

With The Failure of Politics, People Are Waking Up To The Realization That They Have A World To Win



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People everywhere are waking up to the realization that they must fight to organize the world in such a way that there is a sustainable future for humanity and the planet.

Last month's COP26 climate summit at Glasgow ended as a complete flop. While some have hailed as success the mere inclusion of the phrase "unabated coal should be phased down" in the final agreement, the fact of the matter is that the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy remains a distant dream. It should also be obvious to all that the climate deal reached at COP26 in no way prevents planetary temperature from crossing the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold.

But let's be blunt about rising global temperatures. Thanks to the failure of politics with regard to global warming, the critical threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius will be reached or exceeded within the next couple of decades under all emissions scenarios considered, according to [IPCCS' latest findings](#). The only question is whether we can prevent the planet from getting even hotter—potentially passing 2 degrees or even 3 degrees Celsius.

Indeed, our national leaders have failed us on climate change, and we know the reasons why.

I explained this in a recent Op-Ed for Al Jazeera English.

"First, leaders sit on climate negotiating tables with the intent to advance an agenda that serves above all their own national interests rather than the health of our planet. Their mindset is still guided by the principles of "political realism" and

political short-termism. This is why their words are not matching up with their actions.

Thus, Joe Biden can make a moral pronouncement to world leaders at COP26 in Glasgow that the US will lead the fight against the climate crisis “by example”, but, less than two weeks later, his administration auctions oil and gas leases in the Gulf of Mexico.

Second, the nation-state remains the primary actor in world affairs, so there are no international enforcement mechanisms with regard to pledges about cutting emissions. International cooperation, let alone solidarity, is extremely difficult to attain under the existing political order, and as leading international affairs scholar Richard Falk has argued, “Only a transnational ethos of human solidarity based on the genuine search for win/win solutions at home and transnationally can respond effectively to the magnitude and diversity of growing climate change challenges.”

Third, “the logic of capitalism” guides the world economy. With profit-maximization as the ultimate motive, capitalism is toxic for the environment, especially in its neoliberal version, with a strong emphasis on deregulation and privatization. Under such a socioeconomic system, it is highly unlikely that the [political establishment](#) will dare to embark on a climate action course that might prove detrimental to powerful economic interests.”

But all is not yet lost. Climate activism is now a global movement, and it is surely our only way out of the climate conundrum.

An estimated 100,000 people marched in Glasgow, and tens of thousands in other cities around the world, demanding bold action at the COP26 climate conference. Global warming demonstrations are filled with people of all ages and walks of life. Scores of scientists were [arrested](#) during the COP26 summit for carrying out various acts of civil disobedience.

To be sure, real leadership at the Glasgow summit was on display by the thousands of activists who [took to the streets](#)—not by the diplomats inside the halls of the Scottish Event Campus.

Moreover, we should not overlook the fact that some progress has indeed been made in the fight against global warming. The European Union is trying to make more than 100 cities carbon neutral by 2030. In Latin America and the Caribbean, in Asia and the Pacific, hundreds of climate projects have been introduced to

combat fight the climate crisis.

Progressive economists, like those at the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) of the University of Massachusetts–Amherst, are taking real steps to help us combat global warming by producing highly detailed climate stabilization programs that drive sustainability while boosting employment. Indeed, Robert Pollin and some of his co-workers at [PERI](#) have brought the Green New Deal project to the forefront of public consciousness in scores of U.S. states. They are also hard at work now to spread it to other countries of the world.

Within the same context, organizations such as ReImagine Appalachia in the Ohio River Valley are laying the groundwork for a post-fossil fuel economy. Through both grassroots and grasstops initiatives, ReImagine Appalachia has engaged a wide variety of stakeholders in a shared vision of building a sustainable future based on clean and renewable energy sources and investments in the natural infrastructure to support “carbon farming,” but also through the creation of good union jobs for low-wage workers and by ensuring a just transition for all towards an environmentally sustainable economy, including of course workers in the extractive industries. As Amanda Woodrum, Senior Researcher, Policy Matters Ohio, and Co-Director, Project to ReImagine Appalachia likes to say, this is the only way that “Appalachia stays on the climate table, otherwise it will be on the menu.”

In the state with the largest economy in the United States, a detailed project of building a clean-energy infrastructure and reducing emissions by 50 percent as of 2030 and achieving a zero-emissions economy by 2045 has received strong support by more than 20 major unions across the state, including the United Steel Workers Locals 5, 675 and 1945 (who represent workers in the fossil fuel supply chain). The latest union to endorse the California Climate Jobs Plan, outlined in Program for Economic Recovery and Clean Energy Transition in California by Robert Pollin and his co-workers at PERI, is the San Francisco Region of the Inland Boatman’s Union.

Indeed, labor activism in California is in the midst of a dramatic resurgence, with key labor union leaders and organizers such as, among others, Tracey Brieger, Dave Campbell, Norman Rogers, and Veronica Wilson, keen to continue the legacy of Tony Mazzocchi of the Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union. Mazzocchi was one of the earliest environmental activist leaders who

advocated the idea of just transition for workers in carbon-intensive industries. His view, which is at the core of “Just Transition,” was that [helping](#) displaced workers should not be seen as philanthropy or welfare. According to Mazzocchi, those who had worked to “provide the world with the energy and the materials it needs deserve a helping hand to make a new start in life.”

There is no shortage of activism in today’s world. The Green New Deal Network, a coalition of 15 progressive organizations working together with the explicit aim of mobilizing grassroots power in order to advance the vision of the Green New Deal across key states, while also applying pressure at the federal level, is yet another case emblematic of the important shift taking place in a world where the conditions for the transition to a sustainable and just future are being so blatantly ignored by the political establishment.

People everywhere are waking up to the realization that they must fight to organize the world in such a way that there is a sustainable future for humanity and the planet. They know that they have a world to win.

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