



Chomsky on a Fragile Democracy

YOU WILL DIE OF
OLD AGE
WE WILL DIE OF
CLIMATE CHANGE

Cook on
I AM Greta

December 2020

Photo credit Shutterstock - Damian Lugowski

DECEMBER 2020 TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMENTARY/1

Fighting for a Progressive Agenda/1

Marjorie Cohn on Biden's victory not guaranteeing a progressive agenda

No Future with a Centrist Agenda/9

Sonali Kolhatkar on the future with Biden

A Feminist Blueprint for Saving Democracy/14

Yifat Susskind on feminist activism worldwide

The Imperative to Achieve National Medicare for All/20

Margaret Flowers on accepting nothing less than health care for everyone



Photo by DCStockPhotography/Shutterstock.com

FEATURES/25

The Fragility of American Democracy/25

CJ Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky

I Am Greta/35

Jonathan Cook on collective insanity

Condemning Murder of Iranian Scientist/45

Medea Benjamin and Ariel Gold look at sabotaging peace



Photo by Vic Hinterlang/Shutterstock.com



Photo by Sheila Fitzgerald/Shutterstock.com

Biden's Victory Does Not Guarantee a Progressive Agenda. We Must Fight for It

By Marjorie Cohn

Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump is monumental. After four years of nonstop cruelty against workers, the poor, people of color, women, LGBTQ folks, immigrants, Muslims, the environment, the climate, and the foreign victims of Trump's bombs, we can breathe a sigh of relief.

But no sooner did Biden win the election, then centrists in the Democratic Party began blaming the left for the loss of seats in the House of Representatives and the failure to decisively regain control of the Senate.

In fact, progressives played a pivotal role in delivering the presidency to Biden and several congressional races to Democrats as well as turning Georgia and Arizona blue. Now progressives must hold Biden's feet to the fire and demand that he govern for the 99 percent and not the 1 percent.

Biden's cabinet selections so far are a mixed bag. His choice for United Nations ambassador has been praised by progressives. But Biden chose a secretary of state who is a strong supporter of U.S. militarism.



Progressives Were Key to Biden's Victory

In a three-hour conference call among House Democrats on November 5, centrists lambasted their progres-

sive colleagues for embracing socialism, Medicare for All, and supporting calls to defund the police. Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA), a former CIA officer, reportedly declared, "We have to commit to not saying the words 'defund the police' ever again. We need to not ever use the words 'socialist' or 'socialism' ever again. It does mat-

ter, and we have lost good members because of that."

Likewise, House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, who has taken more money from the pharmaceutical industry in the past decade than any other member of Congress, reportedly said if "we are going to run on Medicare for All, defund the police, socialized medicine, we're not going to

Photo by
Johnny
Silvercloud/
Shutter-
stock.com



win.”

The protests against white supremacy led by Black Lives Matter activists and demands to defund the police, however, brought Black Americans to the polls in cities that were critical to Biden’s victory.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) told CNN’s Jake Tapper she wasn’t aware of any candidate who campaigned on socialism or defunding the police, but “these were largely slogans or demands from activist groups that we saw in the largest uprising in American history around police brutality.”

Ocasio-Cortez said she offered her help to “every single swing state Democrat” and all but five refused her assistance. The five who accepted her offer were victorious or are on a path to victory. And every one who rejected her help is losing.

Moreover, every single Democrat who supported Medicare for All won reelection, Ocasio-Cortez noted. Progressive Representatives Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) were instrumental in delivering Minnesota and Michigan, respectively, for Biden. Candidates endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America won 26 out of the 30 races they entered.

“It turns out that supporting

universal health care during a pandemic and enacting major investments in renewable energy as we face the existential threat to our planet from climate change is not just good public policy. It also is good politics,” Bernie Sanders wrote on November 11.

When he addressed the country as president-elect, Biden attributed his victory to “the broadest and most diverse coalition in history.” Indeed, “youth turnout was through the roof, and we’re probably looking at, when all the ballots are tallied, the highest youth vote turnout ever,” said NextGen America’s executive director, Ben Wessel. Young people of color supported Biden overwhelmingly and their votes were decisive in many races, according to an analysis by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University.

Many on the left were not keen on Biden because he supported the Iraq war, played a key role in the 1994 crime bill that led to mass incarceration, and refused to oppose fracking and back universal health care. They didn’t enthusiastically back Biden but rather voted against Trump’s escalating fascism.

Biden Must Be Pushed to Embrace Progressive Policies

Trump could not have been defeated but for the activism of progressives and grassroots organizing, Norman Solomon wrote at Common Dreams: “Now, on vital issues—climate, health-care, income inequality, militarism, the prison-industrial complex, corporate power and so much more—it’s time to engage with the battle that must happen inside the Democratic Party.” Solomon advocates “a combative approach toward corporate Democrats.”

In a November 10 memo to the Democratic Party, New Deal Strategies, Justice Democrats, Sunrise Movement, and Data for Progress wrote, “Scapegoating progressives and Black activists for their demands and messaging is not the lesson to be learned here. It was their organizing efforts, energy and calls for change needed in their communities that drove up voter turnout.”

The four progressive organizations warned that abandoning “our core progressive base agenda” will lead to the loss of the House majority in the 2022 midterm elections and the Democratic Party



PORTLAND

TO HER SONS WHO DIED
FOR THE UNION

DEFEND
DEMOCRACY

ACAB



will not gain ground in the Senate. “We cannot let Republican narratives drive our party away from Democrats’ core base of support: young people, Black, Brown, working class, and social movements who are the present and future of the party.”

They urged linking racial and economic justice, noting that a “progressive message framing racism as a divide-and-conquer class weapon” polled effectively before the election. The memo also advocated investment in mobilizing the base, including organized labor and allied progressive organizations, and driving an economic message that resonates with all working people.

A recent *New York Times* poll found that 3 in 5 respondents support Medicare for All, 2 in 3 favor a wealth tax, and even more support free college tuition. National exit polls revealed that 53 percent of Americans want a national health care option “in which all Americans would get their insurance from a single government plan.” Sixty-six percent of voters think climate change is a serious problem and 52 percent consider climate change a “severe threat” that must be an “immediate priority” for Congress and the president. And a study in late September by the Guardian and Vice Media Group

demonstrated that 8 out of 10 Democrats and 41 percent of Republicans supported the Green New Deal.

Exit polls also showed that 57 percent of voters support Black Lives Matter. Seventy-one percent said that racism is either one of the most important issues or the most important issue we face today. Fifty-three percent believe that Black people are treated unfairly by the criminal legal system.

The groups recalled in their November 10 memo how controversial the statement “Black Lives Matter” was in 2014 and the way Democrats resisted too close an association with Colin Kaepernick and Black athletes who kneeled during the national anthem. But after the public lynching of George Floyd, a majority of Americans said they supported Black Lives Matter. Indeed, the organizations wrote, “the Black youth leading the Black Lives Matter movement have turned their power in the streets into votes and have helped secure Biden’s victory in key cities.”

Black Lives Matter activists told *The New York Times* on November 10 that they sent a letter to Biden seeking a role in the transition process but had not received a response.

Biden’s Administration Must Adopt Popular, Not Corporate, Policies

If Democrats are to retake leadership of the Senate, both Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff must win their runoff elections in Georgia. It was the monumental organizing by Stacey Abrams and other progressives over a decade that caused Georgia to vote Democratic. Now there is a tremendous mobilization effort underway to elect the two Democrats on January 5.

But even if Democrats are unable to reclaim control of the Senate, Biden can use executive orders to undo some of Trump’s worst actions and take other bold steps to move the country in a progressive direction.

Biden has already committed that he will reinstate DACA, reenter the Paris Climate Accord, end the Muslim Ban and rejoin the World Health Organization. As Elizabeth Warren argued in a November 11 op-ed in the *Washington Post*, Biden should take the offensive on Day One and cancel billions of dollars in student loan debt, lower drug prices for key pharmaceuticals, issue enforceable OSHA health and safety standards for the

COVID-19 pandemic to protect essential workers, raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for all federal contractors, declare the climate crisis a national emergency to marshal resources to fight that battle, establish a Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force to collect data and address racial disparities in funding for the pandemic, and prioritize enforceable anti-monopoly policies. Biden must also revoke Trump's unconscionable asylum policies and support progressive immigration reform.

It is essential that Biden not capitulate to Mitch McConnell's right-wing agenda and take independent action to implement a progressive program. Biden can use the Vacancies Act and the Presidential Adjournment Clause of the Constitution to make appointments that don't require Senate approval.

The warning signs of a hawkish Biden administration are all too evident. "An eye-popping array of corporate consultants, war profiteers, and national security hawks have been appointed by President-elect Joe Biden to agency review teams that will set the agenda for his administration," Kevin Gosztoła wrote at *The Grayzone*. "A substantial percentage of them worked in the United States government when

Barack Obama was president."

Biden Must End the Wars and Punishing Sanctions

The antiwar movement, which helped end the Vietnam War, prevented large-scale U.S. imperial wars until George W. Bush invaded Iraq in 2003. Unfortunately, Barack Obama and Trump both bought into Bush's "war on terror" and continued his illegal and deadly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and mounted drone and bombing attacks in multiple countries.

Biden's choice for secretary of state is worrisome as the nation's chief diplomat should favor diplomacy over militarism. Tony Blinken was Obama's deputy national security adviser. He was instrumental in formulating Biden's support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Blinken recently said that Biden "would not tie military assistance to Israel to any political decisions that it makes, period, full stop."

But Biden's selection for ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who was Obama's assistant secretary of state for African Affairs, looks more

promising.

Michèle Flournoy, Obama's top policy official in the Pentagon, is a prospective Biden pick for secretary of defense. She advocated a preemptive strike on Iraq in 2002, and helped lead the escalation of the Afghan war and the illegal humanitarian and political disasters in Syria and Libya during the Obama administration.

Susan Rice, Obama's national security adviser, will likely be appointed to a cabinet position. Rice argued for attacking Iraq without a Security Council resolution in 2002 and engineered Obama's disastrous policy of regime change in Libya. In 2014, she defended Israel's illegal slaughter in Gaza.

Biden has already promised to end U.S. support for the tragic war in Yemen. He should also restore humanitarian aid to Yemen and urge Saudi Arabia to negotiate an end to that conflict. It is essential that we pressure Biden to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces. In addition, Biden must reverse Trump's escalation of the war in Syria and urge all parties to engage in diplomacy.

We must also push Biden to end U.S. military aid to regimes that commit gross violations of human rights, as

required by the Leahy laws. And he must comply with the Arms Export Control Act, which forbids the export of weapons that are not solely used for legitimate self-defense. These regimes include Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Israel. Although Biden has pledged his undying loyalty to Israel, in spite of its illegal occupation of Palestinian lands and egregious human rights viola-

tions, he should be pressured to restore financial assistance to the Palestinians and reimburse them for the aid Trump withheld during his regime.

Biden must end the illegal punishing sanctions (unilateral coercive measures) against Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Syria and Cuba. He should restore Obama's steps toward normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba, and support South

Korea's diplomatic efforts for a "permanent peace regime" in Korea.

In addition, Biden must rejoin the Iran nuclear deal and end the saber-rattling against that country. He should halt the arms race—both conventional and nuclear—with Russia and China, renew the new START treaty with Russia, and rejoin the nuclear treaties from which Trump has withdrawn. And Biden must urge





Photo by Allison C Bailey/Shutterstock.com

the Senate to ratify the new UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Biden should also end U.S. sanctions and threats against the International Criminal Court and cooperate with its investigations.

Finally, Biden must reduce the enormous U.S. military budget which enriches defense contractors and enables the commission of U.S. imperial wars that kill innocent people, create massive refu-

gee crises and make us less safe.

This is a tall order and Biden will only respond to overwhelming popular pressure to pursue a progressive agenda. As history has demonstrated, the executive and congressional branches submit most effectively to mass organizing efforts. “The New Deal of the 1930s owed less to Democratic politicians than to workers’ disruption of their workplaces,” Kevin

Young wrote at Truthout. It was those struggles that gave us the Social Security Act of 1935 and unemployment insurance. Likewise, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the result of the massive civil rights movement.

We have our work cut out for us. Let us begin. **Z**

The publication of Origin for this article is *Truthout*.

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*.

America—and the Democrats—Won't Have a Future If Joe Biden Adopts a Centrist Agenda

By Sonali Kolhatkar

President-elect Joe Biden has called the November 2020 U.S. election a “battle for the soul of the nation.” In offering himself up as a contrast to President Donald Trump, Biden made a clear distinction between his political agenda and statesman-like behavior, and that of Trump. Ultimately, millions more Americans chose Biden over Trump and gave him a larger

I AM NO LONGER
ACCEPTING THE THING
I CANNOT CHANGE
I AM CHANGING THE
THINGS I CAN NOT ACCEPT
#RESIST





mandate than any other presidential candidate in American history. Biden's victory was possible in large part due to an alliance between Bernie Sanders-backed progressives and the centrist liberals who longed for a return to the Obama years. Now begins a battle for the soul of Joe Biden.

For years, the two major parties had tacked toward the center when running candidates for president. It seemed logical to assume every four years that most American voters would prefer someone who tried to appeal to the mass of voters in the middle rather than one end of the political spectrum. But since Ronald Reagan, the Republican Party has shifted further and further to the right, culminating in Donald Trump's extremist right-wing presidency—a "reign of terror" that looks like none other in history. To keep up, Democrats moved to the right as well, hoping eventually they would catch up to a now-mythical centrist majority that would ensure their electoral victories. Instead, Americans were becoming disillusioned with politics and simply not participating. In 2016, there were three blocs of eligible voters: those who voted for Trump, those who voted for Clinton, and those who didn't vote. While Trump's share was the

smallest of the three, the latter was the largest grouping.

After three years of watching Trump's disastrous presidency unfold, progressives worked hard alongside liberals and even anti-Trump Republicans this past year to convince disillusioned American voters that everything was at stake in 2020 and that the future of the nation depended on their participation. Voter turnout surged all over the nation, but it grew particularly in swing states among those demographics who identify as progressive—such as young people of color.

For example, in Philadelphia, whose Democratic votes helped deliver the critically important state of Pennsylvania for Biden, a young Black organizer with the Working Families Party named Nicolas O'Rourke wrote, "As usual, the Democratic Party played to a mythical swing voter while taking Black and brown voters for granted." He explained, "It was up to our progressive movement to street canvass Philadelphia's early vote centers and distribute water and face masks and answer voters' questions."

Although Biden clearly and decisively won the presidency—notwithstanding pandemic-related delays to casting and counting votes—his party did not win much beyond the White House. Dem-

ocrats lost seats in the House of Representatives and failed to win an outright Senate majority as they had hoped. The centrists wasted no time in blaming progressives for those losses. Congressperson Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) in an interview with the *New York Times* countered with cold hard facts: "Every single candidate that co-sponsored Medicare for All in a swing district kept their seat. We also know that co-sponsoring the Green New Deal was not a sinker." Indeed, the ranks of young progressives of color in Congress increased.

While one can indeed counter that it is easier to run as a staunch progressive for lower office in densely populated diverse urban centers than it is to run for president of the entire nation, Trump proved that even with a narrow agenda and forceful populist rhetoric, it is possible to win a national election. Indeed, Biden won voters all across the nation by running on a platform that was deeply influenced by progressives.

Now, Biden's task is to make sure that the Democratic Party's political future is assured in two years at the 2022 midterm elections, and just as importantly in four years, as Trump has already considered launching a new White House bid for 2024.

More importantly, he needs to ensure that millions of Americans do not fall through the financial fissures wrought by the devastating pandemic, that climate catastrophe can be avoided, that the torture of immigrants can end, that devastating wars are terminated, and more.

He can protect both his party's political future and the people's well-being by moving decisively to the left, not to the right (which is often erroneously labeled "the center"). It is progressive policies—like Medicare for All, raising the minimum wage, taxing the wealthy and corporations, adopting the Green New Deal, legalizing immigration, and ending wars—that are actually popular. But forceful red-baiting propaganda unleashed by right-wing forces have scared centrist Democrats like Abigail Spanberger (D-VA), whose explanation of her party's down-ballot losses was the use of the word "socialism." Spanberger lashed out against progressives, saying, "We need to not ever use the word 'socialist' or 'socialism' ever again." But Biden did not use those words during his campaign, except to unequivocally denounce the idea of "socialism." He reveled in the fact that he beat the socialist candidate Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) in

the primary elections. None of the down-ballot candidates explicitly identifying as socialists lost their races, and in fact, the left did quite well on election night.

The fact is that Republicans will say and do anything to win elections and label Democrats "socialist," whether or not it is true. Allowing the extremist right wing to dictate the direction of the Democratic Party simply gives Trump and his backers the leverage that they can and will use to crush liberals and progressives alike.

Biden and Democrats can and should thread the needle by proudly adopting progressive and popular policies and brushing off accusations of being socialist without taking the bait. If Medicare for All is socialist, then so is "Medicare for Some," which is what we currently have. If raising the minimum wage is socialist, then Florida voters just proudly claimed the mantle in deed while denouncing it in word. The Green New Deal is as socialist as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's original plan for which it is named. If ending war is considered socialist, then so is Trump, who pledged to bring troops home. It is not difficult to make the case for progressive policies because, simply, they are popular. The only case to be made against tacking left is

through fearmongering propaganda, which Republicans are adept at.

Will Biden do what needs to be done to ensure his party and nation's future? Among the first items on his agenda appears to be reversing many of Trump's worst executive orders. This is an easy and uncontroversial first step. But Biden faces serious pressure to veer rightward. He appears



to be bending to Republican power in forming his Cabinet. According to an *Axios* report, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) “would work with Biden on centrist nominees but no ‘radical progressives’ or ones who are controversial with conservatives.” Conservative and centrist media pundits have warned Biden repeatedly that he would need to tack

to the right. They cite Biden’s talk of “unity” as a reason to justify landing in the center.

But voter concerns do fit not neat geometrical shapes where the right and left can be folded into a middle ground that means rejecting both ends of the spectrum. The middle ground can be centered on a rejection of cruelty, abuse, corruption, corporate greed, war, racism, misogyny,

homophobia, and dishonesty. The middle ground can be centered on popular policies that directly benefit people. In other words, Biden needs to reshape himself into a left-wing populist, and he can do so without explicitly labeling himself as such. The future of the nation and planet depend on it. **Z**



This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

Sonali Kolhatkar is the founder, host and executive producer of “Rising Up With Sonali,” a television and radio show that airs on Free Speech TV and Pacifica stations.

A Feminist Blueprint for Saving Democracy in the U.S.—and Beyond

By Yifat Susskind

A group of women link arms, shielding protesters from armed security forces who stand ready to detain them. Thousands of women, many dressed head to toe in white and holding flowers, line the streets in “chains of solidarity.”

These are the “Women in White,” who have mobilized in unprecedented numbers in Belarus, calling for the resignation of President Alexander Lukashenko after his disputed re-election this August.

Belarus offers a cautionary tale. It’s a story of an authoritarian leader who rigged an election, claiming to have secured 80% of the vote. When people rose up in protest, he cracked down through widespread police brutality and the arrest of thousands of peaceful protestors.

Here in the U.S., it’s no secret that Trump has been laying the groundwork for shady election maneuvers. He has consistently cast doubt on the validity of mail-in ballots and refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power.

Trump has shown willingness to use violence, deploying federal troops to suppress non-violent protests for racial justice in Washington, DC and Portland. And he has emboldened an armed, white supremacist base in urging the Proud Boys to “stand by and stand back.” These are loud and clear warning signs of the risks this November brings.

The end of Belarus’s story has not yet been written, and neither has ours. We can take a page from their book and from the history of pro-democracy, feminist activism worldwide. It may be the key to saving our democracy here at home.

Strategic non-violence

ence

Step one—if Trump blocks vote counting or refuses to step down—is to urgently mobilize a peaceful, people-powered resistance movement. Non-violence is a hallmark of women-led, feminist organizing; indeed, up to 70% of non-violent movements between 2010 and 2014 included the significant presence of women.

The data is clear: this tactic works. Research by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan shows that between 1900 and 2015, non-violent campaigns were nearly twice as effective as violent campaigns. In part, that’s because if security forces meet peaceful protest with violence, they often trigger an indignant, popular reaction, thereby expanding the protest movement.

In April 2019, Algeria’s “Hirak” movement opposed Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s decision to seek a fifth term, successfully ending his 20-year reign of the country. There, women were highly visible at the forefront of organising.

Protestors maintained a steadfast commitment to non-violence, chanting “Silmiya” (“peaceful”) as a rallying cry, handing out flowers at demonstrations and even injecting a bit of humour—bringing houseplants



**I'm The Liberal
Pro-Choice
Outspoken
Feminist You
Were**

WARNED ABOUT

to protests to “get watered” when police threatened to fire water cannons.

Common Ground

Step two is to usher in mass participation in protests through an inclusive approach that unifies people across many identities, while

centering the demands of marginalized communities.

Campaigns with significant women’s representation tend to be much larger—and ultimately more successful. When so many people mobi-



lize, it becomes harder for the government to delegitimize the movement as fringe or extremist.

In Sudan, women—who bore the brunt of the regime’s repressive rule—were at the

forefront of last year’s revolution, which ousted President Omar al-Bashir after three decades in power. We were transfixed by the powerful image of Alaa Salah, standing atop a car and lead-

ing a peaceful chant.

Forming up to two-thirds of protestors, women also brought with them a wide cross-section of society, across all regions, ethnic groups, ages, sexualities, reli-

Photo by GrandAve/Shutterstock.com



gions and classes. Protestors pushed back against the regime's racism and efforts to polarize the Sudanese people along ethnic lines by chanting "We are all Darfur." This broad-based participation and unity was key to the movement's success.

Bottom-up Leadership

Third, successful movements are full of leaders, not just a single icon. Here, we can learn from women-led movements that employ a feminist style of leadership rooted in collaboration and challenging hierarchy. We see this in Belarus; while the movement was initially sparked by one fearless woman, opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, it has since taken on a life of its own. Ordinary people have used digital platforms to spontaneously organize hundreds of protests. Not only does bottom-up leadership empower more people to join in, it also makes it harder for state forces to target and discredit the movement's figureheads.

In Iraq, people took to the streets in late 2019 calling for an end to the corrupt, sectarian brand of politics shaped by

the 2003 U.S. invasion. The decentralized protests, which succeeded in forcing the prime minister's resignation, resurged this October to demand free and fair elections.

Groups such as the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) have been a constant presence in Baghdad's main protest square, insisting that there is no true democracy without women's rights, and vice versa.

We can learn from them how to ensure that protests are accessible to the greatest number of people. In Baghdad, OWFI set up tents at protest sites to welcome and educate new arrivals to the movement, create spaces for women's leadership and offer support to protestors—including food, baking soda to counter tear gas, and safe transport to and from protests.

Transnational Solidarity

Finally, we can strengthen connections across borders—and galvanize movement allies abroad in support of pro-democracy activism in the U.S. Protests in other countries can help fortify domestic organizing.

In solidarity with the pro-democracy movement in

Belarus, for instance, women have organized demonstrations in Germany, Poland, Belgium, Russia and Ukraine.

Likewise, in the aftermath of brutal police killings of Black people in the U.S., international women's rights group MADRE brought together hundreds of feminist organizations and human rights defenders from around the world to sign a statement of support, drawing from their common experiences of confronting militarism and white supremacy.

Feminists know that building transnational solidarity is often crucial when trying to counter domestic oppression.

We know that if our democracy is threatened, we can and must turn out in massive numbers to protect the results of the U.S. election in November. To do so, we can learn from feminist movements the world over how to generate the kind of people-powered movement we need to preserve our democracy. We have a feminist blueprint: let's put it into action. **Z**

The Publication of Origin for this article is *Open Democracy*.

FIGHT LIKE A GIRL

Don't forget to pick up your painting supplies:
■ Brush
■ Paint Tray
■ Paint Knife
■ Paint Roller
■ Drop Cloth
■ Paint Roller Cover
■ Hanging
■ Hanger

The Imperative To Achieve National Improved Medicare For All

By Margaret Flowers

Health care will be a major issue early in the new Biden/Harris administration. Unemployment is still high, with over a million people applying for unemployment benefits last week and 42.6% of working age people without a job.

In the United States, losing employment often means losing health insurance. On top of the 30 million people who are already uninsured, it is estimated that nearly 15 million people lost their health insurance due to becoming unemployed as of June. The current number of people without health insurance is not known, but as Biden takes office, it could surpass the 44 million who were uninsured when Obama took office in 2008.

Biden's healthcare plan looks like a replay of the health reform process of 2009-10 when the Democrats effectively divided the movement in support of national improved Medicare for all and pushed through the so-called Affordable Care Act (ACA), which passed without Republican support. Health insurance and pharmaceutical corporate profits have soared since then while people struggle to afford healthcare.

In a time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when over 250,000 people have already died and the University of Washington predicts over 500,000 deaths by the end of February, we cannot allow a repeat of the failed ACA. It is unconscionable to create anything less than a universal single payer healthcare system.

The ACA Challenge in the Supreme Court

Recently, oral arguments in a case against the ACA were heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. This is the third constitutional challenge to the law and the second time the individual mandate, which requires people to have health insurance or pay a penalty, has been questioned.

During the first challenge, I was part of a group of 50 physicians and lawyers who filed an amicus brief with the court, arguing that national improved Medicare for all is the most constitutionally-sound healthcare system.

Traditional Medicare has been our national healthcare system for seniors and people with certain health conditions since 1965. It meets the definition of "taxation for the general welfare" in Article 1, section 8, of the Constitution. On the other hand, the ACA uses our public dollars to subsidize private health insurers with hundreds of billions of dollars every year. Those health insurers then pay their CEOs multi-million dollar salaries and bonuses and dividends to their stockholders. The Congressional Budget Office estimates those subsidies will be \$920 billion in 2021.

As if that wasn't bad enough, private health insurers are taking over our public insurances, Medicaid and Medicare. Most Medicaid enrollees are in plans managed by private insurers. Over a third of seniors are in private "Medicare Advantage" plans that rip them off when they have health problems. Private insurers are working aggressively to increase their Medicare takeover. Private insurers also provide health plans



to public employees and the military. *Modern Healthcare* reports that by 2017, 50% or more of the revenue of the top health insurance corporations came from the government.

Many of us saw what the

ACA actually was, a bailout for the private insurance industry that had raised premiums so high people couldn't afford them. The ACA not only subsidized people purchasing health insurance, it

required the government to sell the plans and forced people to buy them with the individual mandate.

Ten years after its passage, the ACA has left our health-care system in a similar state





THE
ANTIDEPRESSANT
THAT COULD'VE
SAVED HER LIFE
WASN'T
ON THE
FORMULARY

AMA
GET OUT OF THE WAY!

VEIN
IMPROV
MEDICAR
FOR ALL

LOB



to when it began. Healthcare costs are too high. People are delaying and avoiding necessary care. Hundreds of thousands of households still become bankrupt each year due to medical illness. And at a time when support for national improved Medicare for all is high, the incoming president is advocating for more of the same.

Understanding the Biden Health Plan

During the 2009-10 health reform process, the Obama/Biden administration used the idea of a “public option” to divide progressives away from the movement for national improved Medicare for all. Tens of millions of dollars went to unions and so-called progressive organizations whose task was to convince people that national improved Medicare for all was asking for too much but what was “on the table” was a public option that they argued was achievable and could lead to single payer healthcare.

None of what they said made sense from a health policy perspective but with enough groups saying it, people were convinced it

was true. In reality, adding one more to the mix of thousands of plans doesn’t change much. As exists with Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans, the healthy population is courted for the private plans and when people become ill, they leave those private plans for the public plan. This puts the burden of paying for care on the underfunded public plan. When it struggles, this is used to reinforce the myth that private is better.

If a public option, the foundation of the Biden plan, were created, it would struggle to compete with the well-marketed private plans. Eventually, it would turn into a high-risk pool and fail. If anything, it would be a relief valve for the private insurers where they could offload expensive patients.

What was most striking during the last health reform process is that all along the widely-promoted “public option” was never intended to be in the final legislation. It was a ploy to keep progressives from demanding single payer healthcare. In December, 2009, when the Senate was being pressured by groups to include a public option in their legislation, as the House had done, the White House started pushing the Senate not to include it. Their plan, which they executed, was to have two different bills from

the House and Senate so the final legislation would be crafted in a conference of a select group from the House and Senate in order to pick and choose what was in it. And, of course, the public option was not in the final bill.

Biden claims that he will take action to reduce the costs of pharmaceuticals. The most effective way to do this is through a national single payer healthcare system. When the government is the single purchaser of goods, like medicines, it has the most leverage to reduce the prices. Without that, reducing prices in one part of the healthcare system, such as Medicare, which Biden proposes, will result in higher prices in another sector. The pharmaceutical corporations have a legal responsibility to protect their investors’ interests. They always find a way.

A single payer system also has the ability to nationalize parts or the whole pharmaceutical industry if needed to protect the public good. Imagine if production of lifesaving medications like insulin were public. Nobody would have to ration their doses or die because they couldn’t afford it. Imagine if a COVID-19 vaccine were publicly manufactured. The government could increase production and instead of selling to the highest bidder, it could prioritize giv-

ing the vaccine to those who need it the most. This is how other nations operate their healthcare systems.

A final point is that, as happened in 2009-10, an important issue will be used to win the support of Democratic Party voters and convince them to support it. Last time, they used pre-existing conditions and the cost of healthcare for women. This time, it is reproductive rights. People will be pushed to support an inadequate reform because they will be told that not supporting it means they will take away reproductive rights. This issue will also be used to differentiate the Democrats from the Republicans.

What we ought to be demanding is what we need: a national universal publicly-financed healthcare system such as national improved Medicare for all or a fully public system as exists in the United Kingdom that includes all necessary care, which means reproductive care. We must not allow the Democrats to weaken our demand that every person in the United States have access to the care they need without fear of financial ruin. The private health insurers must go. They are parasites sucking the blood out of our healthcare system and they will never be satisfied until they have it all.

How We Win Universal Healthcare

The Democrats are using the same tactics they used in the last go-round because they work. People cannot allow themselves to be fooled again. It is critical that people know what those tactics are, recognize them when they are being used, and take action to counter them.

If we are able to hold firm in our demand that we will accept nothing less than healthcare for everyone, not promises of healthcare for everyone but an actual healthcare system that can deliver that, then we will win. At every turn, when the Democrats offer less than that, their offer must be forcefully rejected.

Over the years, the biggest impediment to not achieving a universal healthcare system is that people don't believe we have the power to win it. They believe the excuses that are used such as it is asking for too much or there isn't the "political will" to pass it. Who creates "political will"? The people do.

The majority of people in the United States support a universal healthcare system. The opportunity to win it is now because the recession means our uninsured num-

bers will soar and the current healthcare system cannot address the COVID-19 crisis. As the crisis worsens, our voices must be louder. Universal healthcare is imperative.

And when we win this struggle, it will have two major impacts that will lead to more victories. First, it will demonstrate that people have power to achieve transformational systemic change. And second, it will create a social solidarity—everyone rich or poor in the same system—which will demonstrate that universal systems are superior to the privatized and complicated mess we have now. When we are all in the same system, we all have an interest in making it the best it can be instead of poor systems for the poor and high-quality systems for the rich. We will go on to demand other universal rights such as housing, education, internet access, jobs with a living wage and more.

This time around, the "Yes we can" slogan so common under Obama must mean that, yes, the people can overcome the plutocrats and put people over profits. **Z**

The Publication of Origin for this article is *Popular Resistance*.



Trump Has Revealed the Extreme Fragility of American Democracy

C.J. Polychroniou interviews Noam Chomsky



C.J. Polychroniou: *U.S. election officials have declared the 2020 election “the most secure in American history.” Yet, the Trump campaign continues to mount legal challenges to the electoral process, pushing outrageous falsehoods, while Rudy Giuliani has gone so far as to make outlandish claims of a vast global conspiracy to steal the election from the Great Leader. In your view, what is really behind Trump’s legal challenges?*

Noam Chomsky: Speculation of course, but I’ll indulge in a bad dream—which could become reality if we are not on guard, and if we fail to recognize that elections should be a brief interlude in a life of engaged activism, not a time to go home and leave matters in the hands of the victors.

I suspect that Trump and associates regard their legal challenges as a success in what seems a plausible strategy: keep the pot boiling and keep the loyal base at fever pitch, furious about the “stolen” election and the efforts of the insidious elites and the “deep state” to remove their savior from office.

That strategy seems to be working well. According to recent polls, “Three-quarters (77%) of Trump backers say Biden’s win was due to fraud” and “The anger among Trump’s base is tied to a belief that the election was stolen.” Rejection of the legal challenges with ridicule may please liberal circles, but for the base, it may be simply more proof of the Trump thesis: the hated elites will stop at nothing in their machinations.

Meanwhile, this strategy requires keeping the wrecking ball—Trump’s symbol—actively at work. Do nothing to deal with the pandemic, even delay in providing data to Biden’s team while a top nurse’s union warns of “catastrophic death” in the growing chaos while “our hospitals are knowingly still not prepared” and the government is on vacation.

Viewed through the lens of this vile strategy, if the pandemic gets worse, so much the better. Then local officials will try to impose restrictions and even lockdowns to control patriotic Americans—in line with the plans of the supposed “Communist-run deep state”—leading to economic harm and intrusions on normal life. Meanwhile, Trump and his associates could abandon other normal governmental activities so that when Biden establishes what they describe as a “fake government” on inauguration day, the immediate problems will be severe and failure likely.

On that day, which will live in infamy among the faithful, Trump might set up what he claims is an authentic government in Mar-a-Lago, with Mitch McConnell’s Senate in his pocket and a furious popular base. The next step would be to make the country ungovernable, a specialty that McConnell has been perfecting for a decade and that an accomplished demagogue like Trump can manage reflexively. Everything that goes wrong can be blamed on the treacherous “elites.”

Trump and associates might, as some have speculated, set up an alternative media empire, incorporating talk radio and other far right outlets but perhaps not Fox, which has shown occasional signs of disobedience. Then they could come roaring back into power in 2022-2024, feeding on growing discontent.

They would then be free to destroy the environment with abandon and maximize short-term profit for their primary constituency, impose discipline on what remains of government, tame the media, institute harsh authoritarian measures elsewhere, and continue with their abject service to their masters—the real elites, the very rich and the corporate sector, the decision-makers, as recent academic research once again establishes very clearly.

It’s of no little interest that we have to turn to the world’s leading business journal, the very respectable *London Financial Times*, to

TR*MP
IS TRASH!



read some elementary truths about what could once claim to be a leading democracy: “Anyone with a pulse,” *Financial Times* Associate Editor Rana Foroohar writes, “knows that in the US today the system is rigged in favour of the wealthy and powerful.” Foroohar adds: “One particularly illuminating paper [just cited] found that considering the opinions of anyone outside that top 10 percent was a far less accurate predictor of what happened to government policy. The numbers showed that: ‘not only do ordinary citizens not have uniquely substantial power over policy decisions; they have little or no independent influence on policy at all.’ We have had decades of legislative tweaks to everything from tax policy to corporate governance and accounting standards that have favoured capital over labour. Supreme Court decisions such as the Citizens United case have also dramatically increased the amount of money funneled into political campaigning. This has left the nature of America’s political economy perilously close to an oligopoly.”

If the Trump strategy is anything like the speculation outlined above, the prevailing oligopoly might look like a fond memory.

Anger and contempt for “elites” is not a mistake, even if the real elites are effectively concealed by the propaganda machine.

The masters do not much like Trump. His vulgar antics undermine their preferred image as humane and benign figures who labor tirelessly for the common good, directing “soulful corporations,” trustworthy guardians in whose hands our future is safe. But they may find it hard to fault someone whose major legislative achievement is a tax scam designed to enrich the very rich while imposing a heavier tax burden on the undeserving (and unwitting) majority.

Trump’s hopes for denying a Biden election win lie with a legislative revolt—that is, by

overturning the certification process. Experts indicate that such an outcome has a very slim chance of taking place, yet the fact that it is even considered as a possibility surely reveals something utterly problematic about the way democracy functions in the United States. Can you share your views with us on this matter, and discuss what it would take to make the democratic process in the U.S. actually democratic?

Whatever the validity of my speculation about the goals and success of the Trump strategy, the whole election reveals the extreme fragility of American democracy. It is amazing enough that someone whose malevolent decision to provoke an out-of-control pandemic has just killed tens of thousands of Americans can even run for office, even carry much of the country with him, and that the political party that virtually shines his shoes can win a resounding victory at every level apart from the White House. That’s putting aside Trump’s major “achievements”: driving to near-term environmental catastrophe and sharply increasing the threat of terminal war, crimes that scarcely registered in the electoral process.

Trump’s rejection of the election results is just the coda to his quite impressive campaign to accomplish an authoritarian takeover, with the executive purged while his close associate Mitch McConnell converts the Senate into a joke, functioning almost entirely to enrich the rich and stack the judiciary with young, far right justices whose task will be to impose the ultra-reactionary Trump-McConnell agenda for a generation.

But that is only the icing on the cake. Foroohar of the *Financial Times*, whom I quoted earlier, is quite right that the malaise cuts far deeper. It traces back as far as the constitutional order, which was established on the principle that “those who own the country ought to



MAKE
the
ASSHOLE

GO
AWAY

govern it” (first Chief Justice John Jay) and that a prime duty of government is to “protect the minority of the opulent against the majority” (leading framer James Madison).

Hard struggles ensued to overturn the “Framers’ Coup” against democracy—the title of the gold standard of scholarship on the framing of the Constitution, by Michael Klarman. There have been periods of progress and of regression. We have just endured 40 years of regression, the neoliberal regime, a bitter assault against democracy and on the kind of society that can sustain it. An estimate of the monetary cost to the general population

was recently given by the Rand Corporation: \$47 trillion transferred from the working and middle classes (90 percent of the population) to the super-rich; the top 0.1 percent doubled their share of wealth to 20 percent of the total since Ronald Reagan.

The Rand figures are a considerable underestimate. Tens of trillions more were “transferred” after Reagan opened the spigots for tax havens, shell companies and other devices to rob the public. More were developed under Clinton’s deregulatory mania. Reagan and his partner Margaret Thatcher moved at once to undermine the labor movement, setting in mo-

Photo by Johnny
terstoo



tion the campaigns to deprive working people of the primary means to resist the assault. The serious decline of functioning democracy is a virtual corollary of the radical concentration of wealth and dispatch of much of the general population to stagnation and precarity.

There is no need to review the rest of the sordid story once again. But it is important to remember the deep roots of the undemocratic structure of the government. In the 18th century, despite the Framers' Coup, the U.S. Constitution was an important step toward democracy, so much so that the great statesmen of Europe invoked the venerable domino theory.

They feared that "the pernicious doctrines of republicanism and popular self-rule" spread by "the apostles of sedition" who had freed themselves from Britain's grip might encourage similar "vicious principles" beyond.

That was then. A lot has happened in 250 years. If the U.S. were to apply for membership in the European Union today, it would probably be rejected. The radically undemocratic character of the Senate would be sufficient reason. There is surely something a little odd about the respected doctrine of "originalism," holding that we should be bound by the ideas of a group of wealthy white slaveowners

Silvercloud/Shutterstock.com







250 years ago, even putting aside the cynical ways “originalist” and “textualist” doctrines are often applied in practice.

Even without Trump, the United States would still be facing a severe constitutional crisis. But that is only a fraction of the problem. Democracy is at best a fragile reed when people spend most of their waking lives under the rule of a master with virtually absolute power. That was understood very well by working people in the early days of the industrial revolution, who struggled hard against this attack on their fundamental rights and personal dignity. They also expressed their concern that a day might come when wage slaves “will so far forget what is due to manhood as to glory in a system forced on them by their necessity and in opposition to their feelings of independence and self-respect,” a day they hoped would be “far distant.”

Thoughts worth contemplating.

Millions of Trump’s supporters seem to believe that their leader actually won the election. In fact, there have even been signs claiming, “World Knows Trump Won.” In light of this, it seems to me that the contemporary United States is not simply a divided and polarized nation on political and ideological issues alone, but that we also have alternative epistemologies in operation: one segment of the population believes in actual facts and relies on science for an explanation of the world, while another segment of the citizenry is under the spell of falsehoods, disinformation and deception. How do you explain this peculiar phenomenon, especially since we are talking about a very rich and technologically advanced country?

A little caution is needed here.

This is the country of the Scopes trial. When I was a student at an Ivy League college, lectures on the theory of evolution were intro-

Photo by
PhotoItalia-
Studio/Shut-
terstock.
com

duced with the professor's warning that you don't have to believe this but it's important to know what some people think. Today, "Both Protestants and Catholics are considerably more likely to say evolution was guided or allowed by God than they are to say that humans evolved due to processes such as natural selection, or to say that humans have always existed in their present form." Over 40 percent of Americans expect the Second Coming by mid-century, while over 80 percent of the population believe in miracles.

In some ways, we're not that far from centuries ago.

It's also important to consider the devastating impact of the neoliberal regime on much of the country, with particular severity in rural areas that were also major centers of manufacturing. After steady growth for many years, employment in manufacturing declined from its 1979 peak of almost 20 million to under 13 million 40 years later. The decline was in large part the result of policy choices: bipartisan investor rights agreements, mislabeled "free trade agreements," which provided unparalleled protection and other rights to corporate power while setting working people in competition with the most poorly paid and repressed workers in the world. That has been a large factor in the devastation of rural America: towns depopulated or abandoned, no jobs or hospitals or other services, general malaise and a justified sense of having been abandoned. That's hardly conducive to participation in the most advanced sectors of global culture.

The sources of the divide you mention are complex. The split, however, is very real. And it has major impacts. Right now, the country is in the grip of a severe pandemic. It was understood by scientists in 2003, after containment of the SARS epidemic, that another coronavirus was likely. The cultural divide soon emerged. When Obama took office

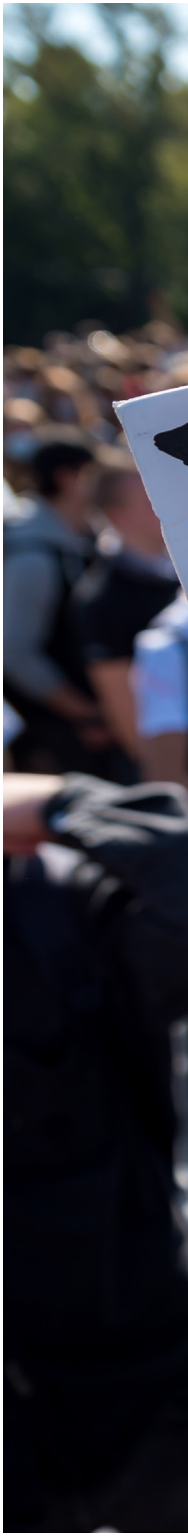
in 2009, one of his first acts was to convene the president's scientific advisory council to request them to provide a pandemic response plan. They did. It was implemented, and remained in force until January 2017, when one of Trump's first acts was to dismantle it, opening the most anti-science administration in modern history, with consequences that we have seen on many fronts—and with effects on popular culture.

The conflict of epistemologies is real. It is no simple matter to explain or to deal with it. The future will depend substantially on how the conflict is resolved.

One way or another, Trump will leave office soon. But the question that still lingers in the air is whether Trumpism will also be gone. In your view, is there Trumpism without Trump?

Returning to my original speculation, I think both Trump and Trumpism will remain with us for a long time, both the individual himself and the poisonous currents he has unleashed. These poisons may be virulent enough to bring civilization to a horrifying end. There are workable solutions to the crises that humans face in this uniquely dangerous moment of human history. What happens within the most powerful country in human history cannot fail to have an overwhelming impact on what eventuates—an impact even on survival of human society in any recognizable form. **Z**

C.J. Polychroniou is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. He is a regular contributor to Truthout as well as a member of Truthout's Public Intellectual Project. He is the author of *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (Haymarket Books).



I Am Greta isn't about climate change. It's about the elusiveness of sanity in an insane world

By Jonathan Cook



Erich Fromm, the renowned German-Jewish social psychologist who was forced to flee his homeland in the early 1930s as the Nazis came to power, offered a disturbing insight later in life on the relationship between society and the individual.

In the mid-1950s, his book *The Sane Society* suggested that insanity referred not simply to the failure by specific individuals to adapt to the society they lived in. Rather, society itself could become so pathological, so detached from a normative way of life, that it induced a deep-seated alienation and a form of collective insanity among its members. In modern western societies, where automation and mass consumption betray basic human needs, insanity might not be an aberration but the norm.

Fromm wrote: “The fact that millions of people share the same vices does not make these vices virtues, the fact that they share so many errors does not make the errors to be truths, and the fact that millions of people share the same forms of mental pathology does not make these people sane.”

Challenging Definition

This is still a very challenging idea to anyone raised on the view that sanity is defined by consensus, that it embraces whatever the mainstream prefers, and that insanity applies only to those living outside those norms. It is a definition that diagnoses the vast majority of us today as insane.

When Fromm wrote his book, Europe was emerging from the ruins of the Second World

War. It was a time of reconstruction, not only physically and financially, but legally and emotionally. International institutions like the United Nations had recently been formed to uphold international law, curb national greed and aggression, and embody a new commitment to universal human rights.

It was a time of hope and expectation. Greater industrialization spurred by the war effort and intensified extraction of fossil fuels meant economies were beginning to boom, a vision of the welfare state was being born, and a technocratic class promoting a more generous social democracy were replacing the old patrician class.

It was at this historic juncture that Fromm chose to write a book telling the western world that most of us were insane.

Degrees of Insanity

If that was clear to Fromm in 1955, it ought to be much clearer to us today, as buffoon autocrats stride the world stage like characters from a Marx Brothers movie; as international law is being intentionally unravelled to restore the right of western nations to invade and plunder; and as the physical world demonstrates through extreme weather events that the long-ignored science of climate change—and much other human-inspired destruction of the natural world—can no longer be denied.

And yet our commitment to our insanity seems as strong as ever—possibly stronger. Sounding like the captain of the Titanic, the unreconstructed British liberal writer Sunny Hundal memorably gave voice to this madness a few years back when he wrote in defence of the catastrophic status quo: “If you want to replace the current system of capi-







FASHION:

<1%

CLOSED-LOOP

RECYCLING



PLANET



NOT



PROFIT





MAKE IT
COOLER

FASHION:
APPROX.
20%
OF
INDUSTRIAL
WATER
POLLUTION

talism with something else, who is going to make your jeans, iPhones and run Twitter?”

As the clock ticks away, the urgent goal for each of us is to gain a deep, permanent insight into our own insanity. It doesn't matter that our neighbors, family and friends think as we do. The ideological system we were born into, that fed us our values and beliefs as surely as our mothers fed us milk, is insane. And because we cannot step outside of that ideological bubble—because our lives depend on submitting to this infrastructure of insanity—our madness persists, even as we think of ourselves as sane.

Our world is not one of the sane versus the insane, but of the less insane versus the more insane.

Intimate Portrait

Which is why I recommend the new documentary *I Am Greta*, a very intimate portrait of the Swedish child environmental activist Greta Thunberg.

Before everyone gets started, let me point out that *I Am Greta* is not about the climate emergency. That is simply the background noise as the film charts the personal journey begun by this 15-year-old girl with Asperger's syndrome in staging a weekly lone protest outside the Swedish parliament. Withdrawn and depressed by the implications of the compulsive research she has done on the environment, she rapidly finds herself thrust into the center of global attention by her simple, heartfelt statements of the obvious.

The schoolgirl shunned as insane by classmates suddenly finds the world drawn to the very qualities that previously singled her out as weird: her stillness, her focus, her refusal to equivocate or to be impressed.

Footage of her father desperately trying to get her to take a break and eat something, if only a banana, as she joins yet another climate march, or of her curling up in a ball on her bed, needing to be silent, after an argument with her father over the time she has spent crafting another speech to world leaders may quieten those certain she is simply a dupe of the fossil fuel industries—or, more likely, it will not.

But the fruitless debates about whether Thunberg is being used are irrelevant to this film. That is not where its point or its power lies.

Through Thunberg's Eyes

For 90 minutes we live in Thunberg's shoes, we see the world through her strange eyes. For 90 minutes we are allowed to live inside the head of someone so sane that we can briefly grasp—if we are open to her world—quite how insane each of us truly is. We see ourselves from the outside, through the vision of someone whose Asperger's has allowed her to “see through the static,” as she too generously terms our delusions. She is the small, still center of simple awareness buffeted in a sea of insanity.

Watching Thunberg wander alone—unimpressed, often appalled—through the castles and palaces of world leaders, through the economic forums of the global technocratic elite, through the streets where she is acclaimed, the varied nature of our collective insanity comes ever more sharply into focus.

Four forms of insanity the adult world adopts in response to Thunberg, the child soothsayer, are on show. In its varied guises, this insanity derives from unexamined fear.





GIUSTIZIA
CLIMATICA
=
GIUSTIZIA
SOCIALE

You should care
about **PEOPLE**
NOT **PROFIT\$**

WE
HAVE NO
FUTURE

The first—and most predictable—is exemplified by the right, who angrily revile her for putting in jeopardy the ideological system of capitalism they revere as their new religion in a godless world. She is an apostate, provoking their curses and insults.

The second group are liberal world leaders and the technocratic class who run our global institutions. Their job, for which they are so richly rewarded, is to pay lip service, entirely in bad faith, to the causes Thunberg espouses for real. They are supposed to be managing the planet for future generations, and therefore have the biggest investment in recruiting her to their side, not least to dissipate the energy she mobilizes that they worry could rapidly turn against them.

One of the film's early scenes is Thunberg's meeting with French president Emmanuel Macron, shortly after she has started making headlines.

Beforehand, Macron's adviser tries to pump Thunberg for information on other world leaders she has met. His unease at her reply that this is her first such invitation is tangible. As Thunberg herself seems only too aware when they finally meet, Macron is there simply for the photoshoot. Trying to make inane small talk with someone incapable of such irrelevancies, Macron can't help but raise an eyebrow in discomfort, and possibly mild reproach, as Thunberg concedes that the media reports of her traveling everywhere by train are right.

Cynically insane

The third group are the adults who line the streets for a selfie with Thunberg, or shout out

their adulation, loading it on to her shoulders like a heavy burden—and one she signally refuses to accept. Every time someone at a march tells her she is special, brave or a hero, she immediately tells them they too are brave. It is not her responsibility to fix the climate for the rest of us, and to think otherwise is a form of infantilism.

The fourth group are entirely absent from the film, but not from the responses to it and to her. These are the “cynically insane,” those who want to load on to Thunberg a burden of a different kind. Aware of the way we have been manipulated by our politicians and media, and the corporations that now own both, they are committed to a different kind of religion—one that can see no good anywhere. Everything is polluted and dirty. Because they have lost their own innocence, all innocence must be murdered.

This is a form of insanity no different from the other groups. It denies that anything can be good. It refuses to listen to anything and anyone. It denies that sanity is possible at all. It is its own form of autism—locked away in a personal world from which there can be no escape—that, paradoxically, Thunberg herself has managed to overcome through her deep connection to the natural world.

As long as we can medicalize Thunberg as someone suffering from Asperger's, we do not need to think about whether we are really the insane ones.

Bursting bubbles

Long ago economists made us aware of financial bubbles, the expression of insanity from investors as they pursue profit without regard to real world forces. Such investors are finally forced to confront reality—and the pain it brings—when the bubble bursts. As it



always does.

We are in an ideological bubble—and one that will burst as surely as the financial kind. Thunberg is that still, small voice of sanity outside the bubble. We can listen to her, without fear, without reproach, without adulation, without cynicism. Or we can carry on with our insane games until the bubble explodes. **Z**

This essay first appeared on Jonathan Cook's blog: <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special

Prize for Journalism. His books include *Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East* (Pluto Press) and *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair* (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net.





Will the World Community Condemn the Murder of Iran's Nuclear Scientist?

By Medea Benjamin and Ariel Gold



Israel used all four years of Trump's presidency to entrench its systems of occupation and apartheid. Now that Joe Biden has won the U.S. election, the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist, likely by Israel with the go-ahead from the U.S. administration, is a desperate attempt to use Trump's last days in office to sabotage Biden's chances of successful diplomacy with Iran. Biden, Congress and the world community can't let that happen.

On Friday November 27, Iran's top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was assassinated in the Iranian city of Absard outside of Tehran. First, a truck with explosives blew up near the car carrying Fakhrizadeh. Then, gunmen started firing on Fakhrizadeh's car. The immediate speculation was that Israel had carried out the attack, perhaps with the support of the Iranian terrorist group the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran (MEK). Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif tweeted that there were "serious indications of [an] Israeli role" in the assassination.

All indications indeed point to Israel. In 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu identified this scientist, Fakhrizadeh, as a target of his administration during a presentation in which he claimed that Israel had obtained secret Iranian files that alleged the country was not actually abiding by the Iran Nuclear Deal. "Remember that name, Fakhrizadeh. So here's his directive, right here," Netanyahu said.

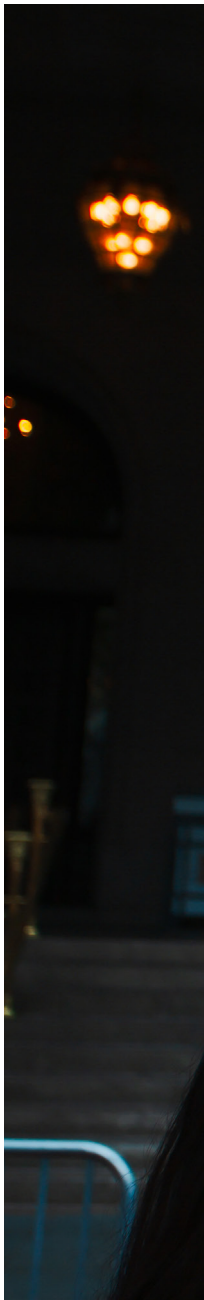
Fakhrizadeh was far from the first assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist. Between 2010 and 2012, four Iranian nuclear scientists were assassinated—Masoud Alimohammadi, Majid Shahriari, Darioush Rezaeinejad and Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan. Though Israel never took official credit for the extrajudicial executions, reports were fairly conclusive that Israel, working with the MEK, were behind the killings. The Israeli government never denied

the allegations.

The assassination of Fakhrizadeh also follows reports that the Israeli government recently instructed its senior military officials to prepare for a possible U.S. strike on Iran, likely referring to a narrowly averted plan by President Trump to bomb Iran's Natanz nuclear site. Furthermore, there was a clandestine meeting between Netanyahu and Saudi ruler Mohammed bin Salman. Among the topics of conversation were normalization between the two countries and their shared antagonism towards Iran.

Israel's attacks on Iran's nuclear activities are particularly galling given that Israel, not Iran, is the only country in the Middle East in possession of nuclear weapons, and Israel refuses to sign the International Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Iran, on the other hand, doesn't have nuclear weapons and it has opened itself up to the most intrusive international inspections ever implemented. Adding to this absurd double standard is the intense pressure on Iran from the United States—a nation that has more nuclear weapons than any country on earth.

Given the close relationship between Netanyahu and Trump, and the seriousness of this attack, it is very likely that this assassination was carried out with the green light from Trump himself. Trump has spent his time in the White House destroying the progress the Obama administration made in easing the conflict with Iran. He withdrew from the nuclear deal and imposed an unending stream of crippling sanctions that have affected everything from the price of food and housing to Iran's ability to obtain life-saving medicines during the pandemic. He has blocked Iran from getting an IMF \$5 billion emergency loan to deal with the pandemic. In January, Trump brought the U.S. to the brink of war by assassinating Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, and in an early November meeting with



his top security advisors, and right before the assassination of Fakhrizadeh, Trump himself reportedly raised the possibility of a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.

After the news broke of the assassination, Trump expressed implicit approval of the attack by retweeting Israeli journalist and expert on the Israeli Mossad intelligence service, Yossi Melman, who described the killing of Fakhrizadeh as a "major psychological and professional blow for Iran."

Iran has responded to these intense provocations with extreme patience and reserve. The government was hoping for a change in the White House and Biden's victory signaled

the possibility of both the U.S. and Iran going back into compliance with the nuclear deal. This recent assassination, however, further strengthens the hands of Iranian hardliners who say it was a mistake to negotiate with the United States, and that Iran should just leave the nuclear deal and build a nuclear weapon for its own defense.

Iranian-American analyst Negar Mortazavi bemoaned the chilling effect the assassination will have on Iran's political space. "The atmosphere will be even more securitized, civil society and political opposition will be pressured even more, and the anti-West discourse will be strengthened in Iran's upcoming pres-



idential election,” she tweeted.

The hardliners already won the majority of seats in the February parliamentary elections and are predicted to win the presidential elections scheduled for June. So the window for negotiations is a narrow one of four months immediately after Biden’s inauguration. What happens between now and January 20 could derail negotiations before they even start.

Jamal Abdi, president of the National Iranian American Council, said that U.S. and Israeli efforts to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program “have now morphed into Trump & Netanyahu sabotaging the next US President. They are trying to goad Iran into provocations & accelerating nuclear work—exactly what they claim to oppose. Their real fear is US & Iran talking.”

That’s why U.S. members of Congress, and President-elect Joe Biden himself, must vigorously condemn this act and affirm their commitment to the U.S. rejoining the nuclear deal. When Israel assassinated other nuclear scientists during the Obama administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton denounced the murders, understanding that such illegal actions made negotiations infinitely more difficult.

The European Union, as well as some important U.S. figures, have already condemned the attack. Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy pointed out the risks involved in normalizing assassinations, how the killing will make it harder to restart the Iran Nuclear agreement, and how the assassination of General Soleimani backfired from a security standpoint. Former Obama advisor Ben Rhodes tweeted that it was an “outrageous action aimed at undermining diplomacy,” and former CIA head John Brennan called the assassination “criminal” and “highly reckless,” risking “lethal retaliation and a new round of regional conflict,” but rather than putting the responsibility on the U.S. and Israel to stop the prov-

ocations, he called on Iran to “be wise” and “resist the urge to respond.”

Many on Twitter have raised the question of what the world response would be if the roles were reversed and Iran assassinated an Israeli nuclear scientist. Without a doubt, the U.S. administration, whether Democrat or Republican, would be outraged and supportive of a swift military response. But if we want to avoid escalation, then we must hope that Iran will not retaliate, at least not during Trump’s last days in office.

The only way to stop this crisis from spiraling out of control is for the world community to condemn the act and demand a UN investigation and accountability for the perpetrators. The countries that joined Iran and the United States in signing the 2015 nuclear agreement—Russia, China, Germany, the UK and France—must not only oppose the assassination but publicly recommit to upholding the nuclear deal. President-elect Joe Biden must send a clear message to Israel that under his administration, these illegal acts will have consequences. He must also send a clear message to Iran that he intends to quickly re-enter the nuclear deal, stop blocking Iran’s \$5 billion IMF loan request, and begin a new era of diplomacy to dial back the intense conflict he inherited from Trump’s recklessness. **Z**

Medea Benjamin is cofounder of CODEPINK for Peace, and author of several books, including *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. She is a member of the writers’ group Collective20.

Ariel Gold is the national co-director of CODEPINK and runs their Peace with Iran campaign.

I CAN
A WAR
WANT

I START
IF I
TO.



I AM YOUR
WORST
EMERGENCY



STOP TRUMP
WAR WITH I
CODEPINK

