

Can Xi Jinping's "Chinese Model" Supplant Capitalist Democracies and Why Should Western Socialists Care? - Part 4

January 9, 2024



Chinese President Xi Jinping takes his oath after he is unanimously elected as President during a session of China's National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Friday, March 10, 2023. AP with permission.

This is part 4 of a four-part series. [Part 1](#) [Part 2](#) [Part 3](#)

I. The Communist Party's critique of American democracy

In 2021 China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a major report on the "The State of Democracy in

the United States”[1] citing extensively from American sources and critics. The report contended that American democracy which once advertised itself as a “model for the world” is shot through with insoluble contradictions, hopelessly corrupt, and in decline:

“Democracy means ‘rule by the people’ or ‘sovereignty of the people.’ Democracy is a common value shared by all humanity. . . Historically, the development of democracy in the US was a step forward. The political party system, the representative system, one person one vote, and the separation of powers negated . . . the feudal autocracy in Europe. . . The principle of ‘government of the people, by the people and for the people’ articulated by Abraham Lincoln is recognized worldwide. However, over the years, democracy in the US has degenerated and deviated from the essence of . . . its original design. . . [It’s] become a ‘game of the rich’ in a country plagued by money politics, political polarization, social divide, widening wealth gap, racial discrimination and gun violence. . . Money politics has penetrated the entire process of election, legislation and administration. . . [it] has become an ‘irremovable tumor’ in American society and a mockery of democracy. . . For example, the 2020 presidential election and Congressional elections cost some US\$14 billion, two times that of 2016 and three times that of 2008. . . Citing Robert Reich, political donations are almost seen as ‘legitimate bribery.’ . . statistics show that winners of 91% of U.S. Congressional races are the candidates with [the most financial] support. And those so-called representatives of the people, once elected, often serve the interests of their financial backers. ‘One person one vote in name, rule of the minority elite in reality.’ In 2021 the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, a Sweden-based think tank . . . list[ed] the US as a ‘backsliding democracy’ for the first time. Political pluralism is only a facade. A small number of elites dominate political, economic and military affairs. They control the state apparatus and policy-making process, manipulate public opinion, dominate the business community . . . making the multiparty system dead in all but name. [As] Noam Chomsky points out, the lower 70% on the wealth/income scale . . . have no influence on policy whatsoever. They are effectively disenfranchised. . . American democracy always flaunts the separation of powers, but . . . the function of ‘checks and balances,’ which was purportedly designed to prevent abuse of power [has become] ‘entrenched paralysis,’ what Francis Fukuyama calls a ‘vetocracy,’”

In January 2021, Chinese media had a field day replaying American network television videos of Trump’s January 6th insurrectionary riot, calling it “a masterclass in dysfunctional democracy.” The *Global Times* posted side-by-side photos comparing Hong Kong protesters occupying the Legco chamber [city hall] in July 2019 with Trump’s rioters invading the U.S. Capitol building in Washington to warn the Chinese that “THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE.”[2]

I couldn’t agree more with the CP’s criticisms of the contradictions and hypocrisies of American democracy. In truth, the history is worse than the picture the Party paints. But their whataboutism hardly excuses their own ruthless suppression of human rights. Their risible feigned love for Lincoln’s “government of by and for the people”[3] makes the United States look like democratic paradise, even under Donald Trump, compared to the Communists’ totalitarian police state where opposition parties are explicitly banned, where Chinese subjects don’t even have the human right to step out of their apartment front doors if the Party says no,[4] where dissenting voices are jailed, tortured and worse,[5] where Tibetan Buddhists and Xinjiang Muslims are locked up in slave-labor prison factories, their children forcibly removed and placed in CCP schools to facilitate extinguishing their culture, where the Party that rhetorically exalts democracy has crushed actual democracy in Hong Kong to ensure that only Party-approved “patriotic” candidates can run for office, and where

its own people are fleeing en masse to the “declining West.”

Moreover, pace the Communist Party, the contradictions and inadequacies of American democracy are not due to the nature of democracy per se, but due to the *weakness* and *incompleteness* of American democracy. Far from “degenerating and deviating from the essence of its original design,” just the opposite. American democracy was vastly worse in the days of the founders when it was a democracy of slaveowners. And “RECD” as it is today, the struggle to radicalize our democracy, to build a democracy that can overpower capitalism, is in my view, the only pathway to avoid social and ecological collapse.

II. The founding fathers’ deep fear of democracy

Capitalist democracies are inherently contradictory because they represent myriad and often mutually conflicting socio-economic interests: capital vs. labor, racist whites vs. blacks, Christian anti-women fascists vs. liberals, fossil fuel interests vs. renewable energy interests, and so on. That’s what democracies are supposed to do, represent the will or at least the majority will of the electorate. In the case of the United States, democratic government “by the people” has been systematically subverted by the power of its economic ruling classes from the outset.

American democracy was founded on the theft of most of the North American continent, the near extermination of its native inhabitants, and the institution of industrial-scale plantation slavery. Its first president George Washington was the largest slaveowner in the colonies. The Enlightenment-inspired 1789 U.S. Constitution promised that “all men are created equal” and formally established the political rule of democracy. But the founding fathers ensured that behind the façade of democracy, a plutocracy of slave owners and capitalists controlled the levers of power. The authors of the Constitution were acutely aware of the threat of democracy, that in a democracy the wealthy would soon be outvoted and likely expropriated by the majority of poorer folk. At the Federal Convention in 1787 James Madison (who owned more than 100 slaves) warned that

In England, at this day, if elections were open to all classes of people, the property of landed proprietors would be insecure. An agrarian law would soon take place. If these observations be just, our government ought to secure the permanent interests of the country against innovation. Landholders [the wealthy] ought to have a share in the government, to support these invaluable interests, and to balance and check the other. They ought to be so constituted as to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority. The senate, therefore, ought to be this body; and to answer these purposes, they ought to have permanency and stability.[6]

John Jay, president of the Continental Congress, first Chief Justice of the United States (and slaveowner) put it more bluntly: “Those who own society ought to govern it.”[7] To ensure the continued dominance of the minority of the opulent against the majority hoi polloi, the framers and their 19th century successors established numerous protections beginning with protection of private property (the 5th and 14th amendments) that enabled primitive accumulation against the native inhabitants, monopolization of the means of production in the hands of slaveowners and capitalists, the accumulation of capital by means of systematic dispossession and exploitation of the workers, and perpetual inequality.

Slavery was protected by prohibiting Congress from outlawing the slave trade for at least 20 years, by requiring the return of runaway slaves (the Fugitive Slave clause Article 4.2), and by granting the government the power to put down domestic rebellions including slave insurrections. From 1789 to 1911, eleven of the first 18 presidents including Ulysses Grant were slave owners. From 1790 to 1865, seven chief and associate justices of the Supreme Court were slave owners or former slaveowners.[8] Chief Justice Roger Tannery, a major slave owner, wrote the infamous Dred Scott

decision in 1857 that extended the rights of slave owners into the free, non-slave states.

Suffrage was initially limited to propertied white men. From 1790 on, states began dropping property qualifications in favor of gender and race qualifications with most states disenfranchising women and non-white men by 1856.[9]

The Electoral College was established to win the southern plantation slaveocracy to support the Constitution by means of a “Compromise” in which their slaves were counted as 3/5ths of a person in apportioning a purpose-built class of “super electors” whose votes would be the only votes that actually count in presidential elections. This awarded slave states more electoral votes than their numbers of legal (white male) voters justified.[10] The 14th amendment abolished slavery and with it, the Compromise. But the electoral college artifact continues to this day and still delivers votes that disproportionately favor rural and former slave states, most recently giving the White House to George Bush who lost the popular vote in 2000, and to Trump who lost the popular vote in 2016.[11]

The U.S. Senate was anti-democratic by design. As Madison said, the purpose of establishing the Senate was to install a more powerful upper house to offset the more plebian and democratic lower house whose members were chosen on the basis of one (white male) person, one-vote - **to “protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.”** Senators weren’t even subject to popular election during the first 125 years of the republic; they were appointed by state legislatures, traditionally monopolized by local agrarian and merchant capitalist ruling classes, until the 17th amendment was ratified in 1913 requiring their election. Further reinforcing white, male and slaveocracy domination, senate seats were apportioned equally between the states with each state getting two senators regardless of population. This has privileged conservative white voters from less populous states from 1789 to today: Wyoming’s five hundred and eighty thousand mostly white residents have the same voting power as California’s thirty-nine million minority-majority residents. The District of Columbia, which has ninety thousand more residents than Wyoming and twenty-five thousand more than Vermont, has no senators. Senators also enjoy four-year terms and other prerequisites and powers that made this body the preserve of mostly wealthy white male quasi-aristocrats that it remains to this day.[12] Looking ahead, the framers also made it extremely difficult to amend the constitution they authored.

III. Progressive gains, limits, and potentials

Yet even though U.S. Constitutional government was and still is structurally plutocratic and racist, it’s a mistake in my view to see the U.S. government as *simply* a tool of the ruling classes. It’s better understood as a contested terrain of perennial struggle between forces for democracy vs. forces for plutocracy in which the plutocrats still overwhelmingly dominate but in which democratic forces have fought for and won reforms making government considerably more democratic and less racist, codified in constitutional amendments and congressional legislation. Property qualifications for voting were the first to fall. It took a civil war to abolish slavery (the 13th amendment) and secure the right of citizenship and right to vote for former (male) slaves (the 14th and 15th amendments). It took another century of struggle to abolish Jim Crow segregation and voter suppression (Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965). The battle for women’s suffrage began in 1848 but white women didn’t win the right to vote until 1920. Native “first peoples” did not secure the right to vote in all states until 1965. Asians did not win citizenship and the right to vote until the Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1952 and 1965.[13] Barriers including the electoral college remain.[14] But thanks to long and hard struggle from below, the institution of one-person, one-vote — so feared and despised by the founding fathers — is the law of the land.

The 20th century saw huge democratic victories against capitalist power and anti-democratic

government. During the 1930s, massive movements including factory occupations and the San Francisco general strike led by socialists and trade unionists pushed the Roosevelt administration to legalize trade unions, to enact Social Security, unemployment insurance and a raft of other reforms the capitalists bitterly opposed. In the 1960s and 70s, labor, civil rights, the nascent environmental movement pressure forced the government to enact more anti-capitalist measures: Medicare and Medicaid (1964), Head Start and related programs (1964), the Clean Air Act (1963 and 1970), the EPA (1970), NIOSH (1971) and others. In this century, Bernie Sanders's 2016 campaign legitimized socialism in the minds of broad numbers of Americans and reenergized the DSA which has elected hundreds of openly socialist congressional representatives, state senators and representatives, city councils and county commissioners across the country — pushing back against the plutocracy from within their own halls of power.

Yet, obviously, even with these historic gains, American democracy is still a capitalist democracy, very far from the direct working people's democracy achieved in the 1871 Paris Commune that institutionalized universal (albeit male) franchise, election with right to recall, payment of officials at ordinary workman's wages, police subject to recall and so on, that Marx hailed as the prototype of a socialist democracy.[15]

Unlimited spending on elections turns candidates and elected officials into “slaves to donors”

Yet even when everyone can vote, the government we get obviously does not reflect the popular will. That's because, obviously, money still overdetermines elections. Presently, thanks to Supreme Court decisions like *Citizens United*, wealth dominates U.S. political campaigns more than ever. Super-PACs allow billionaires to pour unlimited amounts into campaigns. Dark money groups mask the identities of their donors, preventing voters from knowing who's trying to influence them. Races for congressional seats cost tens of millions of dollars.[16] Biden spent \$1.6 billion to win the presidency in 2020. He might spend \$2 billion to try to win in 2024. That's just crazy. It doesn't have to be this way. In no other country do candidates spend anything like those figures, and nowhere else are they such slaves to the rich.

The rich *want* elections to be insanely expensive because then only the wealthy or candidates with wealthy backers can afford to run for higher offices — and he who pays the piper calls the tune. In a population of 334 million, the wealthy are comparatively few in number. Consider these figures: As of June 2023 the top 1% of households – just 1,313,064 families (net worth minimum \$13.7 million) own 31.9%, nearly a third of all net worth in the United States. The top 10% of households – just 12.9 million families (net worth \$7.0 million on average) own more than three-quarters, 76%, of all the wealth in the United States. The bottom 50% (64.3 million families, net worth \$122,000 on average), own just 2.5% of total wealth.[17] Over the last half century, wages have stagnated. Adjusted for inflation, by 2019 average wages finally recovered from a decades-long depression to reach their previous peak of \$23.24 per hour – set in *February 1973*. [18] Meanwhile, prices of nearly everything have multiplied several fold, which is why so many people are living on the streets or in their cars. The middle class has shrunk both in numbers and wealth as the costs of housing, healthcare, college tuition etc. have outstripped their incomes and investment returns, forcing many to tap into their retirement savings or borrow to keep up. In 2021, just 50% of Americans lived in middle-class households (the Census Bureau defines middle-class incomes for a family of 3 as \$60,000 to \$180,000), down from 71% in 1971, and their share of national income fell from 62% in 1971 to 43% in 2014.[19] Nearly all the gains of economic growth since the 1970s have gone to the upper 10% and especially to the upper 1%. In short, after 50 years of deindustrialization and Reaganomics, inequality today resembles the Gilded Age of the 1920s when unions were illegal and there was no safety net at all. In AOC's words, “We're in an absolute crisis of inequality.”[20] It's fair to say that the class interests of capitalists, business owners, employers, landlords and highly-paid

professionals, are diametrically opposed to those of the mass of American voters on many issues – tax rates on the rich, union rights, private vs. public health care, environment, money in politics, and other issues. “The rich are different.” Ever-growing inequality, the obscene wealth of the “elite,” the plight of financially squeezed workers abandoned by the post-Clinton “New Democrats” who rebased themselves on the suburban middle class and Wall Street bankers, were major factors driving the populist Donald Trump revolution.

Given the exorbitant cost of running for office in this country, even comparatively wealthy candidates need campaign contributions from business owners, corporations and the rich to fund their campaigns. But since the great mass of the constituents who actually elect them are not rich and have distinctly different interests and concerns from wealthy campaign funders, politicians have no choice but to become hypocrites, to speak with forked tongues. To win elections they need to support, or at least be seen as supporting policies, legislation and programs that favor the working and middle classes, many of which are antithetical to the interests of employers, landlords, and the rich. But to fund their campaigns they have to do the bidding of the wealthy (with a few exceptions like Bernie Sanders who famously beat the establishment by self-funding his own campaign with \$27 donations via the internet from left-liberal supporters. AOC and other leftists have followed suit with modest success, so far). But for mainstream candidates without Sanders’ notoriety and super-activist DSA mini-mass base, this is not an option. For them, in the words of Judge Richard Posner, one of the country’s leading legal minds, “If you become a member of Congress, you’ll get a card from the head of your party that you will spend five hours [each] afternoon talking to donors. That’s not the only time you spend with donors—they’ll take you to dinner, cocktails—but these five hours are important. The message is clear: You are a slave to the donors. They own you. That’s [the] real corruption, the ownership of Congress by the rich.”[21] That’s why politicians “promise one thing but do another” and regularly vote against the will of their constituents.[22] That’s why Trumpists and liberals alike say that “government doesn’t represent me.” The legal corruption of politics is the prime cause of the disillusionment and anger that’s fueled the crisis of representative government[23] and a major reason why alienated voters go for “outsiders” – even crazies with their own baggage like Donald Trump.

IV. Polls vs. pols

Yet most of the contradictions noted above and at the outset of this article in Part 1 are not impossible to solve, even within the framework of capitalist democracies. Despite our many divisions, Americans are actually more liberal, progressive, and united on the critical issues of the day than one might imagine. For example, according to recent polls:

1. **68% of Americans say immigration is good for the country, a majority want it increased.** 72% believe immigrants come to the U.S. “to find jobs and improve their lives” not to live on welfare, and 53% say immigration “is a human right.”[24] 55% support a pathway to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants. Anti-immigrant Republicans are loud but comprise a minority of the electorate. Over-represented rural and southern states control the House of Representatives and half the Senate, so the popular will is thwarted.
2. **63% of Americans want bans on assault weapons.**[25] But the Republicans who dominate the House and control half the Senate, are bankrolled by National Rifle Association campaign contributions and the NRA opposes bans. Marco Rubio (FL, Senate) has received \$3,303,355 from the NRA. Don Young (AR, House) \$2,624,288. Tod Young (IN, House) \$2,903,882. As of March 2023, the NRA had donated a grand total of \$27,413,008 to 316 Republican senators and representatives. And that’s just direct payments for campaigns and does not include “more substantive contributions for lobbying and outside spending.”[26] By comparison, in Australia, after a horrific mass shooting in 1996 that took 35 lives, the country passed a sweeping reform of gun laws that sharply restricted legal ownership of firearms. It banned automatic and semi-

automatic rifles and shotguns. To get them off the streets, the government imposed a mandatory buyback of guns, at fair market value, and offered legal amnesty for anyone who handed in illegally owned guns. It also established a national registry of all guns owned in the country and required permits for new firearm purchases. "Thankfully, fears of violence turned out to be unfounded. About 650,000 legally owned guns were peacefully seized, then destroyed, as part of the buyback." In result, murders and suicides p[27] We can do that here too, if we ban NRA bribery of politicians.

3. **61% of Americans say abortion should be legal in all or most cases.**[28] The Right broke out the champagne when the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. Justice Alito writing for the all-Catholic majority exulted that now "the people and their elected representatives" would legislate abortion. They misjudged the electorate. As the New York Times observes, "Eighteen months later, the American people are indeed using their voices, but not in the way anti-abortion advocates had hoped. In a steady march of ballot measures, even in conservative states like Ohio, they have codified a right to abortion and rejected attempts to restrict it. Polls show increasing support for abortion rights in all 50 states, with majorities and nearly all states — even deep red states — saying that abortion should be legal in all or most cases." [29] This is, in my view, an excellent example of popular power, of people taking decision-making into their own hands on a key issue, writing laws and referenda for the voters to decide directly.
4. **65% of Americans would abolish the electoral college and amend the Constitution to elect presidents by popular vote.**[30] But again, underpopulated and overrepresented guns-and-religion rural and white-dominated former slave states thwart the popular will on this issue as with so many others. What we need here is a national referendum. Even better: abolish the Senate.[31]
5. **72% of Americans across ideological and demographic lines favor strict limits on campaign spending.** More than 85% say that the cost of running for office makes it hard for good people to run for office. 58% think that "it's possible to have laws that would effectively reduce the role of money in politics." [32] TV advertising is the single largest expense for most American congressional and presidential candidates. But in other, more democratic countries, candidates are either forbidden from advertising on television or given free TV time. Most European countries provide substantial public funding of campaigns, and candidates are often forbidden from campaigning until a relatively short period before election day. In France for example, there is a total ban on TV election campaign commercials, French law limits spending on presidential campaigns to 22.5 millions euros (about \$25 million), and the government pays for half of that.[33] Corporate and union contributions are illegal. Television stations are required to host debates and provide equal time to each candidate, free of charge. Paul Wildman of the American Prospect concludes "Put all that together, and you have elections where, even if it would technically be legal to rain huge amounts of money down on candidates, nobody considers it worth their while (for instance, here's a nice description of the relative quiet of a German campaign). So the idea of someone spending two or three million dollars to get a seat in the national legislature, the way American House candidates routinely do, would seem absurd." [34] We don't get to vote directly for such restrictions, and Republicans have stacked the Supreme Court with judges favoring unlimited spending. Yet, it's possible to change this. This should be high on the list of Left priorities.
6. **57% of Americans say the government should ensure universal health care for all U.S. citizens** - including 88% of Democrats, 59% of Independents and 28% of Republicans. The majority, 54% favor a single-payer system.[35] But the enormous and fabulously rich private medical-industrial complex - Big Pharma, private hospitals, private medical insurance companies and related industries are among the leading legal bribers of presidential and congressional candidates and are determined to block any "public option." A recent study found that from 1999-2018, the pharmaceutical and health product industry spent \$4.7 billion,

an average of \$233 million per year lobbying the US federal government; \$414 million on contributions to presidential and congressional electoral candidates, national party committees, and outside spending groups; and \$877 million on contributions to state candidates and committees.[36] More than two-thirds of congressmen and women cashed a pharma campaign check in 2020.[37] In the 2022, Democratic senators took in an average of \$518,890, Republicans \$246,480; House Democrats received on average \$187,640 and House Republicans \$141,180. So far in the upcoming 2024 election Joe Biden has hauled in \$1,432,060 from the medical-industrial complex, Donald Trump \$1,335,695, Adam Schiff, \$729,606, and so on.[38] Given this history of flagrant legal bribery, is it any wonder that single-payer is invariably pushed off the table?[39] Well, why can't we put this be up for a referendum vote – even it's state by state?

7. **More than two thirds, 68%, of Americans want an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and just 31% support sending Israel weapons while 43% opposed the idea.**[40] Polls have long shown that six in ten Americans of both parties support either a two-state solution or a one-state solution. A June 2023 poll found that 73% of Americans (80% of Democrats and 64% of Republicans) would support “a single democratic state in which Jews and non-Jews would be equal, even if that meant that Israel would no longer be a politically Jewish state.” Only 17% would support “preserving Israel as a politically Jewish state.”[41] With Israel's genocidal carpet-bombing and mass expulsions of Palestinian civilians since Hamas terrorist attack on October 7th, what popular support Israel used to have in America is cratering. Those saying “the U.S. should support Israel in the war,” fell from 41% in October to 32% in November. Yet Biden and both parties in Congress, flooded with millions of dollars in legal campaign bribes from multiple Zionist Jewish organizations,[42] are all in for Israel. Well, let's put this up for a popular vote too.

THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY SHOULD LOOK LIKE:

Democracy means “rule by the people,” “popular sovereignty,” we've been reminded. Well, if the American citizenry, the electorate, stood up, organized, demanded that sovereignty, and won the right to put immigration, gun control, abortion, universal health care, the electoral college, the legal bribery of politicians, and even policy toward Israel-Palestine on the ballot, we would have a much more progressive, even if still a capitalist democracy. There's no reason why all the above issues could not be resolved by grassroots produced legislation and referenda, as is being done right now across the country with respect to abortion rights. Such a democratic process would result in a much fairer and less racist society, would defuse our divisions, build social solidarity, and restore confidence in government to tackle the largest threat that humanity has ever faced: climate change.

V. Democracy and climate change

One of, if not the main reason leftists should support liberal democracies against totalitarian regimes like China is the wide divergence between CO2 emissions mitigation in China and the Western democracies. One often hears the argument that China's authoritarian police state ought to be able to suppress the country's emissions faster than Western democracies because it monopolizes all power. And yet the opposite is happening. As I wrote in a recent paper:

After all, it is often argued—as by Yifei Li and Judith Shapiro, for example —that China's dictatorship should be an advantage in this context: ‘Given the limited time that remains to mitigate climate change and protect millions of species from extinction, we need to consider whether a green authoritarianism can show us the way.’ . . So why is Xi Jinping not doing that?[43]

Most of the world's leading capitalist industrial democracies have reduced their GHG emissions to an extent. In the United States, carbon dioxide emissions in 2020 were down 14 per cent from their peak in 2005; emissions in the 27 member states of the European Union were down 32 per cent from their peak in 1981; and Japan's have dropped 14 per cent from their peak in 2013. *To be sure, those reductions are still insufficient to meet their respective Paris commitments* (and their Paris commitments are themselves insufficient to prevent global temperatures rising above 1.5°C), but at least they are declining.

By contrast, under Xi Jinping, as much as under his predecessors, China's carbon dioxide emissions have relentlessly grown, more than quadrupling from 1990 to 2020. Climate Action Tracker estimates that in 2021 China's emissions increased by 3.4 per cent to 14.1 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂e)—nearly triple those of the United States (4.9 GtCO₂e) with a gross domestic product just three-fourths as large. Since 2019, China's emissions have exceeded those of all developed countries combined^[44] and presently account for 33 per cent of total global emissions. Paradoxically, China leads the world in the production and installed capacity of both wind and solar electricity generation. Yet, 85.2 per cent of China's primary energy consumption in 2020 was still provided by fossil fuels—down just 7 per cent from 92.3 per cent in 2009. And despite huge investments in giant solar and wind farms across multiple provinces and autonomous regions, fossil fuels (mostly coal) still accounted for 67.4 per cent of electricity generation in 2021, while wind contributed just 7.8 per cent and solar barely 3.9 per cent.^[45]

This difference is hardly due to capitalist altruism. Capitalism is driven by profit maximization and if that's not suppressed it will drive us off the cliff to collapse. Given this driver, it's difficult to imagine how GHG emissions can be suppressed these trends can be halted or reversed short of the collapse or overthrow of capitalism.^[46] China's drivers are different,^[47] but they're just as suicidal if not even more suicidal than capitalism. I maintain that declining emissions in the West are overwhelmingly due to one factor: democracy and human rights: the freedom of environmental activists, scientists, writers, academics and others to protest against polluting companies, to educate, propagandize, organize and pressure local and national governments, to fight global warming. None of that is possible in China.

China has suffered the worst environmental disasters in its history in recent years - unprecedented drought, soaring temperatures, glacial melting, extensive flooding. But the government never links those to global warming; it only talks about "natural disasters" while state media plays up the heroics of rescue workers instead of asking hard questions about the causes of these disasters or challenging the government's obsession with maintaining 6%+ growth rates, with all their unavoidable pollution, to overtake the West. Given Xi Jinping's Great Firewall, it's difficult for ordinary Chinese to learn much about the state of the global environment. And even if they could, they can't organize with others to do anything about it.^[48] Since the Party faces no domestic competition from other parties, no free speech, no free press and tolerates no non-governmental organizations, it's free to brush off Western criticism and carry on building coal fired power plants and leading the world to climate collapse.^[49]

VI. A China Dream of democracy

Given China's drivers, it's difficult to imagine how this trend could be halted or reversed short of the collapse or overthrow of the CCP. That's coming but of course it's impossible to predict when. Yet we should keep in mind that not only the ex-Soviet "satellite" colonies but also Taiwan and South Korea all transitioned to mostly liberal democracies, with virtually no bloodshed. To all appearances, Xi and the Party seem invincible. But Xi's not so sure. Last May at a National Security Commission meeting, he called on his top national security officials to think about "worst case" scenarios and prepare for "stormy seas," as the ruling Party hardens efforts to counter internal and external

threats. “The complexity and difficulty of the national security issues we now face have increased significantly. We must get ready to undergo the major tests of high winds and rough waves, and even perilous, stormy seas.”[50] Indeed, they face unprecedented threats: the exhaustion of the “Chinese Model” as the Party faces sustained economic stagnation and decline despite growth in some sectors like solar panels and EV cars and batteries, the collapsing housing market, the paralyzed Party bureaucracy fearful of taking the slightest risk, the paralyzed private sector fearful of Xi’s crackdowns, expropriations and arrests, the shrinking and ageing workforce, the women’s strike against child-bearing, spreading industrial strikes as businesses slow down and wage arrears mount, the exodus of Western investors, capital flight by rich Chinese, exodus of the brains Xi needs to develop his economy, growing public alienation from the Party as the economic “miracle” collapses and political repression intensifies, discontent within the Party over Xi’s self-defeating policies, growing global resistance to China’s political-military aggression, tech theft, and debt-trap diplomacy — and the ecological crisis that threatens not just China but life on Earth. Xi and his Party have no solution to any of those problems because they all come down to the lack of democracy.

Despite fierce repression, China’s incredibly brave fighters for democracy persist. On April 10th, a Chinese court sentenced two of the country’s most prominent human-rights lawyers, Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiaxi, to prison for long stretches for “subversion of state power.” Xu is a legal scholar who fought on behalf of migrant workers and co-founded the New Citizens Movement that advocated civil rights and a peaceful transition to democracy. Assuming (correctly) that he would not be permitted to make a statement at his sentencing he dictated a statement to be released the day before his sentencing. It begins as follows:

I have a dream, a dream of a China that is beautiful, free, fair, and happy. It is a democratic China that belongs to everyone on this land, not to any one ethnicity or political party. It is truly a country of the people, its government chosen by ballots, not violence.

The people regularly elect legislators, mayors, governors, and presidents, whose power comes from the people, and is owned, governed, and shared by the people. People are no longer the pretense with which the dictator claims his legitimacy; people are no longer the silent ants as dynasties rise and fall; they are the real masters of the country. The rulers are no longer occupiers perched high above the people, but humble servants. They compete fairly and are elected by the people for their merits. Power succession is no longer a struggle of life and death, but a process celebrated by the people. . . **A democratic China must be realized in our time, we cannot saddle the next generation with this duty.**”[51]

Notes:

[1] https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202112/t20211205_10462535.html

[2] Tracy Wen Liu, “Chinese media calls Capitol riot ‘world masterpiece’” *Foreign Policy*, January 8, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/08/chinese-media-calls-capitol-riot-world-masterpiece/>.

[3] Xinhuanet: “Full text: China: Democracy That Works,” December 4, 2021, http://www.news.cn/english/2021-12/04/c_1310351231.htm.

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