Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* (Polity 2021)

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The central problem Andreas Malm's engaging new book grapples with is the climate movement's ongoing failure to bring about radical emissions cuts. New coal mines are still being built, and this suggests many investors simply do not believe that radical decarbonisation is likely any time soon. No doubt there are many actors who bear some responsibility for our continued and catastrophic adherence to business as usual. Climate denialism undoubtedly plays a role, as do the fossil fuel interests which have managed to capture a disproportionate amount of political power. But denialists and big oil are not Malm's intended audience: they "are not amenable to persuasion,' he suggests, and will continue to act much as they do until forced to act otherwise (p. 20). The real targets of Malm's arguments are climate activists who have doggedly stuck to political strategies that are simply not working – and who often cast aspersions on the very strategies that *are* likely to make a real difference.

The book delivers a bracing and forthright polemic against both defeatism and quietism within the climate movement. The defeatist wing is represented here by luminaries such as Jonathan Franzen. Defeatists assume that mass collective action will inevitably fail to shift the emissions curve, and that we might as well bunker down and watch the unfolding of mass extinction and climate chaos. Their creed espouses deep adaptation rather than radical mitigation; in the meantime, the defeatists see no reason to cut back on their air miles. Malm's challenge is to convince us that the defeatists are mistaken – because we *can* still make a difference – at the same time as showing how deeply wrongheaded the prevailing methods of climate activists are. It is the quietism of activists – their widespread rejection of violent tactics, even when those tactics target property or fossil fuel infrastructure rather than people – which turns out to be the main focus of the book.

The central puzzle that vexes Malm is why the climate crisis is escalating, while activists' tactics remain stubbornly the same. He has a grudging admiration, certainly, for movements which have raised the public profile of climate issues. Extinction Rebellion (XR) deserves special praise for encouraging a number of governments to declare a climate emergency (p. 129). But its activists are firmly committed to methods of protest which are docile and non-destructive; indeed the organization has at time made a kind of fetish out of non-violence, as if it is only through brutalisation by the police that it will find its salvation. Bill McKibben is one figure singled out for identifying non-violence as a superb tactical innovation, uniquely capable of bringing about radical change, and attracts some of Malm's ire as a result. To be clear, Malm does not reject non-violent protest: it seems to be a vital part of the picture. But he does reject the claim that non-violent protest *alone* is likely to succeed. While it is perfectly understandable

– perhaps even necessary – for a climate movement that aspires to mainstream appeal to *formally* repudiate any resort to violence (p. 120), it is simply bad politics and bad social science to assume that non-violent action will be sufficient by itself.

XR, Malm claims, has leaned on a distorted history of the radical struggles of the past, downplaying the fact that they have regularly relied on a violent flank or fringe. If we are to believe the tacticians of XR, slavery and colonial regimes were overthrown entirely by peaceful demonstrations, and the vote for women was gained by noisy but non-violent Suffragettes. The movements that brought about the Arab Spring, and the end of Apartheid in South Africa, are similarly – but wrongly - presented as though they were overwhelmingly non-violent in their tactics. Much of the central chapter in the book is devoted to an alternate reading of these turbulent periods, in which, Malm claims, the threat of a militant flank was crucial to the concessions apparently won by the peaceful mainstream. The reader can sense Malm's frustration keenly. There is a kind of madness, he implies, in sticking to methods which have failed repeatedly to bring about decarbonisation. "When do we start physically attacking the things that consume our planet and destroy them with our own hands?" he asks. "Is there a good reason we have waited this long?" (p.9). The climate movement is quite exceptional insofar as "it has not engendered a single riot or wave of property destruction" (p.50) – and yet its activists still hope, naïvely, that success is in the offing.

The later parts of the book are taken up by a critique of the moral and strategic pacifism that has afflicted the climate movement, and which it urgently needs to shake off. Malm argues that the climate movement needs to recognise the sheer efficacy that carefully-calibrated acts of violence can possess. Much hangs here, of course, on what gets counted as violent. Malm chiefly has in mind acts of sabotage and property destruction, which are not directly harmful to human beings. While the current methods of climate activists are noisy and disruptive, they do not usually involve breaking, smashing, and tearing property apart. Of course, Malm argues, the destruction of property constitutes a *prima facie* wrong (p. 104), which stands in need of a powerful justification. But the climate emergency – and the failure of polite tactics of protest – amply provides it. Instead of being held in thrall by an excessively civil model of disobedience, it is time to take the next step.

One of the strengths of the book is that Malm engages seriously not only with the empirical literature on the effectiveness of protests and demonstrations, but also with the normative literature on the legitimate use of violence. Drawing connections with just war theory, Malm argues that what ultimately matters is whether the consequences of our violent actions are proportionate, and whether they are likely to be effective (he does not, however, believe that we should be excessively concerned with the prospects of success, lest we end up condemning actions like the Warsaw Uprising). In light of the incredible harms that dangerous climate change will bring about, it should not be difficult at all to justify acts of violence against property. But there are, of course, limits. Malm has sometimes been taken to be repudiating violence against people; but that is not how I read him. His suggestion is that "it would be catastrophic for the movement if any part of it used terrorism" (p. 111), because doing so would delegitimise the movement as a whole. But this seems to be a judgement made about the state

of the world *at the time of writing*, and even then for strategic rather than moral reasons (p. 111). Militant action – including violence against people - should certainly be seen as a last resort (p.115). But Malm seems careful not to rule it out on moral grounds, or even on strategic grounds, *if* the turn to violence against property does not succeed in bending the emissions curve soon.

Malm is a profilic author, and also a very fluent and engaging one. This book is no exception. It is pithy, eminently quotable, and a very enjoyable read. While it feels like it was written quite quickly, this imparts an immediacy and vibrancy to the book. That, along with the provocative title, has already helped it to garner a wide audience. In aiming for a wide audience, what is after all a short book inevitably leaves some loose ends. In closing I want to lay out some of the more interesting questions which the book raises, and which it might be profitable for the climate justice community to consider further.

First, we might wonder whether the violent / non-violent distinction really ought to be seen as fundamental. After all, even non-violent demonstrations and disruptions can harm people – roadblocks, for instance, can mean that the homes of the elderly don't get heated, or that ambulances carrying the sick don't arrive at hospital. This, perhaps, is part of Malm's point: it is not obvious why actions which deliberately wreck infrastructure have a higher burden of justification than non-violent actions which interfere with its operation.

Second, much of the book engages with a debate about the relative prospects of purely non-violent activism, versus a movement with both violent and non-violent wings. But to make informed decisions, activists need to know much more than which strategy is more effective on average. Among other things, they need to know in what kinds of circumstances each strategy is likely to be effective. They need to know how long change will take, on each strategy. And they need to know what the likely moral costs will be. One of the points the book brings home is how little reliable knowledge we possess on these questions, even as acting *somehow* becomes ever more important.

Third, if we are certain that violent tactics are justified in a given case, where would they be best targeted? Malm suggests that we should target both luxury emissions (which is why he tells the reader how to let down the tyres of an SUV) and continued fossil fuel extraction (which is why he discusses the sabotage of pipelines). But neither of those actions ostensibly targets the state. This raises a puzzle, because Malm is clear that "At the end of the day, it will be states that ram through the transition, or no one will" (p. 69). It would be good to reflect more, then, on the causal connection between letting down an SUV's tyres and stronger state action on the climate.

Finally, we might wonder who the book is addressed to. Malm's many and varied examples might be taken to suggest that violence against property is something that anyone could engage in. But of course, we stand in structurally different positions when it comes to the violent capacities of the state. Some of us are (relatively) protected by our class, race, gender, or connections, while others are decidedly not. Malm recognises this in the course of his critique

of XR, which has, he suggests, "remained persistently aloof from factors of class and race" (p. 126), not least when it apparently imagines that being arrested is a burden that young black men can take on with impunity. This, Malm points out, is naïve. But the same worry applies *a fortiori* when it comes to Malm's own proposals. Are we to imagine that violent property destruction is a tactic which is equally available to people regardless of class and race, in the global South as well as in the global North? If not, what kind of beast will violent climate activism be? Since the majority of Malm's examples of violence undertaken by climate activists are drawn from the global North, this question could bear more reflection.

Overall, this is an impressive and often exciting book. Its author has managed, within just a few pages, to engage seriously with climate science, with the political theory of violence and disobedience, and with the social science of protest. Though it inevitably raises more questions than it answers, it is always thought-provoking. It should provide much (renewable) fuel for discussion among those concerned with climate justice.