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OCTOBER 2019 TABLE OF CONTENTS



COMMENTARY/2

Seeing Horizons in the Clotheslines/2

Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Amazon Fires Will Have Global Consequences/4

Marjorie Cohn on 75,000 fires in the Brazilian Rainforest

Who Killed Oscar and Valeria?/7

Ramzy Baroud on the inconvenient history of the refugee crisis

The Primary Contradiction/9

Norman Solomon on corporate power vs. progressive populism

Trump has Blocked Wage Gains for Workers/11

Lawrence Wittner on miniscule wage increases

A Winning Strategy for Workers/13

Margaret Flowers & Kevin Zeese on worker awakening



FEATURES/16

Making the U.S. a Democracy/16

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

Our Vanishing World: Rainforests/22

Robert J. Burrowes on a crucial feature of the Earth's biosphere

Fighting Fossil Fuels in South Africa/30

Patrick Bond on Climate Justice

A GI Rebellion/39

Steve Early on soldiers saying no to war

Labor Day 2019/42

Jack Rasmus on the condition of the U.S. working class



Seeing Horizons in the Clotheslines

By Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Automatic tumble dryers notwithstanding, most people in the world (women, most often than not) hang the wash on clotheslines made of metal, hemp rope, or wood. Tree branches can also be used as clotheslines. The technique for hanging the wash varies from one country to another, but there are certain general rules. The clothes need to be spread wide to ensure maximum exposure to sun and wind; their weight must be calibrated to the sturdiness of the clothesline; clothespins or something similar should be used to hold the clothes, lest the line collapses as a result of turbulence. Hanging the wash on a clothesline is a thorough job, and in order to do it successfully, close attention needs to be paid to both the clothes and the clothesline. But anyone accustomed to hanging clothes on a clothesline to dry knows that, aside from looking straight at what's in front of you, you also have to take into consideration the time of year, meteorological conditions, the incidence of the sun's rays, the wind's strength and direction, air pollution, and even the degree of safety of the washing line, lest the clothes get



"We are at this juncture where the small, detailed horizon of hanging our clothes to dry needs to be articulated with the broader horizon of the social, economic, political, and cultural meteorology of our time," by REDPIXEL.PL/Shutterstock.com

stolen.

Every democrat in the world, especially those who wear their hearts doubly on the left-hand side (physically and politically); those who feel insulted by the exorbitant enrichment of some and the unfair impoverishment of others; those who are outraged by the uncontrolled arms build-up and all other aspects of war, be they embargoes, economic sanctions, or drug, human and organ trafficking, the assassination of civic and political leaders, or femicide; those who are scared of the possibility of ecological collapse, as a result of increasing global warming, deforestation, water contamination and the blindness of politicians with regard to these issues; those who are alarmed by the resurgence of the far right and its reactionary, nationalist, hyper-conservative ideologies; in a word, all those who will not give up fighting for a society that is more fair, more decent,

and more dignified should learn from the women of this world and their art of hanging the wash on the clotheslines.

We are at this juncture where the small, detailed horizon of hanging our clothes to dry needs to be articulated with the broader horizon of the social, economic, political, and cultural meteorology of our time. The articulation effort is more difficult for the political forces of the left than for those of the right. Given that we have been living for centuries in capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal societies, and that the injustices and discriminations generated by such societies have changed shape but not in their intensity and lethality, the political forces of the left have been training just to exist and to brave the current and channel their energies into paving the way for the society of the future. To put it differently, they have concerned themselves not so much with hanging the clothes

to dry as with the weather conditions. Every time they tried to articulate the two concerns, they did so from within the same political horizon, seeking to scan it, now with near-vision glasses (tactics), now with distance-vision glasses (strategy). This articulation worked for a long time, even if in most cases part of the left became accustomed to seeing with near-vision glasses only, while the other became accustomed to seeing with distance-vision glasses only. Had it happened to women and their washing line, we might be walking around naked today.

However, 40 years of neoliberalism have rendered this political habit no longer viable. The political horizon has shrunk to such stifling proportions that the optico-political market has been forced to specialize in near-vision lenses. Those who insist on wearing distance-vision glasses have to resort to old lenses, thus running the risk of being labeled as either myopic or lunatic. Democrats whose political heart is on the left-hand side have been slow to notice how much the times and the weather have changed, and until they do, they will be putting not only their clothes but also our own at great risk. But there is great urgency in the endeavor, which is why I come forward to suggest where our efforts should concentrate next.

What used to be two scales of the same political horizon are now two separate worlds, which is why, in order to adequately see them within a political framework, we now need a lot

more than two pairs of glasses. In fact, a whole new political culture vision is now required. A consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall and all it symbolized, combined with the soaring concentration of wealth and the deepening of the ecological crisis, was that the hope and the struggle for a better society had to be thought out and carried out with two very different horizons in sight: the political horizon and the civilizing horizon. The former is the conventional horizon of the political struggle. It is still divided into tactics and strategies, but its scale has shrunk since the moment the civilizing horizon became a subject of discussion in society. When that happened, the difference between tactics and strategy became negligible. The political horizon became the horizon of hanging the clothes on the clothesline, political agenda being but the name we give to the clothesline.

The civilizing horizon is a set of themes that go beyond the political horizon, but which, in the eyes of a growing number of people, especially young people, will determine the future of humankind: new models of consumption, democratic coexistence, and friendly relations between humans and between humans and nature. There is no other way to prevent ecological collapse, the emergence of new dictatorships, and the mushrooming of irregular wars with their preferred victims—innocent civilians. The civilizing horizon comprises two political anxieties, the one negative, the

other positive. Negative anxiety is the feeling that all the clothes on the clothesline belong to one single body, one style, one past history. Positive anxiety consists in the fact that, even if the civilizing themes cannot, at least for now, be processed by the political system, they are more and more present in the discussions and everyday life of citizens: in the way in which consumer habits change, in the feelings of outrage over public policies that negate or minimize the relevance of the civilizing themes, in the discomfort in the face of the magnitude of what is at stake in the civilizing horizon as opposed to the smallness of the debates that fill the political clothesline. In view of all this, many men and women end up drifting away from conventional politics, which the clothesline politicians mistake for depoliticization, but in fact is nothing but an intense yearning for alternative policies.

This disconnect between the political and the civilizing horizon is a new thing, and the drama of our time is that it requires that a new and fundamental distinction be made between left and right, a distinction, moreover, for which politicians lack preparation. For all their stating the opposite, the civilizing horizon is the sole concern of the political forces of the right, who despise those who would question it. After all, the world as it stands has largely been wrought by those forces, and they are the main beneficiaries of the status quo. They do not care for the civilizing horizon, because,

they say, that is long-term, and in the long-term we'll all be dead. Conversely, the forces of the left will not be viable in the future unless they are capable of articulating the two horizons. Should they fail to do it, they are the ones who will be dead in the long-term. Hence their vital interest in bringing the civilizing horizon into the discussion. But that will not be possible in the short-term, nor even within election time frames. The solution, therefore, can only be as follows. The forces of the left must learn to operate both within and outside the political horizon. Within it, their goal should be to reshape it so as to broaden its democratic nature (toward more colorful and ever more diverse clothes on the clothesline). They know that the political horizon will be under increasing pressure from the outside, by those citizens who are primarily interested in the civilizing horizon, and that, as a consequence, the forces of the right will respond with repression and do everything in their power, including sacrificing democracy, to maintain the status quo. That is why the defense of democracy must be the new center of the political horizon for the forces of the left and their sole reason for participating in it.

But they must also operate outside it, at the level of the civilizing horizon. The political tools at this level are the following: popular education aimed at intercultural, eco-socialist democracy, personal and collective example as life testimony, and new forms of organization.

As regards education: it is imperative to promote the global democratization of life, the intercultural diversity of post-capitalist, post-colonialist, and post-patriarchal possibilities, and the rights of nature. This entails turning the party-sponsored summer universities and training schools inside out: it is up to citizens to teach politicians about the civilizing horizon. As regards life testimony: the politicians of the left must bear personal witness to the civilizing concerns and live in closer proximity to the poor, discriminated-against urban peripheries, learn anew how to speak to the classes that historically were their *raison d'être*, and go live among them whenever possible. As regards the form of organization: the left has to be at once party and movement, because neither one by itself will be able to survive the deterioration of democracy caused by the forces of the right. By articulating their efforts, the forces of the left can begin to look at the political and

civilizing horizons as part of the same equation and transform the former in accordance with the latter. With that they will be securing their future, their promising, pressing future. **Z**

Amazon Fires Will Have Global Consequences. The UN Must Act

By Marjorie Cohn

The Amazon is burning. Nearly 75,000 fires have started in the iconic Brazilian rainforest this year to date, an 84 percent increase from the year before. Since August 10, a spate of intentionally set fires have been raging in the



Burned Down Amazon Tropical Rainforest, by Alexandre Laprise/Shutterstock.com

Amazon. But Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, who took office in January, let them burn for two weeks before sending firefighters to put them out following an international outcry.

Fires ravaging the Amazon pose imminent peril to the 34 million people and 3 million species of animals and plants that live in the world's largest rainforest, which covers 2 million square miles.

Damage from the raging fires will change the face of the planet. The rainforest is home to 10 percent of the species on Earth, including many types of plants and animals that cannot be found anywhere else.

"The loss of the Amazon's biodiversity will be beyond devastating for the planet," Dahr Jamail wrote in *Truthout*, noting that many scientists consider the Amazon to be the Earth's most important site of biodiversity.

"An International Crisis"

French president Emmanuel Macron tweeted, "Our house is burning. Literally," and exhorted, "Members of the G7 Summit, let's discuss this emergency first order in two days!" Bristling at Macron's exhortation, Bolsonaro wrote on Twitter, "The French president's suggestion that Amazon issues be discussed at the G-7 without participation by the countries in the region evokes a colonialist mentality that is out of place in the 21st century."

In light of Bolsonaro's refusal to provide resources to

extinguish the fires, Macron threatened to block the Mercosur-European Union trade deal. Bolsonaro capitulated. He allocated \$7 million and sent 44,000 troops and military aircraft to the burning areas.

But that falls short of what is needed to put out the fires and save the Amazon. "We're talking about battling what will be hundreds of fires burning simultaneously, beyond any road network, distributed across thousands of miles," according to Douglas Morton, head of the Biospheric Sciences Laboratory at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. "It's quite a challenge to mobilize resources for one of these fires, but to simultaneously track down and put out a number of these sorts of fires ... demands essentially a full press," adding, "You really do need thousands of people."

The countries in the G-7—the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada—donated \$20 million to help fight the fires, but Bolsonaro refused to accept the money unless Macron apologizes. Bolsonaro is playing games while the Amazon burns.

Donald Trump, who skipped the climate meeting at the G-7 summit, later said he hadn't agreed to contribute to the \$20 million because of lack of coordination with Bolsonaro.

Moreover, even if accepted, this money would not be sufficient. Rick Swan, of the International Association of Fire Fighters, told *The Washington Post* that, by comparison, to extinguish the 2017 Tubbs Fire in

Northern California, "the costs alone were \$100 million."

In other words, a massive international effort is needed to end the Amazon fires.

Bolsonaro's Appeal to Anti-Colonial Politics Is Deeply Cynical

Those who are critical of ongoing colonial and neocolonial dynamics but who are not entirely familiar with the context of the fires in Brazil may at first be skittish about backing international efforts to pressure Bolsonaro to end the fires. In truth, however, Bolsonaro's appeal to anti-colonial politics is deeply cynical and should not deter progressives with anti-colonial commitments from backing international endeavors to end the fires.

The cynicism of Bolsonaro's anti-colonial appeal is evident in the context of widespread popular protests in which Brazilians have marched holding signs with messages, such as "The Amazon belongs to the world, and we need the world's help right now" and "SOS." Protesters took part in some 30 demonstrations across Brazil, and thousands of demonstrators marching in Rio chanted, "The Amazon stays, out with Bolsonaro."

Indigenous peoples in Brazil have also made clear that they hold Bolsonaro's government responsible for the destruction of the Amazon. The Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon

(COIAB) issued a statement expressing “extreme concern about the rapid destruction of the Amazon rainforest, home to our families and to all the resources we need to live.” COIAB stated, “The related record rates of deforestation and outbreaks of fire are a consequence of the anti-indigenous and anti-environmental genocidal speeches of this government.”

A group of Indigenous Huni Kuin leaders recently called for a stop to the fires, saying: “Nature is crying and we are crying. If we don’t stop this destruction of Mother Nature, future generations will live in a completely different world to the one we live in today. This is Mother Nature’s cry, asking us to help her. And we are working today so that humanity has a future. But if we don’t stop this destruction, we will be the ones that will be extinguished, burned and the sky will descend upon us, which has already begun to happen.”

The UN Security Council Should Order International Firefighters and Economic Boycott

As empowered by the United Nations Charter, the Security Council should find that the fires in the Amazon pose a “threat to the peace” and order measures to restore and maintain international peace and security. Those measures “may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations.”

The Council should require that member states refrain from entering into trade agreements

with Brazil unless and until it agrees to allow international economic and physical firefighting assistance. As Moira Birss, Amazon Watch’s finance campaign director said in a release issued by the Institute for Public Accuracy (IPA), “Now that the world is finally paying attention, it’s important to also understand that governments and companies around the world are emboldening Bolsonaro’s toxic policies when they enter trade agreements with his government or invest in agribusiness companies operating in the Amazon.”

In addition, the Council should order member states to contrib-

South Africa, prohibition of the sale of South African currency and coins, restrictions on cultural relations and sports, suspension of guaranteed export loans, prohibition of new nuclear contracts, and prohibition of sales of computer equipment that could be used by the South African police and army. The international boycott of South Africa led to the end of the apartheid regime.

All UN member countries are bound by the resolutions of the Security Council. Article 25 of the Charter says, “The members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council.”



Protest to demand international aid for forest fires in the Bolivian amazon and repeal Presidential Decree 3973 permitting forest burning and clearing, by Devin Beaulieu/Shutterstock.com

ute money and personnel to fight the fires raging in the Amazon.

There is precedent for this type of resolution. In 1985, the Council passed Resolution 569, which condemned the South African government’s policy of apartheid. It urged UN members to adopt measures including suspension of all new investment in

And Article 49 states that the UN members “shall join in affording mutual assistance in carrying out the measures” upon which the Council decides.

Bolsonaro’s Policies Have Exacerbated the Fires

Fires do not ignite themselves in the rainforest. “Basically, the Amazon hadn’t burnt in hundreds of thousands or millions of years,” said William Magnusson, a biodiversity specialist at the National Institute of Amazonian Research in Brazil. According to National Geographic, “A growing number of manmade fires have plagued the Amazon in recent years, imperiling the ecosystem. The rainforest is not built for fire.”

Farmers in the Amazon cut down trees to clear the area for planting. Miners and loggers start fires to cover their illegal activities. And some fires are set to force Indigenous peoples from their land. Bolsonaro, however, has fanned the flames in the Amazon.

A *New York Times* analysis found that for the first six months of 2019, Bolsonaro’s pro-development, anti-environmental policies led to a 20 percent decrease in enforcement measures aimed at protecting against deforestation, as compared to the same period in 2018.

“Bolsonaro must take immediate, comprehensive steps to not only extinguish these fires but also address the root causes of this environmental catastrophe: the roll-back of environmental and indigenous rights protections and the recklessness of the profit-seeking agribusiness industry,” Christian Poirier, program director at Amazon Watch, said on the IPA release. But, he added, “This burden isn’t on the Brazilian government alone. We are all global

citizens of our shared planet and must take shared responsibility for its preservation.”

We must act internationally to save the precious Amazon rainforest. Citizens of the 15 member countries on the Security Council should pressure their governments to vote in favor of a resolution calling for an economic boycott of Brazil and the provision of resources to quell the forest fires. The future of our planet is at stake. **Z**

Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, deputy secretary general of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and a member of the advisory board of Veterans for Peace. Her most recent book is *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral, and Geopolitical Issues*.

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Who Killed Oscar and Valeria: The Inconvenient History of the Refugee Crisis

By Ramzy Baroud

History never truly retires. Every event of the past,

however inconsequential, reverberates throughout and, to an extent, shapes our present, and our future as well

The haunting image of the bodies of Salvadoran father, Oscar Alberto Martinez Ramirez, and his daughter, Valeria, who were washed ashore at a riverbank on the Mexico-U.S. border cannot be understood separately from El Salvador’s painful past.

Valeria’s arms were still wrapped around her father’s neck, even as both lay, face down, dead on the Mexican side of the river, ushering the end of their desperate and, ultimately, failed attempt at reaching the U.S. The little girl was only 23-months-old.

Following the release of the photo, media and political debates in the U.S. focused partly on the Trump administration’s inhumane treatment of undocumented immigrants. For Democrats, it was a chance at scoring points against Trump, prior to the start of presidential election campaigning. Republicans, naturally, went on the defensive.

Aside from a few alternative media sources, little has been said about the U.S. role in Oscar and Valeria’s deaths, starting with its funding of El Salvador’s “dirty war” in the 1980s. The outcome of that war continues to shape the present, thus the future of that poor South American nation.

Oscar and Valeria were merely escaping “violence” and the drug wars in El Salvador, many U.S. media sources reported, but little was said of the U.S. government’s support of El Salva-



Matias Romero, Oaxaca/Mexico: Salvadorans fleeing poverty and gang violence in the third caravan to the U.S. gather to wait for trucks to take them to their next stop in Veracruz, by Vic Hinterlang/Shutterstock.com

dor's brutal regimes in the past as they battled Marxist guerrillas. Massive amounts of U.S. military aid was poured into a country that was in urgent need for true democracy, basic human rights and sustainable economic infrastructure.

Back then, the U.S. "went well beyond remaining largely silent in the face of human-rights abuses in El Salvador," wrote Raymond Bonner in the *Nation*. "The State Department and White House often sought to cover up the brutality, to protect the perpetrators of even the most heinous crimes."

These crimes included the butchering of 700 innocent people, many of them children, by the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion in the village of El Mozote, in the northeastern part of the country. Leaving El Salvador teetering between organized

criminal violence and the status of a failed state, the U.S. continued to use the country as a vassal for its misguided foreign policy to this day. Top U.S. diplomats, like Elliott Abraham, who channeled support to the Salvadoran regime in the 1980s carried on with a successful political career, unhindered.

To understand the tragic death of Oscar and Valeria in any other way would be a dishonest interpretation of a historical tragedy.

The dominant discourse on the growing refugee crisis around the world has been shaped by this deception. Instead of honestly examining the roots of the global refugee crisis, many of us often oscillate between self-gratifying humanitarianism, jingoism or utter indifference. It is as if the story of Oscar and Valeria began the moment they decided to cross a river between

Mexico and the U.S., not decades earlier. Every possible context before that decision is conveniently dropped.

The politics of many countries around the world have been shaped by the debate on refugees, as if basic human rights should be subject to discussion. In Italy, the ever-opportunistic Interior Minister, Matteo Salvini, has successfully shaped a whole national conversation around refugees.

Like other far-right European politicians, Salvini continues to blatantly manipulate collective Italian fear and discontent regarding the state of their economy by framing all of the country's troubles around the subject of African migrants and refugees. Fifty-two percent of Italians believe that migrants and refugees are a burden to their country, according to a recent

Pew Research Center study.

Those who subscribe to Salvini's self-serving logic are blinded by far-right rhetoric and outright ignorance. To demonstrate this assertion, one only needs to examine the reality of Italian intervention in Libya, as part of the NATO war on that country in March 2011.

Without a doubt, the war on Libya, justified on the basis of a flawed interpretation of United Nations Resolution 1973, was the main reason behind the surge of refugees and migrants to Italy, en-route to Europe.

According to the Migration Policy Center, prior to the 2011 war, "outward migration was not an issue for the Libyan population." This changed, following the lethal NATO war on Libya, which pushed the country squarely into the status of failed states.

Between the start of the war on March 19 and June 8, 2011, 422,912 Libyans and 768,372 foreign nationals fled the country, according to the International Organization of Migration (IOM). Many of those refugees sought asylum in Europe. Salvini's virulent anti-refugee discourse is bereft of any reference to that shameful, self-indicting reality.

In fact, Salvini's own Lega party was a member of the Italian coalition which took part in NATO's war on Libya. Not only is Salvini refusing to acknowledge his country's role in fostering the current refugee crisis, but he is designating as an "enemy" humanitarian NGOs that are active in rescuing stranded

refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.

According to the UN refugee agency (UNHRC), an estimated 2,275 people drowned while attempting to cross to Europe in 2018 alone. Thousands of precious lives, like those of Oscar and Valeria, would have been spared, had NATO not intervened on the pretext of wanting to save lives in Libya in 2011.

According to UNHRC, as of June 19, 2019, there are 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide; of them, 41.3 million are internally displaced people, while 25.9 million are refugees who crossed international borders.

Yet, despite the massive influx of refugees, and the obvious logic between political meddling (as in El Salvador) and military intervention (as in Libya), no western government has accepted any moral—let alone legal—accountability for the massive human suffering underway.

Italy, France, Britain, and other NATO members who took part in bombing Libya in 2013 are guilty of fueling today's refugee crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. Similarly, the supposedly random "violence" and drug wars in El Salvador must be seen within the political context of misguided American interventionism. Were it not for such violent interventions, Oscar, Valeria and millions of innocent people would have still been alive today. **Z**

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and editor of *Palestine Chronicle*. His last book is *The*

Last Earth: A Palestinian Story (Pluto Press, London). Baroud has a Ph.D. in Palestine Studies from the University of Exeter and was a Non-Resident Scholar at Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, University of California Santa Barbara. His website is www.ramzy-baroud.net.

The Primary Contradiction: Corporate Power vs. Progressive Populism

By Norman Solomon

For plutocrats, this summer has gotten a bit scary. Two feared candidates are rising. Trusted candidates are underperforming. The 2020 presidential election could turn out to be a real-life horror movie: *A Nightmare on Wall Street*.

"Wall Street executives who want Trump out," *Politico* reported in January, "list a consistent roster of appealing nominees that includes former Vice President Joe Biden and Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Kamala Harris of California."

But seven months later, those "appealing nominees" don't seem appealing to a lot of voters. Biden's frontrunner status is



U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders speaks to supporters in Los Angeles, CA,
by YASAMIN JAFARI TEHRANI/Shutterstock.com

looking shaky, while other Wall Street favorites no longer inspire investor confidence: Harris is stuck in single digits, Booker is several points below her, and Gillibrand just dropped out of the race.

Meanwhile, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are drawing large crowds and rising in polls. In pivotal early states like Iowa and especially New Hampshire, reputable poll averages indicate that Biden is scarcely ahead.

“Bankers’ biggest fear” is that, “the nomination goes to an anti-Wall Street crusader” like Warren or Sanders, Politico reported, quoting the CEO of a “giant bank” who said: “It can’t be Warren and it can’t be Sanders. It has to be someone centrist and someone who can win.”

But the very biggest fear among corporate elites is that

Warren or Sanders could win—and then use the presidency to push back against oligarchy. If Biden can’t be propped up, there’s no candidate looking strong enough to stop them.

Biden, Warren and Sanders, as the *New York Times* reported, are “a threesome that seems to have separated from the rest of the primary field.” In fourth place, national polling averages show, Harris is far behind.

Biden’s distinguished record of servicing corporate America spans five decades. He is eager to continue that work from the Oval Office, but can he get there? A recent *Times* headline noted reasons for doubt: “Joe Biden’s Poll Numbers Mask an Enthusiasm Challenge.” Enthusiasm for Biden has been high among Democratic-aligned elites, but not among Democratic-aligned voters.

While corporate news organizations—and corporate-enmeshed “public” outlets like NPR News and the PBS NewsHour—evade primary contradictions, Sanders directly hammers at how huge corporations are propelling media bias and undermining democracy.

Even though he has inspired media onslaughts—such as the now-notorious 16 anti-Sanders articles published by the *Washington Post* in a pivotal 16-hour period during the 2016 primary contest—the Sanders campaign is so enormous that even overtly hostile outlets must give him some space. In an op-ed piece he wrote that the *Post* published, Sanders confronted Biden’s wealth-fondling approach.

Under the headline “The Straightest Path to Racial Equality Is Through the One Percent,” Sanders quoted a statement from Biden: “I don’t think 500 billionaires are the reason why we’re in trouble.” Sanders responded, “I respectfully disagree”—and he went on to say: “It is my view that any presidential candidate who claims to believe that black lives matter has to take on the institutions that have continually exploited black lives.”

Such insight about systemic exploitation is sacrilege to the secular faith of wealth accumulation that touts reaching billionaire status as a kind of divine ascension. Yet Sanders boldly challenges that kind of hollowness, shedding a fierce light on realities of corporate capitalism.

“Structural problems require structural solutions,” Sanders pointed out in his *Post* article,

“and promises of mere ‘access’ have never guaranteed black Americans equality in this country. . . . ‘Access’ to health care is an empty promise when you can’t afford high premiums, co-pays or deductibles. And an ‘opportunity’ for an equal education is an opportunity in name only when you can’t afford to live in a good school district or to pay college tuition. Jobs, health care, criminal justice and education are linked, and progress will not be made unless we address the economic systems that oppress Americans at their root.”

Like many other progressives, I continue to actively support Sanders as a candidate who bypasses euphemisms, names ultra-powerful villains—and directly challenges those in power who’ve been warping and gaming the economic systems against working-class people.

Those systems are working quite nicely for the ultra-rich, like the giant bank CEO who told *Politico* that “it can’t be Warren and it can’t be Sanders.” That’s the decision from Wall Street. The decision from Main Street is yet to be heard. **Z**

Norman Solomon is cofounder and national coordinator of RootsAction.org. He was a Bernie Sanders delegate from California to the 2016 Democratic National Convention and is currently a coordinator of the relaunched independent Bernie Delegates Network. Solomon is the author of a dozen books including *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.



Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) speaks during a campaign rally in Long Island City, Queens, by Ron Adar/Shutterstock.com

Trump has Blocked Wage Gains for American Workers

By Lawrence Wittner

On June 19, 2019, President Donald Trump bragged at his re-election kickoff rally in Orlando that, thanks to his leadership, the wages of American workers “are rising at the fastest rate in many decades.”

The reality, however, is that they are not. Indeed, wages rose at a faster rate only a few years before, under his predecessor. And a key reason for the very limited wage increases since Trump entered the White House is his administration’s success in blocking any wage

increases for some workers and in reducing wage increases for others.

In fact, Trump has never been enthusiastic about increasing the pay of America’s workers. “Our wages are too high,” the billionaire businessperson complained back in November 2015, during his campaign for the presidency.

Naturally, then, Trump and his fellow Republicans have blocked any increase in the federal minimum wage during his time in office. In 2016, Trump stated his opposition to setting any federal wage floor and, since then, has never proposed raising it. As a result of years of Republican resistance in Congress and the White House, the federal minimum wage has remained stuck at a poverty level—\$7.25 an hour—for a decade and has lost much of its purchasing power, making it the lowest minimum wage throughout the industrialized world. The minimum wage for waiters and other workers relying on tips is even

lower: \$2.13 an hour.

Moreover, the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress continue to oppose any minimum wage increase. In early May 2019, Trump's Secretary of Labor, Alexander Acosta, testified before two Congressional committees, declaring: "We do not support a change in the federal minimum wage at this time." In response, Senator Patty Murray, alluding to the 10-year gap since the last increase, asked: "If workers do not deserve [a raise] at this time, then when do they?" But Acosta did not answer her question.

In July 2019, the new, Democratic-controlled House of Representatives passed legislation to phase in an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, thereby—as the AFL-CIO noted—giving "40 million Americans a raise." But only three House Republicans voted for the measure, while Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declared that he would prevent a Senate vote on it. Although, in mid-June, Trump said he was "looking at" the idea of a \$15 an hour minimum wage, he quickly countered that by stating, falsely, that he had "already created a minimum wage because wages have gone up more than . . . in many decades" under his administration. Since then, nothing about a minimum wage increase has been heard from the president, and the Democratic wage raise legislation remains banned from consideration in the Republican Senate.

Trump has also gone out of his way to undermine the income of

public sector workers. In August 2018, he announced that he would scrap a scheduled 2.1 percent pay raise, plus locality paycheck adjustments, for 2 million federal employees. "Federal agency budgets cannot sustain such increases," he declared, avoiding any mention of the fact that he had previously secured a sharp reduction in federal income through legislation for a \$1.5 trillion tax cut that largely benefited the wealthy and their corporations. In late December 2018, Trump followed up by issuing an executive order to freeze the pay of federal workers. But, subsequently, Congress overrode his action and partially restored the pay increase—raising the pay for federal employees by 1.4 percent (two-thirds of the scheduled increase), with additional money factored in for locality pay adjustments.

In the winter of 2018-2019, Trump attacked the livelihoods of public workers once again, when his shutdown of the federal government forced 800,000 federal employees to go on unpaid leave or to work without pay.

One of the factors advancing the income of American workers, as well as helping to safeguard them from excessively-long work weeks, is the provision in the Fair Labor Standards Act that guarantees them time-and-a-half pay for more than 40 hours of work per week. But coverage is based upon workers remaining under a specific income level and, thanks to inflation over the past few decades, fewer and fewer workers re-

mained below that level. Recognizing that only seven percent of American workers were still covered by the law, the Obama administration raised the income level for eligibility substantially. But, upon taking office, the Trump administration severely cut back Obama's expansion of eligibility, thereby depriving as many as 8.2 million workers of the overtime coverage they had previously been promised.

Despite these actions taken by Trump and his administration to reduce wage gains, what economists call real wages (that is, wages and salaries adjusted for the rising cost of living) have been rising—in part because many states and localities have passed laws raising their minimum wages far beyond the pathetic \$7.25 level set by the federal government.

But, overall, increases in real wages during the Trump presidency have remained minuscule. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor, the real average weekly earnings for American workers increased by just 0.2 percent between June 2017 and June 2018. From June 2018 to June 2019, the increase in their real average weekly earnings was only 1.2 percent. Consequently, as Senator Bernie Sanders has stated, correctly, the average American worker earns less today than he or she did 45 years ago.

Although the pundits say the U.S. economy is booming—and it certainly is for the country's billionaires—it's not doing much for the incomes of Amer-

ican workers. And much of the responsibility for this situation lies with Republican officeholders, especially Trump. **Z**

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A Winning Strategy For Workers

By Margaret Flowers and Kevin Zeese

After years of declining power and stagnant wages, workers in the United States are awakening, striking and demanding more rights. A Bureau of Labor Statistics report shows the number of striking workers is the highest since 1986. In 2018, 485,000 people went on strike, a number not exceeded since 533,000 went on strike in 1986—and 2019 will be even larger. Workers should be in revolt, as the Economic Policy Institute found workers have had stagnant wages for three and a half decades even though productivity is increasing.

Labor Returns To Its Roots: Strikes Escalate

This is the 125th anniversary of Labor Day, which was declared in 1894 after the nationwide Pullman railroad strike

led by the American Railway Union under Eugene Debs when 260,000 workers in 27 states participated. Federal troops were used to stop the strike and 26 people were killed. Six days after the more than two-month-long strike ended, President Grover Cleveland pushed legislation through Congress creating Labor Day as a conciliatory gesture to the workers.

Near the end of the strike, on July 4, Debs described the strike as the beginning of a conflict where, “90 percent of the people of the United States will be arrayed against the other 10 percent.” Six days later, Debs was arrested and, after his conviction was upheld by the Supreme Court, he served six months in prison for violating an injunction against the strike. When released, Debs started the Socialist Party, which built worker power in elections, resulting in many changes to the laws.

The Pullman Strike was part of a growing labor movement that won reforms such as ending child labor, the 8-hour workday, the right to unionize and Depression-era New Deal laws, which included many laws demanded by workers, the Socialist Party and the Progressive Party.

Since the 1947 Taft-Harley Act, which restricted worker rights, unions have been in decline with reduced members and rights. The *Janus* decision, which some saw as a fatal attack on public-sector unions, might be the low point, perhaps the darkness before the dawn, for workers in the United States.

Workers are realizing that democracy requires unions and now 64 percent of people say they approve of unions, a dramatic increase of 16 percent over a record-low figure registered in 2009.

Janus seems to have focused unions on the need to rethink their approach, and so far unions who have moved to an organizing culture have not been hurt by *Janus*. In recent years, there has been an awakening with a wave of strikes such as the teachers’ strikes in multiple states (California, Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, among others). There have also been recent strikes by healthcare and hotel workers in ten cities, grad students, farmworkers and Stop and Shop, National Grid and Steelworkers, as well as the largest strike of manufacturing workers in the Trump era, McDonald’s, and even prisoners went on strike in 17 states. WalMart workers threatened to strike and won increased wages.

Workers in the new gig economy also face challenges. When Uber and Lyft went public, it was bad news for drivers. While investors made billions of dollars, it created new “demands from investors for fare increases and further attacks on drivers, already grossly undercompensated.” These drivers are contractors, not employees subject to minimum wage laws or the benefits of being an employee. The effective hourly wage of an Uber driver is less than what 90

percent of U.S. workers earn. Drivers have begun to organize and strike to demand better wages and benefits.

It is time for a new era of worker rights, union organizing, higher wages, and worker ownership. Decades of mistreatment of workers are boomeranging and could make the next decade one of massive advancement by workers.

More Than Wages

The vast majority of people in the United States are wage slaves as they depend on their job for survival and missing a short time without work puts people in serious financial difficulty. This is the time to transform the relationship of workers to their jobs.

The Congressional Budget Office found the wealth divide has reached new levels of disparity, finding the wealthiest top 10 percent of families with incomes of at least \$942,000 now hold 76 percent of the total wealth and average \$4 million in wealth. The remainder of the top half of the population took most of the rest, 23 percent, which left only 1 percent of wealth for the bottom 50 percent. That bottom half can barely pay their bills, has no money for emergencies, has no savings, can't afford to send their children to college and is trapped with great insecurity and no upward mobility. In fact, the bottom 25 percent of people in the U.S. are, on average, in debt \$13,000 and the bottom 12 percent is \$32,000 in debt.

One reason for the wealth divide is that since 1979 productivity has increased by 70 percent while hourly compensation has increased only by 12 percent. During this period, the top one percent's wages grew 138 percent, while wages of the bottom 90 percent grew just 15 percent. If the wages of the bottom 90 percent had grown in parallel with the increase in productivity, then the bottom 90 percent's wages would have grown by 32 percent, more than double the actual growth. Breaking this down further, middle-class wages have been stagnant with an hourly wage increase of only 6 percent since 1979, while low-wage workers' wages have actually declined by 5 percent. Those with very high wages had a 41 percent increase.

Radical transformation is needed to correct decades of decline in worker's rights and wages. This means reversing the era of privatization and creating economic democracy, such as worker ownership and workers sharing in the profits. As the calls to declare a climate emergency get louder, there is an opportunity to do both while we confront the reality of the climate crisis. Various proposals are being put forward for a Green New Deal. Transitioning to a clean energy economy requires changes in many economic sectors, e.g. construction, manufacturing, transit, agriculture, housing, finance, energy, and infrastructure. (Jeremy Brecher and Joe Uehlein list 12 reasons why a Green New Deal could be good for workers on

the Labor Network for Sustainability website.)

Responding to the climate crisis is going to require major public capital investments over the next two decades. With these public investments, the United States needs a democratically controlled economy. This means more public works, and the nationalizing of some sectors of the economy, especially the energy and transportation sectors. It is an opportunity to put in place public ownership where workers have a share in ownership of businesses or complete ownership based on a worker-cooperative model.

Labor unions need to be involved in determining the details of the new Green-era economy. As Labor for Sustainability points out, many unions are already on board. It is important for workers involved in the fossil fuel economy to realize the new economy of the future will not include fossil fuels and they need to help create that new economy so they can be part of it and benefit from it. Green New Deal advocates are calling for a "Just Transition," where workers are compensated and receive training as they transition to the new economy. One of the challenges of building the new economy is it will require millions of workers. There will be a worker shortage as all sectors of the economy will have to transition to sustainability and clean energy.

The shift to a democratized economy is already underway as more people are developing worker-owned business-

es. The movement for worker ownership in the United States has been growing rapidly since before the 2008 financial crash. This movement is now reflecting itself in the electoral process. Polls show widespread support among people in the U.S. for workers having ownership in corporations where they are employed.

Senator Sanders (I-VT) recently put forward a labor program that included giving workers a greater ownership stake in companies. Senator Warren (D-MA) made a similar proposal last year when she announced her exploratory campaign that included workers on boards of directors and receiving a share of the profits. Green candidate Howie Hawkins has a long history of support for economic democracy, giving workers more rights, a share in profits and ownership of corporations. Such “codetermination” policies are widely prevalent in Europe, providing unions with a strong voice in corporate decision-making.

Wage-Slaves Must Revolt

The attack on workers is a product of the privatization era that began under Reagan, accelerated under Clinton and continues today. Some of the teacher’s strikes have focused on charter schools, highlighting how privatization hurts workers and strengthens financiers. The negative consequences of the privatization era are increasing support for socialism and eco-

nomic democracy as well as specific policies such as national improved Medicare for all, municipal Internet networks, public utilities, and worked-controlled businesses.

There has been an increased call for general strikes by workers, climate activists, and immigrants. When the people of the United States become mobilized enough to organize a general strike, it will be a revolutionary moment in the development of the United States. People will realize they have the power to determine their own futures.

When we describe building power at Popular Resistance, we are describing the kind of people’s movement that is able to stop business as usual with a mass general walkout or other tactics. A wage-slave revolt is where the popular movement is going in the foreseeable future.

The escalation in worker organizing in the U.S., both inside and outside of unions, over the

past half-dozen years is coming at a time when people are being radicalized in social movements from Occupy to Black Lives Matter. Unions are connecting worker struggles to community concerns and as a result, when they strike, the community supports them. The linking of the popular movement to growth in unions strengthens both workers and activists. People uniting across issues is building a popular movement that is demanding people and planet, not profit.

Labor Day is a time to reflect on the potential of workers building power. The people are on the path to build a powerful political movement against both corporate-controlled parties to fight for a government that represents the interests of workers and puts people and planet before profits. **Z**

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Feature



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To Make the U.S. a Democracy, the Constitution Itself Must Change

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

CJ. Polychroniou: According to popular conception, the United States is a “nation of immigrants,” although this formulation significantly excludes Native people—who were already here, and were subjected to colonization, displacement and genocide at the hands of Eu-

ropean immigrants—and also excludes African Americans, whose ancestors were kidnapped and enslaved. When it is described as a “nation of immigrants,” the U.S. is often portrayed as a varied nation where people have the freedom to pursue their dreams of a better life while maintaining

their own cultural, ethnic and religious distinctiveness or uniqueness. Yet, the truth of the matter is that inequality and oppression of the “Other” have been ongoing political and social realities since the origins of the republic. In fact, today we have a president in the White House who makes no bones about wishing to see non-white people, even elected representatives of the U.S. Congress, leave the country because they challenge the status quo and seek a United States with a more humane and democratic polity. Meanwhile, the very rich are enjoying political privileges like never before. Noam, what are some of the tangible and intangible factors that seem to be pushing the country—socially, politically and economically—backward rather than forward?

Noam Chomsky: Trump’s diatribes successfully inflame his audience, many of whom apparently feel deeply threatened by diversity, cultural change, or simply the recognition that the White Christian nation of their collective imagination is changing before their eyes. White supremacy is nothing new in the U.S. The late George Fredrickson’s comparative studies of white supremacy found the U.S. to be almost off the chart, more extreme even than Apartheid South Africa. As late as the 1960s the U.S. had anti-miscegenation laws so extreme that the Nazis refused to adopt them as a model for their racist Nuremberg laws. And the power of Southern Democrats was so great that until 1960s activism shattered the framework of legal racism—if not its practice by other means—even New Deal federal housing programs enforced segregation, barring Black people from new housing programs.

It goes back to the country’s origins. While progressive in many ways by the standards of the day, the U.S. was founded on two brutal racist principles: the most hideous system of slavery in human history, the source of much of its wealth (and England’s too), and the need to rid the national territory of Native Americans, whom the Declaration of Independence explicitly describes as “the merciless Indian savages,” and whom the framers saw as barring the expansion of the “superior” race.

Immigrants ... were supposed to be white immigrants—in fact, basically “Anglo-Saxon,” in

accord with weird racist myths of the founding fathers that persisted through the 19th century. That includes the leading Enlightenment figures. Benjamin Franklin urged that Germans and Swedes be barred because they were too “swarthy.” Thomas Jefferson was greatly interested in Anglo-Saxon language and law, part of his immersion in the “Saxon myth” that English democracy and law trace back to a pre-Norman Saxon period. The first Naturalization Act, 1790, restricted the option to whites, extended to ex-slaves after the Civil war.

The country of course needed immigrants to settle the “Indian country” from which Indigenous nations were expelled or “exterminated” (as the Founders put it). But they were supposed to be “white”—a somewhat flexible culturally constructed category. By the late 19th century, Asians were excluded by law. The first more general immigration law was in 1924, designed to bar Jews and Italians primarily. There is no need to review here the horrendous record of how Jews were prevented from fleeing Nazi barbarism, crimes that persisted even after the war. Truman sent Earl Harrison on a mission to inspect the concentration camps where Jews were still held, under grotesque conditions as he reported. About the only effect was to intensify efforts to ship them to Palestine.

The 1924 law remained in place until 1965. By the 1980s immigration began to be criminalized. Treatment of Haitians fleeing terror was particularly despicable. Guantánamo was first used as a detention center by the Bush I and Clinton administrations, a place to get rid of Black people fleeing in terror from the murderous coup regime that [U.S. leaders] were supporting, despite pretenses to the contrary. They were classified as “economic migrants,” a cynical pretense in gross violation of international law and minimal decency.

Another ugly story.

It’s not terribly surprising, then, to read a report of a conference of conservative intellectuals where one esteemed speaker, University of Pennsylvania Law professor Amy Wax, explains learnedly that, “our country will be better off with more whites and fewer nonwhites,” since immigrants may not quickly come to “think, live and act just like us” because the social and cultural climate of their places of origin.

Wax failed to elaborate on whether her parents, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, came from a cultural and social climate where people were thinking and acting like “us.”

It’s not hard to understand why these deep currents are becoming more manifest, and ominous, today, after 40 years of the “savage capitalism” unleashed by the neoliberal assault. It’s enough to recall that for a large majority of the workforce, wages have either stagnated or declined since 1979, when the neoliberal assault was just taking off. From the country’s origins, U.S. workers benefited from the world’s highest wages.... Since the 1980s, though the unusual advantages persist, working people have fallen behind the rest of the developed world by many measures. For review of their current status, see Amanda Novella and Jeff Madrick’s February 2019 contribution to the journal *Challenge*.

The effects of the assault are sharp concentration of wealth and power, increasingly in largely predatory financial institutions, stagnation or decline for the majority, deterioration of benefits, astonishing collapse of infrastructure, a form of globalization designed to pit working people against one another for the benefit of international investors, weakening of institutions to protect worker rights,

undermining of functioning democracy, and much else that is all too familiar.

The result, in the U.S. and in Europe, is an upsurge of anger, resentment and, all too often, a search for scapegoats—typically those even more disadvantaged, who are portrayed as being coddled by liberal elites. It’s a dangerous mix: fertile territory for demagogues.

The threats are far more extreme than the incipient fascist-style tendencies, which are severe enough. It cannot be overlooked that humans are facing a decision of extraordinary significance, which must be made very soon: Will organized human society survive in anything like its present form, or will it be devastated by global catastrophe? The two most ominous threats are nuclear war and environmental catastrophe, both increasing. On the latter, major energy corporations are apparently planning on a future with 5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels by mid-century, and with that in mind, are racing to accelerate what climate scientists recognize to be indescribable catastrophe by maximizing the profitable production of fossil fuels, joined by the biggest banks and other major capitalist institutions.

Meanwhile the Republican administration, determined to safeguard its credentials as the most



“The effects of the assault are sharp concentration of wealth and power, increasingly in largely predatory financial institutions,” by nuvolanevicata/Shutterstock.com

dangerous organization in human history, is anticipating a slightly less overwhelming catastrophe—a rise of 4°C by end of the century, also far above what scientists recognize to be a colossal danger. And it concludes from this detailed environmental assessment that we should not limit automotive emissions, because—what’s the difference? We’re going over the cliff anyway.

If there is anything like this in world history, I haven’t found it. And this passes with scarcely a raised eyebrow.

Of course, this is only science, and as [right-wing radio host] Rush Limbaugh instructs his tens of millions of radio listeners, science is one of the “four corners of deceit,” along with government, academia, and media (of the wrong sort).

All of this tells us that the tasks ahead are urgent, on many fronts.

Another common (mis) perception is that American culture and society adapt easily to change. Yet, this is a country where it is immensely difficult to change even outdated and dysfunctional political processes and institutions, such as the Electoral College and the distribution of Senate seats. It is very hard to pass amendments to the Constitution. And so far, we have faced many barriers to moving away from the two-party system. How do we explain the inflexibility of U.S. political processes and institutions?

In the 19th century the U.S. Constitution was in many ways a progressive document, even though it was a “Framers’ Coup” against the democratic aspirations of most of the public—the title of Michael Klarman’s impressive study of the making of the Constitution, generally regarded as the “gold standard” in the scholarly literature.

The document has inherent problems, which are leading to a likely constitutional crisis. The problems are serious enough for law professor Erwin Chemerinsky, writing on “America’s constitutional crisis,” to entitle his article “The First Priority: Making America a Democracy” (contrary to the intentions of the Framers). He reviews some of the familiar problems. One has to do with the Electoral College, which was designed by the Framers because of their distrust of popular government.

By now states with 23 percent of the population have enough electoral votes to choose the president. Even more importantly, the same radical imbalance makes the Senate a highly undemocratic institution—in accord with the intentions of the Framers. In Madison’s constitutional design, the Senate was the most powerful branch of government, and the most protected from public interference. It was to represent “the wealth of the nation,” the most “responsible” men, who have sympathy for property and its rights. Furthermore, though the Framers did not anticipate this of course, social and demographic changes have placed this excessive anti-democratic power in the hands of a part of the population that is mostly rural, white, Christian, socially conservative and traditionalist—generally sympathetic to the Wax principle.

Some of these undemocratic features were virtually unavoidable. The Constitution would never have been ratified if the smaller colonies were not granted an equal voice. But by now the effects are severe—and unchangeable by amendment because of the same radical imbalance in voting power.

These problems are exacerbated by the monopolization of politics by the two political parties and “winner take all” state laws that bar proportional representation, which can permit a variety of voices to enter the political arena, sometimes growing to major parties. Some have argued, not implausibly, that if a country with the U.S. system tried to join the European Union, the application might be rejected by the European Court of Justice.

The impending crisis is becoming more severe because of the malevolence of the Republican leadership. They are well aware that their formula of abject service to wealth and corporate power along with mobilization of a voting base of the kind that shows up at Trump rallies is not enough to overcome their growing minority status. The solution is radical gerrymandering of the kind now authorized by the reactionary Roberts Court, and stacking the judiciary with far-right justices who will be able to hold the country by the throat for many years. Here the evil genius is Mitch McConnell, who maneuvered to block appointments under Obama, a campaign of obstruc-

tion that left 106 vacancies at the end of Obama's second term (including the scandalous case of Merrick Garland), and is now rushing through appointment of Federalist Society choices.

Another recurring theme of U.S. history involves religious fundamentalism, which is still widespread throughout the country. Does the United States, in some ways, look more like a fundamentalist nation rather than an advanced secular republic?

"looking away" that we were discussing earlier. All in all, it is a curious form of exceptionalism that goes back to the earliest settlers.

The United States remains a global superpower, but its domestic society is strikingly unequal and poverty is rampant. Given that, should we interpret Trumpism as a political phenomenon akin to the same dynamics that gave rise in the prewar era to fascism and other forms of authoritarian rule in Europe and elsewhere?



"Throughout its history the U.S. has been an unusually fundamentalist society, with regular Great Awakenings and beliefs that are far off the spectrum of developed societies,"
by Victor Moussa/Shutterstock.com

Throughout its history the U.S. has been an unusually fundamentalist society, with regular Great Awakenings and beliefs that are far off the spectrum of developed societies. Almost 80 percent of Americans believe in miracles. There is a huge Evangelical community, a large part of Trump's base, which he keeps in line by throwing them crumbs. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, a devout Evangelical Christian, speculated recently that God might have sent Trump to save Israel from Iran—which is threatening Israel with destruction in the fantasy world of doctrinal verities. Fully 40 percent of Americans expect Jesus to return to earth by mid-century (23 percent certainly). It's possible that this accounts for some of the

Already in the 1950s, economist John Kenneth Galbraith described U.S. society as marked by private affluence, public squalor. It's true that in the public sphere it often resembles a "third world" country. The Infrastructure Report Card of the American Society of Civil Engineers regularly ranks the U.S. down at the bottom, D+. And one can hardly walk through a U.S. city or travel in poor rural areas without being shocked at the squalor. The same holds for social justice measures. Among OECD countries, the U.S.

ranks near the bottom. I don't think this relates specifically to Trumpism, except insofar as the contemporary Republican Party leadership is a virtual caricature of long-standing features of U.S. political economy, based on business power that is unusual by historical standards, with a pervasive impact on the political system and also on the "hegemonic common sense," in Gramscian terms. The business classes are not just unusually powerful, but are also highly class conscious, constantly engaged in bitter class war, in some ways vulgar Marxists, with values inverted.

There is variation. The New Deal period brought the U.S. somewhat closer to European-style social democracy, but from the 1980s that has been

sharply reversed. By now, when Bernie Sanders calls for renewing and extending the New Deal—ideas that would not have greatly surprised Eisenhower—he is considered a radical who wants to destroy “American values.”

Trumpism and pre-war fascism seems to me a different matter. There surely are resemblances. Just speaking personally, Trump’s Greenville, North Carolina, rally evoked my childhood memories of listening on the radio to Hitler’s Nuremberg rallies, not understanding the words but the mood was apparent enough, and frightening. The not-so-subtle appeals to racism, xenophobia, misogyny, the treachery of dissent, demonization of media that do not kowtow abjectly to the Grand Leader—all this and more is reminiscent of pre-war fascism. And the social base of Trumpism has similarities to prewar fascism as well: superrich power and petty bourgeois popular base.

But prewar fascism was based on control of all aspects of the society—business included—by a powerful state in the hands of a totalitarian all-powerful ruling party: Gleichschaltung. The situation here is quite different, almost the opposite, with the increasingly monopolized business world, particularly its financial sector, having overwhelming power in sociopolitical life and doctrinal management....

In the 1980s, Japan was regarded as the most likely power to replace U.S. hegemony. We know what happened to that forecast. Now, many pundits see China as a future global superpower. Is this a realistic assessment of future geopolitical developments given the huge economic and military gap that exists today between China and the United States?

The “Japan is #1” fantasy traces in large part to the incompetence of U.S. management, which was unable to compete with superior Japanese production methods. Reagan took care of that with “voluntary export restraints”—where “voluntary” means do it or else, making clear who is #1—and a number of other devices. One was SDI (“Star Wars”), sold to the public (and maybe to Reagan himself) as defense against the evil enemy, but to the corporate world as a great business opportunity, courtesy of the taxpayer, a familiar benefactor.

As for China, it has made substantial economic and technological progress, but remains a very poor country. It is ranked 86th in the 2018 update to the UN Development Index, right below Algeria. (India is ranked 130th, barely above East Timor.) China has huge internal problems unknown in the West. It is argued that China is comparable to the U.S., maybe ahead, in Purchasing Power Parity, but that means that it is far below per capita. China has been pursuing systematic plans to expand its influence through Eurasia in a somewhat uneasy partnership with an economically much weaker Russia, first through the Shanghai Cooperation Council, now with the Belt and Road Initiative. In some areas of technology—solar panels, electric cars—it may be in the lead. But it still has a long way to go to reach the level of the rich industrial societies.

The U.S. is concerned with Chinese growth, and is seeking (pretty openly) to impede it—not a very attractive policy stance.

It’s also worth bearing in mind that in the age of neoliberal globalization, national accounts are a less meaningful measure of economic power than in the past. Political economist Sean Starrs has done informative work on a different measure: proportion of world wealth held by domestically based multinational corporations. By that measure the U.S. is far in the lead internationally, owning a spectacular 50 percent of world wealth—more than the U.S. share of global GDP at the peak of its power in 1945—and U.S. corporations are in the lead in just about every category.

China is sure to have a major role in world affairs. A sane policy would be accommodation and cooperation, which doesn’t seem out of the range of possibility.

Z

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Feature



Amazon forest fire, by MemoryMan/Shutterstock.com

Our Vanishing World: Rainforests

By Robert J. Burrowes

Rainforests are a crucial feature of Earth's biosphere. Apart from being critical to Earth's climate and vital carbon sinks, the major player in Earth's hydrological (water) cycle, a massive producer of oxygen and home to most of the world's species, rainforests are the home of a large indigenous human population. They are

also the source of many vital resources, including medicines, used by humans around the world.

However, the vast range of ecological services that rainforests have provided ongoingly for the 400 million years of their existence, and which have been critical to the survival of homo sapiens since we first walked the Earth 200,000 years ago,

are not measured and valued by accountants and economists: Have you ever seen a balance sheet or set of national accounts that includes an entry for “Value of ecological services taken from nature and on which life and our entire production of goods and services depend”?

Because these services have been available without the need for human management or intervention, and given the primitive conception of accounting and economics that humans use, the ecological services of rainforests are given no monetary value. Hence, essential ecological services are treated as worthless by virtually everyone in the industrialized world. As a result, modern industrialized humans have decided to systematically destroy the rainforests in order to extract a vast amount of short-term profit for the benefit of a few and the temporary satisfaction of many. So if we do not value ecological services such as oxygen and water generation as well as climate and weather-moderating capacities, what is it that we do value by destroying rainforests?

A small proportion of rainforest is logged to provide attractive rainforest timbers—such as teak, mahogany, ebony and rosewood—for a variety of decorative purposes, including making furniture, which can last hundreds of years.

However, a much wider range and vastly greater quantity of rainforest trees are cut or burned down for purposes such as the following:

- acquiring timbers used in construction, clearing land to establish cattle farms so that many people can eat cheap hamburgers,
- clearing land to establish palm oil plantations so that many people can eat processed (including junk) foods based on this oil,
- clearing land to establish palm oil and soy bean plantations so that some people can delude themselves that they are using a “green biofuel” in their car (when, in fact, these fuels generate a far greater carbon footprint than fossil fuels),
- mining (much of it illegal) for a variety of minerals (such as gold, silver, copper, coltan, cassiterite and diamonds),
- and logging to produce wood chips so that

some people can buy cheap paper, including cheap toilet paper.

In essence, then: we trade the essential life-giving and sustainably-available ecological services of Earth’s rainforests, also home to indigenous peoples and countless wildlife, for hamburgers and other processed junk foods, carbon-intensive “biofuels,” paper and some building and furniture materials, as well as some minerals. Obviously, some humans are far from clever at “making deals.”

But if you think that is bad, consider this: “by one estimate, a hectare of livestock or soy is worth between \$25 and \$250, while the same hectare of sustainably managed forest can yield as much as \$850” harvesting, depending on the location, such products as medicinal plants, rubber, nuts and fruits while benefitting from a range of ecotourism services and research opportunities. (See “Rainforest on Fire: On the Front Lines of Bolsonaro’s War on the Amazon, Brazil’s Forest Communities Fight Against Climate Catastrophe.”) Of course, you have to know how to manage the forest sustainably to yield this much income but that sort of intelligence is rare and invariably escapes those focused on destruction for short-term profit.

So how bad is this rainforest destruction? Well, worldwide we are currently destroying rainforests for these unsustainable and mainly short-term products at the rate of 80,000 acres each day. (See “Measuring the Daily Destruction of the World’s Rainforests.”)

Moreover, beyond the devastating impact this has on indigenous peoples, forcing increasing numbers of them to leave their destroyed homes in the rainforest to try to survive elsewhere, this rainforest destruction is also the key driver of species extinctions globally with one million species of life on Earth threatened with extinction. As reported in the recent Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services researched and published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)—the scientific body which assesses the state of biodiversity and the ecosystem services this provides to society—“Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human

history. The IPBES Global Assessment ranks, for the first time at this scale, the 5 direct drivers of change in nature with the largest global impact. So what are the culprits behind nature's destruction?" Number one on the IPBES list is "Changes in land and sea use, like turning intact tropical forests into agricultural land."

Let me briefly illustrate the nature and extent of this destruction by discussing rainforests in just three locations (the Brazilian Amazon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Indonesia/West Papua) where the destruction of rainforest was greatest in 2018—see "The World Lost a Belgium-sized Area of Primary Rainforests Last Year"—and which are representative of elsewhere around the planet where even World Heritage listed areas are ongoingly under threat.

The Brazilian Amazon

While the Amazon in South America occurs in several countries, two-thirds of it lie within the borders of Brazil. Unfortunately, since his fraudulent election in 2018, the neofascist, corrupt and insane president Jair Bolsonaro—see the definition of sanity, which Bolsonaro does not come close to meeting, in "The Global Elite is Insane Revisited"—has promptly eliminated years of painstaking effort by committed indigenous and environmental activists to convince previous governments to protect the Brazilian Amazon from the worst corporate and other depredations. (For just a taste of the documentation on Bolsonaro's actions in accord with elite interests and to the detriment of indigenous and environmental well-being, see "Bolsonaro Caps Natives' Lands, Pleasing Farmers in One of First Acts," "Rainforest on Fire: On the Front Lines of Bolsonaro's War on the Amazon, Brazil's Forest Communities Fight Against Climate Catastrophe," "Bolsonaro's Clearcut Populism," "The Barbarism has Begun.")

The key drivers of rainforest destruction in the Amazon are soy production and cattle ranching. Brazilian soy accounted for 14.3 percent of the country's total exports, generating \$31.0 billion in 2017, while cattle exports accounted for about \$5.4 billion. Because Brazil leads the world in exports of both of these commodities, it is the

world market for these products that is driving these industries to aggressively expand activities to the detriment of the rainforest and indigenous peoples.

But the Amazon is huge, you might say: Does it matter if we destroy some of it for soy and cattle farming? Well, one recent study suggested that deforestation of 20–25 percent of the Amazon would be the tipping point beyond which it would cease to be a functioning rainforest ecosystem and this, as you might expect, would be catastrophic. Moreover, recent severe droughts appear to be "the first flickers of this ecological tipping point" suggesting that it is already imminent. (See "Amazon Tipping Point.")

So, to reiterate, the key driver of rainforest destruction in the Brazilian Amazon is consumer-generated demand for certain products in other parts of the world. And while the U.S. and European countries play critical roles in destruction of the Amazon, China is the largest importer of agricultural products from Brazil so its government and consumers are complicit too. For example, as China's demand for Brazilian soy surges due to the trade war between the United States and China, "it could drive further ecological catastrophe: 13 million hectares (50,000 square miles) in the Amazon and Cerrado could ultimately be cleared to meet this additional demand." (See "Complicity in Destruction II: How northern consumers and financiers enable Bolsonaro's assault on the Brazilian Amazon.")

The point then, is this: governments and ordinary people (in their role as consumers) in other parts of the world can play a vital role in defending the Amazon and its indigenous peoples—see, for example, Brazil's Indigenous People Articulation—by choosing what they buy from Brazil. Boycotting rainforest timber, beef and soy bean products are powerful options to consider. But don't forget, there is no point simply identifying and boycotting Brazilian timbers, beef and soy beans. If you want impact on the total market (to prevent one country's timber, beef and soy beans being substituted for another's), then you must boycott them all (unless you can clearly identify the source of the product as local and sustainable). Obviously, this takes commitment. The future



**Forest fires in the Congo Basin, Central Africa, by
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of the Amazon depends largely on enough of us making that commitment.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo in Central Africa

The rainforests of the Congo Basin in central Africa are the second largest on Earth. Much of this rainforest lies within the borders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, crippled by corrupt government for decades and a new president elected earlier this year who has inherited a corrupt and inefficient state apparatus. (See “Democratic Republic of the Congo: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption.”)

Unfortunately, therefore, rainforests in the Congo have long been under siege on several fronts. With rebel soldiers (such as the Rwanda-backed M23), miners and poachers endlessly plundering inadequately protected national parks and other wild places for their resources, illegal mining is rampant, over-fishing a chronic problem, illegal logging (and other destruction such as charcoal burning for cooking) of rainforests is completely out of control in some places, poaching of hippopotami, elephants, chimpanzees and okapi for ivory and bushmeat is unrelenting (often despite laws against hunting with guns), and wildlife traffick-

ing of iconic species (including the increasingly rare mountain gorilla) simply beyond the concern of most people.

The Congolese natural environment—including the UNESCO World Heritage sites at Virunga National Park and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, together with their park rangers—and the indigenous peoples such as the Mbuti (“pygmies”) who live in them, are under siege. In addition to the ongoing mining, smaller corporations that can’t compete with the majors, such as Soco, want to explore and drill for oil. (See “Virunga National Park Ranger Killed in DRC Ambush,” “The struggle to save the ‘Congolese unicorn,’” “Meet the First Female Rangers to Guard One of World’s Deadliest Parks,” and “The Battle for Africa’s Oldest National Park.”)

Unfortunately, too, as with rainforests elsewhere, “What Happens in the Congo Basin Doesn’t Stay in the Congo Basin”: it impacts on regions across Africa playing a part, for example, in recent droughts in Ethiopia and Somalia causing millions of people to depend on emergency food and water rations. (See “Congo Basin Deforestation Threatens Food and Water Supplies Throughout Africa.”)

As with the Amazon, you have some powerful options to consider if you want to save the Con-

golese rainforests and their indigenous peoples. Again, refusing to buy rainforest timbers, conflict minerals and wildlife products is a good start but remember that key minerals in your computer and mobile phone are illegally sourced from the Congo so your thoughtful consideration of minimizing how many of these devices you own can play a part too. For a fuller account of this exploitation and its destructive impact on the rainforests and its indigenous peoples, with references to many other sources, see “500 years is long enough! Human Depravity in the Congo.”

Indonesia and West Papua

Indonesia has the most extensive rainforest cover in Asia—and is home to hundreds of distinct indigenous languages and over 3,000 animal species including Sumatran tigers, pygmy elephants, rhinoceros and orangutans—but the forests are being systematically degraded and destroyed. Rainforest cover has steadily declined since the 1960s when 82 percent of the country was covered with forest; it is less than 50 percent today. The rainforest is being destroyed by logging, mining, large-scale agricultural plantations (especially for palm oil), colonization, and subsistence activities like shifting agriculture and cutting for fuelwood. Much of the remaining cover consists of logged-over and degraded forest although large areas, including of the island of Kalimantan/Borneo (shared with

Malaysia and Brunei), have been stripped bare.

Logging for tropical timbers and pulpwood (to make paper) is the biggest cause of rainforest destruction in the country where as much as 75 percent of the logging is illegal. Indonesia is the world’s largest exporter of tropical timber, which generates more than \$5 billion annually. And more than 48 million hectares (55 percent of the country’s remaining rainforests) are concessioned for logging. Destruction of the rainforest in Indonesia has opened up some of the most remote places on Earth to development: as rainforests in less remote locations have been decimated, timber corporations have stepped up practices on the island of Kalimantan/Borneo and the occupied West Papua, where great swaths of forests have been cleared in recent years. In fact, 20 percent of Indonesia’s logging concessions are in West Papua, despite ongoing resistance by West Papuans.

Unfortunately, the fastest and cheapest way to clear rainforests for plantations is by burning. Hence, every year “hundreds of thousands of hectares go up in smoke as developers and agriculturalists feverishly light fires before monsoon rains begin to fall. In dry years—especially during strong el Niño years—these fires can burn out of control for months on end, creating deadly pollution that affects neighboring countries and causes political tempers to flare.”

Mining operations, including for coal, also have



Borneo tropical rainforest is destroyed for oil palm plantations and human development, by Rich Carey/Shutterstock.com



Demonstrators protest against Bolsonaro environmental policies and Amazon forest fires, by sebastorg/Shutterstock.com

a devastating impact on the rainforests and their peoples. By far the worst of these projects, however, is the gigantic gold, silver, and copper mine in occupied West Papua, run by Freeport-McMoRan. As widely documented, the mining company has dumped appalling amounts of waste into local streams, rendering downstream waterways and wetlands “unsuitable for aquatic life.” Relying on large payments to Indonesian police and military officers, the mining operation is “protected”; this has resulted in many West Papuans being killed.

The waste from the mine, estimated by Freeport at 700,000 tons each day, covers several square miles and government surveys have found that tailings from the mines have produced levels of copper and sediment so high that almost all fish have disappeared from vast areas of wetlands downstream from the mine.

Like other powerful corporations in Indonesia (and elsewhere), Freeport-McMoRan is well aware that there is little official interest in its abuses of local people and the environment as long as corrupt officials are given sufficient incentive to ignore them. As elsewhere in many parts of the world, therefore, corporate access to resources includes serious human rights abuses and persistent conflicts between companies and local communities which is ignored by corrupt politicians.

Apart from the rainforest itself and the millions of people who live in them, destruction of the rainforest threatens the habitat of iconic species like Sumatran tigers and orangutans, as well as many others, and plays a part in destroying the climate too.

But the damage does not stop with the issues noted above. Forests across the world are being destroyed to make fabrics for clothing we wear every day. Fabrics like rayon, viscose and modal are all made from trees and, every year, more than 120 million trees are cut down to make clothing. This is done by companies such as Forever 21, Under Armor, Foot Locker, Prada Group and Michael Kors. You can join the Rainforest Action Network in campaigning to get these laggard companies to adopt responsible sourcing policies for their forest-based fabrics. (See “Does your clothing contain rainforest destruction?”)

Bizarrely, while its incredible rainforests, along with its coral reefs and beaches, play a part in attracting tourists from across the world to see Indonesia’s charismatic native species—such as orangutans, Sumatran tigers, Komodo dragons, whale sharks, sea turtles and manta rays—and to experience its adventure and dive destinations, this tourism also contributes significantly to the destruction as rainforests make way for tourist facilities.

So, as with Brazil and the Congo, you can boycott rainforest products from Indonesia and other countries where rainforests are being destroyed. Along with suggestions made earlier, responsible choices about the clothing you wear and the tourist destinations you choose (or boycott) will all make a difference.

So, as with Brazil and the Congo, you can boycott rainforest products from Indonesia and other countries where rainforests are being destroyed. Along with suggestions made earlier, responsible choices about the clothing you wear and the tourist destinations you choose (or boycott) will all make a difference.

The “Big Picture” Fight for the Rainforests: What can we do?

A great deal. Halting rainforest destruction might be a complex undertaking but it is imperative if we are to have any prospect of preserv-

ing life on Earth. So I hope that you will consider the many options I have offered above and those I mention now and do as many as you can, even if you are already working on other critical issues such as the climate and the struggle to end war and the threat of nuclear war.

If you want easy options, you can support the campaign efforts of organizations that defend rainforests, indigenous peoples and wildlife such as the Rainforest Action Network, the Rainforest Information Centre, the Rainforest 4 Foundation, and Rainforest Rescue which work closely with indigenous and local communities while campaigning against the governments and corporations destroying rainforests, as well as the banks and insurance companies that support this destruction.

If you recognize the pervasiveness of the fear-driven violence in our world, which also drives the massive over-consumption of resources by people in industrialized countries—see “Love Denied: The Psychology of Materialism, Violence and War”—then consider addressing this directly starting with yourself—see Putting Feelings First—and by reviewing your relationship with children. (See “My Promise to Children” and “Nisteling: The Art of Deep Listening.”)

If you want to understand and address the fundamental cause of violence in our world, see “Why Violence?” and “Fearless Psychology and Fearful Psychology: Principles and Practice.”

If you wish to campaign strategically in support of indigenous peoples and local communities in their struggles to halt the destruction of Earth’s rainforests, see Nonviolent Campaign Strategy.

The governments and corporations that profit from the destruction of the rainforests are deeply entrenched and not about to give way without strategically focused campaigns to make it untenable and unprofitable for them to do so. This will include convincing key personnel, whether company directors of corporations involved in rainforest destruction, cargo ship owners, trade unionists (in many industries) and the many other agents involved in the rainforest destruction-to-customer supply chain, as well as ordinary consumers of rainforest products—to make conscious choices about the products they supply, use and/or buy. So

strategy is imperative if we are to get corrupt and/or conscienceless governments and corporations, as well as people further removed from the source of the destruction, to end their role in rainforest destruction before it is too late.

The big deforestation drivers are timber, palm oil, cattle and soy while mining, oil drilling, clothing and dam construction all play significant roles too, depending on the country. And, as reported by the CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project): “The ABCD (The Archer Daniels Midland Company [ADM], Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus Company) trader companies have a large impact on countless commodity supply chains. For example, they represent up to 90 percent of the global grain trade. With a wide array of clients that go from Nestlé to McDonald’s, their role in managing deforestation risk is crucial” and, so far, grossly inadequate. (See “Revenue at risk: Why addressing deforestation is critical to business success,” which contains a long list of hundreds of companies [on pages 39-46] which are making zero effective effort to end their rainforest-destroying business practices.)

Given the strategic sophistication necessary to tackle this complex problem effectively, you may want to view a 15 minute video of (or read a couple of short articles about) the inspirational Melbourne Rainforest Action Group (MRAG) that successfully led a national campaign from 1988 to 1991 to halt imports of rainforest timber into Australia.

In those cases where corrupt elites control or occupy countries, such as those controlling Brazil, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and West Papua, it might be necessary to remove these corrupt governments as part of the effort—see Nonviolent Defense/Liberation Strategy—thus helping to restore the political space for local populations to defend rainforests and their rights.

You might also consider joining the global network of people resisting violence in all contexts by signing the online pledge of “The People’s Charter to Create a Nonviolent World.”

But if you do nothing else while understanding the simple point that Earth’s biosphere, including its rainforests, cannot sustain a human population of this magnitude of whom more than half



Amazon forest fire, by MemoryMan/Shutterstock.com

endlessly over-consume, then consider accelerated participation in the strategy outlined in “The Flame Tree Project to Save Life on Earth.”

Or, if none of the above options appeal or they seem too complicated, consider committing to:

The Earth Pledge

Out of love for the Earth and all of its creatures, and my respect for their needs, from this day onwards I pledge that:

1. I will listen deeply to children (see explanation above)
2. I will not travel by plane
3. I will not travel by car
4. I will not eat meat and fish
5. I will only eat organically/biodynamically grown food
6. I will minimize the amount of fresh water I use, including by minimizing my ownership and use of electronic devices
7. I will not buy rainforest timber
8. I will not buy or use single-use plastic, such as bags, bottles, containers, cups and straws
9. I will not use banks, superannuation (pension) funds or insurance companies that provide any service to corporations involved in fossil fuels, nuclear power and/or weapons
10. I will not accept employment from, or invest in, any organization that supports or participates in the exploitation of fellow human beings or profits from killing and/or destruction of the

biosphere

11. I will not get news from the corporate media (mainstream newspapers, television, radio, Google, Facebook, Twitter...)

12. I will make the effort to learn a skill, such as food gardening or sewing, that makes me more self-reliant

13. I will gently encourage my family and friends to consider signing this pledge.

Feeling overwhelmed? Still prefer something simpler?

I wish I could, in all sincerity, offer you that option. If it were still 1990, I would. But the time for simple actions to make a difference is long past and time is now incredibly short. (See “Human Extinction by 2026? A Last Ditch Strategy to Fight for Human Survival.”)

In essence, you have a choice: understand and act on the crucial importance of rainforests before we destroy their integrity and lose them completely. Or help to accelerate the human rush to extinction as a consequence of failing to do so. **Z**

Robert J. Burrowes has a lifetime commitment to understanding and ending human violence. He has done extensive research since 1966 in an effort to understand why human beings are violent and has been a nonviolent activist since 1981. He is the author of *Why Violence?* His email address is flametree@riseup.net and his website is robert-jburrowes.wordpress.com.

Feature



South Africa, by JMX Images/Shutterstock.com

Fighting Fossil Fuels in South Africa

By Patrick Bond

South Africa is one of the most difficult places to combat fossil fuels, including the petrochemical complexes that regularly poison the third largest city, Durban, founded by white settlers on the east coast in the mid-19th century. The average South African emits 9 tons of

CO₂ annually, which is the 11th highest among countries with at least 10 million residents. And measured in CO₂/capita/GDP—in order to assess an economy's carbon intensity—it is the world's third highest level, behind only Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic.

There is no average, though, because the racial Apartheid system that ended in 1994, at least politically, and the “class Apartheid” processes that took its place, meant that wealthy white males still retained enormous power and wealth, and they vastly over-pollute. Two-thirds of the country’s citizens—mostly blacks and women—live in poverty, below the official line of \$3.30/day. With the rise in electricity prices, their power supplies are increasingly, dangerously dirty: wood, coal or paraffin for heating, lamps and stoves. They have “energy-switched” backwards in time, unable to pay the parastatal Eskom’s retail electricity bills. The price of a kiloWatt hour quadrupled in price over the last decade due to a decision to build the world’s two largest coal-fired generators now under construction. Corruption, delays and the incompetent boiler manufacturer Hitachi doubled the construction costs of the two 4800 MegaWatt plants from \$8 billion each when financing was arranged in 2010 (primarily by the World Bank, in its largest ever loan), to \$15 billion each today.

Can these contradiction-riddled conditions at the national scale give rise to a deeper Climate Justice (CJ) movement, drawing on local strengths, and adding the renewed power of the youth? This is the question posed by many of the country’s environmental-justice and eco-socialist strategists, after a quarter-century of political liberation. But freedom has been profoundly distorted by neo-liberal-nationalist ideology and crony-capitalist practices, including periodic repression of socio-economic rebellions. In the process, environmental justice has been sidelined.

Locally, fossil fuels are facing opposition. A petrochemical complex regularly poisons Durban. There, Africa’s largest oil refinery comes under repeated attack for both local and global pollution by the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA). The quarter-century battle heated up in 2019 because, 1,200 kilometers down the Indian Ocean coast, 45 billion cubic meters (300 million barrels worth) of new offshore oil and gas condensate were discovered by Total. Announced by excitable politicians with great fanfare, doubts have subsequently developed about the extremely difficult conditions for extraction.

In the other direction, 2,800 kilometers up the

coast at Rovuma in northern Mozambique, are even greater quantities of gas (\$20 billion worth is thrown around), some of which Total is buying from Anardarko, with ExxonMobil and Eni hot on its heels. Older gas fields at Pande and Temane, in the middle of the country, are being drained by Sasol, of which 20 percent creates energy for local consumption and 80 percent is pumped 900 kilometers to South Africa’s main inland refinery in Secunda. There, drips of liquid petroleum are squeezed with such an intense application of energy that this small city of 40,000 is the world’s single largest CO2 emissions point source. Local activists fighting hard here are led by the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance.

In between, in Durban, oil companies are swarming 3 kilometers offshore with exploratory drills nearly 4 kilometers deep in the Agulhas Current, the second most turbulent ocean waterway, after the Gulf Coast. But notwithstanding all the anti-oil activism—divestment, “unburnable carbon” and “stranded asset” pressures, as well as direct-action protests—against the oil majors, four of them anticipate billions of dollars in profits once they set up rigs: ExxonMobil, Statoil, Eni and Sasol, respectively the biggest from the U.S., Norway, Italy and South Africa.

Durban is already the regional oil hub for refiners Shell and BP, alongside Malaysian-owned Engen. Nearby, within Africa’s largest container harbor, are more massive oil storage facilities. On South Africa’s cold Atlantic coast at Saldanha, Saudi Arabia’s Aramco is also considering a major investment in oil storage. And two hours north of Durban at Richards Bay—home to one of world’s largest coal export terminals—the parastatal port manager, Transnet, aims to set up an LPG terminal. In all this seaside ecological risk-taking, the corporations are being encouraged by government’s “Blue Economy” propaganda.

SDCEA, the country’s leading anti-oil campaigning force, regularly links local health and ecological damage to climate change, and opposes ocean degradation on behalf of local residents, thousands of fisherfolk, coastal small farms and even surfers. Victories have included lowering refinery sulphur emissions and delaying the nearby port-petrochemical complex’s \$25 billion ex-

pansion. The asthma rate in the Settlers Primary School, between the two mega-refineries, had peaked at 52 percent of children in attendance in 2004, but is now substantially lower. But the group hasn't yet shut down the refineries—SDCDEA's objective—or even lowered their 350,000 barrels/day capacity. And while SDCEA insists that no more offshore oil and gas exploration occur, it is—and most dangerously, the parastatal firm Transnet doubled the size of an oil pipeline from Durban to the main consumption site, Johannesburg, in a controversial \$1.8 billion project from 2005-18.

Joining SDCEA, which is based in Durban's black communities of Wentworth, Merebank, Clairwood and Umlazi (and to some extent also the Bluff, a formerly white residential area), are conservationists from Oceans Not Oil and Wild Oceans. But SDCEA has taken the lead, alongside its groundWork NGO allies, in working against offshore oil and gas, up and down the coastline from Mozambique to Cape Town. Inland, there is also courtroom guerrilla warfare by farmers and environmentalists to counteract threats by the U.S. firm Rhino to frack in the beautiful Drakensburg mountain range and nearby KwaZulu-Natal farmland. In the semi-desert Karoo, Shell's fracking division is retreating after a courtroom setback. Nevertheless, still lacking climate consciousness, the government's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research is planning a massive gas pipeline across the country.

"Coalanization" Continues

Coal mines supply 90 percent of Eskom's generation inputs, as well as around 80 million tons of exports. The main battles against coal occur because of its local damage to public health, water, land and air. On grounds of climate change, war is being consistently waged by three forces: NGOs, lawyers and communities in destructive coal zones. Unfortunately organized labor is basically pro-coal, though that could change.

In general, local activists are not yet as militant and effective as, for example, Germany's Ende Gelände annual movement, in part because the society is still poorly organized for understand-

ing and acting on climate politics. So progress currently relies upon pressure against financiers, legal strategies on difficult terrain, and mainly localistic protests. Some community disruptions occur in the immediate vicinity of coal mines and coal-fired power plants, such as road blockages, while others are using the courts to prevent two privatized coal-fired plants from being built, so far successfully.

Fragmentation has prevented the emergence of a general movement against coal, and indeed against climate change. Some NGOs with specific agendas are internationally affiliated. Greenpeace Africa, for example, issues important research against the coal industry's air and water pollution, and periodically engages in direct actions against the main electricity company and state officials, although these are mostly small-scale and symbolic. The South Africa branch of 350.org specifically targets coal industry financiers—successful against several local banks—and is central to the broader "decoolonize Africa" campaign. (Its main success was claimed this year in Lamu, Kenya—against a Chinese project with anticipated South African coal imports until Kenyan mines are developed). Unfortunately the CJ angle is quite weakly articulated by these NGOs, whether because they are so single-issue in nature or simply not yet sufficiently sensitive to race, class, gender, generational and other inequities.

Those with a forthright CJ orientation include local NGOs who have their own community-based partners. The most prominent is "Life after Coal," consisting of the hard-working groups Earthlife Africa and groundWork, and progressive lawyers at the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER). Sometimes they attempt creative objections to Environmental Impact Assessments on grounds that climate change is not properly incorporated into planning, and they harass state agencies for disclosure and stronger enforcement of environmental regulations. Sometimes their partners are involved in mass-based protest, although the last substantial one—with at least 10,000 marching—was in late 2011 when Durban hosted the UN annual climate summit. The counter-summit was messy, as it revealed persistent splits between the two philosophies: CJ (led at the time by the Dem-

ocratic Left Front, which is now dormant) and Climate Action (mainstream NGOs such as WWF).

Today, the most militant network of grassroots anti-coal activists is Mining Affected Communities United in Action. Others include the Mining and Environmental Justice Community Network of South Africa and Women from Mining Affected Communities United in Action. In the coal-rich Mpumalanga province, especially around the most affected two towns, Emalahleni (Witbank) and Carolina, these groups and the Southern African Green Revolutionary Council have an important impact, both in organizing and motivating an eco-socialist ideology. However, no major victories can yet be claimed, aside from Earthlife and CER using an Environmental Impact Assessment to slow construction of new privatized coal-fired power plants.

The highest-profile battle against coal is being waged on the border of Africa's oldest wildlife reserve, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi, famed for conservationist Ian Player's breeding of white rhinos when they were on the verge of extinction a half-century ago. At the park's southeastern entrance are two neighboring villages: Somkhele—where activists have attempted to close down one fast-growing coal mine—and Fuleni, where they have so far prevented another from opening. Within Somkhele, the Johannesburg-based Tendele mining house and local elites are opposed by the Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organization, backed by ecologists in Player's tradition, especially attorney Kirsten Youens and the Global Environmental Trust. The latter group explains: "For seven years, the mine operated without a valid water use license. The mine also exhumed and re-located hundreds of graves without necessary permits and reneged on its agreed compensation to families for the exhumation of the remains of their ancestors—a very serious matter in Zulu culture. The mine has taken the property of hundreds of people without compensating them for their land, only for their homes."

But tensions have risen between Somkhele men expressing a desperate need for work—even in the hazardous coal mine—on the one hand, and women articulating their self-preservation of homes, clean air, water access, small farms and

livelihoods on the other. Mineworkers and ethnic leaders in league with the coal company won the latest round—a dispute over expanding the existing Somkhele mine—in an August 2018 court battle, but the case is on appeal. It illustrates the desperate need for a Just Transition strategy and sufficient funding for alternative employment of an ecologically constructive, meaningful character, instead of coal mining.

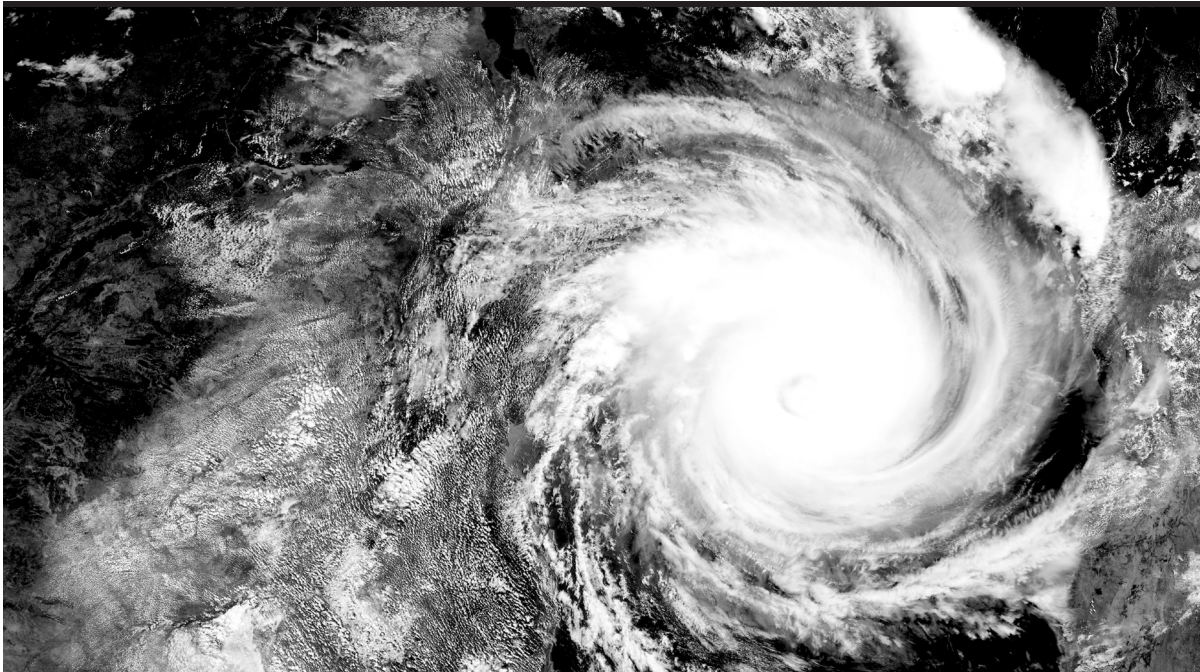
In Johannesburg, the Somkhele and Fuleni activists have another vital ally: the eco-feminist fusion of continent-wide women farmers, environmentalists and sophisticated NGO critics in the group African Women Unite against Destructive Extraction, better known as WoMin. They are the most explicit in fighting coal using climate change narratives.

Movements like these fighting against coal are sometimes working at cross-purposes with a different set of NGOs whose aim is to merely ameliorate local damage from mining, and who rarely if ever consider climate change or the massive economic loss caused by non-renewable resource depletion. Such arguments are "outside the box" for reformist NGOs insofar as acknowledging their logic would justify leaving minerals, oil and gas underground. Their annual Cape Town meeting occurs at the same time the mining industry gathers for their "Mining Indaba" (the latter word meaning consultation) and is known as the Alternative Mining Indaba.

Since the NGO-driven event generally fails to "connect the dots" between micro-mining grievances and bigger-picture problems like climate, energy choices and general resource looting, critics organized the November 2018 Thematic Social Forum on Mining and Extractivism in Johannesburg. It offered a much more critical perspective, demanding "the right to say no" to corporate land and mineral grabs. CJ was a consistent theme there, too.

Two Cyclones and a Rain Bomb

In mid-2019, the contradictions and limits of all these approaches came into focus when hundreds of regional activists in the Southern African People's Solidarity Network held their annual



Cyclone Idai heading towards Mozambique and Zimbabwe in 2019 - Elements of this image furnished by NASA, by lavizzara/Shutterstock.com

meeting at the national museum in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Rural Women's Assembly members offered testimonials from cyclone-affected sites in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi and South Africa. It was their mutual aid against flooding, during the terrifying weeks of March-April 2019, that allowed survival in the face of an unprecedented double-whammy of cyclones.

Idai and Kenneth were the worst cyclones on record in this region, and in between was a "Rain Bomb" on Easter Monday that devastated South Durban and areas further down the coast. Scientists agree that these storms were more vicious due to climate change, for the temperature of the Indian Ocean offshore Beira, Mozambique was recently higher than normal by more than 2 degrees, the impact of which was to make Idai much more intense. With sustained winds of 195 kph at peak, Idai was the Southern Hemisphere's third most destructive storm in recorded history (following cyclones in Madagascar in 1892 and Indonesia in 1973).

Governments estimated Idai's fatalities at 1,078: 602 Mozambicans, 415 Zimbabweans, and 60 Malawians, with more than 2 million people suffering other loss and damage, and sustained

threats of cholera. Two-thirds of Mozambique's and Zimbabwe's staple maize crop was destroyed, not only by the flooding but also drought that hit elsewhere.

Zimbabwe's low rainfall is unprecedented. The country's main power source, the Zambezi River, dropped sufficiently low as to extinguish hydropower supply at the Kariba Dam, the world's largest artificial lake. The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery confirms, "Mozambique ranks third among African countries most exposed to multiple weather-related hazards and suffers from periodic cyclones, droughts, floods, and related epidemics."

The links between Cyclone Idai and climate change were acknowledged here by those with a social conscience. The South African government mainly sent their armed forces and technicians to help rebuild pylons to restore the main electricity supply from Mozambique, from the Cahorra Bassa mega-dam on the Zambezi River. South Africa suffered a major set of blackouts the week Idai hit, due to the disruption of more than 1 MW supply. The main agency assisting Mozambicans was a famous South African charity, Gift of the Givers, which provides relief support across the world.

Five weeks later, on April 22, 170 mm of rain fell on Durban and its southern hinterlands, leaving 71 dead. The prior record was October 2017 when only 108 mm fell in a day. And the following week, Cyclone Kenneth hit Mozambique—near the newly discovered northern oil and gas fields—at the scarcely-populated border with Tanzania, so although winds reached 225 km/hour, there were only a few deaths.

The cyclones and rain bomb revealed the region's terrible vulnerabilities, as did the 2019 drought in South Africa's, Mozambique's and Zimbabwe's main food producing areas and the Cape Town water shortage that from 2015-18 left the city's residential taps nearly bone dry. As Mozambique began to recover, the most popular television talkshow—the SA Broadcasting Corporation's "Big Debate"—made Cyclone Idai a central point in a furious two-hour dispute over how to link the energy and climate crises, and solve both.

What is also much clearer after the 2019 extreme weather, is South Africa's "subimperial" role in the region, including as a central force behind environmental damage. It is increasingly important—and easy—to show that the wealthiest South Africans have a "climate debt" liability for this damage. Fewer than three dozen corporations operating in South Africa—led by BHP Billiton, Sasol, Glencore, Anglo American, Arcelor Mittal and other smelting and mining houses in the Energy Intensive Users Group—are responsible for 40 percent of the electricity consumption. In general, as University of Manchester climate scientist Kevin Anderson points out, "Almost 50% of global carbon emissions arise from the activities of around 10% of the global population," an indicator of how extreme climate injustice has become.

Climate Justice requires that not only the historically highest emitters internationally, but also South African "Global North" residents and corporations, start to acknowledge guilt, and identify ways to both pay reparations for damage, according to standard polluter-pays principles, and forthwith reduce emissions with a clear phase-out strategy.

This point was made after Cyclone Idai by the Rural Women's Assembly: "The three countries now affected by this unfolding disaster—Zimba-

bwe, Mozambique and Malawi—have among the world's lowest emissions rates. We demand that rich countries who continue to pollute the Earth's atmosphere with greenhouse gas emissions commit to pay compensation for the damage and loss of life resulting from this latest storm."

As expressed by Anabela Lemos, director of Justiça Ambiental! (Friends of the Earth Moçambique), "People in Mozambique know this is climate chaos. They know what's going on. They are going to come and challenge everyone in northern countries and ask: why are you continuing to do this to us? Stop this genocide."

The Harare-based Centre for Natural Resource Governance in Harare released a statement specifying how reparations could be made: "the rich countries must pay their climate debt to the Zimbabwean people—but the Zanu PF government and Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube cannot be trusted to manage the payments. Instead, we need trusted agencies in civil society to receive aid and direct transfers to the ordinary people affected. This could be done simply by arranging payout systems in the affected parts of Zimbabwe, so that everyone living in those areas would get a reparations payment. There is need to compensate families for loss of lives, destruction of homes and even loss of food, livestock and domestic utensils. The situation is dire in fragile states where governments have misplaced priorities—which relegates human security to humanitarian work of NGOs and well-wishers."

This doesn't yet change everything—but could and should

Even though these extreme incidents of climate damage are becoming more obvious, the construction of a South African CJ movement has been elusive. One reason is the philosophical differences between the environmental justice and conservation movements. Occasionally these movements come together in specific sites of unity, such as defending against coal mining on the border of the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi reserve (where the white rhino was saved from extinction).

But there are several missing links before they can generate a national movement with equivalent weight to, say, the Treatment Action Campaign which demanded that generic AIDS medicines be

universally available. Their victory raised life expectancy from 52 to 64 years from 2005-15, by getting life-saving drugs to 5 million South Africans who previously could not afford them.

One gap in climate activism is the failure to re-frame climate change the way Naomi Klein did in 2014: *This Changes Everything*. That would entail conjoining all manner of struggles over energy, transport, agricultural, production, suburbanization and waste disposal processes that cause climate change—each step of the way, insisting on “Just Transition” policies and projects that switch workers from dirty to clean jobs with no loss of pay, and with sensitivity to geographical impact.

The climate movement would then need more unity of purpose in everything from popular education, to militant activism, to media advocacy, to watchdogging the national policy process to lobbying legislatures, to filing regulatory objections—since Pretoria’s environment and mining ministries generally behave as if they were in the pockets of the polluters—to building up climate-conscious case law in the courts. It would require more support from the various foundations and funding organizations that currently amplify infighting, turf wars and “silo” politics. Also required is stronger youth leadership, where signs include several local manifestations of the Climate Strike: strongest in Cape Town and Johannesburg, but with potential to spread across the country and continent. One promising network was the South African Youth Climate Change Coalition.

Strategically-minded intellectuals were occasionally involved in CJ activism, particularly the group of eco-socialists assembled by University of the Witwatersrand political economist Vishwas Satgar to develop a book-length Climate Crisis critique. Satgar also helped mobilize the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign which in 2018 established a People’s Climate Justice Charter. A team at the Alternative Information and Development Centre put together a 2017 Million Climate Jobs booklet and campaign to support decarbonization, including in the coal fields. Some of the best anti-coal research comes from groundwork. Investigative journalists with a climate focus can be read regularly at *Daily Maverick* (led by Kevin Bloom) and the *Mail & Guardian* (especially Si-

pho Kings).

South Africa’s CJ ideas are recognized as being very different than the Climate Action approach, thanks to 1990s traditions of environmental justice and the 2004 founding of the (international) Durban Group for Climate Justice. However, South Africa remains the world’s most unequal society and cultures of activism differ dramatically from the components that would need to fuse for a proper national CJ movement to emerge: environmental justice advocates (including in the conscientized middle-class), low-income communities, women, labor and especially the youth.

In contrast, the top-down SA Climate Action Network has many more resources and insider credibility with the state and capital, but has a much lower-profile presence in the vital concrete struggles—and too often, insiderism means endorsing weak climate policies such as the UNFCCC, or South Africa’s Integrated Resource Plan for energy and Long-Term Mitigation Scenarios for decarbonization. Very few groups bridge this gap.

Red and Green Fragments, not Fusions—but in Future?

As a final and perhaps most important consideration, South Africa also reveals age-old conflicts between environmentalists and organized labor over employment. Often insensitively, Greenpeace fought periodically with two of the largest trade unions, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) and National Union of Mineworkers, whose members include workers in carbon-intensive sectors. Their struggles for better wages in the electricity plants, auto factories, mines, smelters and other heavy industries were openly waged since unions re-emerged during the 1970s, and their strength of purpose was vital to ending apartheid. But they remained opposed to the loss of 100,000 jobs in the main coal district, Mpumalanga, because the government never provided details on what it meant by the oft-repeated mantra, a Just Transition.

Numsa’s staff were once visionary advocates of renewable energy democracy, and by the early

2010s, the union had developed one of the world's most ambitious Just Transition statements. But Numsa then turned in 2017-19 to fighting against Climate-Action environmentalists over the 10,000 MW of privatized solar and wind projects being installed mainly by European corporations.

As the union's deputy leader Karl Cloete explained, "the mandate of Renewable Energy projects must be to achieve service provision, meet universal needs, decommodify energy and provide an equitable dividend to communities and workers directly involved in production and consumption of energy."

The president of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, Joseph Mathunjwa, agreed that the privatized model should be discarded: "If we leave it to the market, we will not get to the roots of the climate and environmental crisis and workers will be discarded in the existing

mining and energy sectors."

The 800,000-strong SA Federation of Trade Unions held a mid-2018 Working Class Summit with similar rhetoric: "We must mobilize for a deep transformation of the current economic system of production and consumption, while at the same time including protecting workers' shop-floor concerns. We have to find a way of reconciling the interests of workers in energy-related industries and those of the working class facing the impacts of climate change."

In short, the battle lines between labor and climate activists were drawn across five fields of action: speed, scale, scope, space and the state:

- The unions—especially Numsa—wanted a slower transition to renewables due to fear the state won't protect jobs.
- Their ideal of the appropriate scale for



Cape Town, South Africa: Climate Change March, by Annel Rautenbach/Shutterstock.com

electricity generation, grid transmission and distribution was always national, not the decentralized, “small scale embedded generation” strategies favored by Climate Action neoliberals (the latter approach makes wide-scale electricity redistribution from rich to poor more difficult).

- The scope demanded by unions is often narrower—in protecting existing dirty-energy jobs—but in Numsa’s case, it has also advocated for a more expansive post-capitalist vision.
- The geographical dilemma—“space”—is thorny, since the sunny, windy and tidal-power areas of South Africa generally don’t overlap with the inland coal fields and power plants, so CJ advocates found themselves challenged to address this disjuncture more explicitly.
- Finally, there were diverging views of the role of the state, particularly the parastatal Eskom, since Numsa and other unions insisted on rescuing it as part of their explicitly socialist political agenda, while many citizens and CJ activists had already given up as a result of the energy agency’s deep-rooted corruption and pro-coal bias.

There are very few encouraging sites of joint work where these five divides in emphasis can be reconciled. The Million Climate Jobs approach to a Just Transition did not take root. Unions were too defensive. Many environmentalists—especially from the white middle classes—were unconscious of justice concerns.

Although in 2015 a major summit between Numsa, environmentalists and social movements addressed energy and climate change with great promise, at a time of consistent shortages and blackouts, there was no follow up. The summit declared opposition to “false solutions such as the introduction of nuclear energy on a huge scale, fracking, agrofuels/biofuels, carbon trading, ‘clean coal’ and carbon sequestration.” But the need for unifying, joint demands on the state for a Just Transition has, since then, yet to be explored, much less realized.

The working class does have a few cases where,

if not production, at least the consumption of coal-generated power is being politicized. Perhaps the most climate-conscious urban social movement of the post-apartheid era was the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, fighting a two-decade-long struggle for energy justice. In part they were popular through encouraging 85 percent of the huge township’s residents to think of power as a “commons,” hence illegally connecting electricity supply. They justified this in part because their visionary leaders regularly critique and protest Eskom’s coal-based generation. “For as long as Eskom uses coal, I won’t pay,” one leader told MSN news in March, refusing to change her stance “unless they connect us to the solar system grid.”

This then was, in 2019, the current unsatisfying hybrid-CJ politics unfolding. There was a mix of consumer-based pro-commoning militancy, in which the leading activists demanded that fossil fuels should be phased out and solar access made universal, combined with tough community struggles against the exploration, extraction, refining and combustion of coal, oil and gas. The leftist trade unions proposed radical versions of eco-socialism but defended their jobs with an understandable desperation. A burgeoning youth and ecologically-aware middle-class feinted towards CJ, but their stamina had not been tested. The mainstream Climate Action scene remained predictably tame and unambitious.

In this context, the vast majority of citizens were apathetic, and the upper-income elites lived in conditions akin to the richest First World habitats. These were the men and a few women who occupied the commanding heights of fossilized power, where profits and new discoveries were too sweet to kick their addictions—unless those promoting CJ politics became much better organized, and brave enough for the conflagration that inevitably lay ahead. **Z**

Patrick Bond authored *Politics of Climate Justice* and teaches at the University of the Witwatersrand School of Governance. This article was also published by *Toxic News*, of Warwick University’s “Toxic Expertise” project.

Feature



A GI Rebellion: When Soldiers Said No to War

By Steve Early

Fifty years ago this fall, a campus upsurge turned opposition to the Vietnam War into a genuine mass movement. On October 15, 1969, several million students, along with community-based activists, participated in anti-war events under the banner of the “Vietnam Moratorium.” A month later, 500,000 people came to a Washington, DC demonstration of then-unprecedented size, organized by the “New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam.”

As we approach the 50th anniversary of both the Moratorium and Mobilization, it’s worth recalling

one critical anti-war constituency whose role was less visible then and remains little acknowledged today.

While student demonstrators and draft resisters drew more mass media attention at the time, many military draftees, reservists and recently returned veterans also protested the Vietnam war—with equal fervor and often greater impact. Fortunately, three Vietnam-era activists have just published *Waging Peace in Vietnam* (New Village Press, 2019), which gives long-overdue credit to anti-war organizing by men and women in uni-

form, and their civilian allies and funders. Labor organizer Ron Carver, Notre Dame professor David Cortright, and writer/editor Barbara Doherty have crafted a beautifully illustrated, 240-page tribute to the GI anti-war movement. *Waging Peace* includes 50 first-person accounts by grassroots builders of that movement, plus photo documentation of their work by William Short, a Vietnam combat veteran.

As Cortright notes in the book's introduction, social science researchers hired by the military (and later academic experts) concluded that one-quarter of all "low-ranking service members participated in Vietnam-era antiwar activity." This percentage is "roughly equivalent to the proportion of activists among students at the peak of the anti-war movement." In the rural and conservative communities which surround most military bases, then and now, "the proportion of anti-war activists among soldiers was actually higher than in the local youth population."

The Anti-Warriors Today

Now in their late 60s and 70s, many anti-warriors profiled in *Waging Peace* are long-distance runners in the field. Some remain active in Veterans for Peace (VFP), which held its national convention last weekend in Spokane. One highlight of that annual gathering was the unveiling of archival material and photos which appear in *Waging Peace*. This hotel ballroom exhibit included many striking examples of underground press work—mimeographed newspapers for GIs with names like *Last Harass*, *Up Against the Bulkhead*, *Attitude Check*, or *Fun, Travel and Adventure* (whose acronymic double message was "Fuck the Army!").

Among those viewing younger portraits of themselves in Spokane—along with documentation of their own anti-war activity—were ex-Marine Paul Cox, Army veteran Skip Delano, and former Navy nurse Susan Schnall. In *Waging Peace*, each one shares a memorable tale of personal transformation, due to their war-time experiences at home or abroad.

A native of Oklahoma, Cox served as a pla-

toon leader in Vietnam's Quang Nam Province in 1969. There, he witnessed a massacre of civilians, "smaller scale but no less barbaric" than the mass killings at My Lai, which occurred a year earlier. After completing his combat tour, Cox was assigned to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. He and several Maine buddies decided it was "our duty to put out a newspaper and print the truth about Nam." Over a two-year period, they and later recruits produced thousands of copies of a clandestine publication called RAGE. As Cox says today, "RAGE was definitely not an example of great journalism." But it did allow him to redirect his own anger and disillusionment into an effort "to warn others who were about to be deployed."

In Vietnam, Skip Delano was assigned to a chemical unit attached to the 101st Airborne Division. After his return to Fort McClellan in Alabama, he believed he had earned the right "to comment on the war to other people"—an opinion not shared by his base commander. Delano helped write and edit a GI newsletter called *Left Face*, whose distributors faced six months in the stockade if they were caught with bulk copies. In October 1969, he and 30 others bravely signed a petition supporting the Mobilization scheduled for the following month in Washington, DC. This deep South expression of solidarity with civilian protestors up north triggered Military Intelligence investigations and interrogations, loss of security clearances, and threats of further discipline.

Protesting in Uniform

A year before Delano's dissent, Susan Schnall's dramatic acts of Bay Area resistance drew heavy military discipline. She was court-martialed, sentenced to six months of hard labor, and dismissed from the Navy for "conduct unbecoming an officer."

Schnall grew up in a Gold Star family; her father, who she never knew, was a Marine killed in Guam during World War II. As a Navy nurse in 1967, she toiled among "night time screams of pain and fear" that came from patients badly wounded and recently returned from Vietnam.

In October, 1968, Schnall became involved in

a planned “GI and Veterans March for Peace” in San Francisco. To publicize that event, she and a pilot friend rented a single engine plane, filled it with thousands of leaflets, and dropped them over local military facilities like the Presidio, Treasure Island, the Alameda Naval Station, and her own workplace, Oak Knoll hospital in Oakland. Then, in full dress uniform, she joined 500 other active duty service people, in a march from Market St in San Francisco to its Civic Center, where they were cheered by thousands of civilian protestors.

Fifty years after Cox, Delano and Schnall rallied their uniformed comrades against the Vietnam war, all three are still engaged in causes like defending veterans’ healthcare against privatization by the Trump Administration.

Later this fall, they and other VFP members are helping to bring the *Waging Peace* exhibit to Amherst and New Bedford, Massachusetts, New York City and Washington, DC. Next Spring, this book-based display will reach campus or community audiences in Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

Red State Resistance

Activists today, particularly those involved in working class organizing, should buy this book or see the exhibit based on it. Local-level leaders of the GI movement displayed courage, creativity, and audacity when rallying their own “fellow workers” who had been conscripted by the hundreds of thousands. Much rank-and-file education and agitation about Vietnam occurred on or near heavily guarded military bases located in what are now called “red states.” They became unexpected incubators for homegrown (and imported) radicalism

Some forms of GI resistance, referenced in the book, involved sabotage of equipment, small and

larger scale mutinies, rioting in military stockades, and deadly assaults on unpopular officers (the grenade-assisted retribution known as “fragging.”)

The national network of GI coffeehouses described in *Waging Peace* became places where active duty military personnel could relax, socialize, listen to music, read what they wanted, and have fun with each other and their civilian supporters. This helped break down the military vs civil society divide that is far wider today—due, in part, to the post-Vietnam creation of a “professional army” to replace the rebellious conscripts of 50 years ago.

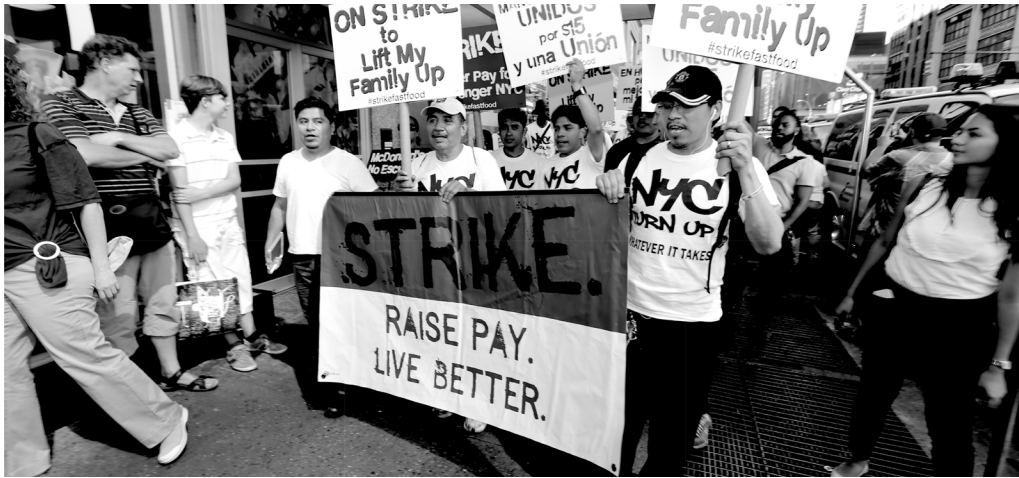
Thanks to their low morale—and heroic Vietnamese resistance to foreign aggression—U.S. ground forces were no longer “an effective fighting force by 1970,” according to Cortright. “To save the Army,” he says, “it became necessary to withdraw troops and end the war. Their dissent and defiance played a decisive role in limiting the ability of the U.S. to continue the war...”

In an era of “forever wars,” it may be hard to imagine such impactful organizing among active duty military personnel or newly-minted veterans. Let’s hope that the many examples of grassroots activism in *Waging Peace* prove inspirational and instructive for younger progressives today. This valuable book might even stimulate some new thinking about how the left can better relate to the 22 million Americans who have served in the military or continue to do so—to their own detriment and that of people throughout the world. **Z**

Steve Early was a campus-based recruiter for both the October Moratorium and November Mobilization in 1969. He later served as a full-time anti-war organizer for the American Friends Service Committee in New England. He is collaborating on a book about veterans’ affairs and can be reached at Lsupport@aol.com.

Let’s hope that the many examples of grassroots activism in *Waging Peace* prove inspirational and instructive for younger progressives today

Feature



By a katz/Shutterstock.com

Labor Day 2019

By Jack Rasmus

What's the condition of the U.S. working class on this Labor Day 2019? Wages and Jobs are, of course, the best indicators of that condition. So let's look at wages and jobs in America today.

What we see is that—contrary to Trump, U.S. government, and mainstream media hype and reporting—a growing number of independent surveys show that wages have not been rising as they claim. And 500,000 fewer jobs were actually created last year than initially reported.

The media's oft-quoted figure for rising wages is about 3.1 percent over the past year. But there are at least 5 reasons why 3.1 percent is not accurate and, in fact, grossly overestimated. First, the 3.1 percent is not adjusted for inflation. Second, it

represents an average only, which reflects higher wages for the top 10 percent of the workforce—professionals, managers, and supervisors. Third, it applies to full-time workers only and leaves out the 60 million or so part time, temp, and gig workers. Fourth, it does not factor into the 3.1 percent average the fact that the millions of unemployed are getting no wages at all. Fifth, it defines wages narrowly, excluding the lack of any increase in deferred wages (pension payments) and social wages (Social Security pay for retirees).

Why Wages Are Not Rising 3.1%

Considering the first point, the 3.1 percent figure is what's called a “nominal” wage. If ad-



**“Real wages from June 2018 to June 2019 have shrunk by -0.8 percent and by 9 percent since 2006,” by Rob Hyrons/
Shutterstock.com**

justed for the 1.6 percent inflation rate, then the real wage gain is only 1.5 percent a year. (It’s even less of a real wage gain for workers at the median household income level [\$50,000 per year] and below—where inflation is even higher than 1.6 percent due to housing and rent cost, local utility fees and taxes, medical insurance premiums and drug-cost escalation, education and other costs escalation).

Looking at the second problem—overestimating the wage gains for the vast majority of workers in the “bottom 80 percent” of the workforce—is that the 3.1 percent represents an “average.” Averaging means the highest paid wage earners (which include most salaried workers) are getting more than the 1.5 percent and, therefore, those at the median or below are getting much less than 1.5 percent. And in most cases, they’re not even getting that 1.5 percent. A survey by the finance site Bankrate.com found that, “more than 60 percent of Americans said they didn’t get a pay raise or get a better-paying job in the last 12 months.” So if 60 percent didn’t get any wage increase at all, how could wages be rising 3.1 percent—or even 1.5 percent? Unless, of course, workers in the best paid 10 percent of the labor force are getting 10 percent or more in wage increases in the last year. These are occupations like software engineers, data scientists, physicians assistants, professionals with advanced degrees, and, of course, middle and upper managers paid mostly by salary. Perhaps they were getting 10 percent last year, but that’s highly doubtful.

Another mainstream-respected survey also challenged the 3.1 percent wage increase myth: “according to figures from the PayScale Index... the median wage increases, when adjusted for inflation, were only 1.1 percent since last year and 1 percent over the past year.”

The Payscale survey is corroborated further by a recent study by McKinsey Global Institute, which shows that median wages have not risen at all since 2007. By 2017, they were the same level as in 2007, rising less than 1.1 percent.

Comparing McKinsey with Payscale, there’s been no wage change under Trump. In fact, the Payscale survey concluded that real wages from June 2018 to June 2019 have shrunk by -0.8 percent and by 9 percent since 2006.

But that’s still not the whole picture.

There’s another adjustment necessary, even to the 1.1 percent real wage. Whether 1.5 percent or 1.1 percent, that figure applies only to the full-time employed workers. It does not take into account the lower wages, and the more typical lack of any wage increases, for the 60 million plus “contingent” (part time, temp, gig) workforce that exists in the U.S. That’s 37 percent of the total workforce of more than 160 million who are not factored into the 3.1 percent estimate at all.

And the numbers for the part time/temp/gig part of the total workforce may be much larger than the government is estimating. U.S. Labor Department statistics count part time, temp and gig work as a primary job. It doesn’t accurately account those who have a primary part time job (or a primary full time job) and who have also taken on second, and even third, part time, temp, or gig jobs to make ends meet. The Bankrate survey showed, for example, that while the government data estimates less than a fifth of all workers are part time, 45 percent of all U.S. workers had second or third jobs. That included 48 percent of Millennials, 39 percent of GenXers, and even 28 percent of Boomers.

The real picture that appears is not one of traditional full-time workers getting annual 3.1 percent wage increases in their base pay every year. That’s the U.S. labor force of the 1950s and 1960s, not the 21st century.

The real picture is little or no wage increases

for the vast majority of those workers, especially those below the 80th percentile of the U.S. labor force, and especially those at the median and below, who are being increasingly forced to take on second and third jobs. Meanwhile, a small percentage of the total workforce, likely well less than 10 percent, comprised of professionals, managers, tech, and advanced degreed special occupations are realizing wage gains well above the average. In fact, those at the very “top,” earning more than \$150,000 a year, may be getting exceptionally large wage increases. That’s because the U.S. Department of Labor employs a methodology in which it “top codes” weekly earnings. Top coding means any raises for those earning above \$150,000 a year are not being recorded at all.

Monthly pension benefits and Social Security retirement payments—i.e. deferred wages—are also never included in the 3.1 percent figure by the government, even though they are really wages as well. They are “deferred” wage payments which are foregone by workers while they were actively in the labor force, to be paid out upon retirement. These wage payments are fixed and are therefore constantly declining in real terms. Nor, of course, do official wage statistics ever consider calculating the wages of millions of unemployed workers who, without jobs, get no wages whatsoever. If deferred wages and unemployed with no wages were included in calculating total wage change for the working class, the Bankrate, Payscale, McK-insey and other independent surveys would show annual wage gains—for all but the very highest paid—have been contracting faster than -0.8 percent under Trump.

Business-Investor Tax Cuts Haven’t Created Jobs

A hallmark claim of neoliberalism is that business tax cuts create jobs. This is part of the economic ideology notion called supply side economics. Cutting business taxes raises business disposable income, which, it is assumed, business then spends on new investment that boosts production and therefore hiring. But this is a deceptive misrepresentation (i.e. ideology) of reality. Busi-

nesses don’t necessarily spend the tax windfall on investment. They may divert the tax savings into investing in financial markets that don’t produce any jobs. They may distribute it to shareholders in the form of stock buybacks and dividend payouts. They may use it for buying up competitors via mergers and acquisitions. They may simply hoard the savings to boost their balance sheets. Or they may invest it on expanding production—but for their offshore subsidiaries.

In January 2018, once again, Trump and Congress “sold” the economic lie that business-investor tax cuts create jobs. But there is no empirical evidence that such tax cuts causally result in job creation. In fact, even a correlation between neoliberal tax cuts and job creation does not exist. Witness Trump’s massive \$4.5 trillion tax cuts of 2017. (Yes, \$4.5 trillion, not his reported \$1.5 trillion). What has actually happened to investment in expanding plant and equipment and therefore employment? After a very brief boost in early 2018, business investment in the U.S. fell to only 2.7 percent (10 percent rate is historically average). In 2019 it fell further into negative territory by mid-year, as “Business investment contracted in the second quarter for the first time since the first quarter of 2016.” That means if investment—i.e. the mechanism for job creation per the supply side theory—has not risen, then the claim cannot be substantiated that business tax cuts, by creating investment, create jobs.

But hasn’t there been actual job creation since Trump took office? Yes, there has—1.1 million according to government official stats. However, its causation cannot be attributed to the tax cuts. So where have the 1.1 million jobs come from?

Are “Contingent” Jobs Greater Than Reported?

U.S. Labor stats do not really report the number of workers finding employment when the Department reports job gains each month. It reports jobs—not people—growth. Jobs may be increasing by 1.1 million but those newly employed may be far less. Why? Because most of the 1.1 million jobs may represent already employed

taking on second and third part time jobs. Recall the prior Bankrate survey which reported that 45 percent of all American workers indicate they are working second and third jobs to make ends meet. Or the Marketwatch survey that 33 percent need a gig side job in order to meet living expenses. But the Labor Department shows numbers not rising as high for part time and temp work. That may be due, however, to its reporting of part time/temp as the primary job of part time/temp workers. They may be working second and third additional part time jobs and the government is not picking that up—its only accounting for part time/temp jobs that are primary for the person.

The confusion in the Labor Department's job stats is perhaps further suggested by recent revisions in its job creation numbers. Annually the Labor Department adjusts its past year job numbers after more data is made available from States' unemployment insurance records. In its latest report, prior to the Labor Department downward revisions, the Department indicated it had overstated 2018 jobs by no less than 500,000. That brings 2018 monthly job creation numbers well under 200,000, which is about the 180,000 monthly creation in 2017. In other words, no actual increase due to Trump's tax cuts introduced in January 2018. The Labor Department stats indicate employment rose from July 2018 through July 2019 by 1.1 million jobs. Does that mean the Labor Department had erred by nearly 50 percent in its job growth numbers? If so, it's such a gross margin of error it makes Labor Department job reporting under Trump highly suspect or else something is fundamentally wrong with U.S. job creation stats. What's wrong is that the stats are failing to accurately reflect contingent job creation as second and third jobs.

Conclusions

A deeper look at the official wage and job numbers shows wages rising nowhere near the official 3.1 percent. In fact, most of the wage gains are highly skewed to the very top. At the median they're barely rising, if at all. And certainly contracting below the median (except perhaps for the few millions in blue states where minimum wages

have been adjusting some). When defined more broadly and therefore accurately, wages have been contracting under Trump—as they have been since 2006. Various independent surveys that are not based on the Labor Department's questionable assumptions or definitions, or even errors, in its estimation bear this out that wages are not rising.

Reliability of official jobs data is also a growing concern. Changes in the U.S. labor market structure in recent decades means the growing number of contingent and gig jobs that are second and third jobs are not being reflected in the official job numbers. The Labor Department's recent adjustment reducing last year's job gains by a whopping 500,000 raises further concerns about the methods by which it reports out monthly job gains. And actual job gains, after its adjustment, suggest that most of these may actually represent part time/temp/gig jobs that are second and third jobs taken on by workers who just can't make ends meet any more with the first contingent job, or even current full time job. Yet Trump and friends keep peddling the myth that more business-tax cuts are needed to create jobs. **Z**

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Burrowes on Our Vanishing World: Rainforests

