

The great success of the Green New Deal is in getting p...

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Aditya Chakrabortty [had this to say](#) about an article he wrote for the Guardian yesterday:

<https://twitter.com/chakrabortty/status/1458706942931701764?s=21>

I think Aditya to be a friend and we won't fall out over this. But that does not mean we might not disagree, a bit.

That's not surprising. As he notes, I was [one of the members of the Group](#) who in 2008 put together the idea of the Green New Deal. From 2011 to 2017 there was probably more written on the Green New Deal on this blog than anywhere else in the world. And since then, as he points out, it's gone ballistic. I am not regretting that. But, as Chakraborrty puts it:

Only one project truly unifies the mainstream left across Europe and America today: trying to limit climate breakdown by overhauling a noxious economic model. Ask the individual parties how and a hundred flowers duly bloom, but all will be branded with those same three little words.

It is apparent that as far as Aditya is concerned this is a problem. I see it as something of a strength. I think much the same of his next criticism, which is:

The project itself – supposedly a stark, bold, urgent idea – is a conceptual fog. Like some kind of policy peasouper, it nestles densely around arguments of ecological limits, social justice and economic transformation, allowing only a glimpse of their outlines.

What else might be expected when this idea only really hit the ground three years ago after a gestation that was longer than I wished for?

His suggestion is that the result is:

For AOC and today's US left, it is about jobs ... and infrastructure; for Lucas, Labour's Clive Lewis and others currently [pushing a green new deal through parliament](#), it

includes citizens' assemblies and a shorter working week. It is both "[a green industrial revolution](#)" in the north of England and [debt cancellation for the global south](#); both low-carbon Keynesianism and nationalisation of the energy industry. It is, in other words, a big duffel bag stuffed with pent-up progressive demands and jumbled up with highly dubious history and tiresome war metaphors.

So? Was there ever one political idea that enjoyed both success and consistent intellectual purity, let alone consistency of support, at the same time?

But what really reveals Chakrabortty's frustration is this:

Why hark back to FDR, who entered the White House nearly a century ago, if you want to be a contemporary global movement? Why lean on Keynes as your crutch, when he set out to save capitalism not to scrap it?

Why FDR, for those who get the reference? Because in the face of systemic financial failure based on dogmatic dedication to markets we need radical change, again. FDR delivered it. We want to. No wonder the right don't get the Green New Deal.

And why the crutch of Keynes? Not because we agree on what Keynes said, for sure. And some of us most definitely buy the ideas within modern monetary theory, and others do not. Rather, let's simply refer to Keynesianism as shorthand for the idea that markets fail to deliver optimal outcomes for society, and that those markets can leave large numbers unemployed or underemployed in jobs with little meaning when state intervention can deliver something so much closer to opportunity for all. We are, in other words, committed to full employment using minimum natural resources for all who want it.

As for capitalism? As matter of fact the Green New Deal does not buy the idea that there is a pure state solution, or a solely market-based one, come to that. Nor do we see a purely community-driven one as likely, which Aditya seems to think there might be. There is no evidence that this can or will happen, so we don't entertain it. But we most certainly see the need for constraints on markets, clear limits on their scope for activity, decided measures to create the inequalities of all sorts that they create, and the need for them to work within the constraints laid down by governments. Does that leave us with a hotch-potch? Of course it does. That is what life in the real world is like. It's how it actually works.

So, what to make of Chakrabortty's call in his final paragraph?

This is not about green growth versus degrowth, and all those old dichotomies. It is about recognising that large swaths of Britain are now effectively post-growth, and that the proceeds of whatever growth we have had has been very unfairly divided. So let us stop haring after "British-owned turbine factories" and "dominating the industries of tomorrow" and all the other boilerplate of politics. Let's get real.

I have no idea what that means. I accept the premise he makes. The evidence is that we are post-growth, at ground level. Wage stagnation proves it. But his rejection of discussion of what might be called industrial policy makes no sense, even in the context of his previous paragraph, which said:.

I hope what comes next is a more focused, locally rooted and inclusive politics based around asking people what they actually need in their lives, and working out how to fit those things within an environmental framework. That can be done with universal desires such as housing and food, healthcare and education.

I would sincerely hope that is true: it is why the Green New Deal supports things like citizen assemblies, although some of us see them as more advisory and not policy making because I, for one, am not sure that they can be democratic. But even if the things he suggests are the focus, energy is required, as is transport and domestic heat and maybe some really difficult things like cement, all of which are the focus of policy that must be beyond the local. It makes no sense to claim otherwise.

Every columnist has their off day. I'm afraid Aditya did with this one. But I will note this comment from him:

Measured from the start of 2018 until this week, the phrase “Green New Deal” appeared in this newspaper and on our website almost as many times as “levelling up” and far more than “Narendra Modi”. Seeing as one of those is Boris Johnson’s signature policy and the other runs the world’s second-most populous country, that is quite the showing.

I am not apologising for that, or the 733 references to the Green New Deal was a major theme of an article on this blog before this one was published which helped put it where it is. We got people to believe in something. And that something is making change happen. What is wrong with that?