



Guided Discussion Prompts: The E-Waste Tragedy

The E-Waste Tragedy (2014). Every year, up to 50 million tons of electronic waste – computers, television sets, mobile phones, household appliances – are discarded in the developed world. 75% of this waste disappears from the legal recycling circuits, with much of it being shipped illegally to India, China or Africa. This is available to rent from Vimeo for £3.49 here: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/ewaste/270046584>

1. The theme for this years Go Green Week is "End Climate Co2onialism". E-waste, as well as being a source of localised pollution, is also an indirect contributor to carbon emissions (see the infographic at the bottom of this document for more infromation). How do you think brands, such as Apple, Samsung etc., are contributing to "Corporate Colonialism"?
2. The documentary highlighted protesting scrap collectors in Spain, angry that stricter e-waste legislation would harm their livelihoods. Can you think of any other examples where environmental policies have come at the expense of working people?
3. This shows how important it is to consider working people, as well as the environment, when coming up with solutions to problems such as climate change and pollution. This is known as a "Just Transition" - using the examples you just came up with, how could things have been handled differently to benefit both the environment and working people?
4. Universities are major purchasers of IT equipment. They have far more purchasing power than we, as individuals, have. How can we use our position of

privilege within a university to create meaningful change for those who recycle electronics?

Note: Beware of boycotts! Sometimes boycotts are necessary, especially when they have been called for by the workers themselves, but a mass boycott of a particular brand of electronic goods might lead to job losses - which is the exact opposite of what we are trying to achieve.

5. As shown in the documentary, e-waste "recycling" largely takes place in the Global South. How do you think that this relationship between consumers and recyclers upholds neo-colonialism (neo-colonialism just means "new colonialism")?

6. Since the release of this documentary in 2014, a lot has been done to tackle the issue of e-waste in Europe. However, electronics supply chains are still fraught with child labour, inhumane working conditions and modern day slavery, from the mines where raw materials are extracted, to the factories where gadgets are made. It's clear from this documentary that the sheer scale of the problem is hindering action - How can we stand in solidarity with electronics recyclers, miners and factory workers around the world?

7. What did you learn from this documentary about planned obsolescence (when products are designed to break after a few months or years)? Current capitalist thought seems to indicate that we can invent our way out of the climate crisis, using ever-more efficient technology. How does the issue of planned obsolescence suggest that this might not be possible?

8. How can we ensure that we take leadership from those on the front lines of climate change and e-waste pollution (e.g. electronics workers, recyclers and miners) and centre their voices when we campaign for social justice?

Further reading:

- Pale Blue Dot, The Carbon Footprint of E-Waste (2015): <http://palebluedot.llc/carbon-copy/2015/2/5/the-carbon-footprint-of-e-waste>
- Right To Repair, Europe: <https://repair.eu/>
- A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet (2018) by Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore
- The Ellen MacArthur Foundation: <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/>

The carbon footprint of our E-Waste



Sources
<http://www.epa.gov>
www.returnit.co.uk
<http://geology.com>
<http://www.electronicstakeback.com>
<http://energy.gov>
<https://www.census.gov>

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E-Waste Tragedy:

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Page 3/3

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