

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



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

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

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

The belief that human activity could change temperatures and somehow alter a local climate has been around since antiquity. Of course, ancient civilizations didn't know anything about climate science. We first learned about Earth's natural "greenhouse effect" sometime in the early 1820s, thanks to Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier, a French mathematician and physicist who was the first person to recognize that the Earth's atmosphere retains heat radiation. Then in the late 1850s the Irish scientist John Tyndall provided the explanation for the

phenomenon of the “greenhouse effect” via his discovery that certain gases such as water vapor and carbon dioxide trap heat and warm the atmosphere. And in the late nineteenth century, the Swedish chemist/physicist Svante Arrhenius [discovered](#) that various human activities, including fossil fuel combustion, were contributing to the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Moreover, Arrhenius was able to determine through a numerical computation that the temperature in Europe could be lowered by between 4 and 5 degrees Celsius if the levels of carbon dioxide were cut in half, and inversely, if levels of carbon dioxide were to be increased by 50 percent, there would be a warming of between 5 and 6 degrees Celsius.

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

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

Yet, very little has been done since the late 1980s to combat global warming. The Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1997 and entered into effect in 2005, was the first [legally binding agreement](#) (pdf) on the climate crisis. But the treaty had severe limitations. First, it applied only to industrialized countries, requiring them to reduce greenhouse gases on average by 5 percent below the 1990 levels from 2008 to 2012. Major emitters like China and India were left out, and the treaty was never ratified by the United States. The Kyoto Protocol was obviously

inadequate in addressing global warming, but it was reservedly hailed as a “[reasonable first step](#)” (pdf), which was really another way of saying that climate crisis was a problem to be solved by future generations.

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

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

Nonetheless, all is not yet lost. The Green New Deal is gaining traction as more and more people become aware of the way that global warming plunders the planet and affects their very own existence. Green parties across Europe are making huge gains in local, national, and European parliament elections, all while grassroots responses to the climate crisis are growing worldwide and climate

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

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

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

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*New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*“ (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors).