

No Harm Here is Still Harm There: The Green New Deal and the Global South (I)

Vijay Kolinjivadi & Ashish Kothari May 20, 2020

Without accounting for globalized production, a Green New Deal in the Global North will merely spur the imperialist quest for cheaper resources and labour to satisfy “eco-friendly” consumption.



A coal mine worker in Bokapahari village, Jharkand. “Green New Deals” promise to transition Global North economies away from fossil fuels but fail to challenge the exploitation of Global South workers for “eco-friendly” materials and cheap labour. Image: [Kevin Frayer/AP Photo via Business Insider](#)



The year 2019 and the first few months of 2020 have thrown up unprecedented ecological crises. Even before COVID-19, ecological crises were raging across the world: wildfires in the [Brazilian Amazon](#), unheard-of summer temperatures in [Antarctica](#), record floods in the [American Midwest](#), [Europe's](#) prolonged summer heatwaves, and countless deaths of animals in [Australia's](#) bushfires.

At the same time, a spate of conflict flashpoints, violent coups, and increasingly visible economic inequalities gave rise to equally unprecedented mobilizations for social change, from [Chile](#), [Ecuador](#), [Bolivia](#) and elsewhere in Latin America, to [India](#), [France](#), [Lebanon](#), Haiti, [Algeria](#), and [Sudan](#). Across Europe and North America, [youth movements](#) on the streets every Friday have demanded climate justice and a future worth living in. India witnessed a general workers' strike of 250 million people this year — the [largest strike in world history](#). Currently, the world is grappling with a paralysis of activity on a scale never seen before, due to a microscopic virus.

While the causes of these social and ecological crises are varied and geographically-specific, there are common threads in the range of responses from citizens — calls for autonomy from oppressive states and a growing resistance to profit- and power-hungry global elites relentlessly pushing people and nature beyond the point of tolerance. Corresponding state responses have ranged from crackdowns and the vilification of movements by right-wing governments, to [a semblance of positive policy moves](#) by “green-friendly” wealthy governments like the Nordic countries. Only a few mainstream politicians have dared to fundamentally differ.

Among the most radical responses is undoubtedly the ‘Green New Deal’ (GND) manifesto of former US Presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders, and parallel statements and manifestos by former UK Prime Ministerial candidate Jeremy Corbyn. A similar proposal has also been advanced by the European Union. GNDs, in their different variations, claim to provide an alternative to the social and ecological destruction caused by the mainstream model of “development”, particularly to some of this model’s key architects, such as the fossil fuel industry. In particular, they target the devastation contributing to, and emerging from, the climate crisis.

However, it is insufficiently recognized that a GND which promises to transform economies in overly-developed regions of the world has significant implications for lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems in the

“developing” world. Here, we examine the extent to which GNDs from the Global North can address systemic forces which rely on and perpetuate ecological degradation and inequality in the Global South. What do GND policies in North America or Europe imply for places like India, which continue to shoulder the costs of “progress” for privileged populations in the West and, increasingly, in cities of the Global South itself?



Demonstrations in central London prior to the United Nations climate change conference in Poland in December 2018. Image: Reuters/Peter Nicholls via Techengage

“What do GND policies in North America or Europe imply for places like India, which continue to shoulder the costs of “progress””

In this article, we first highlight what makes the GND unique in our current historical moment. We then describe what a GND within the Global North would imply for the



Global South, unless a more internationalist outlook was adopted — both in terms of shifting the costs of development to marginalized regions of the world and the historical legacy of racialized patterns of resource extraction and wealth creation. We explain why any GND will reinforce “business-as-usual” if it fails to encompass the Global South and does not take clear positions against capitalism, statism, and patriarchy. Finally, we offer alternatives to development that a globally-integrated GND could draw inspiration from. Throughout, we draw on examples from India in particular.

How is the Green New Deal “new”?

Bernie’s version of the GND had a clear focus on both ecological and social justice issues. It heavily centred around the need to tackle the climate crisis, moving completely away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy, while explicitly supporting people’s movements demanding such measures. Importantly, unlike mainstream climate change proposals, it emphasized the need to address social justice issues in the transition period, especially for those most vulnerable (including low-income people, ‘people of colour’, children, seniors, and the disabled). It stressed the need to create dignified, ecologically-oriented jobs for workers likely to be affected, and to place transport infrastructure and energy systems in public hands (including worker-cooperatives) instead of the fossil fuel industry. Measures for conserving public lands for “ecologically regenerative and sustainable agriculture” and ecological restoration were also included, which would have generated millions of jobs (invaluable in a period of [unprecedented joblessness](#)). The renegotiation of international trade deals to “ensure strong and binding climate standards, labour rights, and human rights” was another positive commitment. Bernie’s GND also explicitly targeted the profiteering of greedy bigwigs of the fossil fuel industry.

Bernie’s campaign, though now called off, had gained momentum on the power of social movements demanding workers’ rights and environmental justice. It did not emerge because a visionary leader vied to single-handedly accomplish radical change — especially in an American political system that is fundamentally at odds with any meaningful and progressive systemic change. Relatively recent examples from Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Greece have shown that leftist parties which formed governments have to varying extents failed to maintain consistent and ongoing grassroots and

democratically-driven political organization and socio-cultural transformation.



Indian students in Hyderabad participate in the March 2019 Climate Protest, holding placards that say “Ab ki baar Climate Change pe Sarkar” (This parliamentary election we shall vote based on climate change policies). Image: AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.

“A GND will only be successful to the extent that people’s movements rise up on an unprecedented scale to build sufficient autonomy and hold the state accountable to political and economic democracy.”

Left forces falling short of their political objectives risk a powerful backlash that right-wing forces (domestically and internationally) have often sought to exploit. Those rooting for progressive transformation need to know that a GND will only be successful to the



extent that people's movements rise up on an unprecedented scale to build sufficient autonomy and hold the state accountable to political and economic democracy. This is also known as [dual power](#), the establishment of 'counter-institutions' that meet the needs of the marginalized while being run by those very people. Democracy must be re-invented in its original meaning — power of the people, not power of the people presumed to represent the people. As B.R. Ambedkar, one of the founders of the Indian Constitution and staunch defender of Dalit rights, eloquently stated in his last speech to the Constituent Assembly of India on November 25, 1949:

“[We must not] be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy.”

Additional crucial flaws would also severely hamper the GND's potential for real change. Foremost, current variants of the GND retain a significant dependence on technological solutions to problems that are not necessarily technological in nature. They also say nothing about the need to reduce material consumption or energy demand overall (except 'weatherization' to reduce domestic consumption). Thus for example, they fail to acknowledge that even if the US transitioned completely to renewable energy and technologies like electric cars, it would *still* be engaging in unsustainable exploitation of nature and natural resources.

Moreover, by focusing heavily on carbon reductions, the GND ignores other major ecological crises, including those of biodiversity and ecosystem loss, driven by uncontrolled consumption in the Global North. Finally, while it commits to holding corporations accountable to domestic climate goals and labour standards, it does not ensure that they will also be held accountable globally (beyond carbon emissions). Similarly, while Bernie's proposals were committed to ending rising inequality within the US, through taxes on fossil fuel billionaires and "green jobs" for low-income sectors, it is not clear how this inequality would be addressed in a way that does not just shift it outside the US.

As such, the GND cannot adequately challenge the structures of capitalism and patriarchy, and from a global perspective remains rooted in "green" colonialism. It effectively perpetuates the quest for cheap raw materials and black and brown labouring bodies to achieve "green" growth.



In the context of the Global South, then, the GND has failed to illustrate what is “new” about it. Put differently, it is simply inadequate, and indeed unjust, in our current hyper-connected world (laid bare by COVID-19) to limit a GND to the national policy of Global North countries. For instance, if a GND for Europe promises to be “climate neutral,” whose resources and labour will be deployed to power Europe’s unrestrained energy and consumption demands?

“The uneven playing field of resources and regulatory frameworks works in the favour of those who have not only historically usurped resources and labouring bodies around the world but also currently dictate the modus operandi of development...”

This is an especially salient question given how renewable technologies for “cleaner,” “greener” economies depend on the same socially and ecologically degrading land and labour practices as traditional energy sources. They are also conveniently located in countries of the Global South, such as Bolivia and DR Congo, where regulatory safeguards are more lax. The uneven playing field of resources and regulatory frameworks works in the favour of those who have not only historically usurped resources

and labouring bodies around the world but also currently dictate the modus operandi of development, including its “greener and eco-friendly” varieties. What is easily forgotten in “eco-friendly” talk is just how development models of the Global North are structurally founded on dehumanization, in which hundreds of millions across the globe are seduced and stripped of their diverse ways of knowing the world, and dumbed down into passive consumerist onlookers and screen junkies, unable or unwilling to acknowledge (much less act upon) the consequences of their consumption patterns.

The Green New Deal as “cost-shifting” of capital?

The Torrent Power thermal power station in Sabarmati, Ahmedabad is one of India’s oldest coal-fired electricity generation plants. Ahmedabad, like many Indian cities, has some of the world’s worst air pollution levels. In Delhi, the air has been likened by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as a “[gas chamber](#)” where simply breathing is akin to smoking upwards of [50 cigarettes a day](#). A transition to cleaner, renewable energy is needed more than ever, to combat the daily plight of billions in rapidly “developing” countries dealing with intolerable pollution and massive displacement and dispossession for mining, power stations, and transmission lines, and for the global fight against climate change.



Under a planned phase-in of higher standards, coal-fired plants in New Delhi were given until the end of December 2019, while others had until the end of 2022. Most plants so far have missed their deadlines. Image: [Reuters/Adnan Abidi/File Photo](#)

Yet, in a world beholden to the imperatives of global capitalism and statism, “[finance-rich, resource-poor](#)” countries are increasingly looking to “resource rich” countries in the Global South to secure their food and energy needs. While traditional players (e.g. North America and Europe)



that have been on the “frontier” of imperialist pursuits are still in the game, new players like India and China also want a piece of the pie. Indeed, the very notion of “national development” is becoming increasingly irrelevant in an era when state-backed transnational corporations are active in dispossessing people of their lands and their food and cultural sovereignty domestically, regionally, and globally. India, for example, is active both [internally](#) in ‘land grabbing’ strategies for biofuel, industrial development, business parks, and transport infrastructure, and abroad in fueling the [investment](#) boom in mineral deposits or agro-industrial projects. Indian companies (backed by their government) are involved in “green energy” production in Chile’s Atacama Desert under the aegis of “sustainable development” in the mining sector, and in grabbing enormous amounts of farm and pasture land in [Ethiopia](#), ostensibly to help the [local economy](#).

“GND must overhaul the “cost-shifting” culture that globalized development requires; this is very different from merely transitioning to a more efficient “green” energy economy.”

Without paying attention to the broader political economy of globalized economic production that transcends national borders, a GND in Europe, US, Canada, [South Korea](#), and its variants in China (e.g. [“Ecological Civilization”](#)) will be mere window dressing to

conceal an underlying imperialist quest for cheap nature and cheap labour to satisfy the (increasingly “eco-friendly”) demands of the wealthiest people. In other words, the GND must overhaul the “cost-shifting” culture that globalized development requires; this is very different from merely transitioning to a more efficient “green” energy economy.

In India, where solar energy generation has become the [cheapest in the world](#), the transition to renewable energy generation could not be a greater blessing. But while decentralizing energy production to ensure clean energy sovereignty at the *panchayat* or urban municipal level is one ray of hope, transitioning entire coal-based mega-cities to maintain and enhance commerce and production through industrial renewable energy generation is an entirely different matter. The move towards more efficient transport infrastructure, like electric vehicles, and proliferating digitization and wifi-enabled devices across all sectors of the economy has offered opportunities to leapfrog away from dirty oil and gas industries. At the same time, it has

spurred the quest to acquire land and mineral raw material domestically and abroad to secure such production.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, hosts French President Emmanuel Macron at the opening of a new solar power “park” in Mirzapur village in Uttar Pradesh, Image: Ludovic Marin/AFP via Inside Climate News

India’s plan to transition all vehicles to electric power in a decade will require an extraction-oriented race “on a war footing” with China to acquire critical lithium and cobalt reserves in places like the Congo, Bolivia, and Chile. Lithium-ion batteries, cobalt, neodymium, silicon, and coltan are crucial for electric vehicle car-batteries, computers, and mobile devices. Increasing demand for these commodities from the world’s largest companies, including Google, Apple, and Microsoft, has resulted in some of the most deplorable working conditions in the world, where pregnant women are often powerless to prevent themselves and their children from working in the mines. It has also directly perpetuated one of Africa’s longest running armed conflicts.

Harm reduction in India, in its move away from polluting coal and unbreathable air towards a hi-tech society, fuelled by renewable energy, means harm creation in the Congo where lives deemed less valuable are



made to shoulder the cost. It also means harm creation domestically, in the grasslands of Kachchh and Andhra Pradesh, the coasts of southern India, and the desert of Rajasthan, where wildlife, farmers and pastoralists face ever-increasing takeover of the territories they depend on.

Of course, we cannot draw direct comparisons between countries of the Global North and South in their capacity to adopt GND policies. As Alex Lenferna [claims](#) in arguing for a “Global Green New Deal,” the ability to enable large-scale stimulus packages that inject money into the economy is only viable for Global North countries who can do so at very low interest rates, backed by high credit ratings. In turn, this is enabled by historical wealth usurped from former colonies and more recently from multinational corporations based in the North. In contrast, countries across Latin America, Africa, and Asia remain bonded by debt in a neoliberal economy, with IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies stifling any investment in public policies and infrastructure.

Racial capitalism, (eco)fascism, and the Green New Deal

The “no harm here is still harm there” narrative explained above reflects all the trappings of a global class war, with divisions along racial, class, and gendered lines. At the same time, rising border imperialism, justified increasingly in ethno-nationalist and xenophobic terms, is ensuring that these divisions of labour reinforce conditions perpetuating the precarity of lives on the margins. The recently established National Registry of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in India, rooted in a Hindu supremacist vision of “development” and castigating any dissent against this vision as [“anti-national”](#), is a case in point. The muscling up of Modi’s India to meet the resource-imperialist requirements of global capital allows India the space to not only extract global resources and labour, but also to close its eyes and victimize anyone suffering from the consequences. This is no different from the US under Trump, Brazil under Bolsonaro, Turkey under Erdogan, and other states under ruthless and plutocratic regimes.

[Some](#) have also pointed out that a GND which treats climate change as a ‘threat’ to security itself irresponsibly implies that the status quo (presumably without climate change) is somehow ‘secure’. For the billions of black and brown bodies that serve as the crude raw materials for production, for women whose regenerative and affective labour at home and in the workplace goes unrecognized, for those Indigenous populations



whose worldviews have been systematically destroyed, and the millions of non-human species being pushed over the edge of extinction, the status quo is anything but secure.

This framing of ecological crises as security threats also risks opening the door to disturbing Malthusian implications. In the 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, author and environmentalist Paul Ehrlich [described](#) a New Delhi slum from his taxi window as a “hellish mob,” describing his fear of being unable to return to his hotel and his recognition of “emotionally” experiencing what he called “over-population.”

This perception is rooted in the fear that more bodies seeking a “good life” would not be sustainable for those who already hold such privileges. This imagery around “threat” serves to erase the real burden of environmental destruction – the richest 10% of the population is [responsible](#) for 50% of global emissions; in India the richest person consumes [17 times the poorest](#). Thus, a GND which considers the climate crisis as a threat, without acknowledging stark inequality in global consumption, can be readily repackaged in ecofascist terms.

No Harm Here is Still Harm There: The Green New Deal and the Global South (II)

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A GND which fails to challenge the hegemony of growth-led development perpetuates the exploitation of the Global South and will be unable to prevent global ecological social collapse



Illustration: Joan Wong via Foreign Policy

In [Part I](#) of this two-part article, we discussed various proposals for a Green New Deal (GND) advanced by progressive forces in the Global North, in terms of their impact on the Global South. We discussed the cost-shifting imperative in capitalism, historical and ongoing practices of



imperialist resource extraction and rising ecofascism. Here, in Part II, we discuss how a GND will reinforce “business-as-usual” if it fails to encompass the Global South, and if it does not take clear positions against capitalism, statism, and patriarchy. We also offer alternatives to development that a globally-integrated GND could draw inspiration from.

A more efficient Old Deal

The concerns mentioned in Part I about rising (eco)fascism, far-right movements and global capital’s response to the GND are interlinked. While collapsing these three interest groups risks masking some nuances, it also helps illustrate their common aim to “optimize” the world by violently erasing alternative ways of thinking or being. Let’s be clear: the private sector’s powerful gaze on the GND is purely to secure future profits and minimize risk. It has no interest in workers’ rights, demands for dignified jobs, wages, food security, housing, or health care, or in ecological sustainability, all of which are central aims of the GND advanced by social democrats like Bernie and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The existential (and Malthusian) fear of losing privileges as a result of unexpected social and ecological “externalities” of “business-as-usual” has (likely unwillingly) forced global elites from the far-right to the centre-left to reckon with climate change as an “[investment risk](#).” From BlackRock CEO Larry Fink to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos (the world’s richest man) to US President Donald Trump, [throwing billions of dollars](#) or planting a [trillion trees](#) is not only good PR but a good return on investment to stabilize risk. Until last year, Amazon had threatened to [fire](#) employees who spoke out about climate change. Indeed, maintaining business-as-usual could not have been made clearer than Microsoft’s recent commitment to become “carbon negative” by 2030 with CEO Satya Nadella [stating](#) that a “corporation’s purpose is to find *profitable solutions* to the *problems* of people and planet.” This view resonates with the United Nations’, which has long espoused a triple bottom line, putting people and planet on the same plane as profits.



U.S. Representative for New York's congressional district, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez speaks during a rally at Howard University May 13, 2019 in Washington, D.C. She has been one of the leading advocates for the GND.

Image: Alex Wong via Jacobin

“The idea that profits can continue while protecting people and the planet is seductively dangerous”

The idea that profits can continue while protecting people and the planet is seductively dangerous at a time of unprecedented global inequality and climatic changes which are

driven by precisely this logic. It suggests delusional and [thermodynamically impossible](#) myths of a world in which the entirety of human-nature relations can be manipulated according to “[some calculus or algorithms](#).” Like a broken record, ecological economists have long [argued](#) that efficiency improvements in a profit-oriented enterprise will eventually run up against the Jevon’s Paradox – that increasing energy and material efficiencies lead to cheaper prices and greater demand, and thus will be



instantly offset in a perpetually growing economy. There is [zero evidence](#) of any ecological decoupling from increased economic growth. The coronavirus pandemic – with ecological outcomes improving from decreased economic growth – could not have made the fallacy of decoupling more evident.

The irony here is that many of the same folks upholding a system responsible for untold death and destruction, are throwing billions of dollars of investment into “green” development. The [EU’s GND](#), while sounding impressive on paper in offering €100 billion per year for “green investment”, is one of several proposals offering too little, too late, and with not-so-subtle ulterior motives. The issue is not the amount of financial support, but of shifting risk away from private enterprise (and wealthy individuals) onto the public and future generations. In a classic case of “having one’s cake and eating it too,” the EU has approved a [multibillion dollar pipeline](#) to transport natural gas to the [apartheid-state of Israel](#).

“The social alienation, inequality, and ecological consequences of tech-induced “efficiencies” are increasingly visible”

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella claims that we must “trust in technology” and put a billion dollars in an “innovation fund.” Yet, it is the endless proliferation of hi-tech developments — from 5G to AI and deep learning —

which has made capitalist development and expansion in the realms of food, energy, urban development, communication, and finance quicker and cheaper. The social alienation, inequality, and ecological consequences of these tech-induced “efficiencies” are increasingly visible, the uncertainties for [future generations more palpable](#). These consequences often counter the potential improvements that these technologies promise.

Quick technical fixes inherently reproduce social disparities and are inadequate to generate the relational shifts needed between humans and our living and non-living environments. Technological innovation does not emerge out of a vacuum; it is embedded in structural power relations predicated upon a tendency for efficiencies to favour privileged, socially mobile, and wealthy groups and their government sponsors. Understanding and reversing the root causes of social inequality and ecological degradation, as they are based in systemic racism, class domination, and patriarchy was never meant to be part of the techno-fix strategy.



Technical solutions to the climate crisis have been offered by many large corporations. This is an illustration showing Microsoft's "moonshot" plan to go carbon negative by 2030. Illustration: Greg Betza via [The Guardian](#)

““Sustainable development” ... is in fact an oxymoron, since nothing based on continuous expansion of material and energy use can possibly be sustainable on a finite planet. ”

Merely throwing scads of money into the air and expecting it to “trickle-down” to reach all hands equally is similarly naive. As Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein, David Graeber, Medha Patkar, Alnoor Ladha and others noted in a [short and](#)

[sharp critique](#) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), current economic growth approaches which do not tackle inequality head-on, will take 100 years to remove poverty (not the 15 promised), if at all, and will in the process expand the global economy by a factor of 12. This is impossible for an already groaning earth to sustain, as economic growth always requires resource, energy and labour inputs and produces waste.

“Sustainable development”, pushed aggressively by global developmental institutions on the Global South, is in fact an oxymoron, since nothing



based on continuous expansion of material and energy use can possibly be sustainable on a finite planet. Unfortunately, none of the GNDs articulated so far, including that of Sanders, acknowledge this, or the need to substantially reduce ('degrow') the Global North's already unsustainable consumption.

The SDGs are a useful case in point for the contradictions of 'green economy'-style approaches. Despite a host of progressive elements that may reduce suffering and postpone ecological collapse, the SDG framework does not encompass the systemic transformations needed to address global crises. It does not contain an [analysis](#) of the structural roots of injustice and unsustainability, focuses on economic growth and globalization as a driver of development despite so much evidence of their unsustainable and iniquitous nature, remains dependent on nation-states rather than seeking more radical democratization, offers little to rein in the unregulated clout of big corporations, and ignores multiple knowledge systems, particularly from Indigenous populations.

A call for alternatives to development

“We must search for alternatives to development, rather than an alternative development.”

To find pathways that break from the dominant model of development, we must break from the socio-economic structures which undergird this model. We must search for

alternatives *to* development, rather than an alternative form of development. This quest leads us inevitably to the realization that there is no one way, but rather a multiplicity of visions and paths, a pluriverse. This does not mean that anything and everything fits: approaches that undermine the possibilities of others to flourish cannot be part of this pluriverse.

Across the world, numerous initiatives are meeting human needs and aspirations without trashing the earth. They take form by respecting the diversity and resilience of nature and human cultures, reducing socio-economic inequities, and challenging and attempting to replace structures of oppression, injustice and unsustainability. Many of these initiatives are linked to movements resisting extractivist 'development'; others are asserting the modern relevance of traditional practices and worldviews; yet



others emerge from industrialised societies and challenge their exploitative nature.

A recent compilation of [over 100 essays](#) highlights many of these initiatives: global networks that bring together thousands of practical examples from agroecology, commons, slow food, community conservation, alternative currencies, and transition movements; worldviews and approaches building on indigenous, spiritual and other traditions such as swaraj, hurai, tao and kyosei (from Asia), buen vivir (and its many parallels across Latin America), ubuntu (and its parallels across Africa), caring for country (from Australia), minobimaatisiwin (and other native North American cosmologies); radical reinterpretations of mainstream religions; and ideological and other approaches from industrialised or modern societies (such as degrowth, ecosocialism, ecofeminism, alter-globalisation, free software, and decolonial design).

While widely different from each other, such radical approaches show shared values and principles: commons and collectives over selfish individualism (but not denying individual identities and aspirations); autonomy and freedom with responsibility; respect for the rights of humans and non-human nature; self-reliance and localisation; simplicity or notions of “enoughness” and sufficiency; direct democracy enabling equitable participation by all; and so on. They attempt [transformation](#) in at least five spheres of life:

Ecological wisdom, integrity and resilience: maintaining eco-regenerative processes that conserve ecosystems, species, functions, cycles; respect for ecological limits at levels, local to global; and infusion of ecological wisdom and ethics in all human endeavours.

Social well-being and justice: ensuring lives are fulfilling and satisfying, physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually; realizing equity between communities and individuals in socio-economic and political entitlements, benefits, rights and responsibilities; realizing communal and ethnic harmony, where hierarchies and divisions based on faith, gender, caste, class, ethnicity, ability, and other attributes are replaced by non-exploitative, non-oppressive, non-hierarchical, and non-discriminatory relations.

Direct and delegated democracy: establishing a democracy where decision-making starts at the smallest unit of human settlement, in which



every human has the right, capacity and opportunity to take part, and builds up from this unit to larger levels of governance by delegates that are downwardly accountable to the units of direct democracy; and where decision-making is not simply on a 'one-person one-vote' basis but rather consensual while being supportive of the needs and rights of those who are currently marginalized.

Economic democracy: developing economic frameworks in which local communities and individuals (including producers and consumers, wherever possible combined into one as 'prosumers') have control over the means of production, distribution, exchange, markets; where localization is a key principle, and larger trade and exchange is built on the principle of equal exchange; where private property gives way to the commons, removing the distinction between owner and worker.

Cultural diversity and knowledge democracy: respecting pluralist ways of living, ideas and ideologies; encouraging creativity and innovation; ensuring that the generation, transmission and use of knowledge (traditional/modern) are accessible to all, and making spiritual and ethical learning and deepening central to social life.

The GND has the potential to be a powerful challenge to the status quo. However, insofar as the GND remains confined within existing inequities of the Global North and South, insofar as it fails to fundamentally challenge the hegemony of growth-led 'development' and the unilinearity of modernist, "Western" ways of life, and insofar as it fails to take leadership from grassroots movements and struggles which demand political change, it will remain wholly insufficient and eventually unable to stave off global ecological and social collapse. Unless advanced as an approach to systemic transformation, the GND will not bring the lasting peace, justice, and ecological resilience we need.

Post-Script

Unprecedented lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economy screeching to a halt have placed enormous pressure on hundreds of millions of workers. While it remains to be seen whether a post-pandemic society can prioritize new relationships between humans and with nature, the rush of governments and corporations to "return to normal" threatens to plunge the world into unparalleled austerity and economic structural adjustments. This scenario must be resisted at all



costs. The pressure to maintain work and rhythms of productivity under quarantine suggests that the time to respond is also slipping away.

As Bernie Sanders bowed out of the presidential race, his GND proposal has been sidelined. This could not be more unfortunate, as the pandemic demands nothing short of a radical economic transformation on a scale only Sanders' GND had come remotely close to. As US unemployment soars to heights unseen since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the bailout of banks, airline companies, and wealthiest segments of society by Trump's \$2 trillion "stimulus" [package](#) is a travesty. Ensuring secure access to food, shelter, and healthcare for people seems to be a distant priority.

In India, half a million migrants were [forced to walk](#) to their ancestral villages after a 21-day lockdown was imposed with no prior warning and no provisions for the poorest. It was many days later, facing unequivocal damage from this strategy that the government announced inadequate relief packages. War rhetoric against the virus as "humanity's common enemy" and insistence on a quick return to "business-as-usual" growth directly implies a full-frontal attack on nature.



A couple along with their baby walks hundreds of miles hoping to reach their home as New Delhi goes on lockdown. Tens of thousands of daily-wage migrant workers found themselves without jobs and unable to find transportation home when India announced a lockdown on 24 March. Image: [Huffpost](#)

A GND in a post-pandemic recovery situation is unexpectedly even more reminiscent of the original post-1930s “New Deal”. However, a “green” deal this time around can only be ecologically-centred and relevant to social and ecological crises if grassroots organizations of mutual aid and social movements are both the means and the ends. It can only be new if “Green” is not just an embellishing prefix while maintaining a relationship which posits humanity as the supreme master set to once again conquer and tame the world. COVID-19 has taught us that such a relationship is ultimately futile and fatal.

A “Green New Deal” must fundamentally be about changing how humans treat each other along the lines of class, race, gender, and caste, as well as changing our relationships to the temporal and spatial connectivity of the living and non-living world. It is the [hyper-connectivity of global capitalism](#)



that compresses space and time to exacerbate the voracity of disease, and [heightens](#) inequalities of life and death. There can be nothing “Green” or “New” if our response to the pandemic is restricted to a quick-fix vaccine.

As long as faith remains on a return to “normal,” — one which proved to be deadly — [eco-modernists](#) who champion [Euro-centric rationality](#) or Trump-style “Make America Great Again” rhetoric will be waiting in the wings behind a vaccine seeking to win another day. From their perspective, control over other humans, over nature, over the spatial and temporal rhythms of the living world is the *raison d'être* of progress. COVID-19 has blown this perspective out of the water, which is why every attempt will be made to [expunge](#) this episode from our collective minds.

We must not let that narrative be the lesson of this health crisis. Rather, we must build on this moment. The crisis has germinated numerous initiatives and solidarity networks to help those most affected, even in highly individualised [societies](#). It has engendered a new search for ethical and spiritual reconnection with the earth, and created new legitimacy for radical alternative initiatives of open localization, self-reliance, and autonomy. These can be the basis for new, pluriversal [pathways](#) to an equitable and sustainable world.

Notes:

French translation published by Plateforme altermondialiste:

Le « Green New Deal » est-il nouveau pour le Sud ?

<http://alter.quebec/le-green-new-deal-est-il-nouveau-pour-le-sud>

Spanish translation published by Espai Marx:

Sin daño aquí no significa que no haya daño allí: el Green New Deal y el Sur Global

<http://espai-marx.net/?p=7751>

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