

Revolutionary Activism May Be Our Last Best Hope To Avert A Climate Catastrophe



CJ
Polychroniou

The challenge ahead is to turn every city and every town in virtually every major country in the world into a stronghold of the global climate movement.

With the United Nations climate-change summit (COP26) in Glasgow less than a few days away, the prospects of forging a global consensus on transformative mitigation strategies to the climate emergency don't look any more promising than they did in previously held rounds of international climate diplomacy.

From the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to COP25 held in Madrid in 2019, the project of advancing global action to tackle the climate crisis has failed rather miserably. In fact, much of the progress in the fight against global warming is driven by cities and local governments, thanks to grassroots activism. And it is actually the young activists that have captured the world's attention in the fight against climate crisis, which seems to suggest that our "last best hope" may be indeed with revolutionary activism. Most national governments have yet to make the fight against global warming a top priority. They are full of big talk, but very little action.

Take for instance the pledges—known as "nationally determined contributions"—at COP21 to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Most countries are [falling](#) way short of the goal of holding warming to 1.5 Celsius. Temperatures have already [risen](#) 1.2 Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and there is in fact very little chance that we can limit the Earth's warming to "well below" 2 degrees

Celsius, which is a key aim of the international agreement.

Moreover, global oil demand is again on the increase, carbon dioxide emissions soared in 2021, and China continues to rely on coal in spite of [recent pledges](#) to stop building new coal-fired power plants abroad. As for the world's biggest economy, the United States is [way behind](#) Europe in the transition to a green economy. In fact, the US is the country that has done the most so far in blocking effective action to combat the climate crisis.

And let's not forget the destruction of the world's largest Amazon rainforest, a process which has greatly [intensified](#) under Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro in the name, he claims, of development.

Indeed, shouldn't the international community have an obligation to intervene in a foreign country in order to prevent irreversible environmental damage?

The failure of advancing global action against the most serious social, political, economic and environmental problem facing the human race and the planet stems from two interrelated facts: (a) the presence of an international economic system (capitalism) which places profits over people and planet, and (b) the absence of effective mechanisms of international cooperation.

Let's face it. Capitalist "logic" is what's destroying the planet. While eliminating capitalism is hardly possible at the current historical juncture, taming the beast is hardly difficult and an absolute must in order to avert a complete climate breakdown. This can be done by bringing back the social state, doing away with the predatory and parasitic practices of financial capital, and charting a course of sustainable development through a global regulatory regime for the protection of the environment.

We can start with the following measures:

1. Eliminate all fossil fuel subsidies, which according to a recent IMF study [amounts](#) to \$5.9 trillion in 2020
2. Ban banks from funding new fossil fuel projects. Amazingly enough, there has been zero mention so far in international climate talks of a "moratorium" on new investments in the coal, oil, and gas industries. In fact, the words "fossil fuel" "coal" and "oil" were not even mentioned in the COP21 agreement, so it should

come as no surprise that banks have [poured](#) close to \$4 trillion in the fossil fuel industries between 2016-2020.

3. [Make ecocide an international crime](#) similar to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. As we move towards a green economy, we must take all measures to ensure that we hold all entities—individuals, states, and corporations—accountable for causing “widespread, severe or long-lasting damage to the environment.”

4. Demand the cancellation of debt for lower income countries, which now [spend several times](#) more on servicing debt than dealing with the challenges of global warming.

Of course, none of the above measures will materialize without international cooperation. However, the extent to which states will come to realize that advancing their national interests in the age of global warming may be detrimental to the greater good of the global society appears to depend not on the wisdom and goodwill of heads of states and elected politicians, but rather on the willingness of average citizens to challenge the existing political establishments and the interests that they serve.

In this context, revolutionary activism on behalf of the planet may be indeed our “last best hope.” Thus, the challenge ahead is to turn every city and every town in virtually every major country in the world into a stronghold of the global climate movement. Then, and only then, can we realistically expect credible action to come from global climate summits.

Our work is licensed under Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0). Feel free to republish and share widely.

Source:

<https://www.commondreams.org/revolutionary-activism-may-be-our-last-best-hope-avert-climate-catastrophe>

[C.J. Polychroniou](#) is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His latest books are [“Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change”](#) and [“Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet”](#) (with Noam Chomsky and

Robert Pollin as primary authors).