

A Global Green New Deal Is The Best Way To Save The Planet



What is urgently needed is a political platform that embraces a sound climate stabilization plan which ensures a just transition, creates a plethora of new jobs, reduces inequality, and promotes sustainable growth.

Another summer is upon us and [heatwaves](#) are scorching many parts of the world, smashing thousands of temperature records. Even the world's [ocean surface temperature](#) is off the charts, reaching unprecedented levels, while [sea ice level in the Antarctic](#) has set a record low for the second year in a row.

Indeed, planet earth is screaming because "[climate change is out of control](#)" as U.N. General-Secretary António Guterres recently put it. Yet the global community's response to the greatest existential threat facing humanity continues to be not merely unacceptably slow but borders on criminal negligence.

We know the reasons why.

Fossil fuels supply about 80% of the world's energy, and contemporary politics is trapped in the short term, with little evidence that it can be repaired. Across the world, politicians continue to make enormous compromises to short term interests in the name of energy security. China and the U.S. are the world's biggest carbon polluters. Yet President Joe Biden has signed off on a series of major fossil fuel projects, and China is building more new coal plants than the rest of the world. This is even while both countries are also pursuing aggressive clean energy transition policies—indeed they are competing with one another on these.

To add insult to injury, governments continue to subsidize fossil fuel production. In 2022, subsidies worldwide for fossil fuel consumption rose above \$1 trillion, according to the [International Energy Agency](#). And the world's biggest banks have provided [\\$5.5 trillion](#) in finance to the fossil fuel industry over the past seven years.

As for global climate conferences, they have turned out to be not only ineffective but something of a cruel joke. They function in the absence of an “enforcement mechanism,” and empty words and promises are their hallmark feature. [Greta Thunberg](#) was indeed right on the mark when she chastised global leaders at the [Youth4Climate](#) event in Milan for their failure to address the climate emergency, dismissing their rhetoric as “blah, blah, blah.”

Moreover, data has shown that [fossil fuel lobbyists](#) attending the negotiations in climate conferences outnumber almost every national delegation. There were more than 500 fossil fuel lobbyists at the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, and more than 600 at the COP27 summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. As for COP28, which will take place this year from November 30 until December 12, the host is the United Arab Emirates, one of the world’s major oil and gas producers, and will be presided by Sultan al-Jaber, the CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Company. At this global climate summit, [fossil fuel companies are expected to have an even bigger voice](#). And their main focus is to promote carbon capture technologies. These technologies have yet to demonstrate their capacity at scale, while also offering their own dangerous side effects.

This is all pretty understandable. It’s capitalism at work.

But we should also be asking ourselves an additional question: Why is it that populations are not motivated enough to address the climate crisis? Not only that, but far-right and right-wing populist parties, which are hostile to climate and carbon-low energy, are growing in prominence and influence. The rise of far-right movements is felt not only in Europe and the United States, but also in Eurasia and South Asia, while right-wing platforms remain popular across Latin America in spite of the fact that the region has shifted to the left over the past two decades.

The reasons for this unfortunate and disturbing development are a bit more complicated. Demagogues are the worst enemies of the laboring populations, yet the working class and poor people are easy targets. In our own era, neoliberal policies (deregulation of the economy, privatization, suppression of wages, and shifting the orientation of the state as far away as possible from redistribution and a socially-based agenda) had led to extremely harmful consequences, including poverty, mass unemployment, income inequality, deficits in decent work and labor rights, social exclusion, and overall decline in the standard of living.

In Europe, home to the majority of the richest countries in the world, in 2022, more than 95 million European Union citizens, representing close to 22% of the population, were [at risk of poverty and social exclusion](#).

In the U.S., more than 51 million workers currently make less than \$15 an hour—nearly one-third of the workforce—according to data compiled by [Oxfam](#), and the [official poverty rate](#) with nearly 38 million people is considered by many experts to be based on a vastly inaccurate measurement of poverty in the United States. For example, the [MIT living wage model](#) uses a cost of living estimate that far exceeds the federal poverty thresholds.

At the heart of the neoliberal vision is a societal and world order based on the prioritization of corporate power and free markets and the abandonment of public services. The neoliberal claim is that economies would perform more effectively, producing greater wealth and economic prosperity for all, if markets were allowed to operate without government intervention. This claim is predicated on the idea that free markets are inherently just and can create effective low-cost ways to produce consumer goods and services. By extension, an interventionist or state-managed economy is regarded as wasteful and inefficient, choking off growth and expansion by constraining innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit.

However, the facts say otherwise. During the period known as “state-managed capitalism” (roughly from 1945-73, and otherwise known as the classical Keynesian era), the Western capitalist economies were growing faster than at any other time in the 20th century and wealth was reaching those at the bottom of the social pyramid more effectively than ever before. Convergence was also far greater during this period than it has been during the last 45 years of neoliberal policies. Moreover, under the neoliberal economic order, Western capitalist economies have not only failed to match the trends, growth patterns, and distributional effects experienced under “managed capitalism,” but the “free-market” orthodoxy has produced a series of never-ending financial crises, distorted developments in the real economy, elevated inequality to new historical heights, and eroded civic virtues and democratic values. In fact, neoliberalism has turned out to be the new dystopia of the contemporary world.

Under the neoliberal socio-economic order and its effects, which provoke fear, insecurity, and indignation, it is not difficult to see why the laboring populations might fall under the spell of right-wing demagogues who know how to exploit

societal divisions and resort to deception and manipulation with a political repertoire based on xenophobic nationalism and law and order. It is also not hard to see why concerns about climate breakdown might become far less of a priority for them when they are struggling to make ends meet. Putting food on the table, paying the rent, and fears of losing a job are what may keep average folks awake at night—not climate breakdown, even when they do recognize it as a major threat. Indeed, climate change, surely among U.S. voters, remains “a lower priority than issues such as strengthening the economy and reducing healthcare costs,” according to a recent [Pew Research Center](#) survey. And France’s “yellow vest” movement speaks volumes about the political risks of green taxes, in conjunction with tax cuts for the wealthy, while living standards are moving in the wrong direction.

This is where radical collective social and political action ought to come in, as it is the only hope we have for a sustainable future. But today’s left has failed so far to convince the laboring populations that it has a viable political agenda which can effectively address their immediate concerns as well as tackle the climate crisis. Today’s left, particularly in Europe, has an economic agenda which pays lip service to social transformation and lacks a concrete action plan for addressing the climate crisis through sustainable development strategies. Throughout the advanced industrialized world, existing climate plans remain insufficient and proceed alongside national plans to increase energy security through reliance on new oil, gas, and petrochemical infrastructure projects.

Make no mistake about it. “Oil and gas projects are back in a big way,” as a recent [New York Times](#) article put it. And climate protests alone cannot stop global warming. They do have a positive impact on public opinion, though “extreme action protests” can also backfire, [according to some studies](#).

Moreover, some bad ideas, such as that of degrowth, have begun to gain ground, distracting attention away from real solutions to the climate crisis and to the ills of neoliberalism.

What is urgently needed is building long-term progressive power around a vision of left-wing politics that is energized by the pressing need to tackle the climate crisis by radically accelerating the transition away from fossil fuels while at the same time pushing for a structural transformation of present-day economies. In other words, a political platform that embraces a sound climate stabilization plan

which ensures a just transition, creates a plethora of new jobs, reduces inequality, and promotes sustainable growth. Of course, this is what the [Green New Deal](#) (GND) is supposed to be all about, except that there are a number of different versions of a GND policy plan, including one adopted by the European Union. But Europe's green ambitions (they call it the "European Green Deal" and the aim is for the E.U. to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050) are contradicted by European countries' quest for new fossil fuel supplies. In addition, and this is typical of poorly formulated GND policy plans, the European parliament has voted in support of E.U. rules labeling natural gas and nuclear energy as green investments.

Even so, the movement for the Green New Deal is growing and is making a positive impact on several fronts. Several states and over 100 cities in the United States have committed to 100% clean energy. The Inflation Reduction Act may not qualify as a GND, but it is still a historical piece of legislation, especially given the existing political climate in the country.

Still, one might say that what we really need in order to save the planet is a comprehensive GND, formulated as a worldwide program. But we do have such a blueprint in place, courtesy of the American economist [Robert Pollin](#), and fully endorsed by the world's greatest intellectual alive, namely [Noam Chomsky](#).

Degrowth is not the answer. As Robert Pollin has argued powerfully and persuasively, cutting back on economic growth will have little to no impact on the task at hand, which is ["delivering a zero-emissions global economy."](#) More precisely, if we depend on reducing gross domestic product (GDP) to reduce emissions, then it follows that we can only reduce emissions by the same number we reduce growth. For example, if GDP shrinks by 10%—a massive global recession—it will succeed in cutting emissions by only 10%. We need emissions down to zero.

Moreover, the idea of shrinking rather than growing economies is, politically speaking, a self-defeating proposition. All that degrowth will accomplish is more pain for working class people and will most likely fuel further support for the far-right.

Of course, degrowth advocates argue that this is a project targeted at the Global North, not a path for the Global South. However, are we to assume on the basis of

such claims that the developed countries are void of class inequalities and have somehow escaped the sort of socio-economic ills that accompany the implementation of ruthless neoliberal policies? Are we to believe that there is no need to improve living conditions, reduce poverty rates, and increase employment opportunities for the Western masses? Perhaps such notions do lie behind degrowth, which is why some, if not most, of its advocates reject the idea of economic planning and by extension of the GND. In this sense, I think it's quite fair to say that degrowth is in fact working in service of neoliberalism while doing nothing to stop global warming. Committed socialists should have nothing to do with degrowth policy proposals.

Pondering radical proposals for saving the planet and humanity from the effects of global warming should be welcomed as they may generate opportunities for creative forms of political and social action. But degrowth is neither a radical alternative nor is it based on sound economics. Furthermore, it is a rather dangerous political idea as it will hurt mostly the laboring classes and deliver them straight into the arms of the far-right.

For all practical intents and purposes, radical politics in the age of climate breakdown goes through a (global) Green New Deal—not through degrowth rhetoric, which is in full display in the current issue of [Monthly Review](#). It is up to the socialist left to embrace it and see that its vision turns into reality.

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