

THE POLITICS OF THE GREEN NEW DEAL: CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Posts in this series.

The Green New Deal Challenges The Domination of
Capital

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The Conventional Wisdom is that the Green New Deal is worse than useless, it's dangerous. This essay by Jerry Taylor of the Niskanen Center lays out all the conventional analysis.

I worry, however, that despite all of the new energy you've unleashed on the political scene, you are setting your cause back, not moving it forward. Nothing about the seriousness of the threat we are facing changes the fact that politics is "the art of the possible," not exhortation for the impossible. Given that serious action on climate will have to come out of the institutions we have – not those we might wish for – the strategies and tactics you are pursuing through the Green New Deal amount to political malpractice. Moreover, the policy initiatives you're promoting are rightly difficult for political actors to swallow. As veteran Democratic operative

Stuart Eizenstat warned this month, "Speaking from experience, by demanding the moon, their proposals will crash on the launching pad and lead to nowhere good." [Link in original.](#)

Note the level of sadness Taylor expresses; some might call it concern trolling. The piece is long, but the basics are summed up in Taylor's subheads:

Wishing for Ponies

Attack of the Killer Watermelons

Magical Thinking Regarding Partisan Power

Your Plan B: The Long War

Get Over the Overton Window

If Not the Green New Deal, What?

Taylor admits that the problem is serious and that he contributed to political inaction, and then dismisses the Green New Deal as impossible. The last section lays out Taylor's ideas for doing a little bit toward solving the crisis: carbon pricing. He wants to use market mechanisms in some complex way to start reducing carbon emissions whenever that passes. I hardly need remind anyone that markets give all the power to people with money, and the more money, the more power. Market solutions automatically punish the working class who consume the product, especially those that lose their jobs as the economy changes; while benefiting those who control the markets. Taylor says tax revenues can be "rebated" to consumers to make them whole, which sounds pretty until you see that rebates come after consumers front the money, money large numbers of us don't have to spare. History says whatever that program is, it will be too little and too delayed and too easily short-changed and too easily ended. And obviously rebates do nothing for people who lose their jobs. And Taylor doesn't explain why passing some complex plan for carbon pricing is an easier project than the Green New Deal. Does he really think the forces of the fossil fuel industry will agree to major taxes on their wealth in the ground?

I argue in this series that the point of the Green New Deal is to insure that the burdens of climate change and our response to it are not shifted to the working class. Taylor acknowledges the concern but dismisses it:

Worse, your “it’s all related” argument validates and amplifies misplaced conservative objections to rapid decarbonization. For instance, you argue that a federal jobs guarantee and the like are critical because decarbonization will require immediate and massive transformation of the economy, necessitating federal action to ensure that radically transformed labor markets protect the well-being of millions of displaced workers. Conservative critics of climate action often make that same point in the course of arguing that the cost of decarbonization is staggeringly high.

Taylor assures us that the number of “displaced” workers will be “modest”. I hear echoes of Paul Krugman’s assurances that trade deals won’t cause job losses. Of course they do, and the jobs lost are the well-paying jobs. In exactly the same way, we can expect massive displacements, and the people hurt will have to pay the price of putting themselves in the right places, and too bad about the people who don’t have the money to move to wherever these supposed replacement jobs might be, and the older workers who cannot make the necessary changes to themselves to fit into the new jobs. Taylor is perfectly happy to stake your life on his market theory. The Green New Deal isn’t.

Taylor’s smug tone is infuriating. He hears your pain as the planet heats up, but really, we can’t do much and you are silly children for thinking we can anything that would actually work. Try for something attainable, and utterly ineffective against the inexorable force of climate change, it sure was a nice planet.

Taylor recommends that supporters of radical change to protect the planet learn from this essay in Politico by Stuart Eizenstat, a veteran of centrist Democrat politics. His title explains his thesis: *I've Seen Civil War Destroy the Democrats Before. We Can't Let it Happen Again*. Eizenstat fears the left. He starts in 1968, blaming Eugene McCarthy for Hubert Humphrey's loss to Richard Nixon.

But [Eugene] McCarthy failed to reconcile with his fellow Minnesotan and led his supporters back into the fold only after it was too late. Richard Nixon exploited the divisions in the party and the country and was elected by the thinnest of margins in November. His election led to an extension of the war Humphrey would have ended; during the next four years 21,000 more American soldiers were killed.

So it was those dirty hippies who lost the election for the Democrats. Then Eizenstat moves to the Reagan Carter election in 1980.

In 1980, Kennedy decided to challenge Carter from the left. The senator's liberal supporters gummed-up the 1980 convention with more than 50 minority floor amendments to the party's platform, demanding more and more spending and full-blown national health insurance. Kennedy lost, but the damage was done. His challenge irrevocably split the party.

And then Kennedy didn't campaign hard enough for Carter, so it's the left's fault Reagan won by an enormous margin.

In the two cases Eizenstat relies on, the left was right and leadership was wrong. The war in Viet Nam was immoral. Johnson withdrew from the election because he couldn't win the election. But the leadership of the Democratic Party

wanted more war. They are responsible for Humphrey's nomination and his subsequent defeat. (Side note: Eizenstat can bite my ass.)

In the case of Carter, national increased federal spending were the correct policy. The early Reagan years were a nightmare for working people brought on by Volcker's extraordinary interest rates, which caused massive unemployment and weakened the unions even just as Reagan and his band of pirates and thugs moved the nation into neoliberalism. Volcker was protecting the assets of the rich. No one lifted a finger for the working class.

Eizenstat doesn't mention HRC's loss, but it's the same thing. the leaders of the Democratic Party wanted her and not the changes Sanders demanded. The left was dismissed as impossible dreamers, and then blamed for her loss.

It's past time for leadership to realize that their policies are the problem. Here's an essay by Ed Kilgore in New York Magazine titled *A New Role for Democratic Centrists: Helping the Left Win*. Kilgore praises Clinton and Obama for holding back the worst of the increasingly "irresponsible and extremist Republican Party".
But

... their effort to revive progressivism by marrying it to market mechanisms – in part to secure business and moderate Republican support – never caught the public's imagination or secured bipartisan support. It instead became a vehicle for deregulation and speculative excesses that helped produce the financial crisis and the Great Recession, a hollowing-out of industries employing the non-college-educated, and the kind of growing income inequality that looked to be waning for a moment in the '90s. And even when this approach succeeded initially, as with the classic public-private structure of Obamacare, it conspicuously failed to inspire the sort of loyalty commanded by the

supposedly archaic and sclerotic public programs of the New Deal and the Great Society.

The conventional wisdom got us into this nightmare. It won't get us out.