Chomsky And Pollin: Just Transition Can Stop Earth From Becoming Uninhabitable

Noam Chomsky

We must act now to heed the UN secretary-general's warning that climate change is "making our planet uninhabitable."

Climate change is "making our planet uninhabitable," said UN Secretary-General António Guterres in late March. Indeed, the threats of the impending climate crisis have become very tangible, and the world's top scientists are warning that the Earth is likely to pass a dangerous temperature threshold very soon unless we act now. Nonetheless, the gap between what is happening to the planet and what is needed in terms of climate action is growing rather than decreasing because, as Noam Chomsky points out in the joint interview with Robert Pollin that follows, "this is how the system works," unless collective action forces those in power to change course. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly evident that a just transition is pivotal to transformative climate action for workers, communities, and all regions of the world. Pollin shows what a just transition entails and why it is so important.

Robert Pollin

Noam Chomsky is institute professor emeritus in the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy at MIT and laureate professor of linguistics and Agnese Nelms Haury Chair in the Program in Environment and Social Justice at the University of Arizona. One of the world's most cited scholars and a public intellectual regarded by millions of people as a national and international treasure, Chomsky has published more than 150 books in linguistics, political and social thought, political economy, media studies, U.S. foreign policy, and world affairs. His latest books are *Illegitimate Authority*: *Facing the Challenges of Our Time* (with C. J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2023); *The Secrets of Words* (with Andrew Moro; MIT Press, 2022); *The Withdrawal*: *Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power*(with Vijay Prashad; The New Press, 2022); and *The Precipice*: *Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Social Change* (with C. J. Polychroniou; Haymarket Books, 2021).

Robert Pollin is distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. One of the world's leading progressive economists, Pollin has published scores of books and academic articles on jobs and macroeconomics, labor markets, wages and poverty, and environmental and energy economics. He was selected by *Foreign Policy* Magazine as one of the 100 "Leading Global Thinkers for 2013." Chomsky and Pollin are coauthors of *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal*: *The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with C. J. Polychroniou: Verso 2020) and are now working together on a new book on the climate emergency.

C. J. Polychroniou: Noam, it has been clear for decades that human activities are having a huge impact on the physical environment in many critical ways, and that we are the cause of global warming, with the burning of fossil fuels accounting for nearly 90 percent of all carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions. It is true, of course, that

some concrete actions have been taken over the past three decades or so to stop environmental degradation and reduce carbon emissions, but the gap between what is happening to the planet, which includes a sharp decline in biodiversity, and what is needed in terms of environmental and climate action seems to be growing rather than decreasing. Indeed, one could even argue that our handling of the climate crisis is flawed as evidenced by the growing emphasis on carbon capture technologies rather than doing away with fossil fuels. Another revealing example of governments constantly advancing highly incomplete courses of action with regard to climate change is the adoption of a historic new law from governments across the European Union today toward deforestation. European governments have agreed to ban the import of goods linked to deforestation, but the new deforestation law does not oblige European banks or investors to stop funding deforestation. So, if it is the link between policy making and economic interests that prevents us from implementing fully comprehensive strategies to stop environmental destruction and prevent global warming from becoming worse, what ways are there out of this conundrum?

Noam Chomsky: Two years ago, John Kerry, Biden's special envoy on climate, reported that he'd been "told by scientists that 50% of the reductions we have to make (to get to near zero emissions) by 2050 or 2045 are going to come from technologies we don't yet have."

While intended to strike a note of optimism, this forecast was perhaps a little less than reassuring.

A few months later, as U.S. representative at the COP27 Glasgow international conference on climate, Kerry was still more optimistic. He reported exuberantly that now the market is on our side, as asset managers pledge tens of trillions of dollars to overcoming the impending catastrophe.

A qualification was noted by political economist Adam Tooze: The pledge holds as long as the investments are profitable and "de-risked" by guarantees from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

The "technologies we don't yet have" remain technologies we don't yet have or can realistically envision. Some progress has been reported, but it is very far from what would be required to deal with the impending crisis.

The present danger is that what must be done to eliminate fossil fuel use is being

set aside on the pretext that some remote technological breakthrough will ride to the rescue. Meanwhile we can continue to burn up the Earth and pour even more cash into the bulging profits of the fossil fuel industry, now so overflowing that they don't know what to do with their incredible riches.

The industry of course welcomes the pretext. It might even spare some cash for carbon capture — maybe as much as a rounding error for their accountants — as long as the usual qualification holds: funded by the friendly taxpayer and de-risked. Meanwhile more federal lands are opened up for fossil fuel production, more gifts are provided to them like the 300-mile long Mountain Valley Pipeline – Manchin's condition for not tanking the global economy — and other such amenities.

In the background of the euphoria about asset managers and technological miracles lies the Stimson Doctrine, enunciated by Secretary of War Henry Stimson 80 years ago as he was overseeing the huge mobilization for war: "If you are going to try to go to war, or to prepare for war, in a capitalist country, you have got to let business make money out of the process or business won't work."

That's how the system works — as long as we let it.

In the early stages of the war, business was reluctant to accept the bargain. Most hated the reformist New Deal and did not want to cooperate with a government not entirely devoted to their interests. But when the spigot was opened, such reservations disappeared. The government poured huge resources into war production. Keeping to the Stimson Doctrine, policies were structured to ensure great profits for business contractors. That laid the basis for what was much later criticized as the military-industrial complex but might more accurately be described as the not-so-hidden system of U.S. industrial policy, the device by which the public funds the emerging high-tech economy: A highly inefficient system, as elaborated by Seymour Melman and others, but an easy way to gain congressional approval for what approved rhetoric calls a marvelous system of free enterprise that helps the munificent "job creators" labor day and night for the benefit of all.

Eisenhower apparently at first wanted to use the term "military-industrial-congressional complex." That would have been appropriate. Why does Congress go along? One major reason is provided by political economist Thomas Ferguson's

well-confirmed "investment theory of politics." In a current updating, once again corroborating the theory, he summarizes the crucial conclusion simply:
'The dominating fact about American politics is its money-driven character. In our world, both major political parties are first of all bank accounts, which have to be filled for anything to happen. Voters can drive politics, but not easily. Unless they are prepared to invest very substantial time and effort into making the system work or organizations that they control will – such as unions or genuine grassroots political organizations – only political appeals that can be financed go live in the system, unless (of course) as helpful diversions.'

That insight into "our world" also offers advice as to ways out of the conundrum. And also, ways to confront the reigning Stimson Doctrine, which is a virtual epitaph for the human species in the context of the awesome and imminent threat of heating the earth beyond the level of recovery.

It is suicidal to look away from the gap between what is happening to the planet, which includes a sharp decline in biodiversity, and what is needed in terms of environmental and climate action seems to be growing rather than decreasing. When we do look, we find a mixed picture.

One critical case is the Amazon Forest. Its central role in global ecology is well understood. It is self-sustaining, but if damaged can shift rapidly to irreversible decline, with catastrophic effects for the region, and the entire world.

During Bolsonaro's term in Brazil, agribusiness, mining and logging enterprises were unleashed in an assault on the forest and the Indigenous societies that have long lived there in harmony with nature. To take just one measure, "Deforestation across Brazil soared between 2019 and 2022 under the then president, Jair Bolsonaro, with cattle ranching being the number one cause." More than 800 million trees were destroyed for beef export. The main researchers, the Indigenous peoples expert Bruno Pereira and his journalist collaborator Dom Phillips, were murdered while conducting their work in the Amazon.

Brazilian scientists report that some sectors of the forest have already passed the tipping point, transitioning to savannah, permanent destruction.

Lula's election in 2022 offered hope to limit, perhaps end, the destruction. As minister of the environment, he appointed Marina Silva, a courageous and dedicated environmentalist, with a truly impressive record. But "the masters of

mankind" who own the economy (in Adam Smith's phrase) never rest. Their congressional supporters are chipping away at Silva's jurisdiction.

Those who hope to save the world are not resting either. Brazilian ecologists are seeking ways to support Indigenous communities that have been the guardians of the forest, and to extend their reach.

The struggle continues.

It continues on other fronts as well. Some good news from China is summarized in the *Washington Post*. Reviewing many studies, the *Post* reports that China is far in the lead globally in "churn[ing] out batteries, solar panels and other key ingredients of the energy transition" as China has "moved aggressively on renewables," leaving the U.S. far behind — very far behind in per capita terms, the relevant figure. China is "likely on track to meet its goals of peaking its emissions before 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2060. It installed a record amount of solar power capacity last year — and this year alone is set to install more than the entire existing solar capacity of the United States."

I've been mispresenting the article, however. The *Post* does not come to praise China, but to condemn it. Its praise is for the U.S., which, from its lofty perch on transitioning to renewable energy is seeking ways "to pressure China to help avert climate catastrophe" — the headline of the article. The article warns ominously that China is responsible for more than double U.S. emissions; or to translate from Newspeak, China is far behind the U.S. in per capita emissions, again the relevant figure.

The article discusses the means under consideration to induce China to join us in our noble pursuit of saving the climate, omitting, however, the most important of these: "Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said Tuesday that the U.S. will rally allies in order to mount pressure on the world's second-largest economy. 'If we really want to slow down China's rate of innovation, we need to work with Europe,' Raimondo said."

We have to make sure to contain China's innovations in producing the advanced technology that might save the world. The prime method, openly announced and highly praised, is to deny China access to the computer chips that are necessary for advanced technology.

At the same time, Raimondo warned China that the U.S. "'won't tolerate' China's effective ban on purchases of [Idaho corporation] Micron Technology memory chips and is working closely with allies to address such 'economic coercion'."

More insight into the famed "rules-based international order" and its subtle design, as the world burns.

Polychroniou: India has overtaken China as the world's most populous country, and its population is certain to continue to grow in the decades ahead. Do we have to reduce global population to save the planet?

Chomsky: The global population should be reduced, perhaps considerably. Fortunately, there is a method to achieve this result, one that is furthermore humane and should be undertaken irrespective of the goal of saving the planet: education of women. That's been shown to lead to sharp population reduction in both rich countries and poor.

Education of women should be supplemented by other humane methods, such as those prescribed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was initiated by the U.S., but that was in a different era, when New Deal social democracy still had not been undermined by the bitter business assault that finally reached its goals with Reagan. By then, the socioeconomic provisions of the declaration, including the ones just quoted, were ridiculed as "a letter to Santa Claus" (Reagan's UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick). Kirkpatrick was echoed by Paula Dobriansky, the official in charge of human rights and humanitarian affairs in the Reagan and Bush administrations. Dobriansky sought to dispel "the myth [that] 'economic and social rights' [of the declaration] constitute human rights." These myths are "little more than an empty vessel into which vague hopes and inchoate expectations can be poured." They are "preposterous" and even a "dangerous incitement," in the words of Bush ambassador Morris Abram when he was casting the sole vote against the UN Right to Development, which closely paraphrased the socioeconomic provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

By then dismissal of the letter to Santa Claus had become largely bipartisan,

though the GOP has maintained the lead in savagery, as we can see right now in the farcical doings in Congress.

There is a lot more to say about this, but for another time.

Polychroniou: Bob, a "just transition" is seen as essential for advancing ambitious climate change policies. Why is a "just transition" so crucial for effective climate action, and how exactly does it affect average citizens?

Robert Pollin: The term "just transition" has been used in various ways. I will first use it to refer to measures to support workers and communities that are presently dependent on the fossil fuel industry for their incomes and well-being. I will then consider below a second use of the term, considering the ways in which high-income economies need to support the Green New Deal programs advanced by low-income economies.

With respect to the first issue of supporting workers and communities that are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry, the broader context is very important. As we have discussed many times before, investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy to build a global zero-emissions energy infrastructure will be a major engine of overall job creation. That is, overall, saving the planet is very good for jobs. This is, of course, the opposite of the fulminations we hear from likes of Donald Trump, but also much more widely across the political spectrum. The vaguely respectable version of this position is that phasing out fossil fuel consumption might well be beneficial on environmental grounds, but it still going to be a job killer. And everyone other than rich coastal elites care more about jobs than the environment.

Here is how this position can actually resonate. While the clean energy transition is indeed a major engine of job creation overall, it is still also true that phasing out the fossil fuel industry will inevitably mean losses for workers and communities that now depend on the fossil fuel industry. In the absence of generous just transition policies, these workers and communities will indeed be facing layoffs, falling incomes and declining public sector budgets to support schools, health clinics and public safety. Should we be surprised that, without hard commitments to generous just transition policies, a good share of these workers and communities will vehemently oppose the fossil fuel industry phase out?

A viable just transition program for these workers and communities needs to build from the framework first advanced by Tony Mazzocchi, the late great labor movement and environmental leader. Mazzocchi was the person who came up with the term "just transition" in the first place. In considering the phasing out of nuclear plants and related facilities, Mazzocchi wrote in 1993: "Paying people to make the transition from one kind of economy to another is not welfare. Those who work with toxic materials on a daily basis … in order to provide the world with the energy and the materials it needs deserve a helping hand to make a new start in life."

Starting from this Mazzocchi perspective, we still need to establish what specifically would constitute a generous set of just transition policies. For the workers, I would argue that, as a first principle, the aim of such policies should be simply, to truly protect them against major losses in their living standards. To accomplish this, the critical components of a just transition policy should include three types of guarantees for the workers: 1) a guaranteed new job; 2) a guaranteed level of pay with their new job that is at least comparable to their previous fossil fuel industry job; and 3) a guarantee that their pensions will remain intact regardless of whether their employers' business operations are phased out. Just transition policies should also support displaced workers in the areas of job search, retraining and relocation. These forms of support are important but should be understood as supplementary. This is because, in themselves, they are not capable of protecting workers against major losses in their living standards resulting from the fossil fuel industry phase out.

Among major high-income economies, just transition policies for workers have recently been enacted within the European Union, Germany and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. Such initiatives are still mainly at the proposal stages in the U.S., Japan, Canada. But even in the cases of Germany, the U.K. and the European Union, these policies remain mostly limited to the areas of job search, retraining and relocation support. In other words, in none of these cases have policies been enacted that provide workers with the guarantees they need.

The most substantive commitments to just transition policies have been advanced by the European Union, within the framework of the European Green Deal. Thus, Frans Timmermans, executive vice president of the European Commission, has stated that that "We must show solidarity with the most affected regions in Europe, such as coal mining regions, and others, to make sure the Green Deal

gets everyone's full support and has a chance to become a reality."

In that spirit, the European Commission established a Just Transition Fund in January 2020 to advance beyond broad principles into meaningful concrete policy commitments. Nevertheless, to date, the scope of these programs and the level of funding provided are not close to adequate to achieve the goals set out by Vice President Timmerman, of "making sure the Green Deal gets everyone's full support." In particular, the categories of support for displaced workers under the Just Transition Fund are limited to skill development, retraining and job search assistance. The fund does not include any provision for the most critical areas of support for workers who will be facing displacement — that is, the guarantees with respect to reemployment, wage levels and pensions.

To obtain a sense of what a much more robust just transition program would look like, I have developed, with coworkers, illustrative programs for eight different U.S. states, for the U.S. economy overall, and, most recently, for South Korea. For now, it might be useful to focus on the case of West Virginia, since it is one of the most fossil fuel dependent state economies in the U.S. As such, West Virginia provides a highly challenging environment in which to mount a generous just transition program.

It is critical that the just transition policies for West Virginia would be one component of an overall Green New Deal program for the state. Under the overall program, fossil fuel production will fall by 50 percent as of 2030 and clean energy investments will make up the difference in the state's overall energy supply. We estimate that the clean energy investments in West Virginia will generate an average of about 25,000 jobs throughout the state through 2030.

What about the job losses from the state's fossil fuel industry phase out? There are presently roughly 40,000 people employed in West Virginia's fossil fuel industry and ancillary sectors, comprising about 5 percent of the overall West Virginia labor force. But it is critical to recognize that all 40,000 workers are *not* going to lose their jobs right away. Rather, about 20,000 jobs will be phased out by 2030 as fossil fuel production is cut by 50 percent. This averages to a bit more than 2,000 job losses per year. However, we also estimate that about 600 of the workers holding these jobs will voluntarily retire every year. This means that the number of workers who will face job displacement every year is in the range of 1,400, or 0.2 percent of the state's labor force. This is while the state is also

generating about 25,000 new jobs through its clean energy transformation.

In short, there will be an abundance of new job opportunities for the 1,400 workers facing displacement every year. We estimate that to guarantee these workers comparable pay levels and intact pensions, along with retraining, job search and relocation support, as needed, will cost about $42,000 per worker per year. This totals to an average of about $143 million per year. This is equal to about 0.2 percent of West Virginia's overall level of economic activity (GDP). In short, generous just transition policies for all displaced fossil fuel workers will *definitely not* create major cost burdens, even in such a heavily fossil fuel dependent state as West Virginia.

For the other seven U.S. states that we have examined, the costs of comparable just transition programs range between 0.001 and 0.02 percent of the state's GDP. For the U.S. economy overall, the just transition program's costs would total to about 0.015 percent of GDP — i.e. one-tenth to one-twentieth of what the West Virginia program would cost relative to the overall economy's size. In short, providing workers with robust just transition support amounts to barely a blip within the U.S. economy. It is almost certainly the case that similarly robust just transition programs in other high-income economies would generate comparable results.

Now let's consider communities' transitions. In fact, communities that are now dependent on the fossil fuel industry will face formidable challenges adjusting to the decline of the industry. At the same time, it is critical that, as I described for the case of West Virginia, the decline of the fossil fuel industry will be occurring in conjunction with the rapid expansion of the clean energy economy. This will provide a basic supportive foundation for advancing effective community transition policies.

One important example has been the integration of clean renewable energy sources— primarily wind and solar power — into Alaska's long-standing and extensive energy microgrid infrastructure. A microgrid is a localized power grid. Since the 1960s, these grids have been heavily reliant on diesel generators. But since 2005, renewable energy has become an increasingly significant alternative to diesel fuel. As of 2015, the Alaska Center for Energy and Power described this development as follows:
'Over the past decade, investment in renewable energy generation has increased

dramatically to meet a desire for energy independence and reduce the cost of delivered power. Today, more than 70 of Alaska's microgrids, which represent approximately 12 percent of renewably powered microgrids in the world, incorporate grid-scale renewable generation, including small hydro, wind, geothermal, solar and biomass.'

Another important development, primarily thus far in Australia, Germany and the U.S. is with creating pumped storage hydropower sites in now defunct coal mines. A *Wall Street Journal* article from late 2022 reports as follows:
'Mining operations that contributed to greenhouse-gas emissions could soon help to cut them. Around the world, companies are seeking to repurpose old mines as renewable-energy generators using a century-old technology known as pumped-storage hydropower. The technology, already part of the energy mix in many countries, works like a giant battery, with water and gravity as the energy source. Water is pumped uphill to a reservoir when energy supply is plentiful. It is released and flows downhill through turbines generating hydroelectric power when electricity demand is high or there are shortages of other types of power. Finally, the water is captured to be pumped uphill again in a repeated cycle. Surface and underground mines hold potential as reservoirs for the water, and could be developed with a lower environmental impact and upfront costs than building such plants from scratch, experts say.'

More broadly, there is no shortage of opportunities for revitalizing fossil fuel dependent communities through developing innovative clean energy projects in these very communities. To its credit, the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act — which is primarily about financing clean energy investment projects in the U.S. — is providing large-scale funding for such projects. Naturally, the congressional Republicans tried to kill such funding through the farcical and now mercifully concluded debt ceiling debate. Fortunately, they failed.

Polychroniou: If moving away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy is the only way forward for the survival of the planet, climate action must be ultimately coordinated on a global level. What does global just transition entail, and what sort of new relationships of power need to be created since the world remains divided by huge differences between rich countries and poor countries?

Pollin: Let's first be clear that there is no such thing as a viable climate

stabilization program that applies only to rich countries. All countries, at all levels of development, need to drive their emissions to zero by 2050. It is true that, at present, China, the U.S. and the European Union together account for 52 percent of all global CO2 emissions. But that also means that if, miraculously, emissions in China, the U.S. and the European Union were all to fall to zero tomorrow, we would still be only a bit more than halfway to driving global emissions to zero. Moreover, if large, fast-growing developing economies like India and Indonesia continue to power their growth through a fossil fuel-dominant energy infrastructure, we will not cut global emissions *at all* by 2050 relative to today, even if emissions in China, the U.S. and the European Union were to indeed fall to zero. The point is that every place does matter if we really are going to hit the target of zero emissions by no later than 2050.

Thus, recognizing that a Green New Deal program has to be global in scope, the worker-and-community just transitions that I have described above for high-income economies applies equally, if not more so, for low-income economies. For starters, the clean energy investment transition programs will be a major engine of job creation in low-income economies just as it is for high-income economies. For example, research that I have done with coworkers finds that creating a clean energy economy in places like India, Indonesia and South Africa will generate between two-to-three times more jobs for a given spending level than maintaining these economies' existing fossil fuel-dominant energy infrastructure. At the same time, phasing out fossil fuels in these economies will still also entail losses for fossil fuel industry dependent workers and communities. These workers and communities will require just transition support comparable to what we have described above for the U.S. and other high-income economies.

We still need to ask the question: who pays for the Green New Deal in low-income countries? As a baseline matter of planetary survival, we can start by recognizing that *somebody* has to pay. How then should we establish fair and workable standards as to who should pay, how much they should pay and via what financing channels?

Two initial points are critical. First, starting with the early phases of industrial development under capitalism, what are now the globe's high-income countries, including the U.S., western Europe, Japan, Canada and Australia, are primarily responsible for loading up the atmosphere with greenhouse gas emissions and causing climate change. They therefore should be primarily responsible for

financing the global Green New Deal. And second, moving from this historical perspective to the present, high-income people in all countries and regions have massively larger carbon footprints today than everyone else. As documented in a 2020 Oxfam study, the average carbon footprint of people in the richest 1 percent of the global population, for example, is *35 times greater* than the average emissions level for the overall global population.

Thus, by any minimal standard of fairness, high-income countries and high-income people, no matter where they live, need to cover most of the upfront costs of a global clean energy transformation. At the same time, let's also remember that these upfront costs are investments. They will pay for themselves over time, and then some, by delivering high efficiency and abundant renewable energy at average prices that are already lower today than fossil fuels and nuclear, and falling.

But it is still necessary to mobilize investment funds into low-income economies right now at both a speed and scale that are unprecedented. We are already seeing that, despite various pronouncements and pledges, private capitalists are not about to accomplish this on their own. As Noam described above, private capitalists are rather waiting for their clean energy investment prospects in developing economies to become "de-risked" by public entities. That means, to summarize Noam, that the private investors get big subsidies from public entities to undertake investments, but then pocket all the profits when the investments pay off. The public entities handing out the subsidies can include their own rich country governments, the governments of the low-income countries where they might invest, or international public investment institutions like the World Bank or International Monetary Fund.

It is also the case that the rich country governments have not been fulfilling the pledges they made initially in 2009 to provide $100 billion in annual climate-related support for poor countries. Between 2015-2020, 35 high-income countries reported providing an overall average of $36 billion per year, only one-third of the $100 billion annual pledge. Moreover, even this low-end figure overstates the actual level of climate finance rich countries are providing, given that countries can claim virtually anything as constituting "climate finance." Thus, according to a *Reuters* story from June 1, 2023:

'Italy helped a retailer open chocolate and gelato stores across Asia. The United States offered a loan for a coastal hotel expansion in Haiti. Belgium backed the

film *La Tierra Roja*, a love story set in the Argentine rainforest. And Japan is financing a new coal plant in Bangladesh and an airport expansion in Egypt….

Although a coal plant, a hotel, chocolate stores, a movie and an airport expansion don't seem like efforts to combat global warming, nothing prevented the governments that funded them from reporting them as such to the United Nations and counting them toward their giving total.'

It's obvious that a serious system of monitoring is one necessary step toward moving significant financial resources into legitimate climate projects in developing economies. But in addition, it will also be critical that public investment banks in low-income countries serve as primary conduits in moving specific investment projects forward in their economies. The public investment banks should be managing the financing of clean energy projects in both the public and private sectors, along with mixed public/private projects. We cannot know what the best mix should be between public and private ownership with any specific project in any given low-income country (or for that matter, any high-income country). There is no point in being dogmatic and pretending otherwise. But, in all situations, we need to operate under the recognition that it is not reasonable to allow private firms to profit at rates that they have gotten away with under 40 years of neoliberalism. If private firms are happy to accept large public subsidies to support their clean energy investments, they then also need to be willing to accept limits on their profitability. Such regulatory principles are, for example, routine in the private U.S. electric utility sector. Similar standards can be easily established in all regions of the globe.

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).

After Victory, What Will Lula's Foreign Policy Look Like?

Pedro Marin – Photo: Facebook

The tenure of President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil is defined by the deforestation of the Amazon, the return of 33 million Brazilians to hunger, and the terrible governance of the country during the pandemic.

But it also marked a radical turning point on a subject that receives little public attention in general: foreign policy. It's not just that the Bolsonaro government has transformed Brazil, a giant in land area and population, into a kind of

diplomatic dwarf. Nor is it just the fact that Bolsonaro turned the country's back to Latin America and Africa. The most serious thing is that in his pursuit of aligning Brazil to the United States, Bolsonaro broke with a long tradition of Brazilian foreign policy: the respect for constitutional principles of national independence, self-determination of the peoples, non-intervention, equality between States, defense of peace, and peaceful solution of conflicts.

Despite the different foreign policies adopted by Brazilian governments over the years, no president had ever so openly broken with these principles. Never had a Brazilian president expressed such open support for a candidate in a U.S. election, as Bolsonaro did to Trump and against Biden in 2020. Never had a president so openly despised Brazil's main trading partner, as Bolsonaro did with China on different occasions. Never had a Brazilian president offended the wife of another president as Jair Bolsonaro, his Economy Minister Paulo Guedes, and his son Representative Eduardo Bolsonaro did in relation to Emmanuel Macron's wife, Brigitte. And never, at least since re-democratization in the 1980s, has a president talked so openly about invading a neighboring country as Bolsonaro did toward Venezuela.

This attitude has thrown Brazil into a position of unprecedented diplomatic isolation for a country recognized for its absence of conflicts with other countries and its capacity for diplomatic mediation. As a result, during the campaign for the 2022 elections—won by Lula da Silva on Sunday, October 30, by a narrow margin of 2.1 million votes, with 50.9 percent of the votes for Lula against 49.1 percent for Bolsonaro—the topic of foreign policy appeared frequently, with Lula promising to resume Brazil's leading role in international politics.

"We are lucky that the Chinese see Brazil as a historic entity, which will exist with or without Bolsonaro. Otherwise, the possibility of having had problems of various types would be great. … [For example, China] could simply not give us vaccines," professor of economics at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ) Elias Jabbour tells me. "Brazil should once again play a decisive role in major international issues," he adds.

The Return of 'Active and Assertive' Foreign Policy?

International relations during the first Lula administrations, from 2003 to 2011, were marked by Celso Amorim, minister of foreign affairs. He called for an "active

and assertive" foreign policy. By "assertive," Amorim meant a firmer attitude to refuse outside pressure and place Brazil's interests on the international agenda. By "active," he was referring to a decisive pursuit of Brazil's interests. This view was "meant to not only defend certain positions, but also attract other countries to Brazil's positions," Amorim said.

This policy meant a commitment to Latin American integration, with the strengthening of Mercosur (also known as the Southern Common Market) and the creation of institutions such as Unasur, the South American Institute of Government in Health, the South American Defense Council, and CELAC. The IBSA forum (India, Brazil, and South Africa) and the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) were also established. During this period, Brazil also advanced its relations with the European Union, Africa, and the Middle East. Due to Brazil's size and the diplomatic weight it took on by increasing its diplomatic representation worldwide, Brazil came to be an important player in international forums, seeking to advance discussions toward multilateralism and greater democratization of these forums, effectively mediating sensitive issues such as the Iran nuclear agreement with the UN and tensions between Venezuela and the U.S. during the Bush administration.

So Far From God and So Close to the U.S.

There is a popular phrase throughout Latin America, originally said by Mexican General Porfirio Díaz, overthrown by the Mexican Revolution in 1911: "Poor Mexico! So far from God and so close to the United States." It applies outside the bounds of its original time and place. Today's Latin Americans could easily swap out "poor Mexico" for their own country, whether that's Colombia, Guatemala, Argentina, or even Brazil—a country where a Christ the Redeemer statue is an international tourist attraction.

In a scenario where nations are heading toward war and confrontation, the return of a diplomatically active Brazil may be exactly what the world, and Latin America in particular, needs. "For the past 40 days, the war in Ukraine has been heading toward a point of no return. Diplomatic exits are no longer on the agenda and the use of brute military force has increased," says Rose Martins, a doctoral candidate in international economic relations at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). "In this scenario, the BRICS and its New Development Bank offer alternatives for economic development distinct from the neoliberal terms."

The question, perhaps, is which "world" actually looks forward to an active Brazil. This resumption may interest the Third World, for example, but there are doubts about whether it would interest the so-called Western world. "In this global situation, in which there is a dispute over 'cosmotechnics' and among which the exercise of force is in place, Brazil will have to play in a very balanced way, with great caution," says Professor Héctor Luís Saint-Pierre, coordinator of the Defense and International Security Study Group (GEDES). "I can imagine two possible attitudes: from the point of view of the dispute over cosmotechnical hegemonies, it would be the pragmatic non-alignment. In other words, entering into commercial, economic, and technological relationships in a pragmatic way, non-aligned: neither with one nor with the other," he says. "And with regard to the U.S., a certain precaution, because they are at war—we are not. We don't need to go to war to defend U.S. interests: the right thing to do, to defend Brazilian interests, is not going to war. Sometimes national interests are defended by not going to war."

In addition to the external challenge, Lula arrives at the presidency in a very different situation from that found in his first term. Not only will he have to deal with all the institutional destruction left by Jair Bolsonaro, but he will also have to deal with the members of his own "broad front" coalition—many of whom had been radical opponents during his previous governments. One of the most sensitive topics, however, is how the armed forces will act. Since the coup against Dilma Rousseff, in 2016, the generals have returned to the Brazilian political scene, expanding their domains to the point of conquering thousands of positions under Bolsonaro—a scenario that puts a country that only left its last military dictatorship 37 years ago on alert. "More than paradoxical, it is aporetic. It's a dead-end situation," says Saint-Pierre, when I ask him whether the way to disarm military power internally would be to carry out a consistent foreign policy, or if, in order to carry out a consistent foreign policy, it would first be necessary to disarm military power. He believes that Lula will have to establish some kind of pact with the military, in which their demands are respected, so that he can effectively govern. But for all the challenges, Saint-Pierre, Martins, and Jabbour all seem to agree on one point: the Lula government's foreign policy will definitely be better for Brazil, Latin America, and the world than Bolsonaro's. So do the Brazilian people.

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Pedro Marin is the editor-in-chief and founder of Revista Opera. Previously, he was a correspondent in Venezuela for Revista Opera and a columnist and international correspondent in Brazil for a German publication. He is the author of *Golpe é Guerra—teses para enterrar 2016*, on the impeachment of Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, and coauthor of *Carta no Coturno—A volta do Partido Fardado no Brasil*, on the role of the military in Brazilian politics.

Source: Globetrotter

Indigenous Organizers In Alaska Lead The Way Toward Livable Climate Future

Ruth Łchav'aya K'isen Miller
nativemovement.org

In the United States, the public and politicians are moving in opposite directions on climate change. Grassroots environmental activism is spreading on the local state, regional and national levels, while Congress generally continues with a "business-as-usual" approach, rejecting the foremost way to avoid the worst

consequences of global warming: the Green New Deal.

While the Green New Deal remains aspirational in the U.S., it has been adopted by the European Union, and scores of countries around the world have committed to pursuing its goals.

Among the many organizations in the U.S. fighting for environmental sustainability and a just transition toward clean, renewable energy is Native Movement, an organization dedicated to building people power for transformative change and imagining a world without fossil fuels.

"There is no future at all with continued oil and gas extraction," says Ruth Łchav'aya K'isen Miller, Native Movement's climate justice director, in this exclusive interview for *Truthout.* "We must eliminate fossil fuel extraction now through a just transition that guarantees justice for workers and for the lands."

Miller is a Dena'ina Athabascan and Ashkenazi Jewish woman. She works toward Indigenous rights advocacy and is a member of the Alaska Just Transition Collective and the Alaska Climate Alliance.

C.J. Polychroniou: Ruth, what does a just transition, from a Native and Indigenous perspective, look like in Alaska?

Ruth Miller: A just transition is a journey of returning to economies, governance structures and social contracts that are not new, but built on Indigenous wisdoms and place-based knowledge to create a truly regenerative economy. A just transition will be built on a values framework of anti-racism and decolonization, deep reciprocity, and respect for all lands, waters and air.

Any just transition for Alaska must be rooted in Indigenous perspectives, because it is Alaska's Native nations who have lived in harmony with these lands for over 30,000 years, and whose deep connections, encyclopedic knowledge and spiritual interconnectivity will heal the wounds of the past 100 years of colonization and extractive capitalism. For this reason, we refer to this shift in resource extraction, governance, labor practices and culture as "remembering forward," first translated in 2020 in the Behnti Kengaga language as "Kohtr'elneyh," and in 2022 in the Dena'ina language as "Nughelnik."

In Alaska this takes many forms. It includes deep democracy, which actively seeks

to incorporate minority voices as well as those in the majority and requires the diversification of elected leaders. It includes an end to all oil and gas extraction, as well as irresponsible mining and other development projects. It means a return to responsible land management practices, including timber and fisheries management, and it means returning stewardship of lands and waters back to their original and eternal caretakers. It includes supporting Alaska Native language and cultural revitalizations while supporting unimpeachable subsistence hunting and fishing rights. It means all workers will have their fair pay and rights protected through strong unions, while communities will be empowered to support themselves through mutual aid networks and non-predatory community loan funds for moving toward clean and efficient energy.

A just transition for Alaska means investing in regenerative industries like sustainable mariculture and ocean-healing crops such as kelp, while also supporting culturally informed eco-tourism that elevates local business with local returns. As we have previously written for *Non-Profit Quarterly,* "To achieve [a Just Transition], resources must be acquired through regenerative practices, labor must be organized through voluntary cooperation and decolonial mindsets, culture must be based on caring and sacred relationships, and governance must reflect deep democracy and relocalization."

Why is the complete elimination of fossil fuel extraction needed to secure a just transition?

The simple truth is that the oil and gas industry is one of the largest contributors to climate change, spewing greenhouse gas emissions to the point at which we are now in the sixth great extinction — one which has been entirely caused by recent human activity. The Arctic, being bled dry for its non-renewable resources, is now experiencing a climate crisis at two to four times the rate as the rest of the globe.

In Alaska, thawing permafrost is not only destabilizing Arctic infrastructure, but the thawing of eons-old organic material leads to the accelerated release of methane, a gas more than 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere. The same thawing is leading to coastal and riverbed erosion, causing more and more communities to be forced to relocate. Already less Arctic sea ice returns in the winter than past generations remember, putting coastal communities at increased risk of damage by winter storms.

With a global temperature rise of 2.5 degrees Celsius or higher (which we are projected to reach within the decade without drastic international action now), it is expected we will have an entirely ice-free Arctic Ocean at least once every eight years. Beyond their climate effects, extractive projects are already causing extreme and irreversible devastation to lands, waters and food systems.

The ecological harm caused by such projects leaves toxic waste, pollution and contamination, harming the health of Alaska Native peoples who live closest with the land. Near the sites of extractive projects, high rates of cancers, birth defects, respiratory illnesses, and more health impacts have been observed for decades. Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit relatives suffer increased rates of homicide, disappearance and domestic violence in and around the man camps that supply labor to extractive development projects.

There is no future at all with continued oil and gas extraction.... We must eliminate fossil fuel extraction now through a just transition that guarantees justice for workers and for the lands.

What are the main obstacles for Alaska to overcome its oil extraction and how would this impact Alaskans?

The dominant story of Alaska began as the "last frontier," ready to be settled and exploited by colonizers. The same narrative now tells the public that the Alaskan economy is dependent on oil and gas, and that we would be left bereft if we challenged those industries. Dark money streams, particularly from the Koch brothers, flow into Alaska to purchase elections for extractive industries.

This is a hurdle we are poised to overcome. These stories are nothing more than myths meant to erase Indigenous history and excellence and undermine any visioning toward a truly regenerative economy for our state. Colonial distortions of history poison our education system and prevent real conversation about the past and future of our state and its people. We are seeking deep decolonization and truth-telling to confront the disempowerment and marginalization of Native people in the name of resource extraction. Ending oil extraction requires questioning the systems that rely on it and healing the wounds of our communities so we may envision a collective future together. As the boom-and-bust cycle of resource extraction continues to enrich the elite few at the cost of the public, Alaskans are awakening to the power and potential of a better

economy — one that is just, regenerative and sustainable.

Already communities are showing ingenuity and resilience as they develop place-based economies that support livelihoods and healthy living — small-scale hydroelectric turbines in Igiugig village to move the community off diesel, high-tunnel greenhouses for year-round produce in the interior of Alaska, mariculture and kelp farming in the Southcentral and Southeast regions. Grassroots efforts across the state (many Black, Indigenous and people of color-led and in rural communities) are leading the way, through renewable energy, local food systems, eco-tourism, sustainable recreation, and much more. Strong unions like the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers are already providing apprenticeship programs to invest in worker transition, while other groups like the Fairbanks Women Carpenters Union, UNITE HERE are pursuing worker health and safety.

The burden of transformation is on the state of Alaska and the federal government to catch up to the progress already happening across Alaska. Alaskans are designing our collective future and taking our story into our own hands.

What is the Alaska Just Transition Collective and who are the communities it is accountable to? How does it bring folks together in action to advance a shared vision for Alaska's future?

The Alaska Just Transition Collective is a group of Alaska-based organizations with a spectrum of focuses working to support Alaska along a path toward a post-oil economy, an Indigenized Regenerative Economy. Alaska Just Transition facilitates intersectional collaboration to build critical thinking around economic and social transition. The Alaska Just Transition Collective is currently comprised of a number of organizations, including Native Movement, Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Native Peoples Action, The Alaska Center, Alaska Poor People's Campaign and Native Conservancy. However, the just transition community is significantly broader and ever-expanding.

In January of 2020, the first Alaska Just Transition Summit was held on the lands of the Lower Tanana Dené peoples. Kohtr'elneyh ("Remembering Forward" in Benhti kanaga) was a groundbreaking gathering in Alaska that brought together community organizers, tribal leaders, artists, union members, faith leaders,

investors, elected officials, educators, small business owners, renewable energy industry leaders, and many more from critical sectors. Alaskans shared, brainstormed and strategized a collective path toward a post-oil economy built on just values frameworks with a home for all. We dived deep into the healing necessary to move toward decolonization, and centered Indigenous voices to move with place-based wisdom and ancestral imperative.

Once the pandemic was upon us, we shifted to online offerings that dove into the intricacies of just transition in a four-part webinar series, and later convened "Fireside Chats" to explore national policy options for Alaska, following the pillars of the THRIVE Agenda (thriveagenda.com) and making the national approaches relatable and visible to Alaskans. Through these online gatherings we reengaged with the hundreds of community members that joined us in person in 2020, as well as expanded our community and tended to new and exciting relationships with more sectors and local leaders.

This year we gather once more in person, on Dena'ina lands, proudly bearing the name Nughelnik ("It is remembered within us" in Dena'ina qenaga). This summit will work to address the pains of the past two years, while also diving deeper into real strategy and active examples of just transition already taking place in Alaska. A just transition does not exist without the leadership and sovereignty of the communities that are deeply impacted by economic transition. Without including the voices of Black, Brown, Indigenous, people of color, disabled, queer, immigrant communities, for example, we are missing key leadership in our path forward. We are working to elevate voices that were regretfully not as visible in our first summit, and to make invitations for all identities to feel stewardship and ownership over our collective space.

As organizers, we hope that the next iteration will be regional and local just transition plans that will ripple across the state and be stewarded by local community members. Through this approach, our partnered organizations will continue to offer support and convening space for community members to lead us forward.

The Just Transition Collective is uplifting Indigenous place-based knowledge systems and ways of life while shaping regenerative economies, stewarding lands and waters, and building more just and equitable communities for all. Can you share the specific principles and aims guiding this vision?

We as a collective honor the Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing, which in summation includes deep inclusion of all voices and identities; an emphasis of community-driven organizing, which means we engage when tribal sovereigns and communities most impacted by issues invite us; allowing people to speak for themselves; working together in solidarity and mutuality by understanding that we are deeply interconnected and must transform together; building just relationships among ourselves, modeling just workplace practices that reflect compassion and humanity; and commitment to self-transformation.

We also honor the Defend the Sacred Alaska Principles, which describe a similar approach to community organizing:

– Unlearn, Dismantle, Heal, and Create: Decolonize.
– Organize from the "bottom-up."
– Uplift a matriarchal, decentralized, and marginalized leadership.
– Grow an inclusive movement for all.
– Create space for people to speak for themselves.
– Work together in unity, solidarity, and accountability to each other.
– Strive to build just relationships in our organizing.
– Uplifting marginalized & oppressed voices that align with these values.
– Commit to a just and equitable transition away from an extractive, oppressive economy toward a regenerative, holistic, living worldview.
– Acknowledge that we exist in a tangible system of racial injustice and that it is our responsibility to dismantle it.
– Be soulful

While we carry these principles through all our work as organizations, our tangible vision for just transition is articulated through these goals of our recently held summit, which will shine the light toward future work:

– "Remember Forward through Grief and Celebration": This means recognizing that for many communities, the pandemic surfaced previously unspoken imbalances wrought by capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy, while many other communities have been acutely aware of their struggle to survive and regain balance since the onset of colonization. As outlined in the 2022 Alaska Just Transition Guide, this goal is about our effort to "reconnect healing as an essential strategy, as we share tools and practices as we move through tumultuous times."

– “Shape Community and Post-Pandemic Economy”: This means developing “a meaningful and reciprocal plan of action to support communities, extend care, and articulate long-term healing needed for Alaska’s economy and culture.”
– “Reimagine Community in a Post-Extractive Economy”: This involves creating a space for our community “to align around a shared vision for a fundamental transformation in Alaska and beyond” and to turn this vision into action by identifying goals and sharing strategies.
– “Weave Storytelling to Illuminate the Path”: This involves an effort to “highlight Alaskan stories of day-to-day challenges and celebrations on the path of visionary planning.”

What strategies have you discovered work best for bringing grassroots and frontline perspectives to bear on national policies like the Green New Deal?

Our theory of engagement with national policy requires translating policy into accessible formats but also empowering our Native frontline communities to speak back to national policy.

Policy work must be reflective of those it is meant to help but also must grow from the ground and answer the needs of communities while honoring their expertise. Therefore, our work is twofold: Firstly, as is the case with the Green New Deal, we were involved in early stages to edit initial drafts of National Economic Recovery Plan proposals to ensure that Alaskan interests were protected, but also that there was unique language that accommodated both our tribal sovereign governments and our complex social services distribution, often through Alaska Native corporations.

We worked with our national partners to ensure that Alaskans could see themselves in the proposals and had many opportunities for consultation. Concurrently, we also elevated examples of Alaskan leadership, where our local initiatives were not just supporting national policy but truly driving it with visionary action: We drafted the “Alaska’s Time to THRIVE” zine to illustrate how regenerative economy is already taking hold across our state, in all aspects of a just transition. This document and the accompanying “Fireside Chats” allowed for deep consultation on these policies from an abundance mindset, where Alaskans were already positioned to lead.

Additionally, we work diligently with community members to elevate local stories

from the land, and to empower narrative sovereignty — the ability to tell one's own story with integrity and authenticity. Through storytelling skills-building and video projects, stories from community members and from the land are able to speak for themselves. We can offer our organizations as conduits to uplift and share these stories widely, particularly within national and international decision-making spaces.

One example of this initiative was our Fall 2021 Indigenous Filmmakers Intensive. Native Movement partnered with the University of Alaska Fairbanks to offer an intense curriculum guided by faculty members and Indigenous film industry professionals, as well as filmmaking gear as students wrote, directed and produced stories of climate justice from their rural communities. These stories were later showcased at the United Nations global climate negotiations at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, and will soon be shown at the Anchorage Museum. Through these techniques, we are able to deepen the sovereignty and self-determination of our communities while sharing their wisdom and leadership with national and international policy makers.

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).

Stopping The War In Ukraine Now Is The Only Option

Willem de Haan

It might not be ‘cool’ to lay down weapons now, but it would mean the end of senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Reuters estimates that, after three weeks of war, 14,000 people have been killed, 2,7 million people have fled, 1,700 buildings have been destroyed and damages exceed 110 billion euro. The trauma that will result from what is happening in Ukraine will last decades.

Defense budgets all over Europe are being increased and relationships with Russia will be disrupted for years to come.

Whenever there is fighting, we seem to be grabbed by a hunger for war: Nuances disappear and a choice must be made between good and evil. The complex reality doesn’t matter anymore, nor do the reasons for the conflict.

Language as a weapon
Language also becomes a weapon in times of war: “Those who do not support us militarily, want us to slowly die”, says Zelensky. It may sound logic, but it’s not

true – nobody wants the Ukrainian people to slowly die.
The appeal is clear, however. If you care about us, you support us with weapons, whatever it takes. The Netherlands is also understanding of Zelensky's call for Polish fighter jets and Finland's wish to become a member of NATO. Both would be an extremely dangerous escalation.
Ukraine did not start this war, but every day Zelensky chooses to continue this inequal battle, he also bears responsibility for the death toll, the refugees and the destruction of his country.

A high price to pay
Continuing to fight maybe cool, but the people of Ukraine and soldiers on both sides are paying a terrible price. Putting weapons down might not be cool, but it would end the senseless violence and prevent the annihilation of Ukraine.

Even if it would cost him his life, ending the war would make Zelensky immortal, a true hero. Defending your country sounds noble, but what if the price is a completely destroyed country? With tens of thousands more dead and millions of refugees?

A report from the NOS Journaal (Dutch news report) sticks with me. A captured Russian soldier being interrogated somewhere in Ukraine. "How old are you?" Answer: 21 years old. "Where are you from?" From St Petersburg. "What are you doing here?" I was sent here. "What do you want?" I want to go home.
According to the voice-over the young man was later executed. Refusing to perform military service is incredibly difficult in both Russia and Ukraine. Soldiers do not have a choice, political leaders do. As Bob Dylan wrote in his song *Masters of War* in 1963: 'You put a gun in my hand / And you hide from my eyes.'

Peaceful protest
War is terrible and the next violent outbursts are already announcing themselves: Moldavia, Georgia, the Baltic States, Taiwan. Will we push the world closer to the brink of war? I prefer to draw hope from the peaceful protest Gandhi used against the British rule in India, the kind that Martin Luther King used to end segregation in the United States, how mass protests around the world helped end the war in Vietnam and how peaceful protest from the East Germans brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989.

According to War Resisters' International (WRI), an organization founded in 1921

to promote peace and antimilitarism, over 1,1 million Russians have signed a petition against the war started by Russian human rights activist Lev Ponomarev. Yurii Sheliazhenko of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement called for peaceful protest three days after the start of the war, where most people only see military solutions. He considers a neutral Ukraine the best option for the future.

The only option
They know that violence only begets violence, history is full of it. Pacifism is not a popular concept in times of war, but among the people who believed in it and practiced it were Jesus of Nazareth and Albert Einstein, John Lennon and Mother Theresa. Call them idealists, but the world would be a far worse place without them.

Stopping the war now is the only option. Does that mean Putin gets his way? No. If he wants to occupy all of Ukraine and succeeds, he inherits a country of 44 million dissidents. Even for a dictator, that is a nightmare.

Willem de Haan is a Dutch sociologist, conscientious objector and journalist. Go to: https://www.willemdehaan.nl

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“Politics as Usual” Will Never Be A Solution To The Current Climate Threat

Richard Falk

There is an ever-growing consensus that the climate crisis represents humanity's greatest problem. Indeed, global warming is more than an environmental crisis — there are social, political, ethical and economic dimensions to it. Even the role of science should be exposed to critical inquiry when discussing the dimensions of the climate crisis, considering that technology bears such responsibility for bringing us to the brink of global disaster. This is the theme of my interview with renowned scholar Richard Falk.

For decades, Richard Falk has made immense contributions in the areas of international affairs and international law from what may be loosely defined as the humanist perspective, which makes a break with political realism and its emphasis on the nation-state and military power. He is professor emeritus of international law and practice at Princeton University, where he taught for nearly half a century, and currently chair of Global Law at Queen Mary University London, which has launched a new center for climate crime and justice; Falk is also the Olaf Palme Visiting Professor in Stockholm and Visiting Distinguished Professor at the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta. In 2008, Falk was appointed as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. He is the author of some 50 books, the most recent of which is a moving memoir, titled *Public Intellectual: The Life of a Citizen Pilgrim* (2021).

C.J. Polychroniou: The climate crisis is the greatest challenge of our time, but, so far, we seem to be losing the battle to avoid driving the planet to dangerous "tipping points." Indeed, a climate apocalypse appears to be a rather distinct possibility given the current levels of climate inaction. Having said that, it is quite obvious that the climate crisis has more than one dimension. It is surely about the environment, but it is also about science, ethics, politics and economics. Let's start with the relationship between science and the environment. Does science

bear responsibility for global warming and the ensuing environmental breakdown, given the role that technologies have played in the modern age?

Richard Falk: I think science bears some responsibility for adopting the outlook that freedom of scientific inquiry takes precedence over considering the real-world consequences of scientific knowledge — the exemplary case being the process by which science and scientists contributed to the making of the nuclear bomb. In this instance, some of the most ethically inclined scientists and knowledge workers, above all, Albert Einstein, were contributors who later regretted their role. And, of course, the continuous post-Hiroshima developments of weaponry of mass destruction have enlisted leading biologists, chemists and physicists in their professional roles to produce ever more deadly weaponry, and there has been little scientific pushback.

With respect to the environmental breakdown that is highlighted by your question, the situation is more obscure. There were scientific warnings about a variety of potential catastrophic threats to ecological balance that go back to the early 1970s. These warnings were contested by reputable scientists until the end of the 20th century, but if the precautionary principle included in the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment (1972) would have been implemented, then certainly scientists bore some responsibility for continuing to work toward more capital-efficient means of finding technological applications for oil, gas and coal. As with adverse health effects, post-Enlightenment beliefs that human progress depended on scientific knowledge inhibited regulation for the benefit of the public good. Only when civil society began to sound the alarm were certain adjustments made, although often insufficient in substance, deferring to private interests in profitability, and public interests in the enhancement of military capabilities and governmental control.

Overall, despite the climate change crisis, there remains a reluctance to hamper scientific "progress" by an insistence on respecting the carrying capacity of the Earth. Also, science and scientists have yet to relate the search for knowledge to the avoidance of ecologically dangerous technological applications, and even more so in relation to political and cultural activities. There is also the representational issue involving the selection of environmental guardians and their discretionary authority, if a more prudential approach were to be adopted.

The climate crisis also raises important ethical questions, although it is not clear

from current efforts to tame global warming that many of the world's governments take them seriously. Be that as it may, how should ethics inform the debate about global warming and environmental breakdown?

The most obvious ethical issues arise when deciding how to spread the economic burdens of regulating greenhouse gas emissions in ways that ensure an equitable distribution of costs within and among countries. The relevance of "climate justice" to relations among social classes and between rich and poor countries is contested and controversial. As the world continues to be organized along state-centric axes of authority and responsibility, ethical metrics are so delimited. Given the global nature of the challenges associated with global warming, this way of calculating climate justice and ethical accountability in *political space* is significantly dysfunctional.

Similar observations are relevant with respect to *time*. Although the idea of "responsibility to future generations" received some recognition at the UN, nothing tangible by way of implementation was done. Political elites, without exception, were fixed on short-term performance criteria, whether satisfying corporate shareholders or the voting public. The tyranny of the present in policy domains worked against implementing the laudatory ethical recognition of the claims of [future generations] to a healthy and materially sufficient future.

Taking account of the relevance of the past seems an ethical imperative that is neglected because it is seen as unfairly burdening the present for past injustices. For instance, reparations claims on behalf of victimized people, whether descendants of slavery or otherwise exploited peoples, rarely are satisfied, however ethically meritorious. There is one revealing exception: reparations imposed by the victorious powers in a war.

In the environmental domain, the past is very important to the allocation of responsibility for the atmospheric buildup of greenhouse gas emissions. Most Western countries are more responsible for global warming than the vast majority of the Global South, and many parts of Africa and the Middle East face the dual facts of minimal responsibility for global warming yet maximal vulnerability to its harmful effects.

These various ethical concerns are being forced onto the agendas of global conferences. This was evident at the 2021 COP-26 Glasgow Climate Summit

under UN auspices. The intergovernmental response was disappointing, and reflected capitalist and geopolitical disregard of the ethical dimensions of the climate change challenge.

Politics also figures prominently in the climate crisis, with questions being raised as to whether our current system of government, both at the national and international level, is adequate to meet the greatest challenge of our time. What are your thoughts on this matter?

As suggested, addressing the global challenge of climate change with the tools developed for problem-solving in a state-centric world possessing weak institutional mechanisms for the effective promotion of the global public good is the organizational root of the problem. The UN was established with the ahistorical hope that the great powers of international relations would cooperate for peace as successfully as they cooperated for war between 1939 to 1945. Despite lofty rhetoric, the UN was designed to be a weak global mechanism. Why else disempower the UN by giving the victors of World War II a right of veto, which in effect was a recognition of the primacy of geopolitics?

Besides geopolitics, there were other obstacles to global-oriented problem-solving as a result of the persistence and expansion of statism after the collapse of European colonialism. This dominance of statism was reinforced by rigid ideological adherence to nationalism on the part of political leaders, shaping relations with other countries even if disguised somewhat by alliance diplomacy, "special relationships" ([such as the U.S.'s relationship with] Israel) and neoliberal patterns of globalization.

The core political issue is upholding the indispensable need for unprecedented degrees of globally oriented cooperation to address effectively climate change challenges that were being stymied by the continuing dominance of statist and geopolitical tendencies in international relations. These tendencies favor the *part* over the *whole* in multilateral forms of problem-solving. This structural reality has recently been accentuated by the rise of autocratic hyper-nationalist leaders in many important states, and by recent preoccupations with overcoming the COVID pandemic and containing its negative economic spillovers.

Until a robust mechanism for the promotion of global public goods is established, the political potential of present structures of world order do not seem capable of

fashioning prudent and effective policies to cope with climate change. For such a mechanism to be established will require [either] the shock effect of future climate catastrophes, or a powerful, widely supported, militant transnational civil society movement dedicated to the protection of the Earth.

The climate crisis also reflects the failure of economics, with the argument being made that capitalism is actually the cause of the problem and climate change merely a symptom. Given where we are, and with the window of opportunity rapidly closing, should the fight against global warming be also a fight against capitalism?

David Whyte ends his book on ecocide with these stark words: "[W]e have to kill the corporation before it kills us." The guiding idea of contemporary capitalism is to maximize short-term profitability, a posture that contradicts the kind of approach that would protect the natural habitat against the ravages wrought by contemporary capitalism.

However, the issue may be broader than capitalism. Actually existing socialist governments, exercising greater state control over the economy, have exhibited no better record when it comes to environmental protection or taking responsible account of longer-term threats to the natural habitat. State-dominated economies may be less concerned about profitability, but their preoccupation with maximizing economic growth and susceptibility to corruption is as dangerous and destructive.

Until economic and political policies grounded upon a new kind of citizenship [prioritizing] humanity gain political traction, it seems highly improbable that ecological threats will be addressed responsibly.

From your own perspective, how do we move forward in the fight against global warming? Indeed, what might be possible approaches to overcome climate inaction?

You saved the most difficult question for last! I do think education in the broad sense is key, including rethinking citizenship and activist civic participation. It is also essential that efforts be made to enable the UN to act more independently of geopolitical and nationalist manipulations, which have prevented the UN from playing an influential role throughout the COVID pandemic. This regressive interaction with states was highlighted by the hostility of Trump's presidency to

any kind of meta-nationalist approach to the control of the virus, including his disgraceful decision to defund and disengage from the World Health Organization.

A more credible UN requires independent and increased funding by way of an international tax, as well as curtailing of the right of veto by the five permanent members of the Security Council. Such global reforms will not happen without substantial pressure from civil society mobilizations coupled with the emergence of more enlightened leadership in important countries.

As suggested above, a reconstituted world order responsive to the magnitude and character of climate change challenge would seem to require the radical transformation of economic activity. This seems as though it could happen only through a revolutionary process, either as something that took the unprecedented shape of a transnational movement or spread from state to state as did the Arab Spring of 2010-2011, but without sparking a counterrevolutionary backlash.

Because there is no currently visible transition strategy to move from where we are to where we need to be, indulging the utopian imagination is a political act, envisioning futures attuned to the climate change agenda.

I believe that our escape from present entrapment depends on "a politics of impossibility." Our leaders say, and the general consensus is, that politics should be conceived as "the art of the possible," which assesses the play of forces to discover what is feasible. My argument has been that what is understood by the political class as feasible is insufficient to produce satisfactory policies and practices with regard to climate menaces. That is, the politics we know lacks the capacity to generate a solution.

It is evident that the impossible happens. This was manifested in recent international experience by the victories of national resistance movements in several major 20th-century anti-colonial wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. In each instance, before the impossible happened, experts deemed the outcome utopian or impossible, not worthy of the attention of serious persons. What seems clear is that the impossible happens only when the mobilization of people is great enough to produce outcomes that defy the perceptions of those forces committed to the permanence of the status quo.

This leads me to view the future as uncertain and unknowable. For this reason, whatever future we believe necessary and desirable can unfold, defying current expectations. This makes it rational and justifiable for patriots of humanity to engage on behalf of this better future. There are many signs that a green vision of the future is gaining support throughout the planet, especially among youth who have most to lose, and hence to gain. Youth may be the vanguard among those demanding ecologically responsible patterns of humane governance for the planet.

This article has been lightly edited for clarity.

Source: https://truthout.org/politics-as-usual-will-never-be-a-solution-to-the-current-climate-threat/

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).

“Localization” Can Help Free the Planet From Neoliberal Globalization

Helena Norberg-Hodge – Photo: nl.wikipedia.org

Localization offers the means to return to a real and stable economy not based on speculation, exploitation and debt.

Is there a viable alternative to the economic, social, political and environmental problems stemming from globalization? How about “localization”? This is the antidote to globalization propounded by Helena Norberg-Hodge, founder and director of Local Futures, an organization focused on building a movement dedicated to environmental sustainability and social well-being by rejuvenating local economies. Norberg-Hodge is a pioneer of the new economy movement, which now has spread to all continents, and the convener of World Localization Day, which was endorsed by the likes of Noam Chomsky and the Dalai Lama. Norberg-Hodge is the author of several books and producer of the award-winning documentary, *The Economics of Happiness.*

In this interview, Norberg-Hodge discusses in detail why localization represents a strategic alternative to globalization and a way out of the climate conundrum, the ways through which localization challenges the spread of authoritarianism, and what a post-pandemic world might look like.

C.J. Polychroniou: The global neoliberal project, under way since the early 1980s following the so-called "free-market revolution" launched by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the U.S. and U.K., respectively, has proven to be an unmitigated disaster on all fronts. Why does a shift toward economic localization, a movement which you have initiated on every continent of the world, represent a superior strategic alternative to the existing socioeconomic order, and how do we go about making this transition?

Helena Norberg-Hodge: The process of globalization with its disastrous effects is a consequence of governments systematically using taxes, subsidies and regulations to support global monopolies at the expense of place-based regional and local businesses and banks. This process has been going on in the name of supporting growth through free trade, but it has actually impoverished the majority, that has had to work harder and harder just to stay in place. Even nation states have become poorer, relative to the trillions of dollars circulating in the hands of global financial institutions and other transnational corporations. This has systematically corrupted virtually every avenue of knowledge, from schools to universities, from science to the media.

As a consequence, instead of questioning the role of the economic system in causing our multiple crises, people are led to blame themselves for not managing their lives well enough, for not being efficient enough, for not spending enough time with family and friends, etc., etc… In addition to feeling guilty, we often end up feeling isolated because the ever more fleeting and shallow nature of our social encounters with others fuels a show-off culture in which love and affirmation are sought through such superficial means as plastic surgery, designer clothes and Facebook likes. These are poor substitutes for genuine connection, and only heighten feelings of depression, loneliness and anxiety.

I see a shift toward economic localization as a powerful strategic alternative to neoliberal globalization for a number of reasons. For starters, the increasingly planetary supply chains and outsourcing endemic to corporate globalization are systematically making every region less materially secure (something that became

starkly apparent during the COVID crisis) and enabling ecological and labor exploitation cost shifting such that feedback loops that could promote greater transparency and thus responsibility are severed. A recent study showed that one-fifth of global carbon emissions come from multinational corporations' supply chains. Localization means getting out of the highly unstable and exploitative bubbles of speculation and debt, and back to the real economy — our interface with other people and the natural world. Local markets require a diversity of products, and therefore create incentives for more diversified and ecological production. In the realm of food, this means more diversified production with far less machinery and chemicals, more hands on the land, and therefore, more meaningful employment. It means dramatically reduced CO2 emissions, no need for plastic packaging, more space for wild biodiversity, more circulation of wealth within local communities, more face-to-face conversations between producers and consumers, and more flourishing cultures founded on genuine interdependence.

This is what I call the "solution-multiplier" effect of localization, and the pattern extends beyond our food systems. In the disconnected and over-specialized system of global monoculture, I have seen housing developments built with imported steel, plastic and concrete while the oak trees on-site are razed and turned into woodchips. In contrast, the shortening of distances structurally means more eyes per acre and more innovative use of available resources.

It is entirely reasonable to envisage a world without unemployment; as is true of every price-tag on a supermarket shelf, unemployment is a political decision that, at the moment, is being made according to the mantra of "efficiency" in centralized profit-making. As both political left and right have bought into the dogma of "bigger is better," citizens have been left with no real alternative.

When we strengthen the human-scale economy, decision-making itself is transformed. Not only do we create systems that are small enough for us to influence, but we also embed ourselves within a web of relationships that informs our actions and perspectives at a deep level. The increased visibility of our impacts on community and local ecosystems leads to experiential awareness, enabling us to become both more empowered to make change and more humbled by the complexity of life around us.

What's the difference between economic localization and "delinking" (an

alternative development approach associated with the work of the late Marxist sociologist Samir Amin)? Moreover, is localization part of the degrowth strategic program that has emerged in the age of global warming?

Delinking was conceived within the framework of industrialism instead of an understanding of ecological limits. Localization, as I have formulated it over the years, calls for a more radical delinking not only from onerous and oppressive relations of economic and political dependency, but also from the worldviews of modernity based in industrialization and so-called progress and development.

As to the relation between localization and degrowth, there is a lot of overlap. Generally speaking, both reject the growthism intrinsic to capitalism. However, from my point of view, many degrowth advocates don't focus enough on the role of global corporations and free trade treaties, nor do they emphasize enough the need for a systemic shift in direction toward localization or decentralization. This I believe again, as with delinking, comes from ignoring many of the ecological and spiritual effects of industrial progress.

Localization is sometimes perceived as right-wing, nationalistic or even xenophobic. I want to stress that we are talking about economic localization or decentralization, not some kind of inward-looking withdrawal from the national arena. On the contrary, we encourage cultural exchange and international collaboration to deal with our global social and environmental crises.

There is a growing, diverse and creative movement emerging all over the world of people coming together in community to construct their own economies in the shell of the old. In a sense, not only is another world possible, it's already here in this global localization movement. Besides degrowth, other closely affiliated and overlapping movements include: new economies, solidarity economies and cooperative economies; food sovereignty; simplicity and sufficiency economics; and on and on.

This florescence of movements and initiatives from all over the world, in addition to being a source of great inspiration, disprove by their very existence the precepts of neoclassical economics and capitalism, and point the way back from the abyss.

The political pendulum has shifted dramatically over the last couple of decades in favor of some very reactionary forces. What explains the return of the ugly and

dangerous face of political authoritarianism in the 21st century, and how can the advancement of the localized path help challenge authoritarianism?

As a result of globalization, competition has increased dramatically, job security has become a thing of the past, and most people find it increasingly difficult to earn a liveable wage. At the same time, identity is under threat as cultural diversity is replaced by a consumer monoculture worldwide. Under these conditions, it's not surprising that people become increasingly insecure. As advertisers know from nearly a century of experience, insecurity leaves people easier to exploit. But people today are targeted by more than just marketing campaigns for deodorants and tooth polish: insecurity leaves them highly vulnerable to propaganda that encourages them to blame the cultural "other" for their plight. The rise of authoritarianism is just one of many interrelated impacts of economic globalization. Because today's global economy heightens economic insecurity, fractures communities, and undermines individual and cultural identity — it is creating conditions that are ripe for the rise of authoritarian leaders.

Increasingly distanced from the institutions which make decisions that affect their lives, and insecure about their economic livelihoods, many people have become frustrated, angry and disillusioned with the current political system. Although most democratic systems worldwide have been disempowered by the *de facto* government of deregulated banks and corporations, most people blame government leaders at home. Because they don't see the bigger picture, increasing numbers of people support laissez faire economics, wanting government red tape out of the way, to allow new authoritarian leaders to grow the economy for them, to make their country "great again."

Localization offers a 180-degree turn-around in economic policy, so that business and finance become place-based and accountable to democratic processes. This means re-regulation of global corporations and banks, as well as a shift in taxes and subsidies so that they no longer favor the big and the global, but instead support small scale on a large scale. Rebuilding stronger, more diversified, self-reliant economies at the national, regional and local level is essential to restoring democracy and a real economy based on sustainable use of natural resources — an economy that serves essential human needs, lessens inequality and promotes social harmony.

The way to bring this change about is not to simply vote for a new candidate

within the same compromised political structure. We instead need to build up diverse and united people's movements to create a political force that can bring about systemic localization. It means raising awareness of the way that globalization has made a mockery of democracy, and making it clear that business needs to be place-based in order to be accountable and subject to the democratic process.

We must acknowledge that the issue is complex: despite its above-mentioned role in pushing globalization, the nation state also remains the political entity best suited to putting limits on global business, but at the same time more decentralized economic structures are needed, particularly when it comes to meeting basic needs. These place-based economies require an umbrella of environmental and social protection strengthened by national and importantly, *international* regulation, but determined through local political engagement.

Localization is a solution-multiplier. It can restore democracy by reducing the influence of global business and finance on politics and holding representatives accountable to people, not corporations. It can reverse the concentration of wealth by fostering the creation of more small businesses and keeping money circulating locally, regionally and even nationally. It can minimize pollution and waste by providing for real human needs rather than desires manufactured by a corporate-led consumer culture, and by shortening distances between producers and consumers.

By prioritizing diversified production for local needs over specialized production for export, localization redistributes economic and political power from global monopolies to millions of farmers, producers and businesses. It thereby decentralizes political power and roots it in community, giving people more agency over the changes they wish to see in their own lives.

The exponential growth in localization initiatives — from food-based efforts like community gardens, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture schemes and urban agriculture, to local business alliances, decentralized renewable energy schemes, tool lending libraries and community-based education projects — attests to the fact that more and more people are arriving, in a largely common-sense way, at localization as a systemic solution to the problems they face.

(I have tackled this question in great detail in my article, "Localization: a

Strategic Alternative to Global Authoritarianism.”)

The COVID-19 pandemic, obviously a direct result of economic globalization, continues to haunt us with its presence and no one can tell with certainly when the world will return to normalcy. In your view, is going back to “normal” even possible? And, if not, what will a post-pandemic normal look like?

I think the first question is whether returning to old normal is desirable, and then whether it is possible. So-called normal pre-COVID-19 was the rapidly-expanding global consumer culture, swelling volumes of waste, global ecological collapse including species extinction and ballooning inequality, among so many other crises. The pandemic has sadly exacerbated these trends, but it is obvious to me that pre-pandemic “normalcy” was itself already a disaster, thus nothing we should wish to return to. Indeed, as has been pointed out by many observers, the radical rift in the status quo operations of globalization, especially apparent during the early worldwide hard lockdown phase, illustrated like nothing else in our lifetimes just how quickly the system can change, how spurious were the narratives of globalization’s inevitability all along. It also exposed — and continues to do so in many ways — the perilous fragility, brittleness and dependencies of globalized supply chains that have increasingly risen to dominance as more and more places have been de-localized during the past few decades of manic globalization.
Wherever one looked, it was the still relatively more localized, often rural communities — the very ones that conventional development has long denigrated and advocated transcending — that proved more resilient and secure in the face of the crisis, even to the point of prompting reverse migration from the cities back to the villages in many places. Similarly, however awful the circumstances provoking it, the response to the pandemic by grassroots movements across the world has been truly inspiring, showing in real time the truth of the longstanding activist slogan that other worlds are possible.

As to the possibility of going back to the destructive old normal: despite dips in global emissions and pollution during the early months of the pandemic and the beautiful flowering of mutual aid and other local solidarity initiatives, the dramatic rebound of pollution of all sorts, now exceeding pre-pandemic levels, along with the obscene worsening of inequality, concentration of power by transnational corporations and devastation of small, local businesses shows that, unfortunately, yes, it is all too possible to go back to the destructive old normal.

This shows that we cannot hope for some external force to “impose” localization and rein in corporate globalization, such as was often placed on peak oil or other forms of resource collapse. There are no shortcuts around the need to politically struggle against the dominant system and create the local alternatives, to create a post-pandemic normal that isn’t a pre-pandemic political-economy on steroids. The imperative for economic localization demonstrated by the pandemic should not be forgotten after the plague has passed, as though only in emergencies does it make sense to strengthen our local resilience and localized production and consumption links. Because of the solution-multiplier benefits of localization referred to earlier, I believe this is the post-pandemic normal we should aspire to.

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).