



onclimate emergency

Climate emergency is here.

Freak weather events are becoming commonplace at home and around the world. Infrastructure across our towns and cities is crumbling under the strain of heatwaves and flash floods.

As a consequence of human activity, the natural world is now facing its first mass extinction event since the end of the dinosaurs. The Amazon burns while Brazil's President Bolsonaro declares that "where there is indigenous land, there is wealth underneath it." Emerging movements, such as Extinction Rebellion and the youth climate strikers are raising awareness of the oncoming catastrophe, causing local and national governments to declare their own climate emergencies. However, there is only so much awareness raising that can be done. The time for action is now, and local authorities who have declared an emergency must put this into practice.

the challenge

For decades, understandings of 'the economy' and 'the environment' have regarded the two as separate spheres, yet their deep symbiosis is now impossible to ignore. The growth that has fuelled the global economy in recent centuries has been built and sustained by the extraction of resources from our natural systems, primarily in the form of fossil fuel usage and the degradation of our ecosystem. This economic system has damaged our natural commons, whilst producing vast inequalities between those who benefit from this regime and those who do not. Ours is the age of extractive fossil capitalism, and it is defined by the extraction and destruction of our shared social and environmental resources on an unprecedented scale.

Continual growth, relying on the accumulation of capital and the extraction of profit, is impossible on a finite planet with finite resources. Though the UK government and authorities up and down the country have declared climate emergencies, the logic of growth and accumulation combined with the deepening austerity of the last decade, means that matching this awareness with tangible, practical action has been limited. Britain's first new deep coal mine in 30 years has been given the go-ahead by Cumbria County Council, Heathrow airport expansion continues, and councils across the UK are collectively investing more than £16bn in the fossil fuel industry.

what needs to change

CLÉS believes that the only way to address climate emergency is to reject the practices of extractive fossil capitalism in favour of a Green New Deal. Whilst work so far to progress Green New Deal policies has focused at the national level, CLÉS believe a local Green New Deal, based on the following four principles which put jobs and justice on the frontline of transitioning our economy and infrastructure, is equally as important.



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1. Action. Internationally, nationally but also locally Central to any Green New Deal must be co-operation at the international, national and local levels. Global organisations such as the UN should be responsible for expediting the transition to a green economy, and nation states must go further and faster in their efforts to combat the climate emergency. However, CLEES believes that we cannot rely solely on national government, or wait for international agreements, to deal with the emergency. Achieving policy transformation at national level is clearly necessary in order to get to the belly of the beast, but we cannot afford to wait for this to happen. Moreover, it is doubtful that macro-strategic policies dictated from Whitehall will be enough to ensure that the transition to a green economy is democratic and decentralised. Extractive fossil capitalism is hardwired into the institutional design of the central British state. The scale of the crisis is such that immediate action is required, demanding action at the local and municipal level to begin this

2. From incrementalism to step change To date, much of the action taken to address the climate emergency has not matched the scale of the challenge, it has been tinkering round the edges- from using paper straws to improving cycling infrastructure. Or, it has focused on the actions of individual citizens rather than the multinational corporations. This is an inadequate approach given the size of the problem we now face. Action on a far greater scale is required – not only nationally and internationally but also at a more local level. For example, local governments and combined authorities must take action to harness their communal resources to achieve systemic transformation. This should be done through partnering with local colleges to invest in green jobs, creating municipal energy companies to take energy generation and distribution out of the hands of corporations, enabling a shift to more renewable sources of energy. It could also involve the declaration of a joint “Climate Emergency Action Plan” to cajole every public and commercial actor in the locality to work collectively in tackling this agenda.

3. A zero carbon future Decarbonising the economy is crucial in the fight against climate change. The major anchor institutions that are rooted in place should be strident in their efforts to be carbon neutral, aiming for zero-carbon procurement strategies and withdrawing any pension fund investment in fossil fuels well before 2050. This would go beyond basic social value indicators to create a radical transformation. In this way, anchors should use their influence to ensure that their suppliers commit to greening their respective practices. This could include, for example, life-cycle costing in value for money assessments as part of tender opportunities, including the costs of externalities such as CO2. However, efforts to decarbonise the economy cannot be left to the public sector alone. Partnerships should be established to ensure that the private sector complements the public sector in these efforts. Similarly, incentives to encourage the research, deployment and commercialisation of new technologies required for renewable energy should be encouraged – including the subsidising of households to decarbonise homes through retrofitting. The benefits of this wouldn't only be environmental – a systemic decarbonising of the entire economy provides a great potential to create millions of jobs and revitalise rural and ex-industrial local economies, currently being failed by growth models based on extractive fossil capitalism.

4. Deepening democracy Our economy and democracy must be pluralised in order to deal with the challenges of the climate emergency. The practices of extractive fossil capitalism have seen urban democracy and governance become intensely unequal and hierarchical, and though there has been limited devolution, city and metro mayors have done little to radically decentralise power to neighbourhoods. To combat this, community ownership should be advanced at the anchor level, through the development of governance and management structures where communities can take direct control of common assets, for example through transferring under-utilised assets to community land trusts or working through public commons partnerships. Moreover, radical new ways of doing democracy are required, through co-operatives, co-production and forms of participatory decision-making that challenge institutional politics as it currently stands.