

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



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GREEN NEW DEAL

Ricardo Coelho

The “COVID-19 crisis” exposed the weaknesses of an economy that maintains a destructive relationship with the environment. A combination of wildlife destruction, which paves the way for exposure to new viruses, and air transport trivialisation, which allows the rapid transmission of diseases between countries, is at the basis of a new zoonotic pandemic that has shaken health systems. We are now experiencing an unprecedented recession caused by conflicting and even destructive society-environment-economy interactions.

The response to the crisis cannot simply be a return to an unsustainable status quo marked by climate and ecological crises, profound social inequalities, systematic discrimination, and a world economic order marked by the privatisation and financialisation of common goods and unequal international trade. An economic recovery programme must therefore be based on principles of justice and environmental sustainability, its main priorities being public investment and regulation aimed at reducing environmental degradation and social inequalities while creating employment.

The Green New Deal concept first emerged during the 2007 financial crisis, when international and civil society organisations put forward proposals for an economic recovery to encourage “green” investments. Over the last few years, the idea was picked up and a resolution plan presented at the United States Congress, while the European Union approved a Green Deal.

Despite the fact that we are facing proposals with different levels of ambition and different geographical and political scopes, it is possible, based on a critical analysis, to outline a Green New Deal for Portugal and Europe. As a public investment and regulation programme aimed at a change of course, the Green New Deal should create decently paid employment and ensure employment protection for workers affected by the necessary industrial restructuring, directly benefiting the most socially vulnerable people. Taking environmental justice as its basic principle, it must ensure territorial cohesion and non-discrimination in the distribution of benefits. Going further, it should ensure that the greatest beneficiaries of environmental investment measures are those most affected by environmental degradation.

Deep changes of this kind will not be possible without rational economic planning. A Green New Deal should therefore be a first step towards reorganising economic activity, including the renationalisation of strategic sectors, the re-regulation of the industry sector and a reform of the financial system, with the ultimate goal of building an economy of care, respectful of people and nature and geared towards ensuring basic rights rather than the pursuit of profit.