levels](#), while “the average global temperatures have [risen relentlessly](#).”

But, alas, it’s not all so difficult or hopeless as the international climate summits make it seem. We have made some progress in the fight against global warming. Cities worldwide are at the forefront of climate action, thanks to grassroots activism. The majority of European cities have already committed themselves to reaching carbon neutrality by 2050, with 12 of them before 2040. In California, a project of building a clean energy infrastructure and reducing emissions by 50 percent as of 2030 and achieving a zero-emissions economy by 2045 has been endorsed by nearly [20 major unions across the state](#). In the Ohio River Valley, ReImagine Appalachia, a broad coalition of individuals and organizations, is laying the groundwork for a post-fossil fuel economy.

Activism is indeed the key ingredient behind the support for green transition programs, and even some major legal victories have been won in the fight against global warming. European courts sided with activists in their effort to put an end to logging in an ancient protected forest in Poland, driving bans have been enforced in some of Germany’s inner cities, and a Dutch court ordered oil giant Royal Dutch Shell to cut its greenhouse emissions by 45 percent by 2045.

Thanks to activism, judges refuse to leave issues about climate and the environment totally in the hands of policymakers.

This is a trend that will most likely increase in the years ahead as international climate summits and governments fail to take the drastic measures needed to for the planet to avoid a climate catastrophe.

As such, revolutionary activism is indeed our last best hope to keep humanity from returning to barbarism on account of the potential collapse of civilized social order due to a climate apocalypse.

In practice, this means turning every city and every town in every major country around the world into a stronghold of the global climate movement. This is the only way that the “general will” can be enforced on the powers-that-be.

Source:

<https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/activism-not-global-climate-summits-answer-climate-crisis>

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Urgently Needed: A Global Green New Deal From Below



CJ

Polychroniou

Restructuring the international economic order to avert cataclysmic climate change demands bottom-up participation.

Solving global warming is humanity's greatest challenge. It can be done, but it is exceedingly difficult as it requires a fundamental restructuring of the world economy.

There are, for all intents and purposes, three paths of restructuring the global economic order in order to keep catastrophic climate change at bay: (a) dismantle capitalism; (b) shrink dramatically economic activity; and (c) implement a Global Green New Deal.

We have both the technological know-how and the economic resources to make the transition to a “green economy.” The only thing that’s missing from making this happen is the political will.

The first path is hardly realistic at the current juncture. Socialists everywhere are in retreat, while socialism continues to have multiple meanings and interpretations. There is not a single place on earth where a socialist revolution is brewing. In this context, I think we can safely say that the dismantlement of global capitalism through a world socialist revolution is nothing more than fantasy.

The second path is almost equally unrealistic, as well as exceedingly dangerous. This is what may be called as the “lazy” approach to tackling the climate crisis. A dramatic contraction of economic activity will lead to mass unemployment, rise in poverty to unprecedented levels, political instability, and social chaos. Neither rich nor poor nations will benefit from intentional policies to shrink economic activity, and surely no one can imagine any government in any part of the world embarking on such an undertaking in hopes that it will help save the planet from the menace of global warming due to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

More important, reducing global economic activity won’t save the planet from global warming. As economist Robert Pollin has argued in [*Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*](#) (co-authored with Noam Chomsky), even if global GDP were to contract by 10 percent over the next 10 years (which, incidentally, would be several times larger than what was experienced over the global financial crisis of 2007-09), carbon dioxide emissions would be pushed down by precisely 10 percent (p. 117). So the world economy remains far away from reaching zero emissions, while workers suffer massive damage to their livelihoods.

The third path, the implementation of a Global Green New Deal, is the only realistic one for humanity to avert a catastrophic climate breakdown. A Global Green New Deal is essentially a call on all governments around the world to use the power of state intervention to halt global warming by stopping fossil fuel emissions and making a transition to clean and renewable sources of energy. The Green New Deal will stimulate the economy while eliminating the bad side of growth.

We have both the technological know-how and the economic resources to [make the transition to a “green economy.”](#) The only thing that’s missing from making this happen is the political will—in spite of so many international climate summits having taken place so far.

Indeed, at COP26, the lack of political will among the world’s leaders to take drastic action to combat the climate crisis is more than obvious and incredibly disconcerting. “Tough talk,” but no commitment to a Global Green New Deal, which is why thousands of protesters [took to the streets in Glasgow](#) during the COP26 conference.

As things stand, the most promising way out of the impasse lies with [revolutionary activism](#). Change, as always, will take place from the bottom up. Indeed, a Global Green New Deal will materialize only when citizens of the world demand it.

Source:

<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2021/11/08/urgently-needed-global-green-new-deal-below>

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People Worldwide Name US As A

Major Threat To World Peace. Here's Why.



Khury Petersen-Smith Photo: ips-dc.org

How is it that people across the globe have come to agree that the United States is now [one of the primary threats to world peace and democracy](#)?

Having leveled two Japanese cities with atomic bombs and established itself as the world's top superpower following the collapse of the international order in the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. quickly became intoxicated by its newfound military superiority.

The U.S. soon went on to introduce a doctrine that positioned itself as the world's police, drop more bombs in the Korean and Vietnamese wars than there had been dropped in the whole course of World War II, and orchestrate military coups against democratically elected governments throughout Latin America. It ended up in turn supporting brutal dictatorships and establishing more foreign military bases than any other nation or empire in history all over the globe.

All this occurred within the first 30 or so years after the end of World War II. By the time the 21st century came around, the U.S. was the only military and economic superpower in the world. Yet, that did not put an end to U.S. imperial ambitions. A "global war on terrorism" was initiated in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, with the U.S. ending up by 2013 being seen by people around the world as "[the greatest threat to world peace.](#)"

What are the roots of U.S. imperialism? What has been the impact of imperial

expansion and wars on democracy at home? Is the U.S. empire in retreat? In this interview, scholar and activist Khury Petersen-Smith, who is Michael Ratner Middle East Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, discusses how U.S. imperialism has undermined democracy, both home and abroad, with the wars abroad even being tied to police brutality at home.

C.J. Polychroniou: The U.S. has a long history of war-on-terror campaigns going all the way back to the spread of anarchism in late 19th century. During the Cold War era, communists were routinely labelled as “terrorists,” and the first systematic war on terror unfolded during the Reagan administration. Following the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration renewed the war on terror by implementing a series of far-reaching policy initiatives, many of which, incidentally, went unnoticed by the public but also continued during the Obama and Trump administrations, respectively, which subverted democracy and the rule of law. Can you elaborate about the impact of war-on-terror policies in the dismantling of U.S. democracy?

Khury Petersen-Smith: It’s true: The tactics and beliefs that the U.S. has deployed in the war on terror have deep roots that stretch well before our current time. I would argue that the U.S. has never been a democracy, and that a key reason is its basically permanent state of war, which began with its founding. New England settlers, for example, waged a war of counterinsurgency against Indigenous peoples here who resisted colonization in King Philip’s War. The settlers besieged Indigenous nations, considering communities of adults and children to be “enemies” and punishing them with incredible violence. This was in the 1670s.

In a different U.S. counterinsurgency, in the Philippines in the early 20th century, American soldiers used “the water cure,” a torture tactic comparable to the “waterboarding” that the U.S. has used in the war on terror. This was one feature of a horrific war of scorched earth that the U.S. waged as Filipino revolutionaries fought for an independent country after Spanish colonization. The U.S. killed tens of thousands of Filipino fighters, and hundreds of thousands — up to a million — civilians. There was also a staggering amount of death due to secondary violence, such as starvation and cholera outbreaks, and due to the U.S. declaration that civilians were fair game to target (as seen in the infamous Balangiga Massacre). It was during that episode in 1901 on the island of Samar, when an American general ordered troops to kill everyone over the age of 10. The designation of whole populations as the “enemy” — and therefore targets for violence — has

echoes that reverberate in Somalia, Yemen, Iraq and other places where the U.S. has fought the war on terror.

This is to say that there are different chapters in the history of U.S. empire, but there is a throughline of justifying military violence and the denial of human rights in defense of U.S. power and “the American way of life.” This history of wars informs those of the present.

In the 20th century, labeling various activities “terrorism” was one way of rationalizing the use of force. The U.S. did this especially with its allies in response to anti-colonial liberation movements. So the South African apartheid regime called anti-apartheid resistance “terrorism,” and the Israeli state did (and continues to do) the same to Palestinian resistance, however nonviolent. The U.S. has armed and defended these states, embracing and promoting the rhetoric of war against “terrorism.”

The flip side of “terrorism” — the blanket enemy against which all violence is justified — is “democracy” — the all-encompassing thing that the U.S. claims to defend in its foreign policy. But again, the 20th century saw the U.S. embrace, arm and wage war with and on behalf of anti-democratic, dictatorial forces on every continent. The decades of violence that the U.S. carried out and supported throughout Latin America in the latter part of the 20th century, in response to waves of popular resistance for social and economic justice, serve as a brutal chapter of examples.

All of these things helped constitute the foundation upon which the Bush administration launched the war on terror.

To answer your question more directly, military violence always requires dehumanization and the denial of rights — and this inevitably corrupts any notions of democracy. War, in fact, always involves an attack on democratic rights at large. When the U.S. launched the war on terror in 2001, the federal government simultaneously waged military campaigns abroad *and* passed legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act, issued legal guidelines and other practices that introduced new levels of surveillance, denial of due process, rationalization of torture and other attacks on civil liberties. These efforts especially targeted Muslims and people of South Asian, Central Asian, Southwest Asian and North African origin — all of whom were subject to being cast as “terrorists” or

“suspected terrorists.”

It is worth noting that while Bush drew upon the deep roots of U.S. violence to launch the war on terror, there has been incredible continuity, escalation and expansion throughout it. Bush launched the drone war, for example, and President Barack Obama then wildly [expanded and escalated it](#). President Donald Trump then [escalated](#) it further.

Have the war-on-terror policies also affected struggles for racial and migrant justice?

The war on terror has been devastating for racial and migrant justice. The Islamophobic domestic programs that the U.S. has carried out are racist. And once they were piloted against parts of the population, they could be expanded to others. This is how U.S. state violence works. Indeed, the mass policing, mass incarceration regime built up in the 1990s — which was supposedly directed at “fighting crime,” and the “war on drugs” — targeted Black people and Latinos in particular, building an infrastructure that was then deployed against Muslims and others in the war on terror. With policing vastly expanded in the name of the war on terror, its force came back to Black and Indigenous communities — as it always does in the United States.

It is important to acknowledge the new level of credibility and power that the police attained after 9/11 and in the war on terror. There was actually a powerful wave of anti-racist protest against the police in the 1990s — especially strong in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles. In New York, thousands mobilized to demand justice for Amadou Diallo, Abner Louima, Patrick Dorismond, and others brutalized and killed by the New York City Police Department. The police were on the defensive. They seized upon the post-9/11 moment and the beginning of the war on terror to rehabilitate their image and attain new powers.

With this in mind, I wonder if the current moment of “racial reckoning” unfolding in the U.S. over these two years — brilliant and important as it is — could have actually happened 20 years ago. I think that anti-racist movements were on track to do it, and the war on terror set us back two decades. Consider all of the Black lives lost in that time.

And yes, the war on terror has been catastrophic for migrant justice. One of the

early measures was the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, which forced the registration of non-citizens from South and Central Asian, Middle Eastern, and North and East African countries. It was largely unopposed, setting the stage for more racist, targeted policies, like the Muslim ban. Before the war on terror, there was no Department of Homeland Security, no Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The U.S. government seized the opportunity of the war on terror to build on the long history of white supremacy in controlling migration and open a new chapter of border militarization, policing and surveillance of migrants, and deportation.

The United Nations condemned this past summer, for the 29th year in a row, the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba. Indeed, the U.S. is notorious around the world for violations of international law and has been widely perceived as the greatest threat to world peace. However, the influence of the U.S. in world affairs is sharply in decline and its so-called “soft” power has all but evaporated. Are we living through the death of an empire?

I’m afraid that U.S. empire is far from death, or even dying.

From the perspective of humanity and the planet, the war on terror has been catastrophic in its levels of destruction and death. But from the perspective of the proponents of U.S. empire, those at its helm, it was a gamble. Bush administration officials were clear from the start that the invasion of Afghanistan was the opening of what they conceived of as a series of invasions and other military operations to demonstrate U.S. hegemony, and punish the minority of states located in the most strategic regions of the world that were not solidly in the American orbit. After invading Afghanistan, Bush declared the “Axis of Evil,” targeting Iraq, Iran and North Korea. The U.S. then invaded Iraq, implying that Iran and North Korea could be next. The idea was to project U.S. power and to disrupt and prevent the rise of potential rivals to it.

The U.S. lost the gamble. Not only did untold millions of people around the world suffer from the wars, but the U.S. also failed in its strategic objectives. The regional and world powers whose ascension the U.S. sought to curtail — especially Iran, Russia and China — emerged more powerful, while U.S. power was set back.

But the U.S. remains, far and away, the most powerful country in the world. And

it will not surrender that status quietly. On the contrary, even as it continues and supports military operations as part of the war on terror, it is very openly preparing for confrontation with China. It is pursuing a belligerent path that is driving rivalry and militarization — a path toward conflict.

The story of the path the U.S. is pursuing regarding hostility toward China is another that reveals the subterranean, forward motion of empire that continues across presidential administrations. President George W. Bush's [2002 National Security Strategy](#) first signaled that, "We are attentive to the possible renewal of old patterns of great power competition," and identified China as one potential competitor. In 2006, the Bush administration gestured further toward identifying China as posing a problem for U.S. empire, [saying](#), "Our strategy seeks to encourage China to make the right strategic choices for its people, while we hedge against other possibilities."

When President Obama took office, the U.S. foreign policy establishment had clearly united behind the notion that China was an enemy to be isolated and whose rise was to be curtailed. Then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [declared](#) "America's Pacific Century" and argued for a winding down of American attention to Iraq and Afghanistan, and a new strategic focus on Asia and the Pacific. Obama launched the "Pivot to Asia," which involved shifting military weapons and personnel to the region and building more facilities there, all aimed at addressing China's ascension. President Trump, of course, brought anti-China hostility to a fever pitch, blaming China for the COVID-19 pandemic, openly using crude, racist language directed at China (but impacting Chinese American people and many other Asian Americans), and opening the door for *Fox News* personalities and officials like Sen. Tom Cotton to talk directly about the supposed "threat" that China poses and call for military action against it. That brings us to today, where there is near consensus between both parties that the U.S. should be gearing up in armed competition with China.

Unfortunately, empires do not simply die. This means that we — around the world, and especially those of us located in the United States — are called upon to resist, undermine and disrupt empire. We need to, across borders, envision a radically different world, and fight for it.

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

Source: <https://truthout.org/people-worldwide/>

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).

Besame Mucho - Een saxofonist verstript



De muziek van de film *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* uit 1958 - regie Louis Malle - is bekender dan de film zelf. Miles Davis maakte de soundtrack, die niet alleen bij jazzliefhebbers bekend is. Vaak is de muziek te horen als achtergrond bij documentaires of televisiereportages. Het onmiskenbare trompetspel van Davis wordt afgewisseld met melancholische saxofoonklanken. Er ontstaat een serie lang uitgesponnen saxofoon- en trompetsolo's met een simpel, telkens

terugkerend thema, zonder echte melodie, wat zich eindeloos lijkt te herhalen. Filmkijkers herinneren zich vooral deze muziek bij de scènes waarin een wanhopige Jeanne Moreau, op hakjes, verdwaasd over de beregende kinderhoofdjes van straten in Parijs beweegt. Het zijn ook de enige beelden uit de film die blijven hangen. Zonder de muziek van Miles Davis zou de film waarschijnlijk al lang in de vergetelheid zou zijn geraakt.

Film noir

Ascenseur pour l'échafaud is de eerste lange speelfilm van regisseur Louis Malle (1932-1995). Het is een in zwart/wit gedraaide film noir die bij vlagen hitchcockachtig aandoet.

Een vrouw - Jeanne Moreau in de rol die haar doorbraak zou betekenen - en haar minnaar zijn van plan haar echtgenoot te vermoorden. Het plan dreigt te mislukken wanneer de minnaar opgesloten raakt in een lift in een verder verlaten kantoorgebouw en zo zijn afspraak met de vrouw misloopt. Wanhopig dwaalt ze 's nachts door een uitgaanswijk van Parijs, in café's en nachtclubs op zoek naar haar minnaar.

Nouvelle Vague

Hoewel *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* niet door alle filmhistorici gerekend wordt tot de Nouvelle Vague, de Franse filmstroming die brak met de traditionele wijze van filmen, geldt de film wel als voorloper ervan. Zeker is dat de film een belangrijke inspiratiebron was voor regisseurs als François Truffaut en Jean-Luc Godard, toonaangevende vertegenwoordigers van de Nouvelle Vague.

Eind jaren vijftig en in het begin van de jaren zestig weken Truffaut en Godard, maar ook regisseurs als Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer en Agnès Varda, met hun werkwijze fundamenteel af van de tot dan toe heersende filmtradities. Hun aanpak was niet gebaseerd op van te voren geprogrammeerde scènes en dichtgetimmerde scenario's, maar ging uit van experiment en improvisatie tijdens de opnames, in camerawerk, chronologie en editing, net als de soundtrack.



Jean Seberg en Jean-Paul Belmondo

Straatscènes

Als een van de eersten nam Louis Malle - later de regisseur van onder meer *Zazie*

dans le Metro (1960), *Pretty Baby* (1978) en *My Dinner with André* (1981) - de camera mee de straat op. Niet om vanuit een vast standpunt te filmen, maar juist om op straat met personages mee te kunnen bewegen. Om Jeanne Moreau lopend door straten te kunnen filmen, werd de camera op een kinderwagen gemonteerd zodat ze overal gevolgd kon worden. François Truffaut filmde later op soortgelijke wijze straatscènes in Parijs voor zijn debuutfilm *Le Quatre Cents Coup* (1959). Truffaut liet de camera op een 2CV zonder dak monteren om de jonge Antoine Doinel te kunnen volgen op zijn zwerftochten door Parijs.

Schatplichtig aan *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* is ook de beroemde straatscène in Godards *A Bout de Souffle* (1959), waarin Jean Seberg de *Herald Tribune* verkoopt op de Avenue des Champs-Élysées en door Jean-Paul Belmondo wordt aangesproken. Door - op de openingsscène na - de hele film op locatie te draaien in plaats van in een studio, doorbrak Godard fundamenteel de bestaande filmtraditie en baande hij de weg voor een nieuwe manier van film maken.



Jeanne Moreau en Miles Davis

Jazz in Parijs

In november 1957 was Miles Davis voor enkele optredens geboekt in de Club Saint-Germain in Parijs, een bekende jazzclub in de Rue Saint-Benoît. Franse jazzmusici als Barney Wilen, Stéphane Grapelli, René Urtreger en Boris Vian traden er frequent op, maar ook voor Amerikaanse jazzmuzikanten als Art Blakey, Kenny Dorham, Bud Powell en Kenny Clarke was het een geliefde plek. Parijs was

een stad waar Amerikaanse musici graag verbleven.

Trompettist Chet Baker nam in Parijs een aantal van zijn beste platen op (op cd als *Chet in Paris vol. 1-4*).

In de jaren vijftig werd Parijs de stad 'waar het gebeurde'. Europa herstelde zich van de Tweede Wereldoorlog, en Parijs was de stad waar de voorhoede van een nieuwe toekomst zich leek te kunnen manifesteren. Nieuwe stromingen in kunst, mode, cultuur en filosofie kondigden zich aan. Hoogwaardige journalistiek - de *International Herald Tribune* vindt zijn oorsprong in Parijs - en literaire tijdschriften als *The Paris Review* en *Les Temps Modernes* (onder redactie van Jean-Paul Sartre en Simone de Beauvoir) bepaalden mede het sociaal-culturele klimaat.

Drugs

Zwarte musici hadden er nauwelijks last van racistische vooroordelen en discriminatie zoals ze dat in de Verenigde Staten meemaakten. Bovendien heerste er een gunstiger klimaat ten opzichte van drugsgebruik. Heroïne was een veel gebruikte drug onder musici. In Parijs was het niet al te problematisch om in die behoefte te kunnen voorzien. Bovendien was het Franse rechtssysteem aanzienlijk minder streng ten opzichte van het gebruik van harddrugs in vergelijking met de Verenigde Staten, waar de criminalisering en segregatie hand in hand gingen.

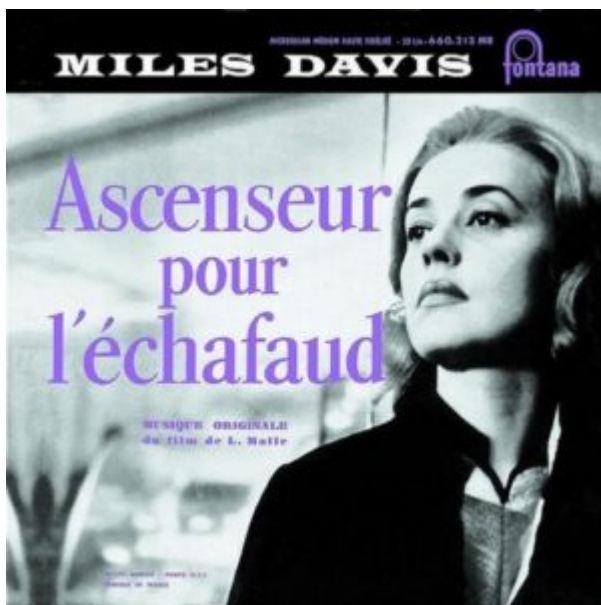


*Juliette Greco en Miles
Davis*

Saint-Germain

Het was niet het eerste bezoek van Miles Davis aan Parijs. Al in 1949 had hij in Parijse clubs gespeeld. De Amerikaanse bebop was in Parijs ongekend populair, met name in de jazzcafé's in Saint-Germain-des-Près. In Parijs werd Davis verliefd op chanteuse en actrice Juliette Gréco, die in bohemienachtige, existentialistische kringen rondom Jean-Paul Sartre verkeerde. In 1957 hernieuwde hij in Parijs zijn relatie met Gréco. Inmiddels was hij wereldberoemd, na het uitbrengen van de legendarische serie platen *Cookin'-, Relaxin'-, Workin'- and Steamin' with The Miles Davis Quintet*.

Jean-Paul Rappeneau, jazzfan en assistent van Malle, kwam met de suggestie Davis te vragen voor de filmmuziek. Voor Louis Malle een uitgelezen kans zijn film publicitair een stuk aantrekkelijker te maken.



Improvisatie

De opnames vonden plaats op 4 en 5 december 1957 in de Le Poste Parisien Studio in Parijs, 116bis Avenue Champs-Élysées. Behalve Miles Davis, bestond de band uit de Amerikaan Kenny Clarke op drums, en de Franse musici Barney Wilen op tenorsax, René Urtreger op piano en Pierre Michelot, bass. Davis gaf de andere bandleden slechts wat globale aanwijzingen over de harmoniestructuur en volgorde van

akkoorden. Terwijl scènes uit de film in de studio op een doek werden geprojecteerd, improviseerden de bandleden op de beelden.

Het samenspel met de bandleden en de ingetogen, trage soundtrack inspireerden Davis vervolgens tot het maken van de plaat *Milestones* (1958) en van *Kind of Blue* (1959), volgens velen de beste jazzplaat ooit gemaakt.

In Europa werd de soundtrack door Fontana uitgebracht op een ten-inch elpee. De eind jaren tachtig verschenen cd bevat ook de alternate takes.



Barney Wilen

Filmmuziek

Voor saxofonist Barney Wilen (1937-1996) geldt *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* als de start van zijn carrière. Direct werd hij gevraagd de filmmuziek voor een tweetal Franse films te componeren: *Un témoin dans le ville* (1958) en *Jazz sur scène* (1958), waaraan Kenny Clarke meewerkte. Ook maakte hij de muziek bij *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1959) van regisseur Roger Vadim, met medewerking van Thelonius Monk. Ook trad hij op het Newport Jazz Festival op.

In de jaren zestig experimenteerde hij met free jazz en ging zich oriënteren op niet-westerse muziek. In 1968 bracht hij de plaat *Dear Prof. Leary* uit, een eerbetoon aan lsd-profeet Timothy Leary. In de jaren zeventig en tachtig maakte hij muzikale uitstapjes naar de rock en punk en bracht hij lange tijd in Afrika door, waar hij speelde en toerde met Afrikaanse musici.

Uit het Franse clubcircuit was hij verdwenen. Zo nu en dan maakte hij nog een plaat en produceerde hij muziek van anderen.



Stripverhaal

Wilen moet stomverbaasd zijn geweest toen hij in 1987 in een Franse kiosk exemplaren aantrof van het striptijdschrift (*A Suivre*), met daarin het stripverhaal *Barney et la note bleue*.

Overduidelijk hadden scenarist Phillippe Paringaux en tekenaar Jacques Loustal zich voor de strip laten inspireren door het leven van Barney Wilen. Het verhaal: een jonge tenorsaxofonist genaamd Barney, die een opmerkelijke

gelijkenis vertoont met Barney Wilen, speelt in de jaren vijftig met jazzmusici als Art Blakey en Kenny Clark, raakt verslaafd aan heroïne en beleeft meerdere tragische affaires met vrouwen. Hij moet in zijn onderhoud voorzien door te spelen in tweederangs jazzorkestjes, die een weinig indrukwekkend repertoire van uitgemolken jazzstandards spelen. Tegen wil en dank wordt het nummer *Besame Mucho* zijn handelsmerk. Het trieste bestaan van Barney speelt zich af in troosteloze casino's, verlaten Franse badplaatsen en derderangs clubs, om vervolgens iedere dag op een haveloze hotelkamer een spuit met heroïne in zijn arm te kunnen zetten. Vergeten door jazzliefhebbers en zonder vrienden sterft hij in alle eenzaamheid.



Barney Wilen bekijkt de tentoonstelling met tekeningen uit La Note Bleue

Comeback

Waarheidsgetrouw was het verhaal zeker niet, want Barney Wilen was springlevend, en ook Wilens levensloop had zich duidelijk anders voltrokken. Juist vanwege deze verschillen meende Wilen bij de makers van de strip verhaal te moeten halen. Er volgden pittige gesprekken tussen Wilen, Paringaux en Loustal. Het verhaal - inmiddels als stripalbum gepubliceerd - was wel degelijk bedoeld als eerbetoon aan Wilen, zo was de verklaring van de makers, maar hun research was niet al te nauwkeurig geweest. Onterecht hadden ze gemeend dat Barney reeds was overleden.



Er kwam een compromis, die zowel voor Wilen als de makers publicitair een gouden vondst bleek te zijn. Wilen nam een nieuwe cd op getiteld *La Note Bleue*, met nieuwe nummers en enkele standards, inclusief *Besame Mucho*. De nummers kregen de titels van de hoofdstukken in het stripalbum, Loustal maakte het hoesontwerp. Wilen maakte met de cd een

comeback, Loustal kreeg een tentoonstelling met zijn werk en zou later furore maken als striptekenaar en illustrator. Het stripalbum moest meerdere malen worden herdrukt.

In 1987 kreeg de cd de prijs voor het beste Franse jazzalbum van dat jaar. In de herfst van datzelfde jaar speelde Wilen avond aan avond in de Parijse jazzclub Le Petit Opportun nummers van de cd. Dankzij de strip voor een opvallend jong publiek. Vaste prik iedere avond is een enthousiast gespeelde versie van *Besame Mucho*.

Soundtrack Ascenseur pour l'échafaud

Barney Wilen, Bud Powell, Kenny Clark e.a, Club Saint-Germain, 6 November 1959

Barney Wilen Quartet, Antibes Jazz Festival, Juli 1961