

A “WELLBEING ECONOMY” MUST EMERGE FROM COVID-19

Yesterday, 26 March, climate litigation charity Plan B gathered together over 100 members of the British media, many of them leading figures in print and broadcast journalism, for a panel discussion on responding to the climate and ecological emergency in the context of Covid-19.

The panel included former Chief Scientific Advisor to the Government, **Sir David King**, professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London, **Sir Michael Marmot**, co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, **Dr Gail Bradbrook**, **Professor Kevin Anderson**, **Professor Sam Fankhauser** and **Dr Jason Hickel**. [1]

There was broad consensus from the panel that, without major shifts to the world’s economic orientation, the world is heading for a three to four degree rise in global temperatures in the course of this century, placing not just millions but billions of human lives at risk. “Humanity stands at a crossroads” it was said: governments must resist the opportunity to bail out “business-as-usual” and should make human health and wellbeing central to economic policy. A breakdown of the implications of a ‘four degree world’ can be found in the notes to editors. [1]

Quotes from the panel discussion

Former Special Representative for Climate Change and Chief Scientific Advisor to the Government, **Sir David King**, when asked whether groups like Extinction Rebellion were exaggerating the climate emergency responded:

“I think the climate emergency is much more serious than people think.”

In a discussion about the role of technology in addressing the climate and ecological crisis the former Chief Scientific Advisor to the government warned that “carbon capture and storage is a fig leaf for the fossil fuel industry if we are not careful.” **Professor Kevin Anderson**, chair of energy and climate change at the School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering (MACE) at the University of Manchester, added that “there is already a reliance on technologies that do not exist, which is already being used an excuse for inaction on difficult issues today.”

In response to a question on the potential ecological and environmental benefits of the Covid-19 pandemic, **Dr Jason Hickel**, lecturer in economic anthropology at Goldsmiths University and member of the advisory board of the Green New Deal for Europe, said:

“When you do scale down energy use and industrial production then it does have these ecological benefits but the crucial thing to observe here is that this is happening in an

unplanned, chaotic way which is hurting peoples' lives. We would never advocate for such a thing in climate policy.

“What we need is a planned approach to reducing unnecessary industrial activity that has no connection to human welfare and that also disproportionately benefits already wealthy people as opposed to ordinary people. So, there are much more equitable, just, and carefully planned ways to approach this kind of problem than what is happening now.”

Discussing how the UK can recover from the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and make the necessary changes to address the climate and ecological emergency, **Professor Kevin Anderson**, said:

“Ten to 20 percent of the houses [in the UK] are in fuel poverty. We should be retrofitting all of the 25 million houses in the UK so they are fit for the 21st and the 22nd century - that is a massive employment agenda, and we eliminate fuel poverty. We need to be moving away from private transport and have really good quality public transport which poorer people in our society already have to use, but it's low quality public transport - so that's great public transport for large swathes of our society. We have to electrify much of our energy system, at the moment 80 per cent of our energy system is not electricity, and we need to make much more of that electrical, and much more efficient - now that's really good job prospects that help many people around our society.”

“We also need to make sure that these jobs are well paid, which means people like me as professors need to take a large cut in our salary and there is nothing wrong with that. We need to re-adjust where we hand out the resources in our society, and if COVID-19 tells us anything it tells us that a care worker, or a nurse, is worth at least as much as a merchant banker.”

On the same topic, **Professor Sam Fankhauser**, co-director of the Grantham Research Institute and former Deputy Chief economist at the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, said:

“As we move into rebuilding the economy we can pay attention to the carbon intensity of the stimulus packages that we have, and there are a lot of things that need to happen in a low carbon or zero carbon economy that are consistent with a rapid boost to the economy.

“The three tests that economists use for a good stimulus is that they have to be timely, targeted and temporary. There are a lot of climate change measures that fall into that category so we can have a low carbon recovery, I think that's absolutely possible.”

Co-founder of Extinction Rebellion, **Dr Gail Bradbrook**, said:

“I think the hidden conversation in the climate and ecological crisis is that it’s somehow seen as a division between more left wing thinking and more right wing thinking. In reality when you have existential threats you have to put down your ideologies, see what change is needed and take the best ideas from everybody.”

Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London and chair of the World Health Organisation’s Commission on Social Determinants of Health, **Sir Michael Marmot**, said:

“What the Covid crisis exposes is that we can do things differently. We must not go back to the status quo, we cannot do that.”

“So what I would like to see, and we are seeing it at some regional levels within the UK, as well as some other countries, is putting the likely impact on health equity at the heart of all policymaking. That would lead to better environmental policy, it would lead to better social policy, it would lead to better healthcare policy and better political policies.

“I’d like to see a wellbeing economy emerge from this crisis.”

For more information, contact Plan B at media@planb.earth or call +44 7740 647023

#ledbythescience

Notes to editors

[1] The full panel was as follows:

Host:

Jennifer Nadel, Barrister, author and co-founder of Compassion in Politics.

Panel:

Professor Kevin Anderson, chair of energy and climate change at the School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering (MACE) at the University of Manchester.

Dr Gail Bradbrook, Co-founder, Extinction Rebellion.

Professor Sam Fankhauser, co-director of the Grantham Research Institute and former Deputy Chief economist at the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

Dr Jason Hickel, Economic Anthropologist, Goldsmiths University.

Sir David King, former Special Representative for Climate Change and Chief Scientific Advisor to the Government.

Sir Michael Marmot, professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London and chair of the World Health Organisation's Commission on Social Determinants of Health.

[2] What would 4°C warming mean?

[According to the UK Committee on Climate Change, October 2008](#)

"The Committee's judgement, on the basis of the IPCC AR4 report, is that ... if a 4°C rise were reached, extreme consequences potentially beyond our ability to adapt would arise. We therefore believe that global policy ... should ensure that the probability of crossing the extreme danger threshold of 4°C is reduced to an extremely low level (e.g. less than 1%)."

According to [Professor Kevin Anderson](#), Tyndall Centre:

"there is a widespread view that 4°C is:

- *incompatible with an organised global community*
- *beyond 'adaptation'*
- *devastating to eco-systems*
- *highly unlikely to be stable (tipping points, etc.)*

and consequently, 4°C should be avoided at 'all' costs."

According to [Professor Jonas Rockstrom](#), as set out in his interview with the [Guardian in May 2019](#):

"Indeed, the consequences of a 4C warmer world are so terrifying that most scientists would rather not contemplate them, let alone work out a survival strategy.

Rockström doesn't like our chances. "It's difficult to see how we could accommodate eight billion people or even half of that," he says. "There will be a rich minority of people who survive with modern lifestyles, no doubt, but it will be a turbulent, conflict-ridden world."

What's the probability of crossing 4°C?

According to [Sir David King](#), the Government's former Chief Scientist:

"A temperature rise of 4.0 degrees C would give rise to unmanageable risks, and yet this is the most likely outcome by 2100 unless appropriate global action is taken."

According to last full IPCC report, AR5, from 2014:

*"In most scenarios without additional mitigation efforts ... warming is **more likely than not** to exceed 4 degrees C above pre-industrial levels by 2100."* [Summary for Policy Makers, s.3.2, p.18]

What's required for compliance with the Paris Agreement?

See <https://www.nature.com/news/three-years-to-safeguard-our-climate-1.22201>

If global emissions start rapidly falling in 2020, the world will have twenty years to decarbonise. But if action is delayed until 2025, that period will reduce to ten.

