

A Q&A WITH JAMIE MARGOLIN & ANN PETTIFOR



ANN: Earth systems breakdown is a big and complex issue. How did you get involved in debates and action around climate breakdown – and do you have advice on how to get more young people involved?

JAMIE: First, existential dread drew me to this issue, but gradually I began to realise how solving climate change means dismantling all the systems of oppression that caused it in the first place.

In the summer of 2017 I was surrounded by other politically engaged high schoolers at a summer course at Princeton University. By that time I had had a ton of community organising experience. That was also a summer full of natural disasters, and thick smog that covered Seattle thanks to stronger-than-usual wildfires up north in Canada.

That was when I finally decided to take the plunge and found Zero Hour. It took us a while to find our footing but since then we've organised many actions, lobby days, protests, and have expanded into a fully fledged organisation.

We are not a movement that happened overnight at all. It took gruelling hours of slow but gradual movement building. My advice is to just jump in and do whatever you can with the resources you have and pour yourself into it.

JAMIE: Do people fully understand the intersections between the climate crisis and all other social justice issues, or is the connection still very distant for most people? How can we make the general public understand the intersectionality of this issue?

ANN: Good question. When I think about this, I am reminded of the campaign to cancel the sovereign debts of low income countries - Jubilee 2000. When we started I was told by experts - including experts in NGOs - that the international financial system and the complexities of sovereign debt was a) beyond the grasp of the wider public and b) there was no interest in this complex subject. We proved them wrong. By slowly steadily informing, briefing and educating the public, we built up huge, well informed support. The government was shocked. They were not prepared for the fact that so many people felt passionately about these issues that about 70-100,000 people turned up to the G8 Summit in Birmingham in 1998. We have to do that again.

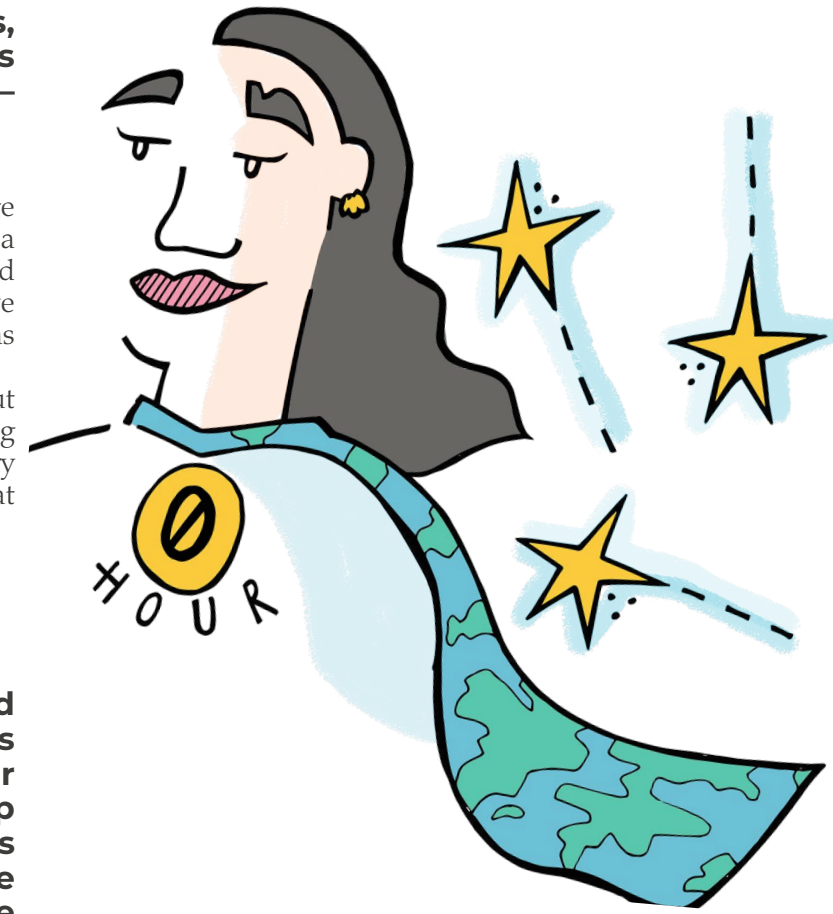
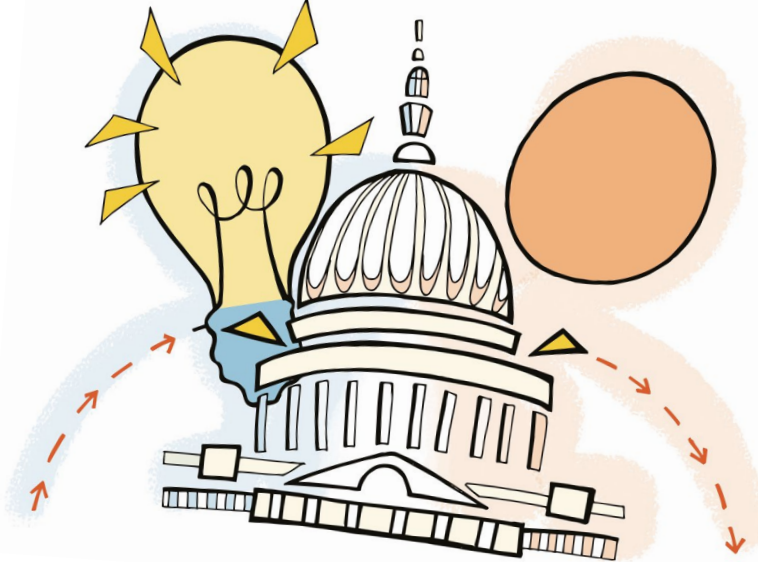
ANN: The world, and friends and family in our own communities, seem stuck in old habits, traditions and harmful ways. What events in history have caused people to change – radically and rapidly?

JAMIE: Events in history that have caused people to change radically and rapidly were events where there was such a level of mass mobilisation that the cries of the people could not be ignored. In terms of the radical social change we need to happen, the problem is it's never happened as quickly as we need it to now.

Maybe certain aspects of movements happen quickly, but it's only after the buildup of years of grassroots organising and a situation building up until it's unbearable. The scary thing about the climate crisis is we don't have time for that gradual change, but that's how most change happens.

JAMIE: Climate change is the grand culmination of all of our societal systems of oppression like colonialism and their negative effects that have been building up for centuries. How do we start to address these deep rooted systemic issues in the rapid time scale that we need to solve the climate crisis in?

ANN: That's a big and deep question. We can't fix the past, we can't heal the deep scars of colonialism, but we can fix the future. We *can* transform the currently globalised, financialised and hugely extractive economic system. I know because we have done so before. We changed the system in 1933 and again in 1945...when we were able to create the NHS, public housing, public education etc...And then Thatcher and Nixon and Reagan changed it back in the interests of Wall St and the City. But transformation takes, first, understanding of the forces at play, and the work that has to be done. Second it takes the mobilisation



of political will. Greta Thunberg is teaching us how to do the latter...so I am hopeful.

ANN: A recent survey by the Bank of England revealed that many people do not know how to define the economy. Do you and your fellow climate strikers discuss issues like globalisation, the finance sector and economics? If not, what or who in your experience would stimulate – or light up - debate around these issues amongst young people?

JAMIE: We do like to discuss the economy, the finance sector and economics because it is so intrinsically intertwined with the 'debate' around the climate crisis. This is because often the number one excuse for not taking action is: "but we have to protect the economy." Without even being able to define what 'the economy' is they are already voluntarily willing to sacrifice all life on earth for it.

From what I learned, the economy is supposed to work for the people, not people being slaves to the economy and unable to prioritise life and health because it needs to be maintained.