

Remaking The World Starts With The Green New Deal



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While the Green New Deal will decarbonize the economy, it will also be egalitarian.

In an entry to his *Prison Notebooks*, in Notebook 3 of the year 1930, the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci observed of the existing political conditions in his society that, “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

Today, it is the entire world that finds itself in the midst of such a tension. Capitalism’s addiction to the burning of fossil fuels is heating up the planet, subsequently creating conditions that pose a direct threat to humans and ecosystems. Actually, there are serious [indications](#) that we are on the edge of a complete climate breakdown. Even the [Brazilian Amazon](#) has turned now into a net emitter. Yet the future ways of powering the world economy are gestating—and it is still far from clear that global warming will be tamed.

However, this is not to suggest that there are no solutions to the climate emergency facing the planet Earth. In fact, we seem to have the [ultimate solution](#) to climate breakdown, but powerful interests do stand on the way and too many people appear to be rather scared of the proposed solution due to misconceptions fostered by those who wish to maintain the status quo for as long as possible, and “damn the consequences.”

Welcome to the Green New Deal!

The Green New Deal is a plan for tackling the climate emergency by doing away with fossil fuels and relying instead on clean, renewable and zero-carbon energy sources to power economies in the 21st century. The term itself emerged

sometime during the 2007-08 financial crisis, and the first full proposal for a Green New Deal was put together by a [UK-based Green New Deal group](#) which drew its inspiration from the history of Roosevelt's New Deal.

Still, while a range of studies on "green economy" were produced shortly thereafter and all throughout the 2010s, it is safe to say that the Green New Deal framework did not fire the public imagination until just a couple of years ago when Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and Senator Ed Markey (D-Mass) introduced [a 14-page nonbinding resolution](#) calling on the federal government to create a Green New Deal as a means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reshaping the US economy. Now the Green New Deal is a topic that's on everyone's lips. The idea has become the Left's rallying cry and the Right's worse nightmare.

But let's get something straight. While there are various versions, the Green New Deal is first and foremost a rapid decarbonization program, with the government leading the way. The rationale for this is very simple: combatting the climate crisis requires a comprehensive social transformation that only the public sector can undertake, albeit the decarbonization of the economy, in the same vein as the goal of achieving and sustaining an approximation of full employment in capitalist economies spelled out by John Maynard Keynes in his classic work *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, "does not exclude all manner of compromises and of devices by which public authority will co-operate with private initiative."

The co-operation between public and private sectors is necessary for numerous reasons, not least of which is the fact that decarbonization will require both public and private investments. In fact, decarbonization will require highly sophisticated public-private partnerships since it will be the government involved in guiding the process and funding most of the projects associated with the transition to a "green economy" but mainly private firms manufacturing and installing renewable energy technologies.

This is necessary because the task of saving the planet from climate breakdown needs to take place under capitalism. Why? Because time is fast running out. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released in late 2018 warned us that we have 12 years to limit devastating global warming by revealing

that carbon dioxide emissions must be cut by 45 percent by 2030 and then to net zero by 2050. Thus, we don't have the time to wait for capitalism to come to an end. The objective conditions for an alternative socio-economic system may be absolutely ripe, but the transformative human activities to bring about this realization are still too fragile and scattered. And, lest we forget, a Green New Deal, as Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin have argued in *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet*, needs to be global if we can hope to keep global warming at bay, although it will start at the national and local level.

Even so, the decarbonization of the economy through a Green New Deal faces massive opposition not only from the fossil fuel industry and the Republican party but from much of the corporate world and a disturbingly sizeable segment of the citizenry tuned into "free-market" ideology and conspiracies.

Decarbonizing the economy means altering the sources of energy we use. The transition to a clean and renewable-resource economy extends obviously to all material goods, but energy is the starting point as [emissions](#) from fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes are overwhelmingly responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. Agriculture and deforestation are the second largest contributors.

Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 is technologically and economically feasible. We already have the technologies in place to make the transition to a carbon-free economy, although some need to be scaled up and new ones will surely need to be introduced in the near future. In fact, in an attempt to help the European Union meet its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, the French consultancy firm [Capgemini has identified](#) no less than 55 high-climate technology projects that can form a road map to climate neutrality. And nuclear power and "blue hydrogen" produced through the integration of carbon capture with steam methane reformers are not included on the list.

Equally important, the costs of renewable energy have plummeted all while creating energy through the burning of fossil fuels remains a much costlier and a highly inefficient process. Air pollution from fossil fuels is also responsible for nearly one in every five deaths worldwide, according to a new study published in *Environmental Research*.

So why is there political mobilization against decarbonization and the Green New Deal, especially when the fundamentals of economics and public health alike favor clean and renewable sources of energy?

The reasons are manifold.

Big Oil and Dirty Coal have been from the beginning the biggest opponents of climate legislation, spending billions of dollars lobbying lawmakers to win concessions for their products and block in turn measures geared towards global warming pollution reductions. Their business activities and profit-making prospects depend on polluting the environment, and damn the implications and consequences of environmental breakdown. Naturally, they are now at the forefront of the opposition to the Green New Deal.

The supporting cast includes the Republican party, one of the most stalwart allies of the fossil fuel industry and by far the most reactionary party all around in today's political universe, moderate Democrats, establishment economists, and all those opposed to the idea of the government being the primary driver of an economic transformation or to government intervention in economic affairs in general.

But the Green New Deal is also opposed because of what we may call it's "green intersectionality"—that is, the idea that environmental devastation and global warming are deeply intertwined with other issues such as economic inequality and racial injustice. Thus, the Ocasio-Cortez Green New Deal includes, besides achieving carbon neutrality, policies for stronger worker rights, universal health care, spending on public housing, and more.

The reintroduction of the Green New Deal by Senator Ed Markey and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on April 20, 2021, which calls for bold action to transform the economy while eliminating US greenhouse gas emissions within a decade, was immediately slammed by Republicans as a plan to advance socialism.

Reactionary elements and the Republican party leveled the same charge of "socialism" against FDR and the New Deal too. For the Republicans, even the universal health care system, found in virtually all European countries, is socialism. So is taxing the super-rich. But red scare tactics have been the hall mark of the party of the rich, white, Anglo-Saxon, right-wing, and racist people.

So no surprise in trying to scare the hell out of American people by equating the Green New Deal with socialism and with outrageous claims that it will take away their hamburgers and “outlaw” cars and plane travel.

What is true, however, is that while the Green New Deal will decarbonize the economy, it will also be egalitarian (Green New Deal jobs will be available to individuals and groups who have been denied access to good jobs; Green New Deal projects will address the concentration of pollution in low-income communities; and the Green New Deal will ensure a fair and just transition for workers and communities most severely impacted by the climate crisis) and will surely transform capitalism just as the original New Deal did in the 1930s.

Climate breakdown is the defining crisis of our time. And time is running out. But we can still avoid falling off the climate precipice. The Green New Deal is our way out, the opportunity to save people and our planet as well as to remake the world in more egalitarian and just ways.

What’s so scary or unappealing about that?

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