
Book Review: *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth* by The Red Nation

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In the wake of a growing consensus about global warming and the imminent climate crisis, the “Green New Deal” (GND) is a catchphrase that has increasingly gained political traction in recent years. Defined broadly, GND proposals call for policies which address climate change while also targeting social and economic efforts like job creation, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy. Some critics of GND proposals claim these efforts do not go far enough. The Red Nation – a coalition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, students, academicians, and organizers – is one such group with an alternative and more radical vision for climate change and social justice. In their book *The Red Deal*, they set forth a liberatory political vision that calls for an end to capitalism, settler colonialism, and global imperialism. Across three major sections, the book argues for the abolition of these systems and the institutions which support them in favor of a vision of society that affirms common life – Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – and revitalizes relationships with land and the environment.

In the first major section, Red Nation’s objective is to demonstrate the necessity of eliminating the carceral regimes that support settler colonialism, global imperialism, and global capitalism through divestment and abolition. The interrelated institutions of the carceral system are the military, police, and prisons – or, as they call it, the military-prison industrial complex (MPIC). According to the Red Nation, the MPIC is in place, serving to protect the settler ruling class by maintaining control over stolen lands. Extensions of this carceral system consist of Child Protective Services, Customs and Border Protection, and Customs Enforcement. The Red Nation proposes that these systems of oppression are known for reflecting white supremacy and settler dominance. It is worth noting that the MPIC expands to the detention and deportation of immigrant people. The Red Nation calls for divestment as a strategy to dismantle these

systems of state violence that seek to steal people from their lands, place them in cages behind bars, and remove Indigenous children from their families and tribes. Further, the Red Nation implies that these racialized systems of incarceration are functioning as intended and cannot be reformed – and, thus, must be abolished. The abolishment of these carceral systems is a key aspect of the Red Deal.

Mindful of the broad implications of settler colonialism and capitalism, the Red Nation aptly identifies other sites of struggle which must be divested from as well. For example, they call for an end to violence in bordertowns. As The Red Nation posits, “Bordertowns emerged from the dispossession, relocation, and ethnic cleansing of Indigenous people” (2021:51). These towns – highly populated by Indigenous people, yet surveilled and policed as settler-controlled spaces – function as sites of capitalist exploitation of Indigenous bodies, land, and labor. These extractive spaces have also been significant sites of violence for Indigenous women, trans, and non-binary individuals. The Red Nation elaborates, “A common form of violence inflicted upon Indigenous people is ‘Indian rolling’ or the targeted assault, torture, and murder of Native People” (2021:53). As such, the Red Nation asserts a need for the extension and enforcement of treaty rights in these off-reservation sites. Furthermore, the Red Nation calls for an end to US occupation of Indigenous lands globally. Just as Indigenous colonization and genocide of the past (and present) has served as a measure of ensuring US economic and political dominance, contemporary US foreign interventions, wars, and occupations across the globe serve to assure continued capitalist dominance. Thus, they assert that movements and campaigns must embrace anti-imperialism as a necessary tenet of change.

Equally important is their call to abolish nation-state borders. Much like global imperialist occupation, they point out that borders serve to segregate, surveil, exploit, criminalize, and overall aid in enforcing the agendas of nation-states – particularly in the Global North. In an especially effective example, the Red Nation refers to the Kumeyaay and Tohono O’odham Nations, whose lands are divided by the US/Mexico border, demonstrating how state borders are in direct opposition to Indigenous

sovereignty and self-determination. They end this chapter of the book by stating, “No one is illegal on stolen ground,” which is perhaps one of the best summations of this contradiction.

Divestment and abolition of these carceral institutions and arms of the state is only one part of what the authors of the Red Nation call for. As they argue in the second major section, divested money and resources from these institutions can and should be reinvested into collectively healing our bodies. As the authors (2021:7) tactfully point out, capitalism, imperialism, and settler colonialism have incapacitated Indigenous peoples (along with many others outside of the ruling class) ability to develop and thrive according to their own “needs, principles, and values.” Furthermore, they point out the United States’ enforcement of global austerity programs, economic sanctions, free trade agreements which favor large corporations in the Global North, and the burning of fossil fuel as contributors to the international displacement and forced migration of Indigenous peoples.

In light of these disparities, they point out a number of possible paths forward. For example, they propose extending citizenship rights to all migrants – especially climate migrants – affected by the fallout of US global imperialism. They also suggest universalizing access to a wide range of resources that fulfill basic human rights. These include free, sustainable, and accessible housing, education, healthcare, and transportation/infrastructure. They also stress the need for access to healthy and sustainable food. Under a capitalist system, food is a commodity, which further drives class inequalities. For Indigenous peoples, this has - in part - translated to an inability to grow their own food and left them with dependence on processed junk foods. Here, they suggest building food sovereignty movements which reestablish relationships with the land, collective efforts such as cooperative gardens and seed banks, and community organizations to feed people. These recommendations call for and encourage self-determination, collectivity over commodification, and access to resources that benefit *all*.

In the final section, the Red Nation makes the case for reinvesting in our common future to heal the planet. The Red Nation argues that healing the planet is not possible without Indigenous liberation and decolonization of our atmosphere. The

future of our ecosystem is dependent on the transition from exploitative extraction or, in better words, extractive capitalism to renewable extraction led by Indigenous people creating clean, sustainable energy. The extraction of minerals for Lithium-ion batteries, which power solar panel systems and sustain renewable energy, may be viewed as a form of renewable extraction. The Red Nation emphasizes this transition cannot be led by anyone other than Indigenous peoples because they are not profit-driven and are not motivated by green capitalism; they are simply attempting to rekindle their relationship with the land, which they consider a relative. Therefore, Indigenous people demand mass land return so they can begin the cleansing of the Earth. This follows with a call to decriminalize all water protectors and land defenders. As part of the process of transitioning to renewable extraction, the Red Nation acknowledges the need to pay reparations to those the US has exploited in the past. We must consider that the US has created the most carbon gas emissions in the world and thus owes what the Red Nation refers to as a “climate debt.” Land, water, and air restoration – polluted and poisoned by capitalist endeavors – will take years to restore. With Indigenous peoples leading this restoration through mass land return, the Red Nation proposes reliance on hydroponics and aquaponics for subsistence. This ultimately means that food will be grown indoors, without groundwater, and not in soil - while the lands are being restored. Biodiversity thrives in areas where Indigenous people are free to caretake land. Humans are not separate from the Earth; the Red Nation believes we are all interdependent and related. Who better to restore our ecosystem than its relatives who view the Earth as sacred?

The Red Nation’s call to action is a call to all of humanity – not just Indigenous peoples. According to their ideology, every human on this Earth is a relative and should act accordingly. This call depends on an anti-capitalistic, anti-imperialistic, and decolonial transition that would ultimately benefit our ecosystem. References to this transition include abolishing borders, carceral systems, and their extensions, providing universalized access to resources, paying reparations and climate debts to those countries of the global north exploits, and mass land return so that Indigenous people can begin the restoration of the Earth. As a call

to action, the *Red Deal* is incredibly comprehensive and covers numerous dimensions and sites of struggle. Whether a scholar, activist, policy maker, or simply interested in changing the world for the better, we highly recommend this book. Although the incredible breadth of the book can occasionally make disseminating information difficult, it is incredibly inclusive as it calls for action from all of those who inhabit the Earth. Despite its shortcomings, this book serves as a vital warning and reminder that “it’s decolonization or extinction” (The Red Nation 2021:7).

REFERENCES

The Red Nation. 2021. *The Red Nation*. Brooklyn, New York. Common Notions Press.

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