

For an Ecosocialist Degrowth

Degrowth and ecosocialism are two of the most important movements—and proposals—on the radical side of the ecological spectrum. Sure, not everyone in the degrowth community identifies as a socialist, and not everyone who is an ecosocialist is convinced by the desirability of degrowth. But one can see an increasing tendency of mutual respect and convergence. Let us try to map the large areas of agreement between us, and list some of the main arguments for an ecosocialist degrowth:

1. Capitalism cannot exist without growth. It needs a permanent expansion of production and consumption, accumulation of capital, maximization of profit. This process of unlimited growth, based on the exploitation of fossil fuels since the eighteenth century, is leading to ecological catastrophe, climate change, and threatens the extinction of life on the planet. The twenty-six UN Climate Change Conferences of the last thirty years manifest the total unwillingness of the ruling elites to stop the course toward the abyss.

2. Any true alternative to this perverse and destructive dynamic needs to be radical—that is, must deal with the roots of the problem: the capitalist system, its exploitative and extractivist dynamic, and its blind and obsessive pursuit of growth. Ecosocialist degrowth is one such alternative, in direct confrontation with capitalism and growth. Ecosocialist degrowth requires the social appropriation of the main means of (re)production and a democratic, participatory, ecological planning. The main decisions on the priorities of production and consumption will be decided by people themselves, in order to satisfy real social needs while respecting the ecological limits of the planet. This means that people, at various scales, exercise direct power in democratically determining what is to be produced, how, and how much; how to remunerate

different kinds of productive and reproductive activities that sustain us and the planet. Ensuring equitable well-being for all does not require economic growth but rather radically changing how we organize the economy and distribute social wealth.

3. A significant degrowth in production and consumption is ecologically indispensable. The first and urgent measure is phasing out fossil fuels, as well as the ostentatious and wasteful consumption of the 1 percent rich elite. From an ecosocialist perspective, degrowth has to be understood in dialectical terms: many forms of production (such as coal-fired facilities) and services (such as advertisement) should not only be reduced but suppressed; some, such as private cars or cattle raising, should be substantially reduced; but others would need development, such as agro-ecological farming, renewable energy, health and educational services, and so on. For sectors like health and education, this development should be, first and foremost, qualitative. Even the most useful activities have to respect the limits of the planet; there can be no such thing as an "unlimited" production of any good.

4. Productivist "socialism," as practiced by the USSR, is a dead end. The same applies to "green" capitalism as advocated by corporations or mainstream "Green parties." Ecosocialist degrowth is an attempt to overcome the limitations of past socialist and "green" experiments.

5. It is well known that the Global North is historically responsible for most of the carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere. The rich countries must therefore take the larger part in the process of degrowth. At the same time, we do not believe that the Global South should try to copy the productivist and destructive model of "development" of the North, but look instead for a different approach, emphasizing the real needs of the populations in terms of food, housing, and basic services, instead of extracting more and more raw materials (and fossil fuels) for the capitalist world market,

or producing more and more cars for the privileged minorities.

6. Ecosocialist degrowth also involves transformation, through a process of democratic deliberation, of existing consumption models—for instance, an end to planned obsolescence and nonrepairable goods; of transport patterns, for instance, by greatly reducing the hauling of goods by ships and trucks (thanks to the relocalization of production), as well as airplane traffic. In short, it is much more than a change of property forms, it is a civilizational transformation, a new “way of life” based on values of solidarity, democracy, equal liberty, and respect for Earth. Ecosocialist degrowth signals a new civilization that breaks with productivism and consumerism, in favor of shorter working time, thus more free time devoted to social, political, recreational, artistic, ludic, and erotic activities.

7. Ecosocialist degrowth can only win through a confrontation with the fossil oligarchy and the ruling classes who control political and economic power. Who is the subject of this struggle? We cannot overcome the system without the active participation of the urban and rural working class, who make up the majority of the population and are already bearing the brunt of capitalism’s social and ecological ills. But we also have to expand the definition of the working class to include those who undertake social and ecological reproduction, the forces who are now at the forefront of social-ecological mobilizations: youth, women, Indigenous peoples, and peasants. A new social and ecological consciousness will emerge through the process of self-organization and active resistance of the exploited and oppressed.

8. Ecosocialist degrowth forms part of the broader family of other radical, antisystemic ecological movements: ecofeminism, social ecology, Sumak Kawsay (the Indigenous “Good Life”), environmentalism of the poor, Blockadia, Green New Deal (in its more critical versions), among many others. We do not seek any primacy—we just think that ecosocialism and degrowth have

a shared and potent diagnostic and prognostic frame to offer alongside these movements. Dialogue and common action are urgent tasks in the present dramatic conjuncture.

1 April 2022

Signatories: Michael Löwy, Director of Research Emeritus, CNRS, Paris, author of *Qu'est-ce que l'Ecosocialisme?* (Paris, Le Temps des Cérises, 2020); Bengi Akbulut, Concordia University, Montreal; Sabrina Fernandes, Doctor of Sociology, ecosocialist organizer, post-doctoral fellow at the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and producer of *Tese Onze*. Giorgos Kallis, professor at ICTA-Barcelona, and author of *The Case for Degrowth* (Polity Press, 2020).

Source: Monthly Review Volume 73, Issue 11 (April 2022)