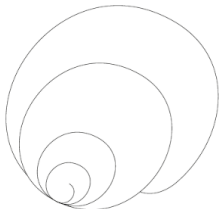
Degrowth Journal Volume 3 (2025) 00313
http://doi.org/10.36399/Degrowth.003.01.11

degrowth
JOURNAL



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards eco-socialist degrowth: class and political strategy

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Information
Received 15 September 2024
Accepted 18 November 2025
Online 23 December 2025

Keywords
ecosocialism
transformation
class politics
alliances
strategy

Abstract
How can transitions to eco-socialist degrowth happen? And who will lead them? This essay engages with Matt Huber's recent work on questions of eco-socialist strategy and offers, hopefully, an opportunity to advance a theory of change beyond single political agents and strategies to encompass different forms of organizing based on varied repertoires of contention and disruption. We wish to sustain an expanded understanding of who may be the political agents of change and how they can effectively organize into a powerful alliance of unions, parties, and social movements across differences, recognising the critical role of workers, trade unions, and disruptive industrial action in fossil fuel sectors, that are central in Huber's model.

1. Introduction

This essay is motivated by recent interest on questions of strategizing and planning for degrowth (Barlow et al., 2022; Bärnthaler, 2024; Bellamy-Foster, 2023; Conde et al., 2022; Savini, 2024; Vastenaekels, 2024). It is triggered by Matthew Huber's (2023) *Climate Change as Class War: Building Socialism on a Warming Planet.* Our essay attempts to articulate our thoughts for a degrowth-oriented theory of change, benefiting from Huber's scheme and the themes his book sets out. Critical engagements with Huber's book already exist (see for example the special coverage edited by Douglas et al., 2023), so not all our arguments are novel. We support many of the points made by others in debates of Huber's contribution, not least the invitation to avoid useless schisms (Katz-Rosene, 2023). The main aim of this paper, therefore, is not to review Huber's book, or the debate about it. We wish instead, entering in dialogue with Huber, to clarify our own theses about degrowth transformation, that we have

introduced elsewhere (D'Alisa & Kallis, 2020; Kallis et al., 2020), and which Huber, like others before, partly misinterpret.

Huber's book set out its thesis in antagonism to degrowth (Douglas et al., 2023). Following Katz-Rosene (2023), we are not interested to defend degrowth against Huber (though, unavoidably, we will end up doing so, too) but to build upon what Huber constructs. A weak spot of radical politics, and Huber's narrative too, is the exaggeration of differences. Rather than starting from where we differ with Huber, we will start from our agreements, which are many, and then diverge (and converge again) from there. Difficult as it may be, this is the standard by which we ask this essay to be judged. Our approach is not a simple exercise, it is a methodological invitation to look at the redundancy (in the good sense) between ours and our companions' narratives, turning it into a base for launching more robust narratives (Bateson, 2000; D'Alisa et al., 2015).

Section 2 reviews our reading of Huber´s theory of change. Section 3 lays out our own reference framework, eco-socialist degrowth, explaining how our understanding of degrowth differs from Huber's version. Section 4 focuses on a big theme in Huber's scheme: the working class as a strategic agent of change. Here, we appreciate the importance of bringing the working class back into political ecology, but argue for a more expanded understanding of who are the working-class communities and what moves them. Section 5 discusses the role of professionals in transformation, where we find insights, as well as dangers in Huber's analysis of a guilt-driven professional-managerial class. Section 6 concludes by arguing for an expanded theory of change that includes the orchestration of different political forces.

2. Climate change as class war

Huber's book is about climate change. Its starting point is a sad, though accurate observation: the climate movement is losing badly the "war on carbon."[1] Carbon emissions increase unabated, and the prospect of drastic and rapid reductions in line with the 1.5-2°C temperature rise range, where some semblance of social and ecological stability may be

[1] We do not feel at ease with the military language used by Huber when it comes to the struggle around climate, but to stay loyal with the way the issue is framed in his book, we follow the narrative of a carbon war.

retained, seems as remote as ever. Huber, rightly, takes issue with three prevalent diagnoses of the problem: first, climate inaction as the outcome of limited (or distorted by fossil fuel interests) knowledge on climate change; second, climate change as a market externality; and third, climate change as the outcome of excessive consumption.

If the first reading of the problem privileges the role of scientists and policymakers in educating the public and eradicating misinformation, the second elevates the role of economists and experts in devising the markets necessary to make everyone pay the "real" cost of carbon. The third favours a diffused strategy of moral and behavioural change. There is a partial dose of truth in these analyses, yet Huber argues that the crux of the issue is in 'the hidden adobe' of production. Fossil fuels are burned to produce industrial and agricultural commodities sold for profit. We should keep our eyes there, Huber insists, and not on consumers' footprints, where capitalists shift attention to obfuscate their own responsibility. Capitalism cultivates an illusion of consumer sovereignty; but consumers, Huber argues, have very limited choice in what to consume, constrained by what has been already produced and by existing infrastructures of provisioning. (An interesting historical digression in the book draws from Huber's (2013) earlier work, telling the story of the New Deal and the planning of American suburbia which necessitated private cars, thereby hooking Americans on petrol). Decisions about consumption are constrained and diffuse; decisions about production are, instead, centralized and concentrated in the hands of the few who own the means of production. This capitalist class, especially the part that profits from fossil fuels and their use, controls investment and production, and stands in the way of climate action: this is Huber's diagnosis of the problem. The solution comes from the working class—all those who own nothing but their labour—which they must sell to the capitalist ruling class to survive, the working class being the only class, Huber argues, that has an objective interest to fight the capitalist class that exploits it and in doing so end all classes.

The challenge, Huber claims convincingly, is that the way the climate movement presents climate change (i.e., as a problem of ignorance, an additional cost to be shouldered by everyone, or as a moral duty of individual austerity), can never appeal to working people already squeezed by austerity, welfare cuts, and unemployment. These framings reflect a professionally dominated climate change movement. Faced with the threat of additional

sacrifices in their living standards, this time in the name of climate, workers become easy prey to fossil interests, climate mis-informers, and right-wing politicians. This is unfortunate, Huber argues, because the working class is the only one with the power to win the carbon war: first, because the working class is the population's majority, and is therefore necessary for mass politics and electoral victories, and second, because of the strategic location of some workers in critical nodes of production, such as power plants, where they can effectively organize to extract maximum concessions and spearhead the conversion, and eventual phase-out of fossil fuels.

Why would the working class fight the carbon war though, if its concern is to survive till the end of the week without the luxury to worry about the end of the world? Huber argues, strategically now, that the climate movement must link its goals to the material interests of the working class, turning the war on carbon into 'a class war', the title of his book. The first point of encounter between the climate movement and working-class interests is 'decommodification': a necessary but insufficient first step towards decarbonization. Huber approximates decommodification with de-privatization and public ownership (This point deserves a longer theoretical discussion, see Bakker (2005)[2] and Goodwin (2018, 2024), a discussion which is beyond the point here) focussing on the electricity sector, which, in the case of the USA, is in private hands. Huber's line of thought is that if the energy system is public, people can democratically decide to decarbonize it; as long as it remains private, profit considerations will always take the driver's seat, and fossil fuels will never be phased out.

The second point of encounter between climate and working-class interests is through expansive, state-led decarbonization programs, where public investment can create more jobs and incomes for workers, and which can come tagged with additional social provisions. Here Huber prefigures, or rather ex-post theorises, the proposal for a Green New Deal, which, in Ocasio-Cortez's version for the USA, combined massive public investment in clean energy with social programs, such as a job guarantee. Huber argues that the working class could

[2] Karen Bakker's work remains a seminal reference in drawing clear distinctions between privatization, commercialization, and commodification.

become an ally of a climate program like the Green New Deal, not because of climate benefits, but because of material and employment benefits.

Huber's persistence in questioning the conditions under which the climate movement can build the power to win is commendable. If we want to reconstruct his analysis, his theory of change consists of the following steps: identify who is the enemy (or in our terms: 'adversary')[3] acting as an obstacle to decarbonization: the capitalist class; identify who is the political agent with an objective interest in fighting this adversary to win: the working class; trace leverage points in the system where fossil capital can be severely disrupted: in the USA, power plants and electricity utilities; construct programs of broader electoral appeal that can turn climate goals into a working class interest: e.g., Green New Deals. We could characterize Huber's path as a reformist way to revolution, or, in terms of Erik Olin-Wright's (2020) strategies of transformation, a symbiotic approach (carbon policies, etc.) combined with selective ruptures (nationalization, strikes, etc.).

An obvious problem with this road to 'building socialism' is that the working class is nowhere seen leading the carbon struggle, at least for the time being, nor has it waged a class struggle for a long time now. Huber's theory is that this can change and that climate radicals (the likely readership of his book, in his admission) should start working in essential well-unionized sectors. They should join their trade unions, work with influential rank and file trade unionists, and start a struggle from the bottom up against conformist union leaders towards public ownership: the first step in the path to decarbonization.

There is much to agree with here if this strategic vision and the emerging strategy are seen as one among many; the question then being: how do activists and workers on the ground articulate and orchestrate different mobilizations, when do they do it, and how can they do it successfully. If, however, this 'trade union/socialism in one sector' path is seen as the one and only, to which Huber's style of argumentation sometimes drifts, then there is much to

[3] We side here with Chantal Mouffe who prefers to think of political antagonism in terms of adversaries, avoiding the Schmittian and militaristic language of enemies and war, but again we stay loyal to Huber's own language when necessary.

question. Before doing so, let us clarify the 'compass' from whose vantage point we write, that of eco-socialist degrowth (Löwy et al., 2022).

3. Degrowth: the way we see it

For Huber, degrowth is shorthand for the third of the three problematic framings (consumption and footprint), a framing that he sees many 'antisystem radicals' tilting towards. Huber's concern with this framing, as we explained, is that it emphasizes diffuse individual action instead of confronting capital's reign in production. A second concern is that 'a politics of less' and of voluntary austerity will not appeal to the working-class. A third objection is that instead of focusing on the working class, degrowth bets on a marginal countercultural (petite) bourgeoisie: the types that frequent urban gardens. The fourth critique is against the work of Jason Hickel, and his (alleged) framing of climate injustice as an issue between an overconsuming Global North and an exploited Global South. Let us engage with each of these four points to 're-construct' an eco-socialist degrowth.[4]

3.1. Consumption

Huber's points here are a useful corrective for many, not-yet-politicized climate professionals and activists. (They make for example good reading for Al Gore's followers, if there are any left, or maybe, some in Bill McKibben's 350.org group.) Huber's critique partly applies also to undercurrents in the degrowth discourse that, especially in the early phases, overemphasized consumerism. (For an early critique see Romano, 2012). However, to see the reduction of individual consumption and carbon footprints as the core of degrowth thinking today would be wrong. All definitions of degrowth that we know of, and that Huber also cites, speak about

[4] What we present here are our own perspectives and ways we have come to understand and approach degrowth. We cannot speak in the name of, or defend, everyone writing about degrowth. Our voice has some weight since we were among the first to write about degrowth in English, and Huber directly engages with our work. On the other hand, one needs to acknowledge that the degrowth community is very diverse. Eversberg and Schmelzer (2018), for example, identified five different clusters of participants among the 814 people they interviewed during the 2014 Leipzig conference on degrowth. The opinions of one of these clusters, the 'modernist-rationalist' cluster, are very close to those of Huber, and while this was not a dominant cluster at the time (13% of respondents), our feeling is that its importance has grown over time. The constituency of the degrowth community and its arguments are also not static, they are evolving. Our engagement here is precisely in the spirit of maintaining a plural community of difference and common purpose.

'production *and* consumption' (One may protest here that these still focus on quantity and scale, not relations of production. We will return to this below.).

One may ask: Why insist on the term 'consumption', even with an 'and', if it is the abode of production that matters? The answer is: Because consumption *does* matter, as Huber himself accepts (2023, p.16). The question is: *How and why* does it matter?

Our starting point is that whatever is produced must be consumed (or of course, wasted or even destroyed[5] intentionally, as in crises of overproduction). In ecological economic terms, production and consumption are relational, two sides of the same societal metabolic process (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971; Giampietro et al., 2012). In Marxist terms, the surplus value created in the factory must be 'realized' in the market. Capital produces what is profitable, and what is profitable depends on demand, which of course can be shaped and constructed (through advertising, consumption infrastructures, etc.). David Harvey's (2020) latest work and graphic illustration of capital in its totality is an attempt precisely to visualise the different, inter-related moments of capital's circulation, and to reveal the connections (actualized or potential) between struggles taking place at different nodes of the system (say, between those who try to stop the realization of capital through advertising and those who struggle to stop exploitation at the factory).

Huber gives a Harvey-like picture of the New Deal and the fossil fuel-based suburbanization of America. This story is not driven just by the industrial production of commodities (suburban houses, lawns, washing machines, cars), but also by the state-led provision of infrastructures that facilitated the consumption of these commodities, realizing their value in this way: the highways, the land subdivisions, the suburban pipelines, etc. Central to this was selling 'the American dream' (Cullen, 2003). American workers were not dispossessed and herded to suburban homes. They 'desired' to go there, and what was on offer was precisely what American capitalism could provide. We do not mean to underplay the desire we all have for a spacious home, ample running water, freedom of mobility, or access to green spaces. Rather, we point out that the way these desires were moulded, packaged, and satisfied served

[5] The destructive phase also fuels new and creative cycles of capital accumulation.

to realize capitalist value in for-profit, fossil-fuelled factories while gaining the consent of workers (Gramsci, 2007). (The human needs at stake could be satisfied in many other plausible ways, not least by following the more concentrated and resource-efficient model of European cities.)

Huber is right that workers living in suburban homes in the US have now a very limited range of choices: they must drive to work to survive, and they must even water and fertilize their lawns to avoid becoming community outcasts. These consumption patterns, and the desires they crystallize, become powerful levers through which the capitalist system reproduces its hegemony socially, culturally, and politically. This may explain why workers who have ended up sleeping in their cars in California still believe in the American dream and await the better days that are coming.[6] To the extent that we all (and not just suburban Americans) remain trapped within desires of individual freedom produced by capitalist growth and locked into the infrastructures and dependencies that keep us consuming the commodities capitalist factories churn out, it is hard to see how the dynamic Huber has in mind will ever emerge: workers organizing to put factories under public control and phase out fossil fuels.

On the contrary, this self-reinforcing relation between production and consumption that characterises the American way of life can explain the difficulties to involve working class communities in the climate movement (Ahern, 2022). Even if the objective interest of the working class is to abolish all classes, it is unlikely to happen if the subjective belief and desire among a substantial part of the working class is that of social mobility, i.e., the desire to live more like those already 'living their individual dream'. We say 'substantial' part, because our hypothesis is that this is not the only, or even the prevalent, view within working people. Our belief, to be tested, is that a substantial part of the working class just desires decent and secure lives, akin to what we attempt to capture with the term 'degrowth'. Indeed, in a recent survey in USA, people are supportive of degrowth policies above all those related to fossil fuel cap and sufficiency (O'Dell et al., 2025).

[6] See *USA on the brink of chaos: How Americans are living the end of the American Dream,* Best Documentary (2023).

Consumption actions and politics are therefore important in a theory of change: not as personal reductions of footprint that sum up to a significant aggregate (Huber is right that they rarely do), but as necessary parts of an everyday, collective construction of an alternative 'dream'; one more compatible with Green New Deals and the worlds that such deals pre-figure. Importantly, it is a dream that people may come to experience gradually, through small, desired, everyday performative changes and not as disruptive retrogressions. Consumption politics, so defined, are a collective rather than an individual matter (Soper, 2023), creating the networks and infrastructures of daily experience among working people that make common sense of the alternate world to be inhabited.[7]

Scholars studying political consumerism have proposed the framework of Sustainable Community Movement Organizations for analysing activists that see the market as the place for enacting their political activism and push producers to re-organise production towards sustainable alternatives (Forno & Graziano, 2014; Graziano & Forno, 2012). The so-called Solidarity Purchase Groups (SPGs), for example, not only act at the concrete level of everyday life choices of consumption (I buy a fair-trade product and not a mere commodity), but they face the more abstract level of choice of the contexts in which the act of consumption takes place (I buy a fair-trade product in a small shop and not in a mega store or a big shopping mall). Finally, they also promote the complete rethinking of the ensemble of alternatives and contexts in which consumption choices take place (I take part in SPGs or a District of Solidarity Economy and not a marketized milieu). This is a process of unlearning (Bateson, 2000) that can help to transform critical consumers into critical citizens (Collettivo Pagine Arcobaleno, 2004; D'Alisa et al., 2013).

Socialist parties in the early 1900s in Germany and Austria provided workers with party-run cohousing and communal kitchens. Radicals in Barcelona hung out and partied in popular, working class 'Ateneus'. Or, in very different personal examples, our parents never brought Coca-Cola home; not because it was bad for our teeth, or because Coca-Cola factories

[7] Consumer culture is not some ethereal superstructure; it is material, crystallized in material production and infrastructure and in our everyday embodied experiences and desires. Here we part company with Huber's separation of a 'New Left' politics framed in a culture/superstructure and a traditional Left production/structure paradigm. Following a Gramscian approach, we see structure and superstructure as coevolving, mutually constitutive and irreducible to one another.

damaged aquifers (which are good enough reasons), but because they rejected being accomplices to a mega-corporation profiting from exploiting workers at home and abroad. We two authors are members of an electric carsharing cooperative– again, not because we want to reduce our footprint, but because we want to challenge the dream of an individually owned, petrol-fuelled car, helping produce by our consumption, a different, feasible, and affordable socially owned, renewable energy car infrastructure. (Obviously alongside good public transport and bike infrastructure, especially given the impact of lithium mining; shared electric cars, being the last option.)

To conclude: consumption politics, and 'cultural politics' more generally, are not a marginal consideration in a theory of change. It would be a mistake to reduce politically conscious action on consumption to an issue of guilt or signalling middle-class virtue (without meaning that many individual consumer choices vacant of political content can be *and often are* positional virtue-signalling). Consumption and desires are relevant in a theory of change as the political subject coinhabits an anthropological subject, whose wishes and desires do not always align with class interests or material necessities. This tension can lead to contradictions within the working class itself: when desires prevail over class consciousness, they may drive individuals to aspire not to transform the system, but rather to become part of the capitalist class.

3.2. The politics of less

A distinction is needed here between bio-physical and political questions. The first relates to whether less resource and energy extraction/production/use is necessary and inevitable, especially in the Global North, if the world is to avoid crossing climate and other planetary thresholds. The second relates to whether 'less' is a good framing for building majoritarian, working class-powered politics. Biophysically, the issue may mean that there is no way other than decreasing energy and resource use. This position, however, may risk becoming a losing political proposition. Alternatively, 'green growth' may be a popular political proposal, but that cannot happen as professed.

We part from Huber on the bio-physical question. We agree with him on the vision of reducing wage working time and sustaining good life conditions for workers, although we read the

scientific evidence as suggesting that this is possible only with drastic reductions in energy/resources (Keyßer & Lenzen, 2021; Slameršak et al., 2024). Huber tends to think that nuclear energy and socialized forms of renewable energy and industrial agriculture could increase labour productivity, decrease energy/resource use, and protect the planet. (Whether resource use should eventually decrease or increase, for Huber, is a matter to be decided once collective/democratic control over production has been gained). Scientifically, the evidence is mounting that sufficient 'green growth' or decoupling are next to impossible, at least under capitalism as we know it (Haberl et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2024; Vogel & Hickel, 2023). Huber's argument about the possibility of green growth under socialism remains an untested hypothesis.

Difficult as this may be as a scientific question, it is not easy to keep it separate from the political question. When reading Huber, the sense we get is that, for him, a socialist decoupling of output from environmental damage *must* be possible, so that a 'politics of more', the only politics he sees as viable, is possible. Neither is it easy, in both Huber's case and ours, to keep the scientific and political questions separate from the underlying pre-paradigmatic vision: in Huber´s case that of an (eco)modernist, socialized high-tech future, and in ours that of a more precautionary and mixed, decentralized model fitting high and low tech, western and non-western types of living.

To be clear, and here we think Huber would agree: the way we approach the motto 'Less is More' (Hickel, 2020) is not as a call for less of the same, or even not less of bad things and more of good ones (who wouldn't want this anyway), but as a claim for doing things differently, beyond the established metaphors of more versus less upon which liberalism and capitalism thrive. As Huber acknowledges, Hickel also leads his proposals with what workers stand to gain in a degrowth trajectory: free time, universal access to necessary goods and services (health, education, housing), guaranteed jobs and income, etc. Increasing collective access to uncommodified basics should come with reduced resource and energy production use, but this is not the same as what is experienced as austerity in capitalist economies.

Degrowth, it is important to note, is not meant to be a political slogan, but a science-based diagnosis and compass.[8] Political communication can focus instead on specific policies and gains for working people. One may argue that such an approach is what Gustavo Petro (President of Colombia, in the moment we write) is following. Petro has not hidden his sympathies for degrowth. He did not frame his politics, however, around degrowth but around specific eco-social policies. Ada Colau (Mayor of Barcelona from 2015-2023 and a leading figure in international municipalism) was criticized by the opposition as leading a 'party of degrowth'. She did not use the term herself however, building the party's platform on reclaiming the commons.

Whether proposals such as Hickel's can mobilize the working class in the US or Europe, or whether fossil capital, the media, and political actors use degrowth as a curse word to beat down otherwise powerful political or climate movements, is an open question. Huber is not wrong in being concerned. Evidence could somewhat temper such concerns. Politicians, such as Petro and Colau, have won political victories; elected representatives in the European Parliament hold (and organize around) post-growth and eco-socialist visions (Kallis et al., 2024) and trade unions in Spain produce degrowth plans of eco-social transition.[9] In a large (unpublished at the time of writing this article) representative survey we undertook in the US and UK with colleagues from the LSE, we find that large majorities of the population approve of degrowth when presented with the full proposal and not just the term. Historical examples abound of powerful political movements adopting degrowth-like discourses, such as Enrico Berlinguer's 'revolutionary austerity' of the 1980s.[10]

[8] Ten years ago, when publishing the first book in English on degrowth, we emphasized that degrowth is not just about a quantitative decrease in selected parameters (and definitely not in GDP); it is rather a 'vocabulary' captured by various interconnected terms, united by a vision of an egalitarian (classless) society of what Serge Latouche called, 'frugal abundance'. To illustrate that degrowth is not about smaller capitalist economies, and that it is about a qualitative, structural change, we used the analogy of an elephant that turns into a snail: that is, a smaller/slower but crucially different system with a different metabolism and therefore different relations between its parts; that is, different relations of production and consumption (see D'Alisa et al., 2024; Latouche, 2012).

[9] See CGT (2024).

[10] Huber mentions our reference to Berlinguer but has problems positioning Berlinguer and his project historically or geographically, mixing Berlinguer's proposal of revolutionary austerity with Thatcher's neo-liberal austerity. Berlinguer was leading the strongest communist party in the western world, representing some 30% of the Italian electorate, with major trade unions on his side. His proposal did take place in a context of a rising neo-liberal project in Europe, which he tried to twist, by arguing that the communist party was always for

3.3. Organic and pre-figurative politics

Here we engage with a mistaken reading of the theory of change in degrowth as one where the countercultural 'commoner' takes the role that the organized worker has in Huber's model. In fact, in our paper, from which Huber draws a quotation to support the above, we provide a very different example to distill our theory of change (D'Alisa & Kallis, 2020). We argue that degrowth-minded people should organize as workers in their workplaces. We say that for example, instead of degrowth academics providing proposals to politicians or movements 'out there', they (we) should organize and struggle in our own workplace, so that universities adopt eco-social policies. (We use the example of a maximum income implemented first in universities and then in other organizations[11] that can, in Gramscian idiom, become a "common sense," and then widely accepted as public policy).

Such organic organizing can root intellectual production on the one hand and pre-figure the advocated change on the other. The numerous references in the degrowth literature to what are called 'commoning' experiments (De Angelis, 2017) or 'community economies' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) have to be understood in this context of building political subjectivities and incipient infrastructures (García López et al., 2017; Varvarousis, 2022). This includes not only paid production, which is one part of our experience and of capital's circuit, but also the spheres of reproduction, leisure/consumption, and unpaid production. Commoning experiments can be seen as ways of economic organization that pre-figure part of a desirable eco-socialist future. Crucially, the future pre-figured is not one where everything is run as a small-scale, decentralized commons, but one of a network of 'public-commons´ partnerships (Russell et al., 2023), where large infrastructures and industries have been socialized and democratized, and other new forms of self-organized commons have emerged and have

'austerity', both in terms of the personal sobriety of its members (in line with international solidarity and rejecting the consumerist dreams that capitalism was offering), but also because it was against the profligate waste of resources generated by capitalist production geared around profit and not the satisfaction of needs. Like degrowth proposals today, Berlinguer's revolutionary austerity was tied to collective consumption and paired with collectivized, public-based access to essential goods and services.

[11] The maximum-minimum ratio policy is very much used, in many cooperatives. For example, back in 2000, when one of the authors was a member of Italian ethical bank (Banca Etica), by statute the CEO of the bank could earn "only" 6.5 time more than the lower wage in the bank.

scaled up with the support of state agencies.[12] We admit that in most cases many of these activities are being pre-figured, at a smaller scale, since, by definition, experiments start small. But there is pre-figuration of cooperatives instead of corporations, of municipal utilities instead of multinationals, of decentralized solar power instead of large-scale wind plantations, or of peer-to-peer robotics against corporate automation (Kostakis et al., 2025). All these are small scale experiments with large ambitions.

Political vision is embodied through such action in the workplace or in common spaces and projects, and stops being a mere intellectual proposal 'for others' to implement. Terms such as 'organic intellectuals' and embodied, 'pre-figurative' action, might partially capture what we intended to communicate. The intention is not to elevate, say, urban gardeners to the frontier of a theory of change, but to re-signify their meaning, for the degrowth community, too. That is, urban gardening is not a feel-good side hobby or a demonstration of sustainable practice, but an embodied building up of the relations of an eco-socialist future. This pre-figuring gets politicized when confronted with the market, or the police state, in the same way that a worker develops a political consciousness through a strike.[13] We have hypothesized, alongside others (Kallis et al., 2020; Roth et al., 2023), that a dynamic of personal change, collective pre-figuration, and political conflict and organizing, via an orchestration of what Erik Olin-Wright (2020) calls ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic strategies, supported the rise to power of municipalist/communalist movements in Barcelona and elsewhere. The alternative commons economies that pre-existed in the city (the squats, anti-eviction occupations, and the occupied gardens) provided the proving ground for the activists who occupied the city square during the 2011 wave of protests. In the occupied squares, a new party-movement emerged ('Barcelona en Comu') bringing city activists

[12] Silvia Federici (2020, p. 21) writes: "It is one thing to set up a day care center the way we want it, and then demand that the State pay for it. It is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and then ask the State to control them not for five but for fifteen hours a day. It is one thing to organize communally the way we want to eat (by ourselves, in groups) and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organize our meals." (One could argue that such a commons–public partnership dynamic has actually played out in the case of Catalonia where the public education system has been moving increasingly towards progressive pedagogies, first introduced by more radically-minded parents and teachers in own groups and tested in a few experimental schools).

[13] To be clear, we are not offering commoning experiments as the only or even the main path forward; pre-figuration obviously can take many different forms than those we mention here. (A worker living a simple and solidary home life is also pre-figuring something important.).

together and winning the municipal elections in 2014. The party, in turn, served as a guardian and promoter of the commons of the city, striving to municipalize the city's energy and water systems in line with Huber's vision. After eight years in power, Barcelona en Comu lost the election; nonetheless, the model of a commons-based social-political movement bringing together different movements and mobilizations, remains relevant.

3.4. Unequal exchange and imperial mode of living

We agree with Huber that in a globalized capitalist economy, it makes less sense to frame unequal exchange in country or world-regional terms, given that transnational corporations and capitalist classes are not bound by territorial allegiances. On the other hand, it is hard to deny a territorial dimension to globalized capitalist dynamics. (Apple, for instance, is a US company located in Silicon Valley where most of the profits and wealth of tech giants concentrate and from where they are governed). Further, nation states use their military and diplomatic power to extract political and economic concessions that serve the interests of national corporations and powerful domestic capitalists. The challenge, then, is to think *both* in terms of the nation-based geopolitical/geoeconomics divisions of power *and* of transnational class relations, and transnational corporations and capitalists.

An internationalist perspective would search for examples of organizing that successfully linked the interests and struggles of domestic workers at home with foreign workers, home and abroad. The inroads of the nativist far-right mobilizing sentiments of domestic workers play into a 'divide and conquer' dynamic, where one group of workers is pitted against another for a diminishing share of a nation's wealth. The relevant question that arises here is whether there are eco-socialist degrowth politics that can build concrete internationalist connections between workers of different origins and between different parts of the world.

Huber justifies his sole focus on domestic US matters by the US position as the biggest emitter of carbon and the most powerful country sabotaging international climate action. Yet Huber also acknowledges that most US manufacturing is now offshored and most of the goods Americans consume are manufactured elsewhere. The 'abode of production' and the manufacturing working class of the American economy are no longer within US borders. Data from Hickel and colleagues (2024) suggests that 90% of all labour in the world economy is

performed in the Global South. If one wished to remain consistent with Huber's own analysis, then working-class organizing must look beyond national frontiers. This is even more so as the possibility of domestic industrial action at the core is consistently undermined by the possibility of offshoring production to other countries where workers can be more easily suppressed and exploited. Such offshoring and appropriation of underpaid labour and resources becomes a core goal of foreign policy and geopolitical relations, and a main obstacle to progressive politics both at home and abroad. Furthermore, through their foreign policy, countries such as the US become responsible for the suppression of (eco)socialist possibilities elsewhere (Hickel, 2018), or for supporting autocratic oil regimes and proxies. Such a reading suggests that national-liberation and anti-imperialist struggles in ex-colonies, and mobilization in their favour by working class Americans in the US may be a locus of struggle as important, if not more so, than domestic industrial action (Ajl, 2021; Hickel, 2021).

3.5. Degrowth properly constructed

In summary, by degrowth, we refer to a compass of classless, egalitarian societies of frugal abundance—of personal sobriety, socialized sufficiency (an organising principle of production as it is in the commons), and collective luxury. Sufficiency is a core principle for degrowth, not only in ecological terms, but also because it is necessary for reducing/minimizing cost-shifting. The more one wants and needs, the more they have to shift the costs of satisfying these 'needs' onto others. Degrowth-oriented societies will therefore satisfy human needs and wellbeing with a fraction of the current levels of energy and resource use characteristic of contemporary high-income economies. To move in this direction could mean upending capitalist relations of production and confronting the interests of capital at various moments of its production, reproduction, and realization, including consumption, the extraction of energy and resources, the appropriation of unpaid carework, and the international expropriation of cheap resources and labour. Such a transformation of provisioning systems does not only integrate different socio-metabolic profiles and political-economic features (Schaffartzik et al., 2021), but would require a coevolution of structure and superstructure, a corresponding culture, and a set of new common senses together with new forms of planning and economic organization.

The eco-socialist degrowth imaginary that undergirds our proposal, and the (eco)modernist socialism that underpins Huber's, are at odds, especially our emphasis upon sufficiency compared to Huber's upon productivity-enhancing technology. Thus, it is important to delve into the differences, to sharpen them by debate. Nonetheless, differences shouldn't overly preoccupy us, firstly, because both imaginaries are presently far from gaining substantial political traction. We do not live in 1970s Yugoslavia where the details of different types of socialism had an immediate relevance. Secondly, although the imaginaries may be different, the politics of moving in their direction share important features that could be actuated by the same agents and forces (Bärnthaler, 2024). Thirdly, and if we want to be pragmatic, the future will generally involve a mix of all of the above rather than a purist version of one or the other vision.

Actually, parts of Huber's vision may not be so far from ours as his polemic makes it seem. In his discussion of the cement industry, Huber (2023, pp. 65–69) criticizes the emphasis on technological fixes in this carbon-intensive industry, noting that 'of course if you cut the emissions per ton but keep growing the tonnage you make, you still produce more emissions'. Huber's vision is to socialize the cement industry and decrease production. However, as he notes, most of the world's cement production occurs in one of the most socialist among capitalist economies, China, and is under public ownership. Unlike private industries, Huber asserts correctly that, in a publicly owned system, the possibility to scale down harmful production exists, warning however that 'states will not do this without massive popular pressure from below'. Scaling down heavy industries, such as cement, with popular pressure from below, from a populace presumably ready and willing to live with less cement, is a good description of degrowth.

Based on this compass, we will now dive deeper into the main theme of Huber's model: class politics.

4. The class question

Huber's model has three main classes: the capitalist class, the working class, and, less convincingly, a professional-managerial class (Ahern, 2022).

The capitalist class consists of those who own the means of production.[14] Huber warns against definitions of this class in terms of income or consumption because it is the control of production and investment that is important. In a decarbonization, and even more so in a degrowth scenario, one would expect the capitalist class to react strongly. This does not mean that there can be no members of the capitalist class favourably inclined to degrowth to the extent that they are convinced of it being in the general interest. Many capitalists, including Friedrich Engels, advocated for socialism against their own class interests. However, individual members should be distinguished from an overall class tendency, which is driven by its objective position (as owners of the means of production) and interests (profit).

Huber's focus in the book is not so much on the obstacles the capitalist class might pose, but on the power of the working class to confront the capitalist class. To this end, he intents an ecological definition of the working class as those who lack control over the ecological conditions of their existence, and who, therefore, depend on a wage to access the basics necessary for their survival in the market. Huber distinguishes his approach from earlier accounts of the ecological interests of the working class that emphasized habitat and livelihood destruction, and workplace pollution. He argues that the material (ecological) interest of the existing working class is the wage needed to access the necessities of life. It is upon this objective interest of everyday biological survival that an ecological working-class politics should be constructed—hence the Green New Deal—as a gradual, but consistent strategy to respond to those objective material interests (Bärnthaler, 2024).

Huber's definition of the working class is wide. It includes everyone dependent on a wage, excluding only a very small but powerful fraction of the population that lives from profits and rents. For a more operational definition closer to an everyday understanding of the term, Huber adds the criterion of lack of autonomy in the workplace, taking professions such as lawyers, doctors, and university professors out of the working class. The remaining 63% of

[14] An important feature of the current capitalist system is the distribution of equity ownership via stock markets. First, this makes many more people feel—mistakenly—part of the capitalist class and aligned to its interests, just because they have some share of industries or businesses (in Germany, the distribution of shares to workers has been an important strategy for delaying wage-related demands). Second, capitalists can control this way the means of production with a relatively low level of ownership.

the employed population in the US consists of a core in industrial and manual forms of work (34%), service workers (28%), and sales and office workers (38%). A similar percentage is derived if the lack of (completed) university education is considered as the criterion of working-class membership. This data cannot be extrapolated to other western countries with public university systems, where a much higher proportion of the population has a university degree.[15] Nonetheless, the data Huber provides leave little doubt that, at least in the US, the working class, even as defined in this narrower sense, constitutes a majority.

This majority, however, is at a low point of historical power at the present time, fragmented, if not divided, and de-unionised. (Workers in, say, accounting firms, coal factories, schools, or Uber cars do not naturally recognize their mutual interests, and the extent of union membership that Huber gives for the US, even in the 'densest' sectors, such as electricity, are depressingly low). Huber acknowledges that organizing from the outside is needed to initiate workers' struggle against capital, and especially against climate change. Huber´s theory anticipates that, as socialist and trade union organizers (re)start grassroots organizing, concessions can be won, a political movement built, and links forged between different segments of the exploited working class. One needs to pause here and ask: Apart from potential organizing, who mobilizes against (carbon) capital *already*? One could point to anti-pipeline, anti-extraction and anti-infrastructure activism, organized peasants, anti-colonial and radical feminist movements, to name a few.

Huber recognizes the impact of such 'blockading' or 'justice' movements, although with two reservations. The first, easier to resolve, is theoretical: mobilizations around oppressed identities are not the same as mobilizations based on 'objective' class positions and material interests, Huber argues. We say "easier to resolve" because in various instances, indeed, Huber himself recognizes that unpaid female home-workers, peasants, and people whose livelihoods are affected by enclosures or contamination are also 'workers'. Also, mobilizations such as Standing Rock or the feminist battle for a wage for housework are material to their core.[16] We say 'easier to resolve' also because recent work by Marxist political economists

[15] See *Population with tertiary education,* OECD (n.d.).

[16] For environmental justice struggles as part of a new global anti-systemic movement see Yaşın (2023).

provides holistic representations of capital circulation (Harvey, 2020) and of capitalism as a social system (Fraser, 2023). These representations link exploitation through wage labour with the appropriations of feminized carework and nature. They also link exploitation to the expropriation of foreign, often racialized, labour and the resources on which it depends.

Such contributions point to the potential, and at the same time challenge, of an alliance of dispossessed working people (native and foreign, domestic and international), with a shared, objective, and mutual interest to confront capital. This is not an 'identity politics', but an intersectional or better, an articulated alliance of working classes. The hypothesis is that there are objective interests connecting diverse working people whose survival is threatened directly or indirectly by climate change (directly through disasters and indirectly through employment and income loss), and those who engage in productive and care work that sustains the planet as habitable: homeworkers, careworkers, environmental defenders, peasants, health workers, and teachers—the 'forces of reproduction' (Barca, 2020). Cameron (2023) and Akbulut (2023), before us, also argued that Huber could have been more consistent in adopting a broad definition of the working class to include all types of workers—wage and non-wage—and in not doing so, underplayed the racialised and gendered dimensions of reproductive work, and the possible alliances these open up. A promising direction, as suggested by Akbulut (2023), lies in adopting a definition of class grounded in the dynamics of surplus production—its distribution and appropriation—as well as in the roles of those who sustain the conditions of its reproduction (see also Shattuck, 2023). This perspective broadens the terrain of class struggle beyond the sites of production, encompassing also those loci where the very conditions for the generation of surplus are constituted and maintained.

The important question, however, remains: Can these various types of productive and reproductive workers, producers of surplus, align in a common political front? Feminist theorists have long warned that the mutual interests of different types of workers cannot be automatically assumed (Federici, 2020). The power of capital lies precisely in its ability to fuel divisions. Examples are: subsidizing exploited male wage workers with an unpaid wife at home, or subsidising a female wage worker with a foreign female domestic worker, often undocumented and uninsured, or lowering the cost of reproduction of workers in the imperial

core by cheap imports produced by over-exploited workers in the periphery. Forging alliances across different classes of productive and reproductive workers is fraught with objective difficulties, and riven with internal conflicts. These need to be researched empirically and resolved organizationally.

Huber's second reservation is strategic: wage workers, he argues, have a unique capacity to block capitalist production and win concessions via striking. This may be true, although self-employed and small-scale capitalist farmers and truckers also have this capacity; it is not the fact of wage dependency that gives certain wage workers disruptive power, but their location in critical nodes of the production process. This is why many other wage workers, say office clerks for example, do not have disruptive power. It is also why workers who do not receive a wage, such as peasants, indigenous groups, and 'blockadia' activists, may achieve disruptive power if they effectively stop critical infrastructures and flows in logistical nodes. The tendency to criminalize disruptive environmental activists is a sign that capital is taking notice of this emerging power, and the murder of environmental defenders is a sign that the conflict has already turned violent (Gulliver et al., 2023; Scheidel et al., 2020). The powering of socialist movements by indigenous and environmental activists of anti-extractivist mobilizations on a national scale in Latin America also suggests that the political power of such mobilizations should not be underestimated. This does not downplay the importance of workers' strikes at critical locations, such as ports and power plants, but serves to position these actions within the context of a broader repertoire of disruptive contention and movement-building.[17]

In this context, the idea of a 'movement of movements' (Mertes, 2004) (dismissed by many, including Huber) dating back to the anti-globalization wave of protests may still be relevant. By this we do not mean an 'all of the above' umbrella agglomeration of diverse identity movements that Huber rightly criticizes. We are interested, instead, in the articulation and orchestration of different working-class movements and how broader, united fronts emerge and succeed when they do. It is important to note that the anti-globalization 'movement of

[17]Another point that Huber has not discussed is that the densest unionization in countries like the U.S. is in the public sector—education, healthcare, transport—meaning that strikes are less likely to disrupt capital directly and very likely to disrupt working-class lives.

movements' and its offshoots *did win* victories. Successes ranged from stopping unfair international treaties and delegitimatizing institutions, such as the WTO, to the municipalization of water and energy utilities in Europe and Latin America, and to several related political victories in Latin America. In both the municipalist and Latin American cases, political 'movement of movements' coalitions brought together trade union and working-class, native and indigenous, and environmentalist groups in the form of movement parties. The unprecedented violence (including torture) by police forces against activists in Genova in 2001 crushed the anti-globalization movement in Europe for a generation. In Latin America, elites toppled, or populations voted out progressive governments. This is not a verdict, however, against the approach itself, nor is it a guarantee that trade unions, or anyone else for that matter, will have a better fate were they to become combative and disruptive.

We suggest here, as a minimum, maintaining an analytical focus on successful political movement alliances between unions, parties, and social movements. Much of the literature in English on climate organizing is dominated by US and UK scholarship: countries where there is comparatively less to show of successful working-class organizing and movement-building. Many of the issues (re)discovered in the US have been exhaustively debated already in other parts of the world and experimented with. Moving out of the US experience, there is much to learn from political movement organizing in Europe and Latin America where utilities, for example, have been de-privatized (a core goal in Huber's model). A mature organizational thinking recognizes the importance of alliance-building, and constructing a political front that captures the best of horizontal and vertical organizing (Nunes, 2021).

5. The role of professionals

As recent experiences of ecological and labor organizing demonstrate, several efforts to position electricity workers at the forefront of climate struggles have largely failed (Ahern, 2022). This outcome cannot simply be explained by the protagonism in environmental activism of professional–managerial classes, but rather by the persistent difficulty of persuading many energy workers that a decarbonized transition serves their own material interests (Levien, 2023). These arguments challenge Huber's strategic emphasis on energy workers, and his critique of the Professional Managerial Class (PMC) alone as the cause of the

failed climate politics (Katz-Rosene, 2023). But let us delve a little deeper on how Huber sees the PMC, and how he sees it as a major obstacle to the climate struggle.

Huber argues that the three misdiagnoses of the climate problem have a class dimension. They stem from the climate movement being composed mostly of members of a 'professional class': university-educated scientists, technocrats, and NGO employees.[18] Unlike the working-class, this PMC is alien to material production. Knowledge workers consequently see climate as an issue of 'policy-making', or, given their own higher consumption levels, believe that reducing consumption is what is at stake. Professionals, Huber proposes, have been conditioned to compete for education credentials, believing that they deserve their merits. This leads them to a sense of inflated self-importance and delusion that it is they who are largely responsible for climate change (academics lamenting their flight milage, and not the decisions of the capitalists who own airlines). This class experience corresponds to a naïve liberal theory of change, in Huber's view, whereby change occurs when enough people understand a problem and change their habits, or vote for representatives who will implement 'the right' policies to 'fix things'. Huber distinguishes between scientists, technocrats, and radicals: the first two conditioned by their professions; the third, exemplified by degrowth activists, driven by 'a carbon guilt' from the dissonance between what they preach and the high levels of consumption they enjoy.

It is true that the current climate movement is predominantly composed of professionals (or would-be professionals, aka university students). We agree that this could lead to a distorted picture of the world and offer a limited base upon which to build power. Framing this in class terms, however, is trickier. If one follows Huber's own Marxist definition of class based on ownership, it is questionable whether PMC passes as "a class." Indeed, Huber himself at some point wonders whether it is better to see PMC as part of the working class. One might complicate the dual capitalist-working class division by introducing a two dimensional matrix

[18] Let us note here, without delving deeper, that Huber misses another dominant diagnosis and associated professional constituency: climate change as a technological problem that has a technological solution that can be developed, or has been developed, and is not being implemented. This ecomodernist discourse, with which Huber flirts, albeit with a socialist twist, is prevalent among engineers and other vocal members of the professional classes, and it would be interesting to hear Huber's views about the origins of this discourse and its material bases.

of ownership of means of production versus autonomy, where capitalists and workers occupy two quadrants (full/no ownership, full/no autonomy), and small business owners (the petit bourgeois), and well-paid managers occupy 'contradictory' positions (the former own means but have little autonomy, the latter do not own means but have some autonomy at work), aligning partly with capital and partly with workers (Wright, 2015). The PMC, however, does not map neatly onto the managerial position, since many, if not most, scientists, non-governmental organization, or government workers are neither managers nor directors; they are wage workers with levels of autonomy akin to those of clerical workers. Their salaries are equivalent (at least in western countries) to those of nurses or specialized manual workers without university degrees. Moreover, many professionals work in public or non-profit sectors and not private enterprises, so the allegiance with the capitalist class is not obvious.

One may abandon the materialist analysis and follow a more subjective understanding of propensities based on university education, and the life and professional experiences this entails. There is a tension, however, in Huber's analysis in so far as he rejects sociological takes on class and wants to follow a strictly materialized approach to class analysis, but the kernel of his critique to degrowth (PMC) is a very sociological one; indeed, we, like Wright (2015) and others, think that materialist and culturalist/sociological understandings of class formation must and can be combined.

There is indeed a sense of intuitive truth in the proposition that climate scientists, independently of whether they are part of a separate class or not, trained and socialized as they are in communities of natural science will come to see the climate problem as one of scientific knowledge. Technocrats, trained and socialized in public policy in an era dominated by mainstream economics, will come to see climate as an issue of costs and missing markets (and engineers, as something begging for a technological fix). It is also true that the material interests (and life experiences) of those with higher levels of security may be different from those with lower levels. Huber castigates correctly the moralist discourse permeating part of the climate movement, including radicals, a discourse that can be traced back to Al Gore, where climate change is framed as an ethical challenge. As we will argue, however, the issue here is not to discard moral sentiments and motivations, but to find ways through which they can be politicized and incorporated into a social struggle.

Huber's analysis of climate radicals becomes even more problematic when it is linked to degrowth, since Huber there uses his knowledge of professionals in the US to extrapolate and speculate on the motivations of a group of people (degrowth activists) in a very different part of the world, mostly southern Europe, that he has neither studied nor experienced.[19] The sentiments, experiences, and contradictory class and social positions of those favourably inclined to radical positions, such as degrowth in places like southern Europe, while interesting, cannot be reduced to an issue of guilt. Worse, the attribution of guilt moves one to the realm of speculative psychology. Guilt, an emotional response based on self-judgement of excessive consumption is neither an objective interest, nor can it be traced empirically or attributed, at least not easily, to a class or even to social position. Causal speculations between social positions and emotional predispositions are difficult to prove (akin to what biologists call 'just so' theories),[20] and risk subjectivizing the objective claims at stake. (This is worse when invoking guilt, as by suggesting that the position at stake is 'emotional', it is implied that it is not rational/objective. It is, therefore, condemned to remain a moral issue, not to be politicized, which, in our view, is precisely the problem).

[19] Just to mention a few (anecdotal) differences between the US and southern Europe that may influence the position and experiences of university graduates and academics: 1. an academic in southern Europe is typically a public sector employee and has a fraction of the salary of an academic in the US, experiencing very different living conditions. 2. Most of the universities are public, typically with low or no tuition and there is probably much higher representation of working-class family backgrounds among university graduates in southern Europe. 3. University students (and graduates) tend to be more politicized and organized in southern Europe. 4. Southern European countries have had more tumultuous political histories shaping the experiences of current generations (indicatively, one of us has had a parent and a grandparent imprisoned by US-backed military regimes). 5. The socio-economic composition of southern European countries is likely to be different from that of the US with a higher share of university graduates, but with lower standards of living than most workers in the US. Anecdotal evidence from the fieldwork of our colleague, Maro Pantazidou, with youth working in solidarity initiatives in Greece points to hard-to-classify class positions in relation to Huber's scheme: cases of precarious university graduates, descendants of manual workers, subsisting after graduation on low incomes from private tutoring or working on food delivery, while devoting time to the commons and political activism.

[20] By 'just so' theories, critical biologists referred to grand, intuitively sensible, but ultimately unverifiable claims about the origin of something. Consider, for example, how easily one could have built a 'just so' PMC theory against Huber and his theory. Say someone who, unlike us, disagrees with the protagonism Huber ascribes to the industrial working class, arguing that certain professionals, distanced as they are because of their well-paid intellectual jobs from the working class, feel guilty for their disconnection and try to compensate this by elevating manual workers to the role of a protagonist. Or one could claim that the very preoccupation of Huber with identifying a protagonist agent, or proving degrowth wrong and his version of modernist socialism right, is so because, as an academic, he is acculturated in competitive academic environments, where distinctiveness and difference of opinion are being rewarded, and where the norm of interaction is combative and competitive, asserting one's own truth against that of others. There is, of course, intuitive sense in both these claims, but does this make them 'true' and more importantly, does it make them relevant when assessing Huber's claims? We don't think so.

Liberal thinkers, such as von Mises, Schumpeter, and Hayek, were the first to employ this type of just-so 'class analysis' in their critiques of socialism.[21] Turning Marxist class analysis on its head, they explained the Marxist inclination of academics in (supposedly) class terms. Their speculative claims, presented with unfounded certainty based on the undeniable strength of their prose, categorized Marxist intellectuals as a product of capitalism's success. These successes produced a surfeit of well-paid professors, trained and drawn to big ideas, such as socialism, while lacking the practical economic experience of entrepreneurs. Frustrated with their failure and inability to change the material world around them, these intellectuals vied to assert their power by agitating the world with their impractical ideals. The lineage of claims currently in vogue to discredit academics and climate activists as aloof elites pursuing their own messianic interests can be traced back to these liberal thinkers. It is a dangerous road for socialists like Huber to follow. Degrowth, like climate change or socialism, must be assessed based on its objective claims and not on skewed just-so speculations about the claimants' personal motivations. This slippery slope dips towards relativizing, and so delegitimating creditable intellectual and scientific work.[22]

Despite these misgivings, Huber's engagement with the relation between professionals and the working class exposes important issues. Analytically and theoretically, the issue is how those more highly educated citizens influence social change, and how their social positions and experience shape their participation, and framing, of processes of change. The related normative-ethical issue concerns the responsibility of scientists and academics, more generally in the present moment of crisis, in constructively navigating their own ideas that are shaped and limited by their own positionalities.

[21] See Hayek (1949/2020) on *Intellectuals and Socialism*.

[22] By this we do not mean to deny that claims to truth are socially produced, and that the 'archaeology' of such claims cannot be unpacked and deconstructed (in a Foucaldian sense). What we are saying is that, first, this must be done properly, with due scientific method, and not assertive, but ultimately speculative claims; and second, that deconstructing a claim can help contextualize it better but cannot be used for relativizing or discrediting it. As Bruno Latour (2018) has argued, it is one thing to explain the various human processes and institutions at play in validating the claims of scientists about the state of the planet, and an altogether different thing to reduce, and discredit, climate change to the product of the fantasy of self-interested, fund-seeking climate scientists.

A starting point in analysing these issues could be the older debates of socialists about the role of intellectuals vis-à-vis the working-class in social revolution. These debates cannot be summarised here, but they do seem a better starting point for thinking about the position of professionals in a process of change than liberal critiques of intellectuals, rediscovered as critiques of a professional class. Historically, aristocratic, bourgeois, and professional intellectuals (from Lenin, Engels, and Marx, to Luxembourg, Kropotkin, and Bakunin or Che Guevara) did have a decisive role in the socialist movements and revolutions of the first half of the 20th century, and in subsequent third world revolutions. University students stirred democratic revolts in the West and catalysed socialist national liberation movements in Africa in the absence of industrial working classes (Bianchini et al., 2023). Huber's model does not allow us to think about why and how some professionals may support, and even be, leading figures in working-class politics while others not.

If our above analysis is correct, this opens the possibility that political action, in all classes, is not solely driven by objective material interests but also by subjective, idealist motivations, and emotions and formative experiences. (The alternative is classifying all non-working-class revolutionaries as idiosyncratic cases of individuals acting against their class interest, which we don't find convincing.) Huber seems to accept such non-materialist motivations, abandoning a strict Marxist formulation of class-driven interest when making his point about the PMC, where guilt, education, and other factors play a crucial role. The interesting question then becomes: Which workers and which professionals, and even which capitalists, under what conditions (would) align in an eco-socialist direction? Material interests carry a principal weight. Without the idealism, rage, or urge that often drive political organizing, however, such material interests may never be realized as political struggle. This is why we cannot dismiss moral sentiments and emotional motivations, and instead must insist on their politicization. Marx and Engels were driven by a moral concern for the working class and not by their own material interest. They differ from someone like Al Gore in that their concern took a radical political dimension and the intellectual product of this concern became part of the social struggle.

Another positive effect of Huber's critique of professionals is forcing readers to look inwards and reflect on their own positionality: how their own class, interests, and life experiences may

influence or skew their intellectual claims.[23] Because education and intellectual work create distance from manual working-class experiences, how can an analyst adequately account for working-class needs and potential without falling into traps, such as the misdiagnoses that Huber points to? Conversely, how can academics avoid the other extreme of romanticizing or overhyping, say manual workers, people from whose experiences they may be disconnected? Ethnographers set a standard for studying and reporting on peoples who live differently while reflecting and reporting on one's own position. Gramsci's notion of the 'organic intellectual' (i.e., intellectuals who organically emerged from particular constituencies in social conflict and through their everyday participation in political struggles), as noted, is preferable in considering transformative political agency rather than perpetuating a dualism between manual and intellectual workers.

Indeed, a problem in Huber's analysis is that, like much work on climate organizing, it appears to be written 'from the outside': from a professional standpoint, offering a strategy that should appeal to and mobilise a separate 'working class'. The second author of this paper, who feels embedded within the working class, has refused to work on climate change in his academic work, and at a personal cost to career and funding opportunities, precisely because

[23] We did this inward work, given that we missed a certain transparency in terms of positionality by Huber himself, and so we would like to state our own positions here in case they help the reader understand where we are coming from, and on what basis we might be arguing what we argue. We are both 'professionals' in terms of employment, working for the public sector and with different degrees of 'autonomy' and security. One of us is a tenured professor with a distinguished professorship which, in Spain, secures a very decent (though medium to low by US standards) salary, coupled with access to free public health, childcare and education, low-cost public transport, etc. The other author, twelve years after completing a PhD, does not have a permanent job and is supported with two to three year 'post-doc' fellowships. Huber would classify the latter's position as a proletarianization of a professional class member, but this is perhaps a proletarianization of the position itself, not the person involved, to the extent that his is the case of someone coming from a proletarian background and continuing to live under semi-proletarian conditions despite working in academia. Among the 12 uncles and aunts of this author, only two have a university degree, one being his father who studied to become an engineer while working on the assembly line. Among 25 cousins, only five, including himself, have a degree, the only one among his two other siblings. The parents of the other author were medical doctors from impoverished backgrounds, all four grandparents of the author being manual or home workers. His parents-in-law are semi-retired Latino immigrants in the US who worked as manual workers in manufacturing and trucking. Both authors grew up in urban neighbourhoods, where many of their elementary school friends did not go to university, though one of the authors also studied later in an elite high school and experienced first-hand the upper side of the class pyramid. To such complex and hard to package and label class-related positions and experiences, we could add the historical moments in which the authors came of age (Greece and Italy in the 1980s to 1990s), and the very politicized family environments in which they grew up. All this is not to boast of our working-class credentials or introspect excessively—rather it is just to illustrate that one's class positionalities are complex and cannot be reduced to simple determinants that boil down to 'guilt'.

he does not perceive it to be of immediate concern among the workers with whom he lives. (He studies instead waste contamination and workplace pollution). We do not point to a right or wrong approach here. We illuminate the tough questions to be addressed in the relation between professionals/academics and working-class politics, especially around climate change.

To summarise, one can agree that the climate movement is currently dominated by professionals, and that this skews its diagnoses and strategies, and limits its popular base. One can also agree that some of the professionals involved in the climate movement tend to mobilize ethical and moral discourses that exude guilt. We reject, however, and find unnecessary just-so, non-empirical explanations for the motivations of different types of professionals. We believe that, in the light of current experiences and the historical record, it is important to theorize the role that certain types of professionals and academics could play in an alliance of unions, parties, and social movements. And we insist that the objective should be to politicize moral motivations where these are prevalent, not discard them as such.

6. Towards a theory of change

In this essay, we have attempted to identify elements of a theory of change in a degrowth direction, engaging with Matt Huber's recent contribution on socialist strategy. We appreciate Huber's contribution to the degrowth scholarship, first, his strong emphasis on questions of strategy and how to win a struggle, two, a welcome return of emphasis on working class agency, third, the importance of tactics of striking and of blocking critical infrastructures, and fourth, the recognition that the capitalist class stands as an obstacle to an eco-social transition and needs to be tactically confronted.

By engaging with Huber's book, we have taken up the opportunity to clarify better both our compass, that of 'eco-socialist degrowth', and the pathways that lead to it. By ecosocialist degrowth, we mean classless, egalitarian societies of frugal abundance, where human needs are collectively met, and where there is socialized sufficiency and collective luxury. Ecosocialist degrowth departs drastically from some socialist visions of abundance, where access to what capitalism now offers to a few is generalized to everyone; and is close, but

also, different from Huber's vision, in that he is less convinced of the necessity for sufficiency or frugality, given the prospect of technologies to provide (under socialism) necessities and luxuries at a fraction of the current labour and energy requirements.

In terms of a theory of transformation, we can summarise six features of our 'model'.

First, we see, like Huber, working people as the core agent of change, but our theory extends the working class to include all those engaged in productive and reproductive labour, whose labour is exploited, appropriated, or expropriated for surplus extraction. This includes waged and unwaged workers, care providers, peasants, and environmental defenders across borders.

Second, we emphasise the need for articulating alliances—alliances between the different types of workers, waged and non-waged, productive and reproductive, industrial and non-industrial, manual and intellectual, low and higher paid. If capitalism divides by differentiated rewards and positions, the big challenge here is how to unite across such different positionalities. Mass-based political parties are one form of condensing and organizing new alliances, but, learning from the anti-globalization and Pink Tide "movement of movements," one needs to think about the context-specific, and effective articulations of movements, parties and unions, each feeding and strengthening the other.

Third, we argued that such alliances may mobilize diverse repertoires of contention, repertoires that need to be conjuncturally determined and strategized. Following Erik Olin-Wright's (2020) tripartite framework, we can think here of articulations of intersticial, symbiotic, and ruptural strategies, as fit for purpose, and as suitable in specific socio-spatial conjunctures. Strike action by essential workers in the energy sector, Huber's priority strategy, might be more suitable in the current moment in the US, and in a context of mobilizing essential workers in the climate battle. It might or it might not be elsewhere; and even where and when it is, it should be articulated with other strategies, otherwise alone, at best, it can only have limited effects.

Fourth, alliances and repertoires should be thought of internationally and geopolitically, otherwise one's domestic working class will be pit against another´s or against working class immigrants. Working class struggles must be organized cross borders, among those exploited. Anti-colonial movements are central foci, and not just add ons, in degrowth transformations. At the same token, working class movements against domestic elites or fossil capital interests within the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, where most of the industrial work and extraction takes place, are equally important.

Fifth, everyday consumption practices, especially collective ones, are part of the repertoire of pre-figurative, interstitial strategies where new common senses and social relations are forged, enabling workers and citizens to desire differently. Different desires are a fuel for political action on top of material interests, and they are a necessary condition both for lower and higher paid workers to get mobilized in an ecosocialist, degrowth direction. Political projects that link climate action to the material interests of workers are crucial, but so is cultural change, and change of the social imaginary, which for us is not a secondary consideration, but a central one. Historical experience tells us, that even in a scenario, hard as it is, when an alternative political-economic project advances to replace—partially or fully—capitalism, this project is likely to produce new relations of domination, if it hasn't first managed to re-articulate common senses and reorient prevalent desires.

Sixth, we advocated here for a plural, overlapping approach, welcoming redundancies between different strategies and agents. Actors involved in industrial action, commoning, electoral politics, and blockades should not compete for primacy but start from what they share, reinforce one another. Redundancy, in Bateson's (2000) sense, is a source of stability and resilience in complex systems change. This should not be mistaken for a strategic indeterminacy or an 'anything goes' approach. Different combinations will work better under different conjunctures. Which approach works best in which context can only be determined by those—including the organic intellectuals—struggling on the ground, and cannot be determined theoretically, and from an informed distance.

Acknowledgements

We thank Matt Huber and Jason Hickel for comments to an initial draft. Ros Sorensen edited this text and improved its English. This essay benefitted from conversations of the circle on political transformations as part of the 'REAL – A post-growth deal' research project (www.realpostgrowth.eu). We especially thank Judith Pape and Diego Andreucci who led a group discussion of Huber's book. We also thank all other participants whose comments there and in other reading conversations informed this essay in various ways (namely: Elke Pirgmaier, Feroz Khan, Theodoros Semertzidis, Victor Canilla, Zehra Yasin, Bertie Rusell, Charles Stevenson, Angelos Varvarousis, David Gilbert).

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Funding

Giacomo D'Alisa acknowledges funding support from the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the Spanish Ministry of Universities under the program María Zambrano (ID: 673220) funded by the European Union-Next Generation EU. This work was supported from the European Research Council REAL under the European Union's — ERC-2022-SYG REAL Reference Number 101071647.

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