

Trump Resists Progress on Global Warming

Exclusive: Market trends now favor renewable energy as a cost-effective alternative to fossil fuels, but President Trump's resistance to this good news is doing real damage in the fight against global warming, reports Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

With petrochemical billionaires Charles and David Koch paying many of the GOP's bills these days, it's no wonder conservative policymakers are pushing hard to protect dirty fossil fuels against competition from clean, renewable energy. But entrepreneurial capitalists whom conservatives claim to worship are fighting back, slashing costs for wind and solar power to the point where few customers can refuse them.

A remarkable new study by Lazard, the venerable New York investment house, concludes that the *unsubsidized* cost of energy from new wind and solar plants now falls decisively below that of nuclear and coal plants, and even below that of efficient natural-gas-fired generation. The gap is widening each year as scale economies and improvements in turbine and photovoltaic technology drive cost reductions. Significantly, even cautious modelers at the U.S. Department of Energy concede these trends.

Even more disruptive is Lazard's finding that "in some scenarios the full-lifecycle costs of building and operating renewables-based projects have dropped below the operating costs alone of conventional generation technologies such as coal or nuclear." In other words, it's often cheaper to shut down those older plants and replace them with new wind and solar projects.

Where local conditions especially favor renewable energy, the cost advantages of wind and solar have become enormous. Last spring, for example, Tucson Electric Power inked a 20-year deal to purchase enough solar energy to power more than 20,000 homes at a price of less than 3 cents per kilowatt-hour. (One kilowatt-hour is the amount of energy needed to light ten 100-watt bulbs for an hour.)

That's just half the cost of new gas and coal generation and about a quarter of the cost of new nuclear power. Only the cheapest wind power can compare.

Trump Fights the Market

Members of the Trump administration, and many Republicans in Congress, are trying to derail the renewable express train.

Secretary of Energy Rick Perry has called for “rebalancing the market” by issuing federal rules to tilt the playing field in favor of coal and nuclear power. Perry was reportedly influenced by the CEO of Murray Energy, a major coal company that sells much of its product to U.S. utilities whose traditional generating plants are becoming uneconomic.

In an effort to boost profits for coal companies, the Trump administration is also working with Peabody Energy to subsidize continued operation of the Navajo Generating Station in Arizona, whose owners voted in February to close the 43-year-old plant. The coal-fired facility has been a major source of air pollution and haze in the Grand Canyon and is the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the nation.

Speaking at a Kentucky Farm Bureau event in October, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt said “I would do away with the incentives that we give to wind and solar,” even though current law already schedules most credits to expire by 2020 for wind and 2022 for solar.

Echoing his sentiment, the latest House tax bill guts clean energy tax credits, though the draft version under consideration by the Senate keeps them intact. The Senate’s reluctance reflects the fact that many of the nation’s more than 300,000 jobs in renewable energy production are in heavily Republican states.

As renewable energy costs continue to fall, however, the Trump administration is finding it hard to repeal the laws of supply and demand.

In August, Duke Energy Florida said it was scrapping plans to build a new nuclear plant and would instead double the Sunshine State’s solar capacity as part of a \$6 billion program to modernize the state’s power grid and build 500 new electric vehicle charging stations.

Meanwhile, American Electric Power, one of the country’s leading owners of coal-fired plants, announced in July that it is investing \$4.5 billion to build the nation’s largest single-site wind project, in western Oklahoma. Beyond that 2,000 megawatt project, AEP has plans to acquire 5,300 megawatts of additional renewable power by 2030 to diversify its power production portfolio and slash carbon emissions.

In a survey this spring of 32 power utilities operating in 26 conservative states, Reuters found only one that said it might prolong the life of its coal-fired units to please the Trump White House.

“The number of utilities betting their futures on renewable energy seems to be growing by the day,” observes the investment website *The Motley Fool*. “Utilities aren’t investing billions of dollars into renewable energy to save the climate

or appease environmentalists, they're doing so because it's in their best interest financially. Renewable energy is now the lowest cost option when building new power plants and that's what's driving adoption. If these utilities are any indication, there will be tens of billions more poured into the industry over the next decade."

The same trend is happening globally, as major greenhouse polluters like China and India invest tens of billions of dollars in new solar and wind plants. Even the world's fossil-fuel capital, Saudi Arabia, is joining the revolution: In October, its power authorities received an astonishingly low bid of only 1.8 cents per kilowatt-hour for a 300-megawatt project in the north of the kingdom. Unlimited sun and cheap land make solar power the cheapest resource even in the land of oil.

Policy Imperatives

With renewable energy costs in sharp decline, and utilities shifting their investments accordingly, why should we care if President Trump's team denies the existence of climate change and lauds the future of coal? Because with global carbon emissions still rising, the world must dramatically step up its response if we hope to keep the impact and cost of global warming in check.

"Humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in generally solving these foreseen environmental challenges, and alarmingly, most of them are getting far worse," declared a communiqué by more than 15,000 scientists from 184 countries published this month in the journal *BioScience*. "Soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory."

To keep overall warming of the planet under 2 degrees Celsius relative to pre-industrial levels – about twice the increase to date – global annual investment in clean energy must *triple*, according to a major new analysis issued this October by Stanford University's Precourt Institute for Energy.

As climate activist Bill McKibben told a recent international climate conference in Germany, "If we have any hope of preventing absolute civilization challenge and catastrophe, then we need to be bringing down carbon emissions with incredible rapidity, far faster than it can happen just via normal economic transition."

In other words, we can't afford to depend on slow market adjustments. We need continued renewable energy subsidies and new carbon taxes to accelerate the transition to cleaner energy. We need increased investment in customer energy efficiency programs. We need to tackle carbon emissions not just from power plants, but from transportation, industry and agriculture – all potentially

greater challenges.

Daunting as that agenda is, we can at least find some comfort in signs – like the new report from Lazard – that market forces are finally lining up to help humanity save itself.

Jonathan Marshall, former editor of the [Next100](#) blog on clean energy and the environment, is author of the recent stories [“Trump’s War for Coal Raises Risks,”](#) [“Trump Takes Aim at Energy R&D Funds,”](#) and [“The World’s Shift to Electric Cars.”](#)

Denying the Imperium of Death

The tens of thousands of American deaths from drug overdoses are a measure of the hopeless desperation left behind by the soul-starving socio-economic system of late-stage capitalism, writes poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

According to a nationwide [study](#) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a greater number of U.S. Americans died (approximately 65,000) from drug overdoses last year than were killed during the course of the Vietnam War.

All part and parcel of capitalism’s war against life itself. The emotional and physical pain, anxiety, and depression inflicted by the trauma inherent to a system sustained by perpetual exploitation has proven to be too much for a sizeable number of human beings to endure thus their need to self-medicate.

The root of addiction is trauma. The soul of the nation is a casualty of war. There is not an Arlington Cemetery for these fallen, no hagiographic ceremonies will be performed over their graves nor statues erected in memoriam. Their ghosts will howl through the long, dark night of national denial. Listen to their wailing. It is an imprecatory prayer. A curse and augury ... that admonishes, our fate and the fate of the nation will converge ... as the nation will stagger, keening in lament, to the abyss.

The solution: Within each of us swells a deathless song. Powerful. Resonate. Piercing. A song, miraculous of influence, plangent with the force to seize back your soul from the death-besotted spirit of the age. Let it rise from within you. Notice: how flocks of empire’s death birds scatter like ashes in the wind.

Yet it will not be possible to navigate around the cultural deathscape; we must walk through it and chronicle its serial affronts to our humanity: "You have to see that the buildings are anorexic, you have to see that the language is schizogenic, that 'normalcy' is manic, and medicine and business are paranoid."
– James Hillman

Try this: Simply stand in the isle of a corporate, Big Box chain store or in the parking lot of a strip mall that squats, hideous, on some soul-defying, U.S. Interstate highway and allow yourself to feel the emptiness and desperation extant. The tormented landscape, besieged by an ad hoc assemblage of late capitalist structures, emporiums of usurped longing, reflects the desperate, rapacious nature of late capitalist imperium.

Compounding the pathos, the forces in play impose a colonizing effect upon the mind; therefore, a large percent of the afflicted have lost the ability to detect the hyper-entropic system's ravaging effects. Stranded among the commercial come-ons and hyper-authoritarianism inherent to late stage capitalism's imperium of death, the human psyche, like the biosphere of our planet, subjected, at present, to humankind-wrought ecocide, has begun to display the terrible beauty of a nightmare.

Internal weather has grown increasingly chaotic: the earth's oceans and seas are rising; wildfires rage; drought scorches the earth. And conditions will grow increasingly inhospitable in regard to the flourishing of inner life, personal and collective thus will continue, and at accelerating rates, to be reflected in the web of phenomena we know as human culture.

The Decimated Working Class

Growing up in a working-class social milieu, as I did, I am confronted, more and more, by the news of the large number of men I grew up with who are dying in their 50s. As of late, when I contemplate the fact, I am forced to pause and seek solitude because my eyes become scalded with tears. I've known, over the years, hundreds of human beings, born into and ensnared by the crime against humanity known as poverty, broken by the culture of greed and social degradation, and blamed by the clueless and the callous for the tragic trajectory in which impersonal fate and the wounding culture, by no fault of their own, has placed them.

Thus arrive: Tears of rage; tears of outrage. Tears unloosed by passion and tempered by compassion ... fall. If poverty was not so profitable for the greed-head elite, both punitive-minded conservatives and affluence-ensconced liberals alike, the situation would be addressed and rectified. The cause of the reprehensible situation, it should go without saying, is not the fault of the

poor but the poverty of spirit at the core of capitalism.

Truth is the system, a hierarchy of ghouls, is maintained by harvesting the corpses of the powerless, by means of imperial slaughter and domestic, economic exploitation. Deep down, we know it. The system's psychopathic beneficiaries, in particular, are aware of the reality. In fact, their desiccated hearts require being irrigated by blood. From the evidence of their actions, it appears they revel in the knowledge of the damage they incur. They appear to believe they will enter the golden dominion of heaven by climbing a mountain of corpses. It is time we dragged them back down to earth and subjected them to our earth-borne fury.

Or so goes my own (powerless) revelry. Of course, we the powerless, at this point, have been left with scant little but a dreaming heart. When we allow heartless power to subdue and usurp our longings, we languish. Thus many die of a broken spirit. The world itself can appear to be depleted of mercy. In turn, all too many begin to mirror the malevolence of the upper castes thereby losing their own measure of mercy.

Hostility directed at the poor is the shopworn, demagogic sleight-of-hand trick used to distract from realities such as: Every McMansion and high-end luxury high-rise constructed creates multitudes of the homeless. Every low pay, no benefits, no future Mcjob serves to decimate an individual, heart and spirit. Moreover the beneficiaries of the system promote the lie that shame should be the exclusive dominion of those broken by their system, a system, which is, in essence, a form of government-sanctioned gangsterism, by which they, the ruthless few, and they alone, benefit.

As a result, in an age of denial and duplicity, change tends to arrive violently. Reactionary, racist soreheads, brandishing Tiki torches, construct an ambulatory klavern in the hateful night. Maledictory tweets rise and roil the imperial air like a nimbus of locust. Unmoored from their sense of humanity by lashing angst and alienation, gunmen, in acts of warped libido, raise assault rifles and kill with no more connection to the strangers they slaughter than do stateside-deployed pilots of the empire's predator drones.

A Needed Paradigm Shift

We human beings, as a species, have arrived at a profound point of demarcation: paradigm shift or perish. Yet, and the fact is mortifying in its implications, there is not a sign of the emergence, even an incipient one, of a viable resistance to the present order. Weekend marches and boutique protests might promote (ephemeral) feelings of affinity and jack the adrenal systems of participants. But the events have proven woefully inefficacious in regard to the

rising and raging tides of adversity we face.

(In addition, monopolist, internet corporations, such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, at the behest of U.S. governmental forces, are further marginalizing the already almost vaporous left by means of presence-abridging algorithms of leftist websites and outright censorship of social media content. Dissenting voices are being ghosted into oblivion.)

An aura of bleakness prevails. Hope seems a fool's palliative. The victims of drug overdoses and, in general, the large and rising, without precedent, untimely deaths of middle-aged, laboring-class people should be regarded as canaries in the coal mines of the late-stage capitalist order, an augury of calamities that loom due to the exponentially increasing harm being inflicted upon both humanity and environmental forces crucial to sustaining the continued viability of the human race.

"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate." C.G. Jung

Although it does not have to be the case. If reality is met head-on, if empire, external and its inner analog, is renounced and challenged, then a liberation staged by the heart's partisans can begin, thereby freeing up a great amount of acreage – a fructifying landscape – wherein both the earth's ecosystem and the architecture of human desire can begin to co-exist and cross-pollinate thus a crucial re-visioning of oneself and the culture can begin.

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The Ongoing Misery of Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane Maria, which hit the U.S. territory on Sept. 20, remains slow and spotty with continued power outages, unsafe water and school closings, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

It's been nearly seven weeks since Hurricane Maria shredded the island of Puerto Rico and, still, conditions for millions of Puerto Ricans remain grim and barely livable. Thousands are still stuck in shelters, while many others remain in

their homes with limited access to electricity and clean water.

Last Thursday, large swaths of San Juan were again without power and those without their own independent generators were thrown into darkness with little support. Once again, heavy rains flooded out the streets of San Juan, creating the conditions for various water-borne diseases like cholera to proliferate.

I spoke with attorney and human rights activist Judith Berkan about conditions on the Island, even as federal troops prepare to leave the struggling U.S. territory.

Dennis Bernstein: Tell us about your day today.

Judith Berkan: I had two court hearings and in the middle of the first one, which was in the federal court, we became aware that there had been a major blackout throughout the north coast of Puerto Rico. This one is supposed to last between twelve and eighteen hours. The system gets overloaded and then it goes out again.

Tuesday night there were incredible storms here in Puerto Rico. Because we don't have electricity, the pumps to drain water from the drains are not functioning. One of the attorneys at the first hearing had actually been pulled out of her car during the awful rains. In the afternoon, after getting out of my first court hearing, I called the court regarding my second hearing, which is an injunction to try to save people's wages during the hurricane aftermath.

When we got there, we had five minutes of generator power to be able to reschedule the hearing.

There are a lot of labor issues going on. People are losing their jobs, businesses are closing, people are not getting paid for days they work. Some businesses have paid their workers even if they could not come in, but those are exceptional cases.

There has been an inaccurate counting of deaths. The official number is 55 right now but every day you hear of situations where people are dying and whether they are attributed to the storm or not is a matter of great controversy. So many health and mental health issues are connected to the storm. The nursing homes are without air conditioning. There are four confirmed deaths from leptospirosis but we suspect there are a lot more.

Dennis Bernstein: The Army or the National Guard announced today that they are going to be removing one-third or one-half their forces because "they have other jobs to do." I guess they are not done, though, are they?

Judith Berkan: No, not at all. I can't say there have been no improvements

since September 20. There is less debris around the streets. We are now at 42% of generator capacity. You get power for a time, then it goes away again. So there is no predictability in our lives. Today the entire San Juan area was out and, from what I understand, the entire north coast. And this is fifty days after the hurricane. And remember that about ten days before Maria we had hurricane Irma, which knocked out the electricity to a good portion of the country. So there have been a lot of people who have not had electricity since Labor Day.

Dennis Bernstein: I assume that people on the outer islands are in even worse shape.

Judith Berkan: It's a lot worse and delivering supplies is a lot worse. We also have very mountainous terrain in the middle of the main island and there are still barrios there which have not seen a single government official or even private institutions.

Dennis Bernstein: We also know that there is quite a substantial exodus from the island, people heading to Florida and New York.

Judith Berkan: Yes, about 100,000 people have already gone to Florida, out of a population of 3.5 million. Today FEMA said they would be giving passage to people to stay in hotels outside of Puerto Rico. A lot of our hotels were destroyed and the others are filled with military personnel and FEMA people, etc. So far only 300 families have accepted the offer. About 25% of people are still without water.

The school situation is devastating. There have been some very arbitrary decisions as to which schools will open and which will not. We fear that it has to do with preexisting plans to privatize the school system. Schools with very strong community bases have been excluded from this reopening process.

Yesterday there were arrests of nineteen teachers from the teachers' union who were protesting at the superintendent's office. I don't know what has happened with their charges.

Dennis Bernstein: A lot of people are out of work now.

Judith Berkan: Old San Juan has been dark. It has something like 900 to 1,000 businesses, which are almost all locally owned. Yesterday it was announced that one of the major music clubs is closing. There are major factories and major shopping centers which have not reopened. Meanwhile, we all have more expenses than we used to have, because everything is getting more and more expensive and the Jones Act was suspended for only ten days.

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the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

California Wildfires and the Undocumented

California's wildfires, like the hurricane devastation in Texas and Florida, compounded human rights concerns about the Trump administration's treatment of the undocumented amid emergencies, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Even as Northern California's massive wildfires are brought under control, another life-or-death question remains: Will the many undocumented people in the area who have lost everything be able to get help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Red Cross?

This question of the rights of the refugee and the undocumented has been central in the minds of those people directly affected by recent natural disasters that have been exacerbated by global warming, not just the California wildfires but the hurricanes that struck Houston, Florida and Puerto Rico.



There's also an economic element to the issue: Will Latinos and other people of color be protected as they undertake the dangerous work of the the frontline cleaning operations?

In Northern California and Sonoma County, which includes the hardest hit city of Santa Rosa, the question of what to do was no small trauma for hundreds of immigrant families, including many farmworkers and day laborers, who fled to the coast and took shelter in front of the Pacific Ocean and the roar of the waves, instead of bedding down in the official designated shelters.

And, while we've heard much concern about the loss of California's Wine Country, there has been less focus on the devastation of Farmworker Country and Indian Country. Indeed, even as the fires were raging, workers were sent in to harvest

the last of the grape crop.

I delved into these issues in a recent conversation with Pablo Alvarado, Executive Director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, or NDLON, who was just back from a tour of the massive fire damage on Oct. 26.

Dennis Bernstein: In the context of the California fires, it is still in question where undocumented workers who have lost their homes are going to go, what kind of support they can count on.

Pablo Alvarado: Sad to say, federal disaster relief is limited and often depends on who is affected. That is why people in Puerto Rico receive different treatment than people in Houston or Florida. Because ultimately those are brown people in Puerto Rico. The first step is that first responders provide direct assistance to homeowners and business owners. They bring the relief that people need to reconstruct their properties and reconstruct their lives.

Unfortunately, they never think about the workers who come to remove contaminated water and hazardous chemicals from burned down homes. These are the second responders, who come to remove the debris, the ashes, the fallen trees. There are no protections for these second responders. They go in to remove hazardous debris without proper protective gear. And while these workers are rebuilding other people's homes, they are also at work rebuilding their own lives. They understand that when they are rebuilding a home they are not only rebuilding the infrastructure, they are rebuilding families, communities.

In Northern California, we are working to ensure that these second responders are protected, that they have the proper training and equipment. We want to make sure that every worker who goes out at the beginning of the day comes back safely to his loved ones at the end of the day. A significant proportion of these second responders are undocumented workers and I can assure you that the work won't get done without these migrant workers and day laborers. The message to America that will come out of these reconstruction efforts is very clear: If you accept the fruits of my labor, you must recognize my humanity. If you benefit from what I produce with my hands, you must give me my rights. We want to raise the value of labor in the context of this massive reconstruction effort.

Dennis Bernstein: What does it mean in real terms to respect the humanity of the workers?

Pablo Alvarado: Everyone in this country enjoys the fruits of other people's labor. But when it comes down to ensuring that workers are safe at the workplace, most people don't want to be bothered. I visited Houston and in every

home you could find a migrant construction crew at work there. Undoubtedly, many of these workers were undocumented, meaning that their humanity was being denied. By reconstructing people's homes, by reconstructing people's lives, these workers earn the right to belong to our communities.

Dennis Bernstein: I understand that the National Day Laborer Organizing Network is going to be expanding in Northern California because of all the reconstruction work going on.

Pablo Alvarado: NDLON has been able to build a national infrastructure to respond to natural disasters. You can go to reconstructionworks.org to see the intervention we did after Sandy in New York and New Jersey, or to reconstructionworkstexas.org to view the reconstruction we have been doing in Houston after Harvey. We have dozens of health and safety trainers across the country who we plan to mobilize to come to Northern California, Houston and Florida to train workers by the thousands.

Many day laborer and domestic worker families were impacted by the fire. Not only did many lose their housing, but they lost their employment as well. The houses they were cleaning and providing gardening services to are no longer there. We have put a petition online to help these workers rebuild their own lives so that they can continue to help their communities rebuild.

Whenever there is a natural disaster of large magnitude, it is common to find people coughing blood, with skin rashes, etc. Unscrupulous employers will come and hire people without providing the health and safety equipment they need. Not only that, oftentimes they will refuse to pay the workers their wages after they have done the work, using the issue of migration to keep the workers quiet.

Dennis Bernstein: How do you determine if it is safe to enter an area that has been hit by a natural disaster?

Pablo Alvarado: Right now our own team is doing the research, consulting with the proper institutions. Trainers help people identify the dangers, for example, in the case of a flood, electrical wires or chemicals in the water. This is exactly what we are doing here in Northern California, identifying the risks and putting together easily readable educational materials. Since the early 1990's, after the fires in Malibu, we have organized relief brigades, who are often first responders at disaster areas.

After Sandy, for instance, in Staten Island, we were running a food bank there and when the workers saw what was happening, they began packing food into bags and went to the neighborhoods to bring food to the families. They were the first to get there. The workers even cleaned the homes of people who were adversaries

of immigrants and, at the end of the day, the people were in tears and saying how grateful they were.

In the end, this is our country. It does not belong to the white supremacists. The day laborers, the construction workers and domestic workers are going to show the way forward.

Dennis Bernstein: What kind of precautions are you taking to protect the workers from immigration people [ICE]? We know that a lot of people without documents fled, some to campsites along the coast.

Pablo Alvarado: This was a big issue in Houston. Undocumented people have to think twice before going to shelters run by government agencies. That is why it is important that civil society insist that people in shelters are not questioned about their status. In Houston there were thousands of people who stayed away from shelters because of that fear. Even many legal permanent residents didn't dare ask for assistance.

If we cannot work with this administration, we have to work with local authorities, who understand that undocumented people are an asset to their communities, not a burden. This becomes especially clear in the case of natural disasters. When undocumented people are themselves affected by a natural disaster, they should get the aid that they need. If the government doesn't provide assistance to undocumented communities, then we have to look elsewhere. That is exactly what we are doing in Northern California.

We know that undocumented people cannot receive aid from the federal government, but we can raise money to make sure that they can find new housing and go on with their lives. At this moment, when we ask undocumented workers to help us rebuild, we should be willing to provide them assistance as well.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Escaping the Colonized Mind

In our late-stage capitalism, every inch of humanity has been exploited and maximized for profit, creating "colonized" minds and emotions, a challenge for humans to free themselves and save the planet, says poet Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

Human sexuality mirrors human culture. Mating dances of seduction and refusal, and acts of non-consensual aggression cannot be separated from traits witnessed, practiced and internalized by the people of a particular society. It is impossible to close the bedroom door to the culture at large. Eros not only inhabits the genitals and the heart but Anima mundi as well.

Sexuality is not going to go away because its nature, which is sublime in the sense of the beautiful and the monstrous, makes people uncomfortable. The phenomenon brings all things human to the fore of consciousness. Therefore, it is imperative we talk about it all, and without mind-negating shame and heart-freezing hysteria.

The late, archetypal psychologist James Hillman, in his final book, the brilliant but under recognized, *A Terrible Love Of War*, noted the consort, the backdoor man, of the Goddess of Love and Beauty is Ares, the God of War. Moments after her practical-minded husband Hephaestus would leave for work, Ares and Aphrodite would be ensconced in the lover's bed, locked in intimate embrace, under the very roof constructed by her craftsman spouse. Withal, libido translates, often, into impractical, irrational and dangerous phenomenon.

Hillman asks, "where else in human experience, except in the throes of ardor – that strange coupling of love with war – do we find ourselves transported to a mythical condition and the gods most real?" – *A Terrible Love of War* (p. 9).

When human beings evince the erotic, we are gripped and grappled by primal forces. The ancient Greeks traced the phenomenon to the heights of Olympus while the lurid, Calvinist/Puritan imagination places it in lakes of torment-inflicting hellfire.

Under capitalism, the activity will be commodified. Sexuality is deemed a "human resource." And, as is the case with the finite resources of all things on planet earth, designated as fodder for exploitation by ruthless profiteers. The genitals of an individual are but another precinct to be colonized. One is advised to be ready with a local insurgency of the heart, mind and body to retain self-rule.

If only it was that easy. Where are the mountains of the heart from which to stage a guerrilla war? The option is possible. But expect a long struggle, and for your heart to receive all manner of wounds. Yet the pain of struggle provides us with a common tongue that limns the radiance of everyday catastrophe, including catastrophes attendant to the realm of Eros, son of errant and erratic Aphrodite. Thus we blunder into self-knowledge, are privy to

our own biography, read by pressing fingertips to the braille of one's scars.

Taking It All

When sexuality has been degraded by inequitable power, and the powers at large have decreed all the things of the world theirs for exploitation then the system from which the predatory class gains their power over the individual must be challenged and dismantled. But the setup cannot be changed from within its own self-sustaining, self-defining order. The notion is as risible as a yellow fin tuna joining the crew of a massive, sea life-decimating fishing trawler, the tuna claiming it plans to reform the system from within.

Men who callously disregard the autonomy of others are only as powerful as the societal structures in place that not only protect but lavishly reward their hyper-aggressive mode of mind and attendant modus operandi – apropos, the spoils gained by the capitalist class by means of their acts of perpetual plunder perpetrated against all of humanity and the whole of nature.

Speaking of which, the coal and steel processing company town, Birmingham, Alabama, where I was born was a colonized place. The small, Southern city, squatting at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, was founded, built and controlled by Northern industrialists. The homes of the city's affluent management class, known among us economic lessers as the Big Mules, luxuriated in the clear, fresh air upon Red Mountain (on which stands an imposing, iron ore cast statue of Vulcan, the Roman version of the Greek's Hephaestus) while the white laboring class and city's Jim Crow-shackled African-American community were relegated to dwelling in the industrial smog below.

As is the case with colonialist socio-economic structures, worldwide, in which a region's wealth is generated by a local, under-compensated labor force, it was imperative for the anger and resentment of the colonized masses to be shunted away from the colonizers. The time-tested method of racial animus did the trick. In my memory, the air of Birmingham was ridden with a heavy industry-generated, sulfuric, rotten egg-smelling reek that was inseparable from the miasmatic rage of white working-class men such as my father.

The reasons for their fuming resentment included: When my father would ask for a raise, the stock reply from management was, "You know, I can go over to Colored Town, right now, and hire five n*gg*ers for what I pay, your narrow ass."

Thus the anger of Birmingham's Jim Crow era among working men was always close to the surface, and, at the slightest provocation, would come boiling forth like phalanxes of fire ants from a disturbed bed. Exposing the hateful social milieu of the Jim Crow-ruled South to the world at large was a primary factor in the

decision of Martin Luther King et. al. to bring the Civil Rights cause to the city of my birth.

Denuded Empathy

For the maintenance of a colonized order to be maintained, empathy must be denuded, fear and antipathy of the alien other must be perpetuated thereby obstructing any inclination towards mutual respect and incipient feelings of affinity between the tribe granted a favored, dominant position and the tribes subjugated into positions of low status. Alliances among the exploited would prove dangerous to the elites whose fortunes are dependent on perpetual racial and ethnic division and divisiveness. Then, as now, class consciousness must be suppressed by the fomenting of racial resentments. When one gazes upon the sorehead denizens of the so-called alt-right, one becomes witness to the workings of a colonized – and wounded – psyche.

In my father's case, the following reveals how he transmigrated the howling abyss of his displaced rage into the precincts of empathy.

My father injured his back in a fall from a freight car while loading a cache of pig iron; as a consequence, he, on a permanent basis, could no longer perform manual labor – the primary type of work available to the working-class men of Birmingham. During his convalescence, he taught himself photography, and, by the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, he was freelancing to Black Star Syndicate and became Life Magazine's primary stringer in the region. I have memories of him arriving home from work, his clothes redolent of tear gas, his adrenal system churning, his mind buffeted, unable to process the brutality he witnessed being perpetrated by both city officials and ordinary citizens on the streets of the city.

On a Sunday, in late summer of 1963, my sister and I were immersed in Blakean innocence playing in the sandbox in the backyard of our family's apartment when he returned from the site of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. There was a quality about his stare that I found unnerving. His gaze kept returning to my sister and me. Being a father now myself, I know what thoughts were gripping and grappling him... "what if it had been them. My god ... what if it had been them."

Empathetic awareness has its starting point by evincing a sensitivity to the feelings, hopes, and aspirations of those close to one's heart yet cannot stall out there. The quality must ripple out to distance shores inhabited by the alien other. In this manner, the process of de-colonization of one's mind can begin.

Denial of the reality of Climate Change, albeit outside the cynical ranks of obscenely compensated Big Energy Industry lobbyists and shills, is borne of a

similar, life-negating dynamic, i.e., an ossified egotism winnows down awareness to manageable bits of casuistry:

“I just shoveled three feet of snow from my driveway. Global Warming...my frozen butt.” “I think too much political hay is made from weather. Our ancestors braved it and it was part of their lives,” arrive the (verbatim) quotes as seen on my Facebook newsfeed.

The declarations reveal an inner colonization, manifested by a monoculture of the mind. Because the natural world and the human psyche emerged from the same evolutionary schematic, circumscribing down one’s consciousness to ad hoc rationalizations for maintaining a destructive status quo, as is the case with climate denialism, amounts to psychical ecocide thus mirrors the fate of the earth, now in the throes of the sixth great extinction, due to the predation attendant to hyper-industrialization and consumerist addiction. The exponential loss of biodiversity is mirrored in the collective psyche of the consumer-scape, as if a massive fishing trawler has stripped all signs of life from the oceanic heart of humankind.

Going On

“I can’t go on...I’ll go on.” – final two sentences of Samuel Beckett’s novel, *The Unnamable*.

Yet, at times, I’m baffled as to how we, the scant and scattered few, who refuse to close our eyes and block our hearts to the realities of the day continue to go on. What force restrains one from reeling into the street seized by lamentation?

One foot is placed before the other. One word follows the next on the page. An ineffable understanding draws us into communion with the world and each other, even as the din of disconsolate angels braces the mind and cleaves the heart.

I know I am not alone in this. Nor are you. Even though, it seems so. What is the common prayer for those who cannot close themselves off from the agonized soul of the colonized world – for those of us who are ants who dream we are Atlas, and our visions crush us as if it were the weight of the earth itself upon our shoulders?

We face a vast aloneness together. An affinity of isolation binds us like a prayer of sacred vehemence. Empathy enjoins us thereby bestowing preternatural strength. Otherwise, the immense sadness of the earth would crush us into oblivion.

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California Wildfires Inflict More Devastation

Among recent natural disasters striking the U.S. are devastating wildfires that torched California's wine country, destroyed thousands of homes and killed more than 40 people, report Dennis J Bernstein and Miguel Gavilan Molina.

By Dennis J Bernstein and Miguel Gavilan Molina

The Tubbs neighborhood in Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, one of the hardest hit by the recent fires in Northern California, looked like some of the worst bombed-out and scorched neighborhoods in Syria with little left standing other than a few red brick chimneys and the burnt-out shells of cars and heavy metal appliances.

According to CalFire, the three largest fires in California's Wine Country – the Tubbs, Atlas and Nuns – have burned more than 182,000 acres in Sonoma and Napa counties. The total number of houses and businesses destroyed is estimated at more than 5,700 buildings with a death count of more than 40 people. In the Tubbs Fire alone, 17 people died, making it among the deadliest fires in the state's history.

Pacifica's Flashpoints program broadcast live from the Arlene Francis Center in Santa Rosa with interviews with Santa Rosa City Council Member Julie Combs and Sonoma County Supervisor James Gore.

Dennis Bernstein: Let me first begin with you, Councilwoman Julie Combs. ... Let's start on a personal note. We were talking before we went on air and I was thinking it must be horrifying to have a tree fall on your house. But then you said...

Julie Combs: I'd rather have a tree than a fire. I was very lucky. I am okay but my heart is with my whole city and my whole city is still recovering.

Dennis Bernstein: Tell us some of the stories you have heard.

Julie Combs: In my spare time I am also a ham radio operator. Sunday night I was listening to fire engines being called. The calls were coming in so quickly and

it was clear the fire was moving fast and spreading rapidly. I kept listening till about 3:00 in the morning when it became clear we had to do massive evacuations. We got shelters open early that morning. It was shocking how rapidly that fire moved. It moved faster than men could run.

Dennis Bernstein: Say something about the level of desperation people have been going through.

Julie Combs: We are estimating about 15,000 displaced. Santa Rosa has lost about 5% of its housing stock. Even before this, we had just a 1% vacancy rate for rentals. We had quite a number of people in shelters but most people found hotel arrangements or family to go to. A lot of people went out of area to stay with family. Many went to campgrounds at the coast. All of this is only going to work in the short term.

Schools will be closed until sometime next week. They have to do an excellent job of removing the toxic elements that have been in the air. The other problem is that hundreds of teachers have been displaced and are still without housing.

Miguel Gavilan Molina: The Spanish-speaking communities have special concerns. A lot of folks that did go out to the coast went because they were afraid of immigration.

Julie Combs: Initially they were afraid to go to shelters. It took us a while to get the word out that we were not going to ask any questions about documentation.

I had a fabulous experience at one of the shelters which illustrates how a community can come together around a disaster. I went to one shelter in a predominantly Latino area. The school gymnasium had about 150 people there. It received people from nursing homes, it received children with developmental difficulties, a lot of people with medical needs. Kids from a Polynesian dance class were performing. In another room, people had volunteered to offer massages. Outside a motorcycle club cooked a barbecue dinner for everyone in the place. So while it has been a great hardship, as we go forward into what will be a much harder time with rebuilding and clean up, I hope we can hold on to how well we pulled together as a community.

Dennis Bernstein: James Gore is vice chair of the Sonoma Board of Supervisors.

James Gore: It is a great opportunity to be here, because we are at a crucial point now between crisis and rebuild and recovery. This fire didn't distinguish, it affected everyone. In my district we have lost core housing stock, something like three to four thousand houses gone. These are teachers, workers, carpenters, farm workers. These were not high-income houses up in the hills. We

need to make sure that people stay there, that when we rebuild it isn't for second homes in the Wine Country. We have to take care of our workers, even if it means changing laws, changing jurisdictions, even changing things at the state level.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you share with us how this disastrous event has ultimately changed your life?

James Gore: My cousin and his family will probably be living with us for a long time because their house is gone. Two of my childhood homes are gone. My step sister lost her home as well. I am driving all around my community, trying to evacuate certain areas and at the same time repopulate other areas. And I look at the back of my car and see basically everything that is important to me. Every time I put on the brakes I can hear my wedding picture slide across the back seat. Because I am ready to go with my kids, too, at any moment.

Someone said to me the other day on the street, "The way the city is rebounding reminds me of the Santa Rosa I grew up in." This is a great equalizer and it is a huge shock to our system that we need to make use of. We tend to get complacent and focus on what I call "hashtag first-world" issues. We need to take this as a mandate to go forward and do what we need to in terms of housing, watershed protection, economic equality.

I feel that we have to seize the moment to prove that we did not run for local office to be professional politicians. As public servants, we must respond to the needs in our community. We need to understand this as an opportunity to rally and create a movement. We have talked about how the city and the country can work together. Well, it is not theoretical anymore.

Miguel Gavilan Molina: One thing I am concerned about is that winter is just a month and a half away. The rains are coming. Are these evacuation centers going to be able to keep people there for the next four or five months?

James Gore: The future is a question more than an answer right now. Let's start with the environment. I was an appointee in charge of conservation in the Obama administration. I visited communities in Colorado and Arizona where flooding after a fire caused double the damage caused by the fire. We are trying to bring in state and federal people to work with local landowners to prepare the lands for rain. Last year we had historic rains. Whether you believe in climate change or not, we are clearly dealing with a new system.

Then look at the economy. We are seeing small business people who haven't had any business for the past two weeks and they don't expect to have much business for the next couple months. We are raising money for our undocumented community,

because they are not going to qualify for FEMA. Finally, where are people going to stay? This is where the city and county are going to have to rally. We have to identify county pieces of land, city pieces of land, private land where we can put up modular units to keep people in our towns.

Julie Combs: The fires are still not 100% contained. Fires continue within the areas of containment. At any moment nature could trick us. We could get a sudden wind. It is possible we could get another fire before the end of the year. We are in the process of both putting out an active fire and re-entering areas where fire damage has occurred. Traditionally, repopulation takes place after the fire has been eliminated. We are trying to get people back in their homes as quickly and as safely as we can.

James Gore: We are at the point right now where we have to figure things out as we go. We are in adaptive management mode. I tell people that the only thing perfect is our relentless, imperfect progress. This is not the first time this has happened. I was talking recently with Supervisor Rob Brown who led the response to the Valley fire two years ago. He told me that when we are rebuilding we have to remember that these are not reconstruction sites, these are sacred sites. These are places where people brought their kids home for the first time. The silver lining is that we are not going to let the systems hold us back from solutions. We have been talking about system inertia for a long time. Well, now is our chance to wipe it out.

Julie Combs: Some of the barriers that existed between the city and the country have disappeared. This has truly been a joint effort. The first question I asked FEMA when they came was how soon we could get FEMA housing support. We wanted FEMA to be thinking more creatively in what they provide to us and how we receive it, so that we aren't stuck in the future with housing we don't want and instead get the housing we need.

Dennis Bernstein: Dealing with FEMA can be tricky.

James Gore: In our initial conversation with FEMA we made clear to them that we wanted not just to rebuild but to build capacity at the same time. They agreed that it didn't make sense to buy a bunch of mobile units from somewhere else, that we should use our workforce here to rebuild. We want to have everyone, both union and non-union, on the ground building capacity, using this as an opportunity to get things done.

There were certain areas in my district that were not connected up to the sewer system. We are looking to FEMA to help us ensure that everyone is connected to the sewer so we have less groundwater damage in the future. We don't want to repeat the horror of empty mobile homes that we saw after Katrina.

I am cautiously optimistic because I believe that we have the capacity to push, to mobilize and get it done. My heart goes out to some of the other communities that don't have the abundance of resources that Sonoma County has. In other communities, the resources are indeed scarce.

Julie Combs: As dollars come in, it is important that we use them locally. That we are not bringing in a lot of outside labor to solve problems that we have the ability to solve here. I think it is important that we are paying a prevailing wage, ensuring that people who are building houses can live in them. I also want to make sure that people really understand what FEMA has to offer them. Federal assistance is up to \$32,000 for loss of residence. There are hotel costs, costs of replacing tools, childcare. There are funds available for these things.

A lot of people assume that if the parents are not documented, they cannot get FEMA aid. If there is one person in the family with documents, the whole family is eligible for FEMA funding. If you are a dreamer with a social security number, that counts. Another thing people worry about is that, when you fill out your visa form, you have to say whether you have received government assistance. FEMA does not count as one of the government assistance programs.

James Gore: A lot of this stuff has already been figured out. We have to make sure we take the best practices from the Valley fire in Lake County, from Santa Barbara, from Monterey, Trinity County, San Diego. I was recently at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds and the private sector engineering contractors association are getting people who are already certified and certifying others. The operating engineers on the union side have 300 people ready to deploy. Right now it is all about getting those contracts out in the most efficient manner.

And, as Julie said, it is crucial that we pay good wages. We have to infuse into our local economy. Julie and I have failed if all of these jobs go to people outside our community and all these people here on a thin wire get displaced.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

As Trump Preen, Puerto Rico Still Suffers

Many Puerto Ricans continue to live in primitive and dangerous conditions more than a month after Hurricane Maria devastated the U.S. territory in the

Caribbean, as Judith Berkan explained to Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Last Thursday, President Trump gave his administration a “ten out of ten” for its handling of the hurricane recovery in Puerto Rico. However, even as Trump was patting himself and his team on the back the power grid in San Juan went down again throwing the city into darkness.

More than a month after Hurricane Maria made landfall on Sept. 20, many Puerto Ricans remained in dire straits, especially those needing electricity for respirators or dialysis machines to treat medical conditions. Some back-up generators were burning out due to overuse.

Meanwhile, those living in more remotes areas of Puerto Rico like Vieques and Culebra were still living without any resources, often left to fend for themselves, forced to drink highly polluted water from rivers, or other sources, including those directly connected to superfund sites.

Given Puerto Rico’s ongoing crisis, some officials of the U.S. territory have tried to avoid angering the President. At one point during the meeting in the Oval Office, Trump turned to Puerto Rico’s Governor Ricardo Rossello and asked, “Did we do a great job?” Rossello finessed the President’s question: “You responded immediately, Sir.”

But San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz quipped that Trump was right about giving his administration a “10” if it was out of 100. “If it is a 10 out of a scale of 100, of course, it is still a failing grade,” she said on CNN’s “New Day” on Friday.

In an interview late Thursday, I spoke with Flashpoints contributor Judith Berkan in San Juan, whose electricity had again failed, along with millions of other Puerto Ricans. Berkan is a human rights activist and attorney who deals with land rights, and has been a resident on the U.S.’ island colony for the last 40 years.

Dennis Bernstein: What’s the latest regarding the situation on the ground? Is the situation beginning to improve?

Judith Berkan: In some ways, the situation keeps getting worse. For example, just a half an hour ago most, if not all, of the San Juan area lost electricity. The power comes and goes. You get it for a couple days and you get a sense of some routine in your life and then it disappears again. So the San Juan

metropolitan area, which in some ways is the economic motor of the country, is still in the dark. I live in an apartment building which has generators. There has been a fire sale of generators here at very exorbitant prices. People are being gouged.

Dennis Bernstein: Talk about the situation in terms of power at medical facilities.

Judith Berkan: I just spoke with a friend of mine who spent all day waiting for ambulatory surgery and then the lights went out. About three-quarters of the hospitals on the island are working but most of those are working on generators. Generators cause all sorts of other problems. The air contamination is frightening and we are seeing more respiratory diseases.

Because of the uncertainty of power, hospitals are limiting their operations and sending people who can afford it off the island to have operations. Because doctor's offices are closed by and large, emergency rooms have become, in effect, doctor's offices.

There has been a propagation of contagious diseases. Pneumonia is showing up quite a bit. We have had torrential rains this past week. In October, so far, we have had over six inches of rain, which has resulted in huge floods. The water is still contaminated by animal carcasses and rodent urine and that kind of thing. We are seeing scabies, which is one of those diseases that can pass from an animal to a human being.

We also have a devastating situation with the tarps. Something like 250,000 homes have totally lost their roofs and many more have lost part of their roofs. The FEMA director here was saying that the only tarps that have been distributed were some 45,000 that were on stock here in Puerto Rico. When the request was made for more tarps to the States, they said that none were available. So now they are being manufactured and they estimate that next week 500,000 will arrive.

As far as the job that the US is doing, they are not offering enough aid, they are offering us loans at a time when Puerto Rico's indebtedness is extraordinary to begin with. There are still communities, 29 days after the storm, who have not been reached by a single governmental agent. Only about 10 percent of roads are passable and there is still debris all over the streets.

Dennis Bernstein: Drinkable water is in short supply. This is like going back a hundred years.

Judith Berkan: People are drinking from creeks. There was a scandal last week when it was discovered that people were drinking water coming from a superfund

site. Personally, as someone who has had water most of this time, I will not drink the water that comes out of the tap. I have no idea whether the water is contaminated or not.

I knew that Trump and Rossello would be meeting today but I hadn't heard Trump's statement. To say that the federal effort has been a ten out of ten would be laughable if it were not so sad. I mean, drop Mr. Trump off in the middle of the island and see if he can get water or a roof over his head.

Dennis Bernstein: The president made a big deal about the minimum number of deaths so far.

Judith Berkan: Every estimate is different. The most recent estimate is 49. 103 [people] are still missing. There are still cadavers being found in river beds. Beyond that, there are many consequential deaths that are not being taken account of. This includes people with respiratory illnesses, people who need frozen insulin, people on rationed dialysis.

No one has studied the psychological effects of all this, but there have been several suicides. So the number of deaths is going to go way up. And even if there have been only 49 deaths, that is not the true measure of the suffering or the responsibility of the United States with respect to this colony.

Dennis Bernstein: And I imagine the situation is a great deal worse in places like Vieques.

Judith Berkan: Vieques and Culebra are two offshore islands with very little access to goods and supplies. There are about eight or nine thousand people on Vieques and about 1,500 on Culebra. Those people are completely on their own. There have been reports of widespread food insecurity. There is only one hospital on Vieques and I don't believe there are any on Culebra. The shipping out there is very unreliable. They are really suffering, as are people in the mountains and also in the poorer communities within the cities.

I do want to say that there has been a lot of solidarity, a lot of aid coming in. We suggest that donations be made to the community organizations, not to corporate organizations like the Red Cross or the First Lady's Fund.

Dennis Bernstein: Vieques had the hell bombed out of it for decades and the remnants of that are going to cause people to get sick for years to come.

Judith Berkan: Before the storm hit, there were cancer pockets in Vieques. For a period of about thirty years Culebra was bombed by the US Navy and in Vieques the bombing went on for about sixty years, from the 1940's until 2003. They left Culebra in the 1970's and Vieques in 2003, in both cases after massive protests.

When the Navy left, they just left the contaminants there. There is unexploded ordinance but more dangerous are the contaminants that have made their way into the ground water. I have no confidence in the water supply, either on Vieques and Culebra or here on the main island. A lot of people are receiving bottled water but I don't know how long it is going to be sustained.

Dennis Bernstein: Who is in charge?

Judith Berkan: That is the question of the hour. Nobody knows. There is a lot of finger pointing. The local government is pointing at the feds. FEMA is here, the Army Corps of Engineers is here, the local government, the municipal government. We also have private security firms here, such as the current incarnation of Blackwater. You see the US military here. And everyone points fingers at everyone else. No one knows where to go to get certain things.

Dennis Bernstein: Any positive developments?

Judith Berkan: One positive development has been that grassroots organizations, progressive organizations, agricultural collectives, and labor organizations have come together to reach out to the people. But as for officialdom, it is totally unknown who is in charge.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Trump's War for Coal Raises Risks

Exclusive: President Trump's war for coal is threatening progress on alternative energy while creating hazards both in the weather effects from global warming and in health risks from breathing dirty air, writes Jonathan Marshall.

By Jonathan Marshall

When Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt proudly declared "The war against coal is over," as part of his Oct. 9 announcement of plans to repeal the Obama-era Clean Power Plan, he neglected to mention the thousands of Americans whose lives will be sacrificed so coal producers and utilities can declare victory in the nation's environmental wars.

As Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune said in a statement, "Donald Trump and Scott Pruitt will go down in infamy for launching one of the most

egregious attacks ever on public health, our climate, and the safety of every community in the United States. He's proposing to throw out a plan that would prevent thousands of premature deaths and tens of thousands of childhood asthma attacks every year."

Coal burning produces deadly particulates, toxic metals, and other pollutants that have a ruinous effect on public health, even with current controls on smokestack emissions. A 2015 analysis by the EPA of the Clean Power Plan, which proposed flexible measures to curb carbon pollution from power plants across the country, noted that associated cuts to smog and soot would "bring major health benefits for American families."

By 2030, when its provisions fully kicked in, the plan would result in "up to 3,600 fewer premature deaths; 90,000 fewer asthma attacks in children; 1,700 fewer hospital admissions; and avoiding 300,000 missed days of school and work."

Those numbers reflected only the projected impact of the Clean Power Plan, not the total impact of coal burning. Carnegie Mellon professor Jay Apt recently cited a vast scientific literature that supports estimates of premature deaths from U.S. power plant emissions at between 7,500 and 52,000 annually – roughly comparable to total fatalities from car crashes.

Switching electric utilities completely from coal to natural gas would slash those emissions and lower human health costs by upward of \$50 billion a year, Apt and a team of fellow scientists calculated in a 2016 paper.

That process is already underway for economic reasons. Thanks to cheap natural gas prices, nearly half of U.S. coal-fired power plants have shut down or announced plans to retire in recent years—including nearly a dozen since Trump took office.

A recent study issued by the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University noted, "A surge in US natural gas production due to the shale revolution has driven down prices and made coal increasingly uncompetitive in US electricity markets. Coal has also faced growing competition from renewable energy, with solar costs falling 85 percent between 2008 and 2016 and wind costs falling 36 percent."

Unless those basic economic facts change, it declared, "US coal consumption will continue its decline despite Trump's aggressive rollback of Obama-era regulations."

War on Renewable Energy

This March, for the first time ever, wind and solar produced 10 percent of all

electricity in the United States, reflecting their growing challenge to coal and their rapidly declining cost. The Trump administration is looking for ways to reverse that trend, even if that means ending the tremendous job boom in alternative energy industries.

At EPA, besides attempting to kill the Clean Power Plan, Trump apparently hopes to roll back costly regulations of mercury emissions and coal ash from power plants by appointing former coal company lobbyist Andrew Wheeler to serve as deputy administrator of the agency.

EPA's Pruitt has also publicly urged repeal of federal tax credits for wind and solar power – without noting that they are scheduled to disappear by 2020 and 2022, respectively, and without acknowledging that extensive federal subsidies for coal for years tilted the playing field in favor of fossil fuels. (President Trump is said by West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice to be “really interested” in providing a lavish new federal subsidy for Appalachian coal.)

Meanwhile, over at the Department of Energy, the White House has asked for cuts of nearly 70 percent in the department's programs for renewable energy and energy efficiency, including its much-acclaimed advanced research program.

Energy Secretary Rick Perry last month asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to ram through new economic regulations favoring ailing coal and nuclear plants. His transparent attempt to interfere with energy markets ran into determined opposition not only from wind and solar representatives, but members of the gas industry. One of Trump's own appointees to FERC objected, saying “I did not sign up to go blow up the markets.”

The Interior Department has weighed in, too, with Secretary Ryan Zinke declaring during National Clean Energy Week that solar companies should stop looking for sites to produce energy on federal lands. To date, his department has approved only one solar project, compared to the 60 approved by the Obama administration over eight years.

Zinke's anti-solar stance conflicts with the opinion of two-thirds of adult Americans, who believe the United States should give priority to renewable energy over fossil fuels.

Perhaps the Trump administration's biggest threat to renewable energy is its potential support for a new ruling by the U.S. International Trade Commission, which found that cheap Chinese solar panels have hurt U.S.-based manufacturers. The Solar Energy Industry Association, the main industry lobby, has decried the ruling and warned that punitive tariffs would raise panel prices, slam the breaks on solar adoption, and cost nearly 90,000 U.S. jobs.

The ruling was also opposed by the conservative Heritage Foundation, at least two Republican governors, and a group of retired military energy experts.

“But for Trump,” observed the *Washington Post*’s Dino Grandoni, “the commission’s decision presents a rare opportunity for him to penalize two of his favorite punching bags – China and Mexico, which was also named in the ITC ruling . . . – without Congress getting in the way.” Just as important, it would allow Trump to land another blow for the coal industry.

By waging war against renewable energy industry, the Trump administration isn’t just putting hundreds of thousands of good jobs at risk. In the long run, it is jeopardizing efforts to slow the pace of global warming, which has contributed to the vast scale and devastation of recent natural disasters ranging from hurricanes to fires.

Just as significant, the administration threatens to condemn to misery or death thousands of Americans who will be forced to breathe dirtier air in order to line the pockets of Trump’s coal-industry supporters. By fighting for coal, Trump is waging war on our very lives.

Jonathan Marshall is a frequent contributor to Consortiumnews.com.

As Trump Fumes, Puerto Rico Struggles

Angered by criticism from desperate U.S. citizens in Puerto Rico, President Trump lashed out with threats to remove federal rescue and recovery personnel – even as the crisis grows worse, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Some three weeks after Hurricane Maria shredded Puerto Rico, the situation on the U.S. island territory remains grave with only about 10 percent of Puerto Rico’s residents having electricity, according to the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority. Meanwhile, thousands of people remain in packed shelters in San Juan.

Health and public officials now worry about a developing public health crisis with outbreaks of several deadly water and airborne diseases that have not plagued the island for years, including four confirmed cases of Leptospirosis, a rat urine-borne disease that can be deadly. The death toll has risen to about 50 although a precise count is difficult given the lack of telephone service in

remote areas.

On Oct. 11, I spoke with Attorney and Human Rights Activist Judith Berkan about the ongoing rescue and recovery, and the major failures on the part of the Trump Administration to deal with a very serious ongoing life and death situation.

Dennis Bernstein: Tell us about your day today. You were delivering generators?

Judith Berkan: People are organizing here like crazy, given the absence of effective official relief. We went out into the countryside today to deliver a generator, flashlights and batteries.

Dennis Bernstein: Before we get into the government failure, tell us about the situation on the ground and the other kinds of actions taken by people who obviously realize that there is racism at play and the federal government is out of town.

Judith Berkan: In some ways it has gotten a little worse than when we spoke last week. The electrical power, which was beginning to come on at a very slow rate, has now basically collapsed again. Virtually no one has power.

The other thing that has changed is that we are beginning to see in concrete ways a public health crisis developing. We have four confirmed cases of Leptospirosis, a rat urine-borne disease you get from being exposed to water or mud and which must be treated very early or it is fatal. About seven other cases have been identified in four island towns. We also have mosquito-borne diseases and stagnant waters are breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

We are experiencing major problems with our hospitals. A lot of them no longer have electrical power. Everything we anticipated happening is beginning to happen. People cannot get fresh food. Asthma and other respiratory diseases are rampant. People are dying in nursery homes with limited access to power. They are rationing dialysis at most hospitals.

Apparently there is some kind of official narrative being heard in the United States that things are vastly improved, that the federal and state response has been good. This is not at all the case. The long-term effects of this storm are going to be worse than the storm itself. It is a lot worse in the countryside than it is here in San Juan, and it has been from the beginning. About half the island now has water, but the water is unsafe for drinking. Health officials are telling people to boil the water before drinking it, but no one has electricity!

There is no strategic planning and there is a sense of total chaos in coordination of services, whether it is the Red Cross or FEMA or the Coast Guard. Nobody seems to know who is supposed to do what. It is a devastating

situation and I believe it is going to get worse before it gets better.

Dennis Bernstein: On the island of Vieques, people are concerned that toxins there are being scattered around by the storms.

Judith Berkan: Yes, on the offshore islands the situation is even worse. In 1942 and 1943 the US expropriated the islands and continued to bomb Vieques until 2003. There is so much toxic material still in the ground water and one of the problems with the lack of sanitation is that the toxins tend to propagate.

Another issue is that we have had extraordinarily heavy rains in the last three days, which has caused flooding because the waterways are full of debris. There hasn't been a cleanup since Irma.

Dennis Bernstein: For a brief moment there seemed to be some hope with the suspension of the Jones Act.

Judith Berkan: The Jones Act was a 1920's statute that was passed largely to benefit the US shipping industry. What it says is that, if you are going to ship anything from US ports to Puerto Rico, you have to do it on US flag ships staffed by US crews. This makes everything much more expensive in Puerto Rico. There are some relief groups in the States who made contact with foreign flag ships to send supplies down here but cannot anymore.

Today it was reported that Trump has proposed to Congress a \$4.9 billion loan to Puerto Rico. This is quite remarkable because Puerto Rico is in a desperate situation with our debt and all we need now is to get more into debt! Right now there is talk that the Puerto Rican government will not be able to meet any payments after October.

Dennis Bernstein: Tell us something about the people's reaction to this devastating crisis.

Judith Berkan: People are taking collective actions which are real models for what Puerto Rico may look like in the future, as a self-sustaining country rather than a dependant colony. You see it in casual ways, with neighbors coming with machetes to help other neighbors, people checking up on each other, on the elderly.

But you also see a lot of new organizational activity. It is collective activity to make sure that people's needs are met: delivering generators, delivering water, doing censuses of people's needs, taking people out of dangerous situations, making sure they get medical care. It is a very egalitarian and democratic way of doing things.

There are some agricultural collectives who are trying to figure out how to get fresh food out to people. There are medical collectives offering free medical services. There is a marvelous sense of community. You walk around the streets and talk to strangers, you figure out what people's needs are, you share experiences.

Before this there had been a gradual process of more alienation, more dependence on electronic devices, on fossil fuels. All that served to break with what was remarkable about Puerto Rican society, which was its sense of collective well-being.

We know we cannot rely on the government anymore. We used to demand things of the government but at this point we don't expect anything. In Washington, we currently have a particularly racist government in power. But there is a long history of colonial relationship in which all economic structure was developed to meet the needs of imperial power. It has been exacerbated with the current administration and there is clearly no interest in making sure the most basic needs are met.

Dennis Bernstein: We now have FEMA picking up where the president left off, in terms of insulting the mayor of San Juan and other local politicians, blaming you and making believe that the oppressed are responsible.

Judith Berkan: And you have to understand that our market system is based on the US market system and we pay for services like FEMA. Our current statehood government is trying to paint a rosy picture in order to curry favor with the administration, which is boasting about how great conditions are in Puerto Rico.

In some ways we are making progress, but the entire island is basically without power. Right now the official death count is 44 and there are 113 people still missing. There has been a spike in suicides. The situation is dire, people are suffering.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Puerto Rico's Continuing Health Crisis

President Trump and his team stress the positive about their response to Hurricane Maria's devastation of Puerto Rico, but people are dying because the island's health care system remains crippled, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

More than two-and-a-half weeks after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, the U.S. territory continues to face a humanitarian crisis with people lacking basic needs, such as food, clean water, electricity and medical supplies. Doctors say they don't have what they need to save lives, with unnecessary deaths occurring especially among the elderly, the infirm and those on respirators and other kinds of electronic life support systems.

The island's healthcare system remains hobbled with about 80 percent of the island without electricity and cell phone service. Many residents also lack potable water.

Meanwhile, residents of the island of Vieques, which was used as a bombing range by the U.S. military for decades, face the added fear of the toxic military waste that has been churned up and may have been spread around and released into the local environment by the high winds and heavy rains from the hurricane.

I spoke on Oct. 6 with Attorney and Human Rights Activist Judith Berkan, who has lived in San Juan for decades, about the tragic and deadly situation that remains for tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans.

Dennis Bernstein: First of all, what can you tell us about the aid situation?

Judith Berkan: The situation continues to be extraordinarily bad. The first week or week and a half after the storm there was basically no distribution of aid. Communities, however, were coming together, displaying typical Puerto Rican solidarity.

But we need additional aid. We need things like the FEMA tents, which have arrived on the island but have not been distributed. Many people have lost their homes, but even those who still have their homes cannot stay there because the aid is not there. It is really a problem of distribution. There are communities that have never seen a federal person yet.

Although the water has receded in most parts of San Juan, there is an extraordinary amount of debris around and a large number of mosquitoes, which has created a public health problem. Only about ten percent of the population have electricity. In mountain communities there is absolutely no distribution. It is clear that there has not been a commitment to really deal with this crisis.

There have been stories about there being 9,000 containers at the port a couple days ago. Some of that has gotten out, not a lot. It is going to FEMA distribution centers and then from there to get to the community it really

depends on community initiative.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you describe for us everyday life there on the island?

Judith Berkan: When you try to communicate with someone, you never know if you are getting through. The first few days, if you wanted to get gas you had to wait in line for eight or ten hours. The ATM machines are still pretty hard to get to. Everything takes ten times longer. People in isolated areas have to walk for hours to get to a grocery store and when you get there, there is not a lot available. The gas problem has been considerably resolved.

Health issues are dramatic. The hospitals don't have diesel for their generators, you can't get prescriptions filled. There is still fecal matter in the water in people's homes. It is a pretty dire existence and the long-term health effects are going to be dramatic.

Dennis Bernstein: Could you talk a little about President Trump's latest insult to the Puerto Rican people?

Judith Berkan: It was racist and arrogant. It is very hard to describe how that was received in Puerto Rico. It started with his tweet that the Puerto Rican people were just waiting for things to be done for them. Then he comes here and says this is not a real catastrophe. When you compare the federal response to that in Florida and Texas, it is hard not to see racism on the part of the government.

Dennis Bernstein: Do the people there have any say in how the island will be reconstructed?

Judith Berkan: For a long time now, we have been resisting the gentrification of the entire island and an economic model designed for the pleasure of outsiders. We need people in the United States on a more macro level to support our community efforts to resist gentrification.

We are very afraid that relief money will go toward policies of privatization and displacement of people from their ancestral homes. We are demanding from the federal government more relief effort and more control of this relief by the people of Puerto Rico.

For the last year we have been under the yoke of the Fiscal Control Board, which has the power to reverse fiscal decisions made by the government. For example, the decision as to whether we should pay off a bondholder or make sure a school stays open. Another power of the board is infrastructure projects. They locate public assets, whether they be forests or buildings, and put them up for sale.

Our great fear now is that the money that is coming in will not be used for the benefit of the Puerto Rican people but to contribute to this privatization model.

Dennis Bernstein: I would like to get your response to the confrontation between the mayor of San Juan and President Trump.

Judith Berkan: The mayor did the right thing in focusing attention on what was really going on here. What she was saying was what we were all feeling. And the response from Trump was both racist and misogynist. Here was a small but strong Latina woman basically speaking truth to power and the response was outrageous and hurtful. While you may hear of Puerto Rican politicians who are Democrats or Republicans, the distinction is irrelevant to local politics. This is not a partisan maneuver against Trump.

Dennis Bernstein: As someone who would like to see the island be for the people, what would you like to see happen in the short run and then long-term?

Judith Berkan: I have lived in Puerto Rico for forty years. This is an incredible people. If we organize on a community level, this could be a new beginning for us. We can reconstruct but the funds have to be here and we have to be in control. We have an opportunity to redirect our usage of land, to work toward community land ownership. We must redirect our use of power sources, moving from coal to solar power.

Beyond that, we have to take the yoke of colonialism off our backs, whether that means independence or federation with other Caribbean states. As the economic models have been imposed through the Caribbean, they have devastated the region. Decisions have to be based on the needs of the Puerto Rican people rather than the needs of colonial power.

We are very thankful here for the outpouring of support. We really appreciate that people are paying attention to Puerto Rico. This is a long, ongoing struggle and it will continue for many years to come. It is important to have your support.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
