

# Capitalism Climate Crisis

## System Change, Not Climate Change!?

### A Preamble

A deadly monster has risen behind you—turn around, fight it now, or it will destroy you.

*Hans Joachim Schellnhuber*



Anyone who observed the changes in nature in recent years could not avoid the fear that the biblical plagues would be surpassed. Rising sea levels, storm surges, and floods in some regions, desertification and desert formation in others. In addition, forest fires of devastating proportions are raging everywhere, in Australia, Siberia, the USA, Canada, and Brazil, and there is widespread dying of forests through heat waves, droughts, and hurricanes. And all this has catastrophic consequences. Huge swarms of locusts are raging in Africa, in Greece masses of dead migratory birds are falling from the sky, and even in the rich and supposedly safe Germany it is now necessary to keep a very close eye on how full the grain stores are and how individual regions can be supplied with drinking water. While the biblical plagues were limited to ancient Egypt, today's multiple ecological crisis undoubtedly has global dimensions. This is also increasingly true of its accompanying and consequential effects, such as the acidification of the oceans—a ticking time bomb. And for all those who still hoped to belong to the last generation to be spared the consequences of the destruction of nature, the COVID-19 pandemic clearly shows that this is not the case. Just like countless other novel pathogens, such as swine flu, MERS, Ebola, bird flu, and all other SARS variants, COVID-19 is a direct result of the constraints of natural systems, i.e., the capitalist overexploitation of nature. Even the biggest pessimists would not in 2010 have thought of that which would become bitter reality not 10 years later.

The climate heating caused by humankind, which dominates and accelerates the entire ecological crisis, has been proven for decades and is completely undisputed in science. The *United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)* met for the first time as early as 1988, and since the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 there have been binding targets under international law for lower greenhouse gas emissions. In 2007, Al Gore and the *UN Climate Council* were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their commitment to climate protection, and at the UN Climate Change Conference in 2015, the international community agreed by consensus to keep the rise in temperature well below 2°C. The threat here is of irreversible tipping points in the climate system. Tipping points are defined as triggers of uncontrollable domino effects which would likely completely remove climate heating from human control. And what has happened since then? Not much. Humankind's greenhouse gas emissions are rising and rising despite all warnings from science, despite all new findings on tipping points, and finally, despite all technological progress. There is currently little to suggest that the momentous 1.5 - 2°C temperature increase could be sustained. It is more likely to be a devastating 4 or even more degrees by the end of the century—if nothing is done!

The fact that the climate crisis, and especially the failure to comply with the Paris Climate Change Treaty since 2019, is even being discussed at all in the general public is significantly not the merit of climate science and certainly not that of the caste of bourgeois politicians who have broken their own agreement. The credit for this goes solely to the young environmental movement and especially to *Fridays for Future*. Parents, who always claim to want the best for their children and say that they “should be better off later,” did not and do not want to accept what the young generation noticed by means of simple mathematics. Anyone born after the year 2000 is likely to come suspiciously close to the end of the century that most climate scenarios are focusing on. The generation born after the year 2000 will have to hand over the world to their children and grandchildren in exactly the same catastrophic state that the respective climate models calculate.

Seriously?!

The fight against global heating has already been described as a “baptism of fire for the nascent world society.” However, the hope that was raised during the big demonstrations in 2019 is already fading. Everything was so promising in the beginning. The young movement grew and grew, its representatives were allowed to present their concerns at the highest levels, on every stage, met Obama, Merkel, and the Pope, and were showered with awards, media attention, and compliments. But unfortunately, not much happened. In the meantime, the corona pandemic and the related protective measures have taken control of the world, and the climate crisis has lost much of its significance for the time being.

“Listen to Science” has been the main message of the *Fridays for Future* movement so far, whether in its demonstrations and school strikes, on TV talk shows, or even with mass appeal on YouTube; “We do not make demands but refer again and again to science and remind politicians of their own Parisian climate goal.” For a grassroots movement of schoolchildren, this approach initially sounded logical and perhaps even promising. In the meantime, however, it must be said that this strategy has not been successful. If politicians are aware of all the facts, then at least the **question of why they do not listen to science** must arise. It would be better to take a step back even further and ask **why nature is being destroyed in the first place**.<sup>1</sup> And whether the answer to the second question is not perhaps also the answer to the first.

While some activists resign and withdraw in frustration, others stick to the strategy of appealing to politicians' common sense, even though they have long since proven that they are not acting after all. Other activists have decided to run for parliament themselves. And yet there are four decades of experience with Green Parties, especially in Germany—parties that started with noble intentions and then became part of the German Federal Government, which in Brussels at the end of the 1990s ensured that the limits on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for cars were prevented. These experiences already suggest that a Green Parties government (participation) is unlikely to be enough to get the climate crisis under control. Parts of the young movement have therefore distanced themselves from the currently dominant realpolitik course under the slogan “System Change, Not Climate Change.” But who or what is the system anyway? And if “System Change” is really supposed to be the solution, what can a movement do—apart from sticking to this slogan? The urgently needed debate on these questions seems to be just beginning within the young environmental movement. This paper is intended as an attempt to make a contribution.

## 1. The Climate and Environmental Disaster

In pragmatic terms, our challenge is less to save the earth from ourselves and more to save ourselves from an earth that, if pushed too far, has ample power to rock, burn, and shake us off completely. *Naomi Klein*

Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly. *Friedrich Engels*

Today, unlike a few years ago, hardly anyone disputes that the climate and with it the weather extremes have changed drastically. Even the lobbyists have become much quieter. Today it is more like to be: “One can't protect the climate ... it has been changing since the earth was formed; at times it was colder and at times hotter; what should one protect?” Or in the same logic: “Nature will fix it; it has always adapted in its development and will inevitably do so even with the current

climate warming.”

Is it really confidence or rather overplayed desperation or the not unjustified fear of fundamental change that speaks from such sentences? Of course, the world has been spinning through space quite consistently for billions of years and everything that exists on it is in the process of coming into being and passing away. The reference to the fact that the world will continue to exist in spite of climate heating and that nature should also come to terms with the new conditions is of course justified in this respect. Unfortunately, however, this statement misses the point entirely and can therefore offer little consolation. For, unlike what the phrase “climate protection” could literally mean, it is of course not about “protecting the climate,” but about the human species. The climate and ecological catastrophe is currently threatening to become **an existential crisis for humanity**. In the history of the planet there certainly have been many climate extremes, but that was several million years ago. “We are currently causing conditions that humans have never had to deal with since they learned to walk upright.”<sup>2</sup>

**Human life** can only exist in and through **metabolism with nature**.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore inevitable that human beings contribute to the dynamics of constant change in nature through their existence alone. Transfiguring and idealising ideas of “untouched nature” or “eternal unchanging cycles” are misleading because everything is in constant evolution, and humans inevitably intervene in nature. The idea of “back to nature” is therefore not possible at all. Unfortunately, the fact that nature is in a state of constant development does not mean that the basis of human life can be arbitrarily modified. Rather, there are **objective material limits**. The dramatic thing is that people are already massively crossing these limits. It will only be possible to overstress ecosystems for a very short time, i.e., to consume resources faster than they can regenerate.<sup>4</sup> This is the actual meaning of the word “sustainability.” There is only limited access to clean water, waste depots are filled much faster than they can degrade, and most serious is the already overused atmosphere, which functions as a landfill for greenhouse gases. Certainly, there are many examples in history of how people have been able to massively overstretch the limits and how their actions have caused the devastation of entire regions. However, the current overexploitation of nature has a completely different quality, as, unlike prior excesses such as acid rain, it has both global dimensions and can have irreversible consequences for humanity. This previously had been “only” the case when the hole in the ozone layer was caused by CFCs, but it could be brought under control to some extent. This time it will not be that easy!

In 2009, with the model of “planetary boundaries,” scientists named and attempted to quantify the material load limits of the human basis of life in nine dimensions.<sup>5</sup> “Research shows that these nine processes and systems determine the stability and resilience of the Earth’s system—i.e., the interactions between land, oceans, atmosphere, and living organisms, which together make up the environmental conditions on which our societies are based.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, all of these nine systems have limits that must not be exceeded in the long term if humanity is not to undermine its conditions of existence. This would put the Earth’s system in a new state, and climate heating and mass extinction play a crucial role. The average temperature of the Earth has already increased by about 1°C since the pre-industrial age. The previously discussed tipping points of the climate system, which lurk somewhere at or above 1.5°C, make it clear that there is only a small window of opportunity to prevent ecological collapse.

What we are dealing with today is therefore nothing less than “an environmentally historical special case [...]. Only the uncontrolled and apparently unlimited use of fossil fuels—the rapid consumption of biomass accumulated and decomposed over millions of years—makes the extreme extent of intervention in the Earth’s systems possible.”<sup>7</sup> In short, the burning of the energy sources coal, oil, and gas is currently the crux of the entire ecological crisis. They are mainly responsible for climate heating, which massively impacts the other “planetary boundaries,” such as mass extinction, freshwater consumption, or ocean acidification. In addition to the burning of fossil fuels, the current form of agriculture, with its intensive animal husbandry and monocultures, must

also be mentioned when it comes to human-made greenhouse gases and mass extinction. Theoretically, it would be possible to achieve climate neutrality. In its present form, agriculture—nitrous oxide as a result of fertilisation and methane from livestock farming—and land use are responsible for about a quarter of all greenhouse gases worldwide.

Critical natural scientists have proclaimed the **Anthropocene** as the new Earth Age, the Earth Age of Humankind. The term is intended to make it clear that humans have now become the most important factor in biological, geological, and atmospheric processes. As important as this exhortation was, it also illustrates the limited bourgeois horizon of these same natural scientists. After all, it is not “man” as such, the “homo sapiens,” who is destroying the basis of his life. Rather, it is the human being in this society. Nor can it be due to “technical development” alone. At least in theory, this technology could be used in a completely different way. We must not speak hastily of “man” and “technology,” but must ask ourselves how people and their technology have developed and why they use their technical abilities in a certain way. It must also be remembered that people have different abilities to change these ways.

As will be shown, the following logic applies today: As long as there is a profit to be made from burning fossil fuels, fossil fuels will be burned. That is human logic and rationality—in capitalism. But this is not human behaviour per se, and in relation to the overall context of human life, this behaviour is anything but rational. The point is a different one: “It is not people per se, but people in the capitalist mode of production who have brought about such grandiose changes in all earth systems... The human being in the **Capitalocene**.”<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The Capitalist Compulsion for Growth and the Rat Race of Profit Maximisation

How dare you! *Greta Thunberg*

Getting companies on an ecological course without changing the framework conditions is not an option. You would jeopardise your competitive advantages. That is a law in a market economy, and you cannot get around it. *Klaus Wiegand (former board spokesman of Metro AG)*

Moreover, the development of capitalist production makes a continual increase in the capital invested in an industrial enterprise a necessity, and competition rules on every individual capitalist the immanent laws of the capitalist mode of production as external laws of compulsion. It compels him to keep expanding his capital in order to preserve it, and he can only expand it by means of progressive accumulation. *Karl Marx*

Nothing is produced in capitalist society if there is no prospect of profit behind it. Everything tends to be for sale. **Capitalism** is not just about money or amassing more money, nor is it just about the big players in the (cultural) industry like Apple or Coca Cola. Money has been around since ancient times, and in fact the desire for endless enrichment is inherent in money. But in the old, perished social formations this played a subordinate role. Today, the increase of money has become the basis of society. The products of labor are produced as **commodities**, i.e., as products intended for exchange with others. Thus, the products of labor in our society are inevitably commodities and have a **value** and a **price**. That the production of wealth is not guided by the needs of people but by profit interests is central, the commodity the “elementary form” of wealth.<sup>9</sup> In the **commodity-producing society**, capitalism, it is therefore not just a matter of simple exchange, like buying and selling or lending money, but of investing one’s money in the production.

“Historically, this upheaval in Europe began in the late Middle Ages. People with money bought *tools* and *labor* to produce new commodities. Think, for example, of the manufactures from the early modern period. Many people did not own any work equipment or land and were therefore forced to sell their labor. The purpose behind the now expanded production was not to serve social

needs. Rather, the aim of those who had money was to *make more money from their existing money*. The value must realise itself—*realisation of the value*. Beyond mutual overreaching, this could only succeed if more value was created in production through labor than was spent on the purchased conditions of production. The important factor here was the labor force, whose value was lower than that of the work result it could provide.”<sup>10</sup>

Greta Thunberg recognised very well that the collapse of entire ecosystems is closely linked to the “fairy tales of eternal economic growth.” She should perhaps have added, “to the capitalist.” In fact, the drive of capital to make profit is excessive in principle and the forces of nature are considered as free and cheapening factors. Forests are being cleared, bodies of water polluted, and the atmosphere serves as a free dumping ground for greenhouse gases. The individual capital strives systematically for market shares and the highest possible profit. Wherever possible, nature must therefore exploit it as a “free productive force” and pass on the consequences to the general public and future generations without questioning them. This is the **essence of capital realisation** and not an immoral activity of a few villains and stock exchange speculators. That this is not about the character traits of individual capitalists, but about an immanent compulsion that this society necessarily produces, has never been proved as well as by Karl Marx in his critique of the political economy.<sup>11</sup> The compulsion of capital to assert itself against others on the market, to become cheaper, better, more productive, to sell more in order to ultimately displace other capital, is in its “nature.” If it does not do so, it gets lost, gets pushed out of the market itself, or gets bought up.<sup>12</sup> It must therefore continue to grow in order to stay one step ahead of its pursuers, or at least keep pace with them.<sup>13</sup>

This **compulsion to grow** manifests itself in an ever increasing quantity of commodities. If the capital grows, it means more commodities. If it becomes more productive—more commodities. It is about mass, and under these conditions the much-conjured “sustainability” is very quickly lost. In the end, the increase in productivity cannot be used to make do with fewer natural products. Capital only saves on the natural conditions of its reproduction if this nature costs more than other alternative means. The purpose of this cost saving is always to squeeze more profit out of the production process. Even the saving of raw materials leads to the fact that the commodities become cheaper, sell more, and in the end are consumed more. The increase in productivity has a similar effect on the workforce: instead of everyone working less, some involuntarily do not work at all, while others are under increasing pressure to perform. Above all, labor and nature present costs, and capital is always interested in both becoming cheaper.

While it was trendy for a short time in 2019 to refer to life cycle assessments, it sounds quite different in the crisis year 2020. The “Bazooka” was brought out again to “escape the crisis with a bang.” Shopping as the first civic duty—buy or die! —One knows again that the compulsion to grow creates its need for the demand for its commodities, and that these needs are above all about more and cheaper. Products with ever shorter shelf lives, constantly changing fashions, accompanied by the incessant advertising circus, are working constantly to maintain capitalist economic growth—however absurd the consequences may be: No one can rationally choose between fifty different tubes of toothpaste. Cities used to be places where children could play in the street, but now they have become car parks, and the car companies are among the richest in the world...

But growth is not only essential for the individual’s capital. Economic growth is also important for society as a whole and the **state** in particular. This is reflected, among other things, in the fact that the state usually aligns its policies with the needs of the economy. Not only because it is itself financially involved in the economy through its tax revenues and borrowing, but also because capitalist property forms its own basis. State and capital are subject to the same condition—private property. Economic promotion and protection are therefore among the core tasks of modern states. Environmental protection, like all non-profit tasks, is therefore in a tense relationship with capital interests, the defender of which is the state. On the **world market**, the competition between nation states is at work, and they must once again protect and promote “their” capital. This has

been and is evident in the fight for binding “climate targets.” It is the reason why states are finding it so difficult to comply with the Paris agreement, even though they had initially adopted it unanimously.

The fundamental problem that cannot be solved within this society is that the exorbitant compulsion to accumulate capital must determine behaviour towards nature. Capitalist society treats nature simply as a resource and a dump. It cannot take into account its limitations. After all, capital does not accept any boundaries in its urge to grow—devastatingly, not even the “planetary boundaries.” In a nutshell: **the infinite capitalist compulsion to grow is opposed to the finite basis of human life.** Capital grows too fast for natural processes. And this problem will not be solved by any technology that itself arises from the compulsion to grow. As long as the accumulation of profits is still possible, capital ultimately does not care “if a large part of the planet becomes uninhabitable,” it can even benefit from it. “The current level of civilisation, however, cannot exist beyond a certain limit.”<sup>14</sup> Whether in rebuilding destroyed regions, selling super luxury bunkers or insurance of all kinds, or setting up private fire brigades—capital still finds ways to maximise profits, even in the event of disaster.

An end of the climate crisis? According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), humanity may only emit less than 800 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the air if it still aims to meet the goals of the Paris Treaty of 2015 and stay below 2° temperature rise.<sup>15</sup> For 1.5° it would be less than 500 billion tons. At present the global figure is almost 45 billion tons per year. Rationally speaking, it is therefore clear what needs to be done in the coming years: a **radical limitation of emissions of all greenhouse gases** and an acceleration of all efforts to reach net zero!<sup>16</sup> But **for capital, the only rational thing is what makes more and more profit.** Of course, there are also capital factions that generate their profits from renewable energy. But as long as fossil fuels continue to make a profit, the market will “naturally” continue to include them. The fossil fuel industry must be compensated for its lost profits, so as not to jeopardise the foundations of a functioning market and state. The technologies to achieve net zero are already in place, but the market and the state are neither able to produce enough of them in the short term nor are they able to do without fossil fuels fast enough.<sup>17</sup> After all, the new technologies would have to be cheap enough to make enough profit in competition with fossil fuels, while at the same time generating enough energy to meet the growing demand. And all this within a few years. It would be madness to bet on this scenario!

### **3. Of Green Growth, the Boomerang Effect, and Technical Super Weapons**

The idea that capitalism and only capitalism can save the world from a crisis created by capitalism is no longer an abstract theory; it’s a hypothesis that has been tested and retested in the real world.[...] The soaring emissions speak for themselves. There will, no doubt, be more billionaire saviors who make splashy entrances, with more schemes to rebrand capitalism. The trouble is, we simply don’t have another decade to lose pinning our hopes on these sideshows. *Naomi Klein*

“For me, climate policy is no contradiction to business,” announced Germany’s Green Party leader Baerbock in a television interview.<sup>18</sup> This was in 2019, when her party basked in an unprecedented high and did not have the problem of having to cozy up to other parties in coalition negotiations. “Capitalism can save the climate” was how Jochen Wermuth, financial investor and “biggest green financier of all time” summed up this future optimism. “I enjoy it very much,” he said, because he was “optimistic that market forces will displace those who only pretend to care about the issue.”<sup>19</sup> And since nothing seems as rational as numbers to capitalists, he was able to present them for his market-driven climate rescue. Cheap electricity from renewable energy sources, he says, “makes some electric cars pay for themselves. They cost 20,000 Euros, but you save 1,000 Euros a year

when you fill up and earn 1,000 Euros when you rent out the battery to store electricity.”<sup>20</sup> What sounds like a nice business idea is unfortunately not the end of the climate crisis. We should not place too much hope in technical innovation within capitalism, because within the framework of our society it is only a means to an end, i.e., a means to increase money.

Let’s stay with motorised private transport: even without electric motors, cars can produce very low emissions compared to the past. However, since they are produced in this society to generate maximum profit and not to ensure resource-saving mobility, this technical progress is immediately cancelled out by the battle for the highest profits. Today there are more large, fast, and heavy cars on our roads than ever before. As a result, despite technical progress, carbon dioxide emissions from car traffic have not been decreased but have increased. The electric car will have a similar result as long as it conquers the market under capitalist conditions. For, as described above, profit-oriented production will be expanded and over-expanded to such an extent that it will ultimately cause damage. Technology is not neutral but is closely interwoven in its action and effects with the society that uses it. It is a similar situation with consumption. Families could use subsidies to buy a small electric car as a second car, even though they previously only had one. This **rebound or boomerang effect** is an ecological disaster, but in the spirit of this social order it is rational behaviour.

And as with the automobile, so it is in other industries. The **compulsion to grow** reduces even the best innovations to absurdity. This could already be observed in the case of biofuels that are state-subsidised with good intentions: “The field becomes the drilling site of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the farmer becomes an energy producer,”<sup>21</sup> said the Green Party’s minister of the environment Jürgen Trittin. Palm and soy monocultures, soil erosion, cleared rainforest, and maize shipped across the ocean—as is often the case, not much is left of the good ecological intentions. “Capitalism can save the climate?” More likely: “Climate protection measures can bring rich returns.” Whether or not these measures are really ecologically sound is irrelevant for the capitalist approach. If the use of new technologies is subject to the laws of capitalist production, the measures usually come to nothing even if they were well-intentioned. After all, in our developed commodity society the be-all and end-all of production remains what has already been presented as the necessary behaviour of the individual capitalist: It is not primarily about the production of useful goods, but rather about market shares and profits. It is a production of commodities for sale with profit, a **“production for the sake of production.”**<sup>22</sup> This fact must be **brought into the center** of the fight against the climate catastrophe. The ecological movement, however, has all too often ignored this fact. Let us use the example of the “2030 carbon-free” study commissioned by *Greenpeace* and conducted by the *Fraunhofer Institute for Energy Economics and Energy System Technology (IEE)* in the autumn of 2018,<sup>23</sup> in which it was thoroughly calculated that energy-related greenhouse gas emissions in Germany could be largely avoided as early as 2035. However, the study’s fundamental miscalculation is to simply ignore the compulsion for growth inherent in our society. For example, the study assumes that neither the volume of freight traffic nor conventional electricity consumption will continue to grow after 2020. Ultimately, however, this cannot be achieved under the conditions of the current social order. As with the green investor Wermuth, the same applies here: Mathematically correct calculations for saving the climate are useless if the conditions are not right, and the compulsion to grow is unfortunately the most essential condition of all. One should not pay too much attention to soap-box oratories of the Chancellor or the EU Commission President, because when things get serious, things look quite different: “There are many, many modern vehicles on the yard, and they have to be removed from the yard so that new ones can be produced,” the German government said, for instance.<sup>24</sup> “Reducing the volume of passenger transport,” “using small cars instead of large and heavy vehicles such as SUVs,” or the goal of a “CO<sub>2</sub>-free transport sector” by 2035, as assumed in the IEE study, is not being discussed. Unfortunately, this is not to be explained by a lack of intellect or the party book of individual politicians, but it is systemic. The Green Party’s Minister President in Baden-Württemberg acts in the same way. Or a conservative-green government’s Minister of Transport in Hessen talks about a turnaround in the transport system, but when it comes to it, a healthy forest must make way for a

new motorway, despite climate heating and dying forests.<sup>25</sup> **Production for production's sake!**

Anyone who profits from this madness has an interest in ensuring that everything remains as it is. The money is still rolling in and climate protection measures that could jeopardise or even reduce profits are unwelcome. When new technological **wonders** that are on the verge of winning the battle against global heating (for instance by removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere) are regularly announced, it is simply a matter of protecting the status quo. The suggestion that technology will soon be able to solve the climate crisis is part of the cynical and macabre behaviour of all advertising professionals on the pay roll of corporations. Effective climate protection is thus prevented. A nasty game—after all, the ticking clock is our biggest problem when it comes to global heating. The fact that technical ideas are becoming increasingly megalomaniacal and are now revolving around how we could control sunlight using a wide variety of geoengineering methods only proves once again how narrow the time window has become. The situation is clear: there is simply no “business as usual.” Instead of hallucinating large-scale manipulations in the style of science fiction, we need to **stop burning coal, oil, and gas, regardless of capital interests**. Too much hope is already being pinned on technologies that will in future extract CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere and store it. “These technologies are immature, uncertain, and involve unforeseeable risks. Their effectiveness is unknown, and their mass application would have enormous geopolitical consequences.”<sup>26</sup>

All the talk about technical super weapons is so misleading because the technical solutions to replace fossil fuels with renewable energies have long been available. But the capitalist economy is not able to produce enough of these renewables in the short time available because there is not enough profit to be made. Therefore, we **do not** have a **technology problem** at all, but a **capital problem! Capitalism cannot solve the climate crisis!**

Of course, capital is not diverted to dirty forms of energy production out of malice, but simply where it expects the greatest profits. In the past, fossil fuels were cheap, always available, easy to exploit, and have thus paved the way for various stages of industrialisation. Often, these energy sources are still cheap—as long as the subsequent costs for the general public, to deal with pollution, illness, and natural disasters, are not included. This was first recognised by scientists and, after a long time, also by many politicians. That is why measures to combat global heating have now been taken in all industrialised countries—but unfortunately far too late and far too timidly.

But can the bourgeois state, the state that represents this social order, still avoid the catastrophe? Or in other words: can the state control, limit, and contain the growth and profit interests of capital at least to the extent that the tipping points are not reached? So far, the results are very disappointing compared to the necessary measures. Of course, lobbying interests play a major role here, but the crucial dilemma of state policy goes deeper. The state itself is based on finance: All the money it spends on ecological modernisation has to be earned somewhere, and in the end, it has to be taken away from other producers of commodities by way of taxes and debt. In the process, the state itself must also operate in a cost-saving manner, which is evident in competition with other states. That is why, in the end, the needs of industry take precedence, profits must continue to flow, and investments must be protected. A major obstacle is the **world market**. That is the reason why international competition is repeatedly used as an excuse for lower limits, exemptions, delays, etc. The bottom line, however, is that the results are very worrying: “Since the mid-1980s there have been countless models and concepts for an ecological reorientation of capitalism, none of which work: Neither a major investment programme in green technologies and repair measures for soil, air, water, and biodiversity [...] nor charging for environmental destruction through environmental taxes and certificate trading, nor any social pacts between capital, state, trade unions, and consumer organisations have fundamentally stopped or even noticeably slowed down the progress of environmental and climate destruction. If environmental destruction is decreasing, it is always in the context of cyclical sales and profit crises of capitalism, with major social collapses and

deterioration for most people.”<sup>27</sup>

The word “pricing” is a good way of summarising the idea of the “green economy” or “green capitalism,” which comes in all kinds of variations. Ultimately, everything boils down to putting a price on nature and its “services.”<sup>28</sup> Certificate trading is one such magic word. In essence, it is about trading CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by issuing certificates. This idea is neither new nor untested. European emissions trading (EU-ETS) has been in existence since the early 1990s. After 10 years of hard negotiations, the certificates have been on the market since 2005 to prove their uselessness for another 10 years. Only a further tightening of the pollution rights and the partial auctioning of the certificates from 2013 onwards brought first successes. Quite apart from how ineffective they have been in practice up to now, and whether such “pricing” can actually be made socially just, as their supporters constantly but unconvincingly argue, the basic assumption remains completely absurd. The supposed solution to the problem of turning nature into a commodity is precisely the problem. The compulsive laws of capitalism, the “becoming a commodity” of everything and everyone, have brought us to the edge of the abyss. This destruction of the basis of life should continue to be possible, but should just be a little more expensive? As absurd as this idea already is, in practice it becomes even more absurd. Compensation agreements ensure that, if certificates are missing or are too expensive, a few greenwashing projects are started outside the EU, and the values are set right again. In a similar “logic,” every electric car sold within the EU ensures that the same company can sell more combustion SUVs, because the certificate limit values apply to the entire vehicle fleet. Or a “coal compromise” sweetens the farewell to power plants that have already become unprofitable for the energy giants. **The capitalist state is failing in terms of saving the climate, as is the social order it represents.**

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world, rather than the end of capitalism” is apparently not just a saying. How deep the ideas of commodity and value are engrained in our minds and hearts is shown once again by the concept of “pricing.” **To sum up**, it must be said that in recent decades all technical, market-led, or administrative methods for the necessary reduction of greenhouse gases have failed. Neither self-imposed targets nor the necessary ones are being tackled seriously enough. The years that remain to prevent reaching the tipping points can soon be counted on the fingers of one’s hand. There is therefore no more time to wait and delay, just as there is no more time for green tranquilisers. The excuse that “we” only contribute a small part to global emissions, and that “the others” have to start first, points the way to disaster. The road to disaster is paved with the intention of not putting national capital at a competitive disadvantage on the world market.

The market, compromises in line with the market, and the state representing the (national) market are incapable of preventing the impending catastrophe—it is **therefore essential to radically question this social order itself.**

#### **4. Planning against the Climate Crisis—Goodbye Capital**

From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.  
*Karl Marx*

The transfer of the capital relation into history is the *conditio sine qua non* of every further human civilisation process. *Tomasz Koniecz*

Planning is not only possible, but is already all around us, working in hierarchical and undemocratic forms. *Leigh Phillips & Michal Rozworski*

As shown in the previous two sections, the pursuit of profit maximisation has brought mankind to the brink of disaster, and there is no evidence that the state or the market or technological innovation could lead to the emergency brake being pulled in the remaining time. In this respect, the slogan “**System Change—Not Climate Change**” is fully justified. However, it must **have substance**. After all, capitalism is not a concept of a few powerful people sitting in the back rooms and controlling the fate of the world. Rather, the merciless mechanism of profiteering, just like the compelling logic of money, is an expression of all social contexts, of the “system.” Just like the wage laborers, the capitalists must submit to the constraints of this society, simply because otherwise they will be “punished by the market” or even “swallowed by the market.” But: market laws can only dictate social conditions within this society. With some (historical) distance it becomes clear that these laws are neither something “natural” nor do they correspond to the “essence” of humankind. They are simply social structures and conditions which, under certain historical conditions, have been created by human action. In everyday life these conditions may seem “natural” to us, but they are created by human beings and can be eliminated by human beings.

The fact that people do not consciously regulate their production and reproduction processes, but are rather subject to abstract and uncontrollable mechanisms, is more obvious when it comes to the subject of money than anywhere else. “Money rules the world,” is a popular saying. It is also no secret that money was created by humans. The reason for the reversal that society serves money, instead of money serving society, lies in the nature of money, which is rooted in the private ownership of the means of production. This is the basic condition of our society today. It seems quite normal to us that it is not society or the direct producers who decide who works how much for what, which products society needs in what quantity, and so on. This is controlled by the private owners of the means of production, by the shareholders’ meetings, and the advisory boards of the banks. In this, they cannot be guided by the needs of the people but must always obey the compulsion dictated by the market.<sup>29</sup>

What is less obvious than the power of money is that there exist value relationships behind money relationships and behind all this the way, in which our society organises its work. Ultimately, money today serves to distribute society’s work: It serves to distribute the products of labor, consumer goods, means of production, and labor force among the various sectors. It also determines who works how much and on what. But this power over labor can only be established by the ownership of the means of production.<sup>30</sup> That is the snag, because this is the prerequisite for the fact that the production and reproduction process of society cannot be regulated sustainably or rationally in accordance with natural conditions at all but is subject to the compulsion to grow. For today “the end-means-rationality consists of producing a certain quantity of commodities at minimum cost or as many commodities as possible for certain amounts in order to increase profit. There is strict one-dimensionality here, both in terms of means and ends.”<sup>31</sup> But under the dictates of this premise, it will not be possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero within a very short time. **The fastest possible end to the burning of fossil fuels must be planned in detail.** Humankind only has a maximum of 800 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> at its disposal if it wants to achieve the Paris climate agreement targets. As the consequences are already dramatic, it would be much better and above all safer to stay decisively below this amount. But it is pure madness to allow capitalist mechanisms to go for this goal. But in the end, it is always madness! Finally, when it comes to the really important things—well-being, health care, education—the majority of people do not trust the laws of the market, especially when it comes to obviously dangerous matters, such as nuclear power. But then why do we let market forces do anything at all?

Why not **allow everyone to live well without capital**? A home, good food, sufficient clothing, and culture? Why do some people have to work far too hard and constantly fear for their existence,

while others do not work at all? Today, money, markets, and shares regulate our everyday life. Why don't we manage it ourselves? We would have to plan how many and which goods our society would need and how much working time this would cost society. This working time would then have to be distributed among all members of society. What natural resources are needed for production, and what about reserves or regeneration? If production were really for the needs and on account of society, rather than for the profits of the few, everything could be done differently. A lot of work would be superfluous—just think of the advertising industry. Many products could be produced more durably and sustainably. There could be a plan for how we could clean the environment and especially the seas from microplastics. Similarly, we could plan how coveted raw materials could be extracted and for which essential products they could be used. New inventions would be used to make everyone work less and not to knock out competitors and plunge people into unemployment. Recycling processes could be perfected because the basis would finally be created for humankind to “use the laws of nature to maintain a beautiful environment. A sustainable consciousness from which truly sustainable action arises.”<sup>32</sup>

A genuine “system change” would mean revolutionising the foundations of the profit system. Only when society owns the means of production it can make decisions directly about its own work. **One can only decide on what one owns.** Therefore, if one wants to replace blind production for the market with rational planning for the benefit of the people, one must first eliminate private ownership of the means of production. Production would then no longer be regulated by exchange in the sense of buying and selling, but by conscious decisions of the producers. The compulsion for growth and profit maximisation would be overcome and money would be completely superfluous. The key aspect would be a **calculation of labor hours for society as a whole, the basic measure of which would be the socially necessary average labor (time).**<sup>33</sup> “A common economy is no longer dominated and controlled by the blind power of the law of value, by competition and markets. Such constraints have ceased to exist. It is now an economy liberated from them, a self-determination of people in their economic life, who regulate their metabolism with nature consciously and sustainably according to their self-imposed goals. As they are no longer controlled and driven by the blind forces of the market, they have degrees of freedom in the organisation of their economic life that were previously unknown.”<sup>34</sup>

The necessary “system change” can therefore by no means be limited to changing political leaders or breaking up power structures. Even the appropriation of the means of production and the overcoming of the profit economy are no guarantee that ecological collapse can be prevented. On the contrary, in such a social upheaval people must also change themselves and be prepared to take their fate into their own hands. From a technical point of view, all-encompassing digitisation may be a wonderful prerequisite for a general working time calculation, but it is not an automatic process. Rather, the **democratic design of production** and distribution processes are basic prerequisites so that planned economic activity can function.<sup>35</sup> They are also a **basic prerequisite for ensuring that** plans can be designed in harmony with the laws of nature and within the limits of the natural foundations of human life.

Planned economic activity is not as abstract as it may appear to many at first glance. In all corners of the capitalist companies, planning is already taking place today,<sup>36</sup> it is just that the companies then compete on the market to generate the most profit. How much more effective would it be to plan together instead of hierarchically and against each other and to generate these plans equally and democratically? There are already companies whose revenues exceed the national income of entire countries. But what would Walmart, Amazon, Facebook, or Uber be without planning? The technological possibilities that have developed here must be freed from their capitalist shackles. Today, the algorithms of named companies dominate people by spying, with pressure to perform, etc. and work in the interest of maximising profits. In a new society there would be a possibility to eliminate these negative aspects and to take over the productive ones of these technologies—coordination, accounting, and planning possibilities—and let them work in the common interest. But to do so, they must be taken away from those who currently generate their profits from them.<sup>37</sup>

## 5. Nitro and Glycerin—Environmental Movement as Class Struggle

But the poor depend on justice, the rich depend on injustice, that's the decisive point.  
*Bertold Brecht*

The climate crisis is not only an ecological problem, but always also a class issue.  
*Kathrin Hartmann*

Only the wage laborers of companies are potentially capable of putting the crucial questions of what, how, where, for whom, and in what way something is produced, at the centre of the political debate in society as a whole. *Christian Zeller*

If it has been argued until now that the whole of society is dominated by profit maximisation and that it cannot simply be a matter of holding “the ruling class” or “the rich” accountable. This is not to say that within this economic system everyone is equally to blame for the upheavals and that everyone should look to themselves first. On the contrary: this society has clear power structures and there are beneficiaries and inferiors in terms of capital accumulation, which, by the way, also has a clear impact on the respective carbon footprint, i.e., the climate balance of a lifestyle. The richest one percent of humanity is responsible for as much greenhouse gas emissions as the poorer half of the world's population!<sup>38</sup> More importantly, under competitive pressure, **the haves determine what, when, and how much is produced**, but wage-earning workers cannot do so. Rather, they are confronted with too little free time, low wages, and the inner conflict of not producing in their own interest.

In fact, it is the exploited who are already suffering the most from the consequences of climate change everywhere, whether in the global South or in the early industrialised countries. Fatally, the prevailing rhetoric has so far been very successful in ignoring this connection. Instead, time and again—and so far, successfully—a contrast between ecological and social concerns has been established. An ecological upheaval as a contradiction to prosperity and jobs. As if capital in general, quite apart from environmental protection measures, were not incapable of guaranteeing a secure life for all people, and not just for some at the expense of many others. The coal industry in eastern Germany, for example, employed 100,000 people at peak times, but today it employs less than 10,000. Nobody was particularly interested in the first 90,000 miners who lost their jobs. But today, when the coal phase-out is the most important imperative of the hour, the jobs of the last 10,000 is to be used to delay the urgently needed phase-out? This mendacity must be exposed: Renewables have lost far more than twice as many in recent years. It is not ecological and social issues that are opposites, but the profit interests of the powerful prevent the urgently needed socio-ecological progress.

To realise that ecological upheaval can certainly mean social progress, the basic assumptions of this social system must be questioned. Within capitalism, any progress is a double-edged issue and capital will always try to increase or at least protect its own profits and pass the cost on to the wage laborers. If one wants to win majorities, and this is exactly what is needed for a real ecological turnaround, one must see this connection. At that point it also becomes clear why seeking consensus with the ruling political caste and compromises with industries are doomed to failure. These compromises would always mean that those who were not lucky enough to be on the sunny side of society would foot the bill. **Instead of closing ranks with the government, the young environmental movement should seek an alliance with the wage laborers—**environmental activism as a class struggle!

So far, the ecological issue has been perceived, with good reason, as something quite different: Not as an idea of how the majority of people can change their standard of living for the better, but as the lifestyle of a rich and nutritionally conscious elite. In this case, environmental awareness

actually shows off one's own lifestyle, to be something better than the "stupid masses." In the end, this behaviour embodies nothing more than the antisocial idea that everyone is responsible only for themselves.<sup>39</sup> The habitus, i.e., the way in which this lifestyle is presented, is not only arrogant but also simply silly. Expensive organic products and meticulous waste separation do not compensate for the large flats and long-distance journeys of this supposedly "aware" but actually better-earning elite. In one sentence: "Bio-elites have depoliticised the ecological question via ethical consumption and made it a question of individual morality and the wallet, but they have not changed production methods."<sup>40</sup> Correct shopping in the wrong economic system? Meanwhile, the poorer parts of the population are being eyed and ridiculed for buying at discount stores, instead of looking at those who benefit from these conditions!

More disposable products, more short-term consumption, more work mania, and more burnout seem to be the last promises of this society. Environmental movement as a class struggle would mean questioning the whole process of work and appropriation of this society. A different way of working, a different way of building and living, different forms of mobility. These ideas would have to become crucial questions of class struggle and the battleground of trade unions willing to question the basic principles of our current economic system. Instead of only sectoral collective bargaining conflicts, which are mainly concerned with the wage level of the workers employed there, **political strikes in favour of all wage-dependent workers**. Turning away from capitalist forms of the pressure to grow can, incidentally, raise living standards enormously. This is particularly true when free time, short distances to work and shop, to school, and kindergarten, clean air and green streets where children can play are seen as real wealth. Sustainable prosperity should not be confused with capitalist consumerism. Yachts to windmills—Golf courses back to nature!—Class struggle must mean questioning the life plans of the ruling class and demanding new and better living conditions.

**The labor movement of the last century has failed in this.**<sup>41</sup> Its social-democratic, i.e., moderate and reformist, wing always had its eye on the capitalist promise of growth and wanted to profit from it through higher wages and political participation. The revolutionary wing of the labor movement did indeed grasp power in the 20th century in some countries, especially those which were economically and politically backward, but did not manage to overcome commodity-money relations by means of a calculation of working hours and did not get beyond emulating the capitalist economic system. "Catch up and overtake" was the maxim of the failed state socialism. "What finally prevailed was not a calculation of working hours but rather a calculation of costs, i.e., an economy with commodity prices, money, interest, wages, profits, etc. Despite 'national economic planning' and 'national property,' the 'commodity-money relations' were finally generally recognised as indispensable social forms of socialism."<sup>42</sup> What was overcome in the upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s offers no evidence of human emancipation.

What matters today is that wage laborers and their unions free themselves from the Babylonian captivity of the capitalist growth mania. The ecological question, on the other hand, must move beyond the "wellness for conscience" niche and stand for progressive living conditions. Only beyond the logic of profit can new and emancipatory horizons be reached. Like many other movements, the French *yellow vests movement (gilets jaunes)* have made it clear that the social distortions of capitalism are no longer bearable. The young environmental movement has sharpened the awareness of how little time there is to prevent an ecological collapse. If both movements come together and start a common struggle for socio-ecological emancipation, this could have the same effect on the old society as nitro and glycerin.

## **6. Degrowth, Post-growth and Renunciation Are Not Enough**

The antagonism between Red and Green must be dissolved. *Kohei Saito*

Post-growth, décroissance, beyond-growth are ideas that can only become practical beyond

capitalism if we pay dialectical attention to the society we live in today. *Elmar Altvater*

More popular than the idea of bringing social and environmental emancipation together is the demand for a renunciation of consumption, which has been the focus of climate protests up to now, partly on an individual basis, partly on a social basis. Degrowth or post-growth are the names of this approach. The problem that growth, at least in its present form, cannot be permanently arranged within the “planetary boundaries” is quite rightly mentioned here. However, as all classic answers to this problem, “green growth” or the permanent “decoupling of growth and energy efficiency,” are not yet sufficient, an “end to growth” is called for in a variety of ways.

Of course, there are representatives of degrowth concepts that ultimately involve a regression or a step backwards to an earlier or less organised stage of human development. Transfiguring notions of “the past” or “untouched nature” are just as common as an idealisation of asceticism, abstinence, and subsistence farming. Such views are neither forward-looking nor acceptable to most people and should therefore not interest us further at this point. However, it is important for us to emphasise that under the keyword degrowth quite different ideas are also being discussed. For example, there are variants such as “agrowth,” that do not attach any particular importance to growth. A prominent representative who argues in this direction with her idea of a “donut economy” and who enjoys greater popularity within the young environmental movement is Kate Raworth. Instead of preaching abstinence, Raworth correctly states that growth per se cannot be condemned because it would mean perpetuating poverty for billions of people. She therefore proposes a welfare-driven economy, which she illustrates with a donut. Outside the pastry are the “planetary boundaries” and the hole in the middle represents the scourges of humanity, such as hunger, illiteracy, gender inequality, or lack of political participation. The doughnut ring is the “safe zone” within which “meaningful economic activity” must move in the future.<sup>43</sup> She rightly reproaches capitalism for “having to grow, whether or not this promotes our well-being.” As an alternative, she propagates the “donut economy,” “which promotes our well-being, regardless of whether it grows or not.”<sup>44</sup>

Raworth correctly and importantly identifies the boundaries within which human economic activity must take place. Her criticism of the theory and image of human beings in the prevailing economic sciences is also well worth reading. But her recommendations for overcoming the current state of affairs overlook the fact that capitalist growth without regard for human “well-being” and the “planetary boundaries” cannot be brought about by a new “understanding” of value. In our society, the goods produced do not acquire value through people’s thinking, but through their acting as private owners in production based on the division of labor and geared to the market. Maja Göpel, the bestselling author and probably the best-known German-speaking degrowth advocate, captures the same basic error as Raworth in her book title—“Rethinking Our World.”<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, “thinking” alone is not enough. There can be no “new understanding of value” in a commodity producing society. The proposals of the Degrowth Movement have narrow limits within the framework of this society, whether they are about “ethical action,” non-profit enterprises, or unconditional basic income.

A positive aspect of the degrowth debate is that the criticism of growth draws attention to production and that often there is talk of an economy based on the common good, which should not be determined by the value but by the usefulness of things. What is insufficient is how little debate there has been so far on why value and money steer our society and where the connection lies between the growth dictates of this society and the accumulation of capital. So, no matter how problems are identified and named on the surface, little analysis of the overall context has been done. But those who are not prepared to question the basic assumptions of this society can do little to counter the degrowth criticism of the capital advocates. “The crisis shows what to think about the philosophers talking about »degrowth« and »post-growth«,” says Alexander Neubacher, economist and editor-in-chief of *Der Spiegel*. “In the real world, the statistical context looks like this: If the economy shrinks, the need grows. Thousands of companies are facing bankruptcy,

hundreds of thousands of people fear for their jobs.<sup>46</sup> Neubacher’s “real world” is the overall context of the capitalist mode of production, in which the accumulation of capital is crucial for economic development. “Sensible economic activity” or “consuming less” is in fact the fastest way into recession in this “world.” Only after practically overcoming the sources of value, money, and capital, can things be different.

Of course, it is good if people are already prepared or have the opportunity to do without large flats, cars, air travel, or excessive meat consumption. But changing these patterns of behaviour will not be enough to prevent climate collapse. One should therefore not be too set on striving for an impeccable life within this society. Are “organic” potatoes from the Egyptian desert really more ecologically sustainable than conventional ones? Does a regionally harvested apple, after months in the cold store, have fewer greenhouse gases on its conscience than one imported from New Zealand? As an individual, one can pursue these questions forever, but one will achieve little: “Imagine that someone came up with a brilliant new campaign against smoking. It would show graphic images of people dying of lung cancer followed by the punchline: It’s easy to be healthy—smoke one less cigarette a month.”<sup>47</sup>

The attempt to live a perfect life within this society is tiring and without prospects in the long run. As Luisa Neubauer put it in her book: “There is no sustainable life in a non-sustainable society.”<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, behind the approach of virtuous striving lies the fateful swing of the environmental movement of the 1980s: if it was initially a matter of suing the big corporations for their pollution and destruction—“take the bastards to court”—a short time later, the only thing that was done was to conform to the market and “create markets for the bastards.”<sup>49</sup> **The environmental question was individualised, privatised, and depoliticised**—everything was to be regulated “by the consumers.” A disastrous turn of events with long-term consequences until today. But: the defense of our livelihood is not a question of individual purity and innocence. Rather, forms of collective resistance must develop that target the structures of this society and show no consideration for capital interests. This cannot be done alone, nor can it be done via the shopping list. Only in **joint struggles**—for example, for more free time, low rents despite energy-saving renovations and green (play) streets worth living on, more bicycle paths or free public transport—can we see the big picture!

## 7. No Degree Further—Immediate Action

When do we want it? —Now! *Slogan of the school strike movement*

As outlined previously, our society, which is geared towards profit growth, is fundamentally incompatible with sustainable economic activity. Ultimately, socio-ecological restructuring and climate neutrality can only succeed if society gains the means of work and rationally plans the production and appropriation process beyond profit maximisation and compulsion to grow. In this respect, the climate crisis does indeed raise the system question. However, anyone who voices this criticism soon hears criticism, even from the ranks of the environmental movement. Harald Welzer says, for example: “Stop confusing the setting of goals with action, stop demanding the abolition of capitalism, [...] and similar magical things, before immediately, without any further ado, starting to do things differently.”<sup>50</sup>

In fact, climate heating is now so dramatic that we cannot afford to wait and drastically reducing greenhouse gas emissions until our current economic system has been completely overhauled. So far, however, neither the state nor the market has been able to get the climate crisis under control. That is why we consider it absolutely necessary to start overcoming the profit economy immediately. This in no way precludes calling for immediate measures to be taken now—preferably today—in this society. **Overcoming the compulsive growth society and immediate measures are mutually dependent.**

Luisa Neubauer is right with her statement on “system change”: “I think it would be nice if we could discuss what should happen in the next three years.”<sup>51</sup> It is absolutely necessary to start a debate on this. But immediate action against climate heating within our class society must also face two problems, as the “coal compromise” clearly shows: How much consideration is given to the property of those people for whom their profit is more important than the consequences of the climate crisis, especially the human suffering they produce? And how can we prevent effective climate protection measures being shifted onto the backs of individuals, and in particular onto those of wage laborers?

We say that a socio-ecological class struggle must show “immediately, without any further ado, now” the liberating potential of progressive politics. The burden must be placed on the main perpetrators who are to blame for ecological devastation: the owners of the production facilities that produce greenhouse gases, namely the energy giants, the automobile, aircraft and real estate corporations, the landowners and large slaughterhouses and fattening farms. They must be stopped immediately with strict laws and public control in their overexploitation of nature. Above all, the urgently needed industrial restructuring must be accelerated. This constitutes the **beginning of a fundamental change in energy use and production** (electricity, housing and construction, agriculture and food, and transport). At the same time, attempts must be made to enforce the common good through democratic control and draconian interventions in property rights. With this in mind, we have compiled the following 11 points that are already circulating in and around the young movement and have sharpened them accordingly. In our opinion, these are the most suitable points for immediate socio-ecological progress.

## **Let’s pay the rich for climate change!**

**I. Coal phase-out by 2025 at the latest.** Immediate closure of the dirtiest piles. Coal remains in the ground—strict ban on import or export. No compensation or payments for the energy giants. The earmarked funds must be used for the (formerly) employed workers, their continued payment of wages, and retraining. Public control of the entire energy sector.

**II. Massive expansion of renewable energies.** A photovoltaic (PV) system belongs on every roof, even in cities, even against the will of the owners. Remove excessive distance rules for wind turbines. The profits must remain in the municipalities where the plants are located, managed by **democratic, public utility companies**. A start must be made immediately on converting the entire electricity grid to make it suitable for predominantly renewable energy production.

**III. Obligation to renovate the energy efficiency of housing, with a ban on rent increases.** All new buildings are in principle to be built as plus-energy houses, which means they have the thermal insulation standard of a passive house and additionally a PV system on the roof. The greenhouse gas emissions from house construction must be regulated.

**IV.** The vast majority of EU subsidies are direct payments based on the cultivated area. This must be changed immediately; **subsidies may only be granted to organic farming or must be linked to high environmental regulations, especially with regard to fertilisation**. Soil-improving measures that bind CO<sub>2</sub> must be promoted—intermediate seeding, underseeding, and agroforestry systems. It is imperative to reduce livestock numbers that are far too high. Where farmers are overburdened with the enforcement of these measures, land must be transferred to common ownership and managed by local authorities or cooperatives. In general, the privatisation of agricultural companies in favour of cooperative structures should be encouraged.

V. **Transfer of all forests (private and state) to protected areas.** Massive expansion of unused forest areas and permanent grassland. Ban on monocultures and forest clearing. Material rather than energy use of wood and industrial standards that ensure a long service life. Renaturation or irrigation of agricultural peatlands.

VI. Massive infrastructure development in favour of walking and cycling, public transport, and railways. Basically, a green wave for cycling and public transport. Expansion of cycle paths, bicycle lanes, and bicycle parking garages. **Free public transport. A publicly owned railway that is committed to the common good. Massive reactivation of disused lines.** New trains for a consistent clocking of connections in combination with demand-controlled bus transport in rural areas. Night train network across Europe. Construction of super-high-speed train lines across Europe, linking east and west, as well as north and south.

VII. **Freight transport** must be transferred from **road to rail**. Truck tolls must be significantly increased and extended to all roads. Away with transport subsidies. Public control of the logistics sector.

VIII. End the car fixation! This means, first, **the abolition of all tax advantages for individual, motorised transport.** Away with the privilege of company cars. Strict **speed limits of 120 - 80 - 30 km/h** (120 km/h on motorways, 80 km/h outside towns, and 30 km/h inside towns). Car-free city centres—residential areas to play streets, parking spaces to green areas. The road traffic regulations must be fundamentally changed in favour of walking and cycling. **Ban on the production and registration of SUVs and heavy, over-motorised cars.** Public control of automobile companies. No new motorways.

IX. All subsidies and tax exemptions for air transport and airports must be abolished. **No domestic flights, no flights under 1000 km.** Prohibition of private aircraft and abolition of first class on aircrafts. **Personalised quotas for long distance flying.**

X. **Climate protection in companies, schools, and universities.** At (works) meetings it is important to discuss and debate how the respective place of work and learning as well as production processes can be made climate neutral. In addition, how the respective product ranges—in terms of durability and recycling processes—can be improved. The accepted energy consumption of many products and production processes must be significantly reduced. Away with the free allocation of emission certificates to industries.

The ten points outlined previously as the basis for the energy system transformations would in principle already improve living standards today. For example, the automobile has massively worsened the quality of life in cities. In terms of lifestyle, however, almost everyone, including the vast majority of wage laborers, would have to do without some of the conveniences to which they are accustomed, as the example of the car suggests. Within a society that is based on profit maximisation, the energy turnaround for wage earners, especially those with children, is made more difficult by the permanent stress and the constant lack of free time. The fight for the fore-mentioned immediate measures must therefore necessarily be complemented by demands for new forms of good living, such as a massive reduction in labor time. In concrete terms this means:

XI. Introduction of the **30 hour week with full wage compensation.** At least **30 days of holiday** per year. At least two consecutive days off every week. **16 Euro minimum wage.** The loss of jobs in industries with high emissions must be compensated by general working time regulations and an employment offensive in the production and operation of public transport, in the health and care sector, in organic farming, and in education. Away with the ban on political strikes! **For the general strike! For the general climate strike!**

## 8. “System Change, Not Climate Change”—Take the Offensive!

In life, something is always dying. But the thing that is dying does not simply want to die, but fights for its existence, defends its survival. In life, something new is always born. The thing that is brought to life isn't simply born; it hurts and screams and asserts its right to life. *Bertolt Brecht*

The capitalist mode of production has apparently not only passed its zenith but has brought humanity to the precipice of catastrophe. The year 2020 brought consequences of unusual quality. The COVID-19 pandemic and gigantic forest fires speak for themselves. The measures taken to combat the pandemic were not the cause, but rather the trigger for the collapse of the global economy. Apart from the fact that COVID-19 is a consequence of the capitalist overexploitation of nature, in a planned economy that could have left commodity, money, and value relations behind, it would have been no problem to shut down production and public life for a few weeks. A world market based on competition, on the other hand, is faltering. And the huge stimulus packages that have been put in place in recent months to support the economy will ultimately have to be paid for by someone. While the state is still willing to pay at the moment, so that tax cuts and bonus payments will help to get us out of the recession, it will soon be back to “tighten our belts” and “save.” In addition to the increasingly noticeable effects of global heating, further social distortions are thus looming on the horizon.

But both evils have the same root. As has been shown, private ownership of work equipment and production for the market bring about the compulsion to grow, which necessarily produces both a disturbed metabolism with nature and social misery. It is therefore not enough to simply denounce “neoliberalism” or “fossil fuel capitalism,” as parts of the climate movement have done up to now. If “system change” is meant seriously, then it must ultimately be “all in.” A society freed from capital and the pressure to grow. This will not come out of the blue, however, but must be fought for in a major social upheaval that involves a **revolutionary break with bourgeois ownership structures**. One does not get one step closer to such a transformation if one demands it in the abstract and otherwise rests on one's laurels. Even retreating into the niches of society is no longer a perspective. The global crisis is already far too dramatic for people to take refuge on an organic farm or in their beloved trendy neighborhood. Rather, collective struggles must be fought that target the narrow-minded ownership structures. Class struggles for socio-ecological emergency measures that do not take account of capital interests offer the chance to set in motion a social-revolutionary development.

**The climate crisis knows no boundaries and the struggle for socio-ecological emancipation is ultimately a global issue.** Especially the plans for the supply of renewable energies, for the necessary reforestation and the protection against the consequences of global heating (e.g., against the rise of the oceans), will only reach their full potential once the bourgeois nation states have been overcome. Here too, however, waiting for a “world revolution” will not get us any further. The political right, which should actually be the most critical of how its “beautiful homeland” is suffering from the consequences of the climate crisis, is behaving in opposition, but has no serious political alternative to offer: “The absurdity of the New Right's ideology that is driven by a death wish, which on the one hand propagates the anachronistic return to the nation and then rejects any effective climate protection measures, precisely with reference to the limited resources of national politics,”<sup>52</sup> speaks volumes here.

The assertion that greenhouse gas emissions in Germany, for example, are so low measured on a global scale that they play a subordinate role in the further development of global heating is only further proof of the lack of prospects for this “avant-garde of barbarism”<sup>53</sup>. In its crisis, the society of private property is resurrecting a whole cabinet of horrors from history, for whom, as “preppers” or “right-wing populists,” nothing else matters but to slide into the catastrophe with their right arm raised or alternatively with their middle finger extended. In the final analysis, this nihilistic delusion is an expression of the fact that capital as a structure of society as a whole is not able to

solve the current crisis.

The “big green stimulus packages,” a “Green New Deal,” and similar projects, on the other hand, are a Janus-faced affair. On the technical side, it is quite possible that here, at least in germinal form, the foundations of the infrastructure will be created that the associated producers will later urgently need to run a planned economy that is in line with ecological legislation. On the other hand, the same economic stimulus packages are not able to solve the crisis because of the capitalist compulsion for growth and profit. They are also to a large extent greenwashing projects for dirty industries and act politically as green calming pills, pretending to be able to avert the disaster. In the worst case, ecological consequences are simply exported to other regions of the world. Denying the crisis is one thing. To claim to be able to solve it, but when in doubt to give preference to the accumulation of capital, is another. The young environmental movement must be careful not to let itself be hitched to the carts of individual capital interests, because the market, compromises in line with the market, and the state representing the (national) market are incapable of preventing the impending catastrophe.

Germany in particular plays a not insignificant role on the world market. It is the strongest economic power within the EU, and together it is the most powerful economic block in the world. Germany is world champion in burning lignite and, as an export-oriented “car country,” is also distinguished as being the (European) trendsetter for cars with gigantic dimensions and weight classes. So, it is definitely worth throwing down the gauntlet to capital in Germany, even if the wider perspective must be European and ultimately global. **Instead of seeking a consensus with politicians who represent the logic of this social order or individual capital fractions, it is now important to radically question this social order itself.** The urgently needed socio-ecological progress is a matter of a socio-ecological class struggle and ultimately of the free association of producers.

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- 1 See: Foster, John Bellamy/Magdoff, Fred 2012. What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism.
  - 2 Rahmstorf, Stefan/Schellnhuber, Hans Joachim 2019, pp. 33. Climate Change.
  - 3 “He [man, author] sets in motion the natural forces, which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.”(Marx, Karl, MEW 23, p. 192)
  - 4 See: Global Footprint Network: <https://www.footprintnetwork.org>
  - 5 The nine planetary boundaries: 1. biosphere integrity, 2. climate change, 3. Biogeochemical flows, 4. Stratospheric ozone depletion, 5. Land-system change, 6. Ocean acidification, 7. Freshwater use, 8. Atmospheric aerosol loading, and 9. Novel entities. Lake: Rockström et al 2009.
  - 6 Potsdam-Institut für Klimaforschung 2015: <https://www.pik-potsdam.de/de/aktuelles-archiv/pressemitteilungen/vier-von-neun-planetaren-grenzen201d-bereits-ueberschritten>
  - 7 Bork, Hans-Rudolf/Winiwarter, Verena 2014, p. 11. The History of Our Environment.
  - 8 Altwater, Elmar 2014: <https://monde-diplomatique.de/artikel/1267688> Emphasis of quote by the author.
  - 9 “The wealth of societies in which a capitalistic mode of production prevails, appears as a ‘gigantic collection of commodities’ and the singular commodity appears as the *elementary form* of wealth. Our investigation begins accordingly with the analysis of the commodity.” These are the introductory sentences in Marx Kapital.
  - 10 Broistedt Philip/Hofmann, Christian 2020, p. 63. Goodbye Kapital.
  - 11 See especially “Das Kapital 1-3“ and the “Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy“ by Marx. A significantly abridged version of the “Grundrisse“ can be found at <https://assoziation.info/?p=54>. Even though neither the labour movement of the last century nor most Marx critics noticed it, nature plays a central role in his analysis. In the first volume of „Das Kapital“ it is already stated unequivocally that capitalist production... “disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth” and becomes “at the same time, a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility.” Marx, Karl, MEW 23, p. 528.
  - 12 “Capitalist production *cannot* become stable, it must grow and expand, or it must die.” Engels, Friedrich, MEW 2, p. 647.
  - 13 There are also bourgeois economists, by the way, who have recognised the absolute necessity for growth as a problem: “The need to generate monetary profits constantly forces companies in market competition to be innovative and become more productive or to develop new products and processes. But for profits to be realised, it is not enough to become more productive or to bring new products to the market. Production must always be increased, [...] The compulsion to grow is therefore not an externally imposed compulsion of any kind, but an inherent condition of the system for the successful functioning of capitalist economies. Economic success in these economies is not an option but a necessity. And for this reason, growth is not an option but a necessity.” Binswanger, Mathias 2019, p. 56f. Compulsion to Grow.
  - 14 See: Saito, Kohei, 2019: <http://www.oekozoz.org/2019/08/der-okosozialismus-von-marx/>
  - 15 “The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has calculated that, from the deadline of 1 January 2018, all countries together will be allowed to blow an estimated 800 billion tonnes of CO2 into the air if heating is to be kept at ‘well below 2 degrees,’ i.e., around 1.75 degrees, with a 67 percent chance of being maintained by 2100. Pötter, Bernhard 2019: <https://taz.de/CO2-Budget-fuer-Deutschland/!5642592/>
  - 16 Net zero means that no more greenhouse gases are emitted than can be broken down or absorbed by nature.
  - 17 “Meanwhile, so long as something is profitable, no matter how detrimental, such as fossil fuels, it will continue to be produced. [...] Simply put, the market is not building enough clean electricity, nor abandoning enough dirty energy, nor doing either quickly enough.” Phillips, Leigh/Rozworski Michal 2019, p. 115, 234. People’s Republic of Walmart.
  - 18 Baerbock, Annalena 2019: <http://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/video/video-573847.html>
  - 19 Wermuth, Jochen 2019: <https://taz.de/Klimapolitik-und-Wirtschaft/!5565123/>
  - 20 Ibid.
  - 21 Trittin, Jürgen 2005: <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/irrweg-biosprit-gruenen-tragen-verantwortung-fuer-debakel-a-851607.html>
  - 22 “Production for the sake of production.” Marx, Karl, MEW 23, p. 618.
  - 23 Greenpeace/Fraunhofer IEE 2018: [https://www.greenpeace.de/sites/www.greenpeace.de/files/publications/2030\\_kohlefrei\\_fraunhofer\\_iee\\_greenpeace.pdf](https://www.greenpeace.de/sites/www.greenpeace.de/files/publications/2030_kohlefrei_fraunhofer_iee_greenpeace.pdf)
  - 24 Scheuer, Andreas 2020: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/auto-verkehr/scheuer-vor-autogipfel-fuer-verbrenner-kaufpraemie-16943158.html>
- Nota bene: In the Anglo-Saxon world, the experience of the “capitalism can save the climate” paradigm is much older than in Germany. Al Gore, the pope of this message, had already stirred up the climate debate in 2006 with his award-winning film "An Inconvenient Truth" and brought a handful of billionaire celebrities and media favourites to an "awakening experience" in terms of the climate crisis. If one wants to re-read the showy promises and pompous announcements, as well as the pitiful failure and secret retreats of Buffet, Bloomberg, Gates, Pickens, and Branson, one should refer to "Capitalism vs. Climate" by Naomi Klein (2015, pp. 281-311). There one learns, for instance, about the pompous announcement to invest three billion dollars in the

- development of biofuels or the media-staged "Virgin Earth Challenge", which promised 25 million dollars to the one who would figure out how to extract one billion tons of carbon dioxide per year from the atmosphere without consequential damage. All just big talk... If Tesla-Musk in Germany is now staging itself as a saviour, this is only an embarrassing epilogue of these long-forgotten and failed stories.
- 25 #DaniBleibt!
- 26 Zeller, Christian 2020, p. 18. Revolution for Climate.
- 27 Gleiss, Thies 2020, in lunapark 21, issue 49, p. 52.
- 28 "That nature and its services must be given a monetary value in order to protect them is the song of the Green Economy." Hartmann, Kathrin 2015, p. 174. From Controlled Overexploitation.
- 29 Detailed discussion by Broistedt Philip/Hofmann, Christian 2020, pp. 69. Goodbye Capital.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Sandleben 2020: <http://www.guenther-sandleben.de>
- 32 Association info 2019: <https://assoziation.info/?p=241>
- 33 Detailed discussion by Broistedt Philip/Hofmann, Christian 2020, p. 74-98. Goodbye Capital.
- 34 Sandleben 2020: <http://www.guenther-sandleben.de>  
This quotation already makes clear that the "degrees of freedom" that must be fought for urgently are no guarantee for a sustainable metabolism with nature. They are the necessary prerequisites, but not yet the sufficient conditions for a life in harmony with the laws of nature.
- 35 "To be clear: a non-market economy is not a question of unaccountable central planners, or equally unaccountable programmers or their algorithms making decisions for the rest of us. Without democratic input from consumers and producers, the daily experience of the millions of living participants in the economy, planning cannot work. Democracy is not some abstract ideal tacked on all this, but essential to the process." Phillips, Leigh/Rozworski Michal 2019, p. 213. People's Republic of Walmart.
- 36 "In simplest terms, Amazon is a giant planned machine for distributing goods." Ibid. p. 92.
- 37 "The glimmers of hope for a different way of doing things are foreshadowed in the sophisticated economic planning and intense long-distance cooperation already happening under capitalism. If today's economic system can plan at the level of a firm larger than many national economies and produce the information that makes such planning ever more efficient, then the task for the future is obvious: we must democratize and expand this realm of planning-that is, spread it to the level of entire economies, even the entire globe." Ibid. p. 244.
- 38 See Oxfam 2020. For the overall rich Germany, this ratio is not quite as drastic, but still very clear: "The richest 10 percent accounted for over half (52 percent) of the emissions added to the atmosphere between 1990 and 2015. The richest one percent were responsible for 15 percent of emissions during this time – more than all the citizens of the EU and more than twice that of the poorest half of humanity (7 percent). During this time, the richest 10 percent blew one third of our remaining global 1.5C carbon budget, compared to just 4 percent for the poorest half of the population.  
<https://www.oxfam.de/ueber-uns/aktuelles/klimawandel-ungleichheit-reichste-1-prozent-schaedigt-klima-doppelt-so-stark>
- 39 See: Hartmann, Kathrin 2009. End of Fairy Tale Hour.
- 40 Hartmann, Kathrin 2020, p. 32. It's Not Going to Get Any Greener.
- 41 "Neither historical currents of the labour movement - the social democratic and the communist parties - offer starting points for emancipatory eco-socialist social changes. Both currents have historically failed across the board, especially on the question of society's relationship with nature. Zeller, Christian 2020, p. 46. Revolution for Climate.
- 42 Sandleben 2020 : <http://www.guenther-sandleben.de>  
See also Zeller, Christian 2020, Revolution for Climate on the failure of the historical labour movement. For the devastating ecological assessment of state socialism, see also Tanuro, Daniel 2011: [http://www.emancipation.org/articles/em\\_1-1/e\\_1-1\\_tanuro.pdf](http://www.emancipation.org/articles/em_1-1/e_1-1_tanuro.pdf)
- 43 Raworth, Kate: <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>
- 44 Raworth, Kate 2018. The Donut Economy. Finally an economic model that does not destroy the planet, p. 322.
- 45 Göpel, Maja 2020. Rethink Our World.
- 46 Neubacher, Alexander 2020: <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/degrowth-und-postwachstum-weniger-ist-nicht-mehr-sondern-weniger-kolumne-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000172270204>
- 47 Marshall, George 2007: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2007/sep/13/ethicalliving.climatechange>
- 48 Neubauer, Luisa/Repenning, Alexander 2019, p. 37. Of the End of the Climate Crisis.
- 49 Klein, Naomi 2015, p. 253 The Decision. Capitalism vs. Climate.
- 50 Welzer, Harald 2019: <https://taz.de/Zeit-fuer-die-Wirklichkeit!/169557/>
- 51 Neubauer, Luisa 2020: <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/jaugstein/joe-kaeser-glaubt-das-wirklich>
- 52 Konicz, Thomasz 2020, S. 154. Climate Killer Capitalism
- 53 Ibid. p. 166.