

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 greenhouses 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

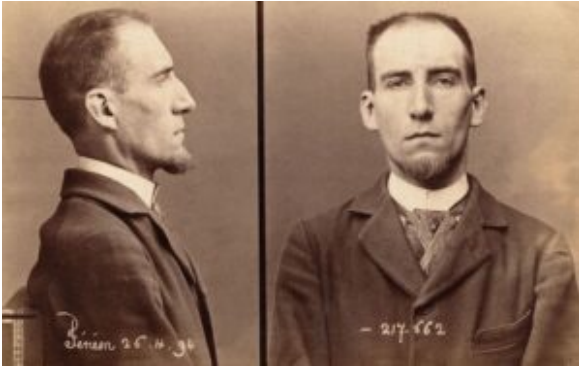
massive and sustained levels of effective political mobilization throughout the world. Whether such mobilizations can be mounted successfully remains *the* open question moving forward. I myself am inspired by the extent to which the environmental and labor movements, in the U.S. and elsewhere, are increasingly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

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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!'.

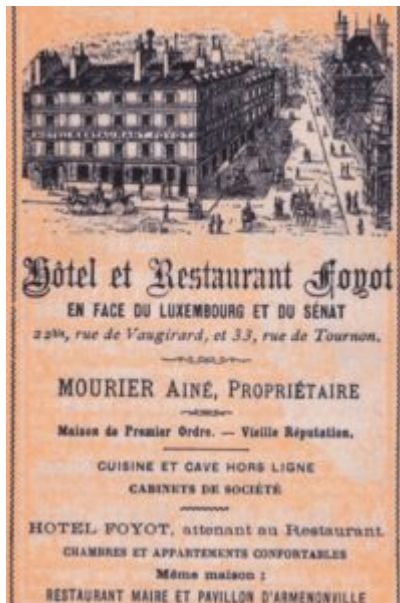


Alexander Cohen

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 Afgevaardigden. 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 eetgelegenheden. 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.



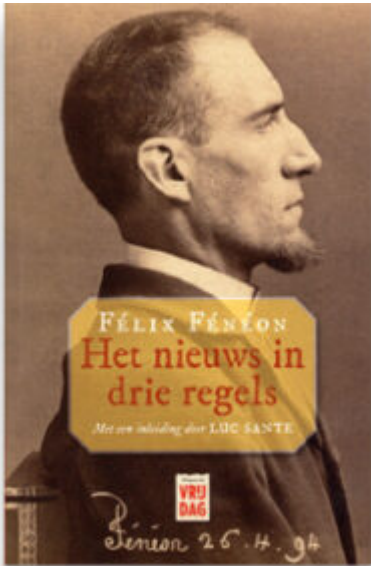
Proces

De Franse regering was de aanslagen beu en vaardige 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 Préfect, 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 gewerschoten 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.

Literatuur

Alexander Cohen, *In opstand*, Amsterdam 1932

John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club*, New Haven/London 2009

Félix Fénéon, *Het nieuws in drie regels*, Antwerpen 2009

Joan Ungersma Halperin, *Félix Fénéon, Aesthete & Anarchist in Fin-de-Siècle Paris*, New Haven/London 1988

Chomsky: Biden's "Radical" Proposals Are Minimum Measures To Avoid Catastrophe



Noam Chomsky

Looking at the state of the world, one is struck by the stark contradiction of progress being made on some fronts even as we are facing massive disruptions, tremendous inequalities and existential threats to humanity and nature.

In this context, how do we evaluate the qualities of progress and decline? How significant is political activism to progress?

In this exclusive interview, Noam Chomsky, one of the world's greatest scholars and leading activists, shares his insights on the state of the world and the conundrum of activism and change, including the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement, the movement for Palestinian rights, the urgency of the climate crisis and the threat of nuclear weapons.

C.J. Polychroniou: It's been said by far too many, including myself, that we live in dark times. And for good reasons. We live in an era where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, authoritarianism is a global political phenomenon, and life on Earth is entering a state of collapse. From that perspective, human civilization is on an inexorable course of decline and nothing but a radical overhaul of the way humans conduct themselves will save us from a return to barbarism. Yet, there are at the same time signs of progress on numerous fronts, which are hard to overlook. Societies are becoming increasingly multicultural and also more aware of and sensitive to patterns of racism and discrimination. In the light of all this, do we see the glass half empty or half full? Moreover, is it possible to evaluate the qualities of decline and progress scientifically, or do we have to rely purely on normative evaluations and value judgments?

Noam Chomsky: There are attempts to measure the contents of the glass. The best-known is the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, with the hands placed a certain distance from midnight: the end. Each year that Trump was in office, the minute hand was moved closer to midnight, soon reaching the closest it had ever been, then going beyond. The analysts finally abandoned minutes and turned to seconds: 100 seconds to midnight, where the Clock now stands. That seems to me a fair assessment.

The analysts identify three major crises: nuclear war, environmental destruction and the deterioration of rational discourse. As we've often discussed, Trump has made a signal contribution to each, and the party he now owns is carrying his legacy forward. They are also currently hard at work to regain power by

overcoming the dread danger of a government of the people, with plenty of [far right big money](#) at hand. If the project succeeds, emptying of the glass will be accelerated.

There has indeed been progress on many fronts. It is startling to look back and see what was regarded as proper behavior and acceptable attitudes not many years ago, even written into law. While substantial, the progress has not, however, been sufficient to contain and reverse the continuing assault on the social order, the natural world and the climate of rational discourse.

Without disparaging the great activist achievements, it's hard sometimes to suppress memory of an ironic slogan of the '60s: They may win the battles, but we have all the best songs.

The glass that is before our eyes is not an encouraging sight, to put it mildly. Take the state of the three major crises identified in the setting of the Clock.

The major nuclear powers are obligated by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

They are pursuing the opposite course.

In its latest annual survey, the prime monitor of global armament, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, [reports that](#) "The growth in total spending in 2020 was largely influenced by expenditure patterns in the United States and China. The USA increased its military spending for the third straight year to reach \$778 billion in 2020," as compared with China's increase to \$252 billion. In fourth place, below India, is the second U.S. adversary, Russia: \$61.7 billion.

The figures are instructive, but misleading. The U.S. is alone in facing no credible security threats. The threats that are invoked in the calls for even more military spending are at the borders of adversaries, which are ringed with U.S. nuclear-armed missiles in some of the 800 U.S. military bases around the world (China has one, Djibouti).

Further threats, in this case quite real, are the development of new and more

dangerous weapons systems. They could be banned by treaties, which were effective, until they were mostly dismantled by Bush II and Trump.

The current mythology concocted to justify escalation of this suicidal enterprise is carefully dismantled by nuclear physicist [Lawrence Krauss](#), who for many years had the responsibility to present publicly the setting of the Clock. He also reminds us that “the US and Russia have both come within seconds of launching nuclear weapons due to software or human errors that erroneously indicated an incoming nuclear missile strike” and now have “more than 5,000 nuclear weapons each, with more than 1,000 of these on high alert, launch-on-warning status” just waiting for another accident or human decision. That might be by someone well down the chain of command, as we learned from Daniel Ellsberg in his essential book, *The Doomsday Machine*.

The bloated military budget could be sharply cut without harm to authentic security — in fact enhancing genuine security if undertaken as a project of international cooperation, which is not an idle dream as history reveals. That would free up badly needed funds for urgent necessities. But it is not to be. The military budget remains untouchable, the example of the cherished ideal of bipartisanship. For some, it is not enough. Three influential Republican senators have just introduced an amendment to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (BIP) now being debated, calling for another [\\$50 billion](#) for the “undernourished” Pentagon.

One consequence is a substantial contribution to environmental destruction: [recent studies show](#) that “the US military is one of the largest polluters in history, consuming more liquid fuels and emitting more climate-changing gases than most medium-sized countries.”

That brings us to the one comparable threat to survival of organized human life: environmental destruction. In this case, unlike the nuclear menace, there is at least discussion and sometimes even corrective action, though nowhere near what is urgently needed. For years, scientists have been warning of a “climate emergency.” Thousands more are [joining the call](#) as the world is swept with disasters intensified by heating the atmosphere. A few weeks ago, we reviewed recent discoveries that show, once again, that the dire predictions of earlier studies were too conservative. Inexorably, the grim tale continues to unfold.

To mention a few more recent examples, new research has found that thawing of

permafrost in rapidly heating Siberia may be releasing the “methane time bomb” that scientists have long feared — a rapid release of massive quantities of methane, which is not as long-lasting as carbon dioxide (CO₂) but far more destructive. The main surprise is that the release is from hard rock, not wetlands, as previously anticipated. The lead researcher cautions that data are still uncertain; interpreting it correctly, [he says](#), “may make the difference between catastrophe and apocalypse” as the climate crisis worsens.

Those are in fact the likely alternatives on our current course.

An accompanying report calls for a “global state of emergency” as temperatures continue to climb in Siberia and other Arctic regions. “Scientists have been shocked that the warm weather conducive to permafrost thawing is occurring roughly 70 years ahead of model projections,” the study warns. “The story is simple,” the report concludes. “Climate change is happening faster than anticipated. One consequence — the loss of ice in the polar regions — is also a driver for more rapid global heating and disastrously rapid global sea level rise.”

Turning elsewhere, [new studies](#) find alarming signs of collapse in major ocean currents that regulate global climates, possibly with an impact on the Gulf Stream, all with incalculable but likely far-reaching effects.

If we return to the topic in a few weeks, there will be more unpleasant news. Meanwhile, political leaders dither, or even act to amplify the threats.

That is the state of threats to survival — threats that could be overcome in a world of rational deliberation and judgment; we know the means.

That brings us to the third factor in the advance of the Doomsday Clock to midnight: the decline of rationality.

Illustrations are so numerous that any small sample will be hopelessly misleading. The most extreme form of irrationality is flat denial of what you don’t like. In the case of nuclear weapons and climate, the word “denial” translates as *Doom*, and not in the distant future.

Lesser examples illustrate the depths to which the malady has penetrated.

One example has to do with nuclear weapons in the Middle East, an obsession of the political class and the media for years. Anyone in the vicinity of the real world

knows that Israel has a substantial arsenal of nuclear weapons and that there is universal agreement among intelligence agencies that Iran has none.

Trump didn't get his "beautiful wall," but in protection of beliefs from reality, it may not be needed. [Polls reveal](#) that "more Americans think Iran possesses nuclear weapons than think Israel does ... 60.5%, including 70.6% of Republicans and 52.6% of Democrats, say Iran possesses nuclear weapons — compared to 51.7% who say Israel does, including 51.7% of Republicans and 51.9% of Democrats.

We have frequently discussed the obvious solution to the concern that Iran might develop nuclear weapons: a nuclear weapons-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. In that case, there would be no constant tensions, no threat of major war, no murderous sanctions that the world must honor or be thrown out of the U.S.-run global financial system. In short, an ideal solution.

A few weeks ago, it seemed that there was finally a convert: the editorial board of *The New York Times*, who [concluded that](#), "Ideally, the result [of current negotiations] would be a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East."

The editors acknowledge that there are some problems, not least "Israel's unacknowledged and nonnegotiable possession of nuclear weapons" — also unacknowledged by the U.S. to avoid the embarrassment of opening the question of the status of U.S. military aid to Israel under American law. Unmentioned is that Washington has unilaterally blocked moves toward the "ideal" solution for these reasons (notably Obama). And that the U.S. has some means to pressure Israel when it cares to, wielded by all pre-Obama presidents.

The editorial also states that there is an African NWFZ, failing to mention that it cannot go into effect because of the U.S. military base in Diego Garcia, part of Mauritius in Africa according to the World Court, the United Nations and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. But not according to the U.S. and its British client, which claims the island in order to provide Washington with the base.

Meanwhile the U.S.-U.K. righteously proclaim their leadership of the "[rules-based international order](#)" challenged by forces of evil.

Defiance of law is no minor matter in this case, not only for the expelled

inhabitants and Mauritius, but also for the targets of U.S. bombing in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Nevertheless, at least the “ideal” solution is on the table, though it will plainly be a long struggle to free the public mind from the impressive grip of propaganda.

In a different domain, the gap between prevailing invented reality and old-fashioned reality is illustrated by the fealty of the Republican voting base to, for many of them, their bitter enemy.

Under Trump, the one legislative achievement of the self-declared party of the working man was the tax scam to enrich the very rich and harm the rest that we’ve already discussed. The practice now [extends to the BIP](#). It has to be funded somehow. “Congressional Republicans objected to tax hikes on the rich or corporations, while also eventually ruling out other measures proposed by the White House, such as stepped-up IRS enforcement on tax cheats. The White House, meanwhile, ruled out higher taxes on Americans earning under \$400,000, including a proposed gas tax.”

An instructive impasse.

Another illustration of deep loyalty, well reported, is the “stolen election” charade, still upheld by [nearly two-thirds](#) of Republicans.

A more subtle though highly consequential case is vaccine rejection, persisting in the face of overwhelming evidence of the efficacy of the vaccines and the grave danger of refusal. The danger, of course, is not limited to the refuser. On a sufficient scale, refusal will prevent herd immunity so that the plague will persist, and worse, will expedite mutations that may reach beyond control. Inquiry has identified many factors in refusal. A careful [statistical study](#) by Anthony DiMaggio reveals that the culprit, for once, is not *Fox News*, which has had no statistically significant effect on refusal. Rather, the most salient sector is Republicans confined to social media bubbles, already primed for distrust of science by decades of right-wing propaganda.

Refusal is no small matter. Nearly 60 percent of Republicans say they are unwilling to get vaccinated. Meanwhile, Republican leaders continue to oppose vaccine requirements, arguing that it’s up to the individual — whatever the lethal effect on others. The most outspoken is the new heroine of the party, Marjorie

Taylor Greene, whose fans cheered when she heralded the low vaccination rate in Alabama, which [tossed 65,000 unused doses](#) — badly needed elsewhere — in the midst of another sharp spike in cases.

This is the barest sample. The task of restoring a measure of rationality is daunting, and a responsibility that cannot be shirked.

Should we accept social change as inevitable or is it completely a consequence of collective action? Moreover, given that social change occurs rather slowly in the course of history, in what context is radicalism of better use than pragmatism for achieving progressive social change?

There are some tendencies in history, rooted in the nature of institutions, but it does not follow a predetermined course. Human agency is essential for achieving progressive social change. Almost invariably, it crucially involves collective action. The great historian and activist Howard Zinn dedicated his life's work to "the countless small actions of unknown people" that lie at the roots of "those great moments" that enter the historical record, small actions almost always undertaken in concert. Labor historian Eric Loomis adds the crucial qualification that the labor actions that have commonly been in the forefront of the struggle for a better world have achieved success when a sympathetic administration contained state-business violence.

The usual path to success is a combination of radical goals and pragmatic choice of tactics, but there cannot be a general formula for the proper course.

Looking at the state of the contemporary United States, one is struck by the nearly simultaneous explosion of two highly contradictory phenomena — white supremacist ideology and a new civil rights or social justice movement known as Black Lives Matter, respectively. How do you assess the historical significance of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and do you see it as a pragmatic or a radical response to the plague of systemic racism?

Black Lives Matter has proven to be a highly significant social movement. The "simultaneous explosion" is real, and not too surprising. BLM is an activist manifestation of a long overdue reckoning with a shameful past and its bitter surviving legacy. Many want that history erased, and its legacy ignored. One salient reason, it seems, is fear of the "[Great Replacement](#)."

It's easy to scoff at Great Replacement absurdities, and to condemn the demagogues and cynics who exploit them for their ugly purposes. But it's not hard to see why they appeal to parts of the population — mostly rural, white, Christian, less educated, relatively affluent, often tending toward white supremacist commitments and Christian nationalism. The absurdities resonate because they rest on a core of fact: Those who have survived under the jackboot for centuries are demanding basic rights and are receiving more general support. BLM and its broad outreach have significantly advanced this cause. The “traditional way of life” that rests on denying these rights is facing threats, including demographic realities.

It's not necessary here to trace how these conflicts have poisoned American society from its origins. They remain virulent, unpredictable, affecting many aspects of life and the social order.

A noticeable change is also being observed among a growing segment of American citizens, from both political parties, with regard to attitudes toward Israel and the Palestinians. How significant is this shift in public opinion, and how do we explain it?

Highly significant, and unmistakable. The poll I cited earlier on the astonishing perception of Middle East nuclear weapons [found](#) that the latest Israeli assault on Gaza “appears to have led to the largest increase to date in the number of Democrats, especially young Democrats, who want the U.S. to lean toward the Palestinians.”

Each of the murderous Israeli assaults on Gaza has had that effect. The regular crimes of settlers and the army in the West Bank mostly pass under the radar. But the longtime tendency is very clear. In earlier years, even at moments where there was some recognition of the brutality of Israeli crimes, in the eyes of liberal America, Israel remained “a society in which moral sensitivity is a principle of political life” and which “through its tumultuous history” has been animated by “high moral purpose” (*New York Times*, *Time*, fall 1982, at the peak of condemnation of Israeli crimes after the Sabra-Shatila massacres).

That has changed. Now support for Israel has shifted to Evangelical Christians, right-wing nationalists and military-security sectors. The shift largely traces the drift to the ultranationalist right within Israel, along with the increasing difficulty

of covering up its brutal actions and increased sensibility on a broad scale in the U.S.

The shift among the population has so far had little impact on policy, in fact runs counter to it. Obama was more supportive of Israel than his predecessors, even if not sufficiently so for the ascendant far right in Israel. Trump pulled out all the stops. Biden, so far, has scarcely modified his extremist stance. If the growing opposition to Israeli crimes crystallizes into an effective solidarity movement, it could bring about significant changes in U.S. policy. That could not fail to have major effects in Israel, which has been dependent on U.S. protection since the 1970s, when the Labor governments made the fateful decision to reject live diplomatic options, choosing instead expansion and construction of Greater Israel in violation of UN Security Council orders and international law.

Environmental activism is growing on a global scale and in various ways. Green political parties are flourishing in Europe, grassroots organizations such as the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion have emerged as crucial agents in the battle against the climate crisis, and even women in Latin America and the Caribbean have become active in defending the environment and fighting global warming. How do you assess the impacts of environmental movements so far to influence environmental policies and practices of governments and corporations?

There has been a notable impact, but it is nowhere near enough even to keep pace with the race to catastrophe, let alone to act decisively to avert it. There is much more to do, and not much time to do it. We cannot emphasize too strongly the immensity of the stakes.

The so-called radical wing of the Democratic Party, which is most vocally represented by Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is coming under rather enigmatic criticism, at least as far as I am concerned, by various left-minded groups and individuals for allegedly not doing enough to push forward a radical agenda of social change, which includes, among other things, Medicare for All. How justified is this criticism considering that the so-called radical wing of the Democratic Party consists of just a handful of individuals, which means that they obviously lack the power to be movers and shakers in Washington, D.C.?

Much of the criticism seems to me misguided in two respects: First, it focuses on alleged failures to achieve what is beyond reach under existing circumstances;

and second, and more significant, it largely ignores very serious failures to achieve what is well within reach, and crucial for survival.

In the first category, it makes very good sense to strongly advocate for Medicare for All and other measures that would bring the U.S. into the “civilized” world, and enable it to realize its potential to become a leading force for progress, as it was in many ways in the New Deal years.

It is a stunning fact that despite its unique advantages, the United States ranks last among the rich societies in health care. The most recent international study of 11 high-income countries finds that, “The United States ranks last overall, despite spending far more of its gross domestic product on health care. The U.S. ranks last on access to care, administrative efficiency, equity, and health care outcomes, but second on measures of care process.” This scandal is mirrored in other measures of social justice. And efforts to overcome it are imperative.

Choice of measures to do so has to begin with assessment of social and political reality. The reality is that the levers of power are in the hands of concentrated wealth, the corporate world and their political representatives. The labor movement has been severely weakened by the neoliberal assault, and other popular movements are in no position to challenge concentrated political-economic power even when their goals are backed by a majority of the population. The Republican half of the Senate is opposed, rock solid, to change that impinges on the welfare of their actual constituency of private wealth and corporate power (posturing aside). Simply look at their conditions on funding the BIP. And enough (so-called moderate) Democrats go along with them to block progressive legislation.

Vigorous advocacy should continue, accompanying the educational and organizational work that is needed to overcome dominant reactionary forces. It is idle, however, to direct criticism to a scattered few for failing to do what cannot be done until this foundational work is accomplished. To do that work is the proper task for the critics.

The second category of criticisms, which is largely lacking, should be directed at failures to undertake actions that are within reach and are of immense significance. I have already mentioned one: sharply cutting the Pentagon budget. A related concern is provocative foreign policy stances, dangerous and readily

avoided in favor of diplomacy.

Keeping just to the domestic scene, there is a great deal that merits serious critical attention. The major Biden initiative is the BIP. As the [business press reports](#), referring to climate policy, “most of Biden’s plans for radical change can’t be found anywhere” in the bill. The “radical” proposals that can’t be found are in fact moderate measures that are essential for escape from catastrophe.

The few progressives in Congress, backed by Sunrise Movement, have said they will not vote for the BIP unless Congress moves on a subsequent legislation that includes the full range of necessary proposals. The fate of the contemplated larger bill is very much in doubt.

While this failure is receiving at least some attention, there is more that is passing in silence and is truly ominous. *AP reports* that, “Approvals for companies to drill for oil and gas on U.S. public lands are on pace this year to reach their highest level since George W. Bush was president, underscoring President Joe Biden’s reluctance to more forcefully curb petroleum production in the face of industry and Republican resistance.” The reference is to reserves already under lease but not authorized.

While there are legal issues about blocking prior leases, there seems to be plenty of room for executive action. Much had been hoped for from Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, who while in Congress had adamantly opposed drilling on federal lands and opposed fracking, and had co-sponsored the original Green New Deal. But the signs so far are hardly encouraging — and one can’t reiterate often enough that there is not much time.

In this domain, critical commentary is well warranted. And even more so, direct engagement and action.

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With Earth On Edge, Climate Crisis Must Be Treated Like Outbreak Of A World War



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Humanity and the environment are under massive assault by global warming caused by human activities.

The new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released today, August 9, 2021—the first of four that make up the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment report—reiterates in scientific language (it deals with the physical science basis of

global warming) what we have already known for quite some time from scores of previous studies: humanity faces a climate emergency, global warming is human driven, major climate changes are irreversible, and time is running out to avoid a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions.

It is, nonetheless, an extremely valuable report because a damning indictment of humanity's wholly destructive actions towards all life on Earth now carries the stamp of approval by the world's most authoritative voice on climate science. And, ironically enough, the new IPCC's 6th Assessment climate report is also approved by the very same entities—195 member governments—largely responsible, although surely not all to the same extent, for the looming global climate catastrophe.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres described the report as “a code red for humanity.” U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry said the report made clear the “overwhelming urgency of this moment.” And U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the report is “sobering reading” and should serve as a “wake-up call” for global leaders ahead of the COP26 summit, which will be held in Glasgow from 31 October—12 November 2021.

The planet is expected to warm by at least 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2040, according to the IPCC's latest findings. But the report also underscores the key point that, without “immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions,” even limiting warming to even 2 degrees “will be beyond reach.”

The IPCC's latest report points to temperatures rising faster than previously thought. In fact, on current trends the world is moving fast towards 3 degrees Celsius.

Coincidentally, once the average global temperature rises 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level, the planet will experience a surge in climatic tipping points, resulting in fiercer heatwaves, melting ice, rising sea levels, and severe droughts.

Yet, the scientists behind the writing of the latest IPCC report say that the worse can be avoided if the world acts fast. In other words, rescuing the planet comes down to politics—and economics. And to human nature, one might add.

There is no doubt that the task ahead is exceedingly difficult, to say the least. A global existential crisis must be addressed in a world occupied by primarily

egoistic and highly imperfect creatures; where the nation-state remains the primary political unit; and with an economic system in place that is destructive and unsustainable. Nonetheless, the odds can be overcome because it's either survival or extinction. Reason must prevail, international cooperation needs to replace national antagonisms, and sustainability take priority over short-term profits.

All of the above are realizable goals through a political decision to move away from the fossil fuel economy and, in turn, to implement a green new deal on a global scale.

World War II was won through economic breakthroughs, technological cooperation, and the formation of a primary alliance against the Axis powers.

The climate crisis must be treated like a world war—World War III. Humanity and the environment are under massive assault by global warming caused by human activities. The biggest polluters on the planet—U.S., China, India, Russia, Japan, Germany—must form an alliance to lead the global economy away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible. The rich countries, which are responsible for the climate crisis, also have a responsibility to finance the bulk of the transition to a global green economy. Moreover, various studies have shown that financing the Global Green New Deal is not a particularly challenging task. UMass-Amherst economist Robert Pollin, for example, has argued that there are several large-scale funding sources for the greening of the global economy, and they include things such as carbon tax, the transfer of funds out of military budgets, lending programs introduced by Central Banks, and the elimination of all fossil fuel subsidies. He has also estimated, a figure corroborated by other similar studies, that the cost of the clean energy transformation would require an average spending of about \$4.5 trillion per year between 2024 and 2050 (which is when most countries have committed to reaching zero emissions).

In sum, all is not yet lost, which is also the conclusion of the IPCC's latest report. Of course, whether we can overcome the institutional, structural, and even intrinsic obstacles to designing a long-term, truly sustainable world economy remains to be seen. But if we convince ourselves that combatting the climate crisis is equivalent to fighting a world war, we do have a realistic chance of rescuing planet Earth.

Source:

<https://www.commondreams.org/earth-edge-climate-crisis-must-be-treated-outbreak-world-war>

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Is A Return To Barbarism Unavoidable?



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A cursory glance at the state of today's world will give pause to anyone wishing to celebrate humanity's progress. In fact, evidence abounds that the possibility of a reversion to barbarism should not be rejected as too far-fetched.

We live in a period of great global complexity, confusion and uncertainty. We are in the midst of a whirlpool of events and developments that are eroding our capability to manage human affairs in a way that is conducive to the attainment of a political and economic order based on stability, justice and sustainability. Indeed, the contemporary world is fraught with perils and challenges that will test severely humanity's ability to maintain a steady course towards anything resembling a civilized life.

For starters, we have been witnessing the gradual erosion of socio-economic gains in much of the advanced industrialized world since the late 1970s, along with the rollback of the social state, while a tiny percentage of the population is wealthy beyond imagination that compromises democracy, subverts the “common good” and promotes a culture of dog-eat-dog world. The pitfalls of massive economic inequality were identified even by ancient scholars, such as Aristotle, and yet we are still allowing the rich and powerful not only to dictate the nature of society we live in but also to impose conditions that make it seem as if there is no alternative to the dominance of a system in which the interests of the rich have primacy over social needs.

In this context, the political system known as representative democracy has fallen completely into the hands of a moneyed oligarchy which controls humanity’s future. Democracy no longer exists in any meaningful sense. The main function of the citizenry in so-called “democratic” societies is to elect periodically the officials who are going to manage a system designed to serve the interests of a plutocracy and of global capitalism. The “common good” is dead, and in its place we have atomized, segmented societies in which the weak, the poor and powerless are left at the mercy of the gods.

The above features capture rather accurately, in my view, the socio-economic landscape and political culture of “late capitalism.” Nonetheless, the prospects for radical social change do not appear highly promising. Darkening times, strangely enough, have never favored the Left. And today’s Left appears preoccupied with identity politics and culture, while unified ideological gestalts guiding social and political action towards the building of a new socio-economic social order are sorely missing. What we may see then emerge in the years ahead is an even harsher and more authoritarian form of capitalism.

Then, there is the global warming phenomenon, which threatens to lead to the collapse of much of civilized life if it continues unabated. The extent to which the contemporary world is capable of addressing the effects of the climate crisis—heatwaves, frequent wildfires, longer periods of drought, rising sea levels, waves of mass migration — is indeed very much in doubt. Moreover, it is also unclear if a transition to clean energy sources, which is slow to emerge, even suffices at this point in order to contain the further rising of temperatures. To be sure, the global climate crisis will produce in the not-too-distant future major economic disasters, social upheavals and political instability.

If the climate change crisis is not enough to make one convinced that we live in ominously dangerous times, add to the above picture the ever-present threat of nuclear weapons. In fact, the threat of a nuclear war or the possibility of nuclear attacks is probably more pronounced in today's global environment than any other time since the dawn of the atomic age. A multi-polar world with nuclear weapons is a far more unstable environment than a bipolar world with nuclear weapons, particularly if we take into account the growing presence and influence of non-state actors, such as extreme terrorist organizations, and the spread of irrational and/or fundamentalist thinking, which has emerged as the new plague in many countries around the world, including first and foremost the United States.

The above reflections are not intended to cause despair, or even to suggest that there hasn't been improvement on some fronts, but only to show that human progress is not linear and that societal regression can easily take place under a socio-economic order designed to enhance the power of a few at the expense of society as a whole, which is indeed the trademark of neoliberal capitalism. Nations rise and fall, and even our ability to use reason does not necessarily increase with time and with the further advance of science.

As a matter of fact, a good argument can be made that we live today in a new age of unreason.

Science is still rejected by many people, objectivity and truth have become contested terms, and we are delaying the end of the fossil fuel age because we are accustomed to doing things in a particular way. Economics, politics, and psychology are all at work behind humanity's apparent inability or unwillingness to alter course with regard to energy production and consumption even though we know that fossil fuels are destroying the environment by producing large amounts of greenhouse gases which trap heat and raise temperature across the globe.

Of course, capitalism itself is a highly irrational system for meeting human needs and wants; yet it's been around for more than 500 years and predictions of a post-capitalist future knocking on our door should be taken with a grain of salt. Capitalism has demonstrated an uncanny ability to evolve, and can easily co-exist with different types of regimes, ranging from social-democracy to dictatorship.

But now it is ruining the Earth, and unless we can this irrational economic system and, above all else, do away with its addiction to fossil fuels, the collapse

of civilized social order is a near certainty. Then the floodgates of barbarism will be wide open.

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