

# **COMMON SENSE FOR THE 21st CENTURY**

ONLY NONVIOLENT REBELLION CAN NOW STOP CLIMATE  
BREAKDOWN AND SOCIAL COLLAPSE

Roger Hallam

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AND SOCIAL COLLAPSE

By Roger Hallam

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## **About this booklet**

This is intended as a first draft and I am open to review, comment, feedback and other suggestions for the final version we hope to distribute wider. Please get in touch.

## **For press enquiries and feedback:**

[roger.hallam.uk@gmail.com](mailto:roger.hallam.uk@gmail.com)

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# I n t r o d u c t i o n

It is time to grow up and see the world as it is. There are some things which are real and there are some things we cannot change, and one of those is the laws of physics. Ice melts when it gets hot. The sun and atmospheric conditions warm up the oceans. Because these things are real, we can also be certain about this planet's ecology and society. We are now heading into a period of extreme ecological stress. Whether or not this leads to the extinction of the human species largely depends upon whether revolutionary changes happen within our societies in the next decade. This is not a matter of ideology, but of simple maths and physics.

The United Nations has estimated that we need to reduce carbon emissions by half within a decade to avoid catastrophe. Of course, this is likely to be an underestimation. Feedbacks and locked in heating will take us over 2C even before we factor in additional temperature raises from human emissions over the next ten years.

In short, we are f\*\*ked – the only question is by how much and how soon. Do we accept this fate? I suggest we do not. Many self-respecting people who can overcome the human failing to disbelieve what they don't like, are happy to accept the science and the maths. But they have not worked through the political and social implications.

This booklet sets out what is obvious from a social scientific point of view: societies will not change with the necessary speed without rebellions and a revolutionary transformation of our politics. Again, this is not a matter of ideology but more of basic structural sociology. Institutions, like animal species, have limits to how fast they can change. To get rapid change they have to be replaced with new social constructions of policy, practice and culture. It is a terrible realisation, but it is time to accept the reality that presents itself; just because we don't like something does not mean it is not true. All of this is common sense.

In 1776 Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet titled 'Common Sense' to tell the American population what they privately knew but did not have the courage to declare collectively, that they needed to declare independence from the British Crown. It was read by 10% of the population and is credited with transforming the resolve of the Americans in deciding to strike out into the political unknown. Likewise, my proposition in this booklet is a Common Sense for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: I declare what we already know – things cannot carry on as they are, and have been. Only a revolution of society and the state – a similar turn to Paine's into the political unknown - can save us now.

This is the first step in transformation: accepting the truth as it is. Climate and ecological breakdown will kill us all in the near term unless we act accordingly.

In this booklet, I explain an implication of this truth – that the reformist political culture of both left and right in neoliberal society is now, to put it mildly, not fit for purpose. To put it bluntly, NGOs, political parties and movements which have brought us through thirty years of abject failure – a 60% rise in global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since 1990 – are now the biggest block to transformation. They offer reformist solutions which they claim will work. This is false, either a lie or lack of accepting the truth. They therefore divert popular political energy away from the task at hand: radical collective action against the political regime which is planning our collective suicide.

The paradigm shift is to move from the words to the action, from lobbying to mass direct action, from elitist radical exclusion to popular democratic mobilisation.

## **My proposal**

We must adopt the most successful model for regime change shown by the social scientific research – *the civil resistance model*. This involves mass participation civil disobedience: tens and hundreds of thousands of people breaking the law to create a transformation of political structures.

There are a number of tactical options, but the main process is as follows:

- The people conduct mass mobilisation – thousands need to take part.
- They mass in a capital city where the elites in business, government, and the media are located.
- They break the law – they cross the Rubicon. Examples include blocking the roads and transport systems.
- They maintain a strictly nonviolent discipline even, and especially, under conditions of state repression.
- They focus on the government, not intermediate targets – government is the institution that make the rules of society and has the monopoly of coercion to enforce them.
- They continue their action day after day – one day actions, however big, rarely impose the necessary economic cost to bring the authorities to the table.
- The actions are celebratory and even fun – most people respond to what is cultural and celebratory rather than political and solemn.

After one or two weeks following this plan, the historical records show that a regime is highly likely to collapse or is forced to enact structural change. This is due to well established dynamics of nonviolent political struggle. The authorities are presented with an impossible dilemma. On the one hand they can allow the daily occupation of city streets to continue. This will only

encourage greater participation and undermine their authority. On the other hand, if they opt to repress the protestors, they risk a backfiring effect. This is where more people come onto the street in response to the sacrifices of those the authorities have taken off the street. In situations of intense political drama people forget their fear and decide to stand by those who are sacrificing themselves for the common good.

The only way out is for negotiations to happen. Only then will a structural opportunity open up for the emergency transformation of the economy that we need. Of course, this proposal is not certain to work but is substantially possible. What is certain, however, is that reformist campaigning and lobbying will totally fail as it has for decades. The structural change we now objectively need has to happen too fast for a reformist strategy.

I propose, however, that a material analysis of power is necessary but insufficient to maximise the changes of revolutionary success. Social relations are built upon cultural rules as much as material interests. It is therefore important to attend to the symbolic and interpersonal as much as the material. Mass action cannot just be nonviolent in a physical sense but must also contain the ethical sense of respecting the opposition, regardless of their repressive responses.

This not only undermines the regime's ability to 'other' you but also makes it much easier for it to save face when it comes to negotiations. Successful mass actions, then, have to include three aspects to optimise the chances of success: mass disruption, mass sacrifice, and respectfulness towards the opposition.

Additionally, mobilisation can only be built by creating alliances between networks. Most political networks are controlled by gatekeeper elites which have little or no interest in moving from a reformist to a revolutionary paradigm (even if they claim to believe in such a view). Nor will they wish



to combine in a mass mobilisation in which they cannot control their particular ethical rules or identity orientations.

Therefore, it is necessary to use direct action to highlight their hypocrisy and to appeal directly to members of these groups to join in a universalist struggle – that is, to save all human beings and fulfil our transcultural duty to create a world safe for our children. This will involve appealing to people in a diversity of political, cultural and religious groups. The appeal will be successful if it addresses both the universalist threat and the opportunity.

This then leads on to the thorny topic of framing – the way in which we communicate the message. Only when the message is put into a culturally neutral language can a mass movement be built. For some groups which have a high level of self-identity, whatever approach we use will be problematic so it will be necessary to create separate mobilisations for such groups who will combine together in a ‘movement of movements’ event. However, most people will be attracted to getting involved to the extent to which they are personally welcomed into the movement. This requires a number of designs of meeting which seem inconsequential but are of vital importance to creating an effective inclusivity.

Finally, there needs to be a post-revolutionary plan otherwise chaos will ensue. The plan I outline is for a national Citizens’ Assembly to take over the sovereign role from a corrupted parliament. Parliament would remain, but in an advisory role to this assembly of ordinary people, randomly selected from all around the country who will deliberate on the central question of our contemporary national life – how do we avoid extinction? What new structures and policies are necessary to maximise the chances of achieving our desire to live, now that the odds are stacked against us? In addition, we may need to act before the government finally comes around. A transition movement has already started. This needs to be massively expanded.

As this book goes to press, conflicting news comes that \$1.9 trillion is being invested in gas and coal whilst solar and wind are now cheaper than fossil fuels. We've clearly still got work to do.

It's going to be quite a show - let's get to it.

| W h y a r e b e l l i o n ?

## **Earth, we have a problem**

Societies around the world did not allow the current ecological collapse. Governments did. Since the 1990s, a false narrative was promoted around the world that individuals should take responsibility for their 'carbon footprint'. Or that 'it's the corporations', the fossil fuel and other polluting industries that are to blame. Yet governments are the only institutions with the power, and the responsibility, to protect us from harm. But they haven't used that power.

In the UK and around the globe, people have inherited a government system and a civil society community of environmental NGOs unable to address the threat we now face to the continued existence of humankind. Government is something created by society to protect us from such threats. Yet it has failed.

We need to rescue the concept of revolution from left wing political ideology into a more classical 19th century tradition where we've had enough of corruption and the gross abuse of power. The challenge we face with the climate emergency is to promote the message that climate change affects us all and so we all need to act.

There is no avoiding the following analysis: that the world's political systems which have facilitated a 60% increase in global emissions since the beginning of the crisis in 1990 have no ability to stop a continued rise in

CO<sub>2</sub>, let alone create the political will to massively reduce levels (40% in the next ten years according to the UN October report<sup>1</sup>).

This leads us to the grave conclusion that the probability of organising a political revolution to remove the corrupt political class has a higher chance (if small/indeterminate) than the chance that the political class will respond to the climate crisis (effectively zero, as evidenced by the last 30 years). This then is the central meta strategic point of this paper.

### **Where did it all go wrong?**

Whilst there is no one clear moment we can point to, there are a number of factors that contributed to the delay in addressing climate change, and nearly all of them are linked to the emerging neoliberal political economy of the 1980s, the financial power and political influence of the fossil fuel industry and flawed thinking about how to solve the crisis within these existing political systems.

One example of a proposal was the 700 page Stern report published in 2007, authored by Nicolas Stern and his colleagues at the London School of Economics Grantham Institute<sup>2</sup>. One of the central ideas proposed by Stern was called the ‘discount rate’ of mitigation costs. This idea suggested that it was possible to act on climate change in the future as technology developed and renewables became cheaper.

Stern would later adjust the rate he suggested but the flaw at the heart of the discount rate was that it assumed perfect political conditions. For example, it

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<sup>1</sup> Masson-Delmotte, V., Zhai, P., Pörtner, H.O., Roberts, D., Skea, J., Shukla, P.R., Pirani, A., Moufouma-Okia, W., Péan, C., Pidcock, R. and Connors, S., 2018. Global warming of 1.5 C.

<sup>2</sup> Stern, Nicholas. 2007. *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

assumed the political willingness to invest in new technology in addition to providing large subsidies to renewable energy, green transport and less polluting industries. This did not happen because the fossil fuel industry created social and political discord by funding anti climate change science groups which manufactured doubt about human influence on the climate.

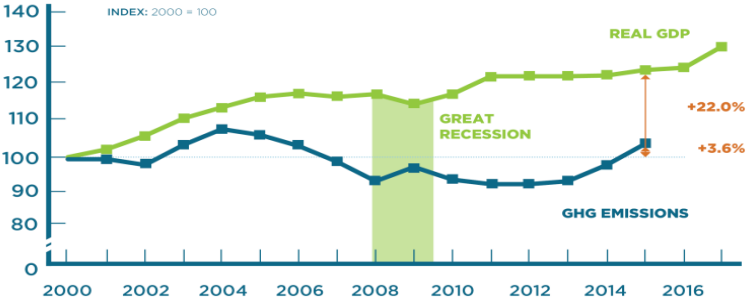
The same assumption of perfect conditions can be found in the structure of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which uses a consensus decision-making system allowing small groups of countries to veto any decision. Additionally, the UNFCCC never became an effective governance system to make commitments legally binding. This meant a positive outcome relied on perfect economic and political conditions.

It assumed that world leaders would support and ratify the outcome from UN Paris Agreement of 2015 as well as the beneficial economic conditions needed to finance the transition from fossil fuels. Yet the 9/11 attacks, subsequent wars and the financial crash seemed to push climate change off the agenda. The result was the weak Paris voluntary agreement that was ignored by the US, Russia and several other governments.

More utopian thinking can be found in the foundation of ‘step by step’ gradual reform processes like the EU cap and trade system whereby high carbon industries were forced to pay for emissions. However, a major flaw in the policy made the system ineffective. By allowing all high emitters a free carbon allowance to start with, it gave many corporations time to move their production facilities to China without penalty. Others simply paid the fines.

All of these examples relied on the good will of politicians, the good will of corporations, pure rationalism and perfect national and international conditions. None of these transpired and the reformist process had no Plan B. Meanwhile, the political systems that are supposed to protect us became

increasingly 'bought' by the fossil fuel lobby whilst simultaneously using concerns about the environment to obtain votes from centrist voters.



Source: <https://www.zeanyc.org/featured-news/data/download/data-download-decoupling-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-economic-growth/>

Accepting the  
truth is the  
first step

What is ‘the truth’? One of the main problems we have experienced with climate change and environmental activism is that people rarely seem to talk about empirical reality (i.e. the latest science), or aren’t even aware of the up to date science on how dire the situation actually is. This is a form of denial that many do not realise they have fallen victim to.

Campaigners often believe they know the magnitude of the problem we face. However, ‘knowing’ is not a binary concept when it comes to grief inducing catastrophic information. You think you know it but then you realise you haven’t processed it emotionally. You think you have processed it emotionally but then you realise that you haven’t done it sufficiently. This leads to a form of ‘unconscious denial’ or motivated reasoning (see Professor Dan Kahan’s research from Yale on the science of science communication and cognitive protectionism).

### **A quick reminder of the latest science**

The IPCC reported in October 2018<sup>3</sup> that we have to reduce carbon emissions by 40% in the next 12 years to avoid ‘catastrophe’. And yet in 2018 emissions went up from an increase of 1.6% in 2017 to an increase of 2.7%. It is not alarmist to suggest this is a catastrophe.

And let’s unpack the word ‘catastrophe’ beyond its abstract meaning. We are looking here at the slow and agonising suffering and death of billions of people.

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<sup>3</sup> Masson-Delmotte, V., Zhai, P., Pörtner, H.O., Roberts, D., Skea, J., Shukla, P.R., Pirani, A., Moufouma-Okia, W., Péan, C., Pidcock, R. and Connors, S., 2018. Global warming of 1.5 C.

A moral analysis might go like this: a recent scientific opinion<sup>4</sup> stated that at 5C above pre-industrial mean temperature, we are looking at an ecological system capable of sustaining just one billion people. That means 6-7 billion people will have died within the next generation or two. Even if this figure is wrong by 90%, that means 600 million people face starvation and death in the next 40 years. This is 12 times worse than the death toll (civilians and soldiers) of World War Two and many times the death toll of every genocide known to history.

This is what governments around the world are willingly allowing to happen. There is no greater crime. Let us bear this reality in mind as we address the question of the necessary strategic response.

### **The only logical option to avert catastrophe: mass civil disobedience**

Successful campaigns rely on a number of factors. Some we can control, others we cannot. One factor we can control is the application of a specific method – rigorous and detailed empirical investigation of the field in which a political conflict is going to take place. As opposed to an idealist, ‘perfect conditions’ or ‘how it should be’ approach, we should design campaigns for imperfect conditions, for political instability and, most importantly, for counter-revolutionary tactics from the fossil fuel industry. This involves an analysis of all the players in the specific time and space where the conflict is going to take place.

### **Design principles**

A first practical design principle is to choose the time and place where the conflict will occur rather than reacting to the opponent. This gives us time to ‘map the territory’ and choose a terrain where we can maximise our chances of success. This enables us to concentrate our resources on this time and place. Therefore, we must know the actions and statements of the main players – our activists, our supporters, the opponents, and their supporters.

### **Opposition analysis**

A critical group here are the opponents, who can be broken down into the

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<sup>4</sup> Xu, Y. and Ramanathan, V., 2017. Well below 2 C: Mitigation strategies for avoiding dangerous to catastrophic climate changes. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 114(39), pp.10315-10323.



elites/management and the various supporting pillars and groups who follow their orders: courts, police, security people etc. In nonviolence theory it is important to notice that the interests of the elites and those that carry out their orders are not equivalent, and indeed in contexts which provide structural opportunities for revolutionary change, their interests can significantly diverge.

We need to focus on the specific blocks to mobilisation and campaign success and then think about a range of micro designs to maximise the chances of reducing these blocks. For instance, I designed London's first organised rent strike by working out that the key block was not that people were not pissed off with their rent levels. They were. The problem was that tenants would not go on strike because they were not confident others would do likewise.

I developed a 'conditional commitment' routine for canvassers. Would you go on strike if a critical mass would act likewise? This worked and led to a hall going on rent strike. The fear factor of eviction disappeared and many more joined the strike, leading to an agreed rent reduction.

### **Avoiding ideological dogmas and learning from history, rather than repeating it**

This is a world away from how many people think about 'how to win'. A key problem is that they take a historically similar situation which did not work and then project this outcome upon a present context as a way of saying your action plan won't work either. Instead we need to look in detail at how the present situation and proposed plan are similar or different to what has happened before. Small differences and the introduction of new design elements can massively change outcomes in a complex social system. This problem is made worse when ideological dogmas are imposed upon policy measures. This prevents us from looking at empirical feedback objectively.

We cannot see clearly because we are closed to various outcomes. A simple example is that, 'the police are nasty for ideological reasons x and y' and therefore it is difficult to accept that the police can be cooperative in a particular set of circumstances. This then prevents us from taking advantage of new possibilities.

It is important to note that the ‘best design’ is not one which will work but one that maximises the chances of success relative to the other options on the table. So it is possible that the plan has only a small chance of success but it has to be compared with other options which have even less chance of success. This is the real choice we face. We have to get into a position where we get to ‘roll the dice’ which might lead to structural political change. This is the logic of rebellion in a complex social system.

### **Designing a pathway to success**

With this in mind, it is worth introducing a method used in other pre-organised civil resistance events. This is ‘reverse engineering’. Instead of working from the here and now to success, we first work out what success looks like and then work back to how it would be created through time from then to now. This has the significant psychological benefit of looking back from the mountain top rather than looking up.

We have succeeded and just have to work out how it was created. It also encourages people to take greater chances and risks without which success is evidently not going to be possible. As mentioned above, the issue is not that the risk might lead to failure but that by not taking the risk, failure is guaranteed. All options in life are dangerous and risky given the existential crisis we now find ourselves in.

R e f o r m i s m   v s  
P o l i t i c a l  
R e v o l u t i o n

The political culture of Western democracies has changed from a reformist to a revolutionary structure. It is no longer possible to save our society through small incremental steps. Mass political disruption is now required. This is a sociological observation rather than an ideological assertion – that is, it is based upon evidence. The evidence can be found in the devastating failures of the reformist political class to correctly predict the outcome of a whole series of political contests in recent years. Arguably this failure started with the Arab Spring – that Arab people would never rise up against dictatorship and still less win.

Then we had the meteoric rise of new left wing parties in Greece and Spain – from effectively zero support to 30 to 40% support in 2 years. Then there was the intense embarrassment of the Corbyn win and the ability of the Sanders campaign to mobilise 2 million people for political revolution in the US and we should also mention the darker side – the total ‘surprise’ of Trump. The approach of reformism (and I am not making any ultimate moral judgement here) is that progress is maximised by making small demands and small ‘asks’ of your supporters.

The logic is that this is more ‘credible’ because it makes some progress rather than none. The argument then is that asking for radical or even revolutionary demands is not credible and therefore leads nowhere and thus is ineffective compared with the reformist approach. This is true in a reformist political context – this is where the common view is that society is mostly stable and the problems that exist can be sorted out by gradualist campaigns that make small demands – issue by issue.

The problem is that, sociologically speaking, not all contexts display signs of a reformist political culture. Some have a revolutionary political culture. Such a phenomenon is evidenced by the mass disillusionment with the political class and a high level of social repression. People conform but don't want to. This then creates the error of conventional analysts – on the surface things look like a reformist political context – nothing revolutionary is happening because of the repression and so they presume it's business as usual.<sup>5</sup> What happens is that when this repression finds an outlet there is a non-linear political event. Politicians like Corbyn offer radical programmes which are not credible but the offer provides the outlet and pathway and people are drawn to this.

Extinction Rebellion was set up in April 2018 to 'tell the truth and act as if that truth is real' on the climate and ecological emergency. Again, this was not a credible approach, but the same thing happened but in the political campaigning / social movement sphere rather than the political party sphere. The structural analysis is the same. Extinction Rebellion said what a lot of people were thinking and proposed a pathway to action; that we are facing extinction due to the ecological crisis and that we should take radical collective action, which means engaging in a rebellion against the government. A conventional view - i.e. from the chief executive of Greenpeace who I met two years ago - was that such an approach lacked 'credibility' and thus would fail. This view is encased in the reformist space which has dominated politics from 1989 until the 2007 financial crisis. Things have now changed.

### **Tell the truth - then act as if that truth is real**

The statement 'tell the truth and act as if that truth is real' is an extreme violation of the reformist paradigm. For reformism you only tell the truth to the extent that you think people can cope with it and you only act on it to the extent that you think you can win (in a gradualist way). This is how reformism ends up in a morally and spiritually bad place – lying and holding back actions which are now justified. What is the revolutionary alternative in 2019?

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<sup>5</sup> The Sociology of Revolution. (1925) Pitirim A. Sorokin. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., USA

# A P r o p o s a l f o r R e b e l l i o n

## **The core proposal**

There are then two opposing, broad logics going forward. There is the reformist logic; to engage and become 'credible' and settle for a gradualist progression. And there is the expansion of the revolutionary logic on the basis of the successes experienced so far. I want to argue that we should pursue the latter.

In the event of the unwillingness of the government and the elites to respond even minimally to demands for structural change, we must draw the conclusion that, due to the crisis we face, only a change in the political system itself can lead to our demands being rapidly enacted.

This could take the following form. We issue a public statement that if, by a specific date, the central government has not responded to our demands and started to enact credible measures to respond to the existential climate and ecological emergency, we call for mass nonviolent civil disobedience starting from that date and until the government makes law the provisions we need.

**Given the complete failure of governments to respond, the demand should be:**

‘The current government hands power to an administration which will call a national climate and ecological emergency and immediately enact measures to deal with the climate and ecological crisis.’

It is one thing to propose a rebellion or revolution, but it is another to work out what happens next. There has to be a credible and attractive alternative arrangement in place. This is a Citizens’ Assembly selected by sortition (randomly selecting citizens) to work out a programme of measures to deal with the crisis. Sortition involves selecting the members of the assembly randomly from the whole population and uses quota sampling to ensure that it is broadly representative of the demographic composition of the country. This proposal then is both concrete and democratic.

This citizens’ administration would be organised as follows. A National Citizens’ Assembly selected by sortition will become the new governance body of the UK, or any country, dealing with the climate crisis. It will make decisions on the following:

- Legislation to transform the economy and society to respond to the existential climate and ecological emergency
- Other social legislation which follows the will of the assembly rather than the former political class
- Draw up a new constitutional settlement which creates a genuine participatory democracy fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### **The revolutionary context**

There is more than one revolutionary context. Some are more obvious than others, but all are difficult to assess because they involve an awareness of what is largely hidden – people’s private desire to be rid of the failed regime. Or potentially, more importantly, the number of people who are indifferent to whether the political system is removed or not.

Some things are important to remember here. We need only a few hundred thousand people to actively break the law and/or support such activities to put us in the ballpark of structural change. We can see that five days of insurrection by 200,000 people in France produced a back down by the government. We should not make the mistake of thinking ‘the people have to rise’ in the sense of the majority of the population. We need a few to rise up and most of the rest of the population be willing to ‘give it a go’.

### **Structural weakness within elites**

The great structural weakness of any elite is that the seeds of its destruction are created by its very success at domination. Success creates separation from real life and a bubble of self-reinforcing orientations – namely that everyone thinks our system is fine. Secondly, elites start with a virtue ethics orientation: they believe in ethical values and end up only believing in one thing – maintaining their position and the economic status quo. This process is now well advanced.

From the other end of the spectrum, the belief in the political system from those on both the left and the right has withered since the financial crisis, as evidenced by the rapid growth of radical political groups which use anti system rhetoric. There is growing rage at the injustice of extreme inequality and the unaccountable global elites and now the emergence into public consciousness that not only have these people been robbing us for 30 years, but they are now going to take us to our deaths.

### **Bring down the government you say?**

I would argue that the slogan – ‘bring down the government’ (or similar) - has an incredible (and therefore actually a very credible) ring about it. Its attraction is that it fully releases the social repression in the most clear and explicit way – we want to get rid of it. It is simple and complete and dramatic.

Question: ‘What do we want?’

Answer: ‘We are going to bring down the government.’

You can imagine the elites and professionals going ‘how ridiculous!’ whilst many saying, ‘about time!’ This is about giving people permission to say what they think and creating the connective tissue for solidarity that many didn’t know existed.

This releases enormous political energy and imagination. Such a view is supported by the evidence of the last nine months with the rapid explosion of support for Extinction Rebellion. Rebellion is ridiculous but for that reason it is sexy. It’s transgressive and people want to break the rules and love to see that now some set up is going to do it. There is a deep psychological attraction to going into the unknown in a world where we are only offered the option to ‘get on and fit in’. There is much evidence that in crises people opt for meaning rather than material security.

The fact is that the materialist analysts on both the conventional left and right have missed this is because they both accept the reductive dogma of neo-liberalism that only money and stuff counts. A longer historical analysis shows this is plainly wrong.

### **Revolutions often fail: a lack of post-revolution planning**

On the other side of the equation there is a big reason why revolutions do not work- because there is no credible pathway for order to come out of inevitable chaos. If there is no plan, then a political vacuum appears which leads to the escalation of revolutionary violence and/or people falling back into the arms of the old elites.

This is not a reactionary consideration. Permanent revolution is hell, not heaven, as the record of the twentieth century shows. People want change but, contrary to political enthusiasts of all shades, they do not want politics to dominate their lives. There are more important things to consider: gossip, family relations, creating beauty, having a laugh, making a living – the constants of all human societies.

The political revolution that has to be proposed here has to find a tricky balance between a joyful exuberant celebration of collective human agency – we will decide ourselves and such like – and creating a brake on utopian



excess. The fundamentals of life remain the same: we still have to face death, we still have a sense of being thrown into this life, we have to master ourselves and learn to relate effectively with others and so on. Politics is a significant part of life, but it is not all of life. This is where we can move on from politics as domination which characterised the twentieth century.

The key element in persuading people that the whole thing will not end in tears is that we have an answer to the fundamental question of politics – ‘who decides? The main reason why revolutionary episodes have failed miserably over the past 30 years is that revolutionaries have either no answer to this question (e.g. Occupy) or fall back on the representative parliamentary answer which has been shown to be irremediably corruptible in the context of the dominance of a global capitalist system – that is, big money trumps political independence. We see the latter in Egypt and Ukraine where an amazing show of people power resulted in a hopefulness, then returned to normal because there was no plan for the day after the revolution.

## The Action Plan

The starting principle of the plan is simple – all resources should be applied to a single point in time and space. This maximises the chances of increasing our political power up to the binary tipping point where on the one side nothing happens and, on the other side everything happens. From the government refusing to agree to serious policy to the point where it calls for negotiations with a nonviolent rebellion. We won’t agree to any compromise that allows the incompetent political class to remain in power. This forces them to choose between either agreeing to our demands or repressing the actions and protests with the risk that more people come onto the street.

Our aim then is to gather enough resources to reach this critical point where we force the hands of the politicians to make the choice; agree with us or repress us.

### **Legitimacy and credibility - critical elements to effect change**

Two key issues need considering in relation to attempting to force political change. One is political legitimacy and the other is mass scale disruptive actions. In response to acts of disruption the standard universal response is ‘why you?’ Why does any movement have the right to tell society what to do? I believe we have a credible answers: if we don’t change, we will soon be dead or forced into a global emergency on a par with World War Two or worse!

However, there is another answer which is just as powerful – a democratic assembly of ordinary people has decided we need emergency action in the absence of credibility within the political class to address this threat to life. That Citizens’ Assembly will have more democratic legitimacy than the elite and their corrupt politicians.

### **The broad aim is to do two things:**

- Continue to organise and inspire nonviolent civil disobedience around the world until serious action from the political class takes place.
- Organise professionally constructed national Citizens’ Assemblies, selected by sortition, to give a judgement on the need to declare and act upon a climate emergency.

The science demands action, citizens are calling for serious policy, but the government has no more legitimacy given its failure to act meaningfully. Many governments have been criminally inactive in the face of warnings from scientists, and the only way we can have a chance of saving our

children and enacting the will of ordinary people around the country is to replace the political class if they don't act.

### **Citizens' Assemblies are not a reformist process**

It has been suggested that holding a Citizens' Assembly without government participation will result in a talking shop that will be ignored. This has definitely been the case within a reformist paradigm as we have seen with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. However, with ecological collapse at our doorstep, Citizens' Assembly decisions and policies will be supported with mass civil disobedience in order for policy to be enacted. As discussed, the reformist and revolutionary logics are at odds with each other. What makes logical sense as one form of change is totally nonsensical for the other. As we are in a revolutionary context due to the climate emergency, the holding of a Citizens' Assembly on the crisis becomes a revolutionary act.

Citizens' Assemblies reveal their dramatic political power through the profound effect on ordinary people of seeing people like them (as opposed to activists) declaring a climate emergency to the world, and making it clear how accepting this reality has led them to more radical action. This is the central reframing challenge of the whole rebellion, which will be necessary to attract mass public support and acceptance from the undecided.

Ordinary people – that is the whole of society – want to see this change and as long as a fair representation of a country's demographic population makes up the assembly, the critical legitimacy and credibility gives the assembly power. Not having politicians but rather a cross section of the public deliberating on the central crisis of our time is the key to the assembly having a major impact on our social and political culture.

The central point is that we need to push everything we have into this one point in time and space and this includes the Citizens' Assembly process. Read more about this in the chapter on post-revolution.

### **Major civil resistance - building up to the action**

The historical record shows that major civil resistance 'episodes' only last between three to six months. It is not a matter then of take it slow and safe. This is even more the case now that we face an existential emergency.

The build-up period to a major act of civil resistance, the culmination of smaller actions, needs to be planned carefully. Too many build-up actions and people will get exhausted, too few and people will not have the confidence. The aim of these build up actions is to prepare the frontline Affinity Groups. Three points need to be made:

1. It is essential that build-up actions and event dates are planned in advance so that people nationally and internationally can put them in their diaries.
2. Similarly, people need to be told about the start date of the major civil resistance event. It's 'all-hands-on deck' and people need to mass at the pre-agreed point and stay there 'for as long as it takes'. People can then take time off work, tell their families and prepare for arrest and possibly prison. We know from Extinction Rebellion actions that after people have decided to break the law, the biggest block to mobilisation is not giving people enough time to ensure they can attend the main dates.
3. It would be beneficial to the rebellion for people to be in prison before the major civil resistance event to create national publicity. The best way of potentially doing this is for people to do repeated acts of peaceful civil disobedience and then read out statements as soon as they enter court, ignoring the judge and court staff. In a loud voice they might say 'I am duty bound to inform this court that in bringing me here it is complicit in the "greatest crime of all" namely, the destruction of our planet and children due to the corrupt inaction of the governing regime whose will you have chosen to administer. I will not abide by this court's rules and will now proceed to explain the existential threat facing all life, our families, communities and nation...' and then start a long speech on the ecological crisis.

This will likely result in the arrestee being in contempt of court and placed in remand or given a prison sentence. It will be a dilemma for the authorities (depending on the regime) on how long the remand or sentence would be. If the period of imprisonment is short, then people will be out soon and can continue to peaceful civil disobedience. If the sentence is long, it will create a national media drama which will feed into overall rebellion.

### **The dramatic potential of mass participation civil disobedience**

For thirty years – since the demise of the 1980s peace movement – direct

action activists in the UK have been faced with a limited number of options due to their small numbers. Open actions, with the authorities knowing in advance, get stopped due to the low numbers compared to police. Alternatively, activists organise secretly in order to reach their targets without the police or authorities being aware of their plans.

In the latter case, the stress of often getting discovered in advance is always present, which can lead to a closed and paranoid culture. An additional problem of secret direct-action planning is that fewer people know about them, and thus when structural conditions create opportunities for mass mobilisation, as in the present context, activists do not take advantage of them. Established groups tend to become attached to the ways they have always done things and find it difficult to change.

Rising Up was set up to question this conservatism - the unwillingness of activists to look at new strategies and tactics. The hope was that by trying tactics which 'will not work' according to conventional activist wisdom, we would find something that will. A key discovery here is that mass civil disobedience works better than any other strategy. This is no accident as the main social scientific research on the subject ('Why civil resistance works'<sup>6</sup>) shows that mass participation civil disobedience is the most successful strategy in bringing down regimes.

### **Mass civil disobedience vs small scale, high risk direct action**

Whilst they seemed like a good idea at the time given the unwillingness of the media to cover environmental issues, small scale direct actions (for example by NGOs like Greenpeace) have had minimal to no meaningful impact on government policy. This poses a challenge to many traditional direct action activists who believe high risk media stunt actions can be as, or more effective than the general public, or 'activism novices' sitting in roads in their thousands. There is often an implicit elitism in the direct-action environmental movements - an unwillingness to engage with the public directly and organise them to break the law on a large scale. Dramatic

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<sup>6</sup> Chenoweth, E., Stephan, M.J. and Stephan, M.J., 2011. Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict. Columbia University Press.

actions can be effective but only once thousands of people are mobilised to do civil disobedience.

My argument then is that radical change is primarily a numbers game. Ten thousand people breaking the law has historically had more impact than small-scale, high-risk activism. This was demonstrated by Extinction Rebellion when thousands of ‘first time’ activists blocked the bridges in November 2018. This was the biggest civil disobedience action for decades and was covered globally. Its impact continues to have major inspirational effects around the world, but it required no high risks and was done peacefully. The key challenge then is to reduce the barriers to participation in such mass mobilisations.

### **Inspiring mass mobilisations to bring about radical political change**

Being able to mobilise large numbers opens up a third possibility not available in the traditional context of activism-as-usual. It means that lots of people can break the law (in a minor way) even if the police know about it. This allows campaigners to be completely open about the events. This is a game changer because it means thousands of people can learn about a proposed act of mass civil disobedience which makes it more effective.

It is important to understand why this is important and that it has no bearing on the moral debate about whether the police are good or bad. That is a separate question on which we don’t need to have any collective position. The key question is how can we make direct action work to the extent that it creates openings for the radical structural changes everyone wants?

### **Proactive police engagement**

A proactive approach to the police is an effective way of enabling mass civil disobedience in the present context. This means meeting police as soon as they arrive on the scene and saying two things clearly: ‘this is a non-violent peaceful action’ and ‘we respect that you have to do your job here’. We have

repeated evidence that this calms down police officers thus opening the way to subsequent civil interactions.

The Extinction Rebellion campaign has consistently treated the police in a polite way when we are arrested and at the police stations, engaging in small talk and quite often in political discussions and other topics where activists might have affinity (inequality, unfair pay). If police initially stonewall activists, they can become more open by a willingness to engage with and listen to them.

This engagement can start before an action. Often a face-to-face meeting with police is effective as they are able to understand that the people they are dealing with are reasonable and communicative people.

Depending on the country or region, the police might not primarily be concerned with either upholding the laws we break nor being aggressive as long as activists are civil and open with them. This can be done by building up some informal protocols with liaison officers before actions happen. This produces something both sides want – predictability.

Crucially, this enabled Extinction Rebellion to predict that they could block five bridges by splitting into five groups at the same time. It also enabled us to predict that as long as everyone maintained non-violent discipline, the police would behave in a civil way and arrest people calmly. Both these predictions proved correct and they enabled us to create this critically successful action.

The key to success was the trust that was built up between ourselves and the police through having regular meetings. The police were assured that we would act in the way we told them in advance (as we have done on each occasion). Thus, from a risk analysis point of view, they did not prepare to overreact (e.g. have thousands of police in expectation of violent disruption). Secondly it was in their interest to follow through on their stated intention to be civil to us so that we would continue to meet and tell them about future actions, something they are very keen for us to do.

### **Ploughshares direct actions movement: when individual criminal actions are justified**

The Ploughshares movement is made by people committed to peace and disarmament and who non-violently, safely, openly and accountably disable a war machine or system so that it can no longer harm people.

Ploughshares activists are given training in safety and non-violence and form groups for long-term support. Ploughshares is drawn from an enactment of the Biblical prophecies to 'beat swords into ploughshares' but is now no longer a Christian movement but one which embraces people from many different faiths or from none at all. The underlying appeal is the universal call to peace, to abolish all war and to find peaceful ways to resolve our conflicts. It recognises the abuse of power that war always is and the deep immorality of threats to kill. Ploughshares actions started in 1980 in the USA and have taken place in many different countries with weapons as diverse as rifles, warships, missiles, submarines and aircraft being dismantled or damaged.

In Britain a successful 'Seeds of Hope' Ploughshares action was one carried out by four women who did £1.5 million worth of damage to a British Aerospace Hawk jet. The plane was prevented from being exported to Indonesia where it may have been used to continue the genocide being committed in East Timor. The women were acquitted in a landmark case at Liverpool Crown Court in July 1996 having argued that their act was justified in law as they were preventing British complicity in genocide.

A critical point here is that any criminal acts outside of mass civil disobedience must have purpose and meaning and they must not be random acts of damage to property.

### **Incentivising first-time disobedience**

Another vital advantage of maintaining civil relations with the police is that thousands of people can engage in their first positive act of direct action and come out of the experience reassured and willing to do more. This meant that the peaceful and inspiring blockage of the five bridges became a major movement-building event. If the police had overreacted, first-time people (around 80% of participants) at the experience would have come away not wishing to 'take the risk' again. What was also interesting about the five



bridges action was the timing of police arresting people (note this has little to do with actually breaking the law). There are three zones – which I explicitly discussed with liaison officers:

1. A zone where nothing critical is happening – e.g. just blocking a single road, in which case arresting people is not worth the time or hassle.
2. A critical zone when you are near a hospital or maybe have blocked too much traffic and police will opt for an orderly five stage warning procedure and then begin arresting people.
3. Lastly there is an emergency zone where a life-or-death ambulance needs to get through, or other urgent event, when the police will use whatever force is necessary to move protesters.

In the third case we agreed we would move, and they assured us they would not lie to us about it.

In the following examples, I outline here two action designs which incorporate this new potential that has been opened up by having large numbers and thus an enabling police response as outlined above.

### **Blood of our Children: an act of Civil Disobedience**

This is a specific example of a number of similar actions. The design of this public event would put the police in the position of making it likely that they would arrest people in an orderly way. In this example people via social media and Affinity Groups would be recruited to gather outside government buildings. They would bring red paint or other safe red liquid in buckets, meet at specific points, then walk to government buildings, stand in a line and throw the blood/red paint onto the ground and sit down as a symbol of the blood of the children who are set to die.

The messaging and artistic design could be worked up, but the basic tactic puts police in a dilemma. We would actually tell them the plan. This would make it likely they would let it go ahead because if they try to intercept individuals beforehand the protesters would simply drop the open bucket on the ground causing a mess for arresting police.

Given there is no security risk, because police will trust that activists will pursue the pre-agreed actions, the likelihood is the protest would go ahead. They would rightly calculate it is easier to arrest everyone in an orderly way, in one go, outside the government building. In addition, they will have to arrest people because the action will have passed the 'criticality' line - throwing a lot of paint over the road is obviously criminal damage and you have the added bonus of it happening in front of government buildings. It is better for the police to manage an orderly and low-cost episode which is compatible with our interest in having a large number of people take part in a highly symbolic and dramatic act.

An action along these lines was carried out in March 2019 in front of Downing Street. As predicted, we were allowed to go to Downing Street. However, no arrests were made despite engaging in criminal damage. The 'political' response was to deny publicity of arrests made by pouring the 'blood of our children' on the ground to highlight the planned destruction of the next generation.

### **Blocking critical infrastructure - e.g. ports, oil refineries and gas works**

Another action design is an economic disruption. A primary candidate for economic disruption would be to block the roads leading out of a major port, for example Dover, UK, through which most of our food imports enter the country. This could ideally involve several thousand people and take place over several days. Again, there would be several meetings with the police to assure them that it would be totally non-violent, and we respect they will have to do their job and arrest people if they so choose. The event would be publicly advertised and so the press and companies involved would know well in advance. Whilst we know that they could mitigate for the disruption, any response would be costly, and the precautionary principle might be an overreaction.

Mass civil disobedience is best organised through open actions such as this. Once we have a thousand or two thousand people taking part, it is very difficult to stop such a disruption from happening. Again, the tactic is that

the police will opt for ordered disruption rather than more aggressive attempts to stop the action – especially as we would have informed the police in advance of the peaceful nature of the planned civil disobedience. The activists would organise in shifts of Affinity Groups, ideally several hundred at a time, occupying the motorway.

People would stay for a long period on the motorway until arrested. This could be combined with a swarming design which could block motorways turn-offs/off-ramps and would continue until the threat of arrest became real (and thus could continue swarming for all three days). This combination would result in national media reporting on a high-arrest event which involves many arrests and the effective blocking of a major port. Specific details and artistic contributions would come from the local groups. An initial successful event would then progress to another event which could involve several road or motorway blockages around other ports in the country.

The above two examples show what dramatic possibilities can be opened up by a proactive approach to the police and mass open organising. A new landscape opens up for radical participatory political action which has been missing for many years. By developing these options, we can create the national debate and resultant mass attitude changes which are vital to enable the massive economic changes which are required.

The Power of  
Symbolic  
Disruption

For thirty years the main emphasis for major direct actions has been the disruption of important economic infrastructure, or other material structures. Direct action, as a way of creating political change, has been subject to a simplistic analysis that sees winning and losing in narrow material terms. There is a strong argument for this strategy as the creation of physical barriers and economic costs certainly bring opponents to the table – as shown by the long-term success of many labour strikes around the world. It is tempting to assume that closing down a power station or a port is a simple pathway to success. However, there are significant limitations to this approach.

Firstly, material structures exist within a larger social space subject to mass psychological dynamics, which do not correspond with linear changes of economic disruption. Raising the economic costs for an opponent can be highly polarising. If done exclusively, or at the beginning of an escalation, then onlookers are likely to side with the opposition if they feel unfairly impacted. This can lead to the opposition hardening their response. In other words, there would be little change in ‘hearts and minds’ of people towards our cause.

### **Winning hearts and minds**

There is a tendency for onlookers to see conventional direct action (e.g. lock-ons) as ‘something I have seen before’ - and therefore nothing of major concern. It is not emotionally engaging enough to create real interest. The response is (often subliminally) ‘they are not like me and so it does not involve me’. The importance of changing hearts and minds cannot be overstated in terms of radical social change. What is important is not that ‘we shut the plant down’ but more ‘we changed a lot of people’s attitudes’. This point has not gone unnoticed in military theory. An occupying force can be

powerful materially but will still lose against an insurgency if it does not actively engage with the civilian population (even at the risk of casualties) to win 'hearts and minds'. The Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts are examples of where hearts and minds were not won and both wars have been a failure.

Therefore, material disruption actions need to be accompanied with a national conversation on what is going on with the climate emergency and ecological crisis. Given the failure of the reformist approach to create change, the new approach has to create a national conversation through sacrificial and symbolic action.

Consequently, having a lot of people to deploy is a key strategic objective. Sacrificial action is the key mechanism by which to create sympathy from supporters (leading to more recruitment) and grudging respect from critical onlookers – 'I don't like their tactics, but I give them this – they stand by their beliefs'. This is a good argument then to stop using lock-ons and other physical equipment for blockades and to just use our bodies.

This demonstrates a greater sense of vulnerability (triggering a more intense emotional response). The message is 'I am just using my body, and I am putting myself in harm's way'. Getting arrested through such actions is the classic sacrificial move. Having hundreds arrested in one day will be a major news story given the drama provided by such public sacrifice.

We must avoid the simplistic idea that if we close down the country we will win, especially if we don't yet have a significant proportion of the population willing to support the cause. Disruption then has to be combined with our willingness to show our vulnerability and to suffer. This is particularly the case when the young and the old take part, which means ensuring direct actions are designed in an open way which are accessible to them.

### **Creating a mass civil disobedience event in the capital city**

The most effective act of mass civil disobedience is to have a significant number of people (at least 5,000-10,000 initially) occupy public spaces in a capital city from several days to several weeks. The design is to draw the establishment into an impossible dilemma of having to choose between mass arrests or mass disruption.

The precise design for the event will need to be made on the basis of data on the numbers willing to take part, the political context, and the expected police response. Groups should aim to get 20,000 people to a central point near government buildings for at least one day. There are two basic designs:

1. They would occupy public parks and bring tents to stay overnight. Each day there would be a public programme discussions and assemblies, workshops, picnics, speakers, and entertainment. Think of a festival! On day two they would occupy several key road junctions for a day – at least 1,000 people on each one. The strategy depends on the police allowing this to happen (see analysis below). On the third day they would return to the junction and stay there permanently – putting up their tents, with a continuing festival programme.

2. A second option is that people would occupy the road junctions in a central location in the capital city from day one and stay there until everyone is arrested.

### **Examples from history: The Leipzig ‘Monday Demonstrations’**

The strategy for the first option above is based upon seminal research<sup>7</sup> on the escalation of demonstrations at Leipzig in East Germany in 1989. The progression of events went as follows. A pastor was extremely disillusioned with the regime and led his community to a public demonstration over a weekend. Approximately 6,500 people attended. Initially, the local security forces did not interfere with a small Christian demonstration. Encouraged by this success and police reaction, the following Monday 17,000 people came out on the street.

Unsure what to do, the authorities contacted their superiors in Berlin. A message came down the line to shoot at the demonstrators. However, the next Monday there were 60,000 people on the streets and the police could

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<sup>7</sup> Lohmann, S., 1994. The dynamics of informational cascades: The Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989–91. *World politics*, 47(1), pp.42-101.

not bring themselves to shoot that many people and thus disobeyed their orders. The following weekend 105,000 people turned out. The fear had gone, and this is the moment when the tide turned and, shortly afterwards, the regime. The lesson is that the regime was caught off guard by the non-linear increase in the numbers taking part in the demonstrations and the slow, centralised, top-down decision making structure failed to act in time.

The design aims to catch the authorities off guard. They might allow occupations to continue for three days because it is not a critical issue. In this time the demonstration effect of thousands of people peacefully breaking the law to force government into serious action or stand aside, encourages thousands of people to join the direct action, or consider doing so. We aim here to hit the holy grail tipping point which leads to regime surrender.

If they allow mass civil disobedience to continue, then protesters will come to the capital and there will be unacceptable mass disruption. Alternatively, if they try to arrest, say 1,000 protesters in a day then the media interest will result in millions of people hearing about the arrests and the pleas to join the non-violent mass action. Only a tiny percent (less than 1%) of these onlookers need to be mobilised for the net numbers (those joining minus those arrested) to rapidly increase. The more they arrest the more people join up.

### **Children's March 1963**

The American movement for black civil rights in the 1960s ran a number of dramatically successful campaigns, using the methods promoted in this booklet. One of the most famous was the Birmingham Alabama campaign of 1963. After failing to make an impression with Martin Luther King going to jail and the difficulties of mobilising the adult black residents of the city, the idea was hatched to involve the city's children and young people in an ongoing escalation of mass participation civil disobedience. The dilemma action design involved thousands of pupils and students leaving school to illegally march through the centre of the city. Word was spread via local radio stations and meetings which promoted the methods of civil disobedience.

A "D-Day" was set when the mass action would begin. The authorities opted for a repression response, arresting 1,000 protestors on the first day and



3,000 on the second day. This triggered the backfiring effect. Thousands more children left their classes to protest and fill the jails.

‘The fear had gone’, as one officer reported. After a week there was no end to the mass protest. The authorities had lost control and the opposition collapsed. Decades of segregation policies were overturned in a week. This is the power of mass civil disobedience. The classic film *The Children March* (viewable on You Tube) is required watching to see these explosive dynamics in action.

### **Bringing the regime to the table**

This is the moment which brings the regime to the table. The point of the build-up design is that it minimises the chance that the police will shut down the civil disobedience before it has reached a critical mass of publicity. However, moving a mass of people without the interference of the police requires a sophistication of coordinated management which will be difficult. In which case it might be better to get to the locations, sit down and stay there.

Alternatively, there could be a compromise between the two scenarios. Such considerations would need to be decided on the basis of the local context. The general aim however is clear: the closing down of the centre of a capital city through the peaceful blockading of streets by thousands of rebels.

### **Gathering the necessary numbers**

The key factor is the numbers involved and this is why the whole strategy in this text is centred around one primary objective – getting thousands of people into capital cities on a specific date. Success could be built by as little as five to ten thousand people. It is this group which provokes the authorities into a repressive response which brings many more thousands to join them on the streets. The key is getting to the tipping point when coverage in the national print media and then the social media triggers a spontaneous mass mobilisation. This is how it takes off - when the fear has gone.

### **Make actions feel inclusive and fun**

The inclusive and human feel of these occupations is essential to maintaining morale and non-violent discipline. We know that the inclusion of children and older people is extremely effective in stopping macho or

aggressive behaviour whilst creating greater media interest. An occupation should not have the logos of other groups or parties but should be a bright display of extinction symbols and whatever appropriate creativity the art groups produce. Occupations can have a programme of events which could include the group sharing food and coming together in groups of 8-10 people for mutual support and human contact. At the same time there should be a programme of entertainment whilst being aware of the delicate balance between promoting different cultural identities.

The general atmosphere should be ‘we’re going to take down the government and have fun doing it’. If and when aggression comes from authorities, it is responded to with humour and good grace. As the Children’s March showed, this is possible even in a dangerous situation. Once a cultural and positive psychological frame is created in a large group it has a very strong socialising influence on individuals in that space and, vitally, on new people coming into the space.

### **Secondary objectives for actions**

Any large-scale event of mass civil disobedience needs to ensure that every opportunity is taken to take advantage of the action and its outcomes. This means giving out tens of thousands of leaflets in public places with messages about the event and why people should join. For example, a flyer might say ‘A peaceful rebellion against the government is taking place – join us!’ (Note that we don’t need to explain what it is about so as to raise interest). These could be handed out at bus stops and transport stations, parks or other public places.

Flyposting should be done by several teams each night for the two weeks before the day of action. ‘There is going to be a rebellion against the government – join us’, with details of where to go. The greater the diversity of posters the better. Hundreds of people might stencil and paint the symbol all around the poor/inner city areas of the capital in the nights leading up to the event. People can spend the day on tube trains shouting out ‘There is going to be a rebellion!’ and handing out leaflets. This happened in Tahrir Square, Egypt during the Arab Spring. Small or super-noisy marches around residential areas of the city would effectively spread the message to people. A peak in social media activity should be planned and an online campaign

run to promote and reflect offline actions.

B u i l d i n g  
A l l i a n c e s

## **Join the rebellion**

Potential political and cultural allies should be lobbied and briefed in the months before a major day of action. This should include the three key motivators for revolution in western democracies: climate/ecological crisis, extreme inequality, and corrupt politicians and governments. This is a crucial movement-building challenge and will be dealt more in the framing part of this text. The rebellion has to morph at the last moment into a general rebellion against ‘all government failures’ in order to catch the regime off guard.

This prevents them framing us as just ‘environmental protestors’ and therefore a ‘special interest’ group. This then leads to a ‘general’ rebellion. A key miscalculation which elites repeatedly make with uprisings is that they think it is just about one issue or group, not anticipating how rapidly it can change into a general rebellion against elite power and corruption. Our plan must be to proactively create this.

The above outline only includes the central action plan. There would also be similar actions in other cities and towns. And there could be swarming groups separate from the road junction occupations which gradually block off all effective access to the centre of the capital city, deepening the material crisis of vital supplies (e.g. food) to the area where the country’s elites, media and government area are located.

Working groups would have remits on all these areas once the meta strategy and basic action design is set during the rebellion process. Of course, there are major logistical issues and internal challenges and opportunities with this design which will need attending to. However, I am focusing here on the logic of the action designs.

### **Disruption and Citizens' Assemblies**

The tipping point comes when the government can no longer sustain authority and control over a mass civil disobedience movement, either by giving ground or by repression. A feedback process of ever greater mobilisation drains away their power and legitimacy until they are forced into making a substantial concession. The power of any elite is psychological, not material, hence the need to focus on hearts and minds. Once 'the fear is gone' for a wider section of the population to get involved, then the doors are opened for an enormous release of emotional energy and motivation from the general public, something that happens to a political system only once in a generation or two. This is what we are aiming for. An alternative outcome is a stalemate where no side is in a winning position. There are two responses we can plan for and execute if this outcome emerges.

### **Affinity marches and occupations**

First, we can work with allied Non Government Organisations (NGOs) and political groups to hold further joint marches and occupations. The aim would be to bring together the themes of ecological catastrophe, gross inequality, and corrupt democracy. This may tip the balance towards a critical mass, particularly if many of the marchers stay to join the occupations of the road junctions/public spaces.

### **People's Assemblies**

Secondly, and more structurally, we need to organise hundreds of People's Assemblies and events on the theme of 'How to solve the ecological crisis' or more simply 'What is going on with the climate crisis?' People's Assemblies are similar to Citizens' Assemblies, but without the process of sortition. Experts from around the world can help train facilitators and produce agendas. The meetings would be based around short testimonials and break-out groups through which ordinary concerned citizens will create a new vision of the social and political transition needed to address the crisis.

Taking over large public spaces to have these assemblies would create dramatic political theatre. All this new political energy would be funnelled into a new concrete political agenda – centring around the three key big issues mentioned above.

A national political working group should coordinate this and feed the energy into the demand for a National Citizens' Assembly - that is a formalised gathering of people selected in a systematic randomised way from the general population. The framing could be – ‘the people have better ideas than the politicians so let's let the people decide’. This national assembly could then be set up in competition with an embattled and discredited government.

### **Political allies and agitation**

Environmental NGOs – such as Avaaz, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, are potential partners for mass civil disobedience actions. However, if they do not come on board, they may require a well-designed direct action campaign which minimises the chances of alienation while maximising the chances of cooperation. This will be done by a ‘maximum respect and maximum disruption’ process. The framing is positive: ‘they have done great activism in the past, but now it's time to change’, combined with short, but noisy, occupations which escalate and media-attracting symbolic actions. These actions should be combined with a specific demand; that the institution or group declare a climate emergency and provide specific resources for mass civil disobedience. They can do an allied action at the same time and/or join in the main rebellion activities.

The key aim here is to create a domino effect. The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) achieved this in their confrontation with exploitative courier companies for better wages. They used disruptive direct action to bring the first two companies to the table. After that the other companies agreed to pay increases without the need for direct action. Choosing the easiest or nearest potential allies first is the ideal starting point.

The starting point then might be the big environmental NGOs and then move to the next ten or twenty organisations and charities – doing quick disruptions of their events. The objective might not be to recruit the top management but to encourage radical change within their organisation from staff and members eager to join mass civil disobedience. The publicity from the actions would increase awareness of the rebellion in diverse political and cultural spaces.

A similar process of creating allies, and/or creating disaffection through quick direct actions, should be organised for left wing and other progressive

organisations. A political strategy group should be set up to oversee this process.

### **Local councils and other civic institutions**

Other alliance opportunities exist with councils and civic institutions declaring a climate emergency. This should be seen as the beginning of the end of the old regime, not as a paper exercise as it is at the present time. The hypocrisy of accepting the truth but not taking appropriate action only makes them more complicit in the criminality of the political class. The way forward here is to call on councils to give central government an ultimatum to call an emergency and act accordingly.

When nothing happens, they should be asked to break off all administrative cooperation with the genocidal regime and leaders should go on hunger strike to show their horror at the inaction of central government. Such dramatic demands will attract the attention of the city and regional press, particularly when combined with quick low input/low cost occupations of council meetings and administrative offices. And again, this will raise a rebellion movement's profile around the country and thus increase recruitment for a central mass civil disobedience event.

### **Cultural allies and agitation**

The basic proposal is that any group or institution can be subject to our message. It has been suggested that people stand up in cinemas, theatres, conferences, lectures, trains, supermarkets, restaurants etc and declare that we will soon die if nothing is done and call on people to join the rebellion. The same applies to religious and spiritual organisations and related groups. These actions can be videoed and live streamed, allowing people to select their own targets without any central direction other than to follow some basic guidelines. Local groups can brainstorm and then prioritise the best targets. Standard messages can be produced for individuals or groups to read out.

### **Schools, colleges and universities**

A particular focus should be schools, colleges and universities, as the mobilisation of young people is already happening around the world but needs to move to more prolonged and disruptive forms of civil disobedience. A possible routine is as follows: campaigners hand out leaflets outside the buildings promoting a school/college strike/civil disobedience event. They enter into conversation with people as they hand out the leaflets – ‘Could I speak to you for a minute about the climate change crisis?’ A script can be used to guide the conversation into listening to what the young person thinks about their future. Emails or other contact information can be taken from the most enthusiastic people who are incentivised to organise further outreach and engagement.

This would lead to the recruitment of more recruiters to canvass and/or have a meeting with the school, college or university. Through this process the young people start to organise their own mobilisation with training and mentoring from experienced rebels. Youth events would happen separately from adult mobilisations in the run-up period to a central action. Ideally, they would be integrated within the wider coalition for the main mass civil disobedience event. The start of this process has been tried with reasonable success at inner city colleges in London where students are mainly black or Asian.

This is a great opportunity to create real diversity in rebellion mobilisations. Movement strategy and outreach teams should therefore develop city youth mobilisation as a top priority.

### **Local community outreach**

A similar diversity priority would be to develop local community meetings in inner cities. The process would involve leafleting and then door knocking. Again, this has been tried but still has to be developed and standardised. As with youth mobilisation – the ‘ordinary’ people who get mobilised through this process should set up their own groups and networks so that they are not put off by the specific culture of middle class/radical campaigning, but are integrated once they are established into a central, major mobilisation.



All this should be combined with a nationwide campaign to roll out doing the standardised talk; ‘Climate Change, we are heading for extinction and what to do about it’ – again focusing on local communities rather than green political groups. A target should be set for how many people we want to reach, and the various mandated groups should work out plans on how to achieve this (e.g. on doing trainings, outreach etc).

Lastly, national phoning groups can be set up to telephone people on the database to tell them about the details of the mass civil disobedience. These and other processes should be created by the outreach/community working groups in local areas.

### **Media allies and media interventions**

The last significant group to reach is the media. Some outlets will be natural allies, and this might include a proportion of the radical and independent online press. However, the mainstream press should be the focus. The BBC and the Guardian in the UK, and the centrist and national media in any other country. The aim here is to ask them to declare a climate emergency and then use that declaration to push for support for a rebellion explicitly. Suggest journalists and editors go on hunger strike on the main day of action.

This ‘extreme/unreasonable’ demand will get media attention and widen the Overton window as it has with the use of the words ‘extinction’ and ‘rebellion’ over the past year and months. Another approach is to get private and informal meetings with journalists, editors and media people to give them the standard talk and help develop contacts with those who will support a central mass civil disobedience event. This should then extend to the right-wing press – using the framing of ‘order, security and legacy’ (see framing below) as a way to highlight the contradictions of being opposed to a rebellion from that quarter.

All the above outlines deal with organisational and action design. The other side of the equation deals with how we communicate what our demands are and why it is vital we succeed.

# F r a m i n g   a n d M e s s a g i n g

“Mass movements are successful when people who hate each other join together for the common good”

Chris Hedges (paraphrased).

*Ex-New York Times journalist who covered revolutions and uprisings for 20 years.*

## **The reformist framing of solutions must end**

The reformist framing of change is both immoral and ineffective as it puts political ideology before scientific facts. This may be justifiable if we are in a period of reformist possibility but that window is now closed. We are now in a new political context where telling the truth is both effective and moral. This is a switch from a degenerative post-modernism where ‘presentation’ takes priority over actuality. It is replaced by a new realism which now provides the best path to create the massive structural changes that are required. The key example here was the decision by Extinction Rebellion to make ‘tell the truth’ their first demand. This kick started a social movement.

In terms of the actual threat to life, this new approach enables us to engage in a straightforward risk analysis which happens routinely in other areas of social and economic life but not in the area of climate change. This means taking a scientifically measured level of the threat and then to multiply it by the probability that it will happen, which gives a risk assessment. Of course, the method cannot be totally accurate, but we have no better means of assessing risk. In the case of climate change we are looking at a high probability of the death of billions of people in the next generation or two. The reformist denial of this reality is catastrophically irresponsible. In the last century such levels of denial in facing the truth have led to atrocities and

to psychopaths like Stalin and Hitler remaining in power long after it was established that they were committing genocide.

### **Telling the truth as a revolutionary act**

This simple concept of telling the truth allows a rebellion to engage the media with the narrative that they are simply acting appropriately in the face of the same ignorance and denial that led to World War Two. In practice this would mean insisting on speaking the truth without interruption and insisting on giving time for listeners to process the emotional impact of the terrible political corruption that claims to be ‘solving the climate crisis’. A key method of communicating this reality is to use direct actions when speaking to the media.

### **Some options are:**

- To walk out of the interview after making a short statement
- To insist on silence after telling the interviewer we are heading towards mass extinction and that we are all going to die unless urgent action is taken
- To simply repeat a prepared short sentence about the reality we face over and over again regardless of what the interviewer says.
- To refuse to leave the studio until removed by security as a protest at the media coverage of climate change, but to go peacefully when removed

All of these moves aim to prevent journalists and presenters avoiding the true horror of mass extinction. Actions speak louder than a thousand words, and we need to see the media as a place for system change rather than some reformist space of repressed rationalist debate about false gradualist improvements. Without emotional engagement in this issue there can be no commitment, and thus no real change. Only when the rules of media engagement are broken can we create effective communication that reaches hearts and minds.

That said, if and when we are given an hour to carefully outline the full magnitude of mass extinction, and the social scientific evidence for rebellion as the most effective response (i.e. to give the talk), then we should of course take this opportunity if a journalist or editor is willing. We are not against

having a serious discussion, but rather against spaces which have no interest in such discussion.

Media and messaging working groups should have the remit to recruit speakers and train them in disruptive action – which sends out what should be our central message; ‘We are different to them (the status quo or regime), we are not afraid of them and you don’t need to be afraid either. Rise up and exercise your freedom. Come down to the occupations and become a human being, not someone living within a media and politically constructed “post-truth” world’. These media appearances have the potential to go viral and thus can have as much influence as the actions on the ground. Therefore, this is a vital additional front which needs to be added to the overall strategic aims in order to reach the tipping point with the authorities during and after a mass civil disobedience event.

### **Internal messaging**

Research shows that members of a social group or network tend to have irrational ‘in and out group’ emotions and reactions that consciously or unconsciously prevent them working with people who are not like themselves. This problem is unlikely to resolve itself easily. To build a mass movement we inevitably need to bring together people who ordinarily don’t want to mix. There are several effective approaches to this significant problem:

1. Make all campaign spaces as friendly as possible on a personal level. This means maximising face to face human connection as a counterbalance to any perceived alienating group identity. People should be explicitly welcomed into the meeting space. They should then sit in small groups in meetings and be given time to get to know each other. There should be food and drink at every event to ease social interaction. There should be calls or one to one meet ups afterwards to thank individuals for coming and to listen to any concerns. People should be appreciated often and generously. Any criticisms should be restricted to critical problems. All this is possible and an essential part of overcoming the conflicting identity problem.

2. The main campaign spaces need to be as ‘culturally neutral’ as possible. This mainly means taking out subliminal social class or mono-cultural elements. This can, ironically, mean changing processes which are supposed to create inclusivity but actually exclude people. These include someone telling the group everyone is welcome (people feel welcome through one to one welcoming behaviour, not through being told something is true because someone says it is).

Activist routines may be off-putting – hand signals which are not explained, using gender neutral pronouns, and new age or academic (radical left) language. Everything written and spoken should be put into commonly known phrases e.g. ‘the way someone talks’ rather than ‘discourse’. People being overly physical and friendly with each other whilst ignoring newcomers (creating the impression this is someone else’s group that I am entering) should be discouraged.

Sources of division such as social class, race and gender will present very real challenges. It is possibly why working-class people are almost totally absent from UK environmental movements. Poorly constructed messaging will put off new people from another identity not least because of the prejudices of the people receiving the message. Some of this may be unavoidable. For instance, a black woman came to an Extinction Rebellion meeting and left afterwards intending not to come back because there ‘were too many piercings’.

3. The structural solution is then to create different spaces for various different groups. For example, working-class mobilisations are organised by working people themselves (as opposed to middle-class groups that claim to speak for them) – similarly with people of colour. People should therefore be encouraged to set up their own groups which agree on basic red lines such as non-violence but are able to promote their own cultural identities.

These internal organisation issues are critical to building a mass movement and so to move the environmental movement out of the middle-class bubble that has defined it for decades. As the research<sup>8</sup> shows we need to create mass participation civil disobedience – that means we need to engage with

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<sup>8</sup> Chenoweth, E., Stephan, M.J. and Stephan, M.J., 2011. Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict. Columbia University Press.

and mobilise many diverse cultures. It's not about creating a comfort zone but about getting on with the critical work that needs to be done – it's not going to be easy.

### **External messaging - the value of inclusivity and universalism**

This is one of the most difficult areas for green and left-wing activists to understand and accept, but it is critical to political success. We must appeal to people who don't join or support environmental causes, be that because of ideology, social class, culture, religion or race. This is actually pretty straightforward and has been done with massive success by the political right wing for decades in order to demoralise and confuse left-wing supporters. They will take a left-wing idea, or word, and co-opt it to right-wing purposes. 'Revolution' is an example – or the idea of workers sitting on company boards which Theresa May promoted on the day of her national election victory. Of course, there was no chance that was ever going to happen.

Left-wing movements can do the same but ideological purism often prevents them from being as creative. However, with the climate crisis and ecological breakdown there is a unique opportunity to play the right at its own game because in this case the arguments are genuinely universalist. There is then a massive opportunity to build up right-wing support and/or demoralise the opposition by parking our tanks on their lawn (to use a right-wing phrase).

The framing should be to ditch environmental language and adopt the language of traditional liberal universalism. This was done to great effect with Extinction Rebellion's Declaration of Rebellion and the letter to the Queen. In no sense does this explicitly exclude a left-wing orientation. Honour and duty were universally respected values on both the left and the right until neoliberalism reduced everything to self-interest and monetary value.

### **Using common language**

Notions of left-wing national identity and civil nationalism have been central to all traditional mass left-wing movements. Words like honour, duty, tradition, nation, and legacy should be used at every opportunity. Not only is this language new and therefore attracts attention but it can be connected to

a profoundly egalitarian ideal. In fact, historical research<sup>9</sup> has shown that inequality is usually reduced not by left-wing administrations but by governments facing national crises such as war. In these circumstances the taxing of the rich is seen as a universally accepted necessity, as it should be by any regime addressing the climate emergency.

### **The trap of reformism**

The tension here is that for the past thirty years the left and environmental movements have had neither the structural opportunity nor the creative innovation to radically change the fundamentalist neoliberal regime. As a displacement activity they retreated into a politics of position and attitude – a morality of individuals’ actions and a language which is compatible with a neoliberal dominance of the economy and the state – i.e. where the real power and capability to exploit natural resources exists.

For instance, ‘climate justice’ movements have been keen on declaring solidarity and morally ‘good’ attitudes but have had no practical or credible plan of action other than calling out the government’s lack of action whilst going on marches and signing petitions. If they were serious, prisons would be full of people following through on their outrage at the clear destruction of the natural world for profit. Instead, when a movement comes along which undertakes mass direct actions which actually do directly challenge the structural inequality, they seem more concerned with words and statements than action.

As such these ‘activists’ and NGOs ironically do the work of the neoliberal elite they claim to be vigorously opposed to, by undermining any real action in favour of what some call ‘armchair activism’ or more recently, clickitivism whereby individuals think they are making a difference by signing an online petition.

Radical direct action is by definition an exclusive act - not everyone can or is willing to do it. But it is also the only way that structural change happens - that is how we stop terrible things from actually happening. We need to make this argument to our ‘radical left’ critics and not allow ourselves to be pulled into the ghetto of excluding ‘inclusivity’. We should be speaking a new universalist language, using Martin Luther King’s speeches as a prime

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<sup>9</sup> Scheidel, W., 2018. *The great leveler: Violence and the history of inequality from the stone age to the twenty-first century* (Vol. 74). Princeton University Press.

example of how to reclaim the framings of national pride to build a broad mass civil disobedience coalition which will win.

The points here are difficult but there is no question where effectiveness lies. The task is to reiterate that we need mass, high-participation civil disobedience concentrated upon a single event - a rebellion. If we are serious about the truth we face we have to be serious about organising and rebelling effectively.



# Post - Rebellion Done Right

## **Citizens' Assemblies and a new transition movement**

The brilliance of the mechanism of Citizens' Assemblies is that it appeals to both liberal and revolutionary values. It is do-able as is demonstrated by its use over the past decade or two.

It is deeply democratic and popular (involves ordinary people) so that no democrat or liberal can object to it – as opposed to the proposition that a revolutionary left-wing elite removes democratic processes in a bid to create a socialist society (been there and done that!) At the same time, it keeps the revolutionaries on board because it creates a forum where deliberation and reason will finally be given space to trump the power and corruption of big money. And for good reason, we can predict that the outcomes of assemblies might be far to the left as this is what natural justice would predict; ‘No, we don’t want people robbing us of the fruits of our labour, and no, we don’t want our children to die in a climate catastrophe... thank you very much.’

The proposal then, in principle, gets the best of both worlds. It proposes a clear and credible solution that is objectively supported by the social scientific evidence<sup>10</sup> – that when a society reaches a point of extreme imbalance then only a revolutionary episode can be successful in reorienting it. At the same time the plan for the replacement of representative democracy with a sortition system shows a clear pathway to a post-revolutionary political resolution to the question of ‘who decides’- which is satisfactory to both liberal and revolutionary constituencies. And it is only when these two political orientations make an alliance does an elite fall. A key part of our strategy then (as outlined below) will be to sell the plan to a critical mass of the liberal elite as well as to the 1% of the general population who will lead the disruption.

### **Citizens’ Assemblies**

Citizens’ Assemblies, chosen by the process of sortition (i.e., randomly selecting citizens), have become very popular over the past few years, especially regarding how Brexit could have been deliberated over more effectively. In essence, they are the roots of original democracy. As part of a Citizens’ Assembly, the selected citizens are exposed to a 360 degree understanding of an issue, which puts them in a better position to make decisions than politicians who are under the influence of a barrage of lobbyists and careerist considerations, both of which take them away from

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<sup>10</sup> Skocpol, T. and Theda, S., 1979. States and social revolutions: A comparative analysis of France, Russia and China. Cambridge University Press.

the simple matter of making an educated choice that is aimed at the best outcome for all.

Citizens' Assemblies allow ordinary citizens to learn about and then decide issues that are often too hot to handle for politicians who fear repercussions from the electorate. The Citizens' Assembly in Ireland in 2016 is a good example where an issue that could have destroyed a political career was taken on and deliberated over by 99 randomly chosen citizens to great effect and succeeded in repealing an archaic law that demonised women and took away their right to make decisions about their own bodies.

In the case of climate breakdown and how society is going to avoid the worst effects of it, Citizens' Assemblies, chosen by sortition, are our only democratic hope. The transition that will be shown to be necessary would be political death for any one party should they suggest the changes that will be required. It is the antidote to the corporate-captured broken democracy of today and indicates a future that can be run truly by the people for the people with the well-being of all as the only dogma that lights the way.

### **The transitional period**

The post-revolutionary plan then needs some detailed working out to be credible. I suggest there could be a transitory period leading to a permanent new political constitutional settlement. For this a professionally created and transparent National Citizens' Assembly (NCA) would be established containing, maybe, 1,000 people for a fixed period of two years. It would then create regional and city Citizens' Assemblies so as to facilitate the decentralisation of power.

The National Citizens' Assembly would deal with social and political legislation, enacting emergency measures on the climate crisis. It would create a new written constitution which would ensure such assemblies were a permanent fixture of our political life.

### **Continuity is king**

The British political tradition of avoiding mass bloodshed at such moments of structural change could be continued by creating a semblance of continuity in the following manner. In the transitionary period Parliament could still exist but under a proportional representation system. It would then have an advisory role to the NCA in a similar relationship to that which the Lords has with the Commons at present.

A process could be set up whereby the NCA would produce a piece of legislation, with help from policy experts and lawyers, which would then be sent to the Commons for debate and approval. If it was rejected, then the NCA could send it back again after three months. This process could then be repeated. Then the NCA would have the final power of enactment. The critical design point here is that the final power resides with the NCA.

The idea here is to have some ‘dignified’ part of the constitution as developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the monarch was still technically in control, but real power passed to the aristocracy. Then the Commons took control over the Lords and became progressively more democratic in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This provides a way of satisfying the not-to-be-underestimated desire for ritualistic and traditional continuity while at the same time real power becomes democratised.

This process was replicated in the most successful participatory political system in the world at Porto Alegre in Brazil. Neighbourhood assemblies elect one-year representatives to join together to create a city budget. A provisional budget is drawn up and then goes back to the assembly for feedback. Then a final budget is drawn up and presented to the conventionally constituted city council which always has to agree the budget. Technically the assemblies have no constitutional power and the council is sovereign, but they know that real political power resides in the people power of the assemblies and so would never dare to deny it.

There could then be a ceremonial role for the Lords or the Queen. It could be up to the NCA to decide on this. But keeping the Commons could be a good move in order to overcome traditionalist opposition (not least from the Labour Party!)

**Pushing the Overton window: where failure lays the foundation for success**

On deciding on this strategy, there are two outcomes which are both very attractive. One is that of the classic revolution as outlined above. The government's power to address climate change is removed and the new power takes its place. However, there is another scenario which in the present context is still clearly preferable to any reformist orientation and that is what I would call the 'glorious failure': the rebellion does not succeed but it has a massively empowering effect on the national and international political imagination by shifting the agenda towards what can concretely be asked for and planned for – namely system change. This is called transforming the Overton window, the range of ideas that are tolerated by the general public. If failure pushes previously intolerable issues to be debated, then we have not completely failed. In fact, we might have made a critical contribution.

Although we may 'fail', the baton will be passed to other contestants who will learn from our mistakes and win the prize (e.g., the French!). We will have created a demonstration effect for an immensely attractive 21<sup>st</sup> Century model of revolution – nonviolent, participatory, and genuinely democratic - compared with the dire record of revolutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We need a way to transform societies with minimal violence and which maintains a balance between liberty and equality.

### **Learning from revolutions past**

We know that a dogmatic pursuit of discredited revolutionary models can be socially ruinous. The Citizens' Assembly system answers the age-old question of 'who decides' and represents as big a political shift as the transition from aristocratic rule to representational democracy. I don't think the constructive effect of such a reframing of the revolutionary project should be underestimated.

Without it, we are left only with the directionlessness of spontaneous uprisings such as the one we have just seen in France, which research shows usually lead to authoritarian outcomes and civil war<sup>11</sup>. It is easy to destroy a system but much more difficult to create a better one. The model outlined here gives viable solutions to both sides of the equation.

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<sup>11</sup> Chenoweth, E., Stephan, M.J. and Stephan, M.J., 2011. Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict. Columbia University Press.

The context of the threat of imminent mass death and destruction is the final and decisive argument for this strategy. There is simply no chance of getting the rapid changes which are needed through negotiations which leave the present political class in power. This is both a terrible thing and a good thing. Terrible because if we do not succeed the consequences will be bad beyond our imaginations. Good, because in the face of such a challenge, there is no longer any need for hesitation. Our purpose is clear. There is no alternative. In a paradoxical way then the clarity and purpose will make us happier than ever before. It is clear why we are here in this world and what we need to do with our lives.

**A new transition movement: if governments won't listen - maybe the people will**

Building on the existing Transition Towns initiative, a major movement is needed to organise the mitigation of climate change as well as preparation and adaptation to the coming changes. For example, this process could start with the foundation of a Transition Lab that is focused purely on engineering and actioning solutions rather than another policy 'think tank'. Imperial College London could research and develop battery technology and give away the patent for free.

An expert group of data scientists could develop Artificial Intelligence to help predict the worst affected areas of the UK, then engineers from Cambridge could design systems to mitigate the impact. Efforts like this are underway all over the world, but there is no central platform that citizens can engage with.

The lab would listen to Citizens' Assemblies, and then support assemblies to actually organise people into citizen service (voluntary). Critically, the lab would not be government funded or be a corporate entity. It would be a service for the people, by the people, rather than waiting for government to pass policy and commission agencies to work. We just get started.

This also acts as a Plan B if the politicians don't listen to mass civil disobedience. They might ignore us, but the highly skilled scientists, experts and workers of the world might listen, and they get to work in a voluntary capacity. We just work six days a week for three to five years, rotating people in and out - 'no five-day-work-week on a dead planet' etc.

**Transition working groups could focus on some of the following issues:**

1. Economists, renewable energy specialists, transport experts, biologists, natural scientists etc. How much will it cost to convert the world economy to avoid collapse and where does that money come from? We could start with tax evaders, reduced military spending and reduced fossil fuel subsidies. These won't be popular now but see how the public feel in 10 years.

2. How do we prepare communities? Google is already working on this with their flood prediction pilot project. It's starting in India as they're worried about the Himalayan glaciers melting or monsoons being insane. But how can we apply this to the world alongside other adaptation techniques? That's for the satellite makers, data, geo-mapping and landscape architects. The problem with Google doing it is that it's a corporation. We need a Wikipedia model/public ownership of the transition.

3. Sociology and cultural politics of mass migration. Also, political scientists. Chatham House already did a study on this years ago.

4. How to feed the world in the event of mass collapse of insects, ecosystems etc (convert cash crops and reduce meat).

None of these issues are being addressed by a trustworthy entity. Trust in the UN has reduced significantly globally, tech companies aren't doing enough, and governments are poor communicators. However, we have a model. Vox,

Now This and The Years Project are great examples of the use of social media. On the mainstream media, David Attenborough and Brian Cox have managed to capture the imagination of the world on the subjects of science and protecting nature. Any Transition Movement needs to learn from these communicators.

### **Transition voluntary service**

In the worst-case scenario, we may need to start building on the great work of the Transition Towns initiative on a massive scale. This could be part of the work of Citizens' Assemblies who would organise a voluntary scheme for anyone who wishes to lend their skills towards some of the following

- Flood defences
- Post-climate change planning
- High-skilled engineering or other staff volunteering for the renewable energy sector (Fellowship Scheme)
- Disaster preparation
- Disaster recovery

This is essentially the work of local councils and authorities. However, where gaps exist, a transition voluntary scheme will supplement and help.

# C o n c l u s i o n



### **The cost of freedom is civic duty**

I recently saw the film *First Reformed*, about a priest who considers blowing himself up in the face of the existential crisis of climate breakdown. The director, in an interview, casually asserts that the human race is certain to be extinct by the end of the century, before answering the next question on some mundane aspect of film production. The film and interview illustrate the depth of moral depravity to which our society has now fallen. We collectively know we are about to destroy our children's lives but can only muster individualistic responses and casual nihilistic indifference.

Let's be clear: such moral degeneration is what enabled the Nazi death camps to happen – a complete collapse of any sense of empathy or duty to universal human values and to the most basic moral principle: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

This booklet proposes another way – a light between the darkness of apathy and cynicism. We have been here before – in fact numerous times. Many societies and cultures have experienced the prospect of annihilation and it is clear which values and actions need to be adopted if chances of survival are to be maximised.

The first step is a return to some sort of trans-cultural balance between the individual and the society/state. We have a duty to protect our society as much as to attend to our self-interest. We are all unique individuals but also intricately connected social beings. We will therefore stand together and survive, or die separately.

In the West, the discovery of this middle ground gave birth to our most glorious political discovery – the assertion of a set of universal rights and obligations which act as a bulwark against both individualist narcissism and murderous autocracy. In this booklet I assert, along with Thomas Paine who inspired the title, that the people come first against any special interest - whether that is a tyrannous monarchy or a corrupted merchant class. The people have the right to decide, and in return, the people need to step up to their responsibilities.

And so again today there is a need for people to step up and make the sacrifices that our forebears underwent many times before us to win the freedoms we enjoy. We are about to lose them if we do not wake up and act. This may require giving up jobs and taking time away from our families. It requires some pain and suffering because no common good has ever been created without it - especially now as we enter our darkest hour. This is what growing up means: to see a situation as it is rather than how you would like it to be and to respond in a responsible manner.

A rebellion, as outlined in this booklet, is not a consumer choice – not an act of possession or enactment of an identity. If it is then it will fail miserably. *It can only work as an act of universal service and duty - a fulfilment of our civic and republican tradition which pulled us out of the dark ages and lives of impoverishment.* It is a rugged, anti-utopian liberalism that asserts the truth that power corrupts, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

That was always thus and always will be. Our absolute power over nature has so thoroughly corrupted us that we are now intent on destroying that part of nature that is our children. Their blood on the pavements - their body parts in the streets. Let us be clear that this is what is coming down the tracks if we fail in our duty. This is what social breakdown looks like – quite simply a living hell for billions.

The situation is serious – deadly serious. The propositions in this book are serious. This is not an academic exercise. I have been arrested many times and been to prison and I expect the need for this sacrifice to continue.

This is where we are at now. What is written in this booklet is not certain, but my argument is that it's our best bet based upon the evidence. And we can no longer afford the luxury or indulgence of hoping for perfect political and economic conditions. Ignoring the social science on political change is as immoral and criminal as ignoring the climate science. We can delude ourselves on this, but we can be assured the next generation will be free of delusions. They will be in the middle of the chaos and ecological collapse. They will want the prosecution of those who created the hell they will face. Think on that.

Friends, there are no easy options anymore. There is only one way that leads to true self-respect – and that is rebellion.

Let's get to it.

Roger Hallam

[roger.hallam.uk@gmail.com](mailto:roger.hallam.uk@gmail.com)