

“‘Behind Enemy Lines’ and ‘Running Out of Time’?: The Necessity For, but the Need to Transcend, Conventional Climate Politics and Policy”

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For over 30 years we have had the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the annual Conference of the Parties (COPs), and yet greenhouse gas emissions keep rising. Nation-states have enacted climate change legislation, declared ‘climate and ecological emergencies’ and yet the climate crisis accelerates and the sixth great mass extinction continues. Fossil fuels, the main cause of the climate crisis, was not even mentioned in official COP documents until COP26 in Glasgow in 2021. It seems we are in what might be called ‘simulative green politics’ (Blüdhorn), or an updating for the Capitalocene/Anthropocene of St Augustine’s famous statement ‘Lord, make us chaste, but not just yet’, now rendered as ‘make us sustainable, but not just yet. So ‘what is to be done’ as Lenin perceptively asked?

This presentation will outline why there is no capitalist solution to our planetary crisis, yet in defence of the economic status quo we see more attention (in politics, policy, business, the media and academia) being given to, *inter alia*, climate adaptation (rather than mitigation), risky and unproven techno-optimistic proposals from geo-engineering to carbon capture, and frankly ‘mythic’ thinking around ‘green growth’, GenAI visions of a ‘circular economy’, the technological decoupling of growth from resource, energy and pollution, and the electrification of everything as decarbonisation of economy and society. All of which are de- or even anti-political strategies deployed to inoculate democracy from capitalism and also promote passivity not agency from citizens.

The suggestion I make is that there are multiple benefits from integrating a *materialist* approach (a broadly Eco Marxist political economy) with a *metabolic* analysis (based on science) of the unevenly distributed causes, consequences and solutions to the polycrisis. My central claim is that there are now science-based reasons for why we need a *revolution beyond capitalism*, as opposed to a *low-carbon transition within it*, but there is a reticence amongst scientists, coupled with resistance amongst policymakers, businesses and other elites, to say this ‘quiet part out loud’. Some suggestions as to what this revolution may entail will be proposed: in the minority world/global north, the management of the economy released from the tyranny and ecocidal impacts of GDP ‘economic growth’; the *socialisation of consumption and democratisation of production* (at macro and workplace levels); a *low energy* not a *low carbon energy* future; *selective deglobalisation* of the economy; and a *working-class* green/climate politics that emphasises jobs, public services, pleasure, meaningful free time and *abundance rather than sacrifice*.