Betrayed by Green Capitalism, Here's How We Can Build a Livable Future

The mainstream climate framework is utterly failing to solve the climate crisis. What could a real solution look like?

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How much better will this future be?

Coming back to the depressing reality of 2025: the IPCC is pushing for the global economy to reach net zero in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. They also have a perfect track record of failure and no realistic methodology for reaching their target. The approach I'm describing here can effectively do better than net zero. It even has the possibility to quickly remove enough CO_2 and methane from the atmosphere to stop the cascade of tipping points that capitalism has already begun to trigger, a cascade that would lock in 3-5°C of warming and cause death, extinction, and suffering on an unprecedented scale.

This approach benefits from being complex and intersectional. It improves quality of life, universalizes access to quality healthcare and housing, and takes major steps to heal the enduring legacies of white supremacy and colonialism. The mainstream approach, on the contrary, exacerbates many preexisting inequalities and rewards the corporations and institutions responsible for the disaster.

No matter when we adopt a realistic response to the ecological crisis, it will be better for our own lives, for future generations, and for all life on this planet. It removes the filters that prevent us from seeing the problem. It empowers us to take action for our shared survival. And it gives us greater resilience to adapt and overcome.

In one way of measuring it, the mainstream framework to address the climate crisis has been a huge success. Promoting green energy, electric vehicles, conservation zones, carbon credits, carbon capture, and other new technologies *has made billions of dollars* for companies like Tesla, Google, NextEra Energy, British Petroleum, Saudi Aramco, Tongwei Solar, McKinsey & Company, and BlackRock. Governments have *gained power* through increased interventions in economic planning, and authoritarian regimes from China and India to Canada and the U.S. now have a new justification to carry out land theft against Indigenous and rural populations. And millions more NGO directors, aid workers, diplomats, accountants, entrepreneurs, engineers, academics, and scientists *get a hand-out* in the form of high salary employment managing the crisis.

Where the mainstream climate framework has been less successful: Doing anything to actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions driving the climate crisis. Nor has the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) acknowledged the reasons for this failure or presented a plan based in reality.

Here are some truths the mainstream climate framework downplays, ignores, or covers up:

- More industrial-scale green energy production actually leads to an *increase* in fossil fuel emissions.

- Green energy is a major source of pollution, deforestation, and land theft, and a motor for genocide around the world.

- No carbon capture techniques have proven functional at a significant scale: Their main real-world application has been to increase production at gas and oil wells.

- The carbon accounting techniques developed by proponents of green growth serve primarily to obfuscate real greenhouse gas emissions.

There are tremendous short-term benefits to legitimizing the failed climate framework: jobs, money, attention, power, the comforting belief that those in charge are going to keep us safe. Likewise, there are immense obstacles to developing realistic alternatives: Lack of rewards, marginalization and silencing, state and corporaterepression. The result is a sort of self-reinforcing confirmation bias. People aren't exposed to the gaping holes in the official framework or to examples of the kind of changes we actually need, alternatives remain easy to marginalize as "fringe," and the failed framework maintains its fatal monopoly.

Our survival depends on escaping the dead-end cataclysm of the official response. But, we can't enact solutions we're unable to imagine — so let's start imagining a real solution.

It won't be an easy exercise: We'll have to jettison the entire institutional complex that has caused and is managing the problem. We'll also have to envision change occurring through a completely different paradigm than the one we're brought up believing in. There isn't really an alternative, since the official framework doesn't constitute a viable plan. And everything we do toward an ecological revolution makes our own lives better, makes our own ecosystem more resilient, and increases everyone's chances for collective survival.

Rooted Networks Instead of Hierarchies

A paradigm and a practice that could successfully confront the ecological crisis is one based on what I would call rooted networks. Rooted networks are ecosystemic and interdependent. They allow for everyone to define their own needs, to build their own relationships with their specific habitat, and to share resources and feedback throughout their habitat and across the entire system.

The basic operating principles of rooted networks are:

does much to mitigate the harm and turbulence, but the climate is already changing thanks to the last two hundred years of capitalist greed. Borders, highways, and the biodiversity deserts of asphalted cities, the lawns and parking lots of suburbia, were all huge impediments to migration. Now, attentive, ecologically-minded human communities aid migration — the migration of fellow humans, of other species, and of entire ecosystems.

With universal healthcare and housing, an immediate decrease of toxins in our air, water, and food, and the recovery of Indigenous or locally-adapted food cultures, our health and happiness improve dramatically. Social decentralization and the abolition of borders allow us much greater resilience to the disasters caused by capitalism.

With the end of fossil fuel production, commercial forestry, cement production, and capitalist food production, greenhouse gas emissions flip from the catastrophic levels permitted by the mainstream climate framework and move into negative numbers. Within about a decade, hundreds of millions of new trees and soil recovery across all the billions of acres of agricultural land on the planet has absorbed significant quantities of CO_2 from the atmosphere.

Energy production has hit net zero, with the shift towards clean-burning biofuels, mostly passive wind and solar, and maintenance of about half of the pre-existing hydroelectric infrastructure. Catastrophic floods and wildfireswhich release huge amounts of methane and carbon — and are usually left off the emissions balance sheets — decline sharply or are eliminated. And without states, the frequency and intensity of warfare, and its massive and uncounted carbon emissions, diminishes drastically.

to Bedouin, have made a huge comeback, aided by the abolition of borders and nation-states.

So too have some of the major biomes worst impacted by capitalism. The commercial "forests" that took up land, depleted soil, and fueled wildfiresfrom Canada to Chile have been transformed into real forests again, complex ecosystems that give life to thousands of species and provide a range of renewable resources to human communities. Likewise, the Great Plains and similar ecosystems from Siberia to the Serengeti are freed from the depravities of a capitalist market, whether in the form of industrial-scale beef and dairy production, gas and oil extraction or colonial conservationism and eco-tourism.

On the Great Plains, for example, once dominant cattle ranchers, with no more industrial market to sell to and few protections against poachers and fence cutters, have either turned to smaller scale, intensive grazing practices that helped restore the prairies, or they moved out. Indigenous peoples and trusted friends and accomplices they invited along recovered most of their lands and are helping restore them by dismantling dams and pipelines and adapting traditional technologies, food cultures, and spirituality. Desertification has slowed significantly, and by the end of the century it's predicted there will be at least four million wild bison, roaming free again.

The abolition of borders and the recovery of large biomes have made a critical difference in one adaptive response that everyone should have access to for survival: migration. Humans living in regions that mining companies have turned into wastelands or that militaries have filled with depleted uranium-need support as they leave their homes behind. And whoever migrates needs a warm welcome, some place to put down roots again.

Ecosystems also migrate, and some species and habitats have to migrate rapidly away from the tropics or to higher elevations. A revolutionary response to the ecological crisis

- Build a habitat that ensures health and survival for you and those around you.

- Don't pursue interests that poison the habitat.

- Turn difference into strength so that the members of the ecosystem fit together in a complementary way. Conflict or contradiction don't mean war: work through it and grow from it or give it some space and allow different habitats to exist side by side.

- Help these communities learn what they can share, to form part of an integrated global ecosystem

This paradigm allows each of us to maximize our potential for action and our unique knowledge, and to amplify both through relationships of mutual aid. Rather than small groups of experts and owners imposing blueprints on a disempowered society and muted landscape, we would all increase our connectivity to our neighbors and the land, understand their needs and their history, and build from there.

Can you already hear that voice in your head braying out that such an approach is naïve?

It's strange how that's the orthodox position in our politics. In the fields of urban science and computer science, AI or machine learning, neuroscience, encyclopedias, comparative cognition, the study of mycelial networks and ecosystems and other complex systems, the social organization of insects with large population groups, the data is practically endless: Decentralized networks have a high capacity for communication, learning, and innovation; they often have a sophisticated capacity for self-organization; and they tend to be more resilient in adverse circumstances where centralized, hierarchical systems are likely to catastrophically collapse.

There are also countless examples of decentralized, complex, resilient societies throughout human history, continuing

into the present. These include the hundreds of interlaced peoples of Zomia—the southeast Asian highlands— who are surrounded but still unconquered by some of the strongest and longest lasting states in history; the Amazigh of northern Africa; the Mayan peoples of the Yucatan Peninsula and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; the Mapuche of the Andes and the Pacific coast; the four hundred Indigenous peoples of the Amazon. These are societies who have defeated empires and colonizers, who have survived and adapted to earlier collapses, or who overthrew their own ruling classes. They are peoples who find abundance and safety in ecosystems where states only see desert, who have cultivated the richest rain forests on the planet, and who even in the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ centuries have launched major rebellions against oppression. Their traditional social structures provide them with decentralized networks and federations that are a major source of their resilience.

An important strategy of colonialism has been to erase these histories and destroy or marginalize these cultures so we have to depend on those in power, believing hierarchies to be natural, believing states to be inevitable.

But the truth of the matter is that decentralized networks are practical, they're intelligent, and they work.

The First Few Years

The first few years after an ecological revolution will be hard, despite the intelligence and resilience of rooted networks, though many benefits will appear immediately. And we'll avoid the worst of the suffering that lies ahead should we stick with the mainstream climate framework.

The top priorities are food, housing, and healthcare for everybody. Capitalist property laws, car- and airplane-based transportation systems, industrial mono-cropping, and bor-

sands of idealistic, innovative communes also spring up on depleted agricultural land or in abandoned strip malls.

Cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants generally shrink by about half in the first dozen years, whereas rural populations double or triple. A huge amount of work has to go into scrapping or renovating the wretched housing stock left over from capitalism. The new standard is for structures to last a hundred years or more without major repairs, to use techniques like passive solar and good air circulation for self-heating and self-cooling, and to have efficient, small-scale energy production built into the very design of our towns and neighborhoods.

In cities, the best housing blocks are taken over and improved, while other blocks are used for workshops, factories, storage, or knocked down and gradually converted into habitat and, if the soil allows, gardens and orchards.

In the countryside, people reform existing large structures or build new onesto create multiple houses, workshops, barns, and storage places clustered together. These clusters share walls and heat. They facilitate communal cooking on a larger scale and simplify the logistics for things like clean water, water remediation, composting, methane harvesting from compost and livestock, and efficient electricity generation.

Ultimately, the divide between urban and rural has eroded, as nearly a quarter of the world's population moves seasonally between rural villages and city neighborhoods, according to weather or labor-intensive agricultural activities like a harvest. Most villages and urban neighborhoods exist in pairs, with a declared bond and a circulation of inhabitants between a specific city block and a village that might be 50–100 miles away. People moving between the sites a couple times a year gain perspective and experience, and their mixed loyalties facilitate mutual aid and prevent the historical domination of urban centers over agricultural zones. Nomadic peoples, from Travellers

some disaster wreaks havoc on a community's fields, herds, or orchards, they can use the relationships and infrastructure linking them to other communities to get their food from elsewhere.

Nearly all the fruit and nut trees we planted in the early years are providing us with abundant harvests for a small amount of labor every year. The trees provide habitat and nourishment for other species in our ecosystem. The yearly piles of pruned branches provide an additional carbon-neutral fuel source. Together with companion planting and ecological grazing, we're regenerating the soil and nourishing ourselves with the healthiest diets possible.

In the first years, every community identified the least polluted land in their area for planting orchards, gardens, and pastures. Moderately polluted lands are reforested and the trees harvested there are used as building material. The most polluted lands can be slowly recovered with bioremediation and other techniques.

Every community tends to wetlands, estuaries, meadows, and forests along its margins. In these spaces, we hunt species like deer that rely on us for a healthy rate of predation. We practice regenerative grazing with goats, sheep, chickens, cows, and llamas, reducing the intensity of wildfires and refertilizing soil. We collect medicinal herbs and harvest building materialslike clay or wood, always in a respectful way, attentive to our impact, focused on helping our ecosystems grow stronger.

On abandoned urban blocks, people tend to the jungles sprouting from the empty structures. Fungal networks, trees, insects, and hardy grasses are breaking down the concrete or asphalt covering the earth, slowly remediating the toxins, and turning a wasteland into a vibrant habitat.

Housing patterns shift considerably. Most people prefer to adapt and repurpose what is in front of them, though thou-

ders are threats to our health, so we abolish, destroy, or transform them. Climate refugees and unhoused people seize mansions and vacation homes, and the rest of us support them because universal housing is more important than the property titles of the rich. With climate disasters like wildfires and hurricanes, everyone's homes are at risk, so empathy comes easier to most of us.

We distribute all the food we find in supermarkets and warehouses, then turn lawns, golf courses, parking lots, and highways into orchards, gardens, forests, meadows, and wetlands. As we transition away from industrial mono-cropping, we gain some breathing room by harvesting fields that are already planted, planting the next seasons' seed stores, and eating the livestock bred to satisfy the machinery of capitalist meat production.

Without money, wages are no longer an incentive. The acceptance and goodwill of one's neighbors isn't just a mental health benefit: It becomes the basis for our survival, motivating us to learn cooperative practices. Workers in high pollution industries — once the bosses have no more power and there's no rent to pay — will decide to protect their own water supplies, their own neighbors and families. They'll cap oil and gas wells and phase out nuclear power plants on the safest timeline. The communities that inhabit affected watersheds will decide whether and how to dismantle hydroelectric dams.

Fossil fuel emissions will begin declining immediately, reaching zero within a few years. As energy supplies diminish, priority will be given to healthcare facilities, food production facilities, factories that produce necessary tools and resources, and for seasonal heating or cooling in regions with extreme temperatures.

Medical research will continue around the world, with the material support of regional community networks rather than the pharmaceutical industry. Those historically abused or silenced by the medical industry will be able to assert their own

experiences, knowledge, and needs. Together, we will generate an informed prediction of the most frequent health problems that are likely to affect us over the coming years despite improved diets, healthier lifestyles, and drastic reductions in environmental toxins. This will help determine which high-tech production facilities for drugs and equipment are still necessary, and what resources they need to continue operation.

Global networks will carry out similar assessments in other vital sectors like housing, travel, transport, communication, and food. Communities across the world will scrap and recycle unnecessary machinery and capitalism's abundant trash, shut down or repurpose the factories, and build towards the material autonomy of every regional network of communities.

The general organizational principles are these:

- to globalize the communication of experiences, techniques, and needs, free from the constraints of intellectual property, artificial scarcity, or nationalist competition

- to localize the movement of material resources and eliminate industrial production, except of goods that make an important difference for our survival and quality of life

- to favor artisanal methods of building, weaving, cultivating, healing, etc. as these tend to create higher quality goods in a sustainable way, also bringing more joy and fulfillment to the artisans, who can determine their own pace of labor

- to empower neighboring communities to allow or block any manufacturing facilities that could directly impact their health, and to require the communities that benefit from the manufactured goods to acquire the needed resources and remediate the waste in a way that is solidaristic and respectful to the ecosystem

- to give preference for land use to Indigenous communities that are recovering their traditional practices, and to encourage non-Indigenous communities to learn from those cultures if it can be done in a way that is consensual and non-exploitative

- to support the autonomy and survival of every community on the planet

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Especially in the first few years of the revolution, one of the key activities is to shift resources globally to undo the forced dependence and vulnerability caused by colonialism. No country should ever have been turned into a plantation or mining pit for global capitalism, and no revolution will be complete if it forgets about the legacies of colonialism.

Using cargo ships, airplanes, and remaining fuel reserves, a global network of former shipping industry workers, revolutionaries, community organizers, and engineers transport whatever is required for historically colonized regions to attain regional self-sufficiency, producing the tools they need for whatever technological culture they choose, so long as it does not damage the health and freedom of others.

Twelve Years Out

After about twelve years of major upheavals, life has settled into a much more comforting pattern.

Communities source the vast majority of their food locally. Coastal communities might travel farther for food, when fishing, but they're using sustainable, ancestral techniques: no trawling, drift nets, purse-seine nets, or dynamite. Food self-sufficiency means that if anything impedes the movement of food across a continent, the situation is uncomfortable for a season or two, but no one's survival is threatened. And, if