Chomsky: We Need Genuine International Cooperation To Tackle The Climate Crisis

Noam Chomsky

Global warming is accelerating, bringing the world close to the edge of the precipice. Heat waves, floods and deaths are major news, and as *Truthout* has reported, "this summer's record-breaking temperatures caused by a climate catastrophe that, until recently, even the most pessimistic climatologists thought was still two or three decades out." Yet, as Noam Chomsky points out in the interview below, corporate media devoted almost as much coverage in one day to a space cowboy than it did the entire year of 2020 to the biggest crisis facing humanity.

Is the world losing the war against climate change? Why is there still climate crisis denial and inactivism? The choice is clear: We need global action to tame global warming or face apocalyptic consequences, says Chomsky, a globally renowned public intellectual who is Laureate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Arizona and Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and is the author of more than 150 books on topics such as linguistics, international affairs, U.S. foreign policy, political economy and mass media.

C.J. Polychroniou: Climate emergency facts are piling up almost on a daily basis — extreme heat waves in various parts of the U.S. and Canada, with temperatures rising even above 49 degrees Celsius (over 120 degrees Fahrenheit); deadly

floods in western Europe, with close to 200 dead and hundreds remaining unaccounted for in the flooding; and Moscow experienced its second-hottest June. In fact, the extreme weather conditions even have climate scientists surprised, and they are now wondering about the accuracy of prediction models. What are your thoughts on these matters? It appears that the world is losing the war against global warming.

Noam Chomsky: You probably remember that three years ago, Oxford physicist Raymond Pierrehumbert, a lead author of the just-released Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, wrote that "it's time to panic…. We are in deep trouble."

What has been learned since only intensifies that warning. An IPCC draft report leaked to *Agence France-Presse* in June 2021 listed irreversible tipping points that are ominously close, warning of "progressively serious, centuries-long and, in some cases, irreversible consequences."

Last November 3 was a narrow escape from what might well have been indescribable disaster. Another four years of Trump's passionate racing to the abyss might have reached those tipping points. And if the denialist party returns to power, it may be too late to panic. We are indeed in deep trouble.

The leaked IPCC draft was from before the extreme weather events of summer 2021, which shocked climate scientists. Heating of the planet "is pretty much in line with climate model predictions from decades ago," climate scientist Michael Mann observed, but "the rise in extreme weather is exceeding the predictions." The reason seems to be an effect of heating of the atmosphere that had not been considered in climate studies: wobbling of the jet stream, which is causing the extreme events that have plagued much of the world in the past few weeks.

The frightening news has a good side. It may awaken global leaders to recognition of the horrors that they are creating. It's conceivable that seeing what's happening before their eyes might induce even the GOP and its *Fox News* echo chamber to indulge in a glimpse of reality.

We have seen signs of that in the COVID crisis. After years of immersion in their world of "alternative facts," some Republican governors who have been mocking precautions are taking notice, now that the plague is striking their own states because of lack of preventive measures and vaccine refusal. As Florida took the

lead nationwide in cases and deaths, Gov. Ron DeSantis backed way (only partially) from his ridicule — eliciting charges of selling out to the enemy from party stalwarts and perhaps endangering his presidential aspirations. A shift which might, however, be too late to influence the loyal party base that has been subjected to a stream of disinformation.

Possibly the sight of cities drowning and burning up may also dent GOP-*Fox* loyalty to the slogan "Death to intelligence, Viva death," borrowed from the annals of fascism.

The denialism of environmental destruction naturally has an impact on public opinion. According to the most recent polls, for 58 percent of Republicans, climate change is "not an important concern." A little over 40 percent deny that humans make a significant contribution to this impending catastrophe. And 44 percent think that "climate scientists have too much influence on climate policy debates."

If there ever is a historical reckoning of this critical moment in history — possibly by some alien intelligence after humans have wrecked this planet — and if a Museum of Evil is established in memory of the crime, the GOP-*Fox* dyad will have a special room in their honor.

Responsibility is far broader, however. There is no space to review the dismal record, but one small item gives the general picture. The indispensable media analysis organization *FAIR* reports a study comparing coverage on morning TV of the climate crisis with Jeff Bezos's space launch: 267 minutes in all of 2020 on the most important issue in human history, 212 minutes on a single day for Bezos's silly PR exercise.

Returning to your question, humanity is quite clearly losing the war, but it is far from over. A better world is possible, we know how to achieve it, and many good people are actively engaged in the struggle. The crucial message is to panic now, but not to despair.

One of the most worrisome developments regarding the climate crisis is that while virtually all of the published climate science shows the impacts of global warming are increasingly irreversible, climate skepticism and inactivism remain quite widespread. In your view, is climate crisis denial motivated by cultural and

economic factors alone, or is there possibly something else also at work? Specifically, I am wondering if there is a connection between postmodern attacks on science and objectivity and climate science denial and inactivism.

There was a skeptical crisis in the 17th century. It was real, a significant moment in intellectual history. It led to a much better understanding of the nature of empirical inquiry. I'm not convinced that the postmodern critique has improved on this.

With regard to your question, I doubt that the postmodern critique has had much of an impact, if any, outside of rather narrow educated circles. The major sources of climate science denial — in fact much broader rejection of science — seem to me to lie elsewhere, deep in the culture.

I was a student 75 years ago. If evolution was brought up in class, it was preceded by what's now called a trigger warning: "You don't have to believe this, but you should know what some people believe." This was in an Ivy League college.

Today, for large parts of the population, deeply held religious commitments conflict with the results of scientific inquiry. Therefore, science must be wrong, a cult of liberal intellectuals in urban dens of iniquity infected by people who are not "true Americans" (no need to spell out who *they* are). All of this has been inflamed by the very effective use of irrationality in the Trump era, including his skillful resort to constant fabrication, eroding the distinction between truth and falsehood. For a showman with deeply authoritarian instincts, and few principles beyond self-glorification and abject service to the welfare of the ultrarich, there's no better slogan than: "Believe me, not your lying eyes."

The organization that Trump now owns, which years ago was an authentic political party, had already moved on a path that provided a generous welcome to such a figure. We've discussed previously how the brief Republican flirtation with reality on environmental destruction during the McCain campaign was quickly terminated by the Koch brothers' campaign of intimidation. The last time Republican leaders spoke freely without obeisance to Trump, in the 2016 primaries, all were loyal climate denialists, or worse.

Scientists are human. They're not above criticism, nor their institutions. One can find error, dishonesty, childish feuds, all of the normal human flaws. But to be critical of *science* as such is to condemn the human quest to understand the world

in which we live. And truly to abandon hope.

Many discussions on the climate crisis revolve around "equity" and "justice." Leaving aside the question of "climate equity vs. climate justice," especially in the context of the Paris Agreement, how much importance should we assign to these debates in the context of the overall goal of decarbonizing the global economy, which is obviously the only way to tackle the existential crisis of global warming?

It shouldn't be overlooked that it is the small, very affluent minority, most of them in the rich countries, who have overwhelming responsibility for the environmental crisis, in the past and right now. Decarbonizing and concern for equity and justice, therefore, considerably overlap. Beyond that, even on narrow pragmatic grounds, putting aside moral responsibility, the major socioeconomic changes required for the necessary scale of decarbonization must enlist committed mass popular support, and that will not be achieved without a substantial measure of justice.

Robert Pollin has been making the case for a Global Green New Deal as the only effective way to tackle global warming, and the two of you are co-authors of the recently published work, Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet. No doubt, we need internationalism in the fight against climate breakdown because, as you have so aptly put it yourself, it is either "extinction or internationalism." My question to you is twofold: Firstly, how do you understand "internationalism" in the current historical juncture where, in spite of all of the globalizing processes under way in the course of the past 40 or 50 years, the nation-state remains the central agency? And, secondly, what system changes are required to give "internationalism" a real fighting chance in the war against the apocalyptic consequences of global warming which are already knocking at humanity's door?

There are many forms of internationalism. It's worthwhile to think about them. They carry lessons.

One form of internationalism is the specific kind of "globalization" that has been imposed during the neoliberal years through a series of investor-rights agreements masquerading as free trade. It constitutes a form of class war.

Another form of internationalism is the Axis alliance that brought us World War II. A pale reflection is Trump's sole geostrategic program: construction of an alliance

of reactionary states run from Washington, including as one core component the Middle East Abraham Accords and its side agreements with the Egyptian and Saudi dictatorships, taken over by Biden.

Still another form of internationalism has been championed on occasion by workers' movements, in the U.S. by the "Wobblies," the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Other unions, too, have the term "international" in their names, a relic of commitment to true internationalism.

In Europe, the most eloquent spokesperson for this form of internationalism was Rosa Luxemburg. The conflict between internationalism and chauvinism came to a head with the outbreak of World War I. Chauvinism conquered. The Socialist International collapsed. In Luxemburg's acidic words, the slogan, "Proletarians of all countries united" was abandoned in favor of "Proletarians of all countries cut each other's throat."

Luxemburg held true to the internationalist vision, a rare stance. In all countries, intellectuals across the political spectrum rallied enthusiastically to the chauvinist cause. Those who did not were likely to find their way to prison, like Luxemburg: Karl Liebknecht, Bertrand Russell, Eugene Debs. The IWW was crushed by state-capital violence.

Turning to the present, we find other manifestations of internationalism. When the COVID pandemic broke out in early 2020, the rich countries of central Europe at first managed to get it more or less under control, a success that collapsed when Europeans chose not to forego their summer vacations.

While Germany and Austria were still in fairly good shape in early 2020, there was, however, a severe pandemic in northern Italy a few miles to their south, within the Europe Union. Italy did benefit from true internationalism — not on the part of its rich neighbors. Rather, from the world's one country with internationalist commitments: Cuba, which sent doctors to help, as it did elsewhere, extending a record that goes far back. Among others, Panama received assistance from Cuba, but the U.S. took care of that. In its final 2020 report, Trump's Department of Health and Human Services proudly announced that it had successfully pressured Panama to expel Cuban doctors to protect the hemisphere from Cuba's "malign" influence.

The malign influence, spelled out in the early days of Cuban independence in

1959, was that Cuba might infect Latin America with its "successful defiance" of U.S. policies since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. To prevent this threat, the U.S. launched a major campaign of terror and economic strangulation, following the logic spelled out at the State Department in 1960 by Lester Mallory. He recognized, as U.S. intelligence knew, that the "majority of Cubans support Castro," and that the "only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship." Therefore, "it follows that every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba … to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."

The policy has been rigorously followed with bipartisan fervor in the face of unanimous world opposition (Israel excepted). The days of "decent respect for the opinions of mankind" have long faded to oblivion, along with such frivolities as the UN Charter and the rule of law. It is astonishing that Cuba has survived the relentless assault.

The successes of the policy of strangulation and torture are reported with no little exuberance, an unusual exhibition of sadistic cowardice. Among the many popular protests underway in Latin America, one is front page news: in Cuba, giving Biden an opportunity to slap even more sanctions on the "villain" for its resort to abusive measures to suppress the demonstrations, which appear to be mostly about "economic dissatisfaction and hardship," and failures of the authoritarian government to respond in timely and effective fashion.

Cuba's unique internationalism is also undermined, freeing the world from any departure from the norm of self-interest, rarely breached in more than the most limited ways.

That must change. It is by now broadly understood that hoarding of vaccines by the rich countries is not only morally obscene but also self-destructive. The virus will mutate in countries with nondominant economies, and among those refusing vaccination in the rich countries, posing severe dangers to everyone on Earth, the rich included. Much more seriously, heating of the planet also knows no borders. There will be nowhere to hide for long. The same is true of the growing threat of nuclear war among major powers: the end.

Rosa Luxemburg and the Wobblies sketched the kinds of "system changes"

toward which humanity should strive, in one or another way. Short of the goals they envisioned, steps must be taken toward engaging an informed and concerned public in international institutions of solidarity and mutual aid, eroding borders, recognizing our shared fate, committing ourselves to working together for the common good instead of "cutting each other's throats."

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Capitol Attack Inquiry Reveals The Extraordinary Influence Of White

Supremacist Ideology

C J
Polychroniou

Without racism running deep in their DNA, Trump's supporters would not have listened to a raving maniac president encouraging violence in order to remain in power.

As the Capitol attack inquiry began with emotional testimony by police officers who came face-to-face with Trump's racist and proto-fascist mob, one cannot help but draw the conclusion that what happened on January 6, 2021, a day that will also live in infamy, is that the chickens came home to roost.

The racist system that has prevailed for nearly 250 years got for a taste of its own medicine on that day as a large crowd of white Americans attacked the very foundation of the country. Calling white police officers "traitors" and using racial slurs against black officers speak volumes about the mentality of Trump's mob, which today has completely taken over the Republican party.

Make no mistake about it. Without racism running deep in their DNA, Trump's supporters would not have listened to a raving maniac president encouraging violence in order to remain in power.
Trumpism is above all a racist movement, with strong proto-fascist principles, that compares favorably well to the political movement that dominated life in South Africa from 1948 through the 1990s.

Of course, the history of the United States, just like that of South Africa, has been locked in century-old patterns of bigotry, racism, and discrimination.

Lest we forget, even Hitler and the Nazis were inspired by America's racist laws, as James Q. Whitman's outstanding work Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law (Princeton University Press, 2008) has so powerfully revealed. Whitman argues that Nazi race theorists were not only impressed by America's racist legislation and used it as a model for the Nuremberg Laws which were enacted in 1935, but even found some U.S. race

laws to be too extreme!

In this context, any attempt to ignore or conceal the history of racism in the United States must be interpreted as beyond whitewashing history. Indeed, it should be treated as an explicit effort to keep in its place racial ideology and hegemonic whiteness.

And this is how Trump and his supporters should be treated: first, as 21st century racists who are bent on turning back the hands of time as America is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse than in the past; and, secondly, as proto-fascists who are willing to do anything, including the use of violence, in order to halt progressive political reform from taking place "in the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Donald Trump's "Big Lie" (a technique originally used by Adolph Hitler himself) was and remains a politically devious scheme to delegitimize democratic procedures and ensure in the process of doing so that conservative and reactionary America maintains power and keeps its values intact.

Unsurprisingly perhaps given America's deep traditions of racism and nativism, the "Big Lie" is working exactly in the manner perceived by Joseph Goebbels: "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it." More than two-thirds of Republicans believe in Trump's "Big Lie" that the election was stolen, and it is absolutely clear that the most reactionary party in the advanced world today is more than willing to destroy what is left of American democracy to retake power.

As the testimony of the police officers at the first hearing of the Capitol attack inquiry has reaffirmed, there are very dark forces out there, and thus there is no room for complacency simply because Trump is out of office.

Also, one hopes that sooner or later Trump will eventually be charged with treason for inciting an insurrection against the United States government. But this is highly unlikely given what the orange maniac represents. Indeed, America still has along way to go before accepting the plague of racism in past and present. White supremacist ideology is still alive and kicking as testimony at the first January 6 hearing is making abundantly clear.

Source: https://www.commondreams.org/capitol-attack

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Medicare For All Rallies In 50 Cities Show Big Support For Universal Health Care

The United States is one of the richest countries in the world, yet its poverty rates are higher and its safety nets are far weaker than those of other industrialized nations. It is also the only large rich country without universal health care. In fact, as Noam Chomsky argued in *Truthout*, the U.S. health system is an "international scandal."

Why is the U.S. an outlier with regard to health care? What keeps the country from adopting a universal health care system, which most Americans have supported for many years now? And what exactly is Medicare for All? On the eve of scheduled marches and rallies in support of Medicare for All, led by various organizations such as the Sunrise Movement, Physicians for a National Health

Program, the Democratic Socialists of America and concerned citizens throughout the country, the interview below with Peter S. Arno, a leading health expert, sheds light on some key questions about the state of health care in the United States.

Peter S. Arno is senior fellow and director of health policy research at the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and a senior fellow at the National Academy of Social Insurance. Among his many works is his Pulitzer Prize-nominated book, *Against the Odds: The Story of AIDS Drug Development, Politics & Profits*.

C.J. Polychroniou: U.S. health care is widely regarded as an outlier, with higher costs and worse outcomes than other countries. Why are health care expenditures in the U.S. significantly higher than those of other industrialized countries? And how do we explain poor health outcomes, including life expectancy, compared to most European nations?

Peter Arno: The short answer as to why the U.S. has the highest health care expenditures in the world is simply that, unlike other developed countries, we exercise very few price constraints on our health care products and services, ranging from drugs, medical devices, physician and hospital services to private insurance products. On a broader level, the corporatization and profits generated from medical care may be the most distinguishing characteristics of the modern American health care system. The theology of the market, along with the strongly held mistaken belief that the problems of U.S. health care can be solved if only the market could be perfected, has effectively obstructed the development of a rational, efficient and humane national health care policy.

Despite the U.S.'s outsized spending on health care, its relatively poor health outcomes are beyond dispute. For example, in 2019, the U.S. ranked 36th in the world in terms of life expectancy at birth — behind Slovenia and Costa Rica, not to mention Canada, Japan and all the wealthy countries in Europe. This is not solely, as one might at first think, a function of racial and ethnic health disparities, as dramatic as they are in the U.S. A recent study found that even white people living in the nation's highest-income counties often have worse health outcomes on infant mortality, maternal mortality, and deaths after heart attack, colon cancer and childhood leukemia than the average citizens of Norway, Denmark, and other wealthier countries.

The relatively poor health outcomes in the U.S. require a more nuanced explanation based on income, wealth and power inequalities. These factors drive inadequate and inequitable access to health care. But they also undermine many of the social determinants of health, particularly for poor and vulnerable populations, which fall largely outside the health care sector. These include, for example, higher income, access to healthy food, clean water and air, adequate housing, safe neighborhoods, etc.

Given the above facts, it's important to ask: Why doesn't the U.S. have universal health coverage?

The simple answer is that the economic and political forces that profit greatly from the status quo are opposed to universal health coverage. It's certainly not too complicated to implement such a system — nearly every wealthy country in the world has figured out how it can be done. Many academics and pundits point to surveys indicating that Americans are fearful of change and are satisfied with the status quo, in particular with their employer-based health insurance (which covers more than 150 million workers and their families). In part, these attitudes are understandable. Most people are healthy and thus are not faced with the inequities and indignities that befall those who become ill and must deal with the private insurance industry and a dysfunctional health care system. Additionally, the true costs of health care are often hidden from workers who receive their insurance through jobs in which insurance premiums are automatically deducted from their paychecks. Even less well understood is the fact that we all subsidize employers' contributions to workers' health insurance with more than $300 billion of our tax dollars (employer contributions are not taxed but are considered a line item in the federal budget). But public sentiment is changing as health care expenditures continue to outpace earnings. Over the past 10 years, insurance premiums have risen more than twice as fast as earnings, while deductibles rose more than six times as fast. And the even more rapidly rising price of prescription drugs has particularly captured the public's attention. This is likely because prescription drug prices rose by 33 percent between 2014 and 2020, and the average price of new cancer drugs now exceeds $100,000 per year. There is also an increasing public recognition of the massive and growing medical debt burden. One recent study estimated that nearly 1 out of 5 individuals in the U.S. collectively had $140 billion worth of medical debt in collections in June 2020.

You have done outstanding research on the economics and politics of AIDS. How did your background in AIDS research shape your views on health care and social insurance?

My background in AIDS research, which began in the mid-1980s as the epidemic exploded around the country, highlighted a central weakness of American health care — if you become ill and lose your job, you frequently lose your health insurance. Thus, at the point when you need it most, you lose access to health care. This was driven by the private health insurance profit-maximizing model, the reliance on employment-based insurance and the lack of recognition of health care as a human right. The Affordable Care Act provided some mitigation but, with tens of millions uninsured today, these issues are still with us.

Another dimension of American health care that came into sharper focus for me was the sheer power of dominant stakeholders, such as the pharmaceutical companies, to extract profits with little restraint. The clearest example of this is perhaps the relentless increase in drug prices, which one could argue began when the first AIDS drug, AZT, was marketed at $10,000 per year in 1987; today we have cancer drugs sold at more than 10 times that price.

Medicare for All is now gaining traction in the U.S. What exactly is Medicare for All and how would it work?

The term "Medicare for All," as it is commonly known and described in congressional bills such as the Medicare for All Act of 2021 (H.R. 1976, which currently has 117 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives), is a short-hand expression for a universal, single-payer health care system. Essentially, this means that health care will be provided to all U.S. residents and a single payer — the federal government — will pay all bills. The Act's summary states in part:
Among other requirements, the program must (1) cover all U.S. residents; (2) provide for automatic enrollment of individuals upon birth or residency in the United States; and (3) cover items and services that are medically necessary or appropriate to maintain health or to diagnose, treat, or rehabilitate a health condition, including hospital services, prescription drugs, mental health and substance abuse treatment, dental and vision services, and long-term care.

The bill prohibits cost-sharing (e.g., deductibles, coinsurance, and copayments) and other charges for covered services. Additionally, private health insurers and

employers may only offer coverage that is supplemental to, and not duplicative of, benefits provided under the program.

The "single payer" aspect of Medicare for All has several crucial virtues. First, it would do away with the thousands of private claim processes that currently exist to service the private insurance industry, thereby reducing an enormous amount of bureaucratic waste that is estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars each year. At the same time, with the negotiating power given to the federal government, prices for pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and other medical expenditures could be brought under control. But most importantly, the single-payer approach is the most realistic approach to providing health care to all Americans.

Medicare for All marches and rallies are taking place in scores of cities across the country on Saturday, July 24. In fact, there is ample evidence that most Americans already support universal health care. But can we have health care reform without reforming the political system?

There is no doubt that the road to Medicare for All is an uphill struggle, given the array of political and economic forces that benefit from the status quo. However, the more than 50 marches and rallies around the country on July 24 reflect not only public support for transformative change in our health care system, but the type of movement building that is necessary to carry out this change. A complementary strategy, which could ignite a national consensus, would be a breakthrough success for a Medicare for All-type program at the state level, particularly in large states such as California or New York, where organizing efforts have been underway for several years. This could well have a cascading effect on other states and ultimately at the federal level. The common strategic thread for success at the state or federal level, is building a strong, popular social movement demanding universal health coverage for all.

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, climate change, the political economy of the United States, 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 his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Arabic, Croatian, Dutch, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books; *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*: *The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice*: *Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).

Chomsky: Bolsonaro Is Spreading Trump-Like Fear Of "Election Fraud" In Brazil

Noam Chomsky

Since 2019, Brazil finds itself in the midst of one of its most difficult periods since the end of the military dictatorship in 1985, thanks to the inhumane policies of the Jair Bolsonaro regime which parallel those of Donald Trump's administration.

President Bolsonaro is an apologist for the brutal military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, and there is even the possibility that he may attempt to resort to the military guys who he thinks might back him up in the face of growing opposition to his handling of the pandemic.

Noam Chomsky has followed closely Brazilian and Latin American politics for many decades, and even visited Brazil's former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in prison in 2018. In this interview, he discusses the factors that brought Bolsonaro to power, dissects his policies and compares them to the Trump regime, and assesses what the future may hold for the troubled nation.

C.J. Polychroniou: Jair Bolsonaro — an apologist for torture and dictatorship and part of the global trend towards authoritarianism that brought us Donald Trump — was sworn in as president of Brazil on January 1, 2019. Since that day, his administration has been pushing an agenda with disastrous consequences for democracy and the environment. I want to start by asking you of the conditions in Brazil that brought Bolsonaro to power, a development which coincided with the end of the "pink tide" that had swept across Latin America in the early 2000s.

Noam Chomsky: A lot is uncertain and documentation is slim, but the way it looks to me is basically like this.

With the fall of commodity prices a few years after Lula da Silva left office in 2010, the Brazilian right wing — with U.S. encouragement, if not direct support — recognized an opportunity to return the country to their hands and to reverse the welfare and inclusiveness programs they despised. They proceeded to carry out a systematic "soft coup." One step was impeaching Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff, in utterly corrupt and fraudulent proceedings. The next was to imprison Lula on corruption charges, preventing him from running in (and almost surely winning) the 2018 presidential election. That set the stage for Bolsonaro to be elected on a wave of an incredible campaign of lies, slanders and deceit that flooded the internet sites that most Brazilians use as a main source of "information." There's reason to suspect a significant U.S. hand.

The charges against Lula were withdrawn by the courts after they were completely discredited by Glenn Greenwald's exposure of the shenanigans of the prosecution in connivance with "anti-corruption" (Car Wash) investigator Sergio Moro. Before the exposures, Moro had been appointed Minister of Justice and

Public Security by Bolsonaro, perhaps a reward for his contributions to his election. Moro has largely disappeared from sight with the collapse of his image as the intrepid white knight who would save Brazil from corruption — while, probably not coincidentally, destroying major Brazilian businesses that were competitors to U.S. corporations (which are not exactly famous for their purity).

Though Moro's targets were selective, much of what he revealed is credible — and not difficult to find in Latin America, where corruption is practically a way of life in the political and economic worlds. One can, however, debate whether it attains the level that is familiar in the West, where major financial institutions have been fined tens of billions of dollars, usually in settlements that avoid individual liability. One indication of what the scale might be was given by the London *Economist*, which found over 2000 corporate convictions from 2000-2014. That's just "corporate America," which has plenty of company elsewhere. Furthermore, the notion of "corruption" is deeply tainted by ideology. Much of the worst corruption is "legal," as the legal system is designed under the heavy hand of private power.

Despite Moro's own corruption, much of what he unearthed was real and had been for a long time. His main target, Lula's Workers Party (PT), it appears, did not break this pattern. Partly for this reason, the PT lost an opportunity to introduce the kinds of lasting progressive changes that are badly needed to undermine the rule of Brazil's rapacious and deeply racist traditional ruling classes.

Lula's programs were designed so as not to infringe seriously on elite power, but they were nonetheless barely tolerated in these circles. Their flaw was that they were oriented towards the needs of those suffering bitterly in this highly inegalitarian society. The basic character of Lula's programs was captured in a 2016 World Bank study of Brazil, which described his time in office as a "golden decade" in Brazil's history. The Bank praised Lula's "success in reducing poverty and inequality and its ability to create jobs. Innovative and effective policies to reduce poverty and ensure the inclusion of previously excluded groups have lifted millions of people out of poverty." Furthermore, *Brazil has also been assuming global responsibilities. It has been successful in pursuing economic prosperity while protecting its unique natural patrimony. Brazil has become one of the most important emerging new donors, with extensive engagements particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and a leading player in international climate negotiations. Brazil's*

development path over the past decade has shown that growth with shared prosperity, but balanced with respect for the environment, is possible. Brazilians are rightly proud of these internationally recognized achievements.

Some Brazilians. Not those who consider it their right to wield power in their own interest.

Brazil became an effective voice for the Global South in international affairs, not a welcome development in the eyes of Western leaders, and a particular irritant to the Obama-Biden-Clinton administration when Brazil's foreign minister Celso Amorim came close to negotiating a settlement on Iran's nuclear programs, undercutting Washington's intent to run the show on its own terms.

The Bank report also concluded that with proper policies, the "golden decade" could have persisted after the collapse of commodity prices. That was not to be, however, as the soft coup proceeded. Some analysts have suggested that a crucial turning point was when Dilma announced that profits from newly discovered offshore oil reserves would be directed to education and welfare instead of the eager hands of international investors.

The PT had failed to sink social roots, to such an extent that beneficiaries of its policies were often unaware of their source, attributing the benefits to God or to luck. The corruption, failure of mobilization and lack of structural reform all contributed to Bolsonaro's electoral victory.

Bolsonaro's victory was welcomed with enthusiasm by international capital and finance. They were particularly impressed by Bolsonaro's economic czar, ultra-loyal Chicago economist Paulo Guedes. His program was very simple: in his words, "Privatize Everything," a bonanza for foreign investors. They were, however, disillusioned as Brazil collapsed during the Bolsonaro years and Guedes's promises remained unfulfilled.

Let's talk now specifically about some of Bolsonaro's policies, which have been denounced by activists, economists and organizations such as Human Rights Watch, as well as by Indigenous leaders. And how would you compare his policies to those of Donald Trump?

The analogy is apt. Trump was Bolsonaro's unconcealed model, though not the

only one. In casting his vote to impeach Dilma, he dedicated it to her torturer during the military dictatorship. That's a level of depravity that even his hero Trump didn't reach. His admiration for the dictatorship is also unconcealed, though he does have some criticisms of the military. His prime complaint is that they were too mild. They should have killed 30,000 people as the military did in Argentina next door. He has also criticized the behavior of the military in earlier years. They should have imitated the U.S. cavalry, which virtually eliminated the Native population. Instead, the Brazilian military left remnants in the Amazon. But Bolsonaro has made it quite clear that he intends to overcome that problem.

Like Trump, Bolsonaro's most important policy commitments, by far, are to destroy the prospects for organized human life in the interest of short-term profits for his friends — in his case, mining, agribusiness and illegal logging that have sharply accelerated the destruction of the Amazon forests. Scientists had anticipated, pre-Bolsonaro, that in a few decades, the Amazon would shift from one of the world's greatest carbon sinks to a carbon source, as it transitions from tropical forest to savannah. Thanks to Bolsonaro, that point may already be approaching. For Brazil, the effects will be devastating. Rainfall will sharply decline, with much of the rich agricultural land turning to desert. The world as a whole will suffer a severe blow, a wound that might prove to be lethal. For the Indigenous inhabitants of the forest, the outcome is genocidal.

As elsewhere in the world, the Indigenous in Brazil have been in the forefront for years in trying to protect human society from the depredations of "advanced civilization." But time is growing short, and if the Trumps and Bolsonaros of the world are granted free rein, chances of decent survival are slim.

Again, as in the case of Trump, Bolsonaro's malevolence is not exhausted by his commitment to destroy organized human society — along with the innumerable species that we are quickly driving to extinction. Like Trump, he can claim personal responsibility for tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of COVID deaths, to mention one salient contribution to the welfare of his country. Police killings, overwhelmingly with Black victims, have long been a plague, mounting under Bolsonaro. A particularly shocking recent incident of military assault on a Rio favela reached international headlines.

All too easy to continue.

What is the likelihood that Bolsonaro could face charges in The Hague over the Amazon?

Virtually none. His contributions to global suicide may be particularly severe, but once that door is opened…
Who is going to allow that?

Brazilians took to the streets recently demanding the removal of Bolsonaro over his handling of the pandemic. Indeed, it seems that public opinion has finally turned overwhelmingly against Bolsonaro, and Lula is expected to trounce him in the 2022 elections. However, in a rather unsurprising manner, and reminiscent of his idol Trump, Bolsonaro announced just a few days ago that he may not accept the results of the 2022 election under the current voting system. How likely is the chance that the generals, on whom Bolsonaro has relied on from the first day he got into power, will stay the course and support an attempt of his to stay in power even if he loses next year's presidential election?

Since 2018, Bolsonaro has been claiming that the only way he can be defeated in an election is by fraud. He's even claimed (of course, without evidence) that Dilma actually lost the 2014 election, which she won handily by over 3 million votes, mostly on sharp class lines, by historical standards a slim margin. He's now stepped up the rhetoric, preemptively charging the 2022 election with attempted fraud by his political enemies and telling a crowd of supporters a few weeks ago that, "Elections next year will be clean. Either we have clean elections in Brazil or we don't have elections" (*Jornal do Brasil*, 7-08-21).

Not exactly unfamiliar.

Right now, Lula is well ahead in the polls, just as in 2018, when measures were taken to bar his candidacy. There are legitimate concerns of a recurrence.

Parliamentary inquiries into the devastating mishandling of the pandemic by Bolsonaro's government are now reportedly reaching the military. The three branches of the armed services recently released a statement declaring that no inquiry that impugns the honor of the military will be tolerated.

There have been reports of steps that might be preparation for a military coup, perhaps modeled on the 1964 coup that installed the first of the vicious "National Security States" that terrorized the hemisphere for 20 years.

The pretext for overthrowing the mildly reformist Goulart government in 1964 was the ritual appeal to save the country from "Communism." Something similar could be concocted today.

How would Washington react? There are precedents that suggest an answer. One is 1964. The military coup that overthrew the parliamentary government was lauded by Kennedy-Johnson Ambassador to Brazil Lincoln Gordon as "the most decisive victory for freedom in the mid-twentieth century." As I discuss in *Year 501*, it was a "democratic rebellion" that would help in "restraining left-wing excesses" and should "create a greatly improved climate for private investment" in the hands of the "democratic forces" now in charge. After 21 years of rule, Latin America scholar Stephen Rabe comments in *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, the "democratic forces" left the country in "the same category as the less developed African or Asian countries when it came to social welfare indices" (malnutrition, infant mortality, etc.), with conditions of inequality and suffering rarely matched elsewhere, but a grand success for foreign investors and domestic privilege.

That's putting aside the "systematic use of torture" and other crimes of state documented by the Church-run Truth Commission during the dictatorship's last days.

We should also recall that the reaction to the Brazil coup — and possible involvement in it — was no exception. Rather, it was the norm after 1962, when JFK changed the mission of the Latin American military from anachronistic "hemispheric defense" to very live "internal security." The predictable results were described by Charles Maechling, who led U.S. counterinsurgency and internal defense planning from 1961 to 1966. Kennedy's 1962 decision, he wrote, shifted the U.S. stand from toleration "of the rapacity and cruelty of the Latin American military" to "direct complicity" in their crimes, to U.S. support for "the methods of Heinrich Himmler's extermination squads."

Those who might innocently believe that things have changed can turn to the Obama-Clinton reaction to the military coup in Honduras in 2009, overthrowing the mildly reformist Zelaya government. Their support for the coup, almost alone, helped turn Honduras into one of the murder capitals of the world, stimulating a flood of terrified refugees now cruelly and illegally turned back at the U.S. border, if they can make it that far through the barriers imposed by U.S. clients.

The rich and ugly record might suggest something about Washington's possible reaction to actions by the Brazilian military to "save the country from Communism."

Peruvians elected as their president last month Pedro Castillo, a teacher and labor union leader, but the far right opponent Keiko Fujimori and her supporters are refusing the accept the outcome by crying fraud, allegations which have been rejected by international observers and while both the European Union and the United States praised the conduct of the election. But in places like Chile and Colombia, the right is also under pressure by citizens fed up with neoliberalism. Is another "pink tide" in the making across South America?

In Chile, a remarkable popular uprising is seeking to free the country at last from the clutches of the Pinochet dictatorship, a criminal enterprise backed even more strongly than usual by the U.S., with particular enthusiasm by the "libertarians" who then turned to launching the global neoliberal assault of the past 40 years. Colombia is being subjected to yet another renewal of the state and paramilitary violence escalated by Kennedy in 1962, when his military mission to Colombia, led by Marine Gen. William Yarborough, recommended "paramilitary sabotage and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents," which "should be backed by the United States" — as it has been through many horrifying years, recently Clinton's Plan Colombia.

There is turmoil and uncertainty throughout the hemisphere, including "the colossus of the North." What happens here will, as always, have enormous impact.

Source:
https://truthout.org/articles/chomsky-bolsonaro-is-spreading-trump-like-fear-of-election-fraud-in-brazil/

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websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Arabic, Croatian, Dutch, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books; *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*: *The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors); and *The Precipice*: *Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change*, an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books (scheduled for publication in June 2021).

An Interview With James Boyce: Agrarian Societies, Environmental Economics And Climate Change

C.J. Polychroniou interviews *Professor Emeritus James K. Boyce* about his career exploring agrarian societies, environmental economics and climate change.
This is part of PERI's economist interview series, hosted by C.J. Polychroniou. *It was first posted here.*

C.J. Polychroniou: How did your interest in economics come about, and why did you choose to pursue graduate studies at Oxford University after having completed your undergraduate degree at Yale?

James K. Boyce: Midway through my college years I worked for two years on a land reform and rural development project in the Indian state of Bihar. I had taken introductory economics in my freshman year, but it was in Bihar that I really began to learn and think about how economies function and malfunction.

On returning to Yale I designed an independent major in Agricultural

Development that included some more courses in economics. More importantly, I met my life partner, Betsy Hartmann, who had just come back from working in India, too. After graduating we returned to South Asia and lived for about a year in a village in Bangladesh. Our aim was to write a book that would give readers a window into the lives and perspectives of some of the world's poorest people – an oral history of the present.

The book, *A Quiet Violence*, came out in 1983 after dozens of rejections from publishers. While we were completing it, we pieced together a living among other ways by teaching a Yale seminar on the political economy of world hunger. One book we used in the seminar was *The Political Economy of Agrarian Change* by Keith Griffin, an economist at Oxford. When I decided to go to grad school, I wrote to Keith and asked if he would consider working with me. He sent an encouraging reply, and that is the main reason I went to Oxford. It turned out to be a wonderful place to be. Keith was a splendid mentor, and I was also fortunate to study with Amartya Sen, who introduced me to the deep normative questions of value and distribution that lie at the heart of economic theory. I could not have had better teachers.

CJP: Your early research centered around food and development policy for mainly agrarian societies. What lessons have we learned about agrarian reform and economic growth in developing countries?

JB: In my dissertation I analyzed agricultural growth in Bangladesh and the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal, the two halves of Bengal that were partitioned in 1947 when India and Pakistan became independent nations. My central thesis was that water control – irrigation, drainage, and flood control – is the "leading input" in Asian rice agriculture, and that Bengal's agrarian structure posed formidable obstacles to resolving the attendant problems of coordinated water management and collective action. The self-interest of the larger landowners who dominated rural society often undermined possibilities for improving agricultural performance. It is an example of what is sometimes called the "inefficiency of inequality."

After receiving my doctorate, I embarked on a book about the Philippine economy in the Marcos era. The Philippines was the birthplace of the so-called "green revolution" in Asian rice agriculture, the introduction of highly fertilizer-responsive varieties that allowed major increases in output. In that country, too,

agrarian inequality acted as a brake on growth and on the extent to which the growth that did occur improved the lives of the poor.

The Philippine experience stands in marked contrast to that of South Korea, which was poorer than the Philippines at the end of World War Two. Today South Korea's per capita income is about ten times greater than that of the Philippines, and income inequality is far lower. The superior performance of South Korea in both respects can be traced above all to the fact that the country implemented a serious land-to-the-tiller agrarian reform shortly after the war, whereas the Philippines did not and still has not.

Thoroughgoing land reform was a key distinguishing feature in the postwar economic trajectories of East Asian countries more generally. China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan shared this experience in common despite their diverse political circumstances. Land reform ended the fateful dichotomy between ownership of the land and labor on it. In so doing, it unleashed broad-based growth not only in the agricultural sectors but in the economy as a whole.

CJP: Over the years your research interests have shifted towards environmental economics. Why did the political economy of the environment become such a major focus of your research?

JB: I've been interested in the environment for as long as I can remember. When I started graduate school, there was not a single course on environmental economics at Oxford. This was not unusual for the time. When a faculty member introduced a new course on the subject, I was the only student to show up. We turned this into a two-person study group, working our way through the classic works in the field. It was a rather short list.

I quickly saw connections between economic development and environmental economics. In both arenas, bringing a political-economy lens to bear – that is, asking about not only the size of the pie but also how it is sliced – could help to explain pervasive market failures and government failures. In both arenas, inequalities of power and wealth impede the coordinated action needed to resolve these failures. In both, the self-interest of those on top – those who extract rents from land and power and those who profit from environmentally degrading activities – leads to outcomes that are inefficient as well as inequitable.

When I joined the UMass economics faculty in 1985, the department did not have any courses in environmental economics. I launched a new undergraduate course called "the political economy of the environment." It began with a couple dozen students, and over the years it grew into a larger lecture. Some years later, at the instigation of grad students, I started a graduate course of the same name.

When I had my first sabbatical in the early 1990s, I was a Fulbright scholar at the National University in Costa Rica. There I helped set up a master's program in ecological economics and sustainable development for students from across Central America and the Caribbean. This was when I wrote my first research paper on the political economy of the environment. It was called "Inequality as a Cause of Environmental Degradation," and it was published in the journal *Ecological Economics* in 1994.

At around the same time, I also began working on the economics of violent conflict and peacebuilding, another arena where large inequalities of wealth and power often lead to dreadful outcomes for the majority of people. I visited El Salvador soon after the signing of the peace accords that ended the country's long civil war. Soon thereafter the United Nations Development Program in San Salvador asked me to organize a study on the interface between economic policies and peace implementation. The resulting book, titled *Economic Policy for Building Peace*, led me onto work in other war-torn societies, including Bosnia, Guatemala, and Cambodia. Peacebuilding became another major focus for my research and writing.

In the past decade or so I have concentrated mostly on the environment. Climate destabilization in particular has become an urgent global issue, and my own country has been more part of the problem than part of the solution. Like many other Americans, I feel a sense of obligation to try to do something about it.

CJP: Environmental justice figures prominently in your analyses of climate change and climate policy. Why and how?

JB: Environmental justice (EJ) is about the distribution of environmental harms (and also the distribution of benefits from using and abusing the environment). In the 1980s pioneering research by Dr. Robert Bullard and others documented the fact that low-income communities and racial and ethnic minorities in the United States often bear disproportionate burdens from pollution and other

environmental hazards.

EJ activists and researchers have helped to reframe environmental problems to ask not only what people do to nature but also what we do to each other. Environmental costs are not impersonal "externalities" that fall randomly across the populace; these costs are often inflicted on communities that are disadvantaged both politically and economically, that is, in terms of both political power and purchasing power. In the U.S. multivariate analyses have shown that race and ethnicity have major impacts on exposure to environmental harm that are independent of income.

Climate change and climate policy intersect with environmental justice in multiple ways. Let me highlight five here.

1. Differential vulnerability: Climate change affects everyone, but throughout the world it is low-income and politically disempowered communities that are at the greatest risk. Many people live precariously close to the margin of survival where droughts, floods, and extreme heat waves can push them over the edge. They cannot afford private insurance, and typically they lack the political leverage to obtain insurance from the public sector. They often live in especially vulnerable settings, such as low-lying lands that are susceptible to storm surges. We saw these multiple factors clearly at work when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005.

2. Disproportionate impacts of co-pollutants: Fossil fuels are not only the main source of the carbon dioxide and methane emissions that are destabilizing the Earth's climate, but also the source of a slew of hazardous air pollutants that constitute a leading cause of premature mortality around the world. From an environmental justice standpoint, it is crucial that policies to reduce the use of fossil fuels take "co-pollutant" impacts into account and ensure that these are reduced first and foremost in the most vulnerable communities.

3. Carbon dividends: If the climate policy mix includes tight restrictions on the supply of fossil fuels allowed to enter the economy – and it must to guarantee that we achieve ambitious targets for emission reductions – this supply constraint will raise the price of fossil fuels, much as OPEC supply restrictions raised oil prices in years past. In many countries, including the U.S., higher fuel prices are tantamount to a regressive tax: as a percentage of expenditure (though not in

absolute dollar terms) fuel price increases hit low-income households harder than middle class households, and the middle class harder than the rich. To offset this regressive impact and its political repercussions, a substantial share of the revenue from auctioning permits to bring fossil carbon into the economy (or, equivalently, from a carbon tax) can and I believe should be returned directly to the public as equal per person payments. This is something I've studied for a number of years, culminating in my 2019 book, *The Case for Carbon Dividends*. From the standpoint of environmental justice, the gifts of nature – in this case, the limited capacity of the biosphere to safely absorb carbon – are owned equally by all. Pollution should not be free even when it is legal. Those who make use of the limited capacity of our environment to safely dispose of wastes should pay for their use, and the proceeds should be shared by all as equal co-owners.

4. A just transition: Like all major transformations, the shift from the fossil fueled economy of the past to the clean energy economy of the future will result in winners and losers. The overwhelming majority of humankind, including future generations, will benefit immeasurably. But in the course of the transition some people will incur costs. These include losses not only to fossil fuel firms and their shareholders, who can afford them, but also to workers and communities who have depended on the industry for their livelihoods. Policies to assist these workers and communities, many of whom have borne great sacrifices to provide our energy, is another dimension of environmental justice. A just transition also requires investing in the ecological restoration of landscapes that have been damaged by mountaintop removal, coal ash residues, oil spills and other toxic legacies of fossil fuel extraction and combustion.

5. Adjustment for whom? Tragically, the world's failure to respond more quickly and resolutely to the climate emergency means that we're already seeing its impacts and that they are sure to worsen in years ahead. Adjustment to climate change that we have failed to prevent will be a crucial challenge even as we move forward on mitigation. A key question is how the scarce resources available for adaptation – for building sea walls, establishing cooling centers to protect people during heat waves, protecting critical ecosystem functions and the like – will be allocated across competing needs and communities. From the standpoint of environmental justice, a bedrock principle is all lives are equally valuable and deserve equal protection. This is very different from prioritizing the lives and property of those who wield the most purchasing power or the most political

influence.

These and other justice-centered policies can help to build a more egalitarian society in the course of climate change mitigation and adaptation. In turn, building a more egalitarian society will help to advance effective climate policy. The two go hand-in-hand.

CJP: You advocate carbon pricing policies as a means of reducing carbon dioxide and emissions of hazardous air pollutants into the air. Is there evidence that carbon pricing policies work for lowering global warming emissions?

JB: We know that price signals affect consumption and investment decisions. When the price of gasoline went up in the 1970s, for example, as a result of the supply restrictions imposed by OPEC and the Iran-Iraq war, consumers cut back their automobile use and began to demand more fuel-efficient vehicles. Businesses invested in energy efficiency. Governments – federal, state, and local – responded to the price incentive, too, by implementing policies to reduce their use of oil.

Of course, a carbon price is not an end in itself. The end is to curb emissions along a path consistent with stabilizing the Earth's climate. The Paris Agreement's target of holding the rise in average surface temperatures to 1.5-2 °C above the pre-industrial level translates this goal into quantitative terms. Achieving this goal will require cutting emissions at something like 8% per year – if we start now – and even more quickly if we delay further.

Past carbon prices invariably have been too low, far too low, to achieve such steep reductions, even when they have been coupled with other climate policies like public investment and regulatory standards. Politicians routinely succumb to the temptation to err on the side of optimism, hoping that a modest carbon tax (alone or in combination with new regulations, more investment, and moral suasion) will suffice do the job. I would like to believe this too, but just because I hope it's true doesn't mean I think it necessarily is.

This is why I believe we must include in the climate policy mix a hard limit on the amount of fossil carbon that is allowed to enter the economy each year, a limit anchored to targeted reductions of, say, 8% per year. If other climate policies turn out to be adequate to meet this goal, that's great, the limit does not act as a binding constraint. But if they are not sufficient it becomes binding, and a limited

number of permits (also known as allowances), up to the level set by the target, are issued to bring fossil carbon into the economy. I believe these permits should be auctioned to the energy firms, not given away free as under a cap-and-trade policy. Most, if not all, of the value of these permits will be passed on to consumers as higher fuel prices. We need to face up to this reality. And we need to face up to the impact that higher fuel prices will have on working families.

By recycling most or all of the revenue from permit auctions (or from a carbon tax) to the public as equal per person dividends, we can transform the regressive impact of the higher fuel prices into a progressive net impact. If the carbon dividends are delivered in manner that is fair, transparent, and visible (and not buried in the fine print of income taxes or electricity bills), they can help to sustain durable public support for the policy.

CJP: A growing number of environmentalists are adopting the position that economic growth is incompatible with environmental sustainability and any sincere struggle to deal with the climate crisis, but you find this perspective to be flawed and perhaps unrealistic. Why? Can capitalism co-exist with a sustainable, equitable, and environmentally friendly economy?

JB: The first question is whether economic growth is compatible with environmental sustainability, above all climate stabilization. We know that national income (or GDP) is a deeply flawed measure of human well-being. As I wrote in the opening essay of my 2019 book *Economics for People and the Planet*, it is a combination of things that are good, bad, and useless. Anything that carries a price tag in the market gets counted as part of national income, no matter whether it's good (like food and housing), or bad (like the costs of pollution remediation and incarcerating people), or useless (like rat-race spending on "positional goods," a phenomenon described a century ago by the economist Thorstein Veblen). Meanwhile, things that are not exchanged in the marketplace, whether good (like unpaid child care) or bad (like environmental degradation) are not counted even though they can greatly affect human well-being.

If national income is an unsatisfactory measure of well-being, then by the same token the growth of national income ("economic growth") is an unsatisfactory measure of changes in human welfare. When environmentalists and their opponents argue about the "limits to growth," they're thinking about different things: environmentalists think about the bad stuff, while growth proponents

think about the good stuff. When they assume that the good and bad are bound together, both sides repeat the mistake in national income measures: they fail to separate the good from the bad. I believe that we need a new banner: grow the good and shrink the bad. The clean energy transition is an example of doing precisely this.

Your second question is about capitalism. Like socialism, this is a word that carries a lot of baggage. If by capitalism you mean a world where wealth and power are concentrated in a narrow elite, then no, I don't think it's compatible with environmental sustainability or equity. But if you mean an economy where there are markets and private property, co-existing with other kinds of property and other institutions for resource allocation, then yes, I think it is. The same applies to different meanings of socialism.

The market-versus-state dichotomy that framed debates between the "right" and "left" in the 19th and 20th centuries turns out to have been off the mark. More fundamental, and more decisive for the well-being of ordinary people, is the dichotomy between an oligarchic order in which wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few and a democratic society in which they are broadly and equitably shared. This, to my mind, is the most important lesson we can draw from the tumultuous history of the 20th century.

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Radical Political Action Is Our Only Hope To Stop Criminal Negligence Of Climate Emergency

C J
Polychroniou

It can be done. It must be done. For there is no tomorrow if we fail to decarbonize and thus rescue the planet from a climate catastrophe.

Planet Earth is on fire because of global warming, yet there are still untold numbers of climate deniers in our midst, including over 130 elected officials in the U.S. Congress, and the global community's response to the climate crisis continues to be not merely unacceptably slow, but borders on criminal negligence.

Economic, political, and even psychological factors are at play as to why humanity refuses to move away from a "business-as-usual" approach when it comes to taking the drastic but ultimately necessary steps needed to tame global warming, which are none other than complete independence from fossil fuels. Yet, we must direct immediately all political energy towards this goal, otherwise complete climate collapse with apocalyptic consequences is inevitable and irreversible. We know the facts and have the know-how to save the planet. Indeed, human activities are destroying planet Earth, but political action can stop the destruction before it's all over.

The belief that human activity could change temperatures and somehow alter a local climate has been around since antiquity. Of course, ancient civilizations didn't know anything about climate science. We first learned about Earth's natural "greenhouse effect" sometime in the early 1820s, thanks to Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier, a French mathematician and physicist who was the first person to

recognize that the Earth's atmosphere retains heat radiation. Then in the late 1850s the Irish scientist John Tyndall provided the explanation for the phenomenon of the "greenhouse effect" via his discovery that certain gases such as water vapor and carbon dioxide trap heat and warm the atmosphere. And in the late nineteenth century, the Swedish chemist/physicist Svante Arrhenius discovered that various human activities, including fossil fuel combustion, were contributing to the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Moreover, Arrhenius was able to determine through a numerical computation that the temperature in Europe could be lowered by between 4 and 5 degrees Celsius if the levels of carbon dioxide were cut in half, and inversely, if levels of carbon dioxide were to be increased by 50 percent, there would be a warming of between 5 and 6 degrees Celsius.

Still, climatology did not emerge into a major scientific enterprise until after World War II, and it was only in the 1950s when researchers began measuring carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, thanks to David Keeling, a pioneer in modern climate science.

Indicative perhaps of how slow politics and societies in general react to scientific discoveries, the cause-and-effect relationship between the greenhouse effect and global warming does not emerge in public consciousness as a major issue—at least in the United States—until NASA scientist James Hansen's seminal testimony in front of a U.S. Senate Committee on June 23, 1988. This was the first warning to the world at large that the age of global warming had arrived. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's most authoritative voice on climate crisis, was also created in 1988, which, incidentally, was the hottest year on record since the beginning of the century. Since the 1980s, each decade has been warmer than the previous one, with 2020 being one of the hottest years on record. In fact, and while as of this writing the Pacific Midwest is experiencing an unprecedented heatwave, with hundreds of deaths, "there is a 90% likelihood of at least one year between 2021-2025 becoming the warmest on record," according to the WMO Lead Centre for Annual-to Decadal Climate Prediction.

Yet, very little has been done since the late1980s to combat global warming. The Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1997 and entered into effect in 2005, was the first legally binding agreement (pdf) on the climate crisis. But the treaty had severe limitations. First, it applied only to industrialized countries, requiring them to reduce greenhouse gases on average by 5 percent below the 1990 levels from

2008 to 2012. Major emitters like China and India were left out, and the treaty was never ratified by the United States. The Kyoto Protocol was obviously inadequate in addressing global warming, but it was reservedly hailed as a "reasonable first step" (pdf), which was really another way of saying that climate crisis was a problem to be solved by future generations.

Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement that was adopted by virtually every nation in 2015 seemed to offer greater hopes for combating global warming. The primary aim of the Paris Agreement is to limit global warming in this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. However, the treaty not only allows individual countries to determine themselves their preferred course of action for reducing greenhouse gases, but it is not even legally binding. In sum, it is a treaty for combating global warming without any teeth. Hardly surprising, therefore, that a recent Nationally Determined Contributions synthesis report found that "current levels of climate ambition are not on track to meet our Paris Agreement goals." The report corroborates the view of Princeton University environmental scientist Michael Oppenheimer who marked the progress made five years after the signing of the Paris Agreement in terms of the prospect of meeting a 2 degrees Celsius target with a grade of D or F.

The emissions reduction process is indeed moving at a very slow pace when we consider the fact that we need to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050 in order to avoid the worse possible effects of global warming. The Covid-19 pandemic did produce a relatively sharp decline, approximately by 5.8 percent, in global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions. But this does not constitute a "success story" given that at some point more than half of the world economy had come to a forced standstill. Destroying economic activity is not the way to combat global warming. Moreover, as the pandemic experience has shown, even with more than half of the world economy in a lockdown, the reduction in carbon emissions was not as huge as one might have expected, and carbon emissions are now again on the rise. Demand for oil has surged even in the midst of new worries about Covid-19, a development which stresses the point rather forcefully of how addicted the world remains to the fossil fuel economy.

Nonetheless, all is not yet lost. The Green New Deal is gaining traction as more and more people become aware of the way that global warming plunders the planet and affects their very own existence. Green parties across Europe are

making huge gains in local, national, and European parliament elections, all while grassroots responses to the climate crisis are growing worldwide and climate lawsuits are becoming a global trend themselves. As a case in point, a Belgian court ruled recently that state authorities have shown negligence in tackling the climate crisis and "breached the European convention on human rights." Germany's highest court found that the country's climate law is unconstitutional, a decision that has been heralded as a "historic" victory for youth. In the U.S. over fifty organizations have called for a Green New Deal plan for Pacific Northwest Forests as part of a response to the growing threat the climate crisis. And Robert Pollin, professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, has designed scores of commissioned state-level Green New Deals aiming towards a transition to a net-zero emissions economy.

But we are still at the beginning of the war against global warming and the fossil fuel economy and its allies. Powerful interests will continue to stand on the way to saving the planet as long as profits are to be made from any activities associated with fossil fuels. This includes not only the fossil fuel industry itself, which has spent many billions of dollars so far in the U.S. alone opposing clean energy policies and even undermining climate science, but other corporate and financial entities such as banks. Governments too. We need greater public mobilization to exert influence on policymakers. We need many more Sunrise Movements, strong coalitions among civil rights groups, environmental groups, and progressive political forces, and intensification of campaigns and protests against investment in fossil fuels.

It can be done. It must be done. For there is no tomorrow if we fail to decarbonize and thus rescue the planet from a climate catastrophe. Humans are responsible for the impending climate apocalypse, but we also have the power to stop it. All it takes is true commitment and concerted action.

Source: https://www.commondreams.org/radical-political-action

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