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***A New Common Sense: Addressing Ecosocialism's Strategy Gap with a Neo-Gramscian
Discourse Approach***

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Introduction

The world is currently facing unprecedented environmental threats, such as extreme weather events, that are putting ecosystems and people inhabiting them at extreme danger. The issue of climate change is constituted of interlinked crises between the ecological, economic, social, and political sphere (Croeser, 2021, p. 1). It is scientific common sense that the damage to the earth and to its people is going to be severe if anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are not going to be sufficiently reduced to limit global warming to 1.5 °C above preindustrial levels (IPCC, 2018). Despite these scientific warnings, governments acting by themselves and through international institutions are continuously failing to effectively address the climate crisis (Croeser, 2021, p. 2). This failure has led to the growth of a “climate movement within civil society whose broad aim is to bring about the changes required to mitigate anthropogenic global warming” (p. 2). It is the climate justice movement, most prominently the youth-led Fridays for Future (FFF) movement, that is the most visible sign of the recent increase of awareness about the climate as a global issue with entwined environmental and social struggles (Coolsaet, 2021). The understanding of interconnections between environmental, economic, political, and social justice struggles has been developed and refined most extensively by practice and theoretical perspective of ecosocialism (Croeser, 2020, p. 54). Despite being a complex position with certain disagreements, ecosocialists unitedly see capitalism as the driver of these interrelated struggles and ‘system change’ (equivalent to the demand of ‘radical climate justice’) as the only real solution to the climate crisis (p. 33). However, the replacement of capitalism by an ecosocialist system is currently far from being realized, and ecosocialists are largely failing to investigate strategic questions about how such a transition may come about (Albert, 2023).

This project is concerned with the puzzle of capitalism’s persistence, despite the multiple crises it produces, as a starting point to investigate the question of strategies for the realization of ecosocialism. Therefore, a Neo-Gramscian discourse approach is adopted because it allows to explain capitalist endurance through the concept of hegemony, and it understands discourse as a site of agency for all actors. To approach this two-level puzzle, the following research question is formulated:

RQ: *“How does the hegemonic climate discourse obstruct radical climate justice?”*

The purpose of this question is three-fold: answering it allows to understand how capitalism sustains itself through discourse, to show the risk of passive revolution the climate justice

movement is currently facing, and to tie this understanding together for a strategic recommendation of an ecosocialist transition. This is the proposal to develop a counter-hegemonic bloc between ecosocialists and the radical climate justice movement, based on a new trans-environmental and anti-capitalist common sense. This idea is developed as an alternative path to calls for using the capitalist-reliant Green New Deal as a transitory strategy, which is argued to risk the further sustenance of neoliberal capitalism.

The scholarly significance of answering this question lies in addressing ecosocialism's strategy gap and to make a proposal based on Neo-Gramscian discourse concepts, which have largely been left unexplored in this regard. To develop the strategy proposal, the project starts by reviewing literature on ecosocialism's principles, its scholarly contentions, and its relationship with the climate justice movement. While theoretical contributions are made throughout, the theoretical framework specifically addresses the endurance of capitalism, focusing on Neo-Gramscian discourse concepts. To support this project's theoretical argument, an illustrative Critical Discourse Analysis is conducted of the FFF movement, to show the need to increase its radicality in the strategic alliance with ecosocialists. The conclusion reflects on this proposal and recommends further engagement with it, as well as ecosocialist strategy overall.

Literature Review

What is ecosocialism?

There is no single way to define ecosocialism (Albert, 2023, p. 13) and some disagreements among ecosocialists about Marx's ecological positions exist (Croeser, 2021, p. 55). However, what unites them is the shared understanding that capitalism's dependency on endless capital accumulation leads to endless resource extraction, which is irreconcilable with the earth's wellbeing (Brownhill et al., 2022, p. 2). Therefore, ecosocialists argue that there is no possible way of achieving ecological sustainability within capitalism, which is why the capitalist system must be replaced by ecosocialism (p. 2). According to Brownhill et al., ecosocialism's founding principles are meant to overcome capitalism-induced calamities, such as inequality and ecological destruction. Thus, an ecosocialist system needs to be grounded in the principle of cooperation of all communities to find reciprocally beneficial solutions for ecological damage, and in the principle of mutually respectful and egalitarian decision-making processes (p. 2).

A more tangible definition is made by Albert, who describes ecosocialism as a broad

post-capitalist alternative of multiple strands. According to him, ecosocialist strands align with different movements such as degrowth, ecofeminism, postdevelopment, and solar communism while other strands “fall somewhere in between” (Albert, 2023, p. 12). He argues that “at core these movements share a commitment to struggling for a socioecological transition beyond capitalism by democratizing the means of production, subjecting markets to more ecologically rational planning, and subordinating private profit to social use-value and ecocentric production” (p. 12). While Albert’s broad conceptualization is not without problems, as will be shown later, it offers a useful starting point for understanding ecosocialism because it is concise, but still includes the most fundamental criteria. Albert identifies three key aspects that he believes are shared across the variety of ecosocialisms. These are: “1) the priority of use-value over exchange-value; 2) collective ownership and planning to shape and constrain markets; and 3) ‘contraction and convergence’ in consumption levels between the global north and south” (Albert, 2023, p. 13).

Firstly, ecosocialism requires the subjugation or abolition of exchange-value to use-value, “by organizing production as a function of social needs and the requirements of environmental production” (O’Connor as cited in Löwy, 2005 p. 18). These concepts draw on Marx’s labour theory of value, which argues that commodities always embody an intrinsic use value and a value of exchange, which is activated by exchanging the commodity for another one that requires a homogenous amount of abstracted labour (Croeser, 2021, p. 28). Because capitalism requires the creation of surplus value (meaning more abstracted labour value in output than in input), exchange values demand the exploitation of labour. Thus, the subjugation of exchange-value to use-value means that “an ecosocialist economy would prioritize and invest in forms of labor, enterprises, and infrastructure projects that are socially useful and ecologically regenerative (rather than profitable for capitalists)” (Albert, 2023, p. 13). The ecofeminist contribution to ecosocialism is that an ecosocialist economy must put emphasis on care and reproductive labor, which help reproducing healthy communities and ecologies and thereby sustain the work force (p. 13).

The second key aspect of ecosocialism, collective ownership over the means of production and collective planning, aims at regulating production in a way that is just and oriented towards future generations (Foster, Clark & York, 2011). Most ecosocialists believe that it is not necessary to abolish markets, “so long as they are constrained by a dominant public sector, nationalization of large firms, and the abolition (or at least radical transformation) of labor markets” (Baer as cited in Albert, 2018). This emphasizes the importance of planning to “efficiently redirect labor and resources to meet human needs while rapidly reducing stress on

planetary boundaries” (Smith as cited in Albert, 2018).

Lastly, Albert (2023) argues that ecosocialists want to organize planning in a way of ‘contraction and convergence’ that reduces material and energy consumption levels in the overdeveloped global north and reallocates resources to the global south (p. 14). According to him, this process does necessitate a decrease of living standards in the global north because the careful redistribution of income can lead to overall increases in living standards, “even while dramatically cutting overall material-energy throughput” (p. 14). The demand of contraction and convergence is associated with the degrowth strand (e.g. Kallis, 2018; Vettese, 2018), which is contested among ecosocialists, not only because of questions about the extent of material-energy throughput cuts, but more importantly because some degrowth approaches allow for within-capitalism solutions (Albert, 2023, pp. 13-14). Therefore, ecosocialists such as Fraser (2021) reject degrowth approaches for not being genuinely anti-capitalist and its association with ‘lifestyle environmentalism’ (p. 126). While Albert is aware of this contention, he chooses to overlook it for the sake of portraying all ecosocialist-related movements as “natural allies in the struggle for more sustainable post-capitalist futures” (p. 13). However, because of the strong contention around degrowth and especially its reliance on capitalist market mechanisms, it seems appropriate to adopt a narrower conceptualization of ecosocialism, based on Albert’s first two principles. These principles of ‘the priority of use-value over exchange-value’ and ‘collective ownership and planning’ (p. 13) are a shared basis of those ‘third-stage’ ecosocialist contributions (Croeser, 2021, p. 75) this project builds on (e.g. Croeser, 2021; Fraser, 2021; 2022; Löwy 2005; 2015). Therefore, these two principles are adopted as a minimally agreed-upon definition of a future ecosocialist system, whose realization this project seeks to propose a strategy for.

Ecosocialist stages conceptualization

What then constitutes the remaining differences of ecosocialists who fall within the definition by the two principles above? This question can best be understood through Burkett and Foster’s categorisation of first-stage, second-stage, and third-stage ecosocialism (as cited in Croeser 2021, p. 53). These stages are best understood as shifts in the evolution of ecosocialist debate (Holleman, 2015). This debate is centred on different understandings to which degree classical Marxism is predisposed to understand capitalism’s destruction of the environment (first- and second-stage) as well as on questions of engagement with the environmental movement and extending the justice conception (third-stage). First- and second-stage ecosocialists disagree about the extent to which ecosocialism should draw from ‘green’ (environmental) perspectives

in order to supplement ‘red’ (socialist / Marxist) perspectives, depending on how ecologically sensitive this ‘red’ position is being understood (Croeser, 2021, p. 55). According to Löwy (2015), the first prominent use of the word ‘ecosocialism’ can be traced to the German Green Party in the 1980s.

First-stage ecosocialism of the 1980s and 90s presents the first instance of a ‘red-green alliance’, with the broad aim of building a better society (Croeser, 2021, p. 54). These ecosocialists (e.g. O’Connor, 1989; Kovel, 2007) emphasize Marx’s distinction between use and exchange value and combined his critique of the capitalist political economy with ecological critiques of capitalism’s obsession with production and wasteful consumption (p. 54). First-stage ecosocialists felt the need for combining these insights because they perceived Marxist (‘red’) thought as neglecting the environment or even to be ‘anti-ecological’ (p. 56).

Second-stage ecosocialists, such as Clark, Burkett, and Foster, revised the classical writings of Marx and Engels in the 1990s to clear up what they understood as misconceptions about Marx’s ecological relationship. They were able to settle the disagreements with first-stage ecosocialists by providing textual evidence that the original writings show an understanding of the interlinkage of “environmental, economic, political and social justice struggles” (Croeser, 2021, p. 54). This was found to be most visible in Marx’s analysis of human alienation from nature through capital relations of production (see Dickens, 1992) and in Marx’s theory of ‘ecological imperialism’ and the ‘global metabolic rift’ (see Clark & Foster, 2009). The concept of the global metabolic rift describes the capitalist robbing of soil in distant countries, which become implicated in a system of ecological imperialism. It is of importance to second- and third-stage ecosocialist analyses because it helps understand contemporary entanglements of the environmental crisis through the global political economy. This analysis becomes possible by applying Marx’s method of ecological materialism, which is a synthesis of Marx’s ecology and political economy based on a dialectic understanding of nature and society (Foster, 2016).

Third-stage ecosocialism extends second-stage ecosocialism’s ‘ecological materialism’ understanding by paying increased attention to explaining interrelated dependencies of the entire earth system, including human spheres (Croeser, 2021, p. 76). What further characterizes third-stage ecosocialism is that it bridges the gap between academic debate of first- and second-stage ecosocialists and on-ground climate justice activism (Weston, 2014). By applying the method of ecological materialism, they aim at explaining capitalism’s multiple entangled crises and why system change is necessary (Croeser, 2021, p. 151). Thereby, third-stage ecosocialists expand the understanding of justice beyond the environment to the social and political sphere

and contribute to the development of climate justice movement strategies (p. 54). The distinction between academics and activists is not clear cut, with some third-stage ecosocialists being involved in climate justice activism and in the writing of popular ecosocialist texts (p. 76; e.g. Kovel, 2007). Because this project is concerned with the realization of ecosocialist ideas and because third-stage ecosocialism is most concerned with such questions, through elaborate explanations of interrelated capitalism-induced crises (see Fraser, 2021) and direct engagement with the climate justice movement, the positions of third-stage ecosocialism are most important to this project. While third-stage ecosocialists aim more at the realization of an ecosocialist reality than those of first and second stage, they are still not devoting enough attention to questions of strategy (Albert, 2023), and therefore, as this project will argue, their engagement with the climate justice movement should go even deeper.

Ecosocialism and movements

Burkett and Foster's categorisation of ecosocialist stages describes the ecosocialism-movement relationship as characterized by third-stage ecosocialism's engagement with the climate justice movement. For the editors of *The Routledge Handbook on Ecosocialism* (2022), including Michael Löwy, this relationship has even closer historical ties. They argue that ecosocialism is not to be primarily understood as "a theory or party line that rains from above, but rather the convergence of resistance and anti-capitalist movements from below [...] rooted in social and ecological justice" (Brownhill et al., pp. 1-2). Thus, they argue, to understand ecosocialist ideas means to understand the history of social movements it has been shaped by (p. 2). Ecosocialism has historically arisen from and informs many of the egalitarian and ecological justice struggles that have emerged in response to the "social and environmental miseries wrought in the global expansion and intensification of capitalist relations" (p. 1). Their analysis is that capitalism has led to a constant increase in GHG output, which causes more frequent and deadly extreme weather events. Even though, all aspects of the ecological crisis are interlinked (i.e. capitalist dependencies on racial and gendered oppression, inequality, and historic colonization), climate change is the most urgent problem because it threatens the conditions of human life (p. 2). Therefore, to prevent further ecological destruction and to become ecologically sustainable, it is necessary to replace the capitalist system and its exploitative relations with an ecosocialist system (p. 2). They argue that socialist ideas have been present in environmentalist movements since the late 1980s. However, the most advanced environmental-socialist understandings did not emerge in the global north but in the decolonial struggle of indigenous communities in countries such as Brazil and Peru, where people faced the capitalist destruction of nature as

immediate threat to their survival (pp. 3-4).

This account should not be seen as challenging but as adding historical nuance to the ecosocialist stages conceptualization. At present, third-stage ecosocialists are those that assume responsibility for the realization of ecosocialism (Croeser, 2021, p. 76), based on an expansion of first- and second-stage ecosocialism's explanation of capitalism's economic-environment entanglement to the human sphere, leading to a more profound conception of climate justice (p. 2). Moreover, some ecosocialist thinkers assume this responsibility through direct activist engagement in the climate justice movement. Having identified the historical relationship between ecosocialism and the climate movement, it is important to further understand the present relationship.

Ecosocialism and the climate movement – climate action or climate justice?

The contemporary climate movement is composed of heterogeneous actors ranging from individuals, civil society organizations, social movements, and networks. Besides the type of actors, the climate movement can be further distinguished along the lines of nationality, age and gender, and ideology (Garrelts and Dietz, 2014 as cited in Croeser, 2021, p. 116).

Due to this diversity of actors and characteristics, conceptualizing the climate movement is no easy task. However, many analysts, including Croeser, foreground the ideological dimension to conceptualize the movement by its two major 'wings': a moderate 'climate action' and a more system-critical 'radical climate justice' wing (p. 117). On the one hand, moderate reformists call for 'climate action', consisting of capitalist-led energy transitions and decarbonisation of the economy through market mechanisms (p. 116). Beyond calls for technological within-capitalism solutions, positions of the climate action wing are often characterized by a certain vagueness associated with liberal environmentalism (Heenan, 2022, p. 310). On the other hand, the radical climate justice wing shares an ecosocialist analysis of capitalism (p. 131) and calls for 'system change' as only solution (Croeser, 2021, p. 2). This conceptualization by movement wings means to focus on two extremes of the climate movement, which ignores their common ground and the "very messy 'in-between' space" (p. 117). Nevertheless, it is the best possible conceptual decision for this project, as well as those of others (see Wahlström, Wennerhag & Rootes, 2013), to treat the reformist climate action and the radical climate justice wings as 'analytically distinct' and 'fundamentally ideologically opposed' (Croeser, 2021, p. 117).

Based on the dimension of system-critique, the climate movement wings can be distinguished between calls for 'real solutions' (associated with climate justice's systemic

changes) and ‘false solutions’ (associated with moderate within-capitalism climate action) (p. 33). The moderate climate action wing treats climate change as a “politically sanitized” issue that “can be addressed in isolation by ‘problem solving’ and tweaking global capitalism so that it is no longer powered by fossil fuels” (p. 117). Therefore, as will be elaborated in a later section, the moderate approach falls prey to neoliberal capitalism’s myth of ‘green growth’ or ‘green capitalism’ (see Wanner, 2015). By contrast, the radical climate justice wing of the climate movement, shares the ecosocialist analysis of the multiple capitalist crises and draws the conclusion that “real solutions to these interconnected problems require fundamental ‘system change’ ” (Croeser, 2021, p. 118). From this perspective, moderate problem-solving approaches of the climate action wing are considered ‘false solutions’ that “will put even greater burdens on the working class and on subaltern social groups that are already disadvantaged in capitalist societies” (p. 119). In sum, while both wings share the broader goal of averting climate change, the radical climate justice wing, in line with ecosocialism, proposes the only ‘real solution’ to get there: system change (p. 33).

Capitalism’s interlinked crises – financialized or neoliberal capitalism?

Perhaps one of the most sophisticated analyses of the entanglement of capitalism’s has been made by the critical theorist and third-stage ecosocialist Nancy Fraser. Her essay “Climates of Capital” (2021) (drawn from her book “Cannibal Capitalism”, published in 2022) aims at disclosing capitalism’s internal contradictions and its connections to multiple strands of injustice. Fraser conceptualizes capitalism not as an economic system but as an institutionalized social order that sustains ‘the economy’ (p. 100) by exploiting its ‘non-economic conditions of possibility’ (p. 99). These are social-reproductive and political prerequisites as well as the condition of nature (p. 103). According to Fraser’s analysis, capitalism’s way of organizing the economy’s relationship to these ‘others’, is inherently contradictory and crisis-prone, producing multiple injustices (p. 100). These contradictions do not only interact with each other, but most importantly with the economic contradiction theorized by classical Marxism (p. 16). This economic contradiction can be roughly described as the jeopardization of its own development through the exploitation of the forces of production (labour power and means of production) by the relations of production (arising from the owners of means of production, Bottomore, 1991).

The first non-economic condition of social reproduction is constituted by the exploitative organization of the various forms of carework, which are mostly carried out by women, and have the function of sustaining those who constitute ‘labour’ (Fraser, 2021, p.

103). While carework is fundamental to the system, it is separated from the economic sphere of production, and appropriated without replenishment or reward (p. 103). Thereby, capitalism acts as a cannibal (p. 101; Fraser, 2022) that jeopardizes its own condition of possibility, which means that it inherently carries a tendency of social-reproductive crisis.

The same happens to capitalism's political prerequisites which enable its existence by providing security, legal systems, and public goods (Fraser, 2021, p. 104). Here, capitalism organizes the polity by splitting off capital's private power from the public power of states, which incentivizes the hollowing out of the latter by evading taxes, weakening regulation, privatization of public good and offshoring of operations (p. 104).

For the issue of climate change, the most important non-economic capitalist contradiction is the one with nature. Here again, capitalism treats its condition of existence, nature, as a value-free other that is positioned externally of it. Capitalism's production and existence both depend on nature for the extraction of material inputs, such as raw materials and sources of energy, and for the disposal of waste (pp. 99-100). The necessity for profit maximization and endless accumulation leads to systemic free-riding on nature, which cannot self-replenish without limit (p. 101). Therefore, Fraser contends that capitalistically organized societies "harbour a built-in tendency to ecological crisis" (p. 102), or more precisely to drive climate change (p. 98).

By developing an analysis of capitalism's multiple interrelated crises, Fraser participates in the tradition of third-stage ecosocialists that aim at disclosing these contradictions. Fraser uses the term 'trans-environmentalism' for describing the understanding of capitalism's crises-tendencies beyond the natural sphere and argues that "[a]nti-capitalism is the piece that gives [it] political direction and critical force" (p. 126).

What capitalism? Neoliberal capitalism.

According to Fraser's (2021) analysis "[t]he historical career of capitalism's ecological contradictions spans four regimes of accumulation" (p. 110), in which the economy-nature relationship and crisis phenomena have taken different form. These are the mercantile-capitalist regime (16th - 18th century), the liberal-colonial regime (19th - early 20th century), the state-managed regime (20th century) and the current regime of financialized capitalism (p. 110). While each of these regimes would treat the economy-nature relationship differently, it would always depend on an ecological contradiction. Historically, when enough friction arises, a regime would be replaced by a new one with small adjustments in the economy-nature relationship, which would allow for a provisional fix. This cycle results in the perpetuation of

capitalism's ecological contradiction (p. 109).

Today's financialized capitalism is different from previous regimes in that past 'bads', especially the disavowal of ecological costs, have exacerbated and that global neoliberalization, with its effect of privatization of public goods like water, has taken hold. It is 'financialized' in its modes of regulation which are premised on neoliberal conceptions of nature. These neoliberal conceptions are represented by a 'new green-capitalist imaginary' (p. 119), which envisions free markets and financial regulations as the solution to the climate crisis. Carbon-trading, emissions permits, and carbon derivatives are instances of these financial regulations. They are grounded in a new neoliberal understanding that absorbs nature into the market through an 'abstract economizing logic' that considers all of nature as 'fungible, commensurable units' (p. 119). Fraser concurs that these neoliberal regulations perpetuate capitalism's ecological contradiction in the 'new-old' idea of the market as governance mechanism, now equipped with the task of cutting GHG emissions (p. 119). Their task of solving the climate crisis is impossible: capitalist market mechanisms cannot effectively cut GHG emissions because they are grounded in capitalism's structural ecological contradiction that produces ecological crisis by subsuming and commodifying nature. In summary, Fraser's conceptualization of capitalism is one of a system that is bigger than the organization of the economy, but that expands to the structural exploitation and destruction of its non-economic conditions of existence. The current regime of financialized capitalism is characterized by neoliberalism, which subsumes and commodifies nature.

Other thinkers concerned with capitalism and the climate crisis, both outside (Parr, 2013; Wanner, 2015) and inside the ecosocialist position (Brownhill, 2022; Croeser, 2021; Giacomini, 2022), put even stronger attention on modern capitalism's defining feature of neoliberalism, by using the term 'neoliberal capitalism'. In line with Fraser's definition, neoliberal capitalism relies on the increased commodification, privatisation, marketisation or the 'neoliberalisation' of nature, which are about creating societal relationships with nature, in which it is subsumed to the free market (Wanner, 2015, p. 26). Moreover, the term neoliberal capitalism is frequently used in discourse approaches that are concerned with the irreconcilability of capitalism and efficient climate change solutions. As will be shown later, such approaches are a fundamental way of understanding the persistence of capitalism and the creation of possible alternatives. Because the term neoliberal capitalism specifies the core of current capitalism's contradictions, the neoliberalisation of its conditions of existence, especially nature, it is the right terminological choice for this project

So far, this project has investigated the ecosocialist position to identify the structural

problem of the climate crisis (capitalism and its ecological contradiction). It has given this problem a more specific name (neoliberal capitalism) and argued for an ideal solution: the replacement with ecosocialism. Currently, such a revolution of the world's social and economic order is not foreseeable. While it is certainly no easy task, and while third-stage ecosocialists see it as their responsibility, the discipline is currently failing to strategize how its 'idealized utopian end-point' (Albert, 2023, p. 22) of an ecosocialist system could become reality. This project is intended to both point out the urgency of taking this task more seriously, as well as to develop a possible strategic starting point for an ecosocialist transition: a counter-hegemonic alliance between ecosocialists and the radical climate justice movement.

Theoretical framework: capitalism's endurance

Capitalism's endurance: a discourse explanation

Before this strategy can be developed, it must be understood how the system of neoliberal capitalism persists. Despite of its multiple self-produced ecological, social-reproductive, and political crises, through the cannibalization of its conditions of existence, it has found ways to endure until today (Fraser, 2021; 2022). Fraser's structural explanation is that it has managed to do so by adjusting its economy-nature relationship in ways that allow for the provisional relief of crises. Even though Fraser believes that this cyclical development today is having difficulties to progress because of the escalating "epochal trans-regime progression of global warming" (p. 110), the historical proof of capitalism's endurance diminishes hope for a natural end of capitalism.

One instance of how capitalism adjusts the economy-nature relationship, and how it achieves dominance, is through the domination of discourse. The dominant (or hegemonic) discourse of neoliberal capitalism is currently based on the logic of 'green growth' or 'green capitalism' (Wanner, 2015). According to these approaches, discourses are bound up with political power (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005). By constructing systems of meaning through language, discourses aid in defining a 'common sense' and what is considered 'legitimate knowledge' (Dryzek, 2022, pp. 9-10). Discourses are conceptualized as shared ways of understanding the world by collective interpretation of information embedded in language (p. 9). Discourse approaches are based on post-structural theory which contends that people are constituted within discourses and that discourses are both a site of inhibition and opportunity for change (Hajer, 1995).

This understanding is enhanced by the Neo-Gramscian approach which views discourse as a form of constant struggle for hegemony in which all groups ('dominant and subaltern', Donoghue, 2018, p. 405) have agency. While there are plenty of discourse accounts on the capitalism-climate crisis issue (e.g. Fleming et al., 2014; Jensen, 2014; Wanner, 2015), Eve Croeser's book is a rare example that makes the connection to ecosocialism. This project makes the strategic recommendation for ecosocialists to deepen their ties with the radical climate justice movement and to join forces in a 'counter-hegemonic bloc' that must create a new common sense and win the discursive 'war of position' (Croeser, 2021, p. 118; Donoghue, 2018). This strategic recommendation is based on the belief that Neo-Gramscian discourse approaches should be devoted more attention as a way of addressing ecosocialism's strategy gap. They have a deepened analytical understanding of domination through the concept of hegemony, specifically hegemonic discourses, and simultaneously show the possibility of developing an alternative: counter-hegemonic discourses. Before developing a strategy based on this discourse approach, the strategy gap, and a popular but flawed solution to it shall be elaborated.

Ecosocialism's strategy gap and the GND approach

Ecosocialist scholarship's lack of attention to the realization of its ideas has been most substantively addressed by Michael Albert (2023). He contends that while "[e]cosocialists convincingly demonstrate that capitalism is incapable of resolving the climate and broader earth system crises [...] they have devoted relatively little attention to questions of strategy, such as: how might ecosocialist transitions take place?" (p. 12). While he notes that some important work has been done in this direction, which he is building on (e.g. Baer, 2018; Huber, 2019; Quincy, 2011), ecosocialist theory and practice remain inhibited by two problematic tendencies. These are firstly, the tendency to describe idealized 'abstract utopian' futures without deeply considering how they would emerge and the failure to anticipate a transition's possible trade-offs and responses to them (p. 12). Even if ecosocialists such as Angus (2016) and Foster (2015) provide transitional steps in the struggle for ecosocialism, he contends that these read more like a wish list than a strategic plan (p. 15). Albert gives a possible plausible explanation for ecosocialists avoidance of strategic questions, being that "they reiterate the scale of what they are up against and may dampen hope for radical change" (p. 27). Therefore, Albert develops what he calls a 'realist utopian' approach of an ecosocialist transition pathway, based on the "promising transitional program" of the 'Green New Deal' (GND) (pp. 17-18).

While various proposals for GNDs exist, they are based on the idea of pushing state-

led investments for green technology and to create green jobs (i.e. creating a green economy), whilst relying on capitalist market mechanisms. Ecosocialists who promote the GND path for an ecosocialist transition, such as Albert (2023) himself, argue that it has the potential for “rapidly reducing emissions while building the longer-term foundations for a post-capitalist transformation” (p. 18). In consecutive paragraphs (pp. 18-26), Albert follows his own “plea for ecosocialists and allied movements to shift more of their intellectual energy towards strategic questions concerning ecosocialist transitions” (p. 27) and anticipates possible challenges of the GND transition scenario.

Albert’s plea for ecosocialist strategy is highly valued and it is a novel contribution to consider scenarios *how* the GND strategy would play out, as an instance of strategizing how the idealist ecosocialist endpoint could come about. Nevertheless, doubts about the suitability of a strategic GND transition remain strong. According to Fraser (2021), the GND approach is both not sufficiently ‘anti-capitalist’ (which Albert would likely argue is to be developed in the process) and it misses the ‘trans-environmental’ character of capitalism (p. 125). The latter problem stems from the GND’s insufficiently broad view of ‘the working class’: by creating green jobs for waged labour, the GND has no answer for all the unwaged carework and capitalism’s social-reproductive crisis (p. 103). Because of its within-capitalism approach, the GND falls inside Croeser’s categorisation of a false solution associated with the reformist climate action approach.

Another problem is underestimated by Albert: the danger of a ‘passive revolution’ (Wanner, 2015). What Albert swiftly discards by saying “‘realism’ (i.e. ‘being realistic’) can always be contested” is in reality a more serious problem. When applying the Gramscian concept of passive revolution to the hegemonic green growth discourse (see Wanner, 2015), to which the GND clearly belongs, the dangerous effect of helping neoliberal capitalism to sustain its ‘hegemony’ becomes apparent (p. 23). “For Gramsci, a ‘passive revolution’ occurs in an ‘organic crisis’ when counter-hegemonic challenges to the dominant capitalist order are co-opted and neutralised through changes and concessions which re-establish the consent in that order” (p. 25). According to Wanner, especially the global financial crisis that started in 2008, marked the apparent end of neoliberal globalization. However, the ‘emergent green economy/green growth discourse’ constituted another passive revolution that helped neoliberal capitalism to adjust to its self-produced crisis by alleviating contention through the myth of decoupling economic growth from environmental resources and degradation (p. 23). Through this myth, the green growth discourse supported a passive revolution that was able to “co-opt and neutralise counter-hegemonic challenges to neoliberal capitalism”, such as arguments

about limits to growth (p. 23) and about anti-capitalism. By making a concession to critics of capitalism (climate change should be addressed) but keeping the system of neoliberal capitalism (and thereby its ecological contradiction) intact through the decoupling myth, capitalism's critics were neutralized, and the system sustained. The danger of following a GND transition strategy is the same: by leaving the capitalist system unharmed, it is more than likely to find ways for new passive revolutions that will eradicate any possible "longer-term foundations for a post-capitalist transformation" (p. 18) that Albert (2023) hopes for.

An alternative ecosocialist strategy: a counter-hegemonic bloc

These should be enough reasons to at least think twice about Albert's GND strategy and to develop alternatives to it. A possible path, and ally, that is completely unmentioned by Albert, is the aspect of large-scale popular transitions aided by social movements, such as the climate justice movement. It has already been established that third-stage ecosocialists are most concerned with the realization of ecosocialism and that they therefore seek direct engagement with the climate justice movement. It therefore almost seems curious that this path is not mentioned in Albert's (2023) assessment of possible ecosocialist transitions (pp. 14-17). The remainder of this paper should be dedicated to developing exactly this path: a counter-hegemonic bloc of third-stage ecosocialists and the radical climate justice movement based on a new ecosocialist common sense as a strategy for ecosocialist transition. This strategy is in line with Fraser's (2021) assessment of the climate justice movement's growing potentials (pp. 124-125) and her Gramscian argument for a counter-hegemonic bloc based on anti-capitalism and trans-environmentalism (p. 97).

In order to start the development of this strategy, the next section elaborates on Gramscian discourse concepts to enhance the understanding of how a 'counter-hegemonic' bloc (Wanner, 2015, p. 25) would have to operate (create a new 'common sense', p. 36) and what its goal must be (to win the 'war of position', p. 25). Through the application of these Gramscian concepts it is possible to develop an answer to this project's research question. The analysis shows an illustrative Critical Discourse Analysis of FfF's press releases, to argue that the still moderate climate justice movement risks helping a passive revolution, but that it is a promising ally if its anti-capitalism and trans-environmentalism is sharpened in an alliance with ecosocialists.

It is beyond the scope of this project to 'anticipate and preempt' (Albert, 2023, p. 12) all dangers this alliance would face, in the manner that Albert does. It therefore does not claim to be a fully developed alternative strategy to his, or to compete on the level of a 'realistic

utopian’ approach (p. 17). However, this project should be considered as a real attempt at starting the debate about strategic alternatives to the GND approach based on Gramscian discourse concepts and it carries the hope that the anticipation of transition scenarios of this counter-hegemonic bloc will be elaborated by future research.

Gramscian concepts and discourse

As previously explained, Marxist concepts are crucial to the development of ecosocialism. An important contribution for understanding the persistence of the dominant capitalist system is made by Neo-Gramscian scholars, such as Robert Cox, who interprets Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony. According to Cox (1983), ‘hegemony’ refers to a form of class rule that is based on consent more than on the coercive apparatus of the state. An important way of constructing hegemony for the ruling class is to create a common identity and ideology, which bind the members of a class together in the social formation of ‘historical blocs’ (Croeser, 2021, p. 44). On a linguistic level, this identity is constructed through a ‘common sense’ that naturalizes ideologies as well as discourses and creates social unity in favour of the dominant class’s rule (Donoghue, 2018, pp. 395-399).

Because the hegemony of historical blocs is vulnerable, it “must be continually constructed, maintained and defended” against ‘counter-hegemonic movements’ of ‘subaltern classes and subaltern social groups’ (Croeser, 2021, pp. 44-45). Hegemony is especially challenged in periods of ‘organic crisis’, in which its practices and structures become dysfunctional (p. 45). This element of systemic crisis can be found in Fraser’s analysis of provisional adjustments to the economy-nature relationship. Neo-Gramscian authors are more explicit about the opportunities these moments present. To them, these moments of organic crisis can be taken advantage of by counter-hegemonic blocs if they make use of the ‘war of position’ (p. 46). Unlike the ‘war of manoeuvre’, which depends on force, the war of position entails the construction of a counter-hegemonic ideology and can be fought discursively by creating a new common sense (Donoghue, 2018). The main danger for counter-hegemonic blocs in the period of organic crisis is to be co-opted in a passive revolution (Croeser, 2021; Wanner, 2015).

Addressing the research question

These Gramscian discourse concepts allow to develop an answer to this project’s research question: “*How does the hegemonic climate discourse obstruct radical climate justice?*” Neoliberal capitalism makes the green growth discourse hegemonic, and its logic becomes

defining of the common sense. This common sense is based on the myth of decoupling the environment from economic growth, which is disguised as a concession to solve the climate crisis, but just sustains capitalism's ecological contradiction. The hegemonic green growth discourse, as previously shown in the context of Wanner and the GND logic, constructs a passive revolution of neoliberal capitalism by co-opting alternative positions through this false concession. Through this sustenance of hegemony, alternative discourses, such as the radical climate justice one, based on anti-capitalism and trans-environmentalism and calling for system change, are obstructed. By obstructing these discourses, the building of a counter-hegemonic bloc fails, and radical climate justice cannot come about.

This analysis shows that a new common sense must be ecosocialist because what needs to be commonly realized is that the climate crisis cannot be solved within capitalism and that capitalism will sustain itself for as long as it is not replaced.

Answering the research question is not the end point of this project. Instead, this answer should guide the further development of a strategy for a counter-hegemonic bloc constituted of an ecosocialist and radical climate justice movement alliance. While the climate justice movement is in principle based on an understanding of capitalism's ecological contradiction, its trans-environmentalism (an understanding of capitalism's other axes of domination) is currently not sufficiently developed, and it is not anti-capitalist enough (Fraser, 2021, p. 124). What is missing is that the movement becomes more 'radical'. Currently, it is far from bringing about the required system change, and its moderateness should be of concern because it risks co-optation in another passive revolution. This becomes visible when conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of press releases of the climate justice movement Fridays for Future (FFF). While recently showing an increased awareness of trans-environmentalism, the movements' anti-capitalism is heavily underdeveloped, and its ambivalent position towards green growth should be viewed critically.

Analysis

Analysis: Methodology and the FFF case

The method of CDA is 'critical' of pre-existing power relationships (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 368), and seeks to study, critique, and expose the discursive reproduction of dominance (Donoghue, 2018, p. 395). Gramscian discourse concepts are already of fundamental importance for CDA, but an explicit use of Gramscian concepts enriches the method because

it allows to explain the maintenance of power with the concept of hegemony (Donoghue, 2018). Therefore, this analysis shall investigate the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism's hegemony by the sub-altern (less powerful) group FFF, as an illustration of this project's theoretical discourse concepts. The goal of the analysis is to assess the movement's current discourse, to warn of the reproduction of the green growth logic that could aid a passive revolution, and to propose the engagement in a war of position, instead. This lays the foundation for the elaborated proposal of an ecosocialist alliance in the discussion part.

The youth-led climate justice movement FFF is currently the most visible sign of increased awareness of the globality of the climate crisis (Coolsaet, 2021). By using the language of justice, the movement has popularized the idea that environmental and social struggles intertwine (p. 1). While FFF "represents a global movement that cannot be fully understood through a national case study alone" (Marquardt, 2020, p. 5), the movement is most active nationally, which is why a country needs to be chosen for analysing its discourse. Despite Germany's portrayal as a global climate leader, FFF has stabilized quickly in Germany (p. 5) and is among the strongest in terms of membership within Europe (Berker & Pollex, 2020). Next to membership, the apprehensibility of the German language for the analysis is another reason for choosing this case. Quotes in the following section were translated to English.

A CDA of 101 press releases since the movement's inception in Germany in 2019 (January) until today (May 2023) was conducted. The use of the movement's official press releases has the advantage that is free from biases of media reports, which are especially strong in the case of FFF (Buzogány & Scherhauser, 2022, p. 3).

Analysis: Findings and Discussion

FFF's press releases offer a good insight into the movement's discourse in the form of responses to political developments, as well as justifications for their actions, initiatives, and strikes. The term climate justice is used in abundance but only rarely specified and often appears to be used as a vague catch phrase. However, there is an interesting development, in which the term becomes used more specifically in recent years and its content seems to shift.

In early periods, 'climate justice' is invoked in terms of generational justice to justify the need of a sustainable energy transition, reducing emissions, climate neutrality and reaching the 1.5°C goal. Later, this justification is complemented by the argument that climate transitions need to be socially just. While first in a national context ("we finally have to combine climate protection and social justice"), social justice is invoked more and more in statements about the global south, where "too many people are already confronted by the

consequences of the climate crisis and the climate crisis exacerbates all injustice”. Only in 2022 and 2023, an understanding of anti-racism and calls for anti-neo-colonial compensatory climate transition payments and debt relief, as well as a single mention of intersectionality, emerge. These recent developments show that FFF’s understanding of capitalism’s multiple crisis entanglements (its trans-environmentalism) is still only nascent.

The movement’s anti-capitalism, however, seems to be even less developed. While it demands “a system change that tackles the climate crisis by its roots under the motto #UprootTheSystem”, this system change is not at all explicitly directed against capitalism. The hashtag and its ‘system change’ implication was only used for the month before and after German elections in September 2021 to demand from parties to include the 1.5°C goal in their programs. More calls for system change are frequently made, but only in reference to increasing the government’s climate politics efforts. Capitalism throughout the press releases is only mentioned twice, once by a FFF activist, and once in a citation of an allied movement in the context of an anti-coal protest in October 2021: “let’s ally with those who have understood [...] that capitalism doesn’t mean progress, but destruction”.

Instead of clearly expressing anti-capitalism, the movement voices its frustration for the apparent failure of the European GND. Its relationship with the green economy and growth discourse is at least ambivalent. While one statement in a press release from 2021 mentions the “tale of green growth”, the GND is mentioned positively in two different press releases. This ambivalence is in line with Marquardt’s (2020) assessment that, while radical system-critical voices exist within FFF, these are marginalized, and the movement publicly presents itself as moderate (p. 14). Thus, when applying Croeser’s (2021) distinction of the environmental movement wings, it must be contended that FFF cannot be considered a radical climate justice movement (advocating anti-capitalist system change) (yet). It falls closer into her definition of a climate action movement because it does not clearly renounce market mechanisms (inherent to the green growth proposal of the GND) as a ‘solution’ to the climate crisis.

FFF-ecosocialist alliance

Because the movement does not clearly renounce the common sense of green growth, but reproduces it through positive mentions of the GND, the current ambivalence in its discourse constitutes a dangerous pathway for another passive revolution of neoliberal capitalism. This can only be prevented if the movement’s trans-environmentalism and anti-capitalism is further developed, i.e. when the movement adopts radical climate justice positions. The strategic contribution of this project is to propose that this development should be closely informed in

an alliance with third-stage ecosocialists, constituting a counter-hegemonic bloc. A deep understanding of trans-environmentalism and anti-capitalism, following the analysis of third-stage ecosocialists like Fraser, has to be the foundation of this alliance, and it must aim at making this understanding the new societal common sense in a war of position. While FFF does not constitute the whole climate justice movement, it is currently its most visible actor and the recommendation made here applies to the larger movement in general.

Conclusion

In response to the research question, this project has found that the hegemonic discourse of green growth, present in the GND, is an important way neoliberal capitalism is currently inhibiting radical climate justice. However, the discourse approach, complemented by Neo-Gramscian concepts, gives agency to sub-altern actors, such as the climate justice movement, which should grasp the opportunity to create a new common sense, based on trans-environmentalism and anti-capitalism, in a war of position against the hegemony. This common sense, based on third-stage ecosocialist thought, should be developed in a counter-hegemonic bloc of the radical climate justice movement and ecosocialists. Therefore, this project addresses ecosocialism's current strategy gap with the proposal to deepen the engagement with the climate justice movement, to foreground its radical (system-critical) potential, to then establish this new common sense.

Currently, as illustrated with the CDA of FFF press releases, the climate justice movement's call for 'system change' are not truly anti-capitalist, and the movement's trans-environmentalism is not deep enough. Its moderate positions, including the ambivalent relationship towards green growth and its support for the GND, are a concern for the future co-optation in a passive revolution of capitalism. While the sole use of press releases, as opposed to a wider range of documents, did not allow to identify the movement's reproduction of the green growth logic to the degree of other research (see Marquardt, 2020, p. 13), the analysis identified the movement's ambivalence, which helped constructing the argument about its need to be further informed by ecosocialists.

By developing a strategic proposal for the organization of a counter-hegemonic bloc based on an ecosocialist common sense, and by warning of the danger of passive revolutions, this project has sought to raise the salience of ecosocialism's current strategy gap, and to offer a possible way of addressing it. It has advocated that Gramscian discourse concepts should be

devoted more attention in developing ecosocialist strategy. Therefore, the analysis and recommendation of this project should specifically be of interest for third-stage ecosocialists, who assume responsibility for ecosocialism's realization. However, the scope of this project does not allow to 'anticipate and preempt' (Albert, 2023, p. 12) all scenarios and dangers the counter-hegemonic bloc would face. This is an important project to undertake because the new common sense must be protected against the constant risk of co-optation in passive revolutions of neoliberal capitalism, as well as any other danger that may arise. Strategically investigating these scenarios, and the development of ecosocialist strategy overall, should be of concern for future research.

Appendix: FFF press releases (first: 23 January 2019 - most recent: 7 May 2023) were collected in a single pdf that is retrievable from this link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DMD8RSv87BJh-1QneZE8BLL9yRtDW0r?usp=sharing>

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