



BLOG

Launching a new era of pro-nuclear environmentalism

Zion Lights · 17 September 2020

In this guest blog, **Zion Lights**, an environmental campaigner and founder of Nuclear for Net Zero, explains why she has become a passionate advocate for nuclear power, why Sizewell C needs to be built and how they have taken their protests to the beach.



I've been an active environmentalist for most of my life. Over the years I've written and spoken publicly about climate change, authored a book on how to lower your carbon footprint using evidence, joined various green groups and founded some myself, attended and organised protests, and engaged in non-violent civil disobedience (also known as direct action).

For many years I've also felt that something was missing from the environmental movement: my love of science has simply never fit in there, alongside my concern for those living in poverty in the Global South, where my parents are from.

You might wonder why this is relevant, so I'll explain without too much detail that current environmentalism is strongly tied into the idea of degrowth, which means reducing what we produce and consume. I'm not against that in principle, but I've realised that it's impractical for the following reasons.

One, I have a fairly low carbon footprint, as I have never learned to drive and don't fly, or eat meat, etc. However, this is a difficult lifestyle to lead, and I wouldn't expect most people to want to do it (or be able to).

From an evolutionary perspective, humans have always valued convenience and progress, so expecting them to do the opposite is unlikely. Which brings me to point **two**: decades of research in behavioural psychology has not discovered how to make people act differently.

Three, that means that in order to bring down emissions this way, it would have to be done by force, i.e. in an authoritarian manner. For example, in the future, our carbon footprints might be restricted and policed. This may sound extreme but it's also the logical endgame scenario, for if we don't bring down emissions in the next few decades – they will have to come down at some point, one way or another. Eco-fascism is a potential scenario which concerns me greatly.

Four, the Global South doesn't want to be kept in poverty: people in those countries mostly want development, infrastructure and the high quality of life that those things bring – just like we enjoy. Therefore, degrowth doesn't apply to them at all: what we need to consider instead is how to encourage 'clean growth'.



Zion Lights

Why nuclear fits the bill

This is where nuclear comes in. Countries need to develop require vast amounts of clean energy, and only nuclear fits the bill.

Perhaps while nuclear is being built they will use more fossil fuels. That may be bad for the environment, but can we really deny them the infrastructure and resulting safety that we gained through doing the same thing?

It seems to me that there's a strong case here for the more developed countries to get to net zero as soon as possible, to allow other countries to continue to develop.

It's possible for us to make a clean energy transition, and it's really only unfounded fears around nuclear that are holding us back, which is what I've been working on trying to shift.

I used to be anti-nuclear, but changed my mind when I read vast amounts of research on the issue, unaware at the time that this was an unusual or exceptional thing to do. However, although anti-nuclear voices remain loud, in my experience they are the minority, with most people on the fence (and being impacted by the loudness, however subtly).

Nuclear for Net Zero

The good news is that I've come to realise that many people who care about the environment and climate change also value science and care about global justice issues – it's just that a space for us has not existed before.

To claim that space I have helped to launch the new environmental organisation Nuclear for Net Zero, founded with Mark Lynas and Joel Scott-Halkes: three generations of environmentalists who ultimately believe that: humans are good; policy decisions should be evidence-led; access to clean, reliable energy is a human right; and positive change is possible when we are open to examining our beliefs and working together.



We have begun campaigning by focusing on Sizewell C, which needs to be built in order for the UK to get to net zero. We are still heavily dependent on fossil fuels, and although investment in renewables has been positive, when the wind stops blowing we have to import coal.

It's easy to ignore this – and environmentalists often do – because we don't experience the direct impact ourselves of having to live near coal power plants that cause severe health issues (usually respiratory) for those people (usually poor) who have to live near them.

They deserve better, and instead of outsourcing the environmental and human cost of fossil fuels of our energy usage to them we can choose a cleaner option that we can built at home instead. That means more nuclear.

Last Saturday Nuclear for Net Zero held a [protest on Sizewell Beach](#). We picnicked, played volleyball, and swam in the sea outside Sizewell B, which is a beautiful compact site. We spoke with locals and handed out free bananas.

Our focus is on positive solutions rather than 'doomism' – however dire the predictions of future climate-changed scenarios may be. We will continue to celebrate the gift that nuclear energy offers us: a gift for all of humanity which can help to end poverty, solve climate change, and reduce air pollution. Feel free to [join us](#) – you are most welcome.

www.zionlights.co.uk
[@ziontree](#)