

**SSFS7 Panel on Ecological Justice through Socialist Transformation
Green New Deals and Extinction Rebellion
RebEleanor Johnson 11 July 2020 panellist (8.00 – 10.30 BST)**

*"People gonna rise like water, gonna turn this system round,
In the name of my great grand-daughters, climate justice now"*
Mobilising song for Extinction Rebellion, 2019

My contribution to this panel will focus on proposals for a "Green New Deal" (GND) from progressive left and Green parties in UK and the radical "Extinction Rebellion" (XR) movement for fundamental change to tackle the climate emergency and work for climate justice. I will argue that the social transformations that are needed to bring about ecological justice will require nonviolent grassroots activism at local and national levels combined with national and international political action and diplomacy to move away from capitalism and end its exploitative, military-industrial economic structures and policies before it's too late.

As a European feminist and XR Peace contributor and activist, it is important to say from the outset that I have chosen to look at these two Euro-Atlantic expressions of climate concern because they have influenced political debates in my country. I do not suggest that they provide leadership or ideas that would be applicable to all. On the contrary, these approaches require critical analysis. I hope, however, that my presentation on these approaches will contribute usefully to our discussions.

Vandana Shiva wrote in her foreword to the Extinction Rebellion handbook:

*"The extermination of biological diversity and of indigenous cultures that know how to live in peace with Mother Earth is part of one extinction, one interconnected war against life. Ecocide and genocide are one indivisible process, and they began with the idea of the colonization of the Earth as the 'civilizing mission' of a 'superior race'."*¹

Living with the patriarchal legacies of rapacious colonialism, racism and military-industrial systems of genocide, exploitation and war, the whole world now faces interconnected annihilation-level threats to our survival, which include:

- climate destruction, with sea level rises, extreme weather and climate chaos;
- environmental devastation and species extinction;
- nuclear war, with "nuclear winter", mass famine, and radioactive pollution of our air, lands and seas;
- global health crises and rapidly spreading coronavirus pandemics, such as today's Covid-19.

Time is running out. These global threats reflect a continuum of violence perpetrated by governments and military-industrial ideologies that uphold hierarchies of power and unequal distributions of resources.

We all have roles to play as we collectively try to stop climate destruction and construct new social and economic relations and institutions to transform the power imbalance in

¹ Vandana Shiva, Foreword to *This is not a drill*, the Extinction Rebellion (XR) Handbook, 2019.

the world, share Mother Earth's resources more equitably, and create the laws, norms, structures and institutions for much fairer international political, economic and security systems.

The principle of ecological justice is that those who created the worst pollution and greenhouse gases (GHG) have the largest responsibilities to stop and undo those harmful actions. Those that have brought the whole world to the brink of ecocide must work hardest to cut their military-industrial activities, take less from the Earth's resources, and restore natural environments.

We have to bring harmony, balance and justice in how we live our lives and nurture the planet's ecosystems. How we do that politically and economically is the driving objective of the growing number of GND thinking, but unfortunately that doesn't mean that all GND proposals will be effective or transformative. We have to critically evaluate all political and economic options, act locally, nationally and internationally, and pressure our governments to implement policies that will work best for our shared planet.

International climate justice requires that the burdens arising from climate destruction – which disproportionately fall on poorer nations of the Global South – be taken far more by the richer countries, the Euro-Atlantic/Global North. However, the Global South also exists within the North, and this needs to be taken into account. Within Europe and US, for example, there are "minoritised" communities who are disproportionately disadvantaged by poverty, poor education, low pay and sexual, racial and ethnic discrimination. In the UK, people from the BAME² communities are also catching Covid-19 in higher numbers, with disproportional fatalities. Factors include working in lower paid and higher risk health, care, transport, food and hospitality sectors and living in rented accommodation that is more likely to be crowded.

Another risk factor identified by researchers is that people who live and work in cities with high environmental pollution have weakened immune systems. In campaigning for ecological justice we have to work on social transformation to address inequalities, power structures and allocations of resources and opportunities within our relevant countries as well as working internationally to enable shared leadership and redistribution of resources towards the peoples and nations who are suffering most as a consequence of climate chaos, militarism, nuclear weapons, and disadvantage in terms of access to health and social services.

Whose Green New Deal?

Green New Deals and XR arose in the UK out of specific political conditions. In 2008, a group of progressive politicians, economists and environmentalists in the UK published a report calling for a Green New Deal. Their aim was to transform our economic and

² BAME and BME are official terms used to denote "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic" people in Britain. These terms are contested by some progressives, who refer instead to "minoritised" people. I don't know if this usage translates into other languages, but 'minoritised' is used to draw attention to the fact that the problem is not about numbers within our societies, but about the disproportionate levels of disadvantage, vulnerability and violence that are experienced by some communities because of the institutional, racist and sexist actions of those in power. Thus in some analyses, women may be in the numerical majority but are politically and economically "minoritised" in patriarchal structures of power.

social policies to tackle the climate emergency through public investment in care, resilience, renewable energy and sustainable jobs, and to reconstruct the British economy – and by extension international economic systems – after the 2008 financial crisis caused by years of profligate "casino capitalism" by irresponsible banks and investors.³

Britain's sole Green MP, Caroline Lucas, played a significant role in getting the GND concept into parliamentary and public discussions on the climate crisis. In December 2019, when the most recent (and unelected) Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson called a snap election, the Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW) fought the 2019 General Election on a hastily pulled together GND manifesto that left out important issues such as security, peace-building and defence and was overly focussed on repairing capitalism rather than transforming economic and social expectations and relations. The Labour Party's annual Conference also committed to bring in GND policies if elected.⁴ In the toxic political atmosphere at that time the slogan "Get Brexit Done" won. Vital issues such as climate destruction, health, and green economic and social policies received little air-time or meaningful debate.

Despite UK problems, slowly but steadily, GND proposals are being taken up internationally. Describing "advanced" capitalism as "literally falling apart", Greece's former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis and others have recently called for an International Green New Deal. This April 2019 proposal is for "a pragmatic plan to raise \$8tn – 5% of global GDP – each year, coordinate its investment in the transition to renewable energy and commit to providing climate protections on the basis of countries' needs, rather than their means".⁵

Varoufakis referred not only to Roosevelt's New Deal, but to the Marshall Plan and – bizarrely, given the subject matter – to the Manhattan Project that developed the first nuclear weapons, including two that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki 75 years ago. He also appeared to advocate centralised US-European leadership and technocratic investment strategies to save the world from climate destruction:

"Suddenly, countries with large trade surpluses will realize they are better able to invest their excess capital if green investments in deficit countries are coordinated under the auspices of an international plan. The positive-sum dynamic will prevail."⁶

This centralising GND approach would not be helpful, as it falls into the patriarchal trap of trying to repair capitalism instead of breaking free of its exploitative military-industrial institutions and frameworks.

³ Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion, ["Wanted: a green 'new deal'". *The Guardian*](#), 9 April, 2008.

⁴ Fiona Harvey, ["Labour's climate policies: what are they and what do they mean?"](#), *The Guardian*, 24 September, 2019; and Grace Blakely, ["Why we need a Green New Deal to solve humanity's greatest challenge"](#). *New Statesman*, 2 October, 2019

⁵ Yanis Varoufakis and David Adler, ["It's time for nations to unite around an International Green New Deal"](#), *The Guardian*, 23 April 2019.

⁶ Yanis Varoufakis and David Adler, ["It's time for nations to unite around an International Green New Deal"](#), *The Guardian*, 23 April 2019.

In the United States, Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez (Democrat, NY) took the lead in 2019 to put forward her Green New Deal resolution, building on the political leadership of women of colour in the climate justice movement.⁷ US political conditions mean the resolution can't go forward as such, but its ideas are gaining traction. Propelled by anger about Donald Trump's destructive environmental decisions and failed pandemic policies, Ocasio-Cortez' GND proposals have become linked with Black Lives Matter narratives and urgent calls for social and environmental justice. Practically, emphasis is placed on decarbonising municipal and state economies and transforming energy, food and production systems in ways that "dismantle inequalities of race, class and gender".⁸

As described by the youth-led Sunrise Movement,

"The Green New Deal is a 10 year plan to mobilize every aspect of American society to 100 percent clean and renewable energy by 2030, a guaranteed living wage job by everyone who needs one, and a just transition for both workers and frontline communities."⁹

As well as Europe and the USA, GND proposals are gaining traction in Canada and further afield in the Asia-Pacific region. New Zealand's Labour government plans to "break from GDP" as the principal "metric of economic success".¹⁰ Australian Greens are keen to go further.

In April this year, South Korea's Democratic Party won a compelling majority with its "climate manifesto" that explicitly linked the pledge to reach "net zero emissions by 2050" with green policies such as increased investment in renewable energy, phasing out fossil fuel financing and supporting transitions to green jobs. Voters are now looking to President Moon Jae-in to develop and implement the necessary policies to make good his green new deal election promises.¹¹

GND, Gender and Militarism

To be effective in delivering the fundamental economic and social changes that are urgently needed to prevent climate chaos and mass annihilation, more must be done to incorporate feminist perspectives regarding economic, social and political inequalities, and how to incorporate security, defence and peace-building into green new deal policies.

⁷ Rep Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal explained on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxIDJWCbk6I> 12 June 2019; and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1w3V4PUv2s> 15 October 2019. This resolution (H. Res. 109) can be downloaded here: (<https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hres109/BILLS-116hres109ih.pdf>)

⁸ Daniel Aldana Cohen, Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni and Thea Riofrancos, 'For a Global Green New Deal', in Roadmap to a GND, Common Wealth, <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/reports/for-a-global-green-new-deal> p 5.

⁹ <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/green-new-deal>

¹⁰ Daniel Aldana Cohen, Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni and Thea Riofrancos, 'For a Global Green New Deal', in Roadmap to a GND, Common Wealth, <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/reports/for-a-global-green-new-deal> p 6.

¹¹ Chloé Farand, "South Korea to implement Green New Deal after ruling party election win". *Climate Home News*, April 16, 2020.

With regard to gender and climate justice, the UK-based Women's Budget Group and Women's Environmental Network (WEN) collaborated on a report this year that called for a Feminist Green New Deal that focussed not only on "reforming and reducing carbon-intensive industries" but also on:

investing in already low-carbon social infrastructure (i.e., services and facilities that meet needs and contribute towards a good quality of life). This requires recognising that care jobs *are* green jobs and that investing in care is investing in a sustainable future. It means expecting men and women to participate equally in unpaid care, domestic and community work, as well as encouraging women and BAME [Black, Asian and minoritized ethnic] workers to participate in the design and construction of physical infrastructure and new technologies. Most importantly it means fundamentally rethinking what work we value and what work counts as part of a just and sustainable society."¹²

The fact that military-industrial establishments are some of the major contributors to climate destruction and global insecurity is obvious, but also routinely camouflaged in the name of "national security".¹³

For example, in the 2017-8 financial year, UK military spending caused a massive carbon footprint (consumption-based calculations) of around 11 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e). Of this, about 6.5 million tonnes CO₂e were produced directly through weapons manufacture, military vehicles and related activities ('territorial', production-based calculations). This is more than the total GHG emissions from 60 less-polluting UN states.¹⁴

Local and global environments and people are routinely contaminated, damaged and destroyed by all kinds of weapons production, testing and use, as well as military facilities, activities and exercises. The environmental impacts of weapons use and war have been well documented in numerous UN reports. As well as the recognised physical and psychological impacts of armed conflict and wargames on combatants, military activities carry gendered health and security impacts for civilian women and girls living near military bases.

Most recently, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted on 7 July 2017 by an overwhelming majority of the UN General Assembly, noted in its preamble:

"...the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons cannot be adequately addressed, transcend national borders, pose grave implications for human survival, the environment, socioeconomic development, the global economy, food security and the health of current

¹² Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor, [It's time to talk about a feminist green new deal](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/economy/its-time-to-talk-about-a-feminist-green-new-deal/), OpenDemocracy 20 May, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/economy/its-time-to-talk-about-a-feminist-green-new-deal/>

¹³ I address this issue in more depth in my SSFS7 lecture on "Black Lives Matter: Feminist-AntiRacist Challenges to national security discourses", available from Global University website.

¹⁴ Stuart Parkinson, [The Environmental Impacts of the UK Military Sector, Scientists of Global Responsibility](#), April 2020, p 2. See also [Climate 2020: Degrees of devastation](#), published by United Nations Association – UK, 2020.

and future generations, and have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including as a result of ionizing radiation..."¹⁵

The Paris Accord entails reporting, but governments should be required to calculate all their military production and consumption activities, and identify them clearly in publicly available GHG emission figures. Further research is also needed to enable policymakers and civil society to form an accurate picture of country-by-country and aggregate military emissions and environmental damage.

School Strikes and Extinction Rebellion

While politicians dithered, children in many countries declared "Fridays for Future" and walked out of school with home made placards telling the adults to wake up.

They were inspired by Greta Thunberg, who decided in 2018 that she needed to take action to draw attention to the urgency of the climate crisis. All on her own she began a school strike outside the parliament building in her country, Sweden. She was initially ignored, but within months more and more children were following her lead and coming out on "Climate Strike". As the children's climate rebellion gathered pace, Greta became a global symbol, invited to speak to the United Nations and many more parliaments, as well as XR and climate protests in Britain and other countries.

Her words were simple but powerful:

- "We children are doing this for you to put your differences aside and start acting as you would in a crisis."
- Treat the climate crisis like the acute crisis it is."
- "No-one is too small to make a difference".¹⁶

Extinction Rebellion launched in London in 2018, stopping traffic on several bridges across the Thames. By April 2019 XR managed to bring much of Central London to a standstill for ten days with creative nonviolent actions that planted trees on Waterloo Bridge, took over Parliament Square, immobilised a pink 'ark' in the middle of the famous Oxford Circus shopping hub, pitched tents at Marble Arch and danced to live music in Piccadilly. Thousands were arrested, but this just swelled the numbers who flowed into London in October, and occupied locations such as Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, Parliament Square and roads leading to the Ministry of Defence for several days. Smaller locations associated with military-industrial polluters were also locked down.

Declaring "This is an emergency, XR mobilized tens of thousands of people – workers and students, young and old, women, men and young people, and families of many colours and backgrounds. XR came together in "affinity groups" to take nonviolent direct action. The slogans included "Climate action now", "Rebel for Life", "There is no Planet B" and "Beyond Politics". They highlighted these key demands:

¹⁵ The 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) text is available from the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>. With 81 signatories and 39 states parties, it is likely to enter into force by 2021. For more information see www.icanw.org

¹⁶ Greta Thunberg, "No-one is too small to make a difference", Penguin Books, 2019.

- Tackle the accelerating climate catastrophe;
- Reduce and mitigate greenhouse gas emissions;
- Change our profligate, polluting use of resources;
- Prevent further loss of species that share the Earth with humanity;
- Develop a "regenerative culture" that is "healthy, resilient and adaptable" and promotes love, care, mutual responsibility, sustainable activities and protection of life on Earth.

Physical activism has so far not taken place in 2020 due to Covid-19, but issue-based groupings within Extinction Rebellion, such as XR Peace, have produced leaflets, materials and social media for online campaigning. These include, for example, weapons and security risks, humanitarian disarmament, nonviolent direct action, the causes and consequences of militarism and climate destruction, principles and steps to implement the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, Black Lives Matter, child victims of conflict, etc. More are in the pipeline, that aim to hold arms companies accountable for harm that their products cause to civilians and the climate.¹⁷

The combination of direct activism and policy proposals for life, disarmament and justice, are the most recent incarnations of people's resistance to wars and oppression across the known and forgotten histories of many of our countries. Vandana Shiva echoed many previous philosopher-activists when she told XR, "It is a moral imperative to rebel against a system that is driving extinction, exterminating species and cultures."¹⁸

If our countries carry on business as usual, it will be too late to stop climate chaos. Environmental collapse, nuclear war and starvation could end humanity's histories as well as our lives sooner rather than later.

Concluding remarks

Capping climate destruction and bringing about ecological justice will require:

- ➔ evidence-based strategies that can be adapted to different conditions;
- ➔ networking, alliance-building and cooperative decision-making in local, regional and international structures; and
- ➔ diverse, shared and cooperative leadership that pays attention to scientists and people at the frontline of the climate crisis.

The highest polluters and emitters of climate-destroying greenhouse gases are countries that are most heavily dependent on military-industrial growth-based extractivist economies. They cannot lead us out of these crises because they are trapped in their histories and delusions. The biggest obstacles to climate justice and social transformation are to be found in the Bretton Woods capitalist club and state-controlled communist ideologies.

All our countries need to take forward Green economic and social proposals and enact policies to turn things round and end reliance on military-industrial production,

¹⁷ See www.xrpeace.org

¹⁸ Vandana Shiva, Foreword to *This is not a drill*, the Extinction Rebellion (XR) Handbook, 2019,

consumption, extractivism and growth. This will require that young, progressive and minoritized people living in these countries rise up and put unstoppable pressure on the vested interests, politicians and institutions that hold the reins of power.

Notwithstanding their origins in the Global North, GND and XR ideas provide ways to imagine and construct sustainable economies, cooperative institutions and post-patriarchal social relations in time to survive. These approaches recognise that the current emergencies need to be tackled globally as well as locally and nationally, but they should not be treated as templates as they may or may not be appropriate for other countries and cultures.

To be sustainable and transformational, tackling the climate emergency must incorporate feminist-humanitarian principles of security, human rights and participation, and ensure that these are embedded in all political, economic and security institutions. If not, green new deals are likely to get co-opted by traditional power brokers to provide greenwashing that shores up capitalism, militarism and the patriarchy. To bring about ecological justice we have to work intersectionally on strategies for change that give priority to the needs of those who are most disadvantaged and at risk, locally and internationally.

Security and defence have to be reframed and restructured to meet humanitarian and ecological needs, and to recognise and address a spectrum of natural and human-induced threats and risks. International relations need to be reimagined with more diverse leadership and responsive institutions that focus on foreseeing, preparing for and if possible preventing major threats. For threats that cannot be prevented or eliminated, we need to collectively ensure we have the laws, norms, and adaptable tools to constrain, diminish and mitigate the humanitarian and ecological impacts and consequences.

The most effective future leadership will likely come from people who have suffered most from the toxic policies of the past: women, indigenous and minoritised peoples and the Global South. These are the people with different ways of thinking about the Earth, find better ways to relate globally, share resources and transcend the stranglehold of military-industrial growth, competition and consumption.

SSFS7 Reading and audio resources for RebEleanor Johnson's presentation on Green New Deals and Extinction Rebellion (for Panel on Ecological Justice through Socialist Transformation, 11 July 2020)

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, 2015, and her youtube interview (2015): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD25aARfJbA>

Vandana Shiva (all writings, but note especially) *Biodiversity, Agroecology, Regenerative Organic Agriculture: Sustainable Solutions for Hunger, Poverty and Climate Change*, 2015; and *Reclaiming the Commons: Biodiversity, Traditional Knowledge, and the Rights of Mother Earth*, 2020.

This is not a drill, the Extinction Rebellion (XR) Handbook, 2019.

Greta Thunberg, "No-one is too small to make a difference", Penguin Books, 2019.

Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion, "[Wanted: a green 'new deal'](#)", *The Guardian*, 9 April, 2008.

Fiona Harvey, "[Labour's climate policies: what are they and what do they mean?](#)", *The Guardian*, 24 September, 2019.

Grace Blakely, "[Why we need a Green New Deal to solve humanity's greatest challenge](#)". *New Statesman*, 2 October, 2019.

US Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal explained on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxIDJWCbk6I> 12 June 2019; and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1w3V4PUv2s> 15 October 2019.

The US Green New Deal resolution (H. Res. 109) proposed by Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez can be downloaded here: (<https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hres/109/BILLS-116hres109ih.pdf>

Daniel Aldana Cohen, Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni and Thea Riofrancos, 'For a Global Green New Deal', in Roadmap to a GND, Common Wealth, <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/reports/for-a-global-green-new-deal> <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/green-new-deal>

Chloé Farand, "[South Korea to implement Green New Deal after ruling party election win](#)". *Climate Home News*, April 16, 2020.

Maeve Cohen and Sherilyn MacGregor, [It's time to talk about a feminist green new deal](#), OpenDemocracy 20 May, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/its-time-to-talk-about-a-feminist-green-new-deal/>

Yanis Varoufakis and David Adler, [It's time for nations to unite around an International Green New Deal](#)', *The Guardian*, 23 April 2019.

Vijay Kolinvijadi and Ashish Kothari, ['No Harm Here is still Harm There: The Green New Deal and the Global South'](#), 20 May 2020.

Stuart Parkinson, [The Environmental Impacts of the UK Military Sector, Scientists of Global Responsibility](#), April 2020, p 2. See also [Climate 2020: Degrees of devastation](#), published by United Nations Association – UK, 2020.

UN Association (UK) Report, *Climate 2020: Degrees of devastation*, UNA-UK, 2020

The 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) text is available from the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>. With 81 signatories and 40 states parties, it is likely to enter into force by 2021. For more information see www.icanw.org

Finalised presentation, with references and reading list. 24.7.20 REJ