

COP26; NOT SO MUCH KEEPING 1.5° C ALIVE AS GIVING IT THE KNIFE.

You know that COP26 was a failure, not by noting the criticism levied at it by environmental activists and groups, but by the very culprits who puts us in this dangerous place, the capitalists themselves. As reported in the Financial Times, this is what John Denton, Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce had to say: *"We applaud governments for making the tough compromises for getting a deal over the line in Glasgow...but the agreement is certainly no cause for celebration."* It was definitely no cause for celebration. Best estimates based on current emissions puts the world hitting 2.4°C, a catastrophic number.

There were minor achievements. After 80 years, first suppressing, then confusing, then fighting a rear-guard action, the fossil fuel industry was finally dragged into the debating chamber, even if it yielded timid resolutions with clauses such as eliminating "inefficient" subsidies and the "phasing down" of investments. Of course if China and India had large oil and gas reserves rather than coal, they would not have been branded the culprits, especially by mature capitalist countries whose legacy emissions from coal burning over centuries is responsible for much of the CO2 in the atmosphere.

Another achievement was the side show of the USA and China agreeing to work together on environmental issues even as they ramp up the arms race. Globally military activity is responsible for at least 6% of global emissions which need not be recorded in national emission figures. Yup folks, jet fighters and tanks burp out more CO2 than do cows and other livestock as shown in the graph below. So, instead of changing your diet, better to consider joining the anti-war movement.

However, the biggest achievement was not that COP26 legally ratified the Paris Accords, but that it called for annual review meetings, at least up to 2023, reversing the Paris Accords which called for meetings only every five years. Any conscious process of restraining and restricting global emissions to under 1.5 degrees, requiring as it does a reduction in emissions of 45% by 2020 relative to 2010, would need a road map plotting the annual fall needed to achieve this. In 2019 that annual reduction was set at 7.6%. Since 2019 emissions are up 14.6% not down, and instead of 11 years there are only 8 years left, meaning that emissions now have to fall by 12.5% p.a. Worse emissions are expected to rise not fall in 2022. In other words, delays make it more difficult and costly to achieve this 45% deduction, which is why 1.5 C has been effectively knifed in the heart. It is as dead as your levelling up, Mr Johnson.

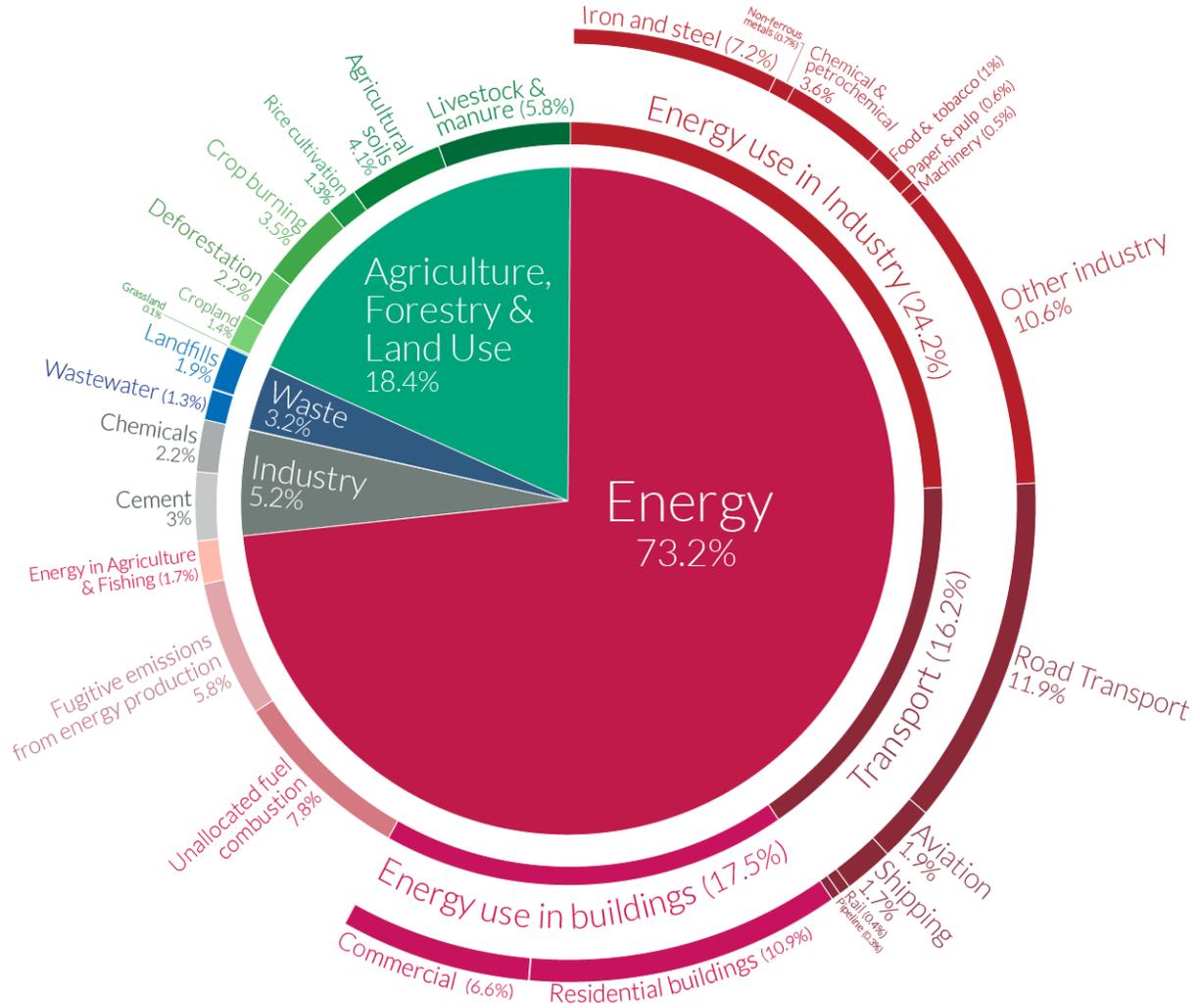
Revolutionaries need to have a twin track approach to climate change. Firstly, overthrowing the capitalist system which is history's first crude, clumsy and damaging industrial society, and alongside this and in the interim, politically mitigating the effects of this primitive system. In terms of political mitigation we need to campaign for annual meetings under the auspices of the UN with real enforceable teeth and the funds to match. These meetings, hint at what a world government would look like; that it should be a supreme body overriding national concerns, that it should be able to levy a single global consumption tax around the world to fall most heavily on the richest 5%, and it should be allowed to redistribute this money to where it is most needed without national prejudices getting in the way. Of course these proposals could be interpreted as an exercise in idealism, but I cannot think of a more concrete way to argue, propagandistically, for the necessity and advantages of internationalism.

GRAPH 1.

Global greenhouse gas emissions by sector

Our World
in Data

This is shown for the year 2016 – global greenhouse gas emissions were 49.4 billion tonnes CO₂eq.



OurWorldinData.org – Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems.

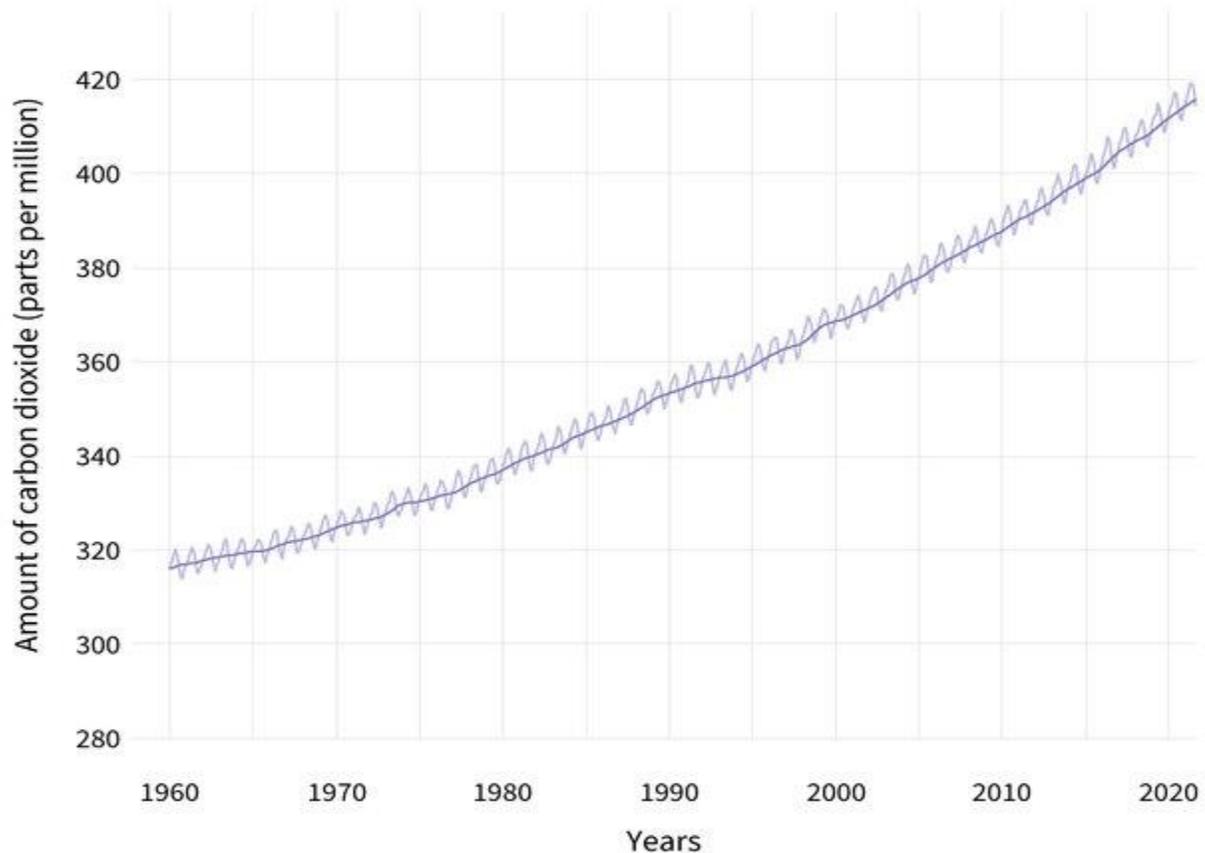
Source: Climate Watch, the World Resources Institute (2020).

Licensed under CC-BY by the author Hannah Ritchie (2020).

<https://ourworldindata.org/ghg-emissions-by-sector>

Graph 2.

ATMOSPHERIC CARBON DIOXIDE (1960-2021)



“Based on preliminary analysis, the global average atmospheric carbon dioxide in 2020 was 412.5 parts per million (ppm for short), setting a new record high amount despite the economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the jump of 2.6 ppm over 2019 levels was the fifth-highest annual increase in NOAA’s 63-year record. Since 2000, the global atmospheric carbon dioxide amount has grown by 43.5 ppm, an increase of 12 percent.” (Updated October 2021) <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-atmospheric-carbon-dioxide>

Capitalism trips over its own contradictions.

The billions of workers around the world are haunted and hurt by the contradictions thrown up by capitalism which paralyzes its ability to reverse global warming. These can be divided into three plus one. (1) the need to preserve capitalist private property, (2) competition, (3) nationalism, and finally and on a lesser note, the reluctance to impose a progressive consumption tax on the rich.

Preserving capitalist private property. In a communist society where workers own the means of production collectively, closing down a part of production found to be harmful, would only result in a fractional loss. On the other hand closing down Peabody Energy in the USA, Adaro Energy in Indonesia, Shendong Coal Mining Group in China Exxon or Shell, would mean a complete loss of wealth to the owners of these coal and oil producing companies. Thus they will always fight to preserve their property and

wealth and use their resources to influence and corrupt government officials. In a capitalist society divided by private property, interests cannot be harmonized but will always be conflicted. This is the primary reason why action against global warming has been delayed by oil and coal interests since the 1960s.

Competition. Capitalism is driven by profit-seeking based on minimizing cost. Unless all firms do it, none can do it. If one group of capitalists, be they national or local, continue to pollute in order to reduce their costs price, then all the others must follow suite or face bankruptcy. Competition always creates a race to the bottom, in this case companies with the lowest environmental standards. Unless governments step in to set minimum standards, then competition will have its way, but in the absence of an international government able to curb global competition, nothing prevents one nation holding sway over the others.

And of course, where competition reigns, planning fails. We have seen this with wind and solar energy. All the focus has been on is making them cheaper, but they remain immature industries. Absent are all the add-ons needed to make them successful such as storage and inter-connectedness. This is what strategic planning is all about, a rounded and comprehensive approach to problem solving which capitalism is incapable of achieving. Or take China, this so called planned economy is continuously being up ended by market forces. Recently its environmental ambitions were torn apart when it was faced with an energy shortage which forced it to relight its coal power stations.

When it comes to complexity capitalism always falls short. The same with Electric Vehicles. Oh yes, in time car batteries will be exchangeable so that flat batteries can be quickly and simply replaced with charged batteries in central locations minimizing the infrastructure needed to charge these batteries. But in the meantime competition ensures every company is doing its own thing and chaos looms. Where is the urgent international “Manhattan Project” needed to solve all these issues in the shortest time? Nowhere! Where are the governments guiding the rational and long-sighted introduction of these vehicles? Nowhere!

Nationalism. Nationalism is the family name given to private property. Seen from space earth looks to be one, but closer to home it is fragmented by nations which put their own first, and who seek advantage against each other. We saw with the pandemic how national priorities led to a distorted global vaccination programme that neglected the dependent nations and failed to vaccinate the most scientifically identified groups. We have seen this once again with the promised \$100 billion in environmental transfers which have not happened despite much of this money taking the form of shameful loans.

But more importantly, nations get in the way of solving the global climate emergency. Nations duplicate, enforce Intellectual Property Rights, seek to nurture national champions and resist agreeing the highest standards. They engage in military competition when these funds could be used to green deserts and provide ample drinking water if it was directed to providing desalination plants for example. Borders stop national electricity grids from being converted into international electricity grids connecting diverse weather zones. There are ample mountain ranges to share out around the world should we need sites for energy storage dams, when and if all other methods of storage, including chemical, fail.

The weather does not respect national borders but as it becomes more disturbed it leads to desperate mass migration piling up against borders. The escalation of the climate emergency shows clearly and unequivocally that nation states are a relic but one whose edges are covered with barbs.

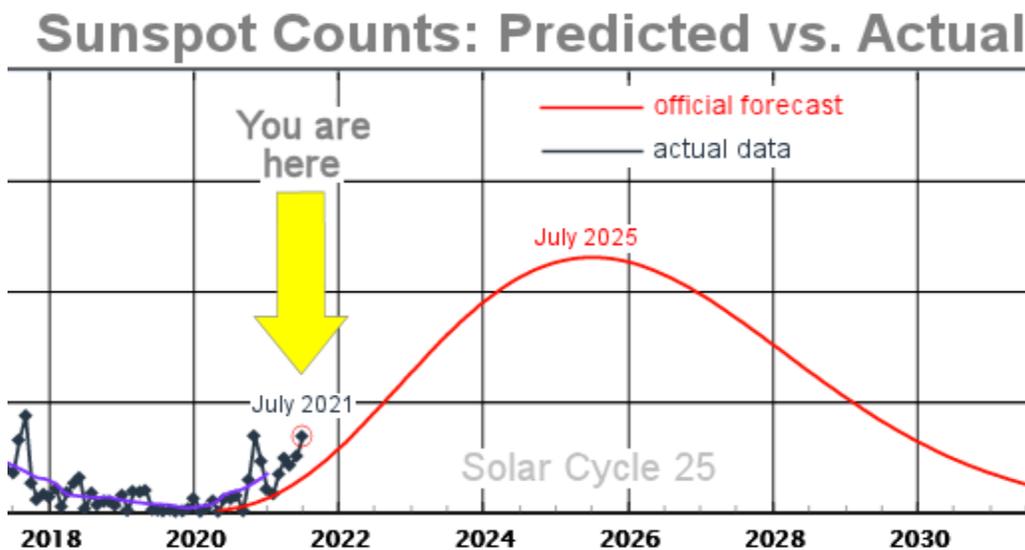
Taxing the consumption of the richest people and families. *“The same (Oxfam) study says that the wealthiest 10% of people--or 64 million people--are responsible for producing half of the planet's individual-consumption-based fossil fuel emissions compared to only 10% of emissions by the poorest 50 percent--or 3.5 billion souls. Yet these 3.5 billion people are "living overwhelmingly in the countries most vulnerable to climate change," according to the report. Individual consumption--as opposed to consumption by governments as well as international transport--makes up nearly two-thirds of global climate emissions.”* <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/How-Big-Is-The-Carbon-Footprint-Of-The-Worlds-Richest-1.html> This equates to the top 5% in the G7 nations as well as the richest in China, Latin America and so on.

Most surveys taken in the G7 countries shows that while people are aware and concerned by the global climate crisis, in their majority they are opposed to paying more taxes and or reducing their standard of living to support remediation. But the wrong question is being asked. The question which should be asked is; do you support taxing the biggest polluters, the rich, in order to remedy global warming. Then to be sure, the majority would say yes. If the richest 5% in most countries were subject to a progressive consumption tax, not only would it go a long way to meeting the 45% in emissions savings needed, but on the other side it would provide trillions, not billions to support poorer communities and rehabilitate our planet. Given that the income of the top 5% in most countries chews up at least 15% of all income, then globally their income would be worth around \$13.5 trillion. Thus a consumption tax of only 10% on this income would yield at least \$1.35 trillion annually. Truly the rich over pollute and under pay their taxes. This seems a staggering amount, but it would only make good the losses suffered from tax dodging by the rich. Truly, the tax havens comprise the most polluting real estate on this planet.

Such a tax should be an international tax, collected internationally and disbursed internationally.

Conclusion.

Graph 3.



<https://earth-chronicles.com/space/the-sun-is-rapidly-increasing-its-activity.html#:~:text=The%20Sun%20is%20rapidly%20increasing%20its%20activity%20by,in%20the%20number%20of%20sunspots%20for%20July%202021>

Time is running out and so is our luck. The sun's output is increasing and though it varies by only 0.1%, its effect on earth's weather is significant. Best estimates put solar activity peaking in 2025 as the graph above shows. Marx observed over a 150 years ago that only the working class can emancipate humanity. To this we must add, only the working class can restore this planet. Workers have built this world, and if they have built it damagingly, this is only because they have laboured under the yoke of capital. Workers freed from this yoke are entirely capable of rebuilding our world in the interests of humanity. But for this to happen they need rise up to the challenges history has set them.

Brian Green, 15th November 2021.