

The Green Bridge: From Tackling Coronavirus to Tackling...

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Posts that originate on this blog quite often end up being reposted on [Brave New Europe](#). This morning the direction of travel is in the other direction, largely because my old friend and long-time Green New Deal Group colleague Colin Hines has given me permission to repost [this excellent piece](#):

One thing rarely mentioned in the wall to wall coverage of the coronavirus outbreak is how the measures taken are inadvertently helping the fight against the climate emergency. In China, the world's largest carbon emitter, there has been a 25% reduction in the carbon dioxide pumped into the air thanks to less coal burning and the reductions in traffic. The International Energy Agency (IEA) expects the international measures being taken to control the coronavirus should cap global fossil fuel emissions. If this trend continues some analysts even think it is possible this will lead to the first fall in global emissions since the 2008-09 financial crisis.

Of course the key question is how can these medium term efforts to deal with the coronavirus be built on and turned into a permanent green bridge towards tackling climate change. The key in the view of the IEA's executive director Fatih Birol, is for governments to use green investments to help counter the global slowdown. He said "We have an important window of opportunity. Major economies around the world are preparing stimulus packages. A well designed stimulus package could offer economic benefits and facilitate a turnover of energy capital which have huge benefits for the clean energy transition."

The role of government is so crucial because the IEA's analysis has shown that 70% of the world's clean energy investments are government-driven, either through direct government finance or in response to policies such as subsidies or taxes.

An Example from the UK

One reason why such a positive transition from dealing with the coronavirus to tackling climate change might occur worldwide is provided by looking at what has happened in the UK. The Prime Minister Boris Johnson, channelling his inner Greta Thunberg, daily

asserts that experts “know how to defeat it” and the Chancellor Rishi **Sunak** has promised to spend, spend, spend to give the NHS “whatever it needs”.

These illustrate two of the three approaches emerging for tackling the coronavirus that will also be central for tackling climate problems. Firstly a panicked political class will continue to do what the ‘experts’ advice them. Secondly the huge cost of propping up care and health systems and supporting a generalised weakening of the economy will need massive increase in government borrowing and doubtless the need to resort to coronavirus QE (quantitative easing). Thirdly personal freedoms to do things that would otherwise make matters worse, such as travelling where we want to, bulk buying whatever we feel we need, whenever we want it, will be constrained by the state.

These massive, three pronged changes introduced to deal with a medium term virus crisis can also be used to tackle the longer term climate crisis. They can act as a battering ram to break down the establishment’s doors at present blocking adequate and rapid enough responses to climate chaos. This will involve listening to climate experts, funding the transition needed through massive government borrowing and Green QE and introducing policies to curb our ‘freedoms’ to travel, eat and consume in ways that threaten the planet.

A first step on the green bridge from tackling corona virus to tackling climate chaos

The UK Chancellors recent budget missed a huge opportunity to help rebuild his nation’s economy in a way that could protect the planet when he failed to prioritise funding a nationwide training and works programme to make all the UK’s 30 million homes and workplaces energy-efficient. Such a massive green programme would generate jobs in every constituency, and business and investment opportunities countrywide. It would also enable the government to substantially build on the commitments it made in its election manifesto to reach net zero by 2050 and to invest £6.3 billion to improve the energy efficiency in over 2 million disadvantaged homes.

Expanding this approach to the rest of Europe and to the United States is also crucial, as I pointed out last year in [***Brave New Europe***](#). ***There are roughly 300 million homes and other buildings in the European Union and*** they currently represent almost 40% of total final energy consumption. Therefore making them all carbon neutral and so providing jobs in every community can make a crucial contribution to the growing demands for a European Green New Deal that addresses both environmental and social concerns.

The US Green New Deal also has at its heart making every residential, business and industrial building energy efficient. Given there are around 140 million residential buildings alone in the US this by definition means jobs in every district in the country, both Republican and Democrat. Given President Trumps disastrous handling of the coronavirus outbreak in the US, such a Green New Deal, with its additional emphasis on

healthcare for all, will doubtless be the cornerstone of the Democrats' attempt to hopefully defeat Donald Trump this November.