

Preparing for the improbable

A Green House Gas by John Foster

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Extinction Rebellion: Insights from the Inside, Rupert Read and Samuel Alexander (Simplicity Institute, 2020).

Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century, Andreas Malm (Verso, 2020).

Extinction Rebellion (XR) continues so to identify itself – pulling, one might think, its crucial punch, since a *rebellion*, unlike a revolution, can take place within an otherwise unchallenged political framework. Historically, indeed, rebellion is what revolutions tend to get called by people who don't support them. For all that, XR is much the nearest thing to a revolution that the climate and ecological emergency has yet produced. But is it near *enough*? Considering these two recent books together may help us to grapple with that very urgent question.

Rupert Read, principal author of *Extinction Rebellion: Insights from the Inside*, was one of the most public faces of XR in the responsible media during its launch and subsequent actions in 2018 and 2019, before Covid-19 achieved what the police couldn't and took it off the streets. He is also a philosopher who has in his professional work bravely grappled with the existential issues about carbon-driven civilizational collapse which it arose to confront. Thus from the perspective of an informed and critically acute insider he presents here both the case for XR's emergence and the case which it makes for its demands, along with a range of ideas about how it should take that case on into the post-lockdown world.

The book works to do this on two levels, interweaving reflective chapters of varying lengths with reprints of what might be called interventions – short media articles, often written from a personal angle, posts originating online and even the transcript of a radio interview (a classic, this latter, in which Read politely but firmly sees off John Humphrys of the *Today* programme over a fossil-fuel-funded report misrepresenting XR and its leaders). The line between intervention and reflection isn't always very sharply drawn: thus, interesting considerations about the legitimacy and potential of Citizens' Assemblies are aired in op-eds sparked by Johnson's illegal prorogation of Parliament or the Tories' 2019 election victory, while the contentious but important suggestion that serious climate action need no more be seen as 'left-wing' than was food rationing in World War II appears in a brief article commissioned by a finance industry journal. Generally, however, there is a refreshing sense of lively alternation between the campaigning briskness of the shorter pieces and the intellectual weight of the more substantial essays, such as Read's chapters on the rebellion's evolving strategy, narrative and targeting, or his theses on the coronavirus crisis and its implications for addressing the climate emergency. The book's editor, Samuel Alexander, also contributes a discussion of civil disobedience and its likely extension as the crisis unfolds. The overall effect is to provide a vivid and engaged running commentary on XR's progress from its founding until the pandemic struck, counterpointed with a fascinating discussion of its rationale, its aspirations and (importantly) its assumptions.

So this is a very useful handbook for anyone who wants to familiarise themselves with the movement and its thinking; indeed, the extended interview from the *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* reprinted here as Chapter 19 is the best place I know to send an enquirer seeking a crisp history and conspectus. But Read is not concerned solely to inform and promote. He has a clear agenda, and hopes also to influence – and it is the issues thereby raised which give the collection its most indisputable value. Increasingly through the book, he develops the argument that XR’s operations going forward should aim at doing more than recruiting the active support of 3.5% of the population, as proposed by the movement’s originators. This figure, derived from research by Chenoweth and Stephan¹, purports to represent the (plausibly achievable) level of public involvement in non-violent civil disobedience at which governments can neither go on ignoring it, nor suppress it without generating a huge backlash, and must therefore concede significantly to its demands. As Read observes, however, that conclusion (drawn from studies of liberation movements and the like) is not readily transferable to our current unprecedented plight, in which not only is an existential threat comprised by consequences still lying mostly in the medium-term future, but the demanded action to address it must entail very far-reaching changes in the lifestyle and expectations of the whole population with virtually immediate effect. He sees these considerations as pointing to a campaign still seeking, indeed, to build core support, but doing so through further actions which don’t also incommode and antagonise the majority. His counter-proposal for such a campaign is that it should focus on the *present vulnerabilities* (of food and other supply chains, current employment patterns and community cohesion) to which the pandemic experience may have helped in opening everyone’s eyes. And it should do so, keeping (almost) everyone on board, by concentrating explicitly on the responsibility of the corporate sector and of its super-rich profiteers (“the 1%”) for creating and continuing to exploit these vulnerabilities.

This suggestion certainly offers an interesting strategic alternative, and one awaits eagerly the end of lockdown to see how much notice will be taken of it. Whether or not it cuts through, however, one fundamental feature of the movement which it serves remarkably to emphasise is the *morally-configured* nature of XR’s self-understanding.

This is not just a matter of the original impetus, which Read states, surely indisputably, thus:

“When a government wilfully abrogates its responsibility to protect the citizens from harm and to secure the future for generations to come, it has failed in its most essential duty of stewardship...it is therefore not only our right, but our moral duty, to bypass the government’s inaction” (p.19)

– or at any rate to make it tell the truth about the emergency and act proportionately in cutting emissions, which are XR’s first two demands. Nor is it only to do with the emphasis laid on Non-Violent Direct Action, which works by getting a *moral* half-nelson on one’s opponent. (If I seek non-violently to obstruct your purposes, and you respectfully abandon them or at best are at pains to tiptoe around me in pursuing them, I have successfully obstructed you – whereas if you hoick me forcefully out of your way I have won a moral victory, so either way I emerge on top.) More significant is the centrally moral issue of *blame* for the emergency. Read is rather tortuously conflicted on this – sometimes he talks

¹ Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Disobedience Works: The Strategic Logic of Non-Violent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

about XR's culture of love and forgiveness, and on one occasion claims that "ours is a compassionate revolution, that does not name, shame or blame" (p.107) – but at other times he is very clear that (at least as a campaigning strategy) he wants to pin major blame on his 1% – the billionaires and millionaires and the global corporate activity which has enriched them. Unambiguously enough:

"It is the polluter elite...who are most responsible for the climate and ecological crisis through their luxury consumption and their investments in polluting companies" (p.203).

Now there are questions to raise about the way in which this blame-game (however conflicted) trades on the widely and carelessly accepted metaphor of the *carbon footprint*. Loathsome as the super-rich and obscene as their differentials are, arguably no billionaire, nor even an oil corporation, produces enough emissions to stamp any kind of impression on the planetary climate *except in conjunction with all the other emissions* from an overpopulated and crassly materialistic world. But I merely trail that point here and leave it on one side, because there is a deeper issue in the offing. This concerns XR's third and politically central demand, that Citizens' Assemblies (CAs) be set up with authority to mandate vigorous government action on the emergency and hold official toes to the fire until such action is in train.

Read rehearses the case for that demand briefly and perspicuously in his book:

"We want CAs that have real decision-making power...They need to be sortitionally based, a part of democracy, much like juries already are. CAs will be tasked with figuring out, with expert advice, how to put together the drastic package of changes, the as-wartime mobilisation, now needed...CAs can take issues out of the 'too-difficult box' into a zone where something real – enough – can be done." (pp.73-4)

Again (in response to Humphrys): "this is not about...us breaking up democracy, this is about...*creating* a real democracy" (p.80). The claim to superior reality is variously based. It is pointed out that, in surveys conducted immediately after XR's first major demonstration, 67% of those surveyed agreed that there is a climate emergency and that urgent Government action on it is required. (As I write, an opinion poll by the UN Development Programme questioning 1.2 million people in 50 countries produces the figure of 64% saying the same thing.²) But this putative two-thirds majority, which ought to carry the day, is allegedly being frustrated in its craving for transformative action by conventional politics with its perverse incentives for politicians to think principally in terms of the electoral cycle and protect the vested interests of party funders. It is taken for granted that sufficiently large groups of the general public, randomly selected but socio-demographically calibrated to mirror the population at large, and deliberating under conditions of maximal information and free discussion, will produce recommendations adequate to the emergency. (In the words of Roger Hallam, XR co-founder, "deliberation and reason will finally be given the space to trump the power and corruption of big money"³ – here, plainly, the moral leverage

² See [UN global climate poll: 'The people's voice is clear – they want action' | Environment | The Guardian](#)

³ Roger Hallam, *Common Sense for the 21st Century*, available at <https://www.rogerhallam.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Common-Sense-for-the-21st-Century-by-Roger-Hallam-Download-version.pdf>, p.62.

gained from blaming a vicious and entrenched opponent is explicit.) And then the overriding authority of these recommendations will rest on a clearly implied claim that CAs are inherently *more democratically representative* than electoral processes (with or without proportionality): each citizen, appraising fully-informed deliberative conclusions in a spirit of “There, but for the chance of sortition, speak I”, may be supposed already to own these conclusions in essentially the way that ethical rules are taken to command me just in virtue of their being what everyone would impersonally will. Through all this transpires the absolutely basic commitment in virtue of which XR can be said to operate on a morally-configured terrain: the quite unquestioned assumption that action against even an existential threat is only legitimate when those mandating it can be taken, in however innovatory a way, as representative of a democratic majority’s wishes.

But that – as the very clarity of Read’s exposition must impel us to suspect – surely means commitment to a completely forlorn hope. For in the nature of this crisis, those demanding action sufficient to confront it must for the present be a small minority. They can only include people who as well as having the intelligence to foresee disaster oncoming over the horizon, the imagination to make it vivid to themselves and the reflectiveness to recognise their own inescapable life-responsibility to oppose it, must also, under current conditions, be both brave and very honest. The combination of such qualities will not be at all widespread, at least while action may yet avert the worst. (Enough disasters may in time extend the constituency, but by then it will be too late.)

That truth is often hard for Green activists – themselves overwhelmingly belonging already to this minority – to see, or at any rate to admit. But it has an even less comfortable corollary, which equally they should be prepared to confront. This is that if we talk, as Read frequently does, of “vested interests” in the current system, we should recognise the most massively vested such interest to be actually the interest which the ordinary unreflective majority has in the system’s continuance. This operates so powerfully because it constitutes the overmastering interest of the addict in his continuity of supply. ‘Finding one’s soul in commodities’, as Marcuse put it⁴ – in iPhones, cars, flat-screen TVs and holiday flight-packages, to update his examples – is now the principal source of substitute life-meaning for very large numbers, in the West and North and increasingly worldwide, who (being human) can’t live without at least a simulacrum of meaning and purpose, but who are denied access to the realities by the lapse of live religious belief and the destruction through technologico-utilitarian ‘progress’ of the living humane culture which might have served instead. (Nor can we now be as naïve as Marcuse was in the sixties about the prospects of pop-cultural ‘liberation’ from this condition – or of pop-cultural anything, except more commodification.) The conscious ego, knowing itself to be merely contingent and fearing that knowledge, but closed off from the dimension of inner human depth where life realises itself for the individual as its own unquestionable purpose, tends strongly to identify itself with commodified objects and experiences which as it were crystallise the logic of their restless competitive development, and pursuing the possession of which thus offers an *ersatz* direction to life. The majority now thus addicted will in due course be forced by climate disaster into some very bleak cold-turkey-type experiences, helping them through which will be one of the scariest things about the coming breakdown; but in the meanwhile,

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964; Routledge Classics 2002), p.11

no radical voluntary resiling from the fossil-fuel economy can be expected from them, any more than the addict can be expected to reform simply from being told, however vividly, about how he is damaging himself.

That, I suggest, is at bottom why the main experiment in a climate-emergency Citizens' Assembly so far tried in Britain, the one convened from January to May 2020 at the behest of six House of Commons Select Committees to consider how Britain should meet its recently-legislated target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, proved so lamentably feeble. Admittedly, this Assembly did not have anything like the terms of reference which XR would have wished to see: it was tasked with making recommendations for achieving net zero carbon emissions only by 2050, rather than by 2025; it did not meet for long enough for participants to be fully exposed to the evidence or to one another; nor above all did it have more than a purely advisory function – so far from a government commitment to implementation, all it had was a promise in the rather weaselly terms adopted by the Select Committees, that they would “aim to use the assembly’s results to inform their work in scrutinising government”. On the other hand, the process was essentially that desiderated by XR insofar as the Assembly was sortitionally chosen to have the appropriate kind of representativeness. And representativeness is the key issue here. For instead of seizing on its advisory status as a licence for ambition, this representative cohort came up with recommendations woefully weak even with a 2050 target in view. Exhibiting a strong general tendency to appeal to technology and “better information” as a way of avoiding hard choices, these recommendations include minimizing restrictions on land travel which might affect lifestyles, while limiting growth in air passenger miles (yes, that’s *limiting growth*) to between 25% and 50% up to 2050, so that “freedom and happiness”, along with the economy, are not too seriously interfered with. (Electric vehicles and aircraft, and synthetic fuels, are to supply the solutions relied on here.) In the field of personal consumption, meanwhile, information and incentives rather than regulation are to rule: all changes in diet must be voluntary, and there was explicit majority opposition from participants to changes in taxation or working hours, as well as to any sort of personal carbon rationing.⁵ It is glaringly evident that this clutch of good intentions fails every test of adequacy which could be seriously proposed – and once we accept the power of commodity-addiction, as noted above, they can surely be taken as broadly indicative of what further unforced exercises in the genre will produce.

The crucial point here is that even were that last conclusion wrong, and more extended and better-informed processes to result in participants significantly changing their views (as evidence shows some CAs to have been effective in achieving), so that they produced genuinely radical recommendations – they would to precisely that extent, by joining themselves to the life-responsible minority, have become *unrepresentative*. And “There but for sortition speak I” would have mutated, by just the same token, into “Who the hell are *this* lot, to tell me I can’t do X, Y or Z any more?”.

XR’s theorising about the 3.5%, we are fain in this harsh light to acknowledge, really expresses the essentially revolutionary recognition that the life-responsible minority

⁵ See the Report at <https://www.climateassembly.uk/report/>.

(comprising whatever small proportion of the population) must come urgently to power if we are to avert catastrophe, and now far too urgently for us to wait until anything happens in that direction through existing political forms. It tacitly embraces an overriding existential imperative either to bypass, or to subvert and commandeer, a system which has epochally shirked the challenge of our unprecedented plight. True to its deeply-moral configuration, however, the movement can only understand that imperative as compelling action through its proposed alternative forms of *democratic-representative legitimacy*. The only role of the activist minority can be to empower a majority currently cheated of its proper say. But if those alternative forms too are set to fail us – if there *is* no such majority for effective action – what then?

That is the crunch question which Andreas Malm's *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency* might help us towards answering. Malm's general thesis is that we need to deploy the kind of state intervention and control which have latterly been rediscovered across the West for dealing with the *impacts* of the Covid-19 pandemic, to deal also with its *causes*, which are in turn integrally linked to the causes of the climate and ecological emergency. These causes are basically the global arrangements for ripping off the planet's life-support systems in order to provide an ever-intensifying flow of commodities to the ever-multiplying addicts of commodification, a good shorthand term for which arrangements is still *capitalism* – although the considerations just glanced at make it clear that blaming the process as it has developed and reinforced itself principally on *capitalists*, even on Read's errant billionaires, is now even more one-eyed than it always was. This process is generating global overheating through excessive carbon emissions and the destruction of carbon sinks, as well as jeopardising our biosecurity as Covid-19 has so starkly illustrated. Since, however, the inherent self-reproducing dynamic of the system precludes its reforming itself in any serious way, *states* must cut in, to break supply chains (those for meat, cocoa and palm oil as well as hydrocarbons) which depend on deforestation, nationalise all private fossil fuel companies and turn their expertise over to a massive extension of direct carbon capture, restrict emissions-generating activities such as flying, expand bus and rail travel, support insulation and renewables, and all the well-known rest – in doing all of which, insofar as it contributes to reducing human pressure on the natural world, they will also be taking what radical preventive measures are possible against future pandemics. And anticipating the implacable vigour which would be needed to drive forward such measures, Malm (who writes in an avowedly Marxist tradition) canvasses the idea of "ecological Leninism". This means for him three things: "turning the crises of symptoms into crises of causes" (p.148), as Lenin sought to use Russia's military disasters, shortages and social strains from the First World War to expose the bankruptcy of the Tsarist regime; recognising that there is now an absolutely overriding need to act swiftly; and using every opportunity of bringing to bear the full coercive power and potential of the state in so acting.

This third imperative, he is quite clear, means that "one part of the population imposes its will on the other part" (p.151) – a phrase he attributes to Engels. In the contemporary context, that won't of course be a matter of armed workers invading the Ministries and setting up Commissars, and what precisely it will involve remains very much a strategy and tactics to be worked out. The key to them, however, should already be apparent: the fact that the vanguard capable of understanding and anticipating the emergency is also likely to

be constituted by people in positions of actual or potential power or influence, with their hands on or near the levers of efficacy and legitimacy in the fossil fuel state.

“Leninism” is plainly the central offer here, and we must return to it. Meanwhile there should be registered a particular strength of this book, independently of any such notion: the cogency and detail with which it documents crucial connections between the climate and pandemic emergencies. Its long second chapter seeks to make “zoonotic spill-over” – “an infection that first sits in an animal and then jumps into a human” (p.31) – as familiar a term as climate change in characterising humanity’s present danger. For the global economy, Malm points out, is now as thoroughly *pathogenic* as it is productive of climate disruption:

“That strange new diseases should emerge from the wild is, in a manner of speaking, logical: beyond human dominion is where unknown pathogens reside. But that realm could be left in some peace. If it weren’t for the economy operated by humans constantly assailing the wild, encroaching upon it, tearing into it, chopping it up, destroying it with a zeal bordering upon lust for extermination...the pathogens would not come leaping towards us. They would be secure among their natural hosts. But when those hosts are cornered, stressed, expelled and killed, they have two options: go extinct or jump.” (p.35)

Combining a wealth of scholarly reference with a journalist’s eye for storyline, he tracks this pathogen assault through the agency of the world’s 1,200 species of bat, prime carriers of coronavirus and capable (unlike the rodents which spread earlier plagues) of flying around in large numbers when their habitats are disturbed, and thereby shedding these viruses towards humans – transmission then being massively multiplied by the tendency of humans also to fly around in large numbers unless prevented. Deforestation is constantly intensifying habitat disturbance while simultaneously stripping out the biodiversity which previously helped absorb shed viruses before they reached humans. And deforestation is now driven by global capitalism rather than by local communities logging their back-country:

“In the new millennium, it is the production of commodities that chews up tropical forests. It negates diversity on every front. No more than four commodities – beef, soybean, palm oil and wood products, in descending order of impact – accounted for four tenths of the dramatically sped-up tropical deforestation between 2000 and 2011.” (p.45)

On top of this demand from consumers largely in the West and North comes the rapidly growing popularity of “eating wild” as a form of conspicuous consumption in the new China, the habit which launched the Covid-19 pandemic from the Wuhan wet-market, but which exemplifies an increasingly worldwide trend of laying the natural world under casually destructive contribution:

“Rich Saudis pluck rare antelopes from Somalia and snow leopards from Afghanistan; rich Mexicans love boots made of reptile or crocodile skin; rich Russians have developed a new fondness for furs...zebra steaks in Germany, crocodile sausages in Norway, marsupials and camels and pythons in the meat halls of Sweden...” (p.67)

And these pressures of addicted commodification are precisely what also drive the fossil-fuel economy to disrupt the climate. The consequence is that while human vulnerability to both climate disruption and zoonotic spill-over remains clearly socially-configured (through all the familiar inequities of power and wealth), all the hitherto natural hazards to which we are vulnerable are now socially-configured too. The logic of capitalism threatens us from both directions, and both global warming and what Malm calls “global sickening” are equivalently anthropogenic.

Here is the most effective telling of this grippingly awful story that I have encountered, and the book is worth reading for its sake alone. His invocation of war communism (from the young Bolshevik regime’s all-out effort against the White counter-revolution) is, however, quite as thought-provoking. He offers this as a better analogy for Read’s “as-wartime mobilisation” than the already-familiar one of the Second World War, which was fought (at least on the British and American sides) in defence of liberal capitalism, and on all sides against *external* enemies. The required mobilisation here, though, is for something much more like a *civil* war, conducted against strongly embedded elements and tendencies within societies which are going to have to overcome large tracts of *themselves* in order to survive. And as with historical war communism, those waging it on the side of survival must throw everything they can command into the fray, and proceed with real ruthlessness against institutions, and perhaps people, within what was before the revolutionary break a shared social space – the “all-in-it-togetherness” tinting folk memories of 1940 will be sadly missing. Malm tries, naturally enough, to insist that he is offering war communism only as *analogy*. He doesn’t want a Red Army, conscript labour battalions or exemplary executions; rather it is a case of

“learning to live without fossil fuels in no time, breaking the resistance of dominant classes, transforming the economy for the duration, refusing to give up even if all the worst-case scenarios come true, rising out of the ruins with the force and the compromises required, organising the transitional period of restoration, staying with the dilemma” (p.167).

But as he also notes, since “the capitalist state is constitutionally incapable of taking these steps...of its own accord...it would have to be forced into doing it, through application of the whole spectrum of popular leverage, from electoral campaigns to mass sabotage” (p.146), and that plainly implies a transformation so drastic as to be very unlikely to remain wholly peaceful.

Still – *Leninism*, as the template for steering this transformation – how plausible, really, is that? Aside from our lacking a Lenin (and none is remotely in view), what corresponds for *that* analogy to the strong Bolshevik presence built up before 1917 within the soviets of workers and peasants, the supportive regiments of defecting soldiers and mutinous sailors, the squads of armed proletarians, the wave of sheer revolutionary energy ridden by the knot of hardened operators comprising the People’s Commissars? Although he is committed to believing that we must be saved, if at all, from the Left, Malm is commendably frank on this point:

“Ecological Leninism...does not imply that there are any actual Leninist formations capable of seizing power and implementing the correct measures

– *the world has never been shorter of them...The crisis is the absence – the complete, gaping absence – of any leadership*” (p.153).

He is also brutally clear about the implications of this judgement for Green-New-Deal type initiatives – or any initiatives (such as those currently being announced by the welcome but notably unLenin-ish President Biden) which claim to offer win-win climate solutions where everyone benefits and no-one gets hurt:

“there is no escaping outlawing wildlife consumption and terminating mass aviation and phasing out meat and other things considered parts of the good life, and those elements of the climate movement and the left that pretend that none of this needs to happen, that there will be no sacrifices or discomforts for ordinary people, are not being honest” (pp.163-4)

– because of course (though he does not actually make the point), honesty would involve an open clash with majority commodity-addiction, and that would mean their project’s collapsing.

So does “ecological Leninism” end up presenting us with nothing more than a challenging analogy and a helpless impasse, bound tightly together? To his credit, Malm has himself the honesty to leave this as an open question. Noting, understatedly, that “the chronic emergency can be expected to usher in pronounced political volatility”, he turns back to the pandemic for what hope he entertains in this context:

“The rather startling measures used to combat the spread of Covid-19 might have been a foretaste. Who knows what openings other moments of impact might bring...climate disasters risk ‘triggering riots, civil disobedience and vandalism’; similar predictions are legion. If or when they are fulfilled, the mission of ecological Leninism is to raise consciousness in such spontaneous movements and reroute them towards the drivers of catastrophe. Hence the heightened relevance of the slogan...Be ready! Be ready for the improbable, for the unexpected, for what happens” (p.152).

Here he aligns, from his different perspective, with a key emphasis of Read’s, who insists that “XR exists to make the ‘politically unrealistic’ realistic” (p.65). Both see clearly that all hopeful action in face of the general emergency must now draw on the peculiarly difficult courage needed to prepare for the improbable.

For that task, however, there is surely a vital resource available which neither canvasses – though Malm comes nearest to implying it. This is recognition of what one might have thought to be the fundamental Leninist posit of *vanguard responsibility*. For Lenin himself, famously, this was embodied by his cadre of professional revolutionaries who stood in for the proletariat and were to seize advance power in its name because the coming to power of the proletariat was anyway written into the laws of history. Perhaps no-one sensible could put that kind of faith in the scientific truth of dialectical materialism at this time of day. But setting aside any deterministic assumptions, and recalling the overwhelming warrant for decisive action supplied now by *real* science, the vanguard analogy can still help us to see that the life-responsible minority confronting the chronic emergency are representative of the whole of humanity in a way which altogether transcends the statistical. They *are*, in fact, for this purpose humanity in its wholeness, rejecting two-

dimensional commodity-addiction out of the depth of life and on behalf of life itself. That is their justification for action, and (if beyond morality we are still to use rights-language) the ground of their right to exercise whatever power they can lay hold on to try and avert catastrophe. *They neither can nor need await majority endorsement in any form*, before taking all measures open to them to urge, assist, marshal and as necessary compel that majority to save itself.

And what might the minority actually *do*, in the light of this liberating recognition? What levers of power *can* they (being who they are, and positioned where they will tend to be placed) hope to lay hold on, and how swiftly? What on-the-ground preparation for the still-improbable supercession of the fossil-fuel state can they drive forward? What ongoing role should targeted civil disobedience play? What more sharply salutary forms of intervention may be called for? Such are the organising questions of the new and utterly unprecedented kind of revolution which must now be put in hand. Its aspiring revolutionaries should be undaunted by their not yet having worked out any cut-and-dried 'theory of change'. (No more, of course, for all the play which it makes with this phrase, has XR – it is *wide open* what would happen once a government which had set up a supposedly executive CA found itself actually presented with recommendations which it couldn't implement by general consent.) What is vital immediately is acceptance by the vanguard of its mandate in clear conscience to act vigorously and at once on behalf of all humanity, and readiness for bold improvisation accordingly.

As these two books taken together make plain, that acceptance and readiness would now be forming the wholly preoccupying agenda of any serious Green politics.