

# April Theses with 2020 Vision

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*Editors' Note: This ecosocialist manifesto was drafted by Quincy Saul while under lockdown in South Africa in April 2020. Its title and structure borrow from V. I. Lenin's famous 10-point message to the Bolsheviks in 1917, on their strategy and goals for the Russian revolution; but with a transformed programme and audience. It is a global analysis and call to action, in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, exhorting us to grab and pull the emergency brake on the ongoing planetary ecocide. First published by the US-based political newsletter counterpunch.org (<https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/04/10/april-theses-with-2020-vision/>), we are grateful for permission to disseminate it in Sri Lanka.*

**W**elcome to the crisis which is not yet a catastrophe, to the pandemic which is not yet a plague, to the real which is not yet a desert.

We are captive in a contest between clarity and confusion. The crisis strips the emperor of his clothes and reveals with sudden clarity the way the world works and the way it doesn't. But simultaneously we are thrown into a confusion both vast and intimate. Are we safe or at risk? Which statistics can we trust? Is the border open or closed? Is the state a friend or an enemy? Is civilisation ending, or just beginning?

The answers to these questions are springing to life all around the world. My goal here is to recognise and record them, and plot their probable trajectory into the future. While this may be foolhardy, I believe that the greater risk is to abdicate responsibility for the creative process of imagining a real route to the redemption of humanity and the salvation of Mother Earth. Indecisiveness brings us closer to the brink, and a failure of analytical nerve, when the future hangs in the balance, could have world historic consequences.

I am locked down in Africa, with a history in the Americas and a future in Asia. This has placed me in an information crossfire; a position in which to attempt a synthesis of the political tectonics which are reshuffling continents. My purpose is to leverage my stranded subjectivity to summon a vision of the unfolding and unravelling opportunity for world revolution, which might then be debated — embraced or adapted, rejected or radicalised — at the local level. What follows are prompts and premises, not impositions or dictates;

designed to rescue clarity from confusion, and revelation from apocalypse: April theses with 2020 vision.

1) This crisis is the crucible in which we will forge the post-capitalist order. We may be in isolation now, but haven't we been alienated all this time? Now isolation is shared. And we will step out of this isolation together, into a new model of local and global civilisation. The question is, which one? The foundations are fluid now, but they will set like concrete. To go back to normal is ecosystemic suicide. This may be our last chance to make real choices, for better or worse. Technocracy or earth democracy? Mutual aid or feudalism? Global apartheid or world revolution? 1.5 degrees, or 6 degrees Celsius average global warming? Smog or sunshine? Ecosocialism or extinction? Common sense is up for grabs, along with the global climate, along with the destiny of future generations.

2) Just as the empire's nakedness is revealed, so too is its antidote and antithesis. All over the world from the grassroots to the governments, the long-awaited solutions are appearing; practical examples of what Brecht praised as "the simplest thing so hard to achieve" (Brecht 2011). Disaster communism, some call it — it's the only kind there ever was. Big questions are being answered by people's movements, in their successes and their failures, as they scale up from local damage control to regional revolution and beyond. There are devils and angels in the details. But the big picture is our choice between a new mode of production and the common ruin of the contending classes; between life and death. Our struggle is for humanity, not only as a species but as an ideal we aim for. Our struggle is to restore the

balance our ancestors shared with the Great Mystery of Mother Earth and Father Cosmos. This is the epic mission our generation will fulfil or betray.

3) The resolution of the world crisis hinges upon the emergence of ecosocialist leadership. This leadership is to be measured not by the colours of its theory but by the contents of its practice – freely associated labour with eco-centric ethics. Self-identified ecosocialists are currently a tiny minority — this is the legacy of a left that is its own worst enemy; either at war with itself or part of a suicidal status quo. But with persuasion and by example, this situation can be turned on its head. The 99% is really the 99%; our minority at present is the optical illusion of our sectarianism. We must stop fighting for the scraps of the minority (ie, greening the reds, redding the greens, etc), but, as the old song suggests, keep our eyes on the prize and hold on. Mass movements struggling for and prefiguring water and food sovereignty, for instance, are already ecosocialist in spirit if not yet in word. Patient mass communication today and persistent mass action tomorrow can lead us to the tipping point. Today cyberspace, tomorrow the streets. We must systematically prepare to leap ahead of the curve or face forever the consequences of our irrelevance. Ecosocialist leadership must coalesce and culminate from the bottom up; it must be grounded in the grassroots, but it cannot afford to leave state power in the hands of finance capital or the military.

4) The threshold we are crossing requires an overdue transformation of our tactics. The era of noble but ineffective protests is ended, perforce. Since their apogee in 2003, when the world showed its numbers against a war on the cradle of civilisation, and the empire didn't blink, these tactics have been more or less futile on the stage of history. Protests imply faith in the antagonist. This faith was misplaced and it must be restored to the creativity of the poor. The next era of struggle will be determined by diverse forms of prefiguration, and by equally diverse forms of mass decentralised non-cooperation. Now, in lockdown, is the time to seal and celebrate the unity of struggles at the workplace and in the home. Now is the time to experience the love and hope that only beloved communities can inspire. Now is the time to plan to disrupt the selfishness of the elite. Public health will be invoked for reaction, and we will have to convoke it for revolution, for this pandemic is a symptom of the greater plague which is the war on nature, on women, on the poor. Many will attempt to use this crisis as a brake on our struggles; we must retool it as a turbocharge. We must mutate as fast as the virus.

5) Our task is not to introduce ecosocialism, but to bring the production of ecosystems and the distribution of essential goods and services under the control of freely associated workers. The many-gated path from mutual aid to dual power will traverse the nation-state very differently in different places. There is no universal strategy that will apply in Mexico and Venezuela, India and Sri Lanka, South Africa and Egypt, the United States and the European Union. But vision may be shared. Some governments will enact changes from above; other peoples will embody changes from below. Socialistic concessions from capitalist states may be initially celebrated. But it is an impossible illusion to hope that capitalist states may become socialist if only we demand it. Organisational methods to out-administer and abolish capitalist states must evolve cumulatively from communities to communes to continental congresses. Only the community can save us tonight, and only the commons will be able to save us tomorrow. The commune — the political reflection of the commons — is revealed by this crisis as the only possible form of government. Overthrowing this or that regime is of little consequence compared to the truly historic imaginative task of building a people's government, sensitive to both its history and its future, to its particular and universal mandates, to its local and geopolitical contexts.

6) Representative social democracy as we know it is dead. It has been revealed not only as a cover for neo-colonial corporate looting, but now also as incapable of protecting the health of its citizens. First it was hollowed out by privatisation and protracted states of exception. Then aspiring fascists were elected, as a result of media monopolies from above and a blind revolt against liberal modernity from below. Now autocrats and single party states are filling the vacuum of governance and moral authority. The incompetent leadership of liberal democracies is on display, and this has paved the way for the masterminds of massacres to be celebrated as messiahs. There is no time to hesitate upon this threshold. Plaintive appeals to be more caring and less racist are no match for national security states and military rule. We must either leap into a new political order, or submit to those willing to preserve this one at any cost. The expropriators of air, water, food, shelter, energy, and health — must be expropriated. We call for the only form of government capable of doing this — a dictatorship of the precariat, of the climate refugees, of the mutual aid collectives, of the nurses and caregivers. This dictatorship can rule by love and not by fear. It can guarantee every civil liberty better than

bourgeois democracy ever could, by abolishing private property over public goods and services. Its mandate and its checks and balances can be measured by the preservation of life on earth; that every decision account for the needs of unborn generations; by fidelity to the rights of Mother Earth.

7) We are on the crossroads of world war, just when global cooperation is most necessary. World peace and nonviolence may be our revolutionary cause and catechism. But the masters of war have dragged us to this threshold which we cannot ignore. The murderous elite is already using the pandemic as pretext to expand their power. So the next world war will be between states but mostly within states; a global class war on the sick and starving masses. For hundreds of millions of people, the order to stay home is a declaration of this class war. This war is kick-started started by consumers who hoard basic necessities, resulting in desperation and eventual death for the poor. It is reinforced by the police and military, who protect and serve the rights of property at gunpoint over the right to life. Class wars will culminate into civil wars, which will, in turn, lead into and overlap with imperialist wars — these will be started both to restore falling rates of profit and to confuse and re-channel revolts from within. Peace may prevail in some places. In the others, the torturous task will be to transform the imperialist wars into people's climate wars. No military, however powerful, can win a protracted war on multiple fronts. The slim possibility of victory, which must traverse vast imponderable variables, depends on the degree of tactical preparation, strategic coordination, and ideological cohesion, across bioregions and countries and continents.

8) Now is the time to call for assemblies and congresses at every level, and to prepare for organisational and ideological struggle. From neighbourhood associations to parties to networks to governments to international institutions, the consent of the governed is up for grabs. Assemblies at every scale, convoked to codify the emerging political order, will be the terrain upon which ideologies and organisational forms will struggle for juridical, legislative, executive, cultural, economic, and spiritual common sense. Regional outcomes will culminate nationally, and national outcomes will culminate internationally. Bold innovation is required for geopolitics in a period of de-globalisation. (We witness a return of the politics of delinking at the level of virology, in which those countries with the greatest links to the centres of money and power are the most vulnerable.) Borders will be bent and sometimes

broken. The transformation of nation-states will eventually necessitate the long overdue re-foundation of the United Nations. Its organisational form will be determined by the preliminary outcomes of the ideological and organisational struggles happening at the national level.

9) International solidarity has been in hospice — now it must be reborn. A tragicomedy: France offered \$20 million for Mother Earth in the Amazon, and received \$1 billion for Notre Dame in Paris. Yet with every passing hour there is a clearer basis and mandate for revolutionary international solidarity. Lenin concluded his April Theses over a century ago with a call for a new International. We already have one — the First Ecosocialist International — and its mandate is to reweave Pangaea. Anyone can join. Its program suggests an orientation for our short-term struggle:

We will create medical militias, made up of contingents of traditional healers, midwives, nurses, community doctors, and conuqueros; the wise, the old, People's Teachers, shamans, people who are Living Books, etc, who thread together knowledges and practices that promote the self-management of medicine in our communities.... This practice will be based on ancestral cosmovisions such as indigenous, traditional Chinese, and Ayurvedic medicine, where we recognise and take responsibility for the sacred and indivisible links between life-giving seeds, foods and medicines. We will build this practice through alliances among the diverse organisations struggling for the self-management of health, and connections between those who sustain life in all the cardinal points of our planet (The First Ecosocialist International 2017).

Its program connects short term tactics to long term vision — indeed, it is a 500 year plan, starting now. Its mission is to coordinate the exodus from capitalist modernity, from its doomed coastlines and unlivable cities. "The best way to be part of the First Ecosocialist International is to commit yourself to fulfilling one or more of the actions in this Combined Strategy and Plan of Action" (The First Ecosocialist International 2017).

10) All over the world, brilliant and buoyant demands are rising up to reclaim humanity's birthright. These demands were unimaginable a month ago, and at this rate may seem too conservative in months to come. They are not cooked up in ivory towers but emerge from the working class genius long repressed by ruling class history and now freed by crisis into

the collective imagination. The purpose of these demands must be clear: not to inspire faith or trust in governments — the vast majority of which cannot or will not answer them — but to ratify the requirements for life on earth; to clarify our own commitments; to define the boundaries beyond which we will not compromise. Some may be won as concessions from above. Others will be built and defended from below. They are the contours of a revolutionary social covenant, to be shared and debated in assembly. Our task is to stay tuned to these demands as they continue to emerge, and thus strive to stay as radical as reality itself. Different organisations and movements must adapt them according to their unique contexts into transitional programs. In the meantime, read this open list of demands, compiled over the last few weeks from countless movements and manifestos, not as “a state of affairs to be established [or] an idea to which reality [will] have to adjust itself,” but as a measure of “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things” (Marx and Engels 1845).

## DEMANDS AS RADICAL AS REALITY

### Finance

- Jubilee! Cancel all debts
- Universal basic income, weighted by need
- Consolidate all private banks into one national bank
- Tax on excess profits
- Income cap: no more billionaires
- Repatriate offshore accounts
- Financial trading tax
- Participatory budgeting; open the books at state and local levels
- Reparations for genocide, slavery, and colonialism
- Convene open forum on new currencies, local, regional and national

### Basic Needs: Water, Food, Shelter, Energy, Communication

- Nationalise all privately owned water systems
- Free basic water ration for all based on need

- Distribution of water rations to regions without it for human need
- Ration guaranteed food income for all by household
- Subsidies and price caps on food
- Strict penalties for hoarding of essential goods
- Expropriate empty buildings and unused land for public use
- Moratorium on all evictions, indefinite suspension of rent
- Ration free energy; electricity and gas
- The right to communication for all: guaranteed access to free news, data, and software; requisition excess phones and computers for shared public use under community control

### Public Health

- Nationalise all private hospitals
- Nationalise sanitation workers with hazard pay and benefits
- Nationalise pharmaceutical companies; restart research, development and production for human needs
- Free basic healthcare for all
- Supercharge free medical testing
- Fund community health centres
- Mass trainings and deputisation of domestic violence first responders at community level, separate from police; open hotlines and begin community surveys
- Emergency shelter or relocation system for women and children suffering abuse
- Ensure access to reproductive health needs from menstrual products to contraception and abortion, especially for those in rural areas or those unable to leave home
- Lift all intellectual property rights in medicine
- Share all scientific research on public open database
- Train and deputise community healthcare workers as permanent employees
- Respect sovereignty of indigenous nations –

demarcation of borders and right to no-contact

## Security

- Peace! Immediate planetary ceasefire.
- Withdraw all military troops deployed abroad
- Redeploy military for emergency relief
- Redirect all military budget not allocated for emergency needs to medicine (including training and research and development)
- Pair military with medical workers for emergency teams; military logistics with medical leadership
- Redeploy military personnel and assets for essential infrastructure needs
- Moratorium on all war games
- Dismantle all nuclear weapons
- Police: no more arrests for nonviolent offenses; protect and serve the elderly and vulnerable
- Deputise mutual aid collectives and mental health workers
- Prisons and detention centres: release all convicted of nonviolent crimes, all on cash bail, all probation detainees, all convicted of technical or misdemeanour offenses
- Essential emergency community service work and associated vocational training to replace incarceration
- Stop deportations
- Expropriate weapons manufacturers and redistribute or retool for medical needs
- Moratorium on arms trade
- End the war on drugs; legalise, regulate, and tax
- Deputise agroecological teams to jumpstart transition from production of cash crops for export to production of food, bioremediation, beekeeping, etc.
- Redistribution of fallow lands
- Distribution of government surplus grain stocks
- Expropriation and redistribution of land owned by agribusiness for sustainable food production for human needs
- Phase out all monocultures larger than 1 hectare
- Local government buys directly from small farmers and distributes wholesale
- Immediate closure of wet markets
- Phased closure of factory farms to begin immediately
- Import substitution industrialisation
- 100 million climate jobs!
- Solar panels for every home
- Planned employment for the unemployed in essential public infrastructure
- Nationalise and expand public transport systems
- Hazard pay for all essential workers
- Expand collective bargaining rights to cover all workers in their industry regardless of employer
- Paid domestic work in excess of universal basic income
- Paid childcare and eldercare in excess of universal basic income
- Nationalise private monopolies which provide essential services (ie, Amazon, Google, etc)
- Mass education to encourage regional barter systems for basic needs and services
- No to closure of workplaces – nationalise bankrupt businesses and promote worker owned cooperative management

## Production and Economic Planning

- Retool all available factories for emergency medical needs
- Retool all available factories for climate mitigation and adaptation infrastructure.
- Retool all available factories for sustainable energy technology production
- Mass educational campaign and subsidies for worker owned cooperatives

## Education

- Education for all! Close all schools, coordinate vocational apprenticeships, free online courses for all, no more standardised testing

- Public radio and TV used for public education for those without internet access
- Mass public education campaigns in all languages to promote basic public health and safety, also to promote equity in domestic labour
- Guaranteed lunch distribution for children enrolled in school
- Mass training of unemployed youth in water, energy, construction, and food systems
- Re-found the World Health Organisation
- Expropriate the IMF, World Bank and WTO and put at service of UN
- Nationalise airlines, regulate and subsidise airfare for essential travel
- Convert ocean freighters for passenger travel
- Lift all sanctions and trade embargoes and blockades

## Environment

- Immediate moratorium on logging
- Expand wildlife parks, deputising and paying surrounding communities as park guards
- Re-regulate polluting industries
- Install air and water quality monitors under community control
- Ban advertising
- Ban single use disposable plastics and packaging

## International

- Re-found the United Nations without the security council
- Re-found the Non Aligned Movement, including seats for social movements

*(These ideas are collected from around the world but have converged for me in the context of South Africa, where all the world's contradictions culminate in acute clarity. With thanks to all the participants in the Left Dialog Forum and the Climate Justice Activist School — convened by COPAC at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg — whose exemplary praxis is hopefully reflected here. This document also received substantial constructive criticism from a network of wiser friends from three continents. Because many do not agree with all my conclusions, I will not list their names. Blame for the bad ideas can be placed on me, but insights hopefully can be shared by all. From Azania with love!)*

## Notes

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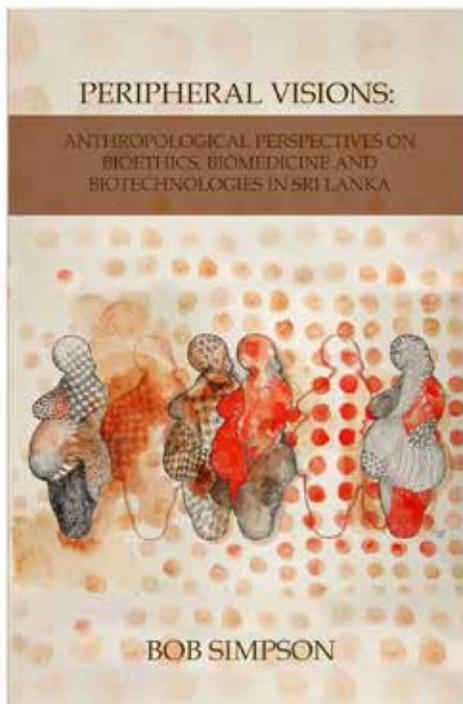
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