

Climate justice and the social-ecological transition

By [Éloi Laurent](#)

There is something deeply reassuring about seeing the growing scale of climate markets in numerous countries around the globe. A section of the youth are becoming aware of the injustice they will suffer as a result of choices over which they do not (yet) have a say. But the recognition of this *inter*-generational inequality is running up against the wall of *intra*-generational inequality: it will not be possible to implement a real ecological transition without dealing with the social question here and now, and in particular the imperative to reduce inequality. In other words, the ecological transition will be social-ecological – or it will not be. This is the case in France, where the national ecological strategy, currently 90% ineffective, needs to be thoroughly overhauled, as proposed in the new [OFCE Policy Brief \(no. 52, 21 February 2019\)](#).

This is also true in the United States, where a new generation of red-green politicians is taking part in one of the most decisive political struggles in the country's history against the ecological obscurantism of a President who is a natural disaster in his own right. In a [concise text](#), which is remarkable for its precision, analytical clarity and political lucidity, the Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has just proposed a "Green New Deal" to her fellow citizens.

The title may seem ill-chosen: the "New Deal" carried out by Franklin Delano Roosevelt from 1933 was aimed at reviving an economy devastated by the Great Depression. But isn't the American economy flourishing today? If we rely on the economic indicators of the twentieth century (growth rate, finance, profit), there's no doubt. But if we go beyond appearances, we

can discern the recession in well-being that has been undermining the country for thirty years and which will only get worse with the ecological crisis (life expectancy is now structurally declining in the United States). Hence the first lever of the ecological transition: to break with growth and count on what really matters to improve people's well-being today and tomorrow.

The second lever: coordinating the approach to social realities and ecological challenges. The New Green Deal identifies as the root cause of America's malaise "systemic inequalities", both social and ecological. Accordingly, it intends to implement a "fair and equitable transition" that will benefit in priority "frontline and vulnerable communities", which one could call "ecological sentinels" (children, elderly people, the energy insecure). These are people who prefigure our common future if we allow the ecological crisis for which we bear responsibility to deteriorate further. It is this coordination between the social and ecological that lies at the heart of the proposal by several thousand economists to introduce "[carbon dividends](#)" (an idea [originally proposed by James Boyce](#), one of the world's leading specialists in the political economy of the environment).

Which brings us to the third lever: to gain citizens' interest instead of terrorizing them. In this respect, the [detailed report](#) published by the Data for Progress think tank deploys an extremely effective argumentative sequence: the new ecological deal is necessary to preserve humanity's well-being; it will create jobs, it is desired by the community of citizens, and it will reduce social inequalities; and the country has the financial means to implement it. It's concrete, coherent, convincing.

In 1933, Europe and France were half a century ahead of the United States in terms of the "new deal". It was in Europe and France that the institutions of social justice were invented,

developed and defended. It is in the United States that the social-ecological transition is being invented today. We should not wait too long to get hold of it.