

Review of *Planet of Humans* (2020)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zk11vl-7czE&t=3850s>)

By David Schwartzman, April 26, 2020

This is a very effective film which already has been seen on youtube by 2.5 million when I saw it today. To sum up my review, it combines a very welcome biting critique of “green” capital-driven renewable energy creation and big capital funding/influence on the agendas of major U.S. environmental groups with a message calling human population growth the driver of an unsustainable planet. The film’s conclusion is that there is a “human presence far beyond sustainability”. It argues that scientists all agree that overpopulation is at root of our environmental crisis. Well, I am a scientist among many others who strongly disagrees with this conclusion, rather that the “cancerous form of capitalism” identified in this film is the root cause. This cancerous form is militarized fossil capital driving perpetual wars for the control of oil. Both radical changes in the physical and political economy are needed.

The film very effectively exposes the false solutions of natural gas and biofuels/biomass energy, including burning wood on a massive scale, ethanol from sugarcane (Brazil), and how mainstream environmental groups like 350.org and the Sierra Club facilitated them in collaboration with big so-called green capital. We discuss this false solution in chapter 6 of our book, *The Earth is Not for Sale*. Nevertheless, 350.org has played a major role in generating a mass movement for terminating fossil fuels, especially among youth who believe the messaging, even with the foundation funding being rather opaque. So to claim as the film does, that the environmental movement has been taken over by capitalism ignores the real radical potential to move in a consistent anti-capitalist direction, in particular in advancing a Green New Deal increasingly guided by an ecosocialist agenda. I have long critiqued Bill McKibben for not confronting militarism and imperialism. Militarized fossil capital would love to get control of the world's biggest oil reserves (Venezuela) and the 4th biggest (Iran). That is the main reason for the U.S. imperialist regime change agenda which we must organize against, and convince the global climate justice movement to join this struggle.

So I don't agree with Tom Athanasiou that this film is "crap" (<https://www.ecoequity.org/2020/04/why-the-planet-of-the-humans-is-crap/>). But Athanasiou does make some good points such as the film's "rap against renewables is embarrassingly wrong. Not all of it, but most of it. Moreover, it is fantastically dated. He seems to not even know that the net-energy analysis of renewable energy systems is a thing." Too bad Mark Jacobson wasn't interviewed. Nevertheless, the film's strong point is that we cannot trust big "green" capital to deliver a wind/solar revolution minimizing ecological destruction, we must fight for maximum decentralized community control, along with nationalization of the energy industry with bottom-up accountability and social management of wind/solar creation world-wide. Further, the intermittency barrier to 100% renewable transition cited in the film is exaggerated given new technologies of storage and the complementarity of wind and solar at a large enough scale.

And Tom Athanasiou is right to conclude, "The film is long on criticism but offers no solution other than a vague non-capitalist pastoral alternative along with a bleak, harrowing final scene." Here is a more concrete non-capitalist solution: ecosocialism with three critical measures: demilitarization of the global economy, i.e., dissolving the military industrial (fossil fuel nuclear state terror and surveillance) complex, substituting agroecologies for non-sustainable industrial/GMO/biofuel agriculture and the creation of a 100% wind/solar energy infrastructure to make possible the elimination of energy poverty of most of humanity and to have the energy capacity for climate mitigation and adaptation. For more on this see my article at <https://medium.com/insurge-intelligence/100-renewables-wishful-thinking-or-an-imperative-goal-9879a8947d1b>, and our book *The Earth is Not For Sale: A Path Out of Fossil Capitalism to the Other World That is Still Possible* (<http://theearthisnotforsale.org>; see updates including the challenge of extractive mining).