

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY PAUL STREET

30.11.2023

We Can Do This But Not Under Capitalism



Image by Mike Erskine.

Liberals want us to believe something that is simply false: that there are meaningful solutions to the leading existential problem of our time under the reigning capitalist-imperialist order.

Recall how they responded to Joe Biden's 2022 corporate climate bill – the so-called Inflation Reduction Act. The legislation was hailed by Democrats and the establishment "green" movement as a "historic" move off fossil fuels (oil, natural gas, and coal) and to an ecologically sustainable energy economy. Never mind that, as the Revolutionary Communist writer Raymond Lotta pointed out:

“There is no explicit charge or comprehensive plan of action in this bill to move quickly to eliminate fossil fuel as the energy foundation of America’s economy. There is nothing in this bill that questions or challenges the U.S. as the world’s largest producer of oil and natural gas. Nowhere does this climate bill *mandate* (set enforceable targets for) fossil-fuel emissions cuts: whether in the extraction of fossil fuels, the industrial use of fossil fuels, the utility-scale generation of electricity, or from transport and agriculture...But the bill contains several key provisions that allow for and facilitate expanded fossil-fuel production, exactly the opposite of what is needed... **this legislation falls massively and obscenely short of what is needed. Worse, t...[it] prolongs the dependency of the U.S. economy on fossil fuels...this bill is part of the problem of global warming, not the solution.**”

The bill “revive[d] offshore oil and gas lease sales in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska” and “weaken[ed] bedrock environmental laws to give faster fossil fuel project approvals and expedite the fracked gas Mountain Valley Pipeline in Appalachia,” as the Center for Biological Diversity warned.

Blowing Past the Goldilocks Zone

And look now at a recent *New York Times* Op-Ed by the liberal climate scientist Kate Marvel, who titles her commentary “I’m a Climate Scientist. I’m Not Screaming Into the Void Anymore.” Dr. Marvel, a researcher at the nonprofit Project Drawdown and a lead author of the Biden Administration’s *Fifth National Climate Assessment* (FNCA), thinks we should chill out a bit about how capitalism is turning the planet into a giant Greenhouse Gas Chamber. She purports to believe that the magic of the marketplace is putting us on the right path to environmental healing.

Yes, Dr. Marvel acknowledges, humanity (try capitalism) “has put about 1.6 trillion tons of carbon in the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution — more than the weight of every living thing on Earth combined.” Further:

“Scientists have raised the alarm over and over again, and still the temperature rises. Extreme events like heat waves, floods and droughts are becoming more severe and frequent, exactly as we predicted they would. ..We showed what the United States would look like if the world warms by 2 degrees Celsius. It wasn’t a pretty picture: more heat waves, more uncomfortably hot nights, more downpours, more droughts... climate science tell us how the feedback loops in the world climate system will make global warming worse. We can also now more confidently forecast catastrophic outcomes if global emissions continue on their current trajectory...the fossil fuel industry is still

ignoring the science. Oil, gas and coal companies have already made plans for infrastructure that, if used as intended, would cause the world to blow past the Paris agreement target of 1.5 degrees Celsius in the next few decades.”

Dr. Marvel knows things aren't looking good (to say the least) “on the current trajectory.” Her own report, the FNCA, spotlights dire perils to civilization: “accelerating sea level rise, intensifying extreme weather” and “reductions in biodiversity.”

It's worse than she says. The standard and modest establishment climate goal is to cap the rise in average global temperature (AGT) below 2°C (3.6°F), and preferably at 1.5°C (2.7°F). Meeting that target requires bringing global CO2 emissions down to net zero by 2050. But the *current trajectory is for AGT to go beyond 2 degrees Celsius in the 2030s, hit 3 degrees Celsius in the 2040s, and 4 degrees Celsius in the 2060s.* This takes humanity well beyond what some climate scientists call humanity's thermal “Goldilocks Zone” – the temperature spectrum within which decent human life and civilization can exit.

“Some Politicians Now Actually Campaign on Climate Change”

Still, Dr. Marvel is now feeling climate Hopey-Changey. She tells us to breathe a sigh of relief. Capitalist market forces and government agencies are now supposedly changing the trajectory by replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy in electricity production. She waxes optimistic:

“State, local and tribal governments all around the country *have begun to take action. Some politicians now actually campaign on climate change, instead of ignoring or lying about it.* Congress passed federal climate legislation [the weak Biden bill critiqued above – PS] — something I'd long regarded as impossible — in 2022. *We can do this.* We now know how to make the dramatic emissions cuts we'd need to limit warming, and it's very possible to do this in a way that's sustainable, healthy and fair. The conversation has moved on, and the role of scientists has changed. We're not just warning of danger anymore. We're showing the way to safety.”

Yes, Dr. Marvel actually wanted us to marvel that “*some politicians now actually campaign on climate change...*” Surely she is aware that many politicians still actually campaign against climate science and denounce any efforts to reduce fossil fuel extraction and burning as nefarious “radical Left” plans meant to destroy great nations.

The politicians who still ignore and lie about climate change are significantly overrepresented in the US Minority Rule political system. One of those politicians is Donald Trump, the leader of an eco-fascistic party that holds down the Supreme Court of

the world's leading climate polluter nation. That party is well positioned to win back the presidency and US Senate next year. It holds down half of the nation's powerful state governments. (In other countries, too, science-hating planet-cooking politicians hold great power. In Argentina, a major source of methane-producing animal agriculture, for example, the presidency has just taken by a far-right maniac who attacks climate science and environmental regulation.)

Climate Science vs. Capitalism

But I digress. What specifically does the FNCA that Dr. Marvel and her colleagues wrote for Biden offer to support her purported newfound optimism? "Mitigation and adaptation activities," the report says, "are advancing from planning stages to deployment in many areas, including improved grid design and workforce training for electrification, building upgrades, and land-use choices...adaptation planning and implementation has advanced in the US [but...] most adaptation actions to date have been incremental and small in scale...Efforts to adapt to climate change and reduce net greenhouse gas emissions are underway in every US region and have expanded since 2018."

Sorry, but this is small potatoes in relation to the ever-escalating climate catastrophe, the biggest issue of our or any time. Bear in mind that the Biden administration, which has broken yet another campaign promise by approving a Conoco-Phillips drilling operation in a formerly pristine part of the Arctic (the horrific Willow Project). Biden's much ballyhooed "green" infrastructure bill does nothing to advance environmentally required green mass transit.

Is it possible to massively roll back the deadly Greenhouse Gassing of the planet? Of course it is. Yes, *humanity can do that* – and later on figure out how to remove carbon from the atmosphere. Scientists, engineers, policy planners and others have *for decades known* ways and proposed plans to restructure energy, transportation, agriculture, and agriculture to drastically reduce CO2 emissions. Remarkable technologies have emerged to enable these plans and methods: renewable energy systems, atmospheric carbon capture and more. "In a rational world," the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) points out, "such plans would have been implemented when the first warnings of the dangers of greenhouse gas emissions were raised" (four-plus decades ago).

But here's the thing: *homo sapiens can't and won't do what is now existentially required under capitalism-imperialism*. As the WSWS notes, the giant disparity between the threat and the remedies in place and proposed by US authorities "underscores *the impossibility of combining a scientific approach to resolving climate change with the ongoing existence of*

capitalism and the dominance of the world economy by the drive for private profits and the division of the world into rival nation-states” (emphasis added).

If you want to fix a problem you have to go to its taproot. The taproot of the greatest crime in history – turning the planet into a giant Greenhouse Gas Chamber – is capitalism, the class rule system of inter-firm and inter-imperial competition that is hopelessly addicted to and invested in fossil fuels to power its need for constant expansion and its imperial militaries and wars. It’s a disorderly global economic and state system devoid of any real capacity to sustainably re-orient and de-toxify human relations with the natural environment.

As the Marxist ecologist Jason W. Moore points out, it’s not really (or if you prefer merely) anthropogenic climate change we face today, it’s capitalogenic climate change. Humanity per se didn’t set up the modern coal, gas, oil, livestock, automotive and airline industries or the giant global militaries (with the US far in the lead) and war industries that rely heavily on fossil fuels. Capitalists and imperialists did that while most of humanity struggled to keep its head above water and eke out a “living” in the world capitalist rat race.

An ever more poisoned planet dominated by capitalist imperialists and broken up into dozens and dozens of competing nation states is not a rational or sane world. It is anarchic and exterminist, tied to an underlying mode of production that cancerously requires endless growth. It is too invested in fossil fuels to stop extracting and using them on a mass scale before the emissions resulting from the burning of coal, oil, and gas push the planet past irreversible tipping points of runaway warming. Capitalism is a fundamentally socio-pathological system that sees the ecological destruction it generates as a source of new profit opportunities – new shipping lanes available in Arctic regions formerly covered by ice, for example.

What’s required is a people’s socialist revolution that radically eliminates private ownership and profit at the commanding heights of human economic life. We must re-constitute production and consumption around an entirely new and different way of managing humanity’s interchange with nature – a mode of life that privileges the common good and life itself over private accumulation, wealth, and class rule.

Something Even Crazier Than Calling for Revolution

A gloomy aphorism common among certain left intellectuals says that “people can more readily imagine the end of life itself than they can imagine the end of capitalism.” If true, that tragic dichotomy must be forthrightly challenged, not merely bemoaned. It’s long past

time to break through such suicidal thinking and struggle with folks to understand the scientific, historical-material reality. To continue down the capitalist road is to consign our own and other species to incredible suffering and extinction.

I understand that it sounds “crazy” and “extreme” – “screaming into the void,” to use Dr. Marvel’s words – for many to hear someone call for socialist revolution. Here’s something crazier: continuing to live under an eco-extremist system that science (both natural and social/historical) knows to be cancelling – *voiding* – prospects for a decent human future. Time’s up for solutions under and through capitalism: *under and through the problem*. Dreaming of meaningful environmental correction under and even through that system is madness. We must imagine and then undertake the radical replacement of capitalism by revolutionary green and red socialism. Marx and Engels were right in 1848: it’s either “the revolutionary re-constitution of society at large” or “the common ruin” of all.

Paul Street’s latest book is *This Happened Here: Amerikaners, Neoliberals, and the Trumping of America* (London: Routledge, 2022).

CounterPunch 29.11.2023