



**Ecological Crisis Special**

**Free/Donation**



The actions of Extinction Rebellion, Stop Oil, and the Climate Strikes have helped put climate change firmly on the political agenda. However, there has been little, if any serious action on the part of any political parties or governments. The date for actually reducing climate change-causing emissions to zero is so far in the future as to be meaningless and deforestation and loss of species continues at an alarming rate.

Though the actions have highlighted the problems and mobilised thousands, the overall approach is seriously flawed. Firstly, making demands on government is symbolic at best. There is no way any government, Conservative, Labour or Green, will take the necessary measures because **they are thoroughly embedded in capitalism**. Any changes, such as the carbon offsetting schemes and creating a market in carbon credits, will do little to address the ecological crisis but will certainly put huge profits in the hands of corporations and large landowners. Basically, **governments do not want to do anything that will hamper capitalism** and as capitalism is the source of the problem, we cannot expect them to act. So if we want to save the planet and ourselves, **it is up to us and will necessitate a strategy that is clearly anti-capitalist**.

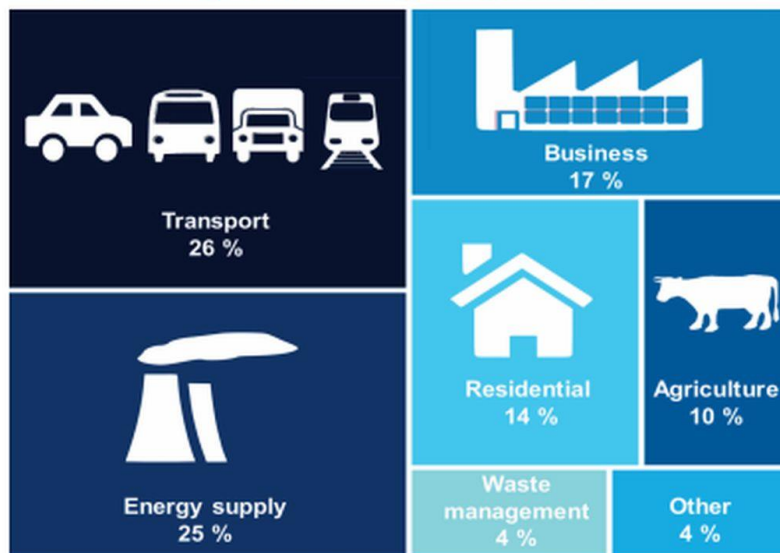
## The specific demands of the 'Big One' are anything but big.

'A citizen-led democracy to end the fossil fuel era' is an unclear demand. The current political system is meant to be citizen-led, but it is anything but. Does it mean citizen assemblies? But how will you ensure that any outcomes will be implemented by the government, which still holds the power? 'Ending the fossil fuel era' is also a limited demand. The ecological crisis is much wider than the fossil fuel question. And without actually getting rid of the big corporations, their power is such that fossil fuel production will continue as long as it is profitable, despite the demands of the citizens' assemblies.

'A fair society that includes reparation' is also unclear. What is a fair society? It could be one in which there are equal opportunities in a class and hierarchical society. And how do you get this fair society? Is the ruling elite going to just give up its power and wealth? 'Reparation', referring to addressing the atrocious legacy of colonialism, will in itself do little to deal with the current social injustice caused by global capitalism. Nowhere is there mention of the need to end a system, dependent on continual growth, in which profit takes priority and in which power lies in the hands of those who own and control the wealth of the world.

It is only revolution that will ensure that we have a society in which people will be able to take direct control of society and their own lives, and thus able to make decisions to save the planet. This revolution must be global and get rid of global capitalism, which has its roots in, and is still intertwined with colonialism. Anything short of this is doomed to failure.

### Transport becomes the largest emitting sector of UK 2016 greenhouse gas emissions



Many recognise the breadth of the problem and focus on the ecological crisis as a whole. There are no simple solutions and a range of measures need to be taken: Stop using fossil fuel and switch to renewables for all energy, reduce air travel and stop airport expansion, increase public transport, change farming practices, for example, drastically reduce use of land for livestock and crops to feed livestock, stop deforestation, preserve peat bogs, make homes more energy efficient.

To do anything will involve challenging corporate power and those who own and control the land- the ruling class of capitalism.

## **Green Capitalism: Is this what we are fighting for?**

Without expressly identifying capitalism as the source of the problem, we end up supporting a system which is identical to the one we have now, but just producing different products and using different sources of energy. It will still be one in which the working class around the world is exploited- in the mines, the factories, and industrial agriculture, which need to keep going to produce the consumer goods people want- and which are the source of profits for the corporations. Land grabbing will continue, displacing local communities and indigenous peoples.

The following two solutions, renewables and electric cars, are the most popular ones put forward, not only by governments and the corporations, but by many climate change campaigners. This is because they do not require major changes in our lifestyle and therefore corporations can continue to amass wealth.



### **Switching from fossil fuels to renewables**

This is one of the main solutions put forward to solve the climate crisis and it is an important element of any strategy. However, renewables are not without their own drawbacks. Nuclear power should not be an option because of the safety risks and the problems of storing the waste. It creates more problems than it solves.

Wind power will form part of a new energy strategy. However, there are a number of problems that are often overlooked or ignored by its supporters. Firstly, wind turbines take up a huge amount of space. If we are concerned about the ecological crisis in general- the loss of biodiversity- then we have to be careful about putting up huge industrial scale windfarms on land that is home to many species. And, turbines still need to be produced and transported- all which requires energy and resources. Rare earth minerals are needed (neodymium and dysprosium, plus small amounts of praseodymium). These aren't necessarily rare but are very difficult to mine and the conditions for workers are appalling. 85% of these are found in China. Turbines have a life span of 25 years- so they have to be decommissioned, new ones produced and put in place. And, if turbines are erected in remote areas, which they are in places like Scotland, then roads have to be built, thus creating more damage to land that is

often valued for its wild qualities. For example, some wind farms in Scotland involve the destruction of peat bogs which are a major store of carbon. So though wind power is a solution, how, where, and how much needs to be carefully considered.



Similar arguments can be made for solar energy and hydro power. Both of these require resources, energy and would have an impact on other species.

## Electric cars

Electric vehicles will have to replace the current fossil-fuel dependent models. However, they also require energy to run so will be using electricity. One of the biggest problems is their resource intensity. Richard Herrington, head of Earth Sciences at the Natural History Museum, calculated the amount of commodities, including rare earth elements, which would be needed to convert all the United Kingdom's 31 million motor vehicles to electric drive. (Rare earths are a group of 17 elements that includes neodymium, an essential ingredient in electric motors.) They found that doing so would require: "two times the total annual world cobalt production, nearly the entire world production of neodymium, three-quarters of the world's lithium production and at least half of the world's copper production during 2018." <https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/460496-electric-vehicles-wont-save-us-from-climate-change>

This means that maintaining the same amount of cars now in the world (with demand increasing all the time) is incompatible with a climate change strategy. Public transport needs to be increased, and that can be electric, and car usage drastically reduced.



## **Reducing consumption and redistribution of resources.**

Given the problems of renewables and electric cars, it is clear that there is not an obvious technological solution. Though new 'green' technology will have a vital role to play, we have to consider how it is used. Energy should be produced and controlled locally as far as possible to enable community control and minimise waste. In addition, the key to making sure it has the desired impact is to actually reduce our consumption. What we need is to reduce growth and address the vast inequality in the world through redistribution. Degrowth does not mean that our quality of life would suffer. If you look at what we do produce, such as the arms industry, it is clear that we could afford to reduce production and still live very well. Just look around at all the waste and unnecessary products. Studies show that we already produce more than enough food to feed everyone. Yes, those at the top would have to reduce their consumption, but we can still share the world's resources and wealth such that everyone lives well without having to do horrendous jobs in order to provide the consumer goods valued by the well-off.

### **Obstacles to change**

#### **Economic system**

Degrowth and redistribution are the only way of finding a long-lasting solution to the ecological crisis. Such a strategy will require a major change in the system. Capitalism, and the consumer culture on which it depends, needs continual growth. And, those who control and use most of the world's resources will fight to keep their wealth. Capitalism and its pursuit of growth at any cost is the root of the problem and therefore cannot be part of the solution.



Capitalism will try and adapt if enough pressure is put on. However, it will only support solutions that involve continual growth in production and consumption. Even if it did rush to become green, there are sections of capitalism which can never be green. For example, the fossil fuel industry will fight to the death to preserve their existence. All over the world this industry continues to expand and no one seems to do anything about it. A huge coal mine, owned by an Indian corporation, has been given the go ahead by the Australian government. Explorations for new sources of oil continue apace in places like the Arctic. The fracking industry has mushroomed all over the western part of the USA. It will not be easy to shut down this immensely powerful industry.

Another industry that will be difficult to deal with is agriculture. It is a major source of greenhouse gases because of the vast amount of livestock and the chemicals used in industrial monoculture agriculture. This means that to stop climate change we will need to have a major change in land use- away from using land for livestock and growing crops to feed livestock- and minimise the use of chemicals. Achieving this will be a major struggle. Agribusiness is now a global industry dominated by large companies who control everything from the seeds to the distribution of the products. Like the fossil fuel industry, they will not want to make any changes to the way they do things. There is too much money at stake.

Food is a basic necessity and should not be controlled by those whose only interest is profit. Major land reform is needed so we can use the land to produce quality plant-based products at price everyone can afford. Livestock will have to be drastically reduced and raised on pasture, integrated into the ecosystem, rather than having to devote large tracts of land to grow food for them. Such changes in agriculture would curtail deforestation in places like the Amazon and release land for afforestation. But this can only happen if we think of land as a Commons, something to be used for the benefit of all and managed and controlled by everyone.



## Political System

The power of corporations and all those with a vested interest in the status quo mean that we cannot rely on government, even one that is genuinely committed, to take the necessary action. The school strikes, the XR Rebellions, and all the other actions of people around the world have succeeded in raising awareness and at least getting governments to pay lip service to the crisis. However, as of yet we have seen no concrete action from those in power. A major part of this is because the government will not take any action that challenges corporations and powerful economic interests. The government declared a climate emergency and then agreed to the expansion of Heathrow. Therefore, we cannot trust the government to do anything. They will only take any action at all if they are forced to by mass action, action even bigger and more challenging than what we have seen so far.

## **Building a mass movement**



The movement for change needs to be much, much larger and engage with a wider range of people and be willing to not only make demands of government but to challenge capitalism directly. Those at the point of production, who have the power to bring everything to a halt, have a critical role. Imagine port workers refusing to let imported Brazilian soya into the country. Imagine the fossil fuel workers refusing to work anymore and demanding full pay until they get alternative jobs. In 1976 workers at Lucas Aerospace put forward an alternative plan to weapons production <https://lucasplan.org.uk/story-of-the-lucas-plan/>. Today, workers at the Belfast shipyards, threatened with closure, have plans for producing infrastructure for renewable energy. This contrasts with the union Unite which supported the expansion of Heathrow. We need to overcome the jobs vs environment division. Only with a complete change in the system can we deal with climate change and social and economic justice issues.



Protesters in Bristol

Dealing with the ecological crisis requires some fundamental changes in land use: changing the type of agriculture, afforestation, getting rid of grouse moors, preserving peat bogs, and stopping fracking. The problem is that we do not have control. Most land is in private hands and its use is determined by what is profitable. Government can control to an extent how land is used through subsidies and payments but these have been used to prop up the status quo. They are reluctant to challenge the basic right of the landowner to manage the land. And, government land itself is not well-managed nor do we have much control over policy decisions.

Campaigns for land reform are therefore crucial to developing an effective movement. Land should be a Commons, owned by us all and used for public benefit, which must include future generations. In this way we would not only ensure that land is used sustainably but that its produce is shared by us all.

Campaigning around land use can link up many issues and create a bigger movement

- anti-fracking
- communities fighting injustices of local landowner, seeking to gain control of the land themselves
- anti-grouse moor campaigns- fighting to reduce destruction of peat bogs, for reforestation and to support species persecuted by grouse moor owners
- land workers aiming to get access to land to grow quality, affordable food
- housing co-ops wanting land for sustainable housing or those fighting against gentrification and against demolition
- communities fighting to keep a wood or local beauty spot
- groups fighting to preserve wild land and to encourage rewilding
- campaigns for a better urban environment: air quality and the amount of traffic, community gardens, green spaces and community centres

Actions from climate change activists will have played a role in bringing more people into the movement and may lead to more politicians giving some verbal commitments to take action. However, this is only one step on a very long road. Any commitment by governments will come up against those who are at the root of the climate crisis- the corporations (industrial, agribusiness and extractive) and the financial institutions that support them. These will not listen to reason or emotional pleas. They will do all in their considerable power to make sure that the government does nothing more than tinker and make superficial reforms. The essential capitalist system will not be changed as it is the basis of their profits and their wealth.

Therefore, if we are to have any hope of shifting the monster that we are facing, we need a mass movement, much larger than what we are seeing now, which brings together the working class in all its diversity. Developing this movement will not be an easy task. The environmental movement has shown that it can be powerful in the streets for a short period of time. Now we need to extend that power to the land, communities and the workplaces, overcoming divisions and making connections, both in the UK and internationally.



# Anarchist Communist Group

<https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Anarchist-Communist-Group-1910429525920383>

<https://twitter.com/Anarcommunists>

***Produced by the London Group of the Anarchist Communist Group***