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Fossil Fuel Welfare Versus the Climate

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1 Introduction

The framing that the cause of the climate crisis is none other than capitalism has gained significant traction in the climate movement and literature. From the pages of the New York Times declaring that “*it’s capitalism stupid*” (Fong, 2017), to one of the climate movements most influential thinkers subtitling her book on climate change *Capitalism vs. the Climate* (Klein, 2014), capitalism is being identified as the underlying drive of the climate crisis. Often central within these critiques is that the heart of capitalist ideology, neoliberal market fundamentalism, has driven and created the climate crisis. More specifically, the core idea often seems to be that the main culprit behind climate change is that of free markets and privatisation, coupled with opposition to government intervention, or so the story goes.

There can be no doubt that the business model of rapacious and often corrupt fossil fuel corporations driven largely by quarterly profit are a significant mismatch for a problem like climate change, whose devastating effects could persist and magnify for thousands of years to come. However, while it is true that the way that capital currently functions is undermining the climate, the framing that it is capitalism versus the climate obscures the fact that it is not simply the machinations of some illusory free market that is driving the climate crisis. Rather, the climate crisis would not be where it

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is without a staggering level of government support and welfare handed out to the fossil fuel industry and other polluting interests. What we have is not so much free market capitalism versus the climate, rather it is what is termed here fossil fuel welfare versus the climate.

To be clear, this chapter is not offering an apology for capitalism. Nor is it suggesting that climate change would be resolved if we just returned to something like a free market. Far from it, we have let the climate crisis go unchecked for so long that major state mobilisation will now be required to avert catastrophic climate change and meet even the weaker of the Paris Climate Agreement targets. Additionally, to address the deep inequalities and injustices that underpin the climate crisis, we will certainly require much more than the operation of capital markets to ensure justice and equality. However, we must rid ourselves of the notion that what underpins the climate crisis is the operation of free markets, as the markets that drive the climate crisis are far from free. Instead it is the heavy hand of governments that drive us towards the brink of climate chaos and will also be needed to pull us away from the cliff.

2 Free Market Fundamentalisms and Corporate Power

To understand the point I am making about why free market capitalism may not be the primary driver of the climate crisis more clearly, we can turn to a distinction between two different ways of understanding capitalism highlighted by Richard Moser (2019). The distinction is between free market fundamentalism (FMF) and corporate power. Under the FMF understanding, what drives capital markets is an “*an unregulated free market... [with] deregulation, austerity, privatization, [and] tax cuts [which] undermine the public commons*” (Moser, 2019). This relates to a typical understanding of neoliberalism.¹ The central idea is that neoliberalism is about creating supposedly ‘free’ markets and protecting them from government interference.

It is this FMF version of capitalism that many have in mind when they engage in the capitalism versus the climate framing, but a more accurate vision of what drives the climate crisis would be Moser’s second conception of capitalism as

¹ Defining neoliberalism is a tricky affair, for as Kean Birch (2017: 22) highlights, it is a concept which has been used in many different ways in public discourse. In this paper, I follow its common use as defined by Birch to refer “*to an economic system in which the ‘free’ market is extended to every part of our public and personal worlds. The transformation of the state from a provider of public welfare to a promoter of markets and competition helps to enable this shift*”.

corporate power. Moser argues that the free market is often a less powerful a driver of capital, and instead what we face is a new form of capitalist order, what he terms ‘corporate power’. Corporate power, as Moser argues, is “*the merger between the biggest corporations and the state*” where the power of the state is used to serve the corporation rather than the people. Under this new capitalist order, the state increasingly uses its power to protect the interests of major corporations, whether through violence, subsidies, protective regulation and other preferential measures.

As Moser further argues, the emphasis that many put on the FMF version of capitalism has unwittingly contributed to “*the deeply rooted mythic aura of free markets*”, and by doing so obscured the nature of corporate power. Likewise, when it comes to climate change, the fossil fuel industry is able to continue to be one of the most profitable and destructive industries on earth not by the machinations of mythical free markets, but rather by corporate power—by merging with the state and using the power of the state to protect corporate interest.

While Moser’s ‘corporate power’ label provides us with an important distinction which moves us away from a FMF understanding of capitalism, I find it too ambiguous. Corporate power, to the lay reader, could be easily read as referring to the power that corporations have, rather than singling out the role that the state plays in propping up the fossil fuel industry. As such, because I am interested in developing a label that is emotive and easily recognisable, in this piece I instead use the term fossil fuel welfare versus the climate. The aim of using this label is to highlight the active involvement of the state in supporting the industry.²

Indeed, far from being defenders of capitalism and the competitive winners in the free market, the fossil fuel industry is perhaps one of the biggest beneficiaries of an egregious amount of government welfare, which makes the public foot the bill for their harmful and increasingly uncompetitive industry. Governments the world over favour fossil fuel interests through rigged capital markets, public financing, financial subsidies, bailouts and corrupt governance systems. To hide this system of corporate welfare, the fossil fuel industry has invested in a wide-scale public relations scheme (read: propaganda campaign) to paint themselves as the defenders of the free market (Conway and Oreskes, 2010; McKinnon, 2016).

²I do not use the fossil fuel welfare versus the climate framing because I believe welfare is a dirty word, although purported supporters of free market fundamentalism often treat it as such. Rather, the aim of calling it fossil fuel welfare is to turn the stigma that free market fundamentalists have tried to create around welfare and direct the stigma towards the fossil fuel industry, by showing how state protection underpins the fossil fuel industry business model. Welfare, then, is not a dirty word, but when welfare is used to prop up a dirty, destructive industry, it becomes a dirty practice.

While many are aware of the multiple investigations revealing the fossil fuel industry's decades-long climate science misinformation campaign, less attention has been paid to how fossil fuel interests have used propaganda to successfully spread the lie that attacks on the fossil fuel industry are attacks on capitalism itself (Banerjee, 2017). Climate science misinformation is deeply intertwined with ideological misinformation, where fossil fuel apologists falsely paint themselves as the defenders of freedom and capitalism. Fossil fuel propagandists have even, quite successfully, tried to dupe Evangelicals into associating the fossil fuel industry with the free market, and the free market with God's will (O'Connor, 2017). Thus, attacks on the fossil fuel industry become attacks on God's will itself. But if God's will was really aligned with the free market, then the fossil fuel industry would be doing the devil's work.

3 International Case Studies of Fossil Fuel Welfarism

To examine the depth and scale of fossil fuel welfare, this chapter examines case studies of the world's worst polluting nations. Consider, for instance, the author's home country of South Africa, Africa's biggest greenhouse gas polluter. South Africa used to be home to the world's fastest growing renewable energy sector—thanks to an innovative private sector investment program (Burkhardt, 2018). However, Eskom, the country's *public* utility, sabotaged the renewables boom, and the government actively intervened to slow down the uptake of renewable energy (Sharife, 2010). A corrupted desire to pursue uncompetitive nuclear power and protect coal interests ground the renewables investment program to a halt. The South African Government did that despite the fact that renewables were greatly outcompeting fossil fuels, saving South Africa billions every year (Calitz et al., 2015).

Far from capitalism versus the climate, in South Africa it has been government cronyism versus capital interests that aligned with the climate. Additionally, it has been resistance from labour unions to the operation of private capital that has slowed the transition to renewable energy. Mining and metalworker unions, who are some of South Africa's most powerful political forces, have opposed the roll out of privatised renewable energy out of understandable fear of losing their jobs and not being protected in the transition to renewable energy (Fakir, 2018). Fear of losing out in the transition in a deeply unequal and poverty-stricken country like South Africa, has been one of the major obstacles to rolling out a more affordable and stable renewable energy economy. As such, we see that in South Africa, it is less free markets, and more

state protectionism, artificially subsidising coal through tariff increases, and a lack of plans for a just transition, which protects coal and jeopardises the climate.

Let us now turn to Saudi Arabia and Russia, respectively the world's largest oil and 'natural' (or rather fracked) gas exporters. Both countries have long blocked progress on climate change within the UN climate negotiations, and form part of a handful of the worst polluting nations whose climate actions are ranked as "*critically insufficient*" (Climate Action Tracker, 2018). Saudi Arabia and Russia both have lavish government support and subsidies for their state-owned oil and gas companies—an arrangement that can hardly be described as adhering to free market economics. Seemingly inspired by Putin and the Saudi Royal Family, Canada, the world's dirtiest oil producer, is moving to nationalise tar sands oil pipelines. More specifically, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has instructed the Canadian government to step in to buy and nationalise the Trans Mountain tar sands pipeline. Trudeau did so despite widespread public resistance and despite the fact that oil and gas pipeline company, Kinder Morgan, who initially owned the project, thought the project was too financially risky to proceed with (McKibben, 2018).

The next major polluter is down under, Australia, the world's largest coal exporter and one of the highest per capita carbon polluters, ranked last in the world on climate action out of all nations, according to the Sustainable Development Goals Index (Lenferna, 2018). Alongside the over \$10 billion in tax-based fossil fuel subsidies Australia provides to the fossil fuel industry (Market Forces, 2018), the government is increasingly attempting to prop up an uncompetitive fossil fuel industry. The federal government is moving to underwrite the coal industry to protect them from losses, making it such that the public would have to foot the bill for potentially billions of dollars of losses from the coal industry (Murphy, 2018). Australia's federal government is also working hard to provide major subsidies and state support to foreign multinational coal mining companies. In addition to virtually limitless water supply, the federal government is desperately trying to use taxpayer money to finance the opening of the largest coal mine in the Southern Hemisphere, the proposed Adani Carmichael coal mine, even though all major banks have declined to finance the project (Ritter, 2018; Slezak, 2017). In the words of the Australia Institute's Chief Economist Richard Denniss (2018):

Australian politics isn't about ideology, it's about interests. The clearest proof of that claim is that neoliberal ideas such as deregulation were never aimed at powerful interest groups like the pharmacists or the gambling industry. And savage spending cuts were never aimed at subsidies for the fossil-fuel industry or private health insurers.

Dennis' point, that neoliberal ideology is hypocritically and unevenly applied, is really central to the climate crisis, where we have generous big government support for the fossil fuel industry, and harsh neoliberalism and austerity for people and the planet. Dennis's quote gets to the heart of what I am arguing in this chapter, insofar as it points out that a central driver of the climate crisis is how the state has been hijacked to serve the interests of large polluting corporations who are driving climate change, rather than to serve the interest of people and planet. It is a dynamic that plays out not only in countries that claim to be capitalists, but also in states who more openly embrace the role of the state, including the world's biggest current greenhouse gas (GHG) polluter, namely, China.

China's unparalleled fossil fuel boom was driven by a mix of capitalism and communism with the state playing a major driving role in the build-out of the most rapid expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure the world has seen (Smith, 2015). Now, in an attempt to turn that massive economy around, a similar mix of capitalism and communism is playing out in China's dramatic state-led U-turn towards renewable energy (Orvis, 2014). To help fathom the scale of their shift we can reflect on the fact that China will build enough renewable energy to meet the equivalent of all of the United States' energy needs within just two decades.

Of course, no survey of the world's largest polluters would be complete without turning to the United States (US), the world's largest historical GHG polluter. The US is often slated as the defender of capitalism. However, it would be a stretch to argue that the fossil fuel industry is thriving because of its competitive capitalist edge. Rather, as Noam Chomsky (2013: 77–78) argues, US has "*never had capitalism, so it can't end*". Instead, Chomsky argues that US has a variety of state capitalism, where the government actively props up and supports certain industries. This holds especially true in relation to the fossil fuel industry where state capitalism is increasingly descending into corrupt crony capitalism or what I am terming fossil fuel welfarism.

Consider a report revealing that US tax payers foot the bill for US\$20 billion in fossil fuel subsidies each year, with 80% going to oil and gas, and coal receiving the other 20% (Redman, 2017). Put in perspective, recent International Monetary Fund estimates suggest that the US spends ten times more on fossil fuel subsidies than it does on education (Ellsmoor, 2019). Without those lavish subsidies, the fossil fuel industry would be in deep trouble. Studies show that without such subsidies half of future oil production in the US would be unprofitable (Erickson et al., 2017). As for coal, even the

Wall Street Journal admits that coal simply “*can’t compete on a true level playing field*”, and is losing out despite its major subsidies (Resesz, 2017). A recent study showed that without regulation to shield them from market forces, about half of the coal plants in the US would be heading towards bankruptcy, as they did not earn enough revenue in 2017 to even cover their operating expenses (Ryan, 2018).

Even fracking for gas, the supposed poster child of US fossil fuel capitalism and innovation, is being kept afloat largely because of handouts and tax breaks. As Justin Mikulka (2018) reported, the tax law that the Republican Party passed in 2017 helped bail out fracking companies who were losing money and taking on mountains of debt. Shale oil frackers have long been losing more money than they make. From 2007–2017 they spent US\$280 billion more than they generated from operations on shale investments (Olson and Cook, 2017). The fracking industry is swamped by debt and is running a business model some commentators argue represents a ponzi scheme of bad debt (Forrest, 2016). As Mikulka argues, it is largely due to the Trump Administration coming in to bail them out, that the frackers were able to avoid the scheme collapsing further than the already wide-spread bankruptcies of the previous few years (Sider, 2015).

4 Fossil Fuelled False Consciousness

The line that is often sold to justify fossil fuel welfare policies is that doing so protects fossil fuel workers and jobs, but protecting corporate profits is very different from protecting workers. Returning to the US context, while the Trump Administration and Republican Congress work to provide the fossil fuel industry with corporate welfare, fossil fuel executives are giving themselves large raises and bonuses, cashing in company stock options, and even betting on their own company’s failure right before they drive their companies into the ground. Workers meanwhile are often being left in the dirt.

As a New York Times investigation revealed, from 2004 to 2016, the average annual wage for chief executives in the coal industry grew as much as five times faster than those of lower-paying jobs in the industry, like construction or truck and tractor operator jobs (Tabuchi, 2017a). While executive pay rose by 60%, the wages of truck and tractor operators barely kept up with inflation, while the wages for construction workers failed to keep up with inflation altogether, resulting in an effective pay cut of about US\$6,000. It would be one thing if execs were rewarding themselves with pay increases for their good

work, but their pay increases often came as they were running the companies into the ground, leading to widespread bankruptcies across the US coal industry.³

What's worse, before the onset of widespread bankruptcies, coal execs continued to talk up the ongoing viability of industry and to invest their companies into further expansions (Anderson et al., 2015). However, analysis of SEC filing shows that behind the scenes those same coal execs cashed in well over US\$100 million in stock options, often short-selling their own companies, providing pretty clear signs that they were betting on the decline of their own industry, all the while pretending in public that the future of the companies was fine, thus putting at risk workers' livelihoods and shareholder value.

While coal company execs were seemingly rewarded for driving their companies into the ground, it seems they were punishing workers as if it was somehow their fault. For instance, Alpha Natural Resources gave their execs multi-million dollar bonuses, while laying off thousands of workers, and cutting the health, life insurance, and retiree benefits of the workers that remained. They were not alone in doing so either with many major coal companies richly rewarding their execs while stiffing their workers (Roberts, 2016).

Revealing Trump's faux-populism and false promises to coal workers, instead of helping coal mining communities as their industry slumps, Trump's first budget proposal sought to slash funding to key programs aimed at promoting economic development in coal regions, including the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Economic Development Administration (Lenferna, 2017). As analysis by the Center for American Progress shows, these programs have been key in supporting coal communities that have been left behind as mining jobs vanished (Bassett and Walsh, 2017). Gutting them as Trump plans to do, could further devastate coal communities.

Even Trump's attempts to eliminate Obama's Clean Power Plan may leave coal workers further stranded. Part of Obama's efforts included the Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative (Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). The initiative aimed at providing economic and workforce development programs and resources to assist communities and workers that have been affected by job losses in the coal industry. This formed part of the POWER + PLAN which would have

³While coal executives and the Trump Administration have blamed regulation for the decline that was seen in the U.S. coal industry, studies suggest that this is a false narrative. As a study developed by economists from Columbia University showed, regulation was responsible for only 3–5% of coal's decline from 2008 until 2016, during the term of Obama's presidency (Houser et al., 2017). The decline came instead predominately from coal executives failing to properly plan for reduced demand and competition from renewables and fracked gas i.e. capital forces predominately killed coal.

leveraged US\$8 billion in investments for coal communities. Trump's attempts to unravel Obama's climate legacy will thus leave coal workers high and dry, while economic forces continue to drive the decline of their industry (cf. Houser et al., 2017).

Unlike places like Germany where a robust social safety net and retraining programs for fossil fuel workers has helped smooth their clean energy transition, in the US, keeping workers in a state of precarity is used as a strategy to help spur resistance to a fossil fuel transition (Dolsak and Prakash, 2016; Zaffos, 2016). Rich fossil fuel executives and bought-off politicians prey on the suffering of fossil fuel workers to fatten their already heavily padded wallets, all the while causing egregious pollution and putting the very stability of the earth's climate at stake.

To borrow some terminology from Marxist scholars (cf. Eyerman, 1981), the fossil fuel industry is using mass culture and propaganda to create a 'false consciousness', whose aim is to trick the working class (or the proletariat) into thinking that its interests are aligned with fossil fuel corporations, even as those corporations leave their workers hanging out to dry. Such a reality suggests that instead of capitalism vs. the climate, a better way of framing the climate crisis would draw on the words of Martin Luther King Jr. who decried that the US "*has socialism for the rich, rugged individualism for the poor*". In the climate case, the US, like South Africa and many parts of the world, has socialism for rich fossil fuel industry companies and executives, and harsh unforgiving individualism for fossil fuel workers.

The examples I have provided from across the globe demonstrate, what is in some ways a rather simple point, that it is not simply FMF capitalism versus the climate, but rather both capitalist and non-capitalist policies and systems of governance can favour fossil fuel interests. It is not simply a free market that drives the climate crisis. Rather, rigged markets which favour pollution and fossil fuels are one of the dominant driving factors behind the climate crisis. One of our most important tasks, if we are to address climate change at the scale needed, is to re-rig markets, regulations, and governance systems which currently favour polluters, so that instead they work to promote the public interest or the common good.

5 Bootstrapping up an Unlevel Playing Field

Globally, the scale of the fossil fuel industry's welfare is astounding. Even if we do not take into account the trillions of dollars' worth of harmful externalities that the industry foists onto the public each year, the International Monetary

Fund estimates that eliminating fossil fuel subsidies could free up US\$2.9 trillion in government revenue annually (Clements et al., 2013). That is more than double the US\$1.25 trillion in estimated annual investment needed in renewable energy and energy efficiency that would be needed globally by 2035 to keep warming to 2°C, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA) (Evans, 2014). To meet the much safer and more just target of keeping warming to 1.5°C would only require an additional \$460 billion per year according to a study in *Nature Energy* (McCollum et al., 2018). So, if all fossil fuel subsidies were re-invested in a low-carbon future, we would have more than enough money to meet the 1.5°C target, provided we have not delayed action too long already to do so (IPCC, 2018).

Remarkably, while the fossil fuel industry receives astronomical amounts of welfare, fossil fuel industry lobbyists and talking heads hypocritically demand renewable energy pull itself up from its bootstraps (Lacey, 2012). They decry subsidies for renewable energy as the government picking winners and losers, conveniently glossing over the fact that the fossil fuel industry's corporate welfare wildly outnumbers the meagre subsidies the renewable energy sector gets. For instance, studies by the IEA point out that global subsidies for fossil fuels outstrip those for renewable energy nearly 10-fold, and if we include their environmental externalities, we can add at least another 10-fold (Parkinson, 2016).

It is this deeply unlevel playing field that keeps the fossil fuel industry afloat and renewable energy from taking off. In the words of Amory Lovins (2016), the world-renowned energy expert who helped engineer China's renewable energy revolution, "*worldwide, renewables in fair competition (no subsidies and no corruption) generally cost less than any other new electricity source and many existing ones*". Despite all the roadblocks it faces, renewable energy is still getting out ahead of fossil fuels, such that two Australian engineering researchers recently calculated that if renewable energy continues growing at current rates it could put the *entire* world on track "*to reach 100% renewable electricity by 2032*" (Blakers and Stocks, 2018). The only thing holding us back from this, they argued, would be politics, and the political obstacles are substantial.

While the fossil fuel industry is given a huge hand up by the government, the innovative and entrepreneurial spirit of citizens who want to produce their own renewable energy and sell it back to others is often being stifled by utilities and governments. Net metering policies allowed citizens to sell their energy back to the grid. However, rather than cheering on this entrepreneurial spirit, in many places the remarkable growth in renewables that such policies created has come to "*a shuddering halt*" due to "*a concerted and well-funded lobbying campaign by traditional utilities*" to kill net metering policies (Tabuchi,

2017b). In response, libertarian free market advocates, who see through fossil fuel industry propaganda, are starting to rail against utilities and big governments' attempts to kill solar and other renewables (Smith, 2013).

It is a sign of our Orwellian times, a remarkable display of double think, that Republicans and right-wing self-professed conservatives who claim to be adherents of the free market and conservatism are the one's defending the fossil fuel industry's grotesque corporate socialism and shielding them from competition. It should be no surprise though, for if we follow the money we see that the fossil fuel industry has given 91 percent of their immense campaign contributions to Republicans (Lavelle, 2016). The campaign contributions seem to have caused an acute form of politician-Amnesia, for just 10 years ago the Republican party accepted climate science and claimed to support climate action. Then the Citizens United ruling lifted the limits on campaign spending and fossil fuel money flowed, corrupting an entire political party (Whitehouse, 2018). Indeed, the partisan divide on climate change did not simply arise out of the cultural milieu or derive from some principled ideological commitment. Rather, it was largely created, funded, and stoked by the propaganda and corruption arms of vested fossil fuel interests.

Part of the danger of the capitalism vs. the climate framing is that by failing to name the immense welfare underpinning the fossil fuel industry, it plays into the hands of the fossil fuel industry propaganda machine. Alternatively, if we insist on the framing of capitalism vs. the climate, let us name the sort of capitalism that we are fighting—a corrupt crony capitalism which makes the public foot the bill for massive corporate welfare handouts to the richest and most destructive industry on earth, while often applying neoliberal austerity to fossil fuel workers and the renewable energy industry. Perhaps some would argue that that is exactly what they mean when they say capitalism vs. the climate, but if so, let us say so more explicitly, because to those surrounded by fossil fuel industry propaganda, capitalism may sound more like markets free of corrupt government intervention.

5.1 Degrees of Socialism

There is also an additional problem with the idea that capitalism is the problem and, what is often taken to be the correlate, that socialism is the answer. The problem is there simply is not enough time or the requisite social base to institute wide-scale socialism in time to address the climate crisis, at least not of the full-blown Marxist-Leninist version where we transform the economy from where it is now to one where we have social ownership of the means of

production. In the words of Noam Chomsky (2013: 170), “*If we’re talking about feasible objectives in the short term, it’s kind of meaningless to talk about socialism. There isn’t a popular base for it. There isn’t an understanding of it*”. Similarly, Jacobin magazine, one of the leading socialist press outlets, warns against thinking that the way to solve climate change is to enact socialism:

If capitalism is driving climate change, does that mean we need a revolution to stop it? We should hope not. The Left’s vision of radical transformation can seem like an obvious match for the climate challenge. But the Left remains historically weak and a return to real power on the scale required isn’t likely anytime soon—certainly not on the timescale we need to start taking serious action. We can’t shortcut the long-term project of building socialism—but nor can we side line climate action along the way. Otherwise, even in the best-case scenario, the Left will win power only to manage a state of increasing climate breakdown. So no matter how necessary a break with capitalism is, for now we’ll have to settle for addressing climate change as best we can within it. (Battistoni, 2017: 9)

While Chomsky and Battistoni both advocate for a form of socialism in the long-run, they provide much needed caution against thinking that a full-blown socialist revolution is the short-term answer to climate change given the incredibly short time remaining to tackle the climate crisis. However, while we may not have time to enact a Marxist utopia and to reclaim all the means of production, an all-or-nothing approach to socialism is arguably not a particularly helpful way of framing our response to climate change.

As philosopher Ann Ferguson (2018) argues, socialism from a feminist perspective is not an all or nothing blueprint, but rather a vision of degrees of power/freedom that people in a particular society have in economic, political, social and personal relations. Taking Ferguson’s spectrum view of socialism into account, what we have now is a deeply impoverished form of corrupted corporate socialism which empowers the fossil fuel industry. We might not have time to implement a robust full-blown socialism, where one seizes and nationalises private corporations, but we can shift the degree of socialism away from fossil fuel corporations and towards people and planet. Indeed, it is long past time we dismantled the fossil fuel industry’s corporate socialism and redirect the immense state support the fossil fuel industry receives to social goals that are beneficial such as a just transition towards a renewable energy future.

Once we recognise the extent of fossil fuel welfare, then we can see that often we may not necessarily need to grow government but rather to redirect government so that its hand is there to help people and planet not fossil fuel

corporations. Instead of public subsidies and government support for polluting activities that is putting the entire planet at risk, we urgently need to redirect the immense government support given to the fossil fuel industry to the sort of future we actually want: a just transition to a more equitable and prosperous renewable energy future, which puts the interests of people and planet over that of fossil fuel corporations. If we do so, we might have a fighting chance to avert the worst ravages of climate change and create a much better world while doing so.

Even in the US, the heart of climate disinformation, fossil fuel propaganda, and the supposed home of capitalism, polling shows widespread support for policies associated with a Green New Deal, which involve an ambitious state-led mobilisation including large public investments and public-private partnerships (Kaufman, 2018). The surging popularity of politicians such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn also demonstrate growing openness to create a society whose hand is aimed not at propping up fossil fuel corporations but rather to benefit social and ecological welfare. Similarly, as George Monbiot (2017) convincingly argues in his book *Out of the Wreckage*, energised campaigns around such a vision of government to favor people and planet may also provide one of the few robust enough visions to counter the rising waves of right-wing fascist politics which themselves have deep ties to the corporate interests which benefit from the fossil fueled status quo. Thus, moving away from fossil fuel welfare and corporate socialism, it is past time that we reclaimed our governments and used them to support the sort of future we actually want, before it is too late.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, the extent of fossil fuel welfare and government protectionism is immense, so much so that by simply redirecting the fossil fuel industry's subsidies to climate action we could meet even the Paris Climate Agreement stronger target of 1.5°C. Recognising this reality, instead of the public subsidising an industry undermining the health of people and ecosystems the world over, and dangerously destabilising the global climate system, we urgently need to redirect the immense government support given to the fossil fuel industry to the sort of future we actually want: a just transition to a more equitable and prosperous clean energy future, which puts the interests of people and planet over that of fossil fuel corporations. It is time we shifted from fossil fuel welfare vs. the climate, to a welfare system aimed at promoting social and ecological well-being.

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