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For a Global Green New Deal

Daniel Aldana Cohen, Kate Aronoff,

Alyssa Battistoni,
and Thea Riofrancos

Climate politics are today bursting to life like never before. For four decades, market fundamentalists in the United States and United Kingdom have blocked ambitious efforts to deal with the climate crisis. But now,

the neoliberal hegemony is crumbling, while popular climate mobilisations grow stronger every month. There has never been a better moment to transform politics and attack the climate emergency.

When the climate crisis first emerged into public consciousness in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were consolidating a neoliberal doctrine that banished the most powerful tools to confront global heating—public investment and collective action.

Instead, neoliberals sought to free markets from democratically imposed constraints and the power of mass mobilisation. Thatcher insisted that there was no alternative to letting corporations run roughshod over people and planet alike in the name of profit. Soon, New Democrats and New Labour agreed. While the leaders of the third way spoke often of climate change, their actual policies let fossil capital keep drilling and burning. Afraid to intervene aggressively in markets, they did far too little to build a clean energy alternative.

Then the financial crisis of 2008 and the left revival that exploded in its wake laid bare the failures of the neoliberal project. An alternative political economic project is now emerging—and not a moment too soon. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change put it, keeping global warming below catastrophic levels will require “rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.”^[1] In other words: public investment and collective action.

Fortunately, movements on both sides of the Atlantic have been building strength to mount this kind of alternative to market fundamentalism. On the heels of Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, Bernie Sanders’s 2016 Democratic primary campaign breathed new life into the American left and its electoral prospects. Jeremy Corbyn’s election as leader of the Labour Party, spurred by a vibrant grassroots mobilisation, gives those of us in the U.S. hope: if New Labour could give way to Corbynism, surely Clintonism can give way to the left wing of the Democratic party. In the U.K., drawing on tactics from the Sanders campaign, Momentum has developed a new model of mass mobilisation to transform a fossilised political party. It’s restoring the dream that formal politics can be a means for genuinely democratic political organising. In turn, U.S. leftists are learning from Momentum’s innovations.

The vision of the Green New Deal that has taken shape in the United States in the past few months is in many ways a culmination of the U.S. left’s revival. The Green New Deal’s

modest ambition is to do all that this moment requires: decarbonise the economy as quickly as humanly possible by investing massively to electrify everything, while bringing prodigious amounts of renewable power online; all this would be done in a way that dismantles inequalities of race, class and gender. The Green New Deal would transform the energy and food systems and the broader political economy of which they are a part.

Massive new public investment would create work for millions of people, guarantee everyone who wants one a decent job, invest disproportionately in poor and racialised communities, and establish truly free, universal public services like Medicare for All and free education from preschool through college.

In the longer run, we hope that confronting climate change will also be the occasion for breaking from capitalism. We see the Green New Deal, like its namesake, less as a particular suite of policies than as a multi-decade effort to write a more humane, sustainable, and democratic social contract. But whereas the New Deal ultimately saved capitalism for capitalists, we aspire to channel a new wave of mass mobilisation in a more radical direction.

Even in the short term, we have no choice but to make major changes to the economy’s most basic structures. We need more public and more democratic institutions to manage the most important investments at scales large and small. We need to revitalise labour unions and develop new kinds of worker cooperatives, to empower workers’ creativity and end shop-floor despotism.

We also see immediate possibilities for increasing worker ownership through arrangements like an inclusive ownership fund. This is possible in even the largest, most capital-intensive parts of the economy. We’re heartened to see both the Labour Party and the most progressive Democratic party aspirants, especially Bernie Sanders, embracing this kind of strategy to increase worker owner-

ship and control over private corporations.

In the U.S., we hope to build new connections to those doing similar work in the UK, linking up two nodes in a broader global project to make the climate emergency the key priority for public, egalitarian investment worldwide. We are excited to organise with comrades around the world to invent new democratic institutions for managing economic life—and for empowering people and places to discover new forms of freedom, emancipated from the threat of climate catastrophe and the domination of private profit.

In this, we're inspired not only by Jeremy Corbyn's political success, but by the ideas coming out of his movement's broader project. Thinkers and activists in Corbyn's and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell's orbits have begun mapping out a transformative program of radical reform. Their core vision is to socialise investment and democratise economic planning, displacing the capitalist class's de facto monopoly on allocating society's wealth and resources.

The idea of a “green industrial revolution” that's arisen from this new thinking promises to decarbonise the production of goods and services, while channeling technological innovation for the greater good, building a new era of public affluence out of the ruins of the carbon-spewing oligarchy.

In the United States, insurgent left movements and politicians have taken a cue from Labour's insistence on bold ideas. It's a refreshing shift from the triangulation of establishment Democrats and older left traditions of economic thinking, which need a refresh for the twenty-first century. As George Monbiot, among others, has argued, Keynesianism can't solve the problems we face today^[2].

In the U.S., democratic socialists aim to finally drag American social services into something resembling the best of Western Europe's postwar achievements. We want to assure equal, free access to quality health care,

college education, and decent childcare and parental leave, even as many of those goods are now under attack in Europe. (Indeed, those modest demands have prompted some of our centrist wonks to join the right in attacking Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal resolution, scandalised that she dares to imagine that reducing carbon and improving quality of life are mutually compatible.)

But we think we can go much further than catching up. Like our comrades in the UK, we see putting an end to fossil fuels as part of a broader project of building public affluence. We want to foster ecologically sustainable agriculture, reclaim urban and rural land from speculators, build huge new amounts of carbon-free public housing, expand public transportation, and advance new kinds of low-carbon labor and leisure that displace the crude metric of economic growth as the primary objective of public policy.

Altogether, the huge investments that we want to see in public goods and spaces would provide a democratically managed commons of no-carbon public luxury. Shorter work weeks that expand free time in parks, beaches, theatres, and football pitches, along with high quality free healthcare and childcare, would together enable a profound shift. We want to stop using inordinate amounts of energy and straining credit card bills to create and buy crap that giant corporations make but no one needs. Instead, we would dramatically improve quality of life through the provision of high-quality services and infrastructures shared in common, giving everyone countless options for enjoying adventurous lives of surprise, creativity, and connection.

We see one “Last Stimulus” of public investment as a chance to break with capital, including a material growth imperative the planet can't handle, by creating the conditions for a different kind of prosperity.^[3] Rich countries have to lead on this, as poorer countries still need space to equitably grow economies and improve living standards. We're cautiously optimistic about the New Zealand Labour government's call to break from GDP as the



principal metric of economic success. Global cooperation could help us identify indicators to better account for material throughput and environmental damage, and the sorts of things we want more of—autonomy, pleasure, health, free time, access to care, and so on. While emphasising these metrics won't put an end to capitalist growth all on its own, it can illustrate the divergence between what's good for business and what's good for people.

We know we need a massive expansion of public power to do what we've outlined here. The work now is to fill in the details of how we get there. Of course, we need more than just ideas. Decarbonisation will require a frontal assault on big fossil capital and the private utilities which have given them cover. Governments around the world now subsidise fossil fuels to the tune of around \$5 trillion a year, \$659 billion of that from the US.^[4] Meanwhile, coal companies that have gone bankrupt in the United States have used that as an excuse to short workers on their pensions and healthcare, further devastating the communities they have damaged for so long. We can expect more of the same with Big Oil. Fossil fuel executives will surely continue to sew themselves golden parachutes as they throw the workers who helped build their fortunes under the bus.

Ironically, those same fossil fuel executives insist that reining in oil, coal, and gas will deprive workers of jobs. Yet research shows that an enormous expansion of clean energy will not only prevent runaway climate change—it can also create millions of new jobs and have massive local health benefits. Done right, this transition could be the occasion for redressing many of neoliberalism's harms.

Thatcher crushed coal miners' unions to inaugurate the neoliberal era. We must ensure that the transition away from both neoliberalism and fossil fuels does not repeat the harm done in those communities. On the contrary, the design and implementation of a Green New Deal transition must be led by the communities, workers, and Indigenous

nations who have paid the heaviest price for our current system. We embrace leadership from the frontlines of carbon pollution, mineral extraction, climate disasters, and toxic contamination, as well as economic disinvestment, underemployment, state abandonment, union-busting, and housing precarity—in short, all those suffering from the damages wrought by capitalism, racism, and the climate crisis.

As we zero out the business model of coal, oil and gas, we also need to hold those who have perpetuated it accountable. Fossil fuel executives are responsible for killing tens of millions through air pollution, and endangering the lives of billions by stoking climate breakdown worldwide. Like the tobacco companies whose models they imitated, the oil majors' own scientists had investigated and confirmed the basics of climate science decades before these companies stopped funding right-wing, fake science front groups that misled the public. And those companies are still trying to thwart decarbonisation, albeit now through marginally more subtle means. Ultimately, as we have argued before, we think they should be tried for crimes against humanity.^[5]

Instead they're now trying to cast themselves as allies in the climate fight, frequenting UN climate talks and – in the US – lobbying for mild carbon taxes that would give them a backdoor out of lawsuits and regulations. The corporations that caused this crisis have no place in mapping out the solutions to it. Nor should Big Oil's closest allies. Here, the financial industry plays an outsized role. Cross-Atlantic organising therefore has a particularly significant role to play in curtailing the linked power of Wall Street and the City. We must break the power of the financiers and scale up alternative forms of investment capable of funding a rapid, just green transition.

On each side of the Atlantic, a militant working-class movement, galvanised around the promise of a green economy built on living wage union jobs, should be in the driver's seat. We must bring environmental justice move-

ments together with Friday school strikers, Extinction Rebellion with the nurses, teachers and care providers whose work is as essential to this transition as that of solar and wind engineers.

Fortunately, the shift away from the too-small, too-white environmentalism of old has begun in the U.S. The 2014 People's Climate March put 400,000 people in the streets in New York, with black and brown frontline community members in the lead. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, whose family hails from Puerto Rico, is taking cues from a climate justice movement led most notably by women of colour. Beyond AOC, some of the strongest supporters of the Green New Deal in Congress have been Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, Deb Haaland, and Ayanna Pressley – Palestinian, Somali, indigenous, and Black Americans now leading the progressive wing of the Democratic party. The broad popular struggle to attack climate change and inequality together is being led most visibly by representatives of the country's multiracial working class.

We know we can't solve a planetary problem on our own; we see US emissions reduction as crucial not least because it is a condition of possibility for global cooperation. Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement was seen by many as a catastrophic break from international climate negotiations. But the international climate process has made little progress—due in no small part to U.S. intransigence and backdoor deals that have torpedoed agreement after agreement and given other countries cover. In this, the UK was too often a willing partner.

We need new kinds of international negotiations and institutions that can pick up the considerable slack left by UN climate talks. A starting point could be an initially small group of countries with governments committed to Green New Deal principles setting collective, binding policy goals, and sharing ideas and practices with anyone embracing the common objectives. Countries at different levels of wealth would be welcome, with

particular commitments commensurate to their specific conditions, and mechanisms for redistributive financing and technology transfers among members. This climate justice grouping would ideally grow over time, forming a more ambitious parallel to the UN Process.

To be sure, new institutions of global governance won't achieve their goals without grassroots pressure. For decades, a wide range of left movements and parties, community groups, peasants' organisations, unions, and others, have worked on transnational campaigns to bring some justice to supply chains from below, ranging from fruit production to jeans manufacture to oil and mineral extraction. Social movements' tools have included direct action to block production or shipping, strikes, campaigns for public and private procurement policies, voluntary product labelling, ethical investment advocacy, and more. But with Green New Deal regimes providing institutional channels to radically restructure the economy from above, we would hope for more effective organising across borders from below. This would push states to adopt bolder and more egalitarian policies, while further strengthening peasants', workers', and communities' autonomous economic power. This popular alliance-building could happen in both sprawling gatherings like the World Social Forum, and via more focused, issue-specific networks.

Our vision of sowing popular power and transnational solidarities is the exact opposite of the Fortress Europe that is currently hardening, with its violent border policing and authoritarian rule by bankers. Of course, only some aspects of Fortress Europe are designed to block movement—it is also committed to capital mobility and financial deregulation. Borders and camps for migrants—but open doors for the investor class. Europe's institutions must be radically reformed.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the left must offer a vision to transform global and regional economic institutions that opposes

right-wing calls for economic nationalism—and its mythical domestic harmony between the interests of workers and bosses. But we can't abdicate trade to the Davos elites either.

We must also address real grievances with the deceptively-named “free” trade regime. For instance, the idea of a Green New Deal club outlined above could extend to trade policy. What would this look like? For starters, rewriting trade agreements to include stringent labour and environmental standards, including full accounting of carbon emissions in manufacture and transport; reforming the rules governing investor arbitration courts to open them up to lawsuits from labour, environmental, and indigenous activists; and holding US and UK companies accountable for social and environmental impacts throughout their global supply chains. We would abolish restrictive intellectual property rules, which at present deprive the whole world of the benefits of scientific and technical innovation, while locking poorer countries into cycles of economic dependency.

We're inspired by the organising in defence of free movement from the British left, as Brexit threatens to harden British borders and deport thousands of Europeans who have made their homes in the UK. We're similarly heartened by the outcry that met the denial of public services and threat of deportation made against members of the Windrush generation. There can be no left revival, and there can be no climate justice, in one country alone. With xenophobic politicians gaining steam in Europe and around the world, we will need much more organising along these lines to build support for welcoming immigrants and refugees, especially as the climate crisis intensifies, and to rectify the damages of European and American colonialism.

Of course, the cross-Atlantic Green New Deal movement has a lot to learn from the left and the world further afield. We're learning from French public transit policy, German codetermination in industry and sectoral bargaining, Costa Rica's plan for

rapid decarbonisation, Scandinavian models for modern welfare and housing, the national ban on large-scale mining in El Salvador, European examples of public utilities, the federation of cooperatives in the Basque region, organising against extractivism in Ecuador, coping with disastrous flooding through popular mobilisation in Kerala, indigenous rights victories in Canada, Brazil's landless movement organising, and much more.

Researching ways to scale up and democratise existing climate policies will be one of the Green New Deal's great contributions to global justice movements. As academics, journalists, policymakers, organisers and more turn attention to the twin crises of capitalism and climate change, we hope a transformative Green New Deal can bolster their efforts, arming movements and politicians to hit the ground running. It wasn't just the wealthy backers of the neoliberal revolution that made them successful, but their commitment to transforming the definition of economic common sense by any means necessary. We might not have a transatlantic coterie of billionaires willing to fund think tanks that help them secure their own self-interest. But we are part of an exploding movement of popular forces who are sick and tired of inequality, and who want to stop climate breakdown.

And as we work toward a new, no-carbon internationalism, we also have a vision: ending inequalities and stabilising the climate; caring for our communities and the planet; and winning freedom and dignity for the many, guided by a solidarity that knows no borders.

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