Ten years ago, a group of well-regarded British academics and environmentalists came together to develop an idea which they called the “Green New Deal.” This was constructed as a response to the need for decarbonisation to be done in a way which didn’t further disadvantage already struggling communities. Despite the advent of the financial crash just after its launch and Prime Minister Gordon Brown calling for austerity, the Green New Deal proposal has explained: “once the immediate threat of economic collapse receded then the centre right was able to replace short lived Keynesianism with talk of balancing the books and consequent need to introduce austerity.”1 But with the emergence of the Sunrise Movement in the US and the Justice Democrats taking up the mantle of the Green New Deal inspired by the work of the original Green New Deal thinkers, the time has now come for the UK environmental movement to organise again to try to bring this necessary progressive response to climate change into the mainstream.

There is much for the environmental movement to worry about. In the ten years since the original Green New Deal proposal, there has been no real progress on tackling climate change. In 2019, we are facing a period of huge uncertainty; on the horizon could be a no-deal Brexit, a financial crash or yet another general election. Yet this is also a period of our history where the opportunities for seismic shifts in public opinion are multiplying. A radical Green New Deal in the UK could be a positive and unifying answer to these crises as by its very nature, this proposal requires a whole-society approach. However, the reality is that a Green New Deal only stands a chance if it’s able to galvanise a broad-based movement that can create the political space for those in power to adopt it, and to build the resilience needed to prepare for the impacts of climate change that are now unavoidable, readying ourselves in unity to make the transition to a decarbonised economy.

It’s important to establish immediately that the Green New Deal cannot just be a campaign; it has to be a social movement. Though these terms are often used interchangeably, there is a significant difference. According to sociologist George Lakey, a campaign is “a subsidiary unit of a social movement, with a goal that furthers the goals of the movement, but which is ancillary.”2 Social movements are characterised by shared values, organised action, a direction for change – both short and long-term goals – and a degree of continuity.

A movement for a Green New Deal intersects with a number of existing movements, and that poses an interesting and exciting opportunity. A Green New Deal, some would say, finds its natural home in the climate change movement – after all, at its core is a solution to an oncoming ecological collapse. However, its aims are not purely environmental. Rather, it interrogates the underpinnings of our society, calling for a far-reaching programme for economic and social justice and requiring bold measures to build a fairer, more prosperous society. It’s an exercise that will have an impact on every part of our social and political culture. For that reason, it needs to be a shared vision which builds on and amplifies the work of many other social justice movements.

In considering the conditions that would allow a movement for a Green New Deal to flourish, we acknowledge the nuances, complexities and unpredictable nature of “movements.” The phrase itself conjures up a living, breathing and fluctuating organism. Something which is creative, organic and prone to change. Here we explore questions rather than give complete answers, in the hope of adding to the growing chorus of diverse voices this movement needs in order to become a powerful force for rapid change.

There are four common features of successful social movements that a Green New Deal would need to adopt to drive itself into mainstream political discourse and, eventually, policy change. In a world where this is happening, the Green New Deal movement would be multiplying and succeeding in the following areas:

1 — Galvanising popular support
2 — Building institutional backing and distributing those resources effectively
3 — Creating strategic and provocative interventions
4 — Amplifying the initial impact of those actions to create space for even more change to come.

We explore these features in more detail and ask how knowledge of other movements might help us build something which has the depth and breadth necessary to seismically shift “business as usual.”

— Galvanising popular support

Successful movements galvanise popular support and strategically organise the people they mobilise. The Green New Deal

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Fatima Zahra-Ibrahim and Hannah Martin (Green New Deal UK)
has been socialised at a rapid rate among campaigners, policy thinkers and the media to a certain extent but to build the kind of popular support that moves the Green New Deal from the echo chamber, and into the hearts and minds of people across the country, we will need to dream big, develop a core DNA and keep the movement open source.

Throughout time, radical visions have captured the imagination of the masses, inspiring hope that we can rethink the realms of possibility. Especially in times of deep dissatisfaction or threat, visions that match or exceed the scale of the problems faced have galvanised unstoppable forces in society and politics. When women had very few individual rights, the suffragettes rallied women across the country around the vision of equal suffrage. When Dr King gave his famous “I have a dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he spoke to a vision that outlived space and time. As movement builders, it’s our job to present ideas that move beyond our political and cultural reality. Big ideas mobilise – there will be moments for grounded strategy and pragmatism, but it shouldn’t be on the big vision. When JFK said “We choose to go to the Moon” it invoked a sense of destiny that reshaped American society to undertake the collective venture beyond what could ever seem possible. It’s this same spirit, both in big ideas and storytelling that is the foundation to movement building. In recent months the youth climate strikers and Extinction Rebellion have broadened the horizon when it comes to public engagement on climate change, drawing huge numbers to acts of civil disobedience – something previously believed to be too high a bar for mass engagement.

In order for this mass engagement to be truly radical, we must be movement lead and intersectional. While most organisers set out with the best of intentions, there’s always a risk that there will be a laissez-faire attitude to intersectionality, and even when good work is being done to make spaces more inclusive, the inevitable urgency of the issue forces it to be deprioritised. But without intersectionality, the movement for a Green New Deal will fail. No matter what external pressure we feel to move fast, making sure that we are centering the voices of those most impacted, and pushing for community-led solutions, needs to be a constant focus for the movement.

Intersectionality needs to be embedded into organising from the start; for example, impacted communities have to be engaged and consulted before policy is developed. Meaningful engagement is to co-create and build agency. In the US, Rhiana Gunn-Wright, who is coordinating the policy development for a Green New Deal has said that before they even begin to develop policy, there will be a democratic and participatory process engaging communities, and that they don’t expect to have any policy recommendations until 2020.

We know that there isn’t one agreed version of a Green New Deal and it would be unrealistic to say there ever will be. It’s not a prescribed policy, but a vision – different views on implementation will emerge, but to stop the movement from being divided by the specifics, and to encourage a “thousand flowers bloom” approach to campaigning, there needs to be core principles that bind the movement. The movement will need to allow some diversity to gain essential breadth, but it will also need to retain its radical identity – this can be done by identifying what the core of a Green New Deal is. We believe that if the Green New Deal is to fundamentally restructure our economy to deliver good jobs and a liveable future, the following should be core principles. These principles have been developed in consultation with many different parts of the environmental and climate justice movement in the UK. A radical Green New Deal must:

1 — Totally decarbonise the economy of the United Kingdom in a way that enhances the lives of ordinary people, workers and communities and works to eliminate social and economic inequality.

2 — Create millions of new well-paid, secure, unionised jobs across the country guaranteeing healthy and fulfilling livelihoods for all workers, and communities including those in today’s high emissions sectors.

3 — Transform our economy to place human and ecological wellbeing and prosperity at the centre; enable democratic participation, accountability and common ownership. Our economy must work in the interest of everyone, which means empowering those communities currently marginalised.

4 — Restore and restore vital habitats, such as carbon sinks, including forests and wild areas, and ensure the provision of clean water, air, green spaces and a healthy environment for all.

5 — Promote global justice by supporting all peoples and countries to decarbonise quickly and fairly, in line with timeframes set out by science, including through transfers of resources, finance and technology from historic emitters in the Global North to the Global South.

So now we have a big dream and core DNA to guide us, how can we build the open and accessible culture we will need to mainstream this vision? We believe in order for a Green New Deal to fly we must keep the movement open source. The open source philosophy originates from the computer software sector – the movement for open source software aims to free up source code and release it to be openly studied, changed and distributed. If there’s something wrong with the code, it encourages developers to find a fix and share it – that fix will then be incorporated into the source code for everyone to benefit from. This form of community cooperation has allowed for thousands of developers to work together to find solutions and innovate off the work of others. The Sunrise Movement has deployed a similar model to build a movement of 200+ Sunrise chapters for a Green New Deal across the country in just a few months. They developed clear guidelines or core principles that any action must uphold and without which is not a Sunrise action. This has allowed organisers across the country, inspired by the big idea to organise and set up local hubs and actions, enabling the Sunrise Movement to build power far beyond the means of their central organising effort.

The climate group 350.org also organised its Fossil Free campaign along similar lines. Their idea was simple: institutions needed to divest their money from fossil fuels to revoke the social license of extractive industries. They communicated a set of core principles around which the campaign was defined, and thousands of campaigns were set up around the world. The targets were diverse – universities, local councils, city pensions – and the tactics were too. The thing that bound these campaigns was that they shared the same idea and DNA. Organisers shared tactics, capitalised on each other’s wins, and all contributed to a shared narrative. This is the kind of organising that gives the Green New Deal its greatest hope. With a short timeframe and whole-society movement wanted, encouraging agency where it exists, and reducing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers to joining the movement is needed. Making resources and strategy open source too will only increase effectiveness.

— Building institutional backing & distributing resources effectively

When any new group or campaign is launched, how it integrates with the existing movement infrastructure of a place or sector is crucial. Union organisers know that mapping the existing power structures of a site of struggle must be done before an organiser can hope to insert their organising strategy into that space. In her description of successfully organising nurses across several private hospitals in Nevada, “Raising Expectations and Raising Hell,” infamously Jane McAlevey describes her approach to mapping with almost military precision. Similarly, we believe if a movement is to be successful it must be aware of the context within which it is operating. Everybody has a role to play in the movement ecology, but how successfully these roles might be executed will be in part due to how well they recog-
As well as a clever use of institutional support, most movements will reach a point where money is both offered and necessary. Movements which are wide ranging will always have a mixture of paid and unpaid work available and necessary. But too much of one, or too little of the other can be devastating and must be managed carefully. Questions must be asked of the organisations who are able to access and manage this money for whatever aspect of movement work it is being offered. Questions like: how will this money create accountability problems and also deliver a blow to the movement if they bow out. A regular source of funding is the only way to make sure movements are sustainable in the long run.

**Creating strategic, accessible and provocative campaign “moments”**

When Nancy Pelosi went to work on November 13th 2018 she probably wasn’t thinking about that day being the day when her lack of leadership on climate issues would be thrust into the spotlight by a young, passionate, diverse group of people calling for a Green New Deal. Direct action which is strategic, provocative and eye-catching does not replace organising and movement building, but it can provide the necessary highlights around which demands can be escalated into the mainstream. The Sunrise Movement did not occupy the Democratic leader’s office out of the blue. They had been building and training young leaders for months and it’s certainly true that a degree of serendipity occurred when rising star Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez chose to use the sit-in as a hallmark for her first day in office. However, nonetheless, this was a clever and well-timed action used to create a whirlwind of questions from the media and the Washington political elite. You can see a similar effect from the global movement of youth strikers. From Delhi to Doncaster, young people are forcing questions to be asked with bold, creative and provocative actions which are both easily replicable and courageous.

When we spoke to veteran activist of the anti-roads movement, Paul Morozzo about the role of these kinds of provocative actions they undertook to stop the building of a new programme of motorways in the nineties, he describes the anarchic and oppositional actions as one part of a much bigger and more nuanced movement:

Movements are different, at different times...a plurality of tactics is what works best. Nobody will give in to the activists who are doing damage to diggers, but eventually, people will become desperate to find a way of getting round the problem of mass resistance. This is where people can come in and put options on the table.

As Extinction Rebellion and the youth strikers have shown, regular activity which is disruptive can lead to the conversation being transformed in a matter of months. You can’t really have popular support for something which nobody is talking about. But what happens when the conversation dies down? This is where a cycle of regular and repeated “moments” of action will be required to show resilience, focus and tenacity in the face of the inevitable lack of concrete action from government.

Sisters Uncut activist Janey Starling described their number one lesson to attract people to take part in these “moments” was “to make it fun, and try as far as you can to make participants reflect society.” They, like many other direct action groups, tried to make many of their actions child-friendly in order to create an attractive and safe image that anybody could participate in:

_The aim was to get people to keep coming back to the movement, and bring friends with them. We did this by trying to make the movement feel like a community and a home: one where people feel connected to others, like they’re having a nice time, and like they’re part of something bigger than themselves. This is harder than it looks. Movements are often under a lot of pressure, and questions like who gets to lead, and how they are held accountable can cause divisions. This is why building a community is so important. People will tolerate difficulties if they feel part of something fulfilling and meaningful._

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**Amplifying and absorbing impact**

Seasoned campaigners and organisers are skilled in the strategy of building momentum, and using “moments” effectively to gain attention and to influence public opinion, and we’ve covered why this is so important. But we have to avoid completely externalising our movement’s sustenance to moments. It’s not a sustainable model of organising to solely rely on trigger moments because this false trajectory fails to recognise the long and slow work needed to win, creating a psychology of disempowerment and burnout. All movements go through ebbs and flows and our movement should create a habit of intentional periods of pause for a deeper reflection and amplifying success through grassroots organising. This is when the hard and rewarding work of movement building happens. Social movement theorist Bill Moyer addresses this in his “The Movement Action Plan”, calling on organisers to not lose sight of the grand theory of change.

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_“Attitude and effort: we can only be as effective as the grassroots groups that we work with and the leaders that we support.” — Janey Starling_
People power is the model used by social movements. The movement’s strategy is not only to use normal channels [trigger events] in an effort to persuade power holders ... to change their minds, but also to alert, educate, and mobilize a discontented, impassioned, and determined grassroots population using nonviolent means beyond the normal parliamentary methods institutions.

Having a system in place to take on huge numbers, and sustaining their commitment and energy, and turning it into leadership and organising capacity, is something that needs to be planned for. What the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion are doing in the months between big mobilisations is to go on nationwide tours — they have hosted town halls, spoken at universities and held mass trainings. In the case of Sunrise, they say that key to their growth has been the building of a strong training culture and reliance on volunteers. They maintain that staff don’t sustain movements; the folks doing the work do. To absorb new volunteers, you need to train them in the “DNA” of your movement (story, strategy, structure, principles) and then build in quality absorption plans so that you can follow up a big mobilisation or training with a clear plan of how to enable participants to take leadership in the movement. Taking moments to pause also provides an opportunity to amplify the stories of success, this will inspire others to join as well as giving those ready to take action an opportunity to hear about successful tactics and things they can replicate.

We will also have to create spaces for learning and reflection, a space filled with compassion where we can disagree productively. Key to this will be skilled facilitators and a depth of understanding about how to take attendees on a journey. As Janey Starling of Sisters Uncut explains:

Don’t let the urgency of the issue overshadow group relations and organising. You cannot underestimate the fragility of peoples’ energy and peoples’ commitment – all it takes is one serious knock-back on an action and that plus life takes over and before you know it going to a meeting is the last thing you want to do. There must be a constant acknowledgement and gratitude given for every single piece of labour that somebody has done – even if that person always buys the snacks, thank them, thank them, thank them.

— Conclusion
There are many things we haven’t covered here, and probably most importantly how a UK movement for a Green New Deal should sit within a global climate justice movement. We hope that those reading this chapter don’t see it as a guide or map, but instead just a few ideas that could help initiate a conversation on how we build a movement that drives a Green New Deal. What we’re trying to do, and the scale and time we’re trying to do it in is necessarily ambitious. It’s inevitable that we will get things wrong along the way, but if we can keep our movement healthy by centering justice and learning, any setbacks or missteps can only help us build resilience in the long run.

References
[3] Letters to the Editor, Times, 29 April 2019