

Message to the Climate Movement

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Throughout the last decade, both in Europe and beyond, a new generation of activists has brought the climate movement to the forefront. Groups such as Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, and Ende Gelände have succeeded in breaking out of the sidelines, convincing millions to commit themselves in defence of the planet. It wasn't so long ago that few were even aware of the possibility of climate catastrophe – nowadays the very opposite is the case. I have no intention to downplay these achievements. What I do want to draw attention to, however, is that climate activism has made little or no difference to something very important, to the only thing which really counts: to actually lowering the amount of carbon emitted by humans across the planet. Such emissions continue to increase every year, as do average global temperatures, weather catastrophes, and rates of species extinction. Earning recognition from across society has not been enough. In all of its core aims, the climate movement remains a decisive failure.

I have a suggestion as to why this is the case. Because the climate movement remains stuck in the assumption that those in power must be convinced to bring about the necessary changes for us. Despite utilising a direct action aesthetic, most climate activism focuses on getting media attention (including mainstream social media, which is as much an extension of capitalist power as television or the newspapers) in order to achieve social recognition, ultimately in order to lobby politicians. However, the political elite will never be able to solve this crisis, because the system which grants them power is also a system which literally thrives on wrecking the planet. What we call “the economy” is an out-of-control megamachine which deems anything short of unlimited expansion (a process which entails ecological devastation) some kind of disaster. No matter their affiliation or the promises they offer, all the politicians and corporations pledge allegiance to the backward logic of this world-eating monster.

Some would argue that certain elements of the climate movement escape this concern. Contrary to Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future, anti-capitalist groups such as Ende Gelände do not make explicit demands of politicians, instead focusing on disrupting critical infrastructure directly. However, we cannot suppose that peacefully occupying a coal mine (or its arteries) for a few hours is a realistic way of shutting it down for good; this is just another way of getting the media interested. Such actions make no sense unless one hopes, consciously or otherwise, that they might serve to convince politicians to step in and reform the economy for us. Other mass organisations (for example, Souvlemont de la Terre/Earth Uprisings) might seem like an improvement, given that they favour sabotaging ecocidal infrastructure, and in this sense encourage something resembling direct action (albeit directed by a secretive vanguard). Again, however, this might only be a more seductive way of receiving media attention; for such attacks would be far more effective if performed by small, autonomous groups who strike under the cover of darkness, especially where the authorities do not expect it.

In short, most climate activism is fixated on requesting help from a system which is inherently incapable of responding. It therefore spreads an ethos of disempowerment and infantilisation, implying that ordinary people are incapable of addressing the climate crisis for ourselves. But really it is the other way around. We will all be burnt to a crisp before the governments will do what needs to be done. It therefore falls on unspecialised, dedicated rebels to begin solving the crisis directly. What might that look like? Enacting without delay the necessary changes which those in power will never seriously consider. By this I mean, shutting down the power stations, airports, motorways, and factories, whilst arranging decentralised (and therefore ecologically-minded) means for sustaining ourselves without them. This proposal no doubt involves a massive escalation in strategy. Nonetheless, given the severity of the situation, combined with the fact

that current methods have proven insufficient, I think it's about time we considered radically overhauling our approach.

Inspiration is already out there. For example, the Switch Off! campaign (initiated in Germany in 2022, and since spreading beyond Europe) forgets about reforming capitalism, instead focusing on directly incapacitating the infrastructure responsible for wrecking the planet.¹ Such instances of sabotage are spreading, whether they are associated with the above banner, another one, or are not claimed at all. To mention but a few of many relevant actions: In September 2023, the railway network outside Hamburg was sabotaged at multiple points, majorly disrupting one of the largest ports in Europe;² in March 2024, an arson attack on the electrical grid nearby Berlin closed down the huge Tesla Gigafactory for multiple days;³ in May 2025, a double arson on a power plant and a high-voltage pylon caused a blackout in a sizeable portion of France, depriving an airport, various factories, and the Cannes film festival of electricity.⁴ One might also recall that London Gatwick airport was closed down for multiple days in 2018, reportedly (and for motivations unknown) because a handheld drone was flown over the runways. Despite massive police efforts, those who performed this readily reproducible action were never found; nor have any of the other actions mentioned here yet led to any arrests. By contrast, conventional climate activist tactics (for example, usage of lock-ons, tripods, superglue) take getting arrested for granted, thereby sacrificing our comrades to the courts, prison, and ongoing surveillance. This is a high cost for actions which, besides fostering a submissive attitude towards the authorities, have little or no impact on the capacities for climate-trashing industries to function.

In order to begin addressing a problem on the scale of climate change, however, attacks against ecocidal infrastructure must become more ambitious still. This might be phrased in terms of moving beyond a focus on specific industries towards targeting industrial civilisation altogether. The relevant centres of production, extraction, and research must be targetted; so too the electrical grid that binds them together, namely, the very network which gives the system of destruction its power (in both senses of the term) in the first place. Such a bold vision will seem out of place to many. But it is too often forgotten that climate change and industrial civilisation are in fact the very same problem. The human degradation of the climate is not something ancient; it is only as old as industrialisation itself. Since roughly 150 years, human life has increasingly centred on the usage of machines which convert fossil fuels into energy, thereby emitting carbon dioxide. Human culture, in other words, has been forced into a relationship of dependence upon an ever-expanding infrastructure which cannot function without poisoning the climate. The Industrial Revolution was only initiated a few generations ago, and already its consequences have led many to question the viability of life itself outlasting the century. There could not be a more damning indictment of this relatively recent technological shift.

Some will respond, of course, that industrial civilisation is not inherently earth-wrecking, and is already in the process of being reformed. We are talking here about the so-called “Green Transition” being heralded across the political spectrum as the solution to the climate crisis. However, it is a common mistake to think that wind, solar, or hydroelectric power represent genuine alternatives to conventional methods; for in reality they are being harnessed *in addition* to fossil fuels, which are currently being burnt in higher quantities than ever. To think the capitalist economy

¹ switchoff.noblogs.org

² actforfree.noblogs.org

³ actforfree.noblogs.org

⁴ actforfree.noblogs.org

would ever consent to leaving untapped reserves of coal, gas, or oil in the ground misunderstands the core logic of a system based on unlimited growth. The consequence of record investment in green tech, therefore, has only been to catapult global energy usage to unprecedented levels.

Moreover, besides failing to involve a transition, the economic restructuring underway is anything but green. Firstly, fossil fuels are highly dense sources of energy, which neither the power of sunlight, wind, or water comes anywhere close to matching; it follows that “renewable energy,” if expected to maintain current levels of intake, must consume far greater areas of land than are already dedicated to energy production. Secondly, the key technologies of such restructuring depend heavily on the extraction of minerals, especially through mining. For example, nickel and rare earth minerals are required to construct solar panels and wind turbines; lithium and cobalt are key components of their batteries, as well as those of electric cars, e-bikes, and smartphones. As such, and in the name of going “green,” the capitalist economy is plundering every corner of the globe in search of lucrative resources, thereby driving ecological devastation, forced labour, and geopolitical conflict. Even the uncharted depths of the oceans are in the course of getting ransacked; next it will be asteroids and other planets. In sum, then, what has been hyped as the technological solution to the climate catastrophe is but a massive lie cloaking the further expansion of the megamachine.

Present in the speech of almost everyone you meet nowadays is an understanding that humans are wrecking the biosphere – and simultaneously committing suicide. Yet far fewer are willing to comprehend the crisis for what it actually is, namely, the outcome of runaway technological development. This is not a problem which can be addressed by voting, petitioning, protesting, boycotting, or investing. The only realistic response to the climate crisis is to attack industrial civilisation. I do not expect that this proposal is about to receive widespread popularity; after all, it guarantees to destabilise the only world almost anybody has ever known. However, we might have to reckon with the fact that many or most humans will forever insist on keeping their cars, fridges, and smartphones running – even at the cost of forsaking the very air we breathe. It therefore falls on those whose priorities lie elsewhere to proceed to brave and uncompromising action.

Further reading

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