

Chomsky on Optimism of the Will

October 2022

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JUST IGNORE IT
YOU DO
MASS SHOOTINGS
CLIMATE CHANGE
WEALTH INEQUALITY
THE PANDEMIC
POVERTY AND
SYSTEMIC RACISM



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It's a Clean Sweep. Not One Country Guarantees Workers' Rights

By Pete Dolack

There is no respite from class warfare. Past annual Global Rights Index reports issued by the International Trade Union Confederation have invariably shown that there is no country on Earth that fully protects workers' rights and the 2022 edition is not only not an exception but finds that repression of labor organizing is increasing.

The best any country scored for the 2022 ITUC Global Rights Index was "sporadic violations of rights," and only nine countries, all in Europe, managed that. That's down from the dozen classified at this rating two years ago. Capitalism, and its neoliberal variant now four decades old, is not becoming more gentle. It is doing what it must do,

what the holders of capital must do to keep their party going.

Let's take a look at a few general highlights before we highlight individual countries. Or should we say low-lights? Then again, they are "highlights" for industrialists and financiers.

- 87% of countries violated the right to strike.
- 79% of countries violated the right to collective bargaining.
- 77% of countries excluded workers from the right to establish or join a trade union.
- 74% of countries impeded the registration of unions.

In its executive summary, the Global Rights Index report says: "Workers are on the front lines as they face the impact of multiple areas of crisis: historic levels of inequality, the climate emergency, the loss of lives and livelihoods from the pandemic, and the devastating impact of conflict. And workplaces are the front line in the fight for democracy. Brutal governments know how much this matters when four out of five countries block collective bargaining and one third of countries violently attack workers. Trade unionists have been murdered on every continent. Where people

stand up for rights and social justice they are silenced with brutal repression."

Lest we think these are problems only in undeveloped countries, there are Global North countries that score poorly in the index, including Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada and the United States. Almost all trends are getting worse, in all parts of the world. Several indicators—including the right to strike, the right to establish and join a trade union, the right to trade union activities and the right to civil liberties—have steadily worsened since the survey's annual reports began being issued in 2014. "The number of countries which exclude workers from their right to establish or join a trade union increased from 106 in 2021 to 113 in 2022," the report said.

The Global Rights Index ranks the world's countries from 1 to 5, with 1 the best category, denoting "sporadic violations of rights," defined as where "Violations against workers are not absent but do not occur on a regular basis." The nine countries given a rating of 1 are Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway and Sweden.

Rating 2 countries are those with "repeated violations of rights," defined as where "Certain rights have come

under repeated attacks by governments and/or companies and have undermined the struggle for better working conditions.” Countries with this rating include the Czech Republic, France, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain. (These are yellow on the report’s maps.)

Rating 3 countries are those with “regular violations of rights,” defined as where “Governments and/or companies are regularly interfering in collective labour rights or are failing to fully guarantee important aspects of these rights” due to legal deficiencies “which make frequent violations possible.” Countries with this rating include Argentina, Britain, Canada, Mexico and South Africa.

Rating 4 countries are those with “systematic violations of rights,” defined as where “The government and/or companies are engaged in serious efforts to crush the collective voice of workers, putting fundamental rights under threat.” Countries with this rating include Australia, Chile, Greece, Peru, Senegal and the United States.

Rating 5 countries are those with “no guarantees of rights,” defined as “workers have effectively no access to these rights [spelled out in legislation] and are therefore exposed to autocratic regimes and unfair labour practices.”

Countries with this rating include Brazil, China, Colombia, South Korea and Turkey. (These are red on the report’s maps.) In addition, there are countries with a 5+ rating, those with “No guarantee of rights due to the breakdown of the rule of law.” Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen are among the 10 countries listed in this category.

The ITUC says it represents 200 million workers in 163 countries and has 332 national affiliates. It determines its ratings by checking adherence to a list of 97 standards derived from International Labour Organization conventions. Those 97 standards pertain to civil liberties, the right to establish or join unions, trade union activities, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike.

Worth noting is the poor rating of the United States and Britain, the two countries that most like to scold other governments and present themselves as democratic beacons that the world should emulate (or else). The United States has consistently been given a 4 rating, including in 2020 and 2019. The 2022 report notes a myriad of union-busting offensives used by employers there. The United Kingdom, which has had 3 and 4 ratings in past years, has seen workers summarily sacked and replaced

with agency workers at below minimum wage.

Conditions are not appreciably better in those countries most eager to follow U.S. and British leads. In Canada, failures to comply with collective-bargaining agreements are a “common occurrence,” union leaders are prosecuted for participating in strikes and workers participating in strikes are fired. In Australia, criminal charges are filed against unions and union leaders as intimidation tactics, and governments not only allow employers to refuse to bargain with unions but intervene in disputes on the side of employers. Both countries are ranked worse than where they had been two years ago.

And so it goes, to channel Kurt Vonnegut. In its latest report on “the world of work,” the International Labour Organization (ILO) said “three out of five workers lived in countries where labour incomes had not yet recovered to their level prior to the crisis,” while inequality and the gender gap in pay remain large. A separate ILO report said “a return to pre-pandemic performance is likely to remain elusive for much of the world over the coming years,” with a global deficit of 52 million full-time equivalent jobs. Tens of millions of adults fell into extreme pov-

erty during the Covid-19 pandemic.

These dismal results aren’t any surprise to anyone paying attention. The wealthy, and especially billionaires, have only gotten richer at everyone else’s expense during the pandemic. In just the first year of the pandemic, 2020, the world’s billionaires accumulated an additional trillion dollars. At the same time, corporations across the Global North enrich speculators and their top executives with trillions of dollars in dividend payments and stock buybacks and the world’s governments, through their central banks, handed out an astounding \$10 trillion in free money to the financial industry through “quantitative easing” programs, the technical name for intervening in financial markets by creating vast sums of money specifically to be injected into them and thereby inflating stock-market bubbles. Despite these incredible sums of money, there is never more than crumbs for working people. It’s always austerity for those whose work actually creates the wealth that industrialists and financiers divvy up between themselves.

But central bank interventions are profitable for the financial industry, and that’s all that matters. The object of capitalism is to make the

biggest possible profit, regardless of cost to employees, consumers, anybody else, the environment or the community; providing a useful product or service is incidental to the goal. Forcing down wages and working conditions through legal manipulation and outright force and violence is always prominent among capitalists’ methodologies to accomplish their goals. The International Trade Union Confederation’s sad results are not the result of some mysterious failure; they come standard with the system. Z

The Publication of Origin for this article is *Systemic Disorder*.

Fossil Fuel Profits Driving Climate Devastation

By Sonali Kolhatkar

What do Pakistan, Puerto Rico and Jackson, Mississippi, have in common? They’ve all recently experienced climate-related catastrophic rain and flooding, resulting in the loss of homes, electricity, and running water. But even more important,

they are all low-income regions inhabited by people of color—the prime victims of climate injustice.

They face inaction from negligent governments and struggle to survive as fossil-fuel companies reap massive profits—a status quo that United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has called a “moral and economic madness.”

Pakistan, which relies on yearly monsoons to enrich its agricultural industry, has had unprecedented floods since June, impacting 30 million people and killing more than 1,500—a third of them children.

Zulfiqar Kunbhar, a Karachi-based journalist with expertise in climate coverage, explains that “things are very critical” in the rain-affected areas of his nation. Kunbhar has been visiting impacted regions and has seen first-hand the massive “agricultural loss and livelihood loss” among Pakistan’s farming communities.

Sindh, a low-lying province of Pakistan, is not only one of the most populous in the nation (Sindh is home to about 47 million people), but it also produces about a third of the agricultural produce, according to Kunbhar. Twenty years ago, Sindh was stricken with extreme drought. In the summer of 2022, it was drowning

in chest-deep water.

The United Nations is warning that the water could take months to recede and that this poses serious health risks, as deadly diseases like cerebral malaria are emerging. Kunbhar summarizes that provinces like Sindh are facing both “the curse of nature” and government “mismanagement.”

Climate change plus government inaction on mitigation and resilience equals deadly consequences for the poor. This same equation plagues Puerto Rico, long relegated to the status of a U.S. territory. This month, on the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico in 2017 and killed nearly 3,000 people, another storm named Fiona knocked out power for the entire region.

Julio López Varona, chief of campaigns at Center for Popular Democracy Action, spoke to me from Puerto Rico, saying, “The storm was extremely slow, going at like 8 or 9 miles an hour,” and as a result, “it pounded the island for more than three days” with relentless rain. “Communities were completely flooded; people have been displaced,” he said. Eventually, the electrical grid completely failed.

Days after the storm passed, millions of people remained without power—some even

lost running water—leading the White House to declare a major disaster in Puerto Rico.

Even on the U.S. mainland, it is poor communities of color who have been hit the hardest by the impacts of climate change. Jackson, capital of the state of Mississippi, with an 82% black population and growing numbers of Latin American immigrants, struggles with adequate resources and has had problems with its water infrastructure for years.

Lorena Quiroz, founder of the Immigrant Alliance for Justice and Equity, a Jackson-based group doing multiracial grassroots organizing, told me how the city’s residents have been struggling without clean running water since major rainfalls and resulting floods overwhelmed a water-treatment plant this summer.

“It’s a matter of decades of disinvestment in this mostly black, and now brown, community,” Quiroz said. In a state run by white conservatives, Jackson is overseen by a black progressive mayor, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, who is now suing the state government over inaction on the city’s water infrastructure.

Quiroz says it’s “painful to see how government is not doing what they should, how the state government is neglecting its most vulnerable populations.”

Over and over, the same pattern has emerged on a planet experiencing catastrophic climate change. Setting aside the fact that we are still spewing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as the world burns and floods, the impacts of a warming climate are disproportionately borne by poor communities of color as evidenced in Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Jackson and elsewhere.

Guterres is doing what he can in using his position to lay blame precisely on the culprits, saying in his opening remarks to the UN General Assembly in New York recently, “It is high time to put fossil-fuel producers, investors, and enablers on notice. Polluters must pay.”

Guterres specifically touted the importance of taxing fossil-fuel companies to cover the damage they are causing in places like Pakistan. According to The Associated Press, “Oil companies in July reported unprecedented profits of billions of dollars per month. ExxonMobil posted three months profits of \$17.85 billion, Chevron of \$11.62 billion, and Shell of \$11.5 billion.”

Contrast this windfall with the countless numbers of people who lost their homes in Pakistan and are now living in shanties on roads where they have found some high-

er ground from the floods. “If you lose a crop, that’s seasonal damage, but if you lose a house, you have to pay for years to come,” Kunbhar said.

Kunbhar’s view of what is happening in Pakistan applies equally to Puerto Rico and Jackson: Society is “divided between the haves and have-nots,” he said. “The poorest of the poor who are already facing an economic crisis from generation to generation, they are the most vulnerable and the [worst] victims of this crisis.”

In Puerto Rico, Varona sees displaced communities losing their lands to wealthier communities. He says the local government in Puerto Rico is “allowing millionaires and billionaires to come and pay no taxes and to actually take over many of the places that are safer for communities to be on.” This is an “almost intentional displacement of communities... that have historically lived here,” he says.

And in Jackson, Quiroz says she is aghast at the “mean-spiritedness” of Mississippi’s wealthier enclaves and state government. “It is so difficult to comprehend the way that our people are being treated.”

Although disparate and seemingly disconnected from one another, with many complicating factors, there are

stark lines connecting climate victims to fossil-fuel profits.

Pakistan’s poor communities are paying the price for ExxonMobil’s billions.

Puerto Rico remains in the dark so that Chevron may enjoy massive profits.

Jackson, Mississippi, has no clean drinking water so that Shell can enrich its shareholders.

When put in such terms, Guterres’ idea for taxing the perpetrators of climate devastation is a no-brainer. It’s “high time,” he said, “to put fossil-fuel producers, investors and enablers on notice,” so that we can end our “suicidal war against nature.” **Z**

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After the Deluge

By Derek Royden

In 1988 climatologist James Hansen announced, “Global warming has arrived.”

Now, 34 years later, it is painfully obvious that climate catastrophe has arrived.

Featuring scenes that have become more and more routine in recent years, summer in the northern hemisphere saw extreme heat and wildfires in many places, as well as torrential rains and colossal floods that washed away the products of human settlement in others. The worst hit by the latter, beginning in June, was Pakistan, where an agonizing humanitarian disaster put a third of the country under water and displaced 33 million people out of a population of 230 million.

At least 1,500 people died as a direct result of the flooding, including hundreds of children. Some 180 health-care facilities were so damaged that they no longer function, leaving many desperate people without access to basic care for themselves and their families.

It’s hard to wrap one’s mind around the disaster, one that will continue to cause suffering in the South Asian nation through things like agricultural losses and water-borne diseases after the waters begin to recede. Pakistan is the country with the most glaciers below the arctic circle, which logically will contrib-

ute to morphing an annual fresh melt-water blessing into a curse.

Pakistan is eighth in terms of the climate disaster impacts it has already felt and risks it faces. Showing how unfairly this emergency is likely to play out, the country is estimated to contribute less than one percent of world carbon emissions.

This crisis is not merely happening, it is accelerating.

Many celebrated pundits fill column inches and on-air time with calls for a new cold war with China to go along with ongoing hostilities in Ukraine, where negotiations seem ever less likely as Western and Russian arms manufacturers gleefully count their profits. None seem to connect the ravages of carbon emission-driven climate chaos with the massive carbon footprint of war and even preparing for war.

As always, the fact that the world's largest militaries are the greatest polluters on a warming planet is a missing part of the story; when it comes to climate change the focus is always on individual responsibility rather than on the business interests and large institutions like the U.S. military that are its main drivers.

Failing to face the roots of this planetary emergency—all the roots, not just the fan-

tasies such as electric vehicles for everyone—is why we seem to be circling the drain rather than seriously addressing what is obviously necessary.

The tragedy in Pakistan is a warning; we ignore it at our peril. **Z**

Derek Royden is a Canadian journalist.

At Least 66 Clinics in 15 States Have Ended Abortion Care Post-Dobbs

By Jessica Corbett

Since the U.S. Supreme Court gutted reproductive rights this summer, at least 66 clinics across 15 states have stopped offering abortion care, the Guttmacher Institute revealed recently.

“An already precarious abortion access landscape is likely to continue to deteriorate.”

The analysis builds on re-

search that the pro-choice institute conducted the month after June 24, when the high court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling reversed *Roe v. Wade*, leading to battles over both “trigger laws” and new bans on care.

In the first 100 days post-*Dobbs*, the number of clinics providing abortions across the 15 states studied dropped from 79 to 13, and all that continue to offer such care are in Georgia.

No clinics are currently offering abortion services in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia—which have all enacted bans since *Dobbs*. Meanwhile, providers in Wisconsin have halted abortions due to uncertainty about an 1849 ban.

“Altogether, these 15 states are home to almost 22 million women of reproductive age (aged 15-49), in addition to other people who may not identify as women but are capable of becoming pregnant and may need an abortion,” the analysis points out. “That means almost one-third (29%) of the total U.S. population of women of reproductive age are living in states where abortion is either unavailable or severely restricted.”

“Even before *Roe* was overturned, getting an abortion was difficult or outright impossible for many people, especially those who were already facing steep barriers to accessing healthcare, including people with low incomes, Black and Brown people, immigrants, young people, those with disabilities and rural populations,” the report acknowledges. “These inequities are likely to worsen as clinic-based abortion care disappears in many states.”

The analysis—which does not include data on doctor offices and hospitals that provided abortions before *Dobbs*—also warns that “an already precarious abortion access landscape is likely to continue to deteriorate,” with the institute's state legislative tracking predicting “26 states are certain or likely to ban abortion within a year of *Roe* being overturned.”

As *The 19th* reported: “In Ohio and Indiana, courts have blocked the states' respective six-week and near-total abortion bans. Near-total bans remain blocked in Utah and Wyoming. And state courts in South Carolina and Iowa have not allowed six-week bans to take effect.

“All of those cases are being actively litigated.

“Meanwhile, lawmakers in other states may push to enact more punitive restrictions.

In Nebraska, the governor attempted to call back the Legislature to pass some form of abortion ban but reportedly fell three shy of the number of votes needed to pass a 12-week abortion ban. Florida is currently banning abortion for people after 15 weeks of pregnancy, but the Legislature is expected to debate a stricter ban in the coming year.”

“The number of clinics providing abortion care will get lower,” Rachel Jones, principal research scientist at Guttmacher, told the outlet. “The number of clinics that will have to shutter completely is going to increase.”

Jones highlighted that anti-choice laws can impact clinics even if they are ultimately overturned.

“It's not just a matter of, ‘Oh, we'll just close our doors because there's an abortion ban and we can reopen overnight if the ban is lifted,’” she explained. “All this off and on is very difficult for clinics to operate. They can't afford to keep staff on hand.”

The institute researchers found that of the 66 clinics identified where abortion is no longer offered, 40 still provide other healthcare services while 26 have fully shut down.

“This means people in these communities are not going to have access to contraceptive

care, STI [sexually transmitted infection] testing and treatment, and pregnancy care, which some of these facilities that closed completely were offering,” Jones told *USA TODAY*.

Abortion restrictions burden not only patients seeking services in their states but also providers—and thus, patients—in states where care is still allowed, the Guttmacher report stresses.

“Individuals who can no longer obtain an abortion from a clinic in these states are now forced to travel to another state for abortion care (facing additional direct and indirect costs associated with travel logistics, child care and time off work), self-manage their abortion, or continue their pregnancy (and accept the significant associated health risks),” the analysis states.

Citing anecdotes of providers in pro-choice states “being inundated” with patients who can't get care closer to home, the report adds that “dramatic increases in case-loads mean clinic capacity and staff are stretched to their limits, resulting in longer wait times for appointments even for residents of states where abortion remains legal.”

According to *USA TODAY*: “Demand for the procedure at a Planned Parenthood clinic in southern Illinois, where

abortion remains legal, has “really just exploded” since the Supreme Court’s ruling, said Dr. Colleen McNicholas, chief medical officer for Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri, which operates the facility just miles away from St. Louis and also has plans for a mobile clinic in Illinois.

Pregnant patients who used to get an appointment in two or three days now can wait up to three weeks, even with the clinic ramping up to ten-hour days six days a week. “Folks are coming from all over the country for this care,” she said, with the Illinois clinic experiencing a 435% increase in patients from beyond Illinois and Missouri between June and September.”

Guttmacher’s findings were released about a month before the U.S. midterm elections, when voters will weigh in on some state-level ballot measures on abortion rights and determine whether Democrats retain control of both chambers of Congress.

Several congressional Republicans, led by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), have vowed to pursue a federal ban on abortion if the GOP wins majorities in the House and Senate. **Z**

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Brazil’s Election Will Have Enormous Effects on Climate Crisis

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, the eyes of the world were focused on Brazil’s presidential election recently, which pitted incumbent Jair Bolsonaro, a divisive far right populist, against former leftist president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had served years in prison on charges of money laundering and corruption in a controversial trial. Neither candidate managed to win more than 50 percent of the vote, so there is going to be a runoff election at the end of the month. Why does Brazil’s election matter so much to the world?

Noam Chomsky: A century ago, Brazil was declared to be “the Colossus of the South,” set to lead the hemisphere along with “the Colossus of the North.” Since then, the northern Colossus has replaced Britain as the virtual ruler of the world, extending its power far beyond

the dreams of what is now Washington’s junior partner. The southern Colossus has stumbled. It is important to understand how.

In the 1950s, decolonization was beginning, and the former colonial societies were not only seeking independence but also advances toward social justice and peaceful settlement of international disputes. The non-aligned movement was formed. Other initiatives were beginning. All of this was anathema to the U.S. and its imperial predecessors.

Brazil was part of the global effort under Kubitschek and in the early 1960s, Quadros and Goulart. The Kennedy administration was deeply concerned with these global developments, particularly in the traditional U.S. preserve in Latin America.

In 1962, in a decision of historical importance, JFK shifted the role of the Latin American military from “hemispheric defense” to “internal security,” meaning war against the population. The effects were graphically described by Kennedy-Johnson Director of Counterinsurgency Charles Maechling: The decision led to a shift from toleration “of the rapacity and cruelty of the Latin American military” to “direct complicity” in their crimes, to U.S. support for “the methods of

Heinrich Himmler’s extermination squads.”

A primary concern was Brazil, Latin America’s powerhouse. The JFK administration helped prepare the ground for a 1964 military coup that overthrew the flourishing Brazilian democracy shortly after Kennedy’s assassination.

The destruction of democracy was welcomed by Kennedy-Johnson Ambassador to Brazil Lincoln Gordon as a “democratic rebellion,” “a great victory for the free world” that should “create a greatly improved climate for private investments.” This democratic rebellion was “the single most decisive victory of freedom in the mid-twentieth century,” Gordon continued, “one of the major turning points in world history” in this period.

Gordon was right. The vicious military junta in Brazil was the first of the neo-Nazi terror-and-torture National Security States that then spread over Latin America, a plague that reached Central America under Reagan’s murderous regime.

By the 1980s, the plague was declining in South America, less under U.S. control. In Argentina and Uruguay, truth commissions exposed the horrors of the military regimes. Not in Brazil. The democratization process largely

evaded the topic, apart from a Church-based inquiry. The result is that many younger Brazilians are unaware of the terrible crimes, or not concerned. That enables a great admirer of the military regime like Bolsonaro to condemn the Brazilian generals for their “weakness”: They did not murder 30,000 people as their associates in Argentina did.

Plumbing the depths of depravity—a considerable achievement for this Trump admirer—when voting for the fraudulent impeachment of [Workers’ Party] Dilma Rousseff, Bolsonaro dedicated his vote to her torturer, the chief torturer of the junta.

All of this passes with little comment, something else we are more than familiar with in the U.S.

The crushing of Brazilian democracy was one stage of a much broader process that is one of the most important and least discussed features of modern history: beating back the efforts of the former colonies to find a place in the global system. That idea was utterly intolerable to the U.S., which led the western campaign to cut off this departure from good order, also virtually wiping it out of history.

Brazil resumed the process in the new century. It became one of the most respected and influential world powers

during Lula’s term in office (2003-2010), a “golden decade” in Brazil’s history in the eyes of the World Bank. Together with his Minister of Foreign Affairs Celso Amorim, Lula also led efforts to gain a voice for the Global South more generally. These positive developments went into reverse during the erratic and authoritarian Bolsonaro years.

The potential remains. The country has abundant resources that the world desperately needs. It is culturally and technologically advanced in many areas. It suffers under the Latin American curse of an ultra-privileged elite that has little commitment to the welfare of the country, a major reason for the sharp divergence in development between resource-rich Latin America and resource-poor East Asia in the past years, as economic historians have discussed.

Cooperating under leadership based on progressive popular movements, the two Colossi could be leading the world toward a brighter future. In a Trump-Bolsonaro alliance, they would be dragging the world to an abyss.

The most compelling immediate concern is the fate of the Amazon forests, mostly in Brazil. It has long been understood that if current trends persist, this core component

of the “lungs of the earth” will turn to savannah, unable to produce enough moisture to sustain itself. A major carbon sink that has been protecting all of us will turn to a carbon producer, impelling us toward catastrophe.

As in many other cases, the time scale of this tragedy has been severely underestimated. Brazilian researchers have shown that it has already begun to happen in some regions, which are reaching irreversible tipping points. The threat to survival has been sharply accelerated by Bolsonaro’s support for illegal logging, mining, agribusiness expansion, and destruction of native reserves and the many tribes that inhabit them. Formally, they are protected under laws that are being cast aside in the interests of short-term profit and power.

Though not of course confined to Brazil, the crime against humanity is particularly grave there because of the scale. And it is particularly critical right now because the fate of the Amazon, and all that it entails, will be decided on October 30, the runoff for the elections. A Bolsonaro victory would likely doom the Amazon. A Lula victory might be able to save it, averting a disaster for Brazil and a catastrophe for life on earth.

The good news is that in the

first round Lula came close to victory, much as polling had predicted. Collaboration with a center-left party rather close to Lula’s Workers’ Party would have led to victory. This and broader coalitions are now forming and might lead to victory on October 30.

The bad news is dual. Bolsonaro’s vote was far beyond what polling predicted, and his candidates swept other offices: governors and parliament particularly, meaning that Lula’s hands will be tied even if elected. The far right surge even included such monstrous figures as Ricardo Salles, the point man for Bolsonaro’s campaign to enrich the criminals who were destroying the Amazon under his watch.

A week later, an election will take place in the northern Colossus with similar stakes but of even greater import given power relations. The denialist party is poised to add Congress to its conquests. The most reactionary Supreme Court in memory is already firmly in its hands and is likely to grease the way to the campaign to turn the country into an Orbán-style “illiberal democracy” where a minority party of the far right will be able to maintain power and drive the country to an extremist Christian nationalism. None of this is at all concealed.

That grotesque outcome will, in fact, not matter much as environmental destruction goes out of control under the hands of those dedicated to enhancing corporate profits whatever the human consequences.

In answer to the question, there is a fateful week ahead.

Opinion surveys had shown Lula leading Bolsonaro by more than 10 percentage points, but the race turned out to be much tighter than anticipated and, in fact, Bolsonaro swept the state and senate races. What happened?

We have to withhold judgment until the facts are in. One possibility is that what happened is similar to what has been studied in depth in the U.S.

In both counties, the huge evangelical vote is by now fairly solidly in the hands of the far right and its propaganda messages about the fires of hell if the accomplice of the devil triumphs. In the U.S., that traces back to the GOP campaigns of the 1970s to shift to “culture wars” to gain political power.

Trump voters regard pollsters as part of the hated elite that is supposedly leading the “Great Replacement” and grooming children for sexual perversion (not an exaggeration of current right-wing discourse) and therefore do not respond to them accurately.

ly if at all. That is very likely a factor in Brazil as well. There may well be studies of the matter, but I don’t know of them.

Another factor is suggested by the fact that many of the right-wingers elected seem to be little known, meaning that voters may have not even been aware of their programs—a fact familiar in the U.S. as well, as extensively documented. Pre-election, Bolsonaro was lavishly distributing state funds to potential voters, using a mysterious “secret budget” of public funds, possibly supplemented by private funds from wealthy supporters in Brazil and the U.S. What was the impact? We can surmise, but do not know.

What we do know is that the stakes are very high.

The election campaign was marked by a series of violent incidents between supporters of Bolsonaro and Lula, and it’s highly unlikely that the climate will be different now that the two candidates are heading to second round. What’s the main cause of the extreme polarization that characterizes contemporary Brazilian society?

I should defer here to people who know far more about Brazil than I do.

Some aspects of the polarization are not obscure. One was already mentioned. The

polarization goes far back. Inequality is deeply rooted. A very rich mostly white minority lives in luxury not far from miserable slums, where people lack access even to food and water. Furthermore, the rich have little commitment to the society. They evade taxes, export their capital, import luxury goods and have second homes in Paris—a pattern increasingly familiar in the U.S. after 40 years of the brutal class war misleadingly framed in terms of market worship.

On the surface, Brazil gives the impression of a well-functioning multiracial society, far more so than the U.S. That’s on the surface. Behind the veil, the white rulers are deeply racist and have harsh class prejudice. One reason for their contempt for Lula, scarcely concealed, is that he is a mere industrial worker lacking formal education. Not the “right kind of person” to be in the presidential palace. Even a white face doesn’t protect him from the contempt, in his case class-based, and deepened by his initiatives at social inclusion of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous communities as well as social welfare for the undeserving poor. Again, the resonances in the U.S. are too obvious to discuss.

The polarization may be taking sharper forms today,

as is happening in much of the world, but it is drawing from social pathology that runs deep.

Bolsonaro has long raised doubts about Brazil’s electoral process. Is it likely that he might refuse to go if he loses the runoff vote at the end of the month, especially with his party having the most seats in both chambers of the congress? How far will Brazil’s military back him?

We can speculate idly or devote our efforts to restricting the possibilities. Brazil is not the U.S., but the questions are not unfamiliar there. Both countries are awash in guns, a recent phenomenon in Brazil as Bolsonaro has opened the arsenals, overwhelmingly to his supporters. There are heavily armed militias that control areas that are barely accessible to the police. Civilian control of the military, and the major police forces, is less firmly institutionalized than in the U.S.—where questions also arise.

In the U.S., large parts of Republican voters have called for violence if it is necessary to “save the country” from the devils intent on destroying the white race, Christianity, the family.... There are similar elements in Brazil. Both countries are plagued by demagogues with the talent to tap the ugliest currents that rot the society from below.

They are visible, prominent, influential, close to power.

If power is allowed to fall into their hands, we will be facing the nightmare of a Western Hemisphere in the hands of the two Colossi bent on driving to world to destruction.

Optimism of the Will

Noam Chomsky interviewed by C.J. Polychroniou

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).

[The following is excerpted in shortened form from Chapter 9 of *Notes on Resistance* by Noam Chomsky and David Barsamian, published by Haymarket Books.]

David Barsamian: What we are facing is often described as unprecedented—a pandemic, climate catastrophe and, always lurking off center stage, nuclear annihilation. Three of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Noam Chomsky: I can add a fourth: the impending destruction of what remains of American democracy and the shift of the United States toward a deeply authoritarian, also proto-fascist, state, when the Republicans come back into office, which looks likely. So, that's four horses.

And remember that the Re-

publicans are the denialist party, committed to racing to climate destruction with abandon in the hands of the chief wrecker they now worship like a demigod. It's bad news for the United States and for the world, given the power of this country.

Barsamian: *The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance just issued the Global State of Democracy Report 2021. It says that the United States is a country where democracy is "backsliding."*

Chomsky: Very severely. The Republican Party is openly dedicated—it's not even concealed—to undermining what remains of American democracy. They're working very hard on it. Since the days of Richard Nixon, the Republicans have long understood that they're fundamentally a minority party and not going to get votes by advertising their increasingly open commitment to the welfare of the ultrarich and the corporate sector. So, they've been long diverting attention to so-called cultural issues.

It began with Nixon's Southern strategy. He realized that Democratic Party support for civil rights legislation, however limited, would lose them the southern Democrats, who were openly

and overtly extreme racists. The Nixon administration capitalized on that with their Southern strategy, hinting, not so subtly, that the Republicans would become the party of white supremacy.

In subsequent years, they picked up other issues. It's now the virtual definition of the party: so, let's run on attacking Critical Race Theory—whatever that means. It's a cover term, as their leading spokesmen have explained, for everything they can rally the public on: white supremacy, racism, misogyny, Christianity, anti-abortion rights.

Meanwhile, the leadership, with the aid of the right-wing Federalist Society, has been developing legal means—if you want to call it that—for the Republicans to ensure that, even as a minority party, they will be able to control the voting apparatus and the outcome of elections. They are exploiting radically undemocratic features built into the constitutional system and the structural advantages Republicans have as a party representing more scattered rural populations and the traditionally Christian, white nationalist population. Using such advantages, even with a minority of the vote, they should be able to maintain something like near-permanent power.

Actually, that permanence might not last long if Don-

ald Trump, or a Trump clone, takes the presidency in 2024. It's not likely then that the United States, not to speak of the world, will be able to escape the impact of the climate and environmental destruction they're committed to accelerating.

Barsamian: *We all saw what happened in Washington on January 6th. Do you see the possibility of civil unrest spreading? There are multiple militias across the country. Representative Paul Gosar of the great state of Arizona and Representative Lauren Boebert, of the great state of Colorado, among others, have made threatening statements inciting violence and hatred. The Internet is rife with conspiracy theories. What must we do?*

Chomsky: It is very serious. In fact, maybe a third or so of Republicans think it may be necessary to use force to "save our country," as they put it. "Save our country" has a clear meaning. If anyone didn't understand it, Trump issued a call to people to mobilize to prevent the Democrats from swamping this country with criminals being let out of jails in other lands, lest they "replace" white Americans and carry out the destruction of America. The "great replacement" theory—

that's what "take away our country" means and it's being used effectively by proto-fascist elements, Trump being the most extreme and most successful.

What can we do about it? The only tools available, like it or not, are education and organization. There's no other way. It means trying to revive an authentic labor movement of the kind that, in the past, was in the forefront of moves toward social justice. It also means organizing other popular movements, carrying out educational efforts to combat the murderous anti-vaccine campaigns now going on, making sure that there are serious efforts to deal with the climate crisis, mobilizing against the bipartisan commitment to increase dangerous military spending and provocative actions against China, which could lead to a conflict nobody wants and end up in a terminal war.

You just have to keep working on this. There is no other way.

Barsamian: *In the background is extreme inequality, which is off the charts. Why is the United States so unequal?*

Chomsky: A lot of this has happened in the last 40 years as part of the neoliberal assault on America in which the Democrats, too, have participated, though not to the ex-

tent of the Republicans.

There is a fairly careful estimate of what's called the transfer of wealth from the lower 90% of the population to the top 1% (actually, a fraction of them) during the four decades of this assault. A RAND Corporation study estimated it as close to \$50 trillion. That's not pennies—and it's ongoing.

During the pandemic, the measures that were taken to save the economy from collapse led to the further enrichment of the very few. They also sort of maintained life for so many others, but the Republicans are busy trying to dismantle that part of the deal, leaving only the part that enriches the very few. That's what they're dedicated to.

Take ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council. This goes back years. It's an organization funded by almost the entire corporate sector, dedicated to hitting at the weak point in the constitutional system, the states. It's very easy. It doesn't take much to buy or impel legislative representatives at the state level, so ALEC has worked there to impose legislation that will foster the long-term efforts of those seeking to destroy democracy, increase radical inequality, and destroy the environment.

And one of the most im-

portant of those efforts is to get the states to legislate that they can't even investigate—and certainly not punish—wage theft, which steals billions of dollars from workers every year by refusing to pay overtime as well as through other devices. There have been efforts to investigate it, but the business sector wants to stop them.

An analog at the national level is the attempt to ensure that the IRS not go after wealthy corporate tax cheats. At every level you can think of, this class war on the part of the masters, the corporate sector, the super-rich is raging with intensity. And they're going to use every means they can to ensure that it goes on until they've succeeded in destroying not only American democracy, but the very possibility of survival as an organized society.

Barsamian: Corporate power seems unstoppable. The uber class of gazillionaires—Jeff Bezos, Richard Branson, and Elon Musk—are now flying into outer space. But I'm reminded of something that the novelist Ursula K. Le Guin said some years ago: "We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable." And then she added, "So did the divine right of kings."

Chomsky: So did slavery. So

did the principle that women are property, which lasted in the United States until the 1970s. So did laws against miscegenation so extreme that even the Nazis wouldn't accept them, which lasted in the United States until the 1960s.

All kinds of horrors have existed. Over time, their power has been eroded but never completely eliminated. Slavery was abolished, but its remnants remain in new and vicious forms. It's not slavery, but it's horrifying enough. The idea that women are not persons has not only been formally overcome, but to a substantial extent in practice, too. Still, there's plenty to do. The constitutional system was a step forward in the eighteenth century. Even the phrase "We the people" terrified the autocratic rulers of Europe, deeply concerned that the evils of democracy (what was then called republicanism) could spread and undermine civilized life. Well, it did spread—and civilized life continued, even improved.

So, yes, there are periods of regression and of progress, but the class war never ends, the masters never relent. They're always looking for every opportunity and, if they're the only participants in class struggle, we will indeed have regression. But they don't have to be, any

more than in the past.

Barsamian: In your Masters of Mankind book, you have an essay, "Can Civilization Survive Really Existing Capitalism?" You write, "Really existing capitalist democracy—RECD for short (pronounced 'wrecked')"—is "radically incompatible" with democracy and add that "it seems to me unlikely that civilization can survive really existing capitalism and the sharply attenuated democracy that goes along with it. Could functioning democracy make a difference? Consideration of nonexistent systems can only be speculative, but I think there's some reason to think so." Tell me your reasons.

Chomsky: First of all, we live in this world, not in some world we would like to imagine. And in this world, if you simply think about the timescale for dealing with environmental destruction, it's far shorter than the time that would be necessary to carry out the significant reshaping of our basic institutions. That doesn't mean you have to abandon the attempt to do so. You should be doing that all the time—working on ways to raise consciousness, raise understanding, and build the rudiments of future institutions in the present society.

At the same time, the measures to save us from self-destruction will have to take place within the basic framework of existing institutions—some modification of them without fundamental change. And it can be done. We know how it can be done. Meanwhile, work should continue on overcoming the problem of RECD, really existing capitalist democracy, which in its basic nature is a death sentence and also deeply inhuman in its fundamental properties. So, let's work on that, and at the same time, ensure that we save the possibility of achieving it by overcoming the immediate and urgent crisis we face.

Barsamian: Talk about the importance of independent progressive media like Democracy Now! and Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting. And may I say, Alternative Radio? Publishers like Verso, Haymarket, Monthly Review, City Lights, and The New Press. Magazines like Jacobin, The Nation, The Progressive, and In These Times. Online magazines like TomDispatch, The Intercept, and ScheerPost. Community radio stations like KGNU, WMNF, and KPFB. How important are they in countering the dominant corporate narrative?

Chomsky: What else is going to counter it? They are the ones holding up the hope that we'll be able to find ways to counter these highly harmful, destructive developments we're discussing.

The core method is, of course, education. People have to come to understand what's happening in the world. That requires the means to disseminate information and analysis, opening up opportunities for discussion, which you're not going to find, for the most part, in the mainstream. Maybe occasionally at the margins. A lot of what we've been talking about is not discussed at all, or only marginally within the major media. So, these conversations have to be brought to the public through such channels. There is no other way.

Actually, there is another way: organization. It is possible and, in fact, easy to conduct educational and cultural programs inside organizations. That was one of the major contributions of the labor movement when it was a vibrant, lively institution, and one of the main reasons why President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were so determined to destroy labor, as they both did. Their first moves were attacks on the labor movement.

There were educational and cultural programs that brought people together to think about the world, to understand it, and develop ideas. It takes organization to do that. Doing that alone, as an isolated person, is extremely difficult.

Despite the corporate effort to beat back the unions, there was a lively, independent labor press in the United States as late as the 1950s, reaching lots of people, condemning the “bought priesthood,” as they called it, of the mainstream press. It took a long time to destroy that.

There’s a history in the United States of a vibrant, progressive labor press that goes back to the nineteenth century, when it was a major phenomenon. That can and should be revived as part of the revival of a militant, functioning labor movement at the forefront of progress toward social justice. It happened before and it can happen again. And independent media are a critical element of this.

When I was a kid in the 1930s and early 1940s, I could read Izzy Stone in the *Philadelphia Record*. It wasn’t the major journal in Philadelphia, but it was there. In the late 1940s, I could read him in the New York newspaper *PM*, which was an independent journal. It made a huge difference.

Later, the only way to read Stone was to subscribe to his newsletter. That was the independent media in the 1950s. In the 1960s, it began to pick up a little bit with the magazine *Ramparts*, radio programs like Danny Schechter’s on WBCN in Boston, and others like it.

And today, this continues around the country. The ones you mentioned are forces for independence, for thinking.

Barsamian: There are multiple mentions of Antonio Gramsci in two of your most recent books, Consequences of Capitalism and Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal—specifically, of his comment, “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” Right now, though, the quote of his I’d like you to address is: “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” Talk about his relevance today and the meaning of that quote.

Chomsky: Gramsci was a leading left labor activist in Italy around the late teens, early 1920s. He was very active in organizing left worker collectives. In Italy, the fascist government took over in the early 1920s. One of its

first acts was to send Gramsci to prison. During his trial, the prosecutor stated: we have to silence this voice. (This gets us back to the importance of independent media, of course.) So, he was sent to prison.

While there, he wrote his *Prison Notebooks*. He wasn’t silenced, though the public couldn’t read him. He continued the work he had begun and in that writing were the quotes you cited.

In the early 1930s, he wrote that the old world was collapsing, while the new world had not yet risen and that, in the interim, they were facing morbid symptoms. Mussolini was one, Hitler another. Nazi Germany almost conquered large parts of the world. We came very close to that. The Russians defeated Hitler. Otherwise, half the world would probably have been run by Nazi Germany. But it was very close. Morbid symptoms were visible everywhere.

The adage you quoted, “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will,” which became famous, came from the period when he was still able to publish. In his spirit, we must look at the world reasonably, without illusions, understand it, decide how to act, and recognize that there are grim portents. There are very dangerous things happening. That’s pessimism

of the intellect. At the same time, we need to recognize that there are ways out, real opportunities. So, we have optimism of the will, meaning, we dedicate ourselves to using all the opportunities available—and they do exist—while working to overcome the morbid symptoms and move toward a more just and decent world.

Barsamian: In these dark times, it’s difficult for many to feel that there’s a bright future ahead. You’re always asked, what gives you hope? And I have to ask you the same question.

Chomsky: One thing that gives me hope is that people are struggling hard under very severe circumstances, much more severe than we can imagine, all over the world to achieve rights and justice. They don’t give up hope, so we certainly can’t.

The other is that there’s simply no option. The alternative is to say, okay, I’ll help the worst to happen. That’s one choice. The other is to say, I’ll try to do the best I can, what the farmers in India are doing, what poor and miserable peasants in Honduras are doing, and many others like them around the world. I’ll do that as best I can. And maybe we can get to a decent world in which people can

feel that they can live without shame. A better world.

That’s not much of a choice, so we should be able to easily make it. **Z**

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Europe as Global Oil Cartel?

By Jack Rasmus

Recently, the European Commission, the umbrella political organization for the European Union (EU) nations, issued its latest set of sanctions on Russia.

The most important of the

measures was the announcement that the EU was establishing a price cap for purchases of Russian crude oil in global markets. In so doing, the EU in effect plans to become a cartel controlling the price of global oil.

Saudi Arabia and even OPEC in the past failed as a cartel to control the price of global crude by controlling its supply. Yet the EU believes it can become a cartel and control the price of oil even globally even without influence over global supply.

Under the plan, which still requires the approval of all EU economies, the EU will not buy Russian oil at global prices set by market supply and demand. Instead, it will buy Russian oil only at a price that is capped below that of the global market. Reportedly the participants in the Commission discussed a price per barrel of crude capped around \$55-\$60 a barrel. EU economies will purchase Russian crude only if it is sold to them at or below their “cap.”

The plan, if approved, will go into effect this December 2022.

The idea of the west setting a price cap on Russian oil as a form of sanction originated with Janet Yellen, Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, some months ago. It was an economically absurd proposition then, and remains no less so

today. The price cap may not prove effective, but it does illustrate the ineffectiveness of sanctions to date on Russian oil and energy products (i.e. natural gas, uranium ore for Europe commercial nuclear facilities, etc.).

Global oil is traded (bought and sold) in the global market solely in U.S. dollars. So too are other critical industrial commodities and many agricultural commodities. The main focus of U.S. sanctions, including the price cap idea, is to deny the target country—in this case Russia—access to revenue in dollars from the sale of its oil. Theoretically, the loss of dollars from lower-priced oil sales means Russia won't be able to purchase as much needed imports critical for its economy in general and its war effort in particular. The lack of dollars in turn further means, again theoretically, Russia would have to print more of its own currency, the Ruble, to make up for lack of dollars in its own economy. That might lead to inflation as excess money supply is created for the domestic Russian economy. In turn, excess money supply creation in Russia might lead to devaluation to domestic inflation and devaluation of the Ruble.

U.S. initial sanctions on Russian oil and energy to date have largely failed. Rus-

sia's export revenue from the sale of oil has actually risen since sanctions and war began last February. Russia has sold more oil to China, India, and at least half of the world economies that have been ignoring U.S./EU announced sanctions altogether.

The EU "price cap" idea is supposedly going to do what oil sanctions up to now, which have been full of loopholes and exemptions, have failed to do—i.e. reduce Russian revenue from oil sales and its accumulation of dollars from those sales.

It is important to note that the EU itself has all but ignored sanctions on Russian oil to date. Russia has continued to ship oil to Europe. And the EU hasn't even bothered to enforce sanctions on Russian natural gas imports or uranium ore shipments. What reduction in oil and natural gas shipments to Europe that has occurred, has been mostly due to political actions not sanctions. Last spring the Nordstream2 pipeline was quickly closed and more recently sabotaged. So too was the Nordstream1 pipeline. Prior to sabotage, Nord1 gas flow to Europe was reduced in stages by Russia to about only 30% of capacity. It wasn't sanctions but a decision by Russia that reduced the gas exports. There are two remaining large gas pipe-

lines from Russia to Europe still functioning. One crosses the Ukraine and another transverse Turkey and the Aegean Sea into the Balkans. Europe has not tried to reduce gas flow from these with sanctions, although it is likely politics will result in their reduction and shutdown as well eventually.

But to the extent Russian natural gas flow to Europe has been reduced, the causes have been political and have had nothing to do with sanctions. So sanctions on Russian energy exports to Europe have hardly been implemented, let alone been effective. The EU price cap idea is supposed to finally result in sanctions on Russian oil sales and revenue.

Sanctions on exports to Europe and the U.S. of Russian industrial commodities have also been rife with exemptions, loopholes and workarounds. In the U.S., for example, Russian nickel and palladium exports needed for catalytic converters in U.S. autos and in steel production have been significantly exempted. The U.S. some time ago implemented sanctions on Russian oil imports to the U.S. The amounts of Russian oil imports were quite small. In any event, the U.S.—unlike Europe—has a glut of excess oil and natural gas.

Russia has been earning significant export revenues

therefore from the sale of its oil, natural gas, as well as many industrial commodities, ever since the U.S./EU sanctions regime was first imposed last January 2022. The "price cap" is but the latest desperate attempt by the U.S. and EU to make the sanctions on Russian oil to Europe "work." But it won't work. Here's why:

First, the price cap is not going to take effect until December (if at all even then since all the EU nations must agree). So why should Russia even bother selling any oil to Europe in the interim. In business contract matters, if one party notifies the other it is breaking its contract and is no longer going to buy from the seller, that seller can simply cancel its contracts early and not wait until December. Russia will likely therefore cut off its oil exports to Europe sooner rather than later, and just redirect the oil elsewhere to China, India or rest of the world. No need for sanctions of any kind in other words.

But the price cap sanctions idea involves not just the EU buying Russian oil. The price cap is really the U.S./EU foray into what's called "secondary sanctions." That is, sanctions on other economies around the world. Up to now, the U.S. has been careful about enforcing sanctions

or penalties on other countries that refuse to go along with sanctions to date—and there are many such examples of economies that have been refusing to participate in sanctions. After all, if the Europeans themselves have allowed various exemptions to oil, gas, and commodities exports from Russia, why should other countries abide by the sanctions?

And there's another even better reason why China, India and so many other countries globally have continued to buy Russian oil: Russia reportedly is selling its oil at around a 30% discount from the global market price.

The global market price today is around \$80-\$85 a barrel, depending on if it's west Texas crude or Brent (North-sea) oil. So Russia's 30% discount means it's selling at around \$50-\$60 a barrel now. If the EU is talking about setting a price cap at \$55, what's the point? It would have to set a cap even lower than it's been discussing. But EU won't be getting any Russian oil after December if Russia decides to turn off what little is still flowing there, as it responds to the price cap threat. And if the EU is not getting any Russian oil but it's demanding the rest of the world economies adhere to the price cap, who believes the rest of the world is going to take that seriously.

EU has nothing to lose from a price cap; but the rest of the world does.

Regardless of any EU artificially set price cap on global oil, should China, India and other countries support the idea just because the U.S. and EU say so. Should they cancel their long term oil contracts with Russia at 30% discount from global market prices because the U.S. and EU say so? Buyers of oil and energy in global markets want price stability and reliable delivery. Russian oil provides that stability. The idea of a price cap means potential instability. And who would trust an arbitrary price cap set by Europe and the U.S. as a bureaucratic political directive?

The whole idea of a price cap as a form of sanction set by EU/U.S. by directive is absurd. Few if any will follow. But such is the arrogance of western imperialism to think they still have the power to enact and enforce such a measure. Perhaps in decades past. But no longer.

But the EU and U.S. think they have an "ace" up their sleeve that will enable them to impose a price cap on the rest of the world: most of the shipping insurance companies are based almost exclusively in the west. What the price cap may have in mind is if other countries don't follow the cap, then the ship-

ping insurers won't insure the ships that carry the Russian oil. That would stop the shipment of Russian oil to those countries not following the price cap. The price cap thus is designed to function as a form of indirect "secondary sanction" on countries that don't go along with the oil sanctions.

Europe is not the real target of the price cap proposal. It will get its oil from the U.S. which will provide much of what Europe needs, albeit at a higher price than the alternative Russian oil. There's no price cap on U.S. oil; just Russian in the EU proposal.

Stopping the flow of Russian oil to other countries by means of a price cap combined with shipping insurance denial will likely result in a shift toward alternative shipping not located in the west. That means a loss of profits for western oil shipping companies. This has not been lost on Greek, Cyprus and Malta shipping companies who spoke out at the recent EU meeting discussing price caps. They are opposed to the price cap idea for good reason.

To sum up: the idea that the EU can become a global price setting cartel in the world oil market is absurd. What OPEC couldn't do on the supply side, Europe cannot do on the demand side. Cartels only

work if all parties go along, and China, India and the rest of the world simply will ignore and not go along with Europe thinking they can set an arbitrary price of global crude below its market price.

The EU's recent announcement of new sanctions went beyond just the "price cap" idea. It also announced new sanctions on Russian imports to EU of steel, paper, machinery, appliances, chemicals, plastics and other items. But wait. Weren't these already sanctioned? If there's now need for further sanctions on imports of these Russian products, that means sanctions on industrial commodities to date were also full of exemptions and loopholes all along.

China, India, Brazil and other emerging market economies are distrustful of U.S./EU sanctions to date and justifiably so. That will be especially true of the arbitrary price cap on Russian oil idea. It will be viewed as not imposing much of a cost on Europe, but likely destabilizing world oil markets' supply and price.

But perhaps they shouldn't worry that much. The price cap idea is unworkable, probably won't be supported by all the EU, and carries with it the smell of secondary sanctions by another name, as well as the stink of arro-

gant western imperialism. **Z**

We Need a Green Wave

By Paul Street

The arch-patriarchal Christian fascist war on abortion that rose to new Hellish heights after the United States Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision reversed a prior Court's historic 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling last June is a monumentally significant issue in and in of itself. It is unleashing despicable horror on women, girls, and medical professionals across the nation.

Things have only gotten worse for women and girls since that piece was published and the terror is not limited to pregnant and potentially pregnant people. The damage and dread spread by *Dobbs* encompasses doctors and other medical professionals trying to negotiate a perilous, literally sickening new legal landscape where physicians have to consult lawyers before taking actions to save patients from harm and death. It extends to

patients whose care is now compromised even in relation to conditions not involving pregnancy. As abortion rights activists chant: "right to life, that's a lie; they don't care if women die."

The women-hating Republi-fascists' war on *Roe* has always been about right to birth, not "right to life." Once poor and working-class women's unwanted babies take their first breaths outside the womb (the real beginning of life, by the way), the nation's rightmost major party couldn't care less about the newborns' subsequent life prospects and circumstances. The "Republicans" are dedicated enemies of adequate social protection, schooling, and care. They viciously denounce and demonize as supposedly evil "socialism" the supports poor families and children desperately need to "thrive" in this savagely separate and unequal nation. How darkly perfect is it that the nation's mostly virulently anti-abortion states are also the U.S. states that grant the least in the way of social welfare for poor and working class kids and families—and that they are the states with the nation's highest (globally scandalous) rates of maternal and infant mortality?

Republi-fascist Gile-

ad

But let's keep in mind the wider political context of the Republi-Handmaid attack on women and girls. The same people inflicting this sexist horror are also waging interrelated and overlapping wars on Black civil rights, immigrant rights, worker rights, gay rights, transgender rights, voting rights, livable ecology, science, truth, intellectual freedom, and the right to teach our children real and non-racist history. From Donald Trump, Tucker Carlson, Amy Coney-Barrett and Clarence Thomas down to the state-level policymakers who are criminalizing "critical race theory" (real American history with racial oppression included) and imposing forced motherhood, these malevolent fossil fascists want to bring back the Jim Crow era, mass book-burning, Native American genocide, old-age poverty for the non-affluent, and uncontrolled air and water pollution. These racist and woman-hating Republi-fascists would like to set up concentration camps for the homeless and poor. They want to turn the country into a Hobbesian shooting gallery where mass-homicidal assault rifles are a household staple. They advocate right-wing political violence to the point of civil war and are de-

liberately scheming to cancel popular votes in the 2024-25 presidential election. They want to accelerate the process of turning the planet into a giant Greenhouse Gas Chamber—a crime beyond anything Hitler imagined.

Remember: Margaret Atwood's remarkable dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* portrays an ecologically devastated and sexist future in which forced-birth motherhood is part of a violent arch-racist and fascist takeover of the United States. (Contrary to childish liberal and faux-radical arguments made against wearing Handmaid costumes at abortion rights rallies, Black women are absent from the novel not because of any racism on Atwood's part but because the novel's plot involves the prior fascist racial and ethnic cleansing of the nation's non-white population).

Today's "Gilead" (the name of Atwood's fictional fascist state) proponents aren't just about going back to the pre-*Roe* years. Supreme Court "justice" Amy Coney Barrett—a real-life Handmaid in the Christian fascist cult People of Praise—is part of a movement for which undoing *Roe v. Wade* is only the beginning. Just read the revanchist ogre "justice" Sam Alito's *Dobbs v. Jackson* de-

cision. It questions the rights to contraception, same sex love and marriage, and interracial marriage. It challenges any right not enumerated in the nation's original 18th Century charter. It cites the 17th Century British jurist Matthew Hale, who ordered the execution of two women for witchcraft and wrote a treatise backing marital rape.

Today's Republi-fascist anti-abortionists are not your grandmother's right-to-lifers: they're determined to roll back the clock on every human and social right they can get their filthy Christo-Hitlerian hands on. These election-denying and vote-cancelling cretins want to replace the bourgeois-democratic era with a new, explicitly authoritarian form of white nationalist rule advancing strict Social Darwinian and patriarchal hierarchy in the lawless name of law and order.

Look at the other decisions the absurdly far right Alioto-Coney Barrett-Kavanaugh-Gorsuch-Thomas Court handed down last session. It rolled back arrestees' Miranda rights. It rolled back gun safety in the wake of two egregious mass shootings. It crippled Indian Country's right to prosecute non-Indigenous people on Native American lands. It limited the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) power

to regulate carbon emissions (even as fossil-capitalist global warming change was shown to be bringing us to the point of extinction faster than previously warned by climate scientists.) In its current term the Trump-Handmaid Court will take more power away from the EPA, further gut the already severely weakened Voting Rights Act, and likely rule (in *Moore v. Harper*) in favor of letting red (Republi-fascist) state legislatures nullify popular statewide presidential votes they don't like in 2024-25.

Nothing to get all "hysterical" about, right?

The Dems' Answer: "Roevenber"

All of which and more raises Lenin's famous question: What is to be done? The fascism-complicit/-enabling Democrats want us to believe that we can—what else?—vote ourselves out of this ugly mess. The solution, they say, of course, is a great "Blue Wave" at the ballot box. The wave, indeed "tsunami," is coming, they say, in less than one month in the November mid-term elections. And the secret to this coming supposed great electoral uprising of the people is, they claim, the *Dobbs* ruling.

This is quite seriously their

line: a great electoral "tsunami" reflecting a mass voter backlash against *Dobbs* will lead the Democrats to an historically rare mid-term elections victory for the party in White House power. Hence their reference to the coming elections as—get this—"Roevenber."

"Roevenber" is coming, the Democrats say, because a solid majority voted to keep the right to an abortion in the state constitution in a special referendum election held in the Republican state of Kansas last August.

After the "blue tsunami," the Dems claim, their party will deliver the restoration of abortion rights through federal legislation that codifies *Roe v. Wade*'s onetime constitutional protection of women's right to an abortion.

The counsel from the Dems is clear: we the people can win back the right to abortion in future elections if we "just mobilize to vote harder."

The Numbers vs. the Electoral Cargo Cult

With all due respect for my fellow Substacker, the brilliant liberal-leftish filmmaker Michael Moore, this is magical electoralist thinking on par with the cargo cults of the post-WWII South Pacific. At worst, it is cyni-

cal and manipulative bullshit that amounts to telling people to march into political quicksand.

The mid-terms are not remotely shaping up as a Democratic triumph driven by voter backlash against the *Dobbs* ruling. Joe Biden's low approval numbers, the high percentage of voters who say the country is "on the wrong track," and widespread popular concerns about inflation and the economy more broadly—there are classic indications of coming Democratic defeat only softened a bit by the *Dobbs* backlash

Always start with reality, head out of the sand. Here's the real deal: abortion ranks below other concerns including inflation, crime, jobs, immigration, voting rights, and infrastructure at the top of voters' minds on the eve of the elections. The Republi-fascists are likely to take back the U.S. House of Representatives and have a fighting chance of winning back a Senate majority. Of the 36 state governor offices up for election this fall, 14 are certain to be claimed by the Republi-fascist party and 3 (Georgia, Florida, and Alaska) are likely to go to the rightmost major party. Eleven governors' races are sure Democratic wins and three or four (Colorado, New Mexico,

Maine, and perhaps Kansas) are likely to go blue. Four governors' races (Oregon, Nevada, Nevada, and Wisconsin) are statistical toss-ups.

There is little basis for the Dems' claim that abortion rights backlash will permit them to avoid the longstanding historical pattern of the party in White House power losing the mid-term elections.

Sorry.

"What We Really Need is a Green Wave"

So give up? Not at all. Guess what: there's political struggle and impact beneath and beyond the savagely time-staggered candidate-centered major party big money ruling class quadrennial and biennial electoral extravaganzas that are disastrously sold to us as "politics"—the only politics that supposedly matters. A shout-out to the Chicago chapter of Rise Up 4 Abortion Rights (RU4AR), to the women of Latin America, and to thinking internationally, beyond the narrow horizons of the U.S. American "Election Madness." As RU4AR-Chi argues in a recent flyer handed out at the modestly attended Democratic Party-affiliated Women's March rally in my home

city's downtown Federal Plaza: "Pouring our energies into elections to restore abortion rights is a fool's errand. The same Christian fascist movement that overturned Roe is stripping voting rights state by state through gerrymandering and voter suppression. It is pursuing outright election nullification, which the Court is poised to greenlight in its new term. And even before all this, 'one person, one vote' has long been rigged against Black and Brown people and in favor of the nation's more reactionary, rural, and anti-abortion regions. Amidst this fascist assault on previously established electoral norms, relying on elections now to restore and expand abortion rights is like marching into quicksand... The call to rely on a 'Blue Wave' as the solution echoes the position of the Democratic Party and mainstream pro-choice 'leaders' who failed to call out the gross illegitimacy of the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision and who advised us in advance to adjust to the new normal of the 'post-Roe era.' We must face the truth that voting by itself will not stop this assault."

"...What we really need is a Green Wave!... Rise Up 4 Abortion Rights calls on you to take a page from our [social movement] sisters in Latin America, raise the

Green Bandanna of abortion rights, and get into the streets again and again [beneath and beyond the biennial and quadrennial major party candidate-centered electoral extravaganzas that are sold to as ‘politics, the only politics that matters’]. Their struggle lasted years, their commitment was unstoppable, and their passion drove them on [to victory in the protection of abortion rights in Mexico, Columbia, and Argentina]. YOUR righteous fury must fuel the society-wide, nonviolent but relentless sustained protest and resistance that, drawing in more and more people, can compel those in power to responds to our demand: Legal Abortion on Demand & Without Apology Everywhere.”

Full disclosure: I just gave a shout out to myself, in part. I am a volunteer with RU4AR and helped craft that statement—and those are my bracketed elaborations in the passage.

One addition: we now need to add the remarkable women’s uprising sparked in Iran by the state murder of Mahsa Amini to our list of international role models. Women and girls and their largely youthful supporters are currently heroically risking life and limb en masse to fight theocratic sexism-fascism in the streets and public squares

of Iran. And that’s why the RU4AR Chicago chapter’s best allies at the Women’s March demonstration two days ago were roughly 200 Iranian Americans who chanted “Women, Life, Freedom,” “Mahsa Amini Say Her Name,” and “One Solution, Revolution!”

Stand down from the cargo cult and get in the streets to shut shit down.

Step away from the electoral bong, Mr. Moore.

We need to go Iranian as well as Latin American against sexist Republi-fascism.

The System Was Already Rigged to the Right

What do my comrades and I mean by “even before all this, ‘one person, one vote has been rigged... in favor of the nation’s most reactionary, rural and anti-abortion regions”? Simply this: well before the latest right-wing assaults on voting rights, the U.S.-American elections and party system was already a Minority Rule regime tilted far to the right of majority U.S. public opinion. This is thanks to: the openly undemocratic Electoral College (which reduces U.S. presidential elections to a small handful of contest-

ed states while significantly over-representing the country’s rightmost voters and states); the absurdly mal-apportioned and powerful U.S. Senate (where low population rural, disproportionately white, and right wing states like Wyoming and Utah have the same number of representatives as high-population, diverse, urban and liberal states like California and New York); national majority-defying “states’ rights” (which grants remarkable policymaking power to politicians and voters far to the right of nationwide public policy opinion); the exaggerated power and influence of the absurdly right-wing and lifetime-appointed “Simon Says” Supreme Court, which has signed off on abject campaign finance plutocracy.

A Cynical Advance Surrender

What do we mean by “failed to call out the gross illegitimacy of the Dobbs decision”? Simply that:

- The Dems and their allied establishment “pro-choice” organizations (chiefly NARAL and Planned Parenthood) surrendered in advance to the well-tele-

graphed *Dobbs* ruling refusing to mobilize masses in the streets to send the desperately needed message to the Court and indeed to the whole national political and social order: that reversing women’s hard-won half-century constitutional right to control their own reproductive lives would lead to mass societal disruption (no more “business as usual”) combined with and reflecting a crisis of legitimacy both for the Court and for the broader U.S. social and political order.

- The Dems cynically looked forward to the *Dobbs* decision as the “voter backlash” key to their supposed ability to defy the usual historical pattern of the party in White House power losing the midterm elections—a remarkable statement of the Dems’ lack of a positive program for the people (!) and all-too-consistent with their reckless strategy of literally backing (supposedly “more beatable”) MAGA Republicans in this year’s intra-party primary elections.
- The Dems have per-

versely played along with the Court’s reactionary and disingenuous command to “return abortion policy to the states” by digging in with fantastic notions that blue “abortion sanctuary states” can save abortion access for millions of women and girls in the expanding number of prohibition states (they can’t). This complicity with “states’ rights” regression elides the crucial fact that the Republi-fascists are clearly gearing up for a national abortion ban.

More Reasons to Distrust the Dems on Abortion

There are more reasons to lack faith in the mythical “Blue Tsunami” as the fix for the war on abortion:

- The Dems had numerous opportunities to “codify Roe v. Wade as national law” over the last half-century and failed to act.
- Codifying *Roe* would require a frankly impossible two-thirds vote in the absurdly malapportioned, right-tilted U.S. Senate under that

body’s ridiculous reactionary filibuster rule.

- Even in this election year the (Democratic) Biden administration has refused to use the very real power at its disposal: to properly declare the accelerated war on abortion a national public health emergency; to open federal lands, military bases, and Veterans Administration hospitals to abortion providers; to pledge to prosecute those who would block the sending of abortion medications through the federal postal service. (This is a very underestimated point. Where is the mass pressure in the streets to make Biden act now? RU4AR demanded executive action from Biden outside the Supreme Court immediately after the *Dobbs* decision was announced. I was there.)
- The Democratic Party’s point person on abortion rights in the U.S. Senate is the center-right Tim Kaine (D-MD), a milquetoast “moderate” with a long “right-to-life” history.
- Biden has deigned to seriously call for the (entirely constitutional) enlargement of the

Supreme Court, who's current 6-3 right-wing composition is wildly out of skew with majority public opinion on abortion rights and numerous other key issues.

- The Dems show no sign of moving to abolish the arch-reactionary U.S. Senate filibuster rule, which blocks one piece of liberal legislation after another.
- The current Christian Fascist Court created by the Trump party's installation of three far-right Handmaid "justices" (Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Coney-Barrett) on top of the pre-existing far-right Supremes Thomas and Alito and the more moderate Republican Roberts) would likely shoot down any federal bill seeking to codify abortion as a national right.

The Gross Inflation of the Kansas Vote

Why question the Dems' claim that the pro-abortion Kansas referendum (last August) shows that "voting harder" is the path to restoring abortion right? Because the mid-term elections

are not single-issue policy referendums. They are candidate-centered partisan contests linked to a multiplicity of issues (with the state of the economy in the lead) insofar as they are about issues at all (millions of U.S. voters have long been led to mark ballots on the basis of incredibly shallow considerations related to their perception of superficial candidate qualities). At the same time, Kansas voters (and non-voters) were understandably confused about the strangely worded referendum's language and meaning. The vote drew heavily on libertarian anti-government sentiments against state control—something very different from a positive commitment to government-backed abortion rights. And the referendum vote was tied to a primary election, with much lower turnout than what takes place in general elections.

"Power Never Concedes Without a Demand"

There are broader historical reasons to reject reliance on the Dems and electoral politics. Frederick Douglass and Howard Zinn got it right. "Power," Douglass said in 1857, "concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress." (Here's the RU4AR demand, issued literally outside the Supreme Court just seconds after the Dobbs ruling was handed down, as right-lifers exploded in joy and liberals wept: "This decision must not stand, legal abortion on demand across the land and without apology!" Calling for anything less or for this sometime in the future—somewhere over the rainbow—is surrender. it's kind of pathetic, if you ask me.)

In United States history again and again, the rejection of submission and the setting of limits of tyranny have required refusal and transcendence of the magical doctrinal U.S.-American belief that, in the radical historian Zinn's critical words 14 years ago, "the most important act a citizen can engage in is to go to the polls and choose one of the two mediocrities who have already been chosen for us." This, Zinn wrote, "is a multiple-choice test so narrow, so specious, that no

self-respecting teacher would give it to students."

Beyond the nation's deeply flawed electoral process, Zinn rightly argued, "government, whether in the hands of conservatives or liberals, has failed its responsibilities, until forced to by direct action: sit-ins and Freedom Rides for the rights of black people, strikes and boycotts for the rights of workers, mutinies and desertions of soldiers in order to stop a war...Voting is easy and marginally useful, but it is a poor substitute for democracy, which requires direct action by concerned citizens."

Anyone who's waiting for a Blue Wave to carry us to freedom from forced birth fascism is pissing into the fierce winds of history. By all means vote, but what we need on the abortion issue above all is a giant Latin American style Green Wave and the fierce determination being shown by women in Iran right now. We cannot depend on politicians and elected officials. What we need is a great social movement beneath and beyond the holy killing confines of the U.S. election cycle, beyond the demobilizing religion of the ballot boss. We need a movement that doesn't just hope for but demands legal abortion across the land. And we need a movement that understands how the

right for abortion rights is both important in and of itself and part of refusing to accept the rise of a fascist America.

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