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## *Slamming China Won't Save Fossil Capitalism From Itself*



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Only the mentally impaired now doubt the reality of climate change. Only the ideologically blind question that human burning of fossil fuels has caused it. In just a few weeks, we had once-in-millennium floods in Germany and Belgium, a once-in-a-millennium heat wave in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia. Fires. Melting Arctic ice and permafrost. Mudslides in India. Floods in the New York City subway. Record floods in China, with a year's worth of rain falling in a single day in Zhengzhou.

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The planet is burning and the arsonists are in charge, as one environmentalist once observed. So in late June and early July, with extreme heat afflicting a quarter of the globe, it became clear that the time had come for the Biden government, and indeed every government, to end the burning of oil, gas and coal. Personally, I favor nationalizing the fossil fuel industry, that is, the wealth of the arsonists. Howsoever we phase it out, this termination needs to happen NOW. Or we as a species will likely not survive. What will come after homo sapiens? No doubt beings adapted to extreme heat, unlike us, with our lineage naturally selected during an ice age.

At the very least, it's time to slash fossil fuel subsidies. As for the aforementioned nationalizing of oil, gas and coal corporations in order to eliminate their product, desirable as this may be, history, unluckily, is against it. In the past, the U.S. has launched wars and invaded countries that threatened to nationalize fossil fuel companies. Think Iran in 1953 and the pandemonium caused by the western overthrow of that country's legally elected president: the shah, the torturers in Savak, the hostage crisis, the decades-long American attempt to get even for it, the disastrous election of Reagan and all the evils of hyper-capitalism that flowed from that. Just the hint of such a nationalization is a casus belli for U.S. elites. And it's likely they knowingly and willfully refuse to put two and two together regarding control of fossil fuel companies and our collapsing climate. Even if they did, U.S. politicians, plutocrats and corporate titans would probably rather die, felled by extreme weather, than turn oil companies over to the state. And at the rate we're going, they will get their wish.

The \$3.5 trillion budget plan making its way through congress would be the perfect vehicle – especially if widely imitated by other countries – in which to transport our species through the climate change storm. Its best feature is a clean energy standard that zeros out carbon emissions by a certain date, which makes humanity's survival chances tick up dramatically. Such a standard penalizes utilities that don't meet clean energy targets, according to Bloomberg on July 15. This is an excellent move. Maybe the only one. Because what else have the bold Dems done? Included a tax on imports from countries “that lack aggressive climate change policies” according to the New York Times on July 14. The EU has a similar carbon border tax. This, folks, is lame.

“The two actions in concert suggest that government leaders are turning toward trade policy as a way to attack climate change,” the Times said. Heaven forbid our rulers should assault the culprits. No, no. That makes too much sense. Besides, what's good for Exxon is good for the U.S...er, or it used to be. Whatever, our government is congenitally

incapable of going after oil companies. So instead, our fearless leaders are...bashing China to save capitalism from itself!

My guess is that China will address climate change on its own. Chinese leaders know their country has become the world's leading carbon emitter (a distinction that until recently belonged to the U.S., which now claims second polluting place), and they already produce more solar panels than anybody else on the globe. They also possess 60 percent of the world's rare earth mineral resources and process over 90 percent of them – both vital to any green energy transition. Chances are China will continue to fund the shift to green energy, with or without taxes from the west. It's just good business. And China, as an astonished and wounded U.S. has discovered, is very good at business.

The Dems' bill will include "tax breaks for wind, solar and other renewable energy, as well as electric vehicles," the Times reports. There's also a methane reduction fee and "funding for civilian climate corps...the plan does not specify how much money will be allocated to the various programs." That, alas, depends on one senator: Joe "I Just Don't give a Shit" Manchin, the one-man roadblock on homo sapiens' path to surviving the climate catastrophe. I guess he doesn't care that for future generations ravaged by hurricanes, floods, killer heat waves, and continent-sized wildfires, his name, along with those of most GOP senators, will live in infamy. But he needs to get that memo.

Meanwhile, the question of the hour is, are the Dems serious about maintaining a habitable climate for humans? If so, their valor defending the proposed clean energy standard would trump their eagerness to show that they're good little soldiers in the tussle the Pentagon wants with China. Those of us wondering, waited with baited breath.

Well, on July 19, the other shoe dropped. Taxing imports from polluting countries (read: China), the Times announced that our brave Dem lawmakers propose, would proceed "regardless of whether Congress passed new laws to reduce emissions created by the United States." Pardon me for being cynical, but U.S. politicians just seized the stage to grandstand about how tough on China they are, even if it means tossing green energy under the bus. You don't think so? Because that's sure what it looks like is happening here.

On the other, less scaredy-cat but decidedly more lunatic side of the political aisle, different concerns prevail. The Times article quoted Republican senator John Barrasso thundering that the Dems' \$3.5 trillion blueprint is "a freight train to socialism." If only he were right! But he's not. And as far as the climate's concerned, this is a freight train to

nowhere. It needlessly ramps up tensions with China and leaves all the big-ticket climate change items up in the air.

Biden has already shown himself more than willing, like Obama before him, to break any promise he chooses, especially if it was made to the left-wing of his party. I would love to be wrong about this, but protecting a habitable earth is shaping up to be his biggest busted pledge yet, a mere pretext for more insane harassment of China. Unlike other shattered vows, this one can't be fixed later. Once our world is carbon-poisoned through and through, we're sunk.

Eve Ottenberg is a novelist and journalist. Her latest book is *[Birdbrain](#)*. She can be reached at her [website](#).

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