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Chomsky on U.S. Jockeying With Russia

May 2022

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BODIES**



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Will Demise of “Roe” Be a Death Knell for Contraception, Marriage Rights?

By Marjorie Cohn

In his explosive draft opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organiza-*

tion, which was leaked to *Politico*, Samuel Alito overrules *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. His draft holds that abortion is no longer a constitutional right and leaves the fate of those who seek abortions to the vagaries of state laws.

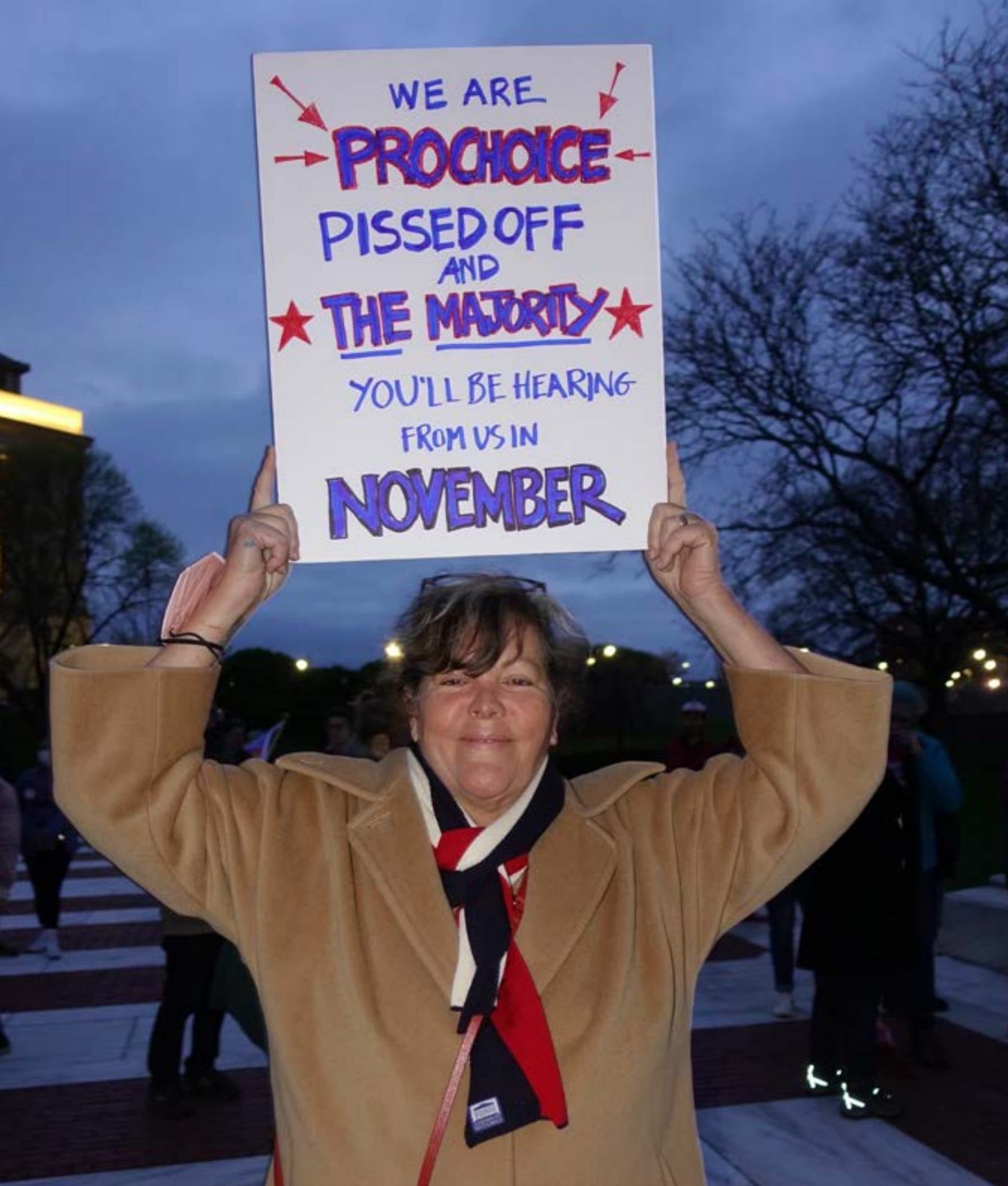
“We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion,” Alito writes. “Roe and Casey must be overruled, and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives.”

If four other members of the Supreme Court adopt Alito's draft, many other privacy rights we hold dear will be in jeopardy. They include the rights to contraception and same-sex marriage, among others.

In December, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett voted with Alito after oral argument and they continue to hold that position, according to *Politico*. That's a five-member majority if they sign on to Alito's draft opin-

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ion by the end of June.

Nearly a half century ago, the Supreme Court held in *Roe* that the Constitution protects “a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.” The court relied on longstanding precedents holding that “the Fourteenth Amendment’s concept of personal liberty” prohibits governmental interference with personal decisions about marriage, contraception, procreation, family relationships, child-rearing and education.

Twenty years later, in *Casey*, the court reaffirmed the central holding of *Roe*—that a pregnant woman has the right to an abortion before the fetus becomes viable (at about 23 weeks of pregnancy). *Casey* highlighted the “settled” principle that “the Constitution places limits on a State’s right to interfere with a person’s most basic decisions about family and parenthood ... as well as bodily integrity.”

The court cited *Casey* with approval in *Washington v. Glucksberg*, in which it listed the right to “abortion” with the rights “to marry,” “to use contraception,” “to have children” and “to bodily integrity,” which are recognized in a “long line of cases” that interpret the Due Process Clause. It requires due process before the government can deprive someone of life, liberty or

property.

In *Lawrence v. Texas*, the court relied on *Casey* to hold that states cannot criminalize “homosexual conduct.” The *Lawrence* court said that the “right to liberty under the Due Process Clause” guarantees “a realm of personal liberty that the government may not enter.”

The court used those same precedents to hold in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the Constitution protects same-sex marriage: “Like choices concerning contraception, family relationships, procreation, and childrearing, decisions concerning marriage are among the most intimate that an individual can make,” and are therefore “inherent in the concept of individual autonomy” protected by the Due Process Clause.

In his draft opinion in *Dobbs*, Alito writes, “We emphasize that our decision concerns the constitutional right to abortion and no other right. Nothing in this opinion should be understood to cast doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion.”

Nevertheless, Alito eviscerates the fundamental underpinnings of the rights to contraception, sexual freedom and same-sex marriage. He holds that abortion, which is not specifically mentioned in the Constitution, is not “deeply rooted in this nation’s his-

tory and tradition” and is not “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty.”

“On the contrary,” Alito writes, “an unbroken tradition of prohibiting abortion on pain of criminal punishment persisted from the earliest days of the common law until 1973 [when *Roe* was decided].”

Alito specifically criticizes *Lawrence* and *Obergefell*, writing that they are not “deeply rooted in history.” But as Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of Berkeley Law School, noted in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Unless the court is going to repudiate all of the other privacy rights, it is impossible to deny that laws prohibiting abortion also intrude on a woman’s liberty.”

In his draft opinion, Alito “disavows the entire line of jurisprudence upon which *Roe* rests: the existence of ‘unenumerated rights’ that safeguard individual autonomy from state invasion,” Mark Joseph Stern wrote at *Slate*. “Alito asserts that any such right must be ‘deeply rooted’ in the nation’s history and tradition, and access to abortion has no such roots.”

If the court overrules *Roe*, around half the states will outlaw or severely limit abortion. Thirteen states with “trigger laws” would immediately ban abortion. Five states that have pre-*Roe* abor-



tion bans could once again enforce them. And 14 states would ban abortions before fetal viability. Prohibition of and restrictions on abortion would disproportionately affect poor women and people of color.

People suffering early miscarriages or ectopic pregnancies could be adversely affected if *Roe* is overturned. Fertility procedures such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF), egg extractions and stem cell procedures could be outlawed.

Other “unenumerated” rights not specifically listed in the Constitution would be jeopardized, including the right to travel, the right to vote and the right to interracial marriage.

The ramifications of a Supreme Court decision overruling *Roe* are unfathomable. Not only will people be denied the right to have an abortion, those who need other medical procedures would be at risk. And privacy rights we now take for granted could evaporate.

As the United States moves, terrifyingly, toward a Christian theocracy that has methodically and finally seized control of the Supreme Court, we must remain vigilant and take action. That includes speaking out, contacting Congress members and the White House, writing op-eds

and letters to the editor, and demonstrating like thousands of people are doing across the country. **Z**

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Marjorie Cohn is professor emerita at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, former president of the National Lawyers Guild, and a member of the national advisory boards of Assange Defense and Veterans For Peace, and the bureau of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers. Her books include *Drones and Targeted Killing: Legal, Moral and Geopolitical Issues*. She is co-host of “Law and Disorder” radio.

With *Roe* on the Ropes, Students Stage Nationwide Walk-outs

By Brett Wilkins

College and high school students from coast to coast walked out of classrooms and off campuses to defend reproductive freedom in the wake of the revelation that the U.S. Supreme Court

is set to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in what would arguably be the biggest rights rollback in American history.

“I’m very terrified,” said Josie Whitmore, a freshman at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. “It starts with one thing being overturned and we’re going to keep being oppressed. The laws are not working in our favor. They’re working against us at this point.”

Nicolas Cardona, another Amherst student, said, “The right of abortion is a fundamental human right and it has historically been won by a very militant struggle.”

“This is affecting the world,” Cardona added. “Working-class women are organizing themselves and fighting in the streets for this right, and the working-class women in this country want to do the same.”

Students at Stony Brook University on Long Island said they organized a demonstration to mobilize outrage “into productive action to draw greater attention to the perilous position that our reproductive rights are in” and to urge the school to “improve the accessibility and availability of contraceptives on campus.”

In New York City, 15-year-old protester Anna Hunt told Reuters that “my rights are being threatened, and I came

here because I'm hoping to not allow these government officials, who think they have control over my body, to do what they're doing and take us back 50 years."

Jean Remarque, a young LGBTQ+ Black man protesting in New York, told Reuters that "the woman has the right to make choices and decisions for her body. No one should... tell a woman what they can and cannot do."

Protesters at Edward Little High School in Auburn, Maine, said the opinions of young people should be taken seriously.

"People might look at us like we're young, but I genuinely feel like we can make the most change," student Cassie Gamache told WGME. "Most of us are voting next year or this year."

Addressing a crowd of 150 students and staff attending a protest at the College of Wooster in Ohio, transgender student Cody Clark told anti-choice forces to "keep your policies off of women's bodies."

"I have a friend who would have died without an abortion," Clark added. "I'm here out of righteous anger, but am I also here out of love for everyone here and for myself."

Hundreds of students at three Louisville, Kentucky high schools—including the alma mater of staunchly an-

ti-choice Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY.)—walked out of their classrooms at noon.

The student walkouts follow nationwide demonstrations on the prior evening involving thousands of reproductive rights defenders angry over a leaked Supreme Court draft opinion written by Justice Samuel Alito and joined by four of the court's right-wing justices that declares *Roe v. Wade* "egregiously wrong from the start."

"We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion," wrote Alito for the majority, "...and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives."

Speaking at Kent State University in northeastern Ohio, Fiona Fisher, an organizer with Students for a Democratic Society, noted that "if *Roe* is overturned, 26 U.S. states will likely enact bans on abortion."

"We call on all working-class, oppressed, and progressive people to take to the streets and fight for our lives," she added, "in some cases literally." **Z**

With Third of America Lost to Hate, Is It High Time to Move On?

By Thom Hartmann

It's time to stop normalizing and accommodating the white supremacists among us. They may be a third of America, but they're the lost third, longing for return to a time we will never revisit.

Instead of looking forward, they're stuck to a past that will never be revived, no matter how many elections they rig or people they terrorize or kill.

The America I was born into and grew up in as a kid was a very different place from today. In the 1950s the country was firmly under the control of straight white men:

- Black people (and other minorities, varying by region) were confined to certain parts of town and were routinely beaten, arrested, or even killed for stepping into whites-only areas.
- In 1951 only about 15% of Black people were successful in registering to vote in all of the for-





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- mer Confederate states.
- With few exceptions, the only minority faces seen in media were those portrayed as either buffoons or criminals.
 - Abortion was illegal, and in many states you could go to jail, even if you were married, for possessing birth control of any sort, including condoms, in your own home. IUD's and birth control pills did not ex-

- ist.
- Schools, restaurants, hotels, and most private businesses were racially segregated.
 - Women (even white women) couldn't sign a contract, get a credit card or open a bank account in their own names without the signature of a father or husband.
 - Immigration into America was regulated to maintain the country's

- racial balance.
- Gays and lesbians were routinely beaten, imprisoned, raped, and murdered with no consequence to their tormentors.
 - Police had carte blanche to terrorize and kill minorities of all types.

Since then, a lot has changed:

- The browning of America began in a big way

- in the 1960s with egalitarian changes to our immigration, voting, and public accommodations laws.
- The Women's Rights movement picked up steam after the legalization in 1961 of birth control pills and *Roe v Wade* in 1973, although Republicans have successfully blocked the Equal Rights Amendment to this day.
 - Full citizenship for

LGBTQ people picked up in the 1990s and was finally realized (in law, at least) when Vice President Biden and then President Obama endorsed gay marriage and the Supreme Court ratified it in June of 2015.

Throughout the past 30 or so years as the larger of these changes have been cemented into law and culture, straight white male backlash has grown to the point where,

today, white male supremacy is the core product sold on rightwing television and hate-talk radio/podcasts.

That backlash has gone from passive resistance against integration, to the Tea Party, to openly declaring Barack Obama "not a real American," to rightwing media embracing the "Great Replacement Theory" first championed by "America First" actual Nazis 80 years ago.

An effort to realize our na-



tion’s founding creed that “all men are created equal” has been twisted in the minds of Trump followers into a sinister plot to deny straight white men their God-given role in American society. Now it’s being used to justify political violence (57% of Republicans today say January 6th was “patriotic”), election-rigging, and court-packing.

This idea that Democrats, in addition to drinking the blood of children and embracing “international” Jewish villains (like George Soros), are actively working to “replace” straight white people with people of color and/or LGBTQ folks is particularly poisonous and virulent.

Tucker Carlson, with the approval of the heir to Rupert Murdoch’s billions, began this in a big way during prime time on Fox “News.” On April 8th, for example, he told his viewers: “[T]he Democratic Party is trying to replace the current electorate, the voters now casting ballots, with new people, more obedient voters from the Third World.”

Four days later, Carlson explained to his mostly white Fox audience the Great Replacement Theory and how, in his opinion, Democrats were its main advocates: “Demographic change,” he said, “is the key to the Democratic Party’s political ambitions. In order to win and maintain

power, Democrats plan to change the population of the country. They’re no longer trying to win you over with their program. ... They don’t even really care about your vote anymore. Their goal is to make you irrelevant.”

On April 15, Carlson echoed the Nazi theory that the pinnacle of evolution was, as Hitler preached, the white (Aryan) race: “Acknowledge the reality of evolutionary biology,” he demanded, sliding into the evening news buzzwords that every white supremacist in America instantly recognized. “It is real.”

He added: “They are changing everything, whether we like it or not. A new language, new values, new biology, new curricula, new social mores and hiring standards and body types. A brand-new national population. And then, because that is still not enough change, a whole new system of government. ... What will the consequences of that change, of that revolution be? In your bones, you know the answer. It’s terrifying, and it does not have to happen.”

Fox’s Laura Ingraham also said it out loud: “Of this my friends you can be sure, your views on immigration will have zero impact and zero influence on a House dominated by Democrats who want to replace you, the American voters, with newly am-

nestied citizens and an ever increasing number of chain migrants.”

Now the chief of the Border Patrol union, Brandon Judd, is even repeating the America-For-Whites-Only theme, saying: “I believe that they’re trying to change the demographics of the electorate; that’s what I believe they’re doing,”

After the last presidential election, white supremacists conspired to keep their leader, Donald Trump, in office by, among other things, trying to murder the Vice President and Speaker of the House in their attempted coup.

This virulent form of white supremacy has also spread to our churches. When PRRI asked if Trump had “encouraged white supremacists,” a majority of Black (75%) and Hispanic (68%) churchgoers said yes. But, the pollsters found, fewer than “half of white mainline Protestants (43%) and white Catholics (43%) and only 26% of white evangelical Protestants share this view.”

These straight white “Christians” cheered when Trump began the “Birther” movement, terrorized refugee children (many of whom are now lost to trafficking or unknown adoptions), referred to majority-Black nations as “shithole countries,” engaged in slurs like “Mexican judge,” and

repeatedly referred to Black women in Congress as “crazy.”

They’ve been told that as minorities increase their roles in media, politics, and the mainstream of American life and business, that must mean that white opportunities are similarly reduced. They see American society and the distribution of jobs, wealth, and power within it as a zero-sum game, which it very much is not.

Most of the old-timers among them have always been racists; the new adherents to the white supremacist ideology were evangelized on unregulated social media and by rightwing hate radio and TV.

They’ve so completely taken over the Republican Party that white supremacist senators felt empowered to attack a highly qualified but Black female judge as pro-pedophile. CBS just put one of them on its payroll. They’re purging the party of old-line “fiscal conservatives” like Liz Cheney; and the savagely bigoted and anti-gay Ron DeSantis is their new savior.

These people are lost. By and large, there is no hope to redeem or awaken them, and we should stop trying.

Americans and our institutions should stop normalizing them, as if being a member of the GOP means a person is

suddenly above also being a white supremacist bigot. Racists should no longer be able to hide behind the sheet of “just being political.”

A big step forward happened this past weekend when *The New York Times* published an extraordinary exposé of Tucker Carlson’s “most racist show in the history of cable news.”

While programming like Carlson’s would have been normal in most of America in the 1950s, it should have no place in our more diverse nation in 2022, regardless of how much money it makes Fox’s Australian owners.

Racists and bigots must be called out, labeled, and shunned, no matter how wealthy or powerful they may be.

This is particularly important on the Sunday TV political shows, where they routinely show up and are almost never confronted with meaningful questioning. (There’s a reason Trevor Noah chose to call out Chuck Todd...)

And then we must turn to the most important work: getting about the business of governing and moving forward, rebuilding this country from the wreckage of 40 years of Reaganism, while leaving his and Trump’s bigoted followers to marinate alone in their own putrid stew. **Z**

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

Thom Hartmann is a talk-show host and author of more than 25 books in print. He is a writing fellow at the Independent Media Institute.

Imperial Nostalgia and its Perils

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Although great empires rank among the most powerful engines of world history, they are also among the most dangerous, especially as they brood over their decline.

The Russian empire provides a striking illustration of this phenomenon. Traditionally referred to as the “prison of nations,” Russia, in its Czarist and Soviet phases, controlled a vast Eurasian land mass of subject peoples. But the implosion of the empire in 1991 left Russian leaders adrift, uncertain whether to steer their nation toward a more modest role in the world or to revive what they considered their country’s past imperial glory. Ultimately, under the leadership



of Vladimir Putin, they decided on the latter, employing Russian military power to attack neighboring Georgia, win a civil war in Syria, annex Crimea, and instigate a separatist revolt in Ukraine's Donbas region. This February, Putin launched a military invasion of Ukraine, with horrendous consequences.

Imperial nostalgia has long pervaded Putin's thinking. As early as 2005, he told the Russian parliament that the collapse of the Soviet empire was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" and "a genuine tragedy" for "the Russian people." In July 2021, he published a long historical article ("On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians") contending that there had never been a Ukraine independent of Russia. During a televised address on February 21, 2022, Putin again invoked the past, claiming that Ukraine was "historically Russian land." In fact, of course, a Ukrainian nation, with its own language and culture, had existed for many centuries and had been ruled by a variety of nations during that period.

Disconsolate Russian officials have their counterparts in Britain. In the aftermath of World War II, as decolonization gathered momentum throughout the far-flung British Empire, the guardians

of the Old Order worked to suppress independence struggles and bitterly lamented the decline of imperial grandeur. In 1956, Prime Minister Anthony Eden, angered by the policies of Egypt's revolutionary leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, launched a British invasion, along with France and Israel, to retake control of the Suez Canal. Blocked in their reassertion of imperial power by the Soviet and U.S. governments, British officials felt deeply humiliated. And the fact that Britannia no longer ruled the waves continued to sting. In 2002, Boris Johnson—currently Britain's prime minister—wrote contemptuously that Africa "may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more."

The French government, too, grew increasingly dismayed in the postwar era as the Algerians revolted, the Vietnamese routed France's armed forces, and its empire disintegrated. Desperate to fend off imperial collapse, French officials proposed retaining their colonial relationships through a French Union. In 1958, when the people of Guinea voted, instead, for independence, the embittered French government turned to sabotaging the ungrateful nation by de-

stroying government records, flooding the country with fake banknotes, and even removing the lightbulbs from government buildings. The failure of their war to subdue Algeria inspired an even greater backlash, including uprisings by French military officers who overturned the French government, though to no avail. In later years, disgruntled French military veterans and staunch imperialists became the backbone of the French rightwing.

Though the United States, originally a thin string of colonies on the Atlantic coast, is less often regarded as an imperial nation, the reality is that, through wars and treaties, it dramatically expanded across the North American continent and beyond. By the end of World War II, it was one of the largest nations on earth, as well as the richest and most powerful. Even so, as other countries recovered from the war and reasserted themselves, fears arose among Americans that they were "losing" nations around the world to Communists, revolutionaries, and nationalists. This anxiety inspired U.S. military intervention in numerous lands, including Vietnam, where, as Lyndon Johnson remarked, the United States could not allow itself to be defeated by a "raggedy-ass, little fourth-



rate country.” Although Donald Trump is best-known for promising to “Make America Great Again,” this backward-looking incantation was also employed by earlier presidents to rally Americans behind reviving the nation’s Golden Age.

China’s leaders—especially Xi Jinping—have reached deeper into the past to locate its era of imperial glory. Shortly after taking power in 2012 as Communist Party Secretary, Xi lauded his nation’s five thousand years of history and its “indelible contribution” to world civiliza-

tion. Condemning China’s more recent years of humiliation at the hands of the colonial powers, he vowed “to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” Xi amplified on this theme in 2018, when he declared that “we are resolved to fight the bloody battle against our enemies . . . to take our place in the world.” Again promising “the great restoration of the Chinese nation,” he used the word “great” 35 times. And Xi has managed to turn China into a major power, surpassed only by the United States in economic and military strength.

He also developed a much more assertive foreign policy, as well as a dangerous military confrontation with the United States in Asia.

The ubiquity and perils of this imperial nostalgia highlight the need to create an international security system to replace today’s international anarchy. Fortunately, the United Nations presents a useful starting point for an international order no longer plagued by imperialism or other forms of international aggression. Although the nations of the world have given

the world organization the responsibility to protect international security, they have failed to provide it with the power to do so. Therefore, as we confront a planet riven by international conflict, let us consider how dreams of imperial grandeur might be discarded and how a strengthened United Nations might be used to fashion a more secure and cooperative world. Z

Dr. Lawrence Wittner, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor of History emeritus at SUNY/Albany and the author of *Confronting the Bomb* (Stanford University Press).

Why Canceling Student Debt Is a Matter of Racial Justice

By Sonali Kolhatkar

“If America has a cold, then the Black community has the flu,” said India Walton, explaining how the burden of student debt is disproportionately borne by African Amer-

icans. Walton, who famously campaigned on a socialist platform to beat a Democratic incumbent in last year’s mayoral primary race in Buffalo, New York, is now a senior strategic organizer with RootsAction.org leading the organization’s “Without Student Debt” campaign. “Forty-seven million Americans carry student debt, but the burden of the debt falls disproportionately on Black and Brown people,” she said.

According to the Education Data Initiative, out of the 47 million Americans that Walton cited, about 92 percent of

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them (43 million Americans) have borrowed more than \$1.6 trillion from the U.S. government in order to access higher education. The average federal loan size per borrower is \$37,113, but when factoring in loans from private borrowers, that number rises to more than \$40,000.

Because of how the income and wealth gap is so starkly delineated along racial lines, it's not at all surprising that Black and Brown students are disproportionately represented among student borrowers. Women are also the majority of borrowers. Those at the intersection of race and gender are most impacted. "The average Black woman carries more than \$35,000 in student debt," said Walton.

The simple reason why nearly one-third of all undergraduates borrow money from the federal government in order to attend college or university is that the cost of higher education has risen dramatically. According to one in-depth analysis, it has risen nearly five times faster than inflation over the past half-century. And, if the price tag of higher education were in line with inflation, it would cost only about \$10,000 or \$20,000 per year to attend a public or private four-year school, respectively. Instead, while public universities are still relatively less pricey, pri-

vate schools can cost upward of \$50,000 a year.

Since wages haven't kept up with the skyrocketing costs of higher education, student debt has ballooned as borrowers are unable to pay back the loans. It's no wonder that some people consider suicide as they face the grim prospects of being unable to pay back tens of thousands of dollars.

It turns out that student debt, just like medical debt or the inability to pay increasing rents, is just another feature of a capitalist, market-driven system designed to ensure the health of Wall Street over the wellness of people. And—it bears repeating—those financial stresses affect people of color the most. "It's a stain on this, the wealthiest nation in the world, that we are not even able to provide basic services to our people," said Walton.

Meanwhile, since his election, President Joe Biden has tantalized debt-burdened Americans with indications that he might keep his campaign promises of forgiving federal student loans. His initial campaign promise of forgiving \$50,000 in loans was dramatically downgraded to only \$10,000. Walton said, "what we're asking for, what we're demanding, is that all federally guaranteed student debt be canceled," not just a

portion.

Corporate media outlets are predictably doing their part to help Biden water down the idea of debt forgiveness. Even though only a minority of Americans feel that it is unfair to forgive the loans of some people because others have found ways to pay them back, media outlets have elevated this talking point.

Walton said this argument is "not valid." Citing the high cost of colleges and low wages, she said, "we're just not in the same economic conditions as people were, who seem to tout having paid off their student loan[s]."

Additionally, some media pundits are labeling the demand to erase student debt as a radical idea, akin to "Defund the Police," or "Abolish ICE" (none of these are in fact radical). David Frum writing in the *Atlantic* claimed that the call to erase student debt is a "trap" laid for Biden by leftist activists. He bizarrely compared it to the right-wing culture wars being waged by GOP leaders like Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida.

How is DeSantis' targeting of transgender youth to win political points from his rabidly homophobic and transphobic voter base anything like Biden erasing the student debt of 43 million Americans? If anything, the GOP may be opposed to debt for-



givenness precisely because such a move would benefit disproportionately impacted Black and Brown people.

Americans are worried about the state of the economy, and are blaming Biden for it. In such a context, student debt forgiveness is a no-brainer. Not only would it amount to a retroactive government subsidy for higher education—a far more constructive use of tax dollars than, say, the fossil fuel industry—it would also amount to an economic stimulus. With fewer loan payments to make, borrowers would have more income freed up to spend on necessities. At a time of high inflation, any extra income helps household finances.

As prospects for Democrats to hold on to their slim House and Senate majorities in the November midterms appear grim, it would seem to be an obvious electoral tactic, if not a morally sound decision, to forgive the student debt that has hampered the lives of so many people, and especially Black and Brown Americans. Polls show there is overwhelming support for doing so.

The response from the GOP does not go beyond the now-cliché label of “socialism” to describe debt forgiveness. Republicans are also claiming that Biden lacks the legal right to cancel the

debt via executive order—a laughable position in light of former President Donald Trump’s constant executive overreach. But, in response to Republicans introducing a recent bill to thwart Biden’s executive authority to cancel student debt, analysts have pointed out that the Republican Party has inadvertently admitted that the president does indeed have the legal standing to do so.

“The Higher Education Act of 1964 gives the president the power to direct his secretary of education to cancel debt broadly,” said Walton. Indeed, for the past two years, Biden has used this same authority to pause the repayment of federal student debt in light of pandemic-related financial hardships.

Still, that hasn’t stopped Obama-era Education Department general counsel Charlie Rose from claiming that presidential action to erase student debt is legally questionable and suggesting that loan servicing companies might sue the administration.

“I’m concerned,” said Walton. “I don’t know what the reason for not [doing] broad cancellation [of debt] would be.” Republicans never seem to waver in their singular focus on ensuring that wealth flows upward and into the hands of wealthy white elites. And Democrats, far too often,

fail to provide a countervailing force in the other direction. **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. She is a writing fellow for the Economy for All project at the Independent Media Institute.

How Could the U.S. Help to Bring Peace to Ukraine?

By Nicolas J. S. Davies

On April 21st, President Biden announced new shipments of weapons to Ukraine, at a cost of \$800 million to U.S. taxpayers. On April 25th, Secretaries Blinken and Austin announced over \$300 million more military aid. The United States has now spent \$3.7 billion on weapons for Ukraine since the Russian invasion, bringing total U.S. military





aid to Ukraine since 2014 to about \$6.4 billion.

The top priority of Russian airstrikes in Ukraine has been to destroy as many of these weapons as possible before they reach the front lines of the war, so it is not clear how militarily effective these massive arms shipments really are. The other leg of U.S. “support” for Ukraine is its economic and financial sanctions against Russia, whose effectiveness is also highly uncertain.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is visiting Moscow and Kyiv to try to kickstart negotiations for a ceasefire and a peace agreement. Since hopes for earlier peace negotiations in Belarus and Turkey have been washed away in a tide of military escalation, hostile rhetoric and politicized war crimes accusations, Secretary General Guterres’ mission may now be the best hope for peace in Ukraine.

This pattern of early hopes for a diplomatic resolution that are quickly dashed by a war psychosis is not unusual. Data on how wars end from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) make it clear that the first month of a war offers the best chance for a negotiated peace agreement. That window has now passed for Ukraine.

An analysis of the UCDP

data by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) found that 44% of wars that end within a month end in a ceasefire and peace agreement rather than the decisive defeat of either side, while that decreases to 24% in wars that last between a month and a year. Once wars rage on into a second year, they become even more intractable and usually last more than ten years.

CSIS fellow Benjamin Jensen, who analyzed the UCDP data, concluded, “The time for diplomacy is now. The longer a war lasts absent concessions by both parties, the more likely it is to escalate into a protracted conflict... In addition to punishment, Russian officials need a viable diplomatic off-ramp that addresses the concerns of all parties.”

To be successful, diplomacy leading to a peace agreement must meet five basic conditions:

First, all sides must gain benefits from the peace agreement that outweigh what they think they can gain by war.

U.S. and allied officials are waging an information war to promote the idea that Russia is losing the war and that Ukraine can militarily defeat Russia, even as some officials admit that that could take several years.

In reality, neither side will

benefit from a protracted war that lasts for many months or years. The lives of millions of Ukrainians will be lost and ruined, while Russia will be mired in the kind of military quagmire that both the U.S.S.R. and the United States already experienced in Afghanistan, and that most recent U.S. wars have turned into.

In Ukraine, the basic outlines of a peace agreement already exist. They are: withdrawal of Russian forces; Ukrainian neutrality between NATO and Russia; self-determination for all Ukrainians (including in Crimea and Donbas); and a regional security agreement that protects everyone and prevents new wars.

Both sides are essentially fighting to strengthen their hand in an eventual agreement along those lines. So how many people must die before the details can be worked out across a negotiating table instead of over the rubble of Ukrainian towns and cities?

Second, mediators must be impartial and trusted by both sides.

The United States has monopolized the role of mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis for decades, even as it openly backs and arms one side and abuses its UN veto to prevent international action.



Photo by Tverdokhlib/Shutterstock

This has been a transparent model for endless war.

Turkey has so far acted as the principal mediator between Russia and Ukraine, but it is a NATO member that has supplied drones, weapons and military training to Ukraine. Both sides have accepted Turkey's mediation, but can Turkey really be an honest broker?

The UN could play a legitimate role, as it is doing in Yemen, where the two sides are finally observing a two-month ceasefire. But even with the UN's best efforts, it has taken years to negotiate this fragile pause in the war.

Third, the agreement must address the main concerns of all parties to the war.

In 2014, the U.S.-backed coup and the massacre of anti-coup protesters in Odessa led to declarations of independence by the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. The first Minsk Protocol agreement in September 2014 failed to end the ensuing civil war in Eastern Ukraine. A critical difference in the Minsk II agreement in February 2015 was that DPR and LPR representatives were included in the negotiations, and it succeeded in ending the worst fighting and preventing a major new outbreak of war for 7 years.

There is another party that was largely absent from the

negotiations in Belarus and Turkey, people who make up half the population of Russia and Ukraine: the women of both countries. While some of them are fighting, many more can speak as victims, civilian casualties and refugees from a war unleashed mainly by men. The voices of women at the table would be a constant reminder of the human costs of war and the lives of women and children that are at stake.

Even when one side militarily wins a war, the grievances of the losers and unresolved political and strategic issues often sow the seeds of new outbreaks of war in the future. As Benjamin Jensen of CSIS suggested, the desires of U.S. and Western politicians to punish and gain strategic advantage over Russia must not be allowed to prevent a comprehensive resolution that addresses the concerns of all sides and ensures a lasting peace.

Fourth, there must be a step-by-step roadmap to a stable and lasting peace that all sides are committed to.

The Minsk II agreement led to a fragile ceasefire and established a roadmap to a political solution. But the Ukrainian government and parliament, under Presidents Poroshenko and then Zelensky, failed to take the next steps that Poroshenko agreed to in Minsk in

2015: to pass laws and constitutional changes to permit independent, internationally-supervised elections in the DPR and LPR, and to grant them autonomy within a federalized Ukrainian state.

Now that these failures have led to Russian recognition of the DPR and LPR's independence, a new peace agreement must revisit and resolve their status, and that of Crimea, in ways that all sides will be committed to, whether that is through the autonomy promised in Minsk II or formal, recognized independence from Ukraine.

A sticking point in the peace negotiations in Turkey was Ukraine's need for solid security guarantees to ensure that Russia won't invade it again. The UN Charter formally protects all countries from international aggression, but it has repeatedly failed to do so when the aggressor, usually the United States, wields a Security Council veto. So how can a neutral Ukraine be reassured that it will be safe from attack in the future? And how can all parties be sure that the others will stick to the agreement this time?

Fifth, outside powers must not undermine the negotiation or implementation of a peace agreement.

Although the United States and its NATO allies are not active warring parties in

Ukraine, their role in provoking this crisis through NATO expansion and the 2014 coup, then supporting Kyiv's abandonment of the Minsk II agreement and flooding Ukraine with weapons, make them an "elephant in the room" that will cast a long shadow over the negotiating table, wherever that is.

In April 2012, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan drew up a six-point plan for a UN-monitored ceasefire and political transition in Syria. But at the very moment that the Annan plan took effect and UN ceasefire monitors were in place, the United States, NATO and their Arab monarchist allies held three "Friends of Syria" conferences, where they pledged virtually unlimited financial and military aid to the Al Qaeda-linked rebels they were backing to overthrow the Syrian government. This encouraged the rebels to ignore the ceasefire, and led to another decade of war for the people of Syria.

The fragile nature of peace negotiations over Ukraine make success highly vulnerable to such powerful external influences. The United States backed Ukraine in a confrontational approach to the civil war in Donbas instead of supporting the terms of the Minsk II agreement, and this has led to war with Russia.

Now Turkey's Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavosoglu, has told CNN Turk that unnamed NATO members "want the war to continue," in order to keep weakening Russia.

Conclusion

How the United States and its NATO allies act now and in the coming months will be crucial in determining whether Ukraine is destroyed by years of war, like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, or whether this war ends quickly through a diplomatic process that brings peace, security and stability to the people of Russia, Ukraine and their neighbors.

If the United States wants to help restore peace in Ukraine, it must diplomatically support peace negotiations, and make it clear to its ally, Ukraine, that it will support any concessions that Ukrainian negotiators believe are necessary to clinch a peace agreement with Russia.

Whatever mediator Russia and Ukraine agree to work with to try to resolve this crisis, the United States must give the diplomatic process its full, unreserved support, both in public and behind closed doors. It must also ensure that its own actions do not undermine the peace process in Ukraine as they did the

Annan plan in Syria in 2012.

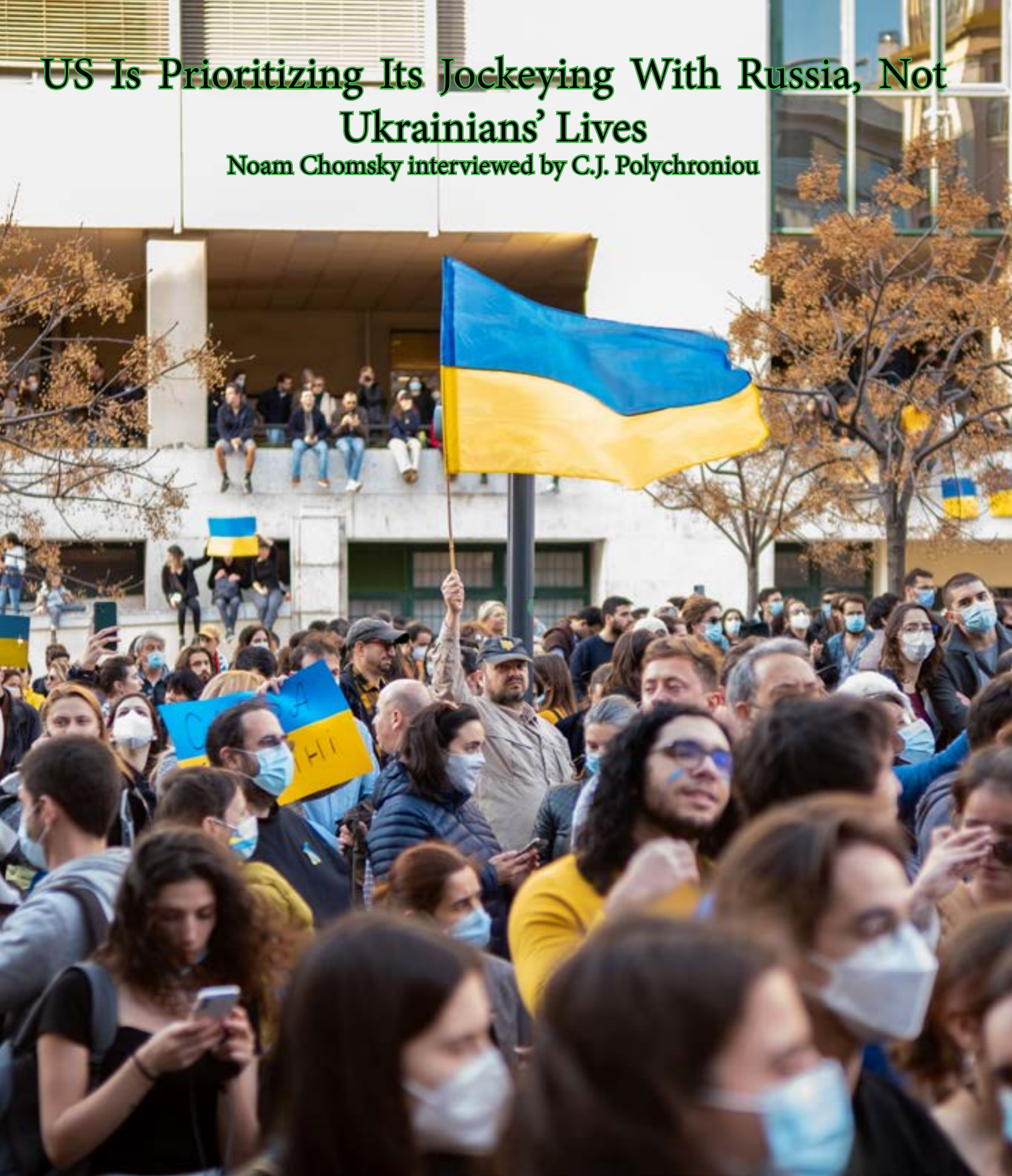
One of the most critical steps that U.S. and NATO leaders can take to provide an incentive for Russia to agree to a negotiated peace is to commit to lifting their sanctions if and when Russia complies with a withdrawal agreement. Without such a commitment, the sanctions will quickly lose any moral or practical value as leverage over Russia, and will be only an arbitrary form of collective punishment against its people, and against poor people everywhere who can no longer afford food to feed their families. As the de facto leader of the NATO military alliance, the U.S. position on this question will be crucial.

So policy decisions by the United States will have a critical impact on whether there will soon be peace in Ukraine, or only a much longer and bloodier war. The test for U.S. policymakers, and for Americans who care about the people of Ukraine, must be to ask which of these outcomes U.S. policy choices are likely to lead to. **Z**

Nicolas J. S. Davies is an independent journalist, a researcher with CODEPINK and the author of *Blood on Our Hands: The American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq*.

US Is Prioritizing Its Jockeying With Russia, Not Ukrainians' Lives

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou



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MAY 2022

C*J. Polychroniou: The war in Ukraine is causing unimaginable human suffering, but it is also having global economic consequences and is terrible news for the fight against global warming. Indeed, as a result of rising energy costs and concerns about energy security, decarbonization efforts have taken a back seat. In the U.S., the Biden administration has embraced the Republican slogan “drill, baby, drill,” Europe is set on building new gas pipelines and import facilities, and China plans to boost coal production capacity. Can you comment on the implications of these unfortunate developments and explain why short-term thinking continues to prevail among world leaders even at a time when humanity could be on the brink of an existential threat?*

Noam Chomsky: The last question is not new. In one or another form, it has arisen throughout history.

Take one case that has been extensively studied: Why did political leaders go to war in 1914, supremely confident of their own righteousness? And why did the most prominent intellectuals in every warring country line up with passionate enthusiasm in support of their own state—apart from a handful of dissidents, the most prominent of whom were jailed (Bertrand Russell, Eugene Debs, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht)? It wasn't a terminal crisis, but it was serious enough.

The pattern goes far back in history. And

it continues with little change after August 6, 1945, when we learned that human intelligence had risen to the level where it soon would be able to exterminate everything.

The policy of escalating the war in Ukraine, instead of trying to take steps to end it, has a horrific impact far beyond Ukraine. Perpetuation of the war is, simply, a program of mass murder throughout much of the Global South.

Observing the pattern closely, over the years, a basic conclusion seems to me to emerge clearly: Whatever is driving policy, it is not security—at least, security of the population. That is at best a marginal concern. That holds for existential threats as well. We have to look elsewhere.

A good starting point, I think, is what seems to me to be the best-established principle of international relations theory: Adam Smith's observation that the “Masters of Mankind”—in his day the merchants and manufacturers of England—are the “principal architects of [state] policy.” They use their power to ensure that their own interests “are most peculiarly attended to” no matter how “grievous” the effects on others, including the people of England, but most brutally the victims of the “savage injustice of the Europeans.” His particular target was British savagery in India, then in its early stages, already horrifying enough.

Nothing much changes when the crises become existential. Short-term interests prevail. The logic is clear in competitive systems, like unregulated markets. Those who do not play the game are soon out of it. Competition among the “principal architects of policy” in the state system has somewhat similar properties, but we should bear in mind that security of the population is far from a guiding principle, as the record shows all too clearly.

You are quite right about the horrific impact of the criminal Russian invasion of Ukraine. Discussion in the U.S. and Europe focuses

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on the suffering in Ukraine itself, quite reasonably, while also applauding our policy of accelerating the misery, not so reasonably. I'll return to that.

The policy of escalating the war in Ukraine, instead of trying to take steps to end it, has a horrific impact far beyond Ukraine. As widely reported, Ukraine and Russia are major food exporters. The war has cut off food supplies to populations in desperate need, particularly in Africa and Asia.

Take just one example, the world's worst humanitarian crisis according to the UN: Yemen. Over 2 million children face imminent starvation, the World Food Program reports. Almost 100 percent of cereal [is imported] "with Russia and Ukraine accounting for the largest share of wheat and wheat products (42%)," in addition to re-exported flour and processed wheat from the same region.

The crisis extends far beyond. Let's try to be honest about it: Perpetuation of the war is, simply, a program of mass murder throughout much of the Global South.

That's the least of it. There are discussions in purportedly serious journals about how the U.S. can win a nuclear war with Russia. Such discussions verge on criminal insanity. And, unfortunately, U.S.-NATO policies provide many possible scenarios for quick termination of human society. To take just one, Putin has so far refrained from attacking the supply lines sending heavy weapons to Ukraine. It won't be a great surprise if that restraint ends, bringing Russia and NATO close to direct conflict, with an easy path to tit-for-tat escalation that could well lead to a quick goodbye.

More likely, in fact highly probable, is slower death through poisoning of the planet. The most recent IPCC report made it crystal clear that if there is to be any hope for a livable world, we must stop using fossil fuels right now, proceeding steadily until they are soon eliminated. As you point out, the effect of the

ongoing war is to end the far-too-limited initiatives underway, indeed to reverse them and to accelerate the race to suicide.

There is, naturally, great joy in the executive offices of the corporations dedicated to destroying human life on Earth. Now they are not only freed from constraints and from the carping of annoying environmentalists, but they are lauded for saving the civilization that they are now encouraged to destroy even more expeditiously. Arms producers share their euphoria about the opportunities offered by the continuing conflict. They are now encouraged to waste scarce resources that are desperately needed for humane and constructive purposes. And like their partners in mass destruction, the fossil fuel corporations, they are raking in taxpayer dollars.

What could be better, or from a different perspective, more insane? We would do well to recall President Dwight D. Eisenhower's words in his "Cross of Iron" speech in 1953: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some fifty miles of concrete pavement. We pay for a single fighter with a half-million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people.... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

These words could hardly be more appropriate today.

Let's return to why "world leaders" pursue this mad course. First, let's see if we can find any who deserve the appellation, except in irony.

If there were any, they would be devoting themselves to bringing the conflict to an end in the only way possible: by diplomacy and statecraft. The general outlines of a political settlement have long been understood. We have discussed them before and have also documented the dedication of the U.S. (with NATO in tow) to undermine the possibility of a diplomatic settlement, quite openly, and with pride. There should be no need to review the dismal record again.

A common refrain is that "Mad Vlad" is so insane, and so immersed in wild dreams of reconstructing an empire and maybe conquering the world, that there's no point even listening to what Russians are saying—that is, if you can evade U.S. censorship and find some snippets on Indian state TV or Middle East media. And there is surely no need to contemplate diplomatic engagement with such a creature. Therefore, let's not even explore the only possibility for ending the horror and just continue to escalate it, no matter what the consequences for Ukrainians and the world.

Western leaders, and much of the political class, are now consumed with two major ideas: The first is that Russian military force is so overwhelming that it may soon seek to conquer Western Europe, or even beyond. Thus, we have to "fight Russia over there" (with Ukrainian bodies) so that "we don't have to fight Russia here" in Washington, D.C., or so we are warned by House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Chair Adam Schiff, a Democrat.

The second is that Russian military force has been shown to be a paper tiger, so incompetent and frail, and so poorly led, that it can't conquer cities a few kilometers from its border defended largely by a citizens' army.

The latter thought is the object of much gloating. The former inspires terror in our hearts.

Orwell defined "doublethink" as the capacity to hold two contradictory ideas in mind and to believe them both, a malady only imaginable in ultra-totalitarian states.

Adopting the first idea, we must arm ourselves to the teeth to protect ourselves from the demonic plans of the paper tiger, even though Russian military spending is a fraction of NATO's, even excluding the U.S. Those suffering memory loss will be delighted that Germany has finally gotten the word, and may soon surpass Russia in military spending. Now Putin will have to think twice before conquering western Europe.

To repeat the obvious, the war in Ukraine can end with a diplomatic settlement, or with the defeat of one side, either quickly or in prolonged agony. Diplomacy, by definition, is a give-and-take affair. Each side must accept it. It follows that in a diplomatic settlement, Putin must be offered some escape hatch.

We either accept the first option, or we reject it. That at least is not controversial. If we reject it, we are choosing the second option. Since that is the near-universal preference in Western discourse, and continues to be U.S. policy, let's consider what it entails.

The answer is straightforward: The decision to reject diplomacy means that we will engage in an experiment to see whether the irrational mad dog will slink away quietly in total defeat, or whether he will use the means that he certainly has to destroy Ukraine and set the stage for terminal war.

And while conducting this grotesque experiment with the lives of Ukrainians, we will ensure that millions starve from the food crisis, we will toy with the possibility of nuclear war, and we will race on enthusiastically to destroying the environment that sustains life.

It is of course conceivable that Putin will just





surrender, and that he'll refrain from using the forces at his command. And perhaps we can simply laugh off the prospects of resort to nuclear weapons. Conceivable, but what kind of person would be willing to take that gamble?

The answer is: Western leaders, quite explicitly, along with the political class. That has been obvious for years, even stated officially. And to make sure that all understand, the position was forcefully reiterated in April at the first monthly meeting of the "Contact Group," which includes NATO and partner countries. The meeting was not held at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Rather, all pretenses were dropped, and it was held at the U.S. Ramstein Air Base in Germany; technically German territory, but in the real world belonging to the U.S.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin opened the meeting by declaring that "Ukraine clearly believes it can win and so does everyone here." Therefore, the assembled dignitaries should have no hesitation in pouring advanced weapons into Ukraine and persisting in the other programs, proudly announced, to bring Ukraine effectively within the NATO system. In their wisdom, the attending dignitaries and their leader guarantee that Putin will not react in ways they all know he can.

The record of military planning for many years, in fact centuries, indicates that "everyone here" may indeed hold these remarkable beliefs. Whether they do or not, they are, clearly, willing to carry out the experiment with the lives of Ukrainians and the future of life on Earth.

Since we are assured on this high authority that Russia will passively observe all of this with no reaction, we can take further steps to "integrate Ukraine into NATO de facto," in accord with the goals of the Ukrainian defense ministry, establishing "full compatibility of the Ukrainian army with the armies of NATO countries"—thereby also guaranteeing

that no diplomatic settlement can be reached with any Russian government, unless Russia is somehow turned into a U.S. satellite.

Current U.S. policy calls for a long war to "weaken Russia" and ensure its total defeat. The policy is very similar to the Afghan model of the 1980s, which is, in fact, now explicitly advocated in high places; by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for example.

Since that is close to current U.S. policy, even a working model, it is worthwhile to look at what actually happened in Afghanistan in the 1980s when Russia invaded. Fortunately, we now have a detailed and authoritative account by Diego Cordovez, who directed the successful UN programs that ended the war, and the distinguished journalist and scholar Selig Harrison, who has extensive experience in the region.

The Cordovez-Harrison analysis completely overthrows the received version. They demonstrate that the war was ended by careful UN-run diplomacy, not by military force. Soviet military forces were fully capable of continuing the war. The U.S. policy of mobilizing and funding the most extremist radical Islamists to fight the Russians amounted to "fighting to the last Afghan," they conclude, in a proxy war to weaken the Soviet Union. "The United States did its best to prevent the emergence of a U.N. role," that is, the careful diplomatic efforts that ended the war.

U.S. policy apparently delayed the Russian withdrawal that had been contemplated from shortly after the invasion—which, they show, had limited objectives, with no resemblance to the awesome goals of world conquest that were conjured up in U.S. propaganda. "The Soviet invasion was clearly not the first step in an expansionist master plan of a united leadership," Harrison writes, confirming the conclusions of historian David Gibbs based on released Soviet archives.

The chief CIA officer in Islamabad, who ran



the operations directly, put the main point simply: The goal was to kill Russian soldiers—to give Russia their Vietnam, as proclaimed by high U.S. officials, revealing the colossal inability to understand anything about Indochina that was the hallmark of U.S. policy for decades of slaughter and destruction.

Cordovez-Harrison wrote that the U.S. government “was divided from the start between ‘bleeders,’ who wanted to keep Soviet forces pinned down in Afghanistan and thus to avenge Vietnam, and ‘dealers,’ who wanted to compel their withdrawal through a combination of diplomacy and military pressure.” It’s a distinction that shows up very often. The bleeders usually win, causing immense damage. For “the decider,” to borrow W. Bush’s self-description, it is safer to look tough than to appear to be too soft.

Afghanistan is a case in point. In the Carter administration, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was a dealer, who suggested far-reaching compromises that would have almost certainly prevented, or at least sharply curtailed, what was intended to be a limited intervention. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was the bleeder, intent on avenging Vietnam, whatever that meant in his confused world view, and killing Russians, something he understood very well, and relished.

Brzezinski prevailed. He convinced Carter to send arms to the opposition that was seeking to overthrow the pro-Russian government, anticipating that the Russians would be drawn into a Vietnam-style quagmire. When it happened, he could barely contain his delight. When asked later whether he had any regrets, he dismissed the question as ridiculous. His success in drawing Russia into the Afghan trap, he claimed, was responsible for the collapse of the Soviet empire and ending the Cold War—mostly nonsense. And who cares if it harmed “some agitated Muslims,” like the million cadavers, putting aside such

incidentals as the devastation of Afghanistan, and the rise of radical Islam.

The Afghan analogy is being publicly advocated today, and more importantly, is being implemented in policy.

The dealer-bleeder distinction is nothing new in foreign policy circles. A famous example from the early days of the Cold War is the conflict between George Kennan (a dealer) and Paul Nitze (a bleeder), won by Nitze, laying the basis for many years of brutality and near destruction. Cordovez-Harrison explicitly endorse Kennan’s approach, with ample evidence.

An example close to Vance-Brzezinski is the conflict between Secretary of State William Rogers (a dealer) and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger (a bleeder) over Middle East Policy in the Richard Nixon years. Rogers proposed reasonable diplomatic solutions to the Israel-Arab conflict. Kissinger, whose ignorance of the region was monumental, insisted on confrontation, leading to the 1973 war, a close call for Israel with a serious threat of nuclear war.

These conflicts are perennial, almost. Today there are only bleeders in high places. They have gone as far as to enact a huge Lend Lease Act for Ukraine, passed almost unanimously. The terminology is designed to evoke the memory of the enormous Lend-Lease program that brought the U.S. into the European war (as intended) and linked the European and Asian conflicts into a World War (unintended). “Lend Lease tied together the separate struggles in Europe and Asia to create by the end of 1941 what we properly call World War II,” writes Adam Tooze. Is that what we want in today’s quite different circumstances?

If that is what we want, as seems to be the case, let us at least reflect on what it entails. That is important enough to repeat.

It entails that we reject out of hand the kind of diplomatic initiatives that in reality ended



the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, despite U.S. efforts to impede them. We therefore undertake an experiment to see whether integration of Ukraine into NATO, total defeat of Russia in Ukraine, and further moves to “weaken Russia,” will be observed passively by the Russian leadership, or whether they will resort to the means of violence they unquestionably possess to devastate Ukraine and set the stage for possible general war.

Meanwhile, by extending the conflict instead of seeking to end it, we impose severe costs on Ukrainians, drive millions of people to death by starvation, hurtle the burning planet even more rapidly to the sixth mass extinction, and—if we are lucky—escape terminal war.

No problem, the government and political class tell us. The experiment carries no risk because the Russian leadership is sure to accept all of this with equanimity, passing quietly into the ash heap of history. As for the “collateral damage,” they can join the ranks of Brzezinski’s “agitated Muslims.” To borrow the phrase made famous by Madeleine Albright: “This is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it.”

Let’s at least have the honesty to recognize what we are doing, eyes open.

Global emissions rose to record high in 2021, so the world went back to a “business-as-usual” approach once the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic subsided—for now. How hardwired is human behavior? Are we capable of having moral duties toward future people?

It is a deep question, the most important question we can contemplate. The answer is unknown. It may be helpful to think about it in a broader context.

Consider Enrico Fermi’s famous paradox: In simple words, where are they? A distinguished astrophysicist, Fermi knew that there

are a huge number of planets within the reach of potential contact that have the conditions to sustain life and higher intelligence. But with the most assiduous search, we can find no trace of their existence. So where are they?

One response that has been seriously proposed, and cannot be dismissed, is that higher intelligence has developed innumerable times, but has proven to be lethal: It discovered the means for self-annihilation but did not develop the moral capacity to prevent it. Perhaps that is even an inherent feature of what we call “higher intelligence.”

We are now engaged in an experiment to determine whether this grim principle holds of modern humans, a very recent arrival on Earth, some 200,000-300,000 years ago, a flick of an eye in evolutionary time. There is not much time to find the answer—or more precisely, to determine the answer, as we will do, one way or the other. That is unavoidable. We will either act to show that our moral capacity reaches as far as to control our technical capacity to destroy, or that it does not.

An extraterrestrial observer, if there were one, would unfortunately conclude that the gap is too immense to prevent species suicide, and with it the sixth mass extinction. But it could be mistaken. That decision is in our hands.

There is a rough measure of the gap between capacity to destroy and capacity to contain that death wish: the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. The distance of the hands from midnight can be regarded as an indication of the gap. In 1953, when the U.S. and Soviet Union exploded thermonuclear weapons, the minute-hand was set to two minutes to midnight. It did not reach that point again until Donald Trump’s term in office. In his last year, the analysts abandoned minutes and switched to seconds: 100 seconds to midnight, where the clock now stands. Next January it will be set again. It’s not hard

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to make a case that the second-hand should move closer to midnight.

The grim question arose with brilliant clarity on August 6, 1945. That day provided two lessons: 1.) human intelligence, in its glory, was approaching the capacity to destroy everything, an achievement reached in 1953; and 2.) human moral capacity lagged far behind. Few even cared, as people of my age will remember very well. Viewing the hideous experiment to which we are enthusiastically committed today, and what it entails, it is hard to see improvement, to put it mildly.

That doesn't answer the question. We know far too little to answer it. We can only observe closely the one case of "higher intelligence" that we know of, and ask what it suggests about the answer.

Far more importantly, we can act to determine the answer. It is within our power to bring about the answer that we all hope for, but there is no time to waste. Z

C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous 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. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).





Banks Fueling Global Warming is Business as Usual

By Pete Dolack

The gap between what needs to be done to save the Earth from the environmental disaster of unchecked global warming and what is actually being done continues to widen. Yet another exemplar of this gap is the funding practices of the world’s biggest banks.

Capitalists not concerning themselves with small things like the future ability of the planet to remain livable is nothing new, or we wouldn’t be in our present predicament. But a new report from 7 environmental organizations finds that 60 of the world’s biggest banks have invested US\$4.6 trillion in fossil fuel projects since the Paris Climate Accord was signed in 2015.

Our descendants, should they be faced with a chaotic climate, massive agricultural disruptions, mass extinctions on land and in the sea, drowned coastal cities and desertification—as they will be should present-day business as usual continue—are not likely to believe that their ruined world will be a fair tradeoff for a handful of industrialists and financiers of the past getting obscenely rich.

Can curses be made retroactive? Perhaps not. But perhaps a worldwide environmental movement can grow sufficiently large and militant to force the necessary changes. There are many out there trying to organize and raise attention—particularly young people, because they will be around long enough to potentially see today’s dire predictions become tomorrow’s reality—but perhaps global warming remains an abstract in too many minds. Or perhaps the daunting challenge of transcending capitalism, without which it is essentially impossible to reverse global warming, is too difficult a challenge. Throwing up our hands in despair would be easier, but if we wish our descendants (or people already alive) to inherit a living world, activism on a world scale is essential.

What words should we use to describe an

economic system under which it is profitable for a handful of powerful people to profit from the destruction of the environment, and this behavior is richly rewarded?

What words should we use to describe an economic system in which, despite overwhelming evidence of the suicidal course that system is leading humanity, is nonetheless heading straight for global calamity?

What words should we use to those who profit enormously from all this, and why do they have such enormous sums of money to be able to force a continuation of this suicidal course? None of you reading these words voted for this, and none of you can vote to put an end to this. Economic decisions are completely out of the hands of working people; current capitalist ideology has evolved to the point where it is supposed to be unthinkable that economic decisions could be subject to democratic processes. Yet more proof that without economic democracy, there can be no political democracy. A lesson capitalism imposes daily.

Nice words for the environment, gigantic sums of money for fossil fuels

The aforementioned exemplar, a report titled “Banking on Climate Chaos: Financial Fuel Report 2022,” sponsored by Oil Change International, Rainforest Action Network, Indigenous Environmental Network and four other organizations, “finds that even in a year where net-zero commitments were all the rage, the financial sector continued its business-as-usual driving of climate chaos.” Banks are investing in fossil fuels at levels even higher than in 2016, the year after the signing of the Paris Climate Accord, when the world’s governments agreed to the goal of holding the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees from the pre-industrial level. Of the \$4.6 trillion

invested by 60 of the world's biggest banks since the Paris agreement, \$742 billion was invested in the industry in 2021 alone.

These banks come from countries around the world, but four United States-based banks were the worst offenders, the report said. "Overall fossil fuel financing remains dominated by four U.S. banks—JPMorgan Chase, Citi, Wells Fargo, and Bank of America—who together account for one quarter of all fossil fuel financing identified over the last six years," it said. "RBC is Canada's worst banker of fossil fuels, with Barclays as the worst in Europe and MUFG as the worst in Japan." Three Canadian banks—RBC (Royal Bank of Canada), Scotiabank and Toronto-Dominion Bank (TD)—are among the top dozen in the world for financing fossil fuels.

Even more alarmingly, Royal Bank of Canada and TD have been the "leaders" in a grotesque expansion of tar sands financing—\$23 billion was invested in tar sands production in 2021, a 51 percent increase from 2020. Those two Canadian banks combined doubled their funding for tar sands in 2021 compared to 2016. Even more money was poured into fracking. Last year alone, \$62 billion was poured into fracking. Wells Fargo more than doubled its fracking investments to \$8 billion in 2021. Since the Paris Climate Accord was signed, four U.S. banks are far and away the biggest culprits in fracking—JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Citigroup and Bank of America.

Yes, the world's governments are hypocritical in signing agreements to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions with no enforcement mechanisms and are far from meeting their announced goals. But that certainly is no reason to excuse the financial industry for its significant role in ensuring that more greenhouse gases than ever are thrown into the atmosphere. Or bank hypocrisy. Take London-based Barclays, Europe's biggest bank-

ing contributor to fossil fuel production and the world's fifth-largest investor in fracking, trailing only the four U.S. banks mentioned just above.

What are we to make of Barclay's pronouncement, right on its website home page, proclaiming that "Barclays gives shareholders a 'Say on Climate.'" The bank says it will give shareholders "an opportunity to vote on its climate strategy, targets and progress" at its 2022 annual general meeting. Barclays Chair Nigel Higgins, in a slick pamphlet, claims the bank aims to be "net zero" by 2050. It would seem to be heading in the opposite direction, unless the intention is to pour billions of pounds into fossil fuels until 2049, then magically stop. If the situation weren't so serious, we could laugh at the chairperson's assertion that "We believe that our original championing of net zero and Paris alignment has made a difference in banking." If hot air could displace carbon dioxide, I suppose it would make a difference.

The slick pamphlet, 36 pages long, is full of aspirational goals and even goes so far as to proclaim itself a founding member of the Net Zero Banking Alliance, "part of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero." How lovely. The result of last year's Glasgow climate summit was to continue the tradition of "we were happy to talk and we will be happy to talk some more" while making commitments that ensure global temperatures will soar past 2 degrees C. As for Barclay's, a reader searches in vain for any mention of what shareholders will be asked to vote on. Those affected by fossil fuel production won't be asked, of course.

If only hot air could be tapped as an energy source



The intent here isn't to single out Barclays. Rather, this sort of corporate greenwashing is all too typical. The world's biggest funder of fossil fuel projects, JPMorgan Chase, for example, claims that it has a "commitment to align key sectors of our financing portfolio with the goals of the Paris Agreement" and "we are measuring the emissions of our clients in key sectors of our financing portfolio." It would seem there are plenty of greenhouse-gas emissions to measure. But are we supposed to be fooled by this folderol?

Similarly, Royal Bank of Canada, the largest non-U.S. funder of fossil fuels and world's fifth largest overall funder, says with a straight face that is helping clients reach net-zero goals and is "Setting the standard for best-in-class governance, including through our Climate Strategy & Governance group." We'd hate to see what a lower standard might look like given the \$201 billion it invested in fossil fuels from 2016 to 2021, with 2021's total double that of 2020.

Although paling in comparison to the US\$4.6 trillion the biggest banks have ladled out to the fossil fuel industry over the past 5 years, including \$742 billion in 2021, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have done their part. The World Bank, funded by the world's governments, in particular those of the Global North, has provided tens of billions of dollars for fossil fuels since the Paris Climate Accords were signed, reports Urgewald, a non-profit environmental and human rights organization based in Germany. This money includes \$12 billion in direct project finance in over 35 countries; as much as \$20 billion annually given as government budget support, including for coal projects; and billions more for infrastructure projects that enabled new coal-fired plants that would not have been built otherwise.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), notorious for imposing extreme austerity on

peoples around the world as the price for loans, sometimes imposes additional conditions mandating they "roll out the red carpet for the fossil fuel industry," reports the U.S.-based environmental organization Friends of the Earth. An FOE report found that: "Aside from the austerity measures it is so well known for, the IMF has been found to attach conditions in its lending to a number of countries that support new tax breaks for Big Oil. One recent study found that IMF loan programs supported new producer subsidies for coal and gas in Mozambique and Mongolia. The Fund also enabled new legislation in these countries to facilitate public finance of fossil fuel projects. As more countries turn to the IMF for help in coping with COVID-19, it is imperative the IMF does not further entrench fossil fuel dependency around the world. But a recent analysis has found that the IMF's COVID-19 era loans failed to boost green recovery policies. Another study found that most Covid-19 era loans by the IMF call for austerity measures to be implemented once the pandemic crisis subsides, limiting the resources that countries will have to spend on a just and green recovery."

Nor can the massive industry subsidies be forgotten. A paper prepared in 2015 by, ironically, four IMF economists, found that subsidies for the fossil fuel industry totaled an astounding \$5.6 trillion for 2014. This total included environmental damages, including air pollution, in addition to direct corporate subsidies, below-cost consumer pricing and foregone taxes. No, the IMF was not suddenly questioning capitalism, nor did this report, carefully noting that it did not represent the views of the IMF, devote so much as a single word questioning the economic system that has produced such disastrous outcomes. A more recent IMF study found that fossil fuel subsidies have increased to \$5.9 trillion, of which 92 percent arose from undercharging



for environmental costs and foregone consumption taxes.

Perhaps those responsible for IMF lending practices don't read their own organization's papers (or, if they do, ignore them when they contradict the IMF's mission of enriching capitalists and immiserating working people). Government officials don't pay attention to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports detailing the dire state of the climate. And oil and gas executives laugh at what they get away with and continue to fund "think tanks" that pump out a steady stream of global warming denial. Canada, during the Stephen Harper régime, went so far as to invent the new crime of being a member of an "anti-Canadian petroleum movement," equating such a stance with terrorism. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police added to this criminalization of advocating for clean air and water by challenging the very idea that human activity is causing global warming or that global warming is even a problem. The basis on which a police force can make such a declaration is unclear.

Capitalism can't be anything other than what it is

Capitalist governments, not only those countries like Canada and Australia that are dependent on energy and/or mining exports, are beholden to not only the industrialists and financiers who are the real rulers of the world but to the ever intensifying competitive pressures of capitalism, from which industrialists and financiers are not exempt. The controllers of corporations routinely threaten to move elsewhere if political officeholders don't do as corporate executives demand, and the decisions of those executives are not reviewable no matter the effect on the local area.

For corporate executives and the speculators whom they in turn must indulge, main-

taining profits means cutting costs (in the first place, the cost of labor), taking bigger shares of existing markets, forcing open new markets and developing new ways of achieving these goals. An enterprise that doesn't do these gets run out of business by enterprises that do. Larger enterprises, those big enough to be listed on stock markets, have to increase profits, not maintain them, piling on still more pressure—not only from the competition, but from the financial industry, which holds a whip over the producers and distributors of tangible goods and services. A company that merely has steady profits, no matter how high, will be punished by financial speculators because the stock price won't rise. Stock prices are bets and claims on future profits, and finance capital is relentless in expecting higher stock prices. A corporate executive team that doesn't deliver will be forced out and replaced by another team that will do as financiers demand.

A corporation can achieve the necessary profits by reducing wages, through either layoffs or moving production to low-wage locations with few regulations. Corporate globalization is due to precisely that. Corporations can also buy machinery so that they can employ less workers; they are doubly incentivized to do this because the machines can be depreciated, lowering their taxes. As more people are put out of work, faster overall economic growth is needed just to maintain existing employment; thus the long-term tendency of more unemployment and lower wages as more people compete for fewer jobs. As industries in national economies become consolidated in an oligarchy of the handful of giant corporations who survived national competition, the route to growth is to expand elsewhere. As the winners in other countries undergo the same process, the relentless competition, now on a planetary scale, winnows these national winners into a small number of

global winners.

And when one competitor gives itself a boost to profits (including by finding the country with the lowest wages), the other competitors have to do the same to stay in business. Profits margins decline as the initial boost is eroded by competitors doing the same; and the next round of "innovation"—finding another country with yet lower wages, more layoffs, work speedups, exemptions from environmental rules, pressure on governments to reduce taxes and eliminate tariffs, and inducing governments to enact draconian "free trade" agreements elevating multinational capital above governments—touches off another round of cost cutting and doing whatever possible to boost profits. This is a cycle that has no end under capitalism.

As this mad, endless growth continues, more must be produced, more must be transported, new sources of energy and raw materials must be exploited and more pollution must be dumped into the environment with no cost to the corporate polluter. More carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases will be thrown into the atmosphere as a direct result of this growth and frenzied activity. Thanks to the massive capital accumulated by the winners of capitalist competition, industrialists and financiers can spend gigantic sums of money spreading propaganda through a network of institutions, bend school and university curricula to their interests, own and control the mass media and buy the political system.

Growth for growth's sake, and without controls—capitalism is a cancer. A system that nobody controls nor can anybody control it. A system, however, that runs on its own momentum and can't be anything other than what it is. That we can somehow get control of the machine and make it do good is worse than an illusion.

The future has no value in capitalist economics

Not only is the environment an externality that corporations do not have to account for, thereby dumping the costs on to the public, but orthodox economics doesn't account for the environment, other than as a source of resources to exploit. The same capitalist market that is nothing more than the aggregate interests of the largest and most powerful industrialists and financiers is supposed to "solve" environmental problems. A May 2009 *Monthly Review* article by sociologists Richard York, Brett Clark and John Bellamy Foster, "Capitalism in Wonderland," puts this contradiction in stark perspective: "Where [orthodox economists] primarily differ is not on their views of the science behind climate change but on their value assumptions about the propriety of shifting burdens to future generations. This lays bare the ideology embedded in orthodox neoclassical economics, a field which regularly presents itself as using objective, even naturalistic, methods for modeling the economy. However, past all of the equations and technical jargon, the dominant economic paradigm is built on a value system that prizes capital accumulation in the short-term, while de-valuing everything else in the present and everything altogether in the future."

From that perspective, it follows that present-day environmental damage is of minimal concern to capitalists and future damage of no concern. The industrialists and financiers who reap billions today won't necessarily be around when the environmental price becomes too high to avoid. The "Capitalism in Wonderland" authors write: "[H]uman life in effect is worth only what each person contributes to the economy as measured in monetary terms. So, if global warming increases mortality in Bangladesh, which it appears likely that

it will, this is only reflected in economic models to the extent that the deaths of Bengalis hurt the economy. Since Bangladesh is very poor, [orthodox] economic models ... would not estimate it to be worthwhile to prevent deaths there since these losses would show up as minuscule in the measurements. ... [E]thical concerns about the intrinsic value of human life and of the lives of other creatures are completely invisible in standard economic models. Increasing human mortality and accelerating the rate of extinctions are to most economists only problems if they undermine the 'bottom line.' In other respects they are invisible: as is the natural world as a whole."

Every incentive is for more

Let us doubt that orthodox economists are moving down a down a slippery slope in which some humans are valuable and others are without value, recall the infamous memo of Lawrence Summers, written when he was chief economist for the World Bank, in which he wrote: "I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that. ... The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I've always thought that under-populated countries in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted."

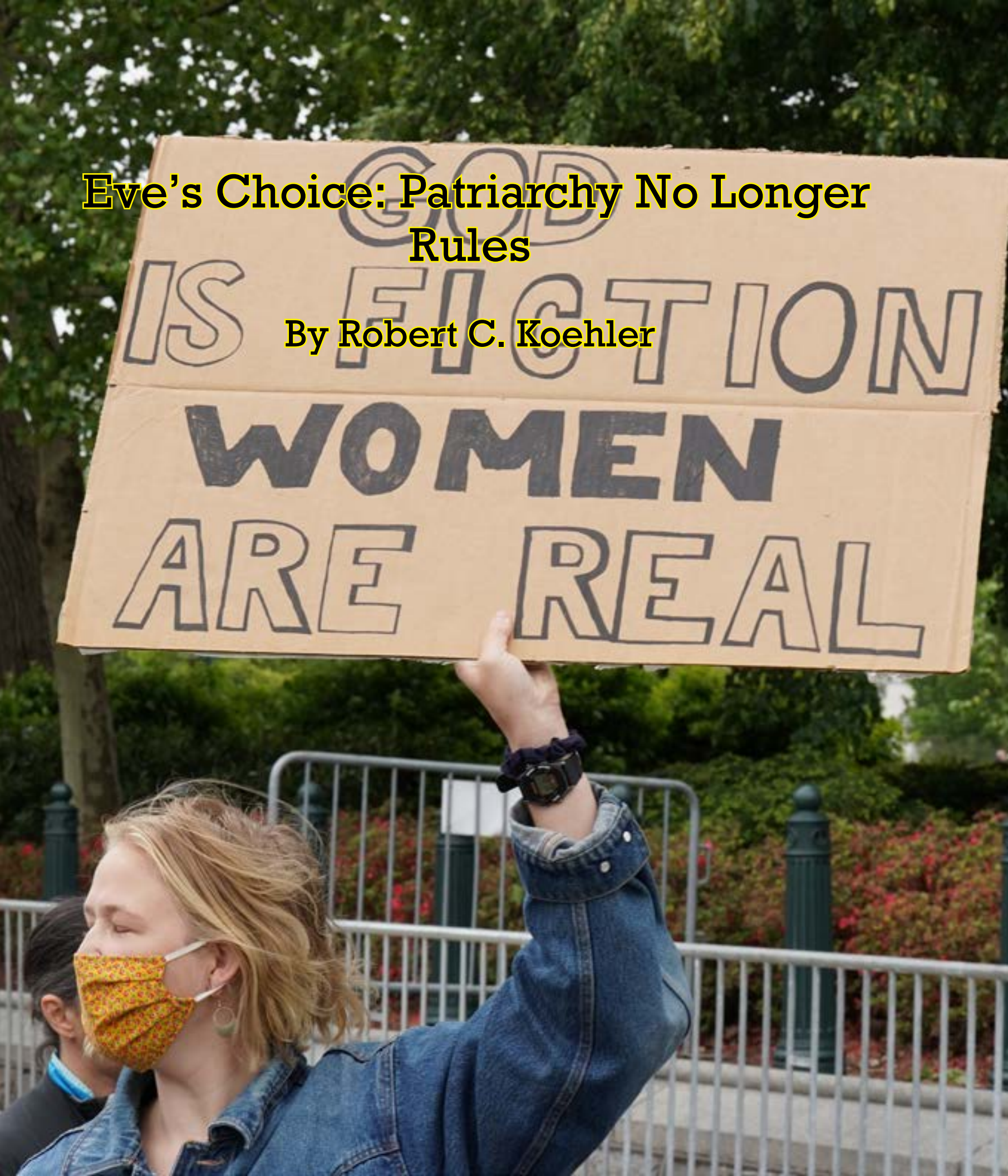
The modern corporation has a legal duty only to provide the maximum profit for its shareholders. In other words, it is expected to act to further its own interest without regard to anything else. The corporation is considered a legal person under U.S. law—one that has no biological limits nor barriers to its growth. Joel Bakan, in the introduction to his book *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, summed up capitalism's dominant institution this way: "The corporation's legally defined mandate is to

pursue, relentlessly and without exception, its own self-interest, regardless of the often harmful consequences it might cause to others. As a result, I argue, the corporation is a pathological institution, a dangerous possessor of the great power it wields over people and societies."

That pathological institution is controlled by, and the wealth produced for, a tiny percentage of people. We can call them the one percent (using the language of Occupy Wall Street), the bourgeoisie (using classical terminology), or industrialists and financiers (using broad labels). Their towering piles of money, hidden away in tax havens and secret bank accounts, are directly built on the backs, the sweat and labor, of their employees. This would be the case even without the added bonus of corporate personhood. Yet no matter how successful today, corporations must expand and be ruthless in beating the competition on pain of going under tomorrow. Every incentive is for more growth, more production, more consumption. Nobody, not even the biggest or most powerful capitalist, has the ability to stop or control it. Even capitalists ride the tiger, although of course they have vastly better ability to manage the vicissitudes of capitalist competition than do working people.

Capitalism is a system that is built, and functions, to generate profit, not to meet needs. If you doubt that, then why are extraordinary amounts of money spent on advertising to get us to buy what we don't need? If global warming is to be reversed, a rational economic system based on human need, not on private profit, is what is needed. Cooperation for the common good, not competition for the profit of a few at any cost. Is corporate profit really worth the destruction of Earth's livability?





Eve's Choice: Patriarchy No Longer Rules

By Robert C. Koehler

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’” — Genesis 2:18. RSV

One chapter later, after Eve was held responsible for the First Sin (Adam, the submissive male, just did what she told him to), we have this: “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be contrary for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” — Genesis 3:16

Some people are able to liberate the creation story from its theological misogyny, but for most believers (especially the male ones), it’s pretty clear: Women are commanded, indeed, they were created, to do what they’re told. This is our cultural infrastructure—a.k.a., the patriarchy—10,000 or so years in the making.

The prejudice leaps into the New Testament (“Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness.” — I Timothy 2:11), and on and on. Thirteen hundred years later, here’s Thomas Aquinas, high-fiving Aristotle, agreeing that a woman is a “misbegotten male.” Jump forward another seven centuries and we get SCOTUS Judge Samuel Alito: “Roe was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences. And far from bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue, Roe and (Planned Parenthood v. Casey) have enflamed debate and deepened division.”

As everyone knows at this point, a woman’s right to an abortion—a woman’s right to be in full control of her own body—is now in jeopardy. This is a terrifying possibility. If the Supreme Court overthrows *Roe v. Wade*, the legality of abortion will be decided state

by state, and at this point more than half of them are ready to pass legislation turning it back into a crime. Oklahoma, for instance, just passed a law making abortion illegal after about six weeks (when cardiac activity can be detected in the embryo)—with no exceptions for rape or incest.

“Yes, I’m angry,” writes Elizabeth Warren.

“I’m angry at the justices who deliberately deceived the American people. I’m angry at the Republicans in Congress who stole two Supreme Court seats to get us to this day. And I’m angry at the cruelty of the anti-abortion politicians who will impose enormous pain, suffering, and possible death on people who have the fewest resources to fight back.”

The passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 was a direct undoing of the infrastructure of patriarchy: male rule, female submissiveness. It dug to the core of who we are and began creating change at, perhaps, the deepest level of being human.

Playwright Eve Ensler (also known as V) puts it this way: Overturning *Roe* “will catalyze and amplify the rightwing misogynist project that is taking away the rights of women everywhere. . . . If we allow the erasure of this central right for women, it will escalate the erasure of them all.

“ . . . this is not about babies, it is about destroying women’s agency and autonomy. And we know that this will most harshly affect the lives of Black and Brown women and marginalized people”—that is to say, those without the resources to travel long distances for an abortion.

In short, this is a complex combo of racism, sexism and God. It’s not an issue to be solved with simplistic, “pro-life” self-righteousness. I honor and value all who are truly pro-life—who stand against trillion-dollar military budgets, a nuclear-armed planet, poverty and starvation—but: “. . . these self-styled pro-lifers don’t seem to care much about ‘life, once a

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baby is born,” Jill Filipovic wrote three years ago at *The Guardian*, in reference to Donald Trump’s supporters.

“They want to cut aid to needy children and healthcare to poor mothers and pregnant women. They oppose contraception and sex education—the most effective ways to reduce the abortion rate. Many of them continue to support a president who separates small children from their parents and keeps them in squalid cages.”

They saw in Trump, she wrote, “a kindred spirit who would work for their interests—their primary interest being a symbolic reassertion of their cultural dominance.”

But cultural—patriarchal—dominance is at the end of its reign, with or without *Roe v. Wade*. Of course, if the leaked SCOTUS draft holds and *Roe* is overturned, if legal abortion turns into a patchwork right across the national landscape, chaos will ensue.

“There will be marching, demonstrations, sit-ins, petitions,” writes Robin Morgan.

“Women will go ahead and disobey the law. What are they going to do when half the population is in revolt? Not 20 percent, not the ultra right wing, not the evangelicals. Women are going to control what happens to our own bodies. No matter how many thousands of us have to go to jail. We are not turning back the clock. No way.” **Z**

Robert Koehler (koehlercw@gmail.com), syndicated by PeaceVoice, is a Chicago award-winning journalist and editor. He is the author of *Courage Grows Strong at the Wound*.

