

THE FUTURE OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT

A mixed message from Poland



AN OPEN DIALOGUE
ABDULLAH SHIBLI

FROM all accounts, it appears that COP24, the recently concluded climate summit held in Katowice, Poland, was a mixed success. Depending on where you stand on the various issues relating to global warming, and how strongly you feel about them, the conclave was a success, if you are an optimist. On the other hand, one could reach the opposite conclusion if one is a pessimist; in other words, the glass now looks half-empty if one feels that the optimism and the momentum preceding the gathering did not lead to many of the desired outcomes. Nonetheless, this is not the time to sit back and wallow in sorrow but to take inspiration from a statement by UN Secretary-General António Guterres who stressed the need for more work in the future. "From now on, my five priorities will be: ambition, ambition, ambition, ambition and ambition," he said.

The Royal Geographical Society of UK lists "climate change" as the topmost challenge of the 21st century. On its website, 21st Century Challenges, after climate change comes education, hunger, poverty reduction etc. Therefore this list raises a puzzle that we all deal with, i.e. the tussle between what is urgent and what is important. Climate change and its consequences will happen sometime in the near future, and it is the responsibility of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to send a clear and consistent message to political leaders, civil society and the masses about the priorities and the immediacy of the various actions.

Evidently, the public is receiving confusing signals on climate change. First of all, what does data tell us? Since the Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997, greenhouse gas emissions were globally targeted to grow around two percent a year. In recent times, CO2 emissions



Climate change activists gathered in Berlin, Germany on December 1, 2018 to protest against the use of coal.

PHOTO: CHRISTOPH SOEDER/AFP

have been steady for a few years, followed by an uptick in 2017 (1.6 percent) and 2018 (2.7 percent). Ironically, the recent IPCC report which painted a very bleak scenario for global warming was not endorsed by COP24. It is not enough to blame the US, Russia and Saudi Arabia for their "bad behaviour" as the news media has done. These countries have said that the report, and the subsequent one by the experts of the National Climate Assessment (NCA) in the USA, must be reviewed and scrutinised before they are accepted by the global community.

Admittedly, the media is adding to the confusion generated by the recent IPCC and NCA reports. A recent op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Press is the Enemy of Climate" sounded the alarm against "Press Overreach". After the NCA report was published, some sections of the media announced that the US economy would shrink by 10 percent as a consequence of climate change. For example, CNN reported that "A new US government report delivers a dire

warning about climate change and its devastating impacts, saying the economy could lose hundreds of billions of dollars—or, in the worst-case scenario, more than 10 [percent] of its GDP—by the end of the century." Soon, there was pushback and it was demonstrated that the basis for this alarm was a miscalculation. According to the NCA report, the US economy will grow at 1.86 percent annually rather than two percent, a difference of 0.14 percent. The slowdown will happen over the next 82 years, by 2100. While this drop in GDP growth will make it less affluent than it would have been otherwise, the drop in GDP in 2090 is estimated to be USD 500 billion or 2.5 percent of today's economy, according to an estimate done by the *New York Times*.

Secondly, the news coming from Poland was disconcerting. As reported in the press, delegates to COP24 spent an inordinate amount of time on the language of the Rulebook. However, as one put it, "for a credible and valid rulebook, we need frank

conversations about energy transition and compensating the 'losers' of climate policies, such as people working in high-emission sectors."

Conversation, an independent and not-for-profit international organisation, was even more critical. "Clearly, 24 years after the first COP there is a deep disconnect between how urgently the world needs effective climate policy and the pace of discussing global mechanisms on how to abate greenhouse gas emissions."

"We were not able to get the strong endorsement we should have," said Alden Meyer, of Union of Concerned Scientists, an environmental group based in Massachusetts. Economist Jeffrey Sachs, formerly of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, said, "It got translated into many frustrating days of arguing over a few words."

Thirdly, there are new issues that a future climate conference may need to address. Economists in the USA and EU have noted

competitive with fossil fuels.

Professor Ottmar Edenhofer, a former IPCC official and an economist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), drew attention to the "fundamental reality" of an oversupply of fossil fuels, which made it "harder for renewables to be cost-competitive with coal." Research at PIK shows that the "renaissance of coal" continues, using up the available carbon budget within a decade.

The New Yorker noted that delegates arriving at COP24 found that the venue featured walls, floors, soap and even earrings all made from coal. The message was reinforced by Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, who told the delegates, "There is no plan today to fully give up on coal."

Finally, Article 6 of the Paris Agreement stipulated that signatory countries would participate in a global market for trading carbon. However, negotiators failed to reach a deal on the "carbon market", which has been called the "unsung hero" of the Paris pact by *Wall Street Journal*.

According to various media sources, some Latin American countries are opposing carbon trading because "they see it as a way for richer nations to unfairly and inexpensively transfer the burden of emission cuts onto poorer ones."

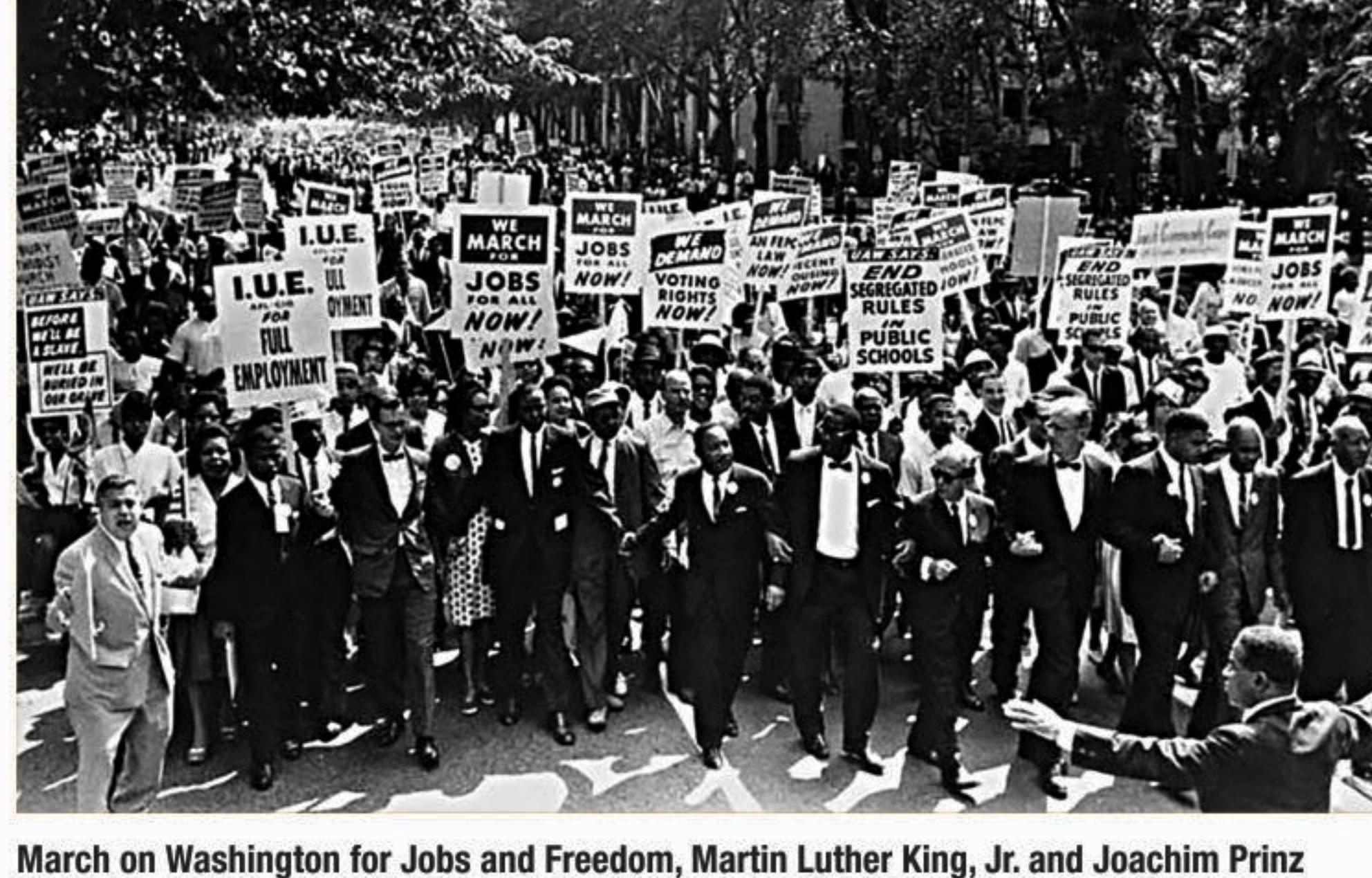
The postponement of any action on an international carbon market is an indicator of the difficult path that lies ahead for countries trying to manage their carbon emissions targets. Policy tools that can be implemented without harming the economy are limited in supply. Carbon tax is one of the most important policy instruments that will assist nations to transition to a low-carbon economy. Undeniably, carbon tax, as discussed previously in my column in *The Daily Star*, is not popular and must be implemented with caution, as the recent riots in France amply demonstrate.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist, and Senior Research Fellow, International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think-tank in Boston, USA. His new memoir, *Fairy Tales: Stories from My Life*, will be published by Jonantik soon.

COP24 happened at a time when oil prices are declining again and renewables are finding it hard to stay competitive with fossil fuels.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Reviving civil disobedience



March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Joachim Prinz pictured, 1963.

PHOTO: CENTRE FOR JEWISH HISTORY/Flickr

WITH populism and authoritarianism on the rise around the world, there has been considerable talk of "resistance," especially in the United States. A rather broad term, resistance could refer to everything from supporting opposition candidates to the life-threatening work of those who went underground to sabotage Nazi occupations during World War II. Such vagueness is helpful, if one wants to appeal to as many citizens as possible; but it can also cloud one's thinking when weighing how best to achieve concrete goals.

As it happens, there is a more precise alternative to "resistance" that is rarely mentioned nowadays: civil disobedience. In theory, civil disobedience should be an effective weapon against populists. But, in practice, it faces two formidable challenges. First, there is a widespread misunderstanding of what civil disobedience actually entails. And, second, changes in the media landscape have made it harder to convey the message of civil disobedience to a broad and diverse audience.

The American philosopher John Rawls offered the classic definition of civil disobedience in the early 1970s. Simply put, it means overt law-breaking, but in a conscientious, nonviolent manner aimed at persuading fellow citizens that a law ought to be changed because it is unjust. In Rawls's formulation, those who commit acts of civil disobedience should be prepared to accept the penalties for doing so.

Today, even protests that do not break any laws are often decried as "uncivil" or too "divisive" for an already polarised society. When citizens confronted politicians during US Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings, they were derided as a "mob." Even fellow liberals have admonished the Black Lives Matter movement for being too aggressive. And the noisy demonstrators who have gathered in Budapest to protest against Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's increasingly authoritarian government have been dismissed as "liberal anarchists." In each case, the "civil" in civil disobedience has been conflated with civility, as in politeness or general respectability.

For his part, Rawls was adamant that any law-breaking be undertaken "within the limits of fidelity to the law." He was echoing Martin Luther King, Jr., who argued that one who breaks the law in the name of civil disobedience "is in reality expressing the very highest respect for the law," by highlighting its fundamental injustice in such a way as not to foreclose on future cooperation with one's fellow citizens. Thus, King believed that, "one who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, [...] and with a willingness to accept the penalty."

That invocation of love should not be taken to mean that civil disobedience must be non-confrontational. A highly sanitised and sentimental historical accounting of the 1950s and 1960s might seem to suggest that the civil-rights movement succeeded merely by appealing to arch-American political principles of freedom and equality. In reality, part of the movement's strategy was to seek out confrontations with police and defenders of white supremacy. These clashes generated images of white brutality that made at least

some whites reconsider their unconditional defence of "law and order" under Jim Crow.

In a recent study of protest movements spanning more than a century, social scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan show that tough but nonviolent confrontation has been twice as likely as violent alternatives to bring about its stated goals. According to their data, sustained participation by a mere 3.5 percent of a population can be enough to achieve fundamental political change.

Yet the history of the US civil-rights movement also points to a novel problem in our age. Rawls, King, and other defenders of

civil disobedience took it for granted that the message—an appeal to principles of justice—would reach a majority of citizens undistorted. But today, the public spheres in many countries have become so fragmented and partisan that King's idea of "national opinion" now seems nonsensical.

As a recent groundbreaking study by three Harvard University scholars shows, the US has become home to a deeply insular "right-wing media ecosystem" in which all "news" is immediately reframed to confirm the identity of right-leaning citizens. And in semi-authoritarian contexts like Orbán's Hungary, media are now completely dominated by

government-friendly actors. Under such conditions, most appeals to what Rawls called a "public sense of justice" will be sidelined, severely distorted, or silenced altogether.

Accordingly, potential practitioners of civil disobedience should not allow themselves to be caught in a trap of politeness and respectability. When opposition politicians recently disrupted the proceedings of the Hungarian parliament by blocking access to the speaker's podium and heckling Orbán to his face, they were accused of attempting a putsch. In fact, they were merely shining a spotlight on the fact that the national assembly is no longer a normal representative body passing legitimate laws.

Still, aspiring disobeyers will have to account for the increasingly fragmented and polluted nature of the public sphere. Sometimes, that will mean engaging fellow citizens directly on the street, in the marketplace, or even through door-to-door canvassing. In other situations, it will mean live-streaming acts of civil disobedience and hoping that authoritarians' brutal methods will be exposed to a large enough audience through social media. And on still other occasions, it will mean pushing for structural changes, such as a return to the Fairness Doctrine by broadcasters in the US.

Civil disobedience would certainly be more effective in a less distorted media landscape. But it still represents one of the most effective forms of democratic "resistance" available.

Jan-Werner Mueller is Professor of Politics at Princeton University. His latest book is *What Is Populism?*
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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Painting by John Trumbull
December 23, 1783

GEORGE WASHINGTON RESIGNS HIS MILITARY COMMISSION

General George Washington voluntarily resigned his military commission as Commander-in-Chief to the Continental Congress at the State House in Annapolis, Maryland, returning to private life. The action was significant for establishing civilian authority over the military.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 British party
- 27 Tooth coating
- 7 Fling
- 29 Citi Field team
- 11 Grove fruit
- 33 Famed riveter
- 12 Foot part
- 34 Wall art
- 13 Lay waste to
- 35 Annoys
- 14 Literary
- 36 Bible dancer
- plantation
- 37 Theater unit
- 15 Checkout line
- 38 Radiated
- count
- 39 Farm females
- 16 Light lunch
- 24 Twin raised by a wolf
- 17 Give over
- 25 Fade away
- 18 Party snack
- 28 View obscurers
- 19 Right away, in the ER
- 30 Undermine
- 21 Santa suit color
- 31 Circus star
- 22 # #
- 32 Goes downhill
- 25 Campaign pro
- 33 Long skirt
- 26 Nevada resort
- 34 Sch. for priests

DOWN

- 1 Donutshaped
- 2 Speak
- 3 Spoke wildly
- 4 Disarrayed
- 5 Meringue base
- 6 Spot
- 7 Moon of Saturn
- 8 Just for fun
- 9 Tough spots
- 10 Lined with elms
- 16 "Paradise Lost" figure
- 18 Yellowish tan
- 20 First odd prime
- 22 Tribute VIP
- 23 Nome native
- 24 Twin raised by a wolf
- 25 Fade away
- 28 View obscurers
- 30 Undermine
- 31 Circus star
- 32 Goes downhill
- 33 Long skirt
- 34 Sch. for priests

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



BEETLE BAILEY



BABY BLUES



BY MORT WALKER

