

Book Reviews

M. Ajl, *A People's Green New Deal*, Pluto Press, London, 2021.

In recent years and even more so with the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, the issue of the Green Transition and the different projects of “Green New Deal” have been assumed as the governance agenda of capitalism in general and of the countries of the northern hemisphere, for the coming decades. In this text, both radical and ambitious, Max Ajl questions the presumed a-political stance and neutrality of the Green Transition models as well as the presumed anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and socialist nature of those political programs proposed by the leftist political forces of the countries at the centre of the capitalist system often referred to as “Green New Deals”. Every economic policy has necessarily a political dimension and social referents and effects that are not neutral.

Thus, the author offers a stimulating and compelling analysis in a book which is not addressed to a specialised audience but aims at stimulating the political debate without compromising with oversimplification. This *pamphlet* – in the classical and higher sense of the word – analyses the key political proposal of the present, which precisely by virtue of the fact that the terms attributable to it have become commonly used in the context of politics and governance tends to be accepted without taking into account the implications of its formulations. Ajl affirms that the intellectual and political history of the “Green New Deals” are, in the public discourse, obscured and misrepresented. So not only the class and economic interests that are hidden, but with them the possible “alternatives” that these projects exclude and preclude. It is precisely the problematization and consideration of this set of proposals within the historical reality to which they belong and with which they relate that constitutes the main value of this book, making it a useful and stimulating reading even for those who do not share the political perspective with which it is written.

The Green New Deal is not something unique, it is not something apolitical, Ajl claims. *It calls into question the relationships of exploitation and social reproduction, the modes of consumption, the relationship between the countries of the centre and those of the periphery.* GND can therefore

have as its purpose to preserve, modify, or abolish capitalism. GNDs are governmental agendas, they do not just affect the relationship with the environment, but they decide social relations, the division of wealth and therefore, based on these factors, the relationship between society and the environment. Therefore, in defining the different GNDs, the author – who explicitly refers to the dependency theory and Marxism – focuses his attention on the relationship between capitalism and imperialism.

And it is precisely the question of imperialism and the relations between the North and the South of the world that – together with the political and cultural hegemony of capitalist interests, which call for an analysis of the proposals of a left that, in the countries of the centre, presents itself as a systemic alternative – determines the perspective of the analysis.

The book is basically divided into two parts. The first part analyses and criticizes both the technocratic models of the Green Transition as “ruling classes agenda”, based on documents produced by think tanks, foundations, international institutions and governments, and the self-styled political models of socialist transition, such as the GND presented to the U.S. Congress by Markey and Ocasio-Cortez, analysed through the documents related to the proposal. In the former ones he sees the attempt of the capitalist classes to create a cultural hegemony around measures that would foster the profitability of a transition guided by market-based mechanisms, through the appropriation and privatization of natural goods as well as through the transfer of capitals from the public to the private sector. And this based on arguments also accepted by the alternative left, as in the case of the accelerationists – a case that again shows the level of capitalist cultural hegemony. Moreover, as for the Green New Deal projects, Ajl points out a constitutive perspective that takes on board the interests of the core capitalist state and perspectives largely compatible with the interests of capitalist economy. Nonetheless this implies a North’s green transition based on the extraction of raw materials and the exploitation of the populations of the South.

These projects, according to the author, despite being labelled as socialist, have all the characteristic of a typical social democracy. And thus, of a preservation of capitalist exploitation. In the view of the author, two consequences follow from this. The first is an ideological confusion, which hides behind a more radical language, the lack of connection between the alternative proposals formulated in the North and in the South of the world, such as those formulated in the past decade, and which found expression in the Cochabamba Declaration. In the Green New Deals, the remaining core capitalist countries would

find the way to re-legitimize themselves and offer an organic alternative to the system after the delegitimization of the same following the 2008 crisis.

The second consequence descends from the characterisation Ajl gives of social democracy as both the way capitalism co-opted the working classes of imperialist countries and the result of the pressures exercised on capitalist interests on national independence and communist forces, including the People's Republic of China and the USSR, all around the world. Therefore, even a purely progressive policy, which nonetheless truly addresses the issue of the environmental crisis – which is not only as Ajl emphasizes, a climate crisis as it is represented in the centre, but an environmental crisis *tout court* – can only be based on relations of force that compel capital and states to implement certain policies. This cannot be expected as a concession from above, but it must be the result of an international, mass, popular and internationalist movement which will represent the instances of national independence, development, and thus green and social transformation of the global South.

The second part of the text is precisely dedicated to discussing some of the themes that should animate what the author calls “a people's green new deal”, a GND that does not consider the crisis exclusively as climatic, but as environmental and does not imagine models aimed at preserving lifestyles and current social relations, which in the first part are shown to be ineffective to counter the dynamics of disruption of natural balances.

In doing so, the author discusses alternative models of urban and industrial development and draws a thorough and stimulating analysis of the relationship between technologies and social relations, which is best developed in the chapter on agriculture – which is the author's academic field of interest. Starting from a radical and documented questioning of the results and models that can be traced back to the Green Revolution, – a model of agriculture subject to the relationship between capitalist centre and periphery, the cultivation of certain crops rather than others and the imposition of a cultivation model, the distribution of products between south and north and therefore the malnutrition of a portion of the population in the south and the poor nutrition of the lower classes in the north – the author traces an alternative model of agricultural development, based on agroecology, permaculture and agroforestry. This model, which would have as its central pivot a radical agrarian reform – the stumbling block against which the struggles for the effective independence of Third World countries have broken down – is analysed on the basis of extensive scientific literature on experiences currently underway, demonstrating how the abandon-

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ment, at least partial, of the technologies, and therefore of the social relations implied by the current system of world agricultural production based on large capital and property would not produce a decrease in production, but a generalized improvement in the conditions of the world population.

This in turn calls into question another pillar of Ajl's and of the internationalist left platform before the North's left withdrew to design its own green transition, i.e., the question of climate debt repayment by northern countries towards southern countries. This is the main proposal of the Cochabamba Declaration, organized by Morales' Bolivia following the failure of the Copenhagen Conference, which is based on the notion of "common but differentiated responsibility" promoted by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. This proposition evidences the diverging interests of the social-democratic political forces in the centre and the political forces of the third world and would allow, through a massive transfer of capital and technologies from north to south, the green transition, and the independent and sustainable development of the countries of the third world and with them of the whole planet.

As mentioned above, this is definitively a text worth reading, since it is dedicated to a broad-spectrum analysis of one of the most mentioned and debated themes in the institutional politics of northern countries and international institutions today, but as such in its own merit one of the least analysed and questioned. What in the end Ajl offers, is a broad-spectrum analysis that often the academic literature, withdrawn in its specialism, refrains from carrying out.

Vittorio Caligiuri
Roma Tre University