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DANIEL ALDANA COHEN AND THEA RIOFRANCOS

Latin America's Green New Deal

On November 13, 2018, congressperson-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) joined dozens of young activists with the Sunrise Movement in occupying the incoming House speaker Nancy Pelosi's office. "The way things are done has not been getting results," AOC said. "We have to try new methods." Two months later, she and Senator Ed Markey introduced a resolution calling for a Green New Deal. For the first time, U.S. climate politics became identified with massive government spending, a "jobs guarantee," priority investments in communities of color, and a social democratic vision of free public health care (free care services are unprecedented for the U.S., but a longtime fact in much of the world).

While the Green New Deal idea massively expanded the scope of climate action—from carbon pricing to rewriting the United States' entire social (and ecological) contract—it said little about the rest of the world. Its chief historical referent, the New Deal, invokes U.S. history alone. And yet, the project's edges have been internationalist. Leave aside the phrasing, and the substance of the project has everything to do with contemporary political economic struggles all over the world, including in Latin America. What role should the state and community play in steering investment? How much investment? How should a no-carbon transition proceed, and who should lead it? Who will benefit first and most? What should happen to the owners, firms, and workers in fossil fuel-rich sectors? How extensively must we reform—or transcend—capitalism? Does the term ecosocialism denote a vague horizon, or a short-term alternative political economy with coherent content? This is no parochial, United States-only discussion. This issue explores these international dimensions, building on NACLA's Spring 2020 issue, "A Peoples' Policy for the Americas," focused on reimagining U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean.

Indeed, the Green New Deal concept was fleshed out a decade ago by British, not U.S., leftists. It is telling that while AOC herself was radicalized in an environmental protest, it was specifically the anti-colonial, Indigenous-led Standing Rock uprising of 2016. And she frequently calls out U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico. We have seen "Global Green New Deal" proposals from the UK, Europe, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Latin American leftists have echoed the Green New Deal's jobs- and investment-forward approach to climate politics explicitly, as well as indirectly through roughly analogous proposals. These include the regional *Nuestra America Verde* network and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's "Big Push" proposal, featured in this issue in English for the first time. We use the phrase "Green New Deal" in this issue's title as a shorthand for an egalitarian, democratic approach to the climate crisis based on expansive public investments, not green capitalism or green austerity. We don't see the phrase as an homage to the particulars of 1930s U.S. politics, but if others do and prefer different labels and slogans, we will embrace them.

As we write in April 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has crashed global markets. Proposals for green stimulus are appearing around the world—in many cases, like in South Korea and Germany, as official government strategies. If in 2018 the Green New Deal idea converged with theoretical calls for bigger, greener, and more egalitarian public investments, today the need for massive public

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investment is common sense—urgent and practical, not just a debating point.

The Latin American Context for a Global Green New Deal

One of the Green New Deal idea's chief upshots is finally discarding the notion of a specialized climate arena of action. We are in a climate emergency. In our view, all politics now are climate politics, and all climate politics are political economic struggles. This isn't because everyone has now agreed to make climate their rhetorical and practical priority, but because no matter what words are used, economies either cause carbon emissions or change in ways that reduce them.

In Latin America, the relevant context for the Green New Deal idea isn't the official realm of national environment ministries and the green policy elites attached to them. Those have merely tinkered at the economies' edges. What matters is changing the entire economic system. Fundamentally, what shapes the possibilities for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and slashing carbon emissions through a massive, accelerated economic transition, is the balance of power between leftist and reactionary forces, between oligarchic capitalists and popular movements, and between the incumbent interests of fossil capital—including public, national oil companies—and a wide array of pro-renewable energy forces. Now, that context is crisis.

In 2010, two-thirds of Latin Americans lived under a left-of-center government. Today, many commentators have declared left electoral hegemony to be in retreat. Right-wing governments are in power in former Pink Tide strongholds such as Bolivia, Uruguay, and Brazil; Ecuador's Lenín Moreno has implemented austerity to appease the International Monetary Fund; and in Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro's government enters deeper into crisis by the day. The Right turn began in 2014 with the commodity bust, which starved left-wing governments of crucial revenues to continue ambitious social spending programs and public works projects. The contradictions of the Pink Tide also enabled the conservative backlash. Despite leftist leaders' critiques of global capitalism, their reliance on exporting commodities to a global bull market, especially China, prevented them from acting on their climate-friendly rhetoric. Commodity export-fueled growth also translated into political vulnerability: when markets crashed, so did governments' fiscal room to maneuver, costing them support among the working class and precarious middle class alike. And of course, extractive development devastated ecosystems, trampled Indigenous rights, and contributed to runaway emissions.

But the narrative of Left "retreat" simplifies the complexity of the political moment. In the past year, Left governments came to power in Mexico and Argentina. In Chile, a massive popular uprising contested neoliberal austerity, pushing Sebastián Piñera's government to concede to holding a constitutional referendum, now slated for October. Similarly, in Ecuador, an Indigenous-led popular mobilization forced the Moreno government to rescind a planned elimination of the fossil fuel subsidy. In Puerto Rico, historic protests laid bare mass dissatisfaction with colonial politics as usual. And in Bolivia, while the interim right-wing Jeanine Áñez government remains in power, it is not at all clear that the fragmented Right would win in a presidential race against Evo Morales's MAS in elections this year.

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While the regional political outlook remains uncertain, it is now clear that the economic model is exhausted. The Left in power reformed but did not replace this model, first installed under neoliberal governments decades ago. In a world of crashing oil prices, volatile commodity markets, secular stagnation and, now, impending global recession, Latin American economies must fundamentally reorient or risk another "lost decade" with even more dire consequences for human development than the 1980s.

The status quo is no longer viable. In its place, thinkers, policymakers, and movements demand transformations that could form the basis for a 21st century ecosocialism. Fortunately, and despite contradictions and constraints, recent experiences of the Latin American Left impart crucial lessons for such a transition.

Take, for example, a core idea of the U.S. Green New Deal that over a third of climate investment should go to frontline communities—communities of color, Indigenous communities, and low-income communities that have borne the brunt of pollution and disinvestment in recent decades. In this vision, these workers and communities should shape a Green New Deal. But while that's a fine notion, it is also abstract. Despite some minimal precedent in California, the United States has not seen widespread economic governance from below since the first New Deal, if ever.

In contrast, Latin American Lefts—whether in revolutionary, developmentalist, or Pink Tide traditions—have conducted extensive experiments with labor unions, social movements, and local democratic institutions remaking political economies with assistance from national governments. And leftist and center-left national governments have directed political economic change in partnership—both friendly and antagonistic—with public and private companies to a degree unheard of in recent U.S. politics. In this sense, the U.S. Green New Deal's innovation is the Latin American Left's familiar bread and butter.

And while the North American wing of the anti-extractive struggle has grown valiant, thanks especially to militant Indigenous leadership, it pales in comparison to the massive and ongoing resistance of Indigenous and working-class communities to extractive and megadevelopment projects in Latin America. This resistance continues in the era of energy transition: Indigenous and environmental movements have sprung up to demand justice in new frontiers of extraction linked to green technologies, from rare earth minerals in the northwest Amazon to lithium in the Andean salt flats. Everywhere, communities are contesting the terms of extraction and articulating inspiring visions of a socially and ecologically just world.

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Struggling Over a New Political Economy

In this NACLA *Report* focused on the idea of a Green New Deal and the prospects for ecosocialism, we take on these themes discussed above with a blend of big picture political economy and case studies of struggles over the substance of climate politics. Together, the pieces put special emphasis on energy and extraction, as well as analyses of agriculture, labor, and cities.

The broadest political economy essays grapple with the role of the state and industrial policy in decarbonizing Latin American economies while eliminating inequalities. Camila Gramkow's essay is the first English translation from Portuguese of ECLAC's new wave of political economy research, broadly termed the "Big Push for Sustainability," which is already influencing Brazilian politics. Gramkow emphasizes the need for a global Green

Keynesian turn, as well as "Schumpeterian" innovation policies to make Latin American firms produce high-value, climate-friendly goods and services. Writing on the Mexican context, economists Juan Carlos Moreno-Brid and Kevin Gallagher likewise emphasize industrial policy and rescuing the state as a legitimate engine of economic transformation. They highlight the role of Pemex, the country's oil company, in delaying the low-carbon transition. Brazilian ecosocialist scholar and activist Sabrina Fernandes also tackles the question of state oil companies head-on, arguing that Brazil's Petrobras could transition into a new model of a state-owned renewable energy company under its workers' union's leadership. And she pushes for a leftist transition that prioritizes decarbonization and addressing the "metabolic rift" between humans and nature. These tensions between greening and taming capitalism through short-term reforms and more fundamental—albeit less definite—transformations reappear throughout the issue. The authors grapple with the need for immediate, concrete action while also expanding the possibilities for even deeper change as years pass.

These themes play out with a special emphasis on territory and physical landscapes in pieces analyzing the socio-environmental impacts of, and political conflicts over, mining for minerals for the clean energy transition. Geographer Tom Perrault shows that Bolivia's contentious lithium politics—and recent coup—must be understood in the context of the country's resource conflicts. Moving from conflict to governance, geographer Julie Michelle Klinger proposes a holistic framework to regulate rare earth mining and recycling, with the goal of reducing extraction and green tech's toxic waste.

Energy governance also raises questions of ownership, democracy, and design. As legal scholar Shalanda H. Baker shows in the cases of Oaxaca and the Yucatán Peninsula, private energy development endangers Indigenous rights, territories, and livelihoods. As Baker argues, local resistance to the onslaught of wind projects contains the seeds of an alternative energy democracy model. In Puerto Rico, Hurricane María exposed the vulnerabilities of its antiquated fossil fueled system. Scholars Ruth Santiago, Catalina M. de Onís, and Hilda Lloréns argue that decarbonizing and democratizing the archipelago's energy system and making it resilient to natural disasters will require a proliferation of community solar projects—and an end to profiteering and colonialism.

Finally, several pieces tackle a range of issues for cities and workers. Julie Gamble, a specialist on transit politics in Ecuador, describes the interplay between car culture, formal public transit systems, and improvised systems ranging from feminist bike collectives to networks of microbuses. These informal systems, she argues, receive far too little attention in discussions of decarbonizing mobility. Also addressing transit politics, photographer Gabriel Hernández Solano captures radiant scenes from Chile's youth-led revolt against transit fare hikes that quickly turned into a broader rebellion against neoliberalism. Turning to North American urban spaces, geographer Nik Theodore examines the role of Latin American immigrant day laborers in disaster recovery in U.S. cities. While fossil fuel workers' declining fortunes dominate discussions of labor and climate politics, the migrant workers responding to increasing climate disasters merit both solidarity and more humane public policies. And David Meek and Rebecca Tarlau, social scientists of education, detail how political education drove the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement's (MST) turn to agroecology, a pillar of food sovereignty essential to decarbonizing agriculture and empowering farmers.

The rest of the issue touches on related themes. In our feature essay, journalist Melissa Vida reports from Nicaragua on Black and Indigenous forest rangers' grassroots conservation efforts. In the Around the Region section, Miriam Pensack highlights the state of regional disintegration with Luis Almagro reelected to head the OAS, Benjamin Dangl sheds light on the violent fallout from Bolivia's coup in an interview with Bolivian journalist Fernando Molina, and Martha Pskowski delves into Mexican energy politics through the lens of natural gas buildout. In the Arts and Reviews section, Puerto Rican poet Nicole Cecilia Delgado explores connections to land and place, and Nicole Fabricant and Stuart Schrader offer book reviews on getting to a Green New Deal and understanding the kind of mixed economy such a policy demands.

At the very core of the Green New Deal idea is a vision of massive public investment to accelerate and democratize a green transition. While some of this vision is new, much is not. Each country, and each region, will have to reckon with their own histories of leftist state intervention in the economy, right-wing reaction, and popular mobilization. The fight for climate justice, ecosocialism, a Green New Deal, *un gran pacto eco-social*—whatever the words end up being—will build on centuries of political economic struggle. And as we confront the climate emergency, we will further expand—and reinvent—our concepts of democracy and living well.

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