

# **Libertarian degrowth**

**Anarcho-syndicalist paths for a just degrowth transition**

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## **Note of the author**

The conclusions of this thesis do not necessarily represent the opinions and views of the organizations and persons that participated in the research process. They only represent the opinions of the author himself.

Whenever a statement or opinion is shared by one of the organizations or persons involved, it will be explicitly said in the text, or marked with citation apostrophes, or provided with the source of the opinion or the statement.

# Abstract

Degrowth advocates for a society not focused on economic growth and profit maximization but on justice, conviviality, and a good life for all within planetary boundaries. The path towards degrowth is a debate that is still vivid within the degrowth community. Both symbiotic, interstitial and ruptural strategies, as well as a diverse set of institutions (public institutions, cooperatives, the Commons, etc), have been proposed as useful for the just degrowth transition. This research aims to contribute to this debate via examining anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as actors in a just degrowth transition, analyzing their strategies using Erik Olin Wright's framework (symbiotic, interstitial and ruptural transformations). Results show that both anarcho-syndicalism and degrowth share common values, common views on work, and common enemies, but that anarcho-syndicalism will remain critical towards unjust degrowth transitions. The research concludes that the inherent idealist-materialist duality that characterizes anarcho-syndicalist trade unions (they aim for an utopian society, but at the same time are very grounded on day-to-day workplace struggles) compels them to proactively push for positive ecosocial transformations in society, but at the same time defend the working class whenever it is disproportionately affected by ecosocial transformations. This, along with their ability to balance efficiency the usage of symbiotic, interstitial and ruptural strategies at the same time and with a coherent goal, makes them a potential effective tool for a just degrowth transition.

# 1. Introduction

Our society reflects inherent contradictions of capitalism. Marx and Engels famously stated that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”, identifying the clash between the bourgeoisie and the working class (Marx & Engels, 1848). Bookchin (1980) extended this perspective, asserting that as long as humans maintain a “system of elites,” the project of dominating nature “will continue to exist and inevitably lead our planet to ecological extinction”. Research shows that capitalism is the primary driver of the climate emergency (Ripple *et al.*, 2019), the 6<sup>th</sup> mass extinction (IPBES, 2019; Ceballos *et al.* 2017), and numerous other environmental crises.

Degrowth emerges as an alternative paradigm to capitalism and its growth oriented societal economic project, aiming to address these multiple ecosocial crises. Advocates of degrowth champion communalism, conviviality, mutual aid, and an ethics of care (Kenkel, 2023; Kallis, 2018, D’Alisa *et al.*, 2014).

Anarchist groundwork resonates with degrowth claims. Both anarchism and degrowth criticize capitalism and its competitive market logic, and envision systems that embrace a communal way of living (D’Alisa *et al.*, 2014). Piotr Kropotkin, in 1892, emphasized society’s duty to universally share resources based on people’s needs. He argued for a society based on mutual aid, solidarity, and communal ownership of surplus value (Kropotkin, 2017; 1892). Bookchin (1993), drawing inspiration from Kropotkin, introduced the term ‘social ecology’ to describe his vision of a society living communally within ecological boundaries. Central to social ecology is the notion that through mutual aid and complementarity, humans can inhabit the natural world in a manner that is “creative, supportive, and deeply appreciative of the needs of nonhuman life” (Bookchin, 1993, p. 3). He envisioned a non-hierarchical social ecology that functions with “libertarian and confederal municipalism”, and that is “sensitively tailored to the natural areas in which they are located”. These decentralized municipalities would operate through radical democracy, with production prioritizing community needs over the market imperative of “grow or die” (Bookchin, 1993, p. 3).

Perrett notes that Bookchin’s advocacy for small-scale, localized production and rejection of capitalist environmental exploitation “has been echoed by modern ‘degrowth’ theorists” (Perrett, 2020). According to Mocca, “in contributions on degrowth, the theorization of the concept of eco-community largely draws on the work of Bookchin” (Mocca, 2020, pp. 82). Thus, the utopian vision shared by anarchist degrowth scholars closely resembles that of social ecologists, both envisioning “a stateless society, self-organized through local, confederal, and direct democracy” (Kenkel, 2023).

From a political and organizational perspective, the degrowth movement is diverse, drawing from various ideologies and contexts. Some advocate for state-planned degrowth (Ajl, 2021); others propose representative democracy as the organizing principle (Latouche, 2009), while some advocate for an anarchist, stateless social ecology (Bookchin, 1980; 1993). Degrowth imaginaries also incorporates influences such as Buen Vivir (Unceta Satrustegui, 2013), ecofeminism

(Bauhardt, 2014), post-growth (Jackson, 2019), Ubuntu (Ramose, 2014); and the economy of permanence (Corazza & Victus, 2014).

Economically, there is consensus on certain elements and guidelines for a degrowth/social ecology society. It is widely agreed that the economy should respect ecological boundaries (Raworth, 2012), rejecting endless growth, and prioritize meeting everyone's needs without discrimination (Kallis, 2018). There is also a general consensus that this will require the reduction of working hours and the redistribution of work (Ecologistas en Acción, 2021). Additionally, while degrowth doesn't entail dismantling the productive system entirely, it is generally accepted that there will be some need for productive activities, thus providing job opportunities in key economic areas for a degrowth society (Albarracín *et al.*, 2021). Those key economic areas include renewable energies, restorative forest management, waste management, electrification of mobility, and sustainable local tourism (Albarracín *et al.*, 2021). Baig (2022) highlights other key economic areas for degrowth, such as agriculture, healthcare, education, care work, mutual aid, and artisanry.

## 1.2. Strategies for a just degrowth transition

Altogether, degrowth is composed of various political and economic configurations, which illustrate a plurality of degrowth imaginaries. This plurality of degrowth imaginaries entails diverse strategies. The debate of strategies for degrowth stands as a vibrant debate in degrowth academia (Barlow *et al.*, 2022).

The concept of "justice" is central within discussions of degrowth transitions (Mulvaney, 2019; Hickel, 2021). In degrowth terms, "justice" implies that environmental improvements or shifts towards degrowth should not disproportionately harm any collective, risking their livelihoods (Mazzochi, cited in LNfS & SPGPP, 2016). The notion of "just transition", originating from the trade union movement, emphasizes fairness in the face of potential job losses due to environmental regulations (Hickel, 2021). The fundamental analysis of incorporating this idea of justice into degrowth is that degrowth is fundamentally a class issue, since it's the privileged who are the main responsible for the ecosocial crisis (Huber, 2022; Khalfan *et al.*, 2023). Khalfan *et al.* argued that the principle that a degrowth transition has to follow in order to be "just" is the "distributional principle": "responsibilities, costs and benefits [...] are shared fairly both between countries in the Global North and Global South and between different social groups within countries, ensuring that their rights to decent work, health and safety, social protection, land and a clean environment are protected" (Khalfan *et al.*, 2023, p. 67). This essay primarily examines strategic proposals for a degrowth transition that incorporates the "distributional principle" as the guiding principle..

Erik Olin Wright's framework for analyzing social transformation strategies offers a lens for dissecting these proposals (Olin Wright, 2010). He categorizes strategies into three "modes of transformation":

- Symbiotic strategies: reforms within the status quo.
- Interstitial strategies: bottom-up alternatives outside the status quo.
- Ruptural strategies: direct confrontations with the status quo.

Chertkovskaya (2022) links symbiotic transformations to changing the rules of the game, interstitial transformations to performing moves in the game, and ruptural transformations to changing the game itself. She suggests that Olin Wright's framework is useful because it "highlights synergies between distinct modes of transformation and thus potentially facilitates collaboration between distinct political factions within degrowth and allied movements" (Chertkovskaya, 2022, p. 20). Schulken *et al.* (2022) also find Olin Wright's vocabulary particularly helpful for conceptualizing different transformation pathways.

This framework has been applied to analyze degrowth strategies before. For example, Kenkel (2023) used it to study collectivizations of the Barcelona Tramways in 1936, while D'Alisa & Kallis (2020) used it enriched with a gramscian framework to explore the potential role of State's apparatuses and agencies in a degrowth transition.

Chertkovskaya (2022) advocates for a diversity of tactics within the degrowth movement, arguing that symbiotic, interstitial, and small-scale ruptural strategies each offer advantages and should be complemented for maximum effectiveness. She cites cooperatives and commoning as examples of interstitial strategies. She views attempts to influence policies and practices at various governance levels as symbiotic strategies. And she views worker takeovers of factories, converting them into cooperatives, as examples of ruptural strategies. She notes the possibility of ruptures at different scales, from the nation-state level to "small scale and temporary overhauls of capitalism" (Chertkovskaya, 2022 p. 60), although she doubts the feasibility of large-scale ruptural transformations for degrowth.

Bookchin proposed an interstitial strategy for achieving social ecology, which aligns with degrowth, as noted by Perrett (2020), Mocca (2020) and Kenkel (2023). Bookchin's strategy entails the "step-by-step reorganization of municipalities, their confederation into ever-larger networks that form a dual power in opposition to the nation-state" (Bookchin, 1993, p. 17).

Scholars have already explored various strategies and tools. For example, literature has already engaged with trade unions' role in ecosocial transformations and degrowth (Barca & Leonardi, 2018; Navas *et al.*, 2022; Burgmann & Burgmann, 2017; Hampton, 2018; Mason & Morter, 1998; Riotorto Varela, 2022, Sheets, 2023). However, there's a notable gap in the literature regarding a specific type of trade unions: anarcho-syndicalist trade unions. Since anarcho-syndicalism has substantial differences with other forms of trade unionism (Shantz, 2012), it needs to be examined more specifically. Therefore, this essay attempts to fill this gap and focuses on the potential role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in the degrowth transition. In particular, it analyzes the engagement with ecosocial transitions of two anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in Catalunya, and assesses if they have strategies and objectives that overlap with the degrowth ones.

### **1.3. Environmentalism and trade unionism**

The relationship between trade unionism and environmentalism is complex. The field of Environmental Labour Studies (ELS) mainly deals with this relationship. ELS recognizes that trade unions often engage as effective environmental actors or form connections with the environmentalist movement (Barca & Leonardi, 2018). This is what Barca has called *working-class environmentalism*, which she defines as "that form of activism that comes to link production with reproduction and ecology as inextricable elements of a struggle for re-framing the economy from



below” (Barca & Leonardi, 2018, p. 2). This definition is based on the realization that workers, as biological beings, are also affected by environmental issues, and thus are also interested in solving them (Barca & Leonardi, 2018). However, ELS notes the inherent contradictions between trade unionism, environmentalism, and degrowth (Fernández Buey, 1992). The fundamental reason for this contradiction is that, while trade unions often theoretically have an interest in solving environmental issues, local union branches are often opposed to ecosocial transformations if they endanger their jobs and livelihoods (Fernández Buey, 1992).

This contradiction led environmentalists to traditionally see trade unions ambivalently. Fernández Buey (1992) contends that this perceived antagonism is often illusory and that both groups often share common goals. He instead advocates for alliances between both. He identifies three factors contributing to this illusion of conflict:

- Mutual incomprehension: Initial skepticism from unions toward the “green” movement stemmed from environmentalists’ advocacy for austerity proposals without distinguishing responsibilities for environmental degradation. Conversely, environmentalists failed to incorporate a class perspective, and unions hesitated to acknowledge environmentalist critiques of capitalist society..
- Mutual unawareness: Environmentalists remained unaware of unions’ efforts to curb workplace pollution, while unions overlooked the positive impact of environmental improvements on working-class communities.
- Jobs vs. environment debate: Initially distanced from class struggle, environmentalism failed to recognize the classist implications of some proposed policies, disproportionately impacting the working class. Workers, in turn, overlooked the impact of their jobs on the community and environment.

Fernández Buey (1992) wrote that, to overcome this “illusion” of conflict, environmentalists and degrowthers should incorporate class consciousness in their analysis and rhetoric, and that trade unionists should broaden their scope, not defending harmful jobs at all costs. It is precisely for this that the framework of “just transition” facilitates discussions on degrowth transitions, merging class and environmental consciousness, by acknowledging that environmental action is needed but that it should mainly affect the privileged classes (Khalfan *et al.*, 2023).

Building on the “just transition” framework, some trade unions have collaborated with environmentalists, recognizing its transformative potential and incorporating it into their agendas (CUT, 2021). Worker’s participation in the ecosocial transition is crucial, because, according to Sheets (2023), too many times they are considered mere “walking skill sets” that can be shifted from unsustainable to sustainable jobs without accounting for their personal preferences.

The literature provides with several examples of trade unions acting as proactive environmental actors when they overcome the narrow economism that caricaturizes trade unionism (The Lucas Combine, 1976; Burgmann & Burgmann, 2017). For example, Mason & Morter (1998) and Hampton (2018) described how two UK trade unions used the symbiotic strategy of appointing and training Workplace Health and Safety Representatives to fight for environmental improvements in the workplace. In 1976, workers at arms factory Lucas Aerospace collectively redacted and presented an economic plan for their factory to stop producing weapons and shift to producing socially and ecologically beneficial products such as medical devices, solar panels, and electric

cars. With their plan they attempted to “transcend the narrow economism which has characterized trade union activity in the past and extend our demands to the extent of questioning the products on which we work and the way in which we work upon them” (The Lucas Combine, 1976, p. 9). Kenkel (2023) studied trade unions’ collectivisations performed by the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in Spain as impactful ruptural strategies “in line with degrowth principles”. Cini & Tassinari (2021) describe the experience of GKN Driveline Firenze workers, who in 2021 occupied the factory and began the process of creating a cooperative to fabricate environmentally useful items such as cargo bikes and solar panels (occupying factories is described by Chertkovskaya as a ruptural strategy – 2022). Navas *et al.* (2022) explain how working class communities, amongst which trade unions, have historically opposed Environmental Health Conflicts (EHCs). Finally, another example are the Green Bans of the Australian Builders Labourers Federation (Burgmann & Burgmann, 2017), which enforced boycotts against environmentally and socially harmful projects, effectively halting the destruction of natural spaces, heritage buildings, and working-class communities.

However, most of the evidence concerns non anarchist forms of trade unionism. There is a lack of literature engaging specifically with anarcho-syndicalist trade unions from a perspective of degrowth strategy. This essay aims to address this gap by discussing their potential role in the degrowth transition. To structure the discussion I will use Olin Wright’s framework of ruptural, symbiotic and interstitial strategies (Olin Wright, 2010).

## 1.4. Anarcho-syndicalism

Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions represent a distinct form of unionism, differing significantly from general trade unions. This distinction traces back to the historical development of trade unionism and revolutionary syndicalism (Damier, 2011). Initially, trade unionism favored craft unionism, organizing workers based on their craft skills, whereas revolutionary syndicalism advocated for industrial unionism, organizing all workers within the same industrial sector, irrespective of their specific craft (Damier, 2011; Brown, 1942). The syndicalist form was meant to avoid conflicts between different craftsmen (Brown, 1942), and to enhance solidarity amongst workers (CNT, 1918).

George Woodcock (1943 p. 1–2) delineated the nature of a syndicate and its differences with general trade unionism: *“The syndicate is a form of union which differs from the ordinary trade union in that it aims, not only at the gaining of improvements in wages and conditions under the present system, but also at the overthrow of that system and its replacement by the free society by means of social revolution based on the economic direct action of the workers. This is not to say that it ignores the day to day struggle, but its members recognise that only by a complete destruction of the structure of property and authority can justice and security ever be attained for the workers”*.

Anarcho-syndicalism is the fusion of revolutionary syndicalist practices with anarchist ideals, aiming to utilize revolutionary syndicates to dismantle capitalism, establish workers’ control of production, and abolish the state and the market in favor of an anarchist society (Damier, 2011), Anarcosyndicalists tend to refer to this anarchist society with the term “libertarian communism”, which is the Stateless society that would be established after the completion of an anarcho-syndicalist revolution (Besnard, 1937).

The nature of an anarcho-syndicalist trade union is to be very grounded on the day-to-day struggles of the working class, while at the same time being idealistic and not losing its utopian view of a libertarian communist society (Damier, 2011). Strategically, anarcho-syndicalists seek to engage in day-to-day struggles to foster solidarity and empowerment among workers, with the ultimate goal of achieving property control and libertarian communism (Rocker, 1938). For them, labor unrest serves as a means through which workers challenge the ideological underpinnings of class domination, fostering confidence and readiness for revolutionary struggles beyond the workplace (Shantz, 2012).

In their day-to-day struggles, anarcho-syndicalists advocate for economic direct action as a means to exert pressure on the ruling classes and build momentum so that bourgeoisie concedes to the working class. According to Rocker (1938), economic direct action involves boycotts, sabotage, anti-militarist propaganda, armed resistance in extreme cases, labor strikes (including local strikes, sectorial strikes, municipal strikes, indefinite strikes, partial strikes, sympathetic strikes, sit-down strikes, etc) and social strikes (which are strikes that aim when workers not only want to improve their working conditions, but are also worried about the consequences of their production). All of the strategies described by Rocker can be classified as “ruptural” using Olin Wright’s framework (Olin Wright, 2010).

However, some contemporary anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, while not abandoning “ruptural” strategies, also employ “symbiotic” strategies, leading to internal divisions within anarcho-syndicalism between those who embrace symbiotic strategies and those who reject them<sup>1</sup>. These symbiotic strategies include the election of temporary non-paid delegates, participation in company Works Councils, negotiation of sectorial collective agreements, engagement in market bargaining, and lawsuits<sup>2</sup>.

#### **1.4.1. Presenting the subjects of this study: anarcho-syndicalism in Spain**

In Spain, anarcho-syndicalism wielded significant influence throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Originating in Barcelona in 1910, the anarcho-syndicalist trade union Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) experienced remarkable growth from 30,000 members in 1915 to 114,000 in 1918 (Bar, 1981). The unity of Catalonia’s workers associations under the Regional Confederation of Catalonia of CNT, established during the Sants Congress in 1918, further consolidated the unity of the Catalan working class under a single union. This unity culminated in the large “La Canadenca” strike of 1919 in Barcelona, led by the CNT, which compelled the Spanish Government to legislate the eight-hour workday (Balcells, 1968). Subsequently, this model of unification expanded nationwide, with the CNT boasting to 845,805 members, solidifying its position as a dominant labor force in Spain (Balcells, 1968), alongside the communist trade union Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT).

During the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923–1930), the CNT faced illegality and severe repression, marked by a period of violent clashes known as the Pistolerismo. However, with the advent of the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939), the CNT experienced a resurgence in influence, bolstered by support from the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, FAI). Despite several failed revolutions, including the 1934 Revolutionary General Strike, the CNT actively resisted Franco’s 1936 coup, initiating a social revolution characterized by the seizure

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<sup>1</sup> <https://valencia.cnt.es/que-es-la-cnt/diferencias-entre-cnt-y-cgt/> Retrieved: 27-2-2024, 22:57h.

<sup>2</sup> <https://valencia.cnt.es/que-es-la-cnt/diferencias-entre-cnt-y-cgt/> Retrieved: 27-2-2024, 22:57h.

of infrastructure, factories, and the formation of workers councils, thereby exerting significant control over the Republican economy during the war (Kenkel, 2023). However, after three years of conflict, the CNT eventually succumbed to Francoist forces.

Under the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), all unions, including the CNT, were outlawed. The CNT was reestablished in France as CNT-Vignoles. It also operated underground inside Spain, alongside the newly formed union *Comisiones Obreras* (Workers’s Commissions, CCOO), which organized clandestine workers’ councils.

Following Franco’s death in 1975, all unions were legalized, and in 1977, the UGT and CCOO, along with relevant political parties, signed the Moncloa Agreements. However, the CNT rejected this agreement. The CNT also rejected involvement in “comités de empresa” (works councils), viewing them as tools of capitalism and the State to co-opt the labor movement. Nonetheless, a faction of affiliates perceived works councils as an avenue to co-opt capitalist structures while still adhering to more traditional direct actions of anarcho-syndicalism. This schism led to the establishment of CNT-Renovada (“Renewed-CNT”), later rebranded as Confederación General del Trabajo (“General Confederation of Work”, CGT) during their 1989 Congress. A small group of dissenting affiliates of the CGT formed the Confederación Sindical Solidaridad Obrera (“Syndical Confederation Workers Solidarity”), positioning itself between CGT and CNT.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, this division led to a divergence among the three organizations, weakening anarcho-syndicalism. Currently, CGT stands as the fifth-largest trade union in Spain and the third-largest in Catalonia, having organized most of the strikes in Catalonia between 2015 and 2020<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, the three unions have recently embraced “unity of action” expressing their collective objective to combat capitalist and state aggressions<sup>4</sup>.

For this essay, the subjects of study will be the CGT and the CNT. The CGT was selected as the primary focus due to its larger size and greater involvement in ecosocial issues. The CNT was chosen due to its historical significance for anarcho-syndicalism in Spain. Solidaridad Obrera was not selected for an in-depth analysis due to its smaller size and time constraints for the research.

Both the CGT and the CNT have expressed their alignment with environmentalism. For instance, the statutes of the CGT highlight a “fundamental objective”: the “*preservation of the ecological equilibrium and the defense of the environment*” (CGT-Catalunya, 2018, p. 7). The XII Congress of the CGT Catalonia adopted the resolution to “promote lines of action and struggle that promote an anti-capitalist and degrowth discourse” (CGT-Catalunya, 2023, p. 40). Scholarly research by Shantz (2012) and Marshall (1993) has identified the CGT as an example of green syndicalism. The CGT Catalonia includes an internal working group called the *Grup de Transició Ecosocial* (“Ecosocial Transition Group”), which operates within the *Secretariat d’Acció Social* (“Social Action Secretariat”). The *Secretariat d’Acció Social* focuses on organizing workers outside the workplace, supporting social movements. The *Secretariat d’Acció Sindical* (“Syndical Action Secretariat”) concentrates on organizing workers within the workplace, emphasizing work-related issues.

The CNT also cites “ecology” in its statutes as one of the main axis for action (CNT, 2015). Shantz (2012) found it to have green syndicalist features, as it, together with the CGT and other trade unions, coauthored the ‘What Type of Anarchism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ manifesto, which,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://cgtcatalunya.cat/la-cgt-bat-records-i-supera-les-21-750-afiliacions-a-catalunya/> Retrieved: 2-3-2024, 15:17h.

<sup>4</sup> <https://cgt.org.es/cgt-cnt-y-solidaridad-obrera-acuerdo-para-la-unidad-de-accion-un-paso-historico-para-el-anarcosindicalismo/> Retrieved: 15-2-2021, 14:24h.

according to Shantz, had a strong ecosocial component. The CNT, likewise the CGT, also divides its organization between *Acció Social* and *Acció Sindical*.

## 1.5. Degrowth and anarcho-syndicalism

The position of anarcho-syndicalism towards degrowth is complex. The contradiction that Barca & Leonardi outlined (2018) of having an interest in preserving the environment and jobs at the same time also affects anarcho-syndicalism, whereas unawareness of mutual overlaps also exists between anarcho-syndicalists and degrowthers (Fernández Buey, 1992).

Despite this, according to González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto (2008), the idealistic nature of anarcho-syndicalism makes both movements ideologically close to each other. González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto argue that “making an incursion in the values that are basic for social ecologism is to penetrate a world that is shared to a great extent by anarcho-syndicalism” (González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto, 2008, p. 8). González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto (2008, p. 3) argued that the fact that both have a “global and radical vision of the systemic causes of the problems that they face”, makes them have “strongly complementary and interdependent approaches”. According to them, both anarcho-syndicalism and degrowth share core ideas such as cooperation, mutual aid, horizontality, slowness, feminist values, diversity, and a focus on “interdependence” rather than “independence”. They also say that both share a critique of capitalist accumulation, of endless economic growth, and that both propose economies oriented towards self-reproduction, towards the distribution of the surplus value and wealth, and towards the redistribution of work (González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto, 2008). In a more recent report, González Reyes *et al.* (2024) highlighted that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions could take three paths for ecosocial transformations: 1) confront the “socioecological degradation” via articulating unionist struggles to tackle workplace pollution and to improve the working conditions of all workers; 2) create “ecosocial cultural frameworks”, that is, ecosocial education; and 3) build “satisfactors of the needs” that are just and resilient, for example mutual aid initiatives.

Shantz (2012) also thought that there are certain points of similarity between anarcho-syndicalism and ecology, which “include, but are by no means limited to: decentralization; regionalism; direct action/sabotage; autonomy; and pluralism and diversity”. He built on the ideas of “green syndicalism”, which is the idea that anarcho-syndicalism has to fight for a society which is not only just for humans, but also for animals and the environment, that production should be organized by workers around human and ecological considerations rather than profitability, and that communities and production should be limited to their respective bioregions (Shantz, 2012).

According to Shantz, “a green syndicalist conception of workers’ organization rejects the hierarchical, centralized, bureaucratic structures of mainstream unionism”, which limit the capacity that environmentally conscious rank-and-file members have to implement ecosocial struggles within mainstream trade unions. He sees mainstream trade unions as reformist and lacking an utopian vision of a sustainable society, thus only engaging in mild ecological reforms. As an example, he cites Adkin (Adkin, 1998, in Shantz, 2012), who provided detailed accounts of the obstacles faced by activists in the Canadian Auto Workers union when attempting to build rank-and-file environmental committees.

Despite that the ideological proximity has been noted by those scholars, they did not focus on describing practical cases of anarcho-sindicalist trade unions engaging in ecosocial transformations that are in line with the principles of degrowth.

## 2. Research question

Having realized this, I decided to cover that gap in the literature. Therefore, this essay will focus on discussing the following research question: “*how can anarcho-syndicalist trade unions contribute as actors in a just degrowth transition?*”. I will do it by analyzing the engagement that the CGT and the CNT in Catalunya have had with specific examples of struggles and cases of positive ecosocial transformations.

I will discuss them through the lens of Olin Wright’s framework (Olin Wright, 2010), by employing 1) an analysis of their reports and documents and 2) by interviewing key Catalan unionists involved in struggles and plans for an ecosocial transition in Catalonia. I will complement this with an analysis of the underlying common grounds between degrowth and anarcho-syndicalism that lay the foundation for the involvement of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in degrowth transitions.

## 3. Methodology

My research is focused in two anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in Spain: the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) and the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT). It consisted in a research around their ecosocial policies and struggles. The research mainly relied on interviews to key unionists of those unions, as well as a documental analysis.

### 3.1. Interviews

Interviews aimed for in-depth dialogues to grasp how environmentally engaged anarcho-syndicalists perceived the connections between anarcho-syndicalism and degrowth.

I conducted 8 semi-structured interviews with 9 trade unionists to effectively explore their beliefs (Naz *et al.*, 2022). Criteria for selecting interviewees included active involvement in the CNT or the CGT and engagement in ecosocial issues within their unions.

Two of the interviewees insisted on doing the interview together, so, when interviewing them, I asked the questions to the two and then they answered one after each other. Seven were from the CGT, and two from the CNT: since the CGT is bigger, it was easier to find members who were environmentally engaged. The uneven gender distribution is partially explained by the male-dominated nature of trade unions, but also by my unexcusable failure to find environmentally engaged women within the unions. Respondents ranged in age from 42 to 72 years, mirroring the general lack of young people in trade unionism. Interviews lasted from 1h 15m to 2h 15m, and were conducted in Spanish or Catalan and later I translated them into English.

To select the interviewees I got in contact with the CGT, and did some interviews to some of its members. To select the rest of the interviewees, I performed snowball sampling: following the recommendations of Parker *et al.* (2019), I asked the first interviewees to recommend me other contacts who fit the research criteria, and they put me in contact with other members of the CGT and the two interviewees of the CNT.

Before interviews, participants received information about the research's purpose, data processing, and data preservation (Naz *et al.*, 2022). Questions were shared in advance, and consent was obtained for recording and publication. Interviewees were informed of their right to withdraw or refuse any questions.

Transcripts, prepared by me, were shared with interviewees for review. Access to them was limited to myself, my supervisor, and the participants.

Participants were informed that their anonymity would be kept. In order to keep it, each interviewee is identified by a number (from 1 to 9).

Common themes and opinions were identified during the analysis of the interviews, along with examples of trade unions as proactive ecosocial actors.

It's important to note that interviewees' opinions may not represent those of the average union member, but they offer valuable insights into union strategies, the focal point of this study.



	Trade union
Respondent 1	CNT
Respondent 2	CGT
Respondent 3	CNT
Respondent 4	CGT
Respondent 5	CGT
Respondent 6	CGT
Respondent 7	CGT
Respondent 8	CGT
Respondent 9	CGT

Figure 1: Breakdown of the interviewees by gender, age, location, trade union, and role within the trade union. In green, the interviewees that were degrowthers prior to being anarcho-syndicalists. In red, the interviewees that were anarcho-syndicalists prior to being degrowthers.

### 3.2. Documental analysis

The interviews provided valuable insights into the unions’ ecosocial perspectives, yet the big size of the unions limited interviewees’ awareness of all ecosocial policies of their respective unions. To address this, I conducted extensive documentary research on union activities related to ecosocial topics.

Due to the scarcity of information on both unions’ activities in academic journals, I primarily relied on non-academic sources and gray literature. I analyzed these sources while obviating the ideological bias with which they were written. This methodology is commonly used in environmental labor studies due to the lack of information about specific trade unions in academic journals. For example, Hampton (2018) utilized “published and unpublished documents produced by trade unions on climate change”. Similarly, Riotorto Varela (2022) conducted “a documental investigation through news, websites, and social networks to collect information from various sources”.

Information sources included official union publications, newspapers covering union activities, and specific sources for each union. For the CGT, primary sources were Rojo y Negro<sup>1</sup>, Revista Catalunya<sup>2</sup>, La Brecha<sup>3</sup>, and internal communications on the union’s official webpage. For the CNT, key sources were official communications in their webpage<sup>4</sup>, and the “CNT” journal<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cgt.es/elmortero/sangloriono.htm> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 13:19h//  
www.revistacatalunya.cat/

<sup>3</sup> <https://cgt.org.es/tag/la-brecha/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnt.es>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnt.es/noticias/tag/periodico-cnt-en-papel/>

## 4. Results and discussion

Respondent 1 sees anarcho-syndicalism as a form of trade unionism that “*combines the aim of social transformation, and also the willingness to protect the working class*”. According to him, it “*deposits its action in a plurality of people in a way that creates the ingredients of an individual capable of participating in a project of profound transformation*”. Respondent 7 also had the same conception of anarcho-syndicalism: “*I am an anarcho-syndicalist because I am an ‘anarcho’ and a ‘syndicalist’. That is, anarchist and syndicalist. What does this mean? That without giving up the ideal, the idealism, the dreaming, I try to solve concrete things, and those concrete things are sometimes tools to try to convince people that another world is possible*”. All the rest of the respondents shared the same view.

Thus, they identify a duality that, according to them, is the core of anarcho-syndicalism: the idealist-materialist duality. Idealist, because anarcho-syndicalism has, according to all the interviewees, the ultimate goal to transform society. Materialist, because despite that, they are grounded in day-to-day struggles of the working class.

The proximity between anarcho-syndicalism and degrowth is influenced by this dualistic nature. For instance, a publication from the industry union of the CGT summarizes their stance on the energy transition: they said that “*As ecologists, in CGT we are perfectly aware that this transition towards green energy is necessary*”, exemplarizing that they do not renounce to the idealist view of a sustainable society, but then they followed by saying that “*Our task is to defend the working class against the companies who seek to use this as a means to justify an industrial restructuring whose costs will once again fall upon the shoulders of the workers*” (FESIM-CGT, 2019), showing that, while not renouncing to the ideal of a sustainable society, they will oppose any form of transition that disproportionately affects the material conditions of the working class.

Thus, the position of anarcho-syndicalism toward degrowth is complex. Results offer some insights to understand this complex position, by exposing the opinions of the interviewees on the common grounds that both share.

### 4.1. Common grounds between anarcho-syndicalism and degrowth

#### 4.1.1. Common values

Some interviewees contended that their alignment in values and objectives renders anarcho-syndicalist trade unions receptive to the degrowth discourse:

For example, Respondent 7 said that anarchosyndicalism integrates the ideal of ecology and balance with nature: “*Anarchy is such a beautiful and broad ideal that it includes all these concepts that we could say that underlie or derive from a perfect world: feminism, environmentalism... That is, it is not possible to conceive a perfect world without respect and balance with nature. And therefore, within anarcho-syndicalism, anarchism, or the ideal of anarchy, [...] the concept of balance with*

*nature is obvious*”. He also said that both anarchosyndicalism and degrowth embody the ideal of mutual aid, because “*being a militant within an anarchosyndicalist trade union has a direct relationship with altruism and the belief in the ideal*”. Respondent 6 shared his view.

Respondent 2, a degrowther turned anarcho-syndicalist, found it easier to persuade anarcho-syndicalists of the efficacy of degrowth than to convince the average environmentalist, because, according to him, anarcho-syndicalists, accustomed to confederal assemblarism, embody practices of horizontality, solidarity, and mutual aid, key elements of degrowth, and, in contrast, not all environmentalists belong to horizontal organizations, and thus, may not internalize these crucial elements. Respondent 4 echoed this sentiment, asserting that degrowthers should align with anticapitalist organizations like anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, where they would find more allies than among Green New Deal (GND)-oriented environmentalists.

Respondent 2 noted a similar contrast when trying to convince anarcho-syndicalist trade unions versus trying to convince general trade unions: according to him, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions are easier to convince due to their horizontal structure, and general trade unions are more difficult to convince due to their more vertical structure. According to him, this is because horizontality fosters openness to new ideas and facilitates internal debates. Respondent 4 also echoed this.

Respondent 3 also believed that anarcho-syndicalists are easier to convince of degrowth, because their idealistic nature makes them see libertarian communism as feasible, and “*imagining libertarian communism as feasible makes envisioning degrowth’s feasibility more plausible*”. Thus, according to Respondent 3, for anarcho-syndicalists it is easier to embrace the notion of a just degrowth transition. Moreover, Respondent 3 posited that anarcho-syndicalists, rooted in discussions of class struggle and workers’ control of production, can more readily envision the execution of this just degrowth transition.

#### **4.1.2. Common views on work**

Respondent 1 said that both anarcho-syndicalism and degrowth aim to transform work into socially useful work, emphasizing the role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in creating conditions for this transformation: “*Trade unionism must be a tool that leads to the world of work, which is another commodity and is to exploit people, and it must turn it into this: something that is not to exploit people, but to generate the services we need and distribute them, so that everyone can have their personal aspirations different from the others, if they want*”.

Respondent 3 shared a similar view, advocating for work that “*puts life in the center*” and highlighting trade unions’ historical contributions to improving working conditions and advocating for workers’ well-being. To do so, he said that the economy should be changed to a more communal mode of production, highlighting historical contributions of trade unions in this regard by reducing working hours, improving health and safety conditions, and advocating for workers’ well-being. Having noted this, he proposed using anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as actors to transform work during the just degrowth transition.

Building on the fact that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions have the capacity to transform work towards socially useful work, some interviewees also suggested that the syndicalist form of production could be applied to organize the economy in a degrowth society through democratic planification of production, using anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as the tool for democratic planification (thus acting as proactive actors in the just degrowth transition). For example. Re-

spondent 3 said: “*You can’t degrow without planning the economy. We have to make plans and say: ‘Okay, how do we want to be in 10 years? What should we do?’. Either you do it from the government or from the economic network. In the economic network, the question of class struggle arises, where anarcho-syndicalist trade unions play a crucial role. If unions have an awareness of degrowth, the class struggle should lead to simpler lives, more autonomy, more local sovereignty, more industrial sovereignty*”. Respondent 9 shared the thought that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions could seize the means of production and plan the degrowth economy, adding that they could do it following “*bioregionalist principles*”. Respondent 1 added that “*this process of redesigning the economy with degrowth criteria should follow the old principle of ‘from each according to their capacities, to each according to their needs’*”. Respondent 7 also thought this. Respondents 2, 4, 6, 8 and 9 were themselves coordinating the elaboration of an economic plan for the degrowth transition in Catalonia, called “*Transición ecosocial en Cataluña: Una propuesta decrecentista*” (González Reyes et al., 2024).

#### **4.1.3. Common enemies: ecofascism**

Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 shared the perception that degrowth could unfold in a planned and socially just manner or collapse into ecofascism. Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions were seen as entities capable of confronting ecofascists (thus, acting defensively). Consequently, they thought that degrowthers, who also oppose ecofascism, must ally with anarcho-syndicalist trade unions. This view is encapsulated in Respondent 8’s phrase: “*Any lever that serves for the collapse that is coming to us, that we are as united as possible and that we know what to do... I am convinced that the collapse is coming. And that we have to decrease. [...] And then, since I believe that these things are going to happen, well then, how good it is that the union, which has so many people and so much power to bring together simple, hard-working and conscientious people, how good it is that it could be that lever!*”.

Recapping, the consensus among interviewees is that an alliance between degrowthers and anarcho-syndicalists can materialize based on these common values, common views on work, and common enemies. I will now proceed to describe, one after another, practical examples of this alliance where the CGT and the CNT acted both as proactive and defensive actors in ecosocial issues, in order to later discuss their strategies through the lens of Olin Wright’s framework (Olin Wright, 2010) in the discussion.

## **4.2. Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as proactive environmental actors**

It was a shared view among the interviewees that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions must extend their influence beyond mere economics, engaging with social movements and communities to effect proactive change in society as a whole. For instance, Respondent 9 said that both social movements and anarcho-syndicalism are not separate from each other, but rather “*integrated*”: “*although we need all the partialized struggles (to explain it in some way), a global and coordinated analysis and action with social movements is also necessary*”. She also said, referring to the CGT, that “*the union must also be present in other struggles beyond the strictly labor-related, providing support and resources and helping to organize other struggles*”. Respondents 1, 3 and 7 said the

same. Respondent 7 considered that the idealistic nature of anarchosindicalism facilitates this connection with social movements, and that “*if you take away the idealism from unionism, it leaves you blind, it leaves you without perspective to address issues that go beyond the factory*”.

However, it was also said that social movements, including degrowth, should also start incorporating class consciousness and organizing from within the workplace in order to mobilize labor. Regarding the class consciousness, Respondent 6, for example, said that environmentalists tend to see themselves as “*middle class*”, but that they have to realize that they are also part of the working class. Regarding the need for degrowthers to start organizing from within the workplace, Respondent 1 said: “*I have always been against these organizations of “We’ll see each other on the streets! Struggle is in the streets!”*, because in the end capitalism in the street does nothing. Capitalism is in companies! Companies pollute. Companies exploit”. Respondent 3 echoed this idea, by advocating ideally for a “*One Big Union*”. However, both later suggested that, given the urgency of the ecosocial crisis, anarcho-sindicalism should prioritize alliances with social movements rather than expecting them to join the union.

Thus, according to them, degrowthers should start to organize from within the workplace, but also anarcho-sindicalism has to organize with social movements that act outside of the workplace.

#### 4.2.1. Organizing ecosocial transformations outside the workplace

In this study, numerous instances of anarcho-sindicalist trade unions being proactive ecosocial actors outside of the workplace emerged. Both the CGT and the CNT maintain a dedicated secretariat, known as the Secretariat d’Acció Social (“Social Action Secretariat”), to liaise with social movements and support various environmental causes.

For example, the CGT section at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center (BSC) protested against Natura Encesa, an exhibition organized by the Spanish oil company Repsol involving the illumination of trees in a nearby naturalized area in Barcelona<sup>1</sup>. The CGT workers at BSC staged protests, collected 300 signatures, and filed a lawsuit against the company, seeking the cancellation of the exhibition on grounds of biodiversity endangerment.

In 2004, CGT Palencia joined the *Plataforma en Defensa de San Glorio* (“Platform in Defense of San Glorio” — PDSG), a coalition of social movements in the Palencia region opposing the construction of a ski resort in a Natura 2000 area inhabited by *Tetrao urogallus* and *Ursus arctos*, two protected species<sup>2</sup>. The CGT argued that “*development does not mean massive, unscrupulous and destructive exploitation of a World Heritage Site in exchange for scarce employment, which is not only scarce, but also precarious and temporary*”<sup>3</sup>. The CNT Cantabria also endorsed the manifesto against the ski resort<sup>4</sup>. The Environmental Justice Atlas considers that the PDSG succeeded in stopping the project thanks to court lawsuits interposed by the Platform<sup>5</sup>.

Respondent 8 highlighted the actions of CGT workers from a polluting company, whose name I will not disclose to protect the identity of the workers, who acted as whistleblowers, informing local environmentalist groups about the company’s new polluting projects, so that environmen-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.totbarcelona.cat/societat/natura-encesa-estrena-protesta-446010/> Retrieved: 12-12-2023, 9:21h.

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pdsge.es/index.php/adhesiones/lista-de-colectivos> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 13:21h.

<sup>5</sup> <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/san-glorio-ski-complex-spain> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 13:26h.

talists could organize themselves in time. According to him, this information led to successful lawsuits against the company for ecological crimes, resulting in court orders prohibiting some polluting activities.

Respondent 3 cited CNT's effort in organizing a forest replantation in Sierra de la Culebra (Zamora), planting about 250 trees and 3000 seeds in an area affected by wildfires.

Similarly, Respondent 5 stated that the CGT in Huelva, along with Ecologistas en Acción ("Environmentalists in Action"), had organized another replantation of a forest in the region<sup>6</sup>.

Respondent 6 discussed Ruesta, a partially acquired and reconstructed abandoned town by CGT, now hosting the union's annual summer schools. Ruesta's two hostels and bars generate benefits for the union. In Ruesta, the CGT has also undertaken environmental regeneration initiatives<sup>7</sup>, as well as extensive work to rehabilitate the town<sup>8</sup>.

The CGT's engagement in the anti-nuclear movement is extensive[16,17]. For instance, the union led protests against nuclear plants in Spain following the Fukushima disaster<sup>9</sup>. In Catalonia, CGT joined the campaign *Apaguem les nuclears* ("Shut down the nuclear plants") advocating for Vandellòs and Ascó nuclear plants closure<sup>10</sup>. In Salamanca, the CGT joined the campaign against the Retortillo uranium mine, arguing that "*the lure of jobs cannot justify such dangerous exploitation for people, the natural environment and the economy of the region*", and that the project was endangering the sustainable jobs of hundreds of local peasants and local tourism workers<sup>11</sup>. They supported protests against nuclear plants in Cofrentes<sup>12</sup> and Almaraz[22,23]. CGT Burgos demanded the closure of the Santa Maria de Garoña nuclear plant several times<sup>13</sup> and filed lawsuits against it<sup>14</sup>. These lawsuits, along with the involvement of other environmentalist organizations, led to the closure of the plant in 2013 (BOE, 2013). In 2017, CGT Burgos filed a lawsuit to prevent the reopening of the plant<sup>15</sup>.

In 2019, the CGT supported the mobilizations organized to protest against the climate emergency<sup>16</sup>. In their communication, they stated that "*CGT points to capitalism as the main problem of the climate emergency situation because it understands that in the name of "progress", an incompatible mode of production has been established and developed, that does not respect physical limits or*

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.diariodehuelva.es/articulo/provincia/repoblacion-forestal/20211124211559207380.html> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 13:29h.

<sup>7</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/jornada-regenerativa-en-ruesta-zaragoza/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 13:35h.

<sup>8</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/munoz-poliz-ha-costado-mucho-que-las-obras-de-rehabilitacion-en-ruesta-arrancasen-pero-ya-estan-iniciadas-y-desde-cgt-continuaremos-trabajando-para-que-los-compromisos-de-la-che-se-cumplan/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 13:39h.

<sup>9</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/galeria/madrid-se-manifiesta-por-el-cierre-de-las-nucleares/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 13:58h.

<sup>10</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-catalunya-campanya-apaguem-les-nuclears/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 14:01h.

<sup>11</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-contra-la-mina-de-uranio-de-retortillo/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 14:07h.

<sup>12</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-exige-la-libertad-de-los-16-detenidos-tras-la-accion-de-greenpeace-en-la-central-nuclear-de-cofrentes/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 14:22h.

<sup>13</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/coincidiendo-con-la-marcha-contra-garona-la-cgt-exige-al-gob0ierno-el-cierre-de-la-central-y-la-elaboracion-de-un-plan-de-abandono-de-la-energia-nuclear/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 14:46h.

<sup>14</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-recurre-judicialmente-la-prorroga-de-la-central-nuclear-de-garona/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 14:48h.

<sup>15</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-burgos-presenta-alegaciones-contra-la-reapertura-de-la-central-nuclear-de-garona/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 14:55h.

<sup>16</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-secundara-las-movilizaciones-del-proximo-27s-por-la-emergencia-climatica/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 16:47h.

*natural balances nor is it compatible with life itself*<sup>17</sup>, making a direct reference to the planetary limits, therefore making a direct reference to degrowth.

Arguing in the same line, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September of 2020, the CGT in Andalusia called for a 24 hours General Strike for climate<sup>18</sup>. The strike was called to support mobilizations of the Global Action Day For Climate, organized by Youth 4 Climate Spain, which were not only limited to Andalusia, but to more than 20 cities all over the country<sup>19</sup>. According to the CGT Andalusia, “*this General Strike is called to defend the environmental, climatic, conservation and development of both animal and plant species, labor, social and economic interests of all Andalusian workers*” [sic]<sup>20</sup>. Their demands included the declaration of the climate emergency in Andalusia, limitations to touristification and gentrification, enhancement of public transport, more infrastructure for rural towns, and conservationist initiatives to protect marine wildlife, amongst other demands<sup>21</sup>.

According to Respondent 2, another attempt to organize a climate strike was proposed to the CGT Catalonia during 2019, but for reasons he did not know the proposal did not go further. Respondent 1 supported the view that strikes could be used by anarcho-syndicalist trade unions to advance ecosocial transformations, and he specifically mentioned that strikes would benefit the just degrowth transition.

#### 4.2.2. Organizing ecosocial transformations within the workplace

Both the CGT and the CNT have a secretariat dedicated to organize union branches called the *Secretariat d'Acció Sindical* (“Union Action Secretariat”). Through *Acció Sindical*, they have actively supported different ecosocial transformations from within the workplace.

The study found many instances of both unions engaging in positive ecosocial transformations from within the workplace, which are mainly concerned with the improvement of working conditions of ecosocial jobs, with the modification of the process of production to make it less polluting, with the democratic planification of the economy to make it adjust to planetary boundaries, and with enhancing the social utility of production.

The CGT has an extensive record of fighting for improving the working conditions of jobs that are sustainable or that are important for degrowth. One notable example is their involvement in organizing public transport workers, such as with Bicing, the public bike service in Barcelona<sup>22</sup>. In 2022, concerns over poor bike conditions and harsh working environments prompted protests<sup>23</sup>, addressing issues like insufficient vehicles and opaque practices reported

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<sup>17</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-secundara-las-movilizaciones-del-proximo-27s-por-la-emergencia-climatica/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 16:47h.

<sup>18</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/formalizada-convocatoria-de-huelga-general-en-andalucia-para-el-proximo-25-de-septiembre/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 17:22h.

<sup>19</sup> <https://juventudxclima.es/2020/12/17/justicia-climatica-para-salir-de-las-crisis/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 18:49h.

<sup>20</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/formalizada-convocatoria-de-huelga-general-en-andalucia-para-el-proximo-25-de-septiembre/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 17:22h.

<sup>21</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/formalizada-convocatoria-de-huelga-general-en-andalucia-para-el-proximo-25-de-septiembre/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 17:22h.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.cgtbarcelona.org/noticia/el-bicing-no-funciona-bien-como-te-cuentan/> Retrieved: 10-1-2024, 21:05h.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cgtbarcelona.org/noticia/el-bicing-no-funciona-bien-como-te-cuentan/> Retrieved: 10-1-2024, 21:05h.

to authorities<sup>24</sup>. Subsequently, in 2023, they started an indefinite strike, with demands including improvements of the working conditions (salary increase to tackle the high cost of living, shorter working hours, etc), but also improvements in the bike services (more bikes, repair of unavailable bikes, an upsurge in investment for station maintenance, etc)<sup>25</sup>.

The strike involved protests and negotiations with the Ministry of Work and with the company<sup>26</sup>. After 15 days, an agreement was reached, securing improvements for workers, such as a 7.4% salary increase, elimination of double salary scales, stabilization of contracts, arrears collection, and increased vacations<sup>27</sup>.

Another instance of the CGT successfully improving the working conditions of ecosocial workers occurred with the nationalization of TRAGSA, a semi-public firefighting company in Valencia<sup>28</sup>. In 2018, Valencia's firefighters initiated an indefinite strike due to precarious temporary contracts, later deemed illegal by the Spanish Supreme Court<sup>29</sup>. Their strike aimed for more contractual stability, better laboral health standards, the full nationalization of TRAGSA, and releasing firefighters over 60 years old away from frontline wildfire duties, amongst other demands<sup>30</sup>. After 68 days of striking and negotiating, all the demands were met, and in addition, they achieved a salary increase<sup>31</sup>.

Another example of the CGT's contribution to positive ecosocial transformations is its extensive involvement in organizing care workers. One notable case is the struggle of *Servei d'Atenció Domiciliària de Barcelona* ("Home Care Service of Barcelona", SAD), which attended 24,000 dependent individuals. The CGT filed a minimum of 16 complaints with Inspecció de Treball. Among the grievances were the denial of a 20-minute rest during shifts for 252 workers, assigning hazardous tasks to a pregnant worker, non-recognition of certain occupational diseases, fraudulent contracts, and off-shift messages to workers<sup>32</sup>. *Inspecció de Treball* ruled in favor of the union on at least 6 demands, while 10 remain unresolved<sup>33</sup>. In December 2022, a 3-day strike was initiated, demanding, amongst others, a salary increase and a reduction of working hours<sup>34</sup>. The strike was followed by other strikes, such as one in February 2024<sup>35</sup>. Negotiations for a collective agreement

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.cgtribarcelona.org/noticia/el-bicing-no-funciona-bien-como-te-cuentan/> Retrieved: 10-1-2024, 21:05h.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.cgtribarcelona.org/notas-de-prensa/huelga-indefinida-en-el-bicing-de-barcelona-desde-el-martes-14-de-noviembre-a-las-7-horas/> Retrieved: 10-1-2024, 21:30h.

<sup>26</sup> <https://directa.cat/hemerotecas/despres-de-la-vaga-arriba-lacord-en-el-conflicte-del-bicing/> , Retrieved: 10-1-2024, 22:32h.

<sup>27</sup> <https://directa.cat/hemerotecas/despres-de-la-vaga-arriba-lacord-en-el-conflicte-del-bicing/> , Retrieved: 10-1-2024, 22:32h.

<sup>28</sup> <https://directa.cat/els-bombers-forestals-del-pais-valencia-convoquen-vaga-indefinida-contr-la-contractacio-fraudulenta/> Retrieved: 11-1-2024, 9:20h.

<sup>29</sup> <https://directa.cat/els-bombers-forestals-del-pais-valencia-convoquen-vaga-indefinida-contr-la-contractacio-fraudulenta/> Retrieved: 11-1-2024, 9:20h.

<sup>30</sup> <https://directa.cat/els-bombers-forestals-del-pais-valencia-convoquen-vaga-indefinida-contr-la-contractacio-fraudulenta/> Retrieved: 11-1-2024, 9:20h.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cgtpv.org/els-bombers-forestals-del-pais-valencia-aconsegueixen-la-fi-dels-contractes-fraudulents-i-desconvoquen-la-vaga-indefinida/> Retrieved: 12-1-2024, 10:12h.

<sup>32</sup> <https://poderpopular.info/2023/01/08/la-cgt-del-sad-de-barcelona-denuncia-que-suara-cooperativa-trepitja-els-drets-laborals/> Retrieved: 6-1-2024, 17:55h.

<sup>33</sup> <https://poderpopular.info/2023/01/08/la-cgt-del-sad-de-barcelona-denuncia-que-suara-cooperativa-trepitja-els-drets-laborals/> Retrieved: 6-1-2024, 17:55h.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.cgtribarcelona.org/noticia/vaga-al-sad-a-barcelona/> Retrieved: 6-1-2024, 18:06h.

<sup>35</sup> <https://twitter.com/cgtsadbarcelona/status/1621249592116355074>, Retrieved: 6-1-2024, 18:35h.



involving CCOO, UGT and CGT began in March 2023, with CGT and CCOO actively protesting to influence the negotiations<sup>36</sup>.

Another instance of the CGT achieving positive ecosocial transformations within the workplace is its involvement in ecosocial reindustrialization, specifically that of NISSAN Martorell. The closure of the NISSAN plant in 2019 was announced for the end of 2020 and would affect 25.000 workers<sup>37</sup> and their families, and prompted the CGT to organize an indefinite strike starting in May 2020, demanding the retention of production at the plant. Together with grassroots activists of *Anticapitalistes*, CGT workers developed an economic plan which proposed the “socialization of the Nissan plants in Barcelona to manufacture electric cars and thus maintain employment”<sup>38</sup> and that “continues with the labor activity of the workers, that allows an ecological and sustainable transition, that enters into the debate of socialization, expropriation or transfer of the means of production of NISSAN, and that has a social commitment with the workers”.

After 94 days, an agreement was reached, allowing the plant to close in December 2021, but establishing that no one would be fired until the final closure, with improved compensation and paid retirement<sup>39</sup>. Following the closure, unions persisted, partnering with Hub Tech Factory to produce electric cars and with the promise of re-hiring all the workers, although only 120 are currently employed<sup>40</sup>.

Respondent 8 explained that in the undisclosed company that was mentioned in 4.2.1., CGT members opposed the change from using electrical vehicles to combustion vehicles to transport material inside the workplace, which would endanger the health of workers due to the accumulation of toxic fumes in the company.

Respondent 3 mentioned in the interview two instances where the CNT took legal action against companies for failing to meet environmental regulations. In the first case, the CNT sued Recambios Marinos primarily for labor exploitation but also cited environmental non-compliance. In the second case, CNT workers sued Fomento de Construcciones y Contratas for illegally disposing of brake fluid, motor oil, and garbage into the sewer system.

In 2004, CGT workers at Delphi alerted the Provincial Environmental Delegation of the Junta de Cádiz of an anomalous layer of oxid found in their personal cars, which they suspected that could come from a gas leak from the factory, and they requested the opening of a sanctioning file “to ensure that similar episodes do not occur again in the future”<sup>41</sup>.

In 2005, the union delegate at the water treatment plant of La China in Madrid denounced to Greenpeace that the plant had been dumping untreated sludge, sewage and radioactive water into the Manzanares River. Several workers were fired to silence them<sup>42</sup>. Later, the water treatment

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.cgtbarcelona.org/noticia/vi-convenio-sad-de-cataluna/> Retrieved: 6-1-2024,18:45h.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/spains-government-lashes-out-at-nissan-over-barcelona-factory-closure-nissan-renault/> Retrieved: 7-1-2024, 13:35h.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.publico.es/economia/nissan-cup-anticapitalistas-cgt-proponen-reconvertir-plantas-nissan-fabricar-coches-electricos-alquiler.html> Retrieved: 7-1-2024, 16:25h.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.publico.es/economia/nissan-y-sindicatos-alcanzan-acuerdo-cierre-plantas-barcelona.html> Retrieved: 7-1-2024, 17:28h.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.latribunadeautomocion.es/2023/04/el-hub-tech-factory-contratara-400-exempleados-de-nissan-barcelona-antes-de-que-acabe-el-ano/> Retrieved: 7-1-2024, 17:31h.

<sup>41</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cadiz-cgt-en-delphi-y-ecologistas-preguntan-a-la-junta-por-una-posible-contaminacion-la-semana-pasada-en-puerto-real/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 22:59h.

<sup>42</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/la-depuradora-de-la-china-ha-vertido-al-rio-lodos-y-aguas-sin-tratar-un-delegado-de-cgt-fue-despedido-por-denunciar-este-tipo-de-irregularidades/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 23:08h.

plant closed, and the Greenpeace director argued that “*the repeated complaints have forced this decision to be made*”<sup>43</sup>.

Finally, another example is when the union section in the nuclear plant of Cofrentes publicly denounced the existence of an overflow of radioactive water in the pool that stores the plant’s radioactive fuel<sup>44</sup>.

### 4.2.3. Organizing ecosocial education

Respondent 7 saw healing workers from the neoliberal ideology as the first step of a just degrowth transition. He thought that degrowth requires self-management and communalism, but he thought that to implement self-management “*involves decades of inoculating thought, of pedagogy, of teaching before finally reaching the objective. Educate those who are not educated, those who only work, bring education to all places and to all people*”. Respondent 5 thought similarly.

Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 saw anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as an effective platform to approach non-politicized workers (which might have joined the union just for work issues, not for political beliefs) and educate them on ecosocial topics and on the necessity of degrowth.

Respondent 9 said that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions have to “*become spaces for formation and socialization*”. She said that they historically took care of educating workers through athenaeums and rationalist schools, before the appearance of public education. Public education, according to her, “*exists thanks to trade unions*”. For her, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions could educate on degrowth matters “*by facilitating that workers can access information on ecological topics*”. Respondent 1 added that unions are good platforms to educate workers because a union has greater legitimacy in a worker’s eyes to speak about work-related issues, such as economic degrowth. Respondents 2, 4, 6 and 7 thought the same.

Respondents 2 and 4 also noted that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions are not just a good tool to approach non-politicized workers, but that they are also good tools to approach anarcho-syndicalist workers which are politicized but might not be aware of degrowth. They argue that this is because approaching anarcho-syndicalists with a degrowth discourse is easier due to the common values.

My research found that the means through which anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can educate fellow affiliates on degrowth are through the organization of courses and workshops, through editing educational materials (journals, books, fanzines, etc), and through network chatting with fellow affiliates.

Regarding the organization of courses and workshops, Respondent 5 explained that he himself had organized several lectures and courses on environmentalism for the CGT workers in Huelva, discussing topics such as the situation of the Doñana Natural Park or the problems that the region is facing from mining. Some of such courses were the “*Curso Pedagogías Libertarias, Emancipatorias, y por la Transición Ecosocial*”<sup>45</sup> and “*Emergencia Climática, Crisis Capitalista e*

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<sup>43</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/el-ayuntamiento-desmantelara-la-depuradora-la-china-con-un-coste-de-900-millones-de-euros/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 23:12h.

<sup>44</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/galeria/cgt-denuncia-de-la-existencia-de-un-rebose-de-agua-radiactiva-en-la-piscina-que-almacena-el-combustible-de-la-central-nuclear-de-cofrentes/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 23:30h.

<sup>45</sup> <https://huelvaya.es/2023/11/06/certamen-creativo-literario-apoyo-mutuo/> Retrieved 3-3-2024, 20:45h.

*Industria*<sup>46</sup>. Respondent 5 also stated that the CGT in Huelva had created the “*1r Certamen Creativo Literario sobre el ‘Apoyo Mutuo’*”<sup>47</sup>, a competition of fictional storytelling on the topic of mutual aid for the schools in the region. According to him, the competition had the aim of promoting mutual aid, with the ultimate goal of “*confronting the ecosocial emergency with the mental framework of anarchism and mutual aid*”. The CGT has also organized other courses, such as the workshop “*Capitalismo verde o futuro libertario*”<sup>48</sup>, a debate on the scarcity of global resources<sup>49</sup>, a course called “*Decrecimiento o barbarie*”<sup>50</sup>, amongst others.

Regarding the publication of educational materials, Respondents 2, 4 and 7 reported having written articles on the union’s journals on degrowth and social ecology. Respondent 6 said that he edited fanzines that discussed the relationship between anarchism and ecology. The CNT had published several articles related to the topic (to cite a few examples: Molinero, 2020; Barquín & Ugarte, 2014; Manzanera, 2022; González Reyes, 2020; Taibo, 2020; Alabort, 2011; Misquero, 2023). The CGT also did the same (to cite some examples: Lallana, 2023; Gisbert, 2008; Baig, 2022; Costanzo, 2020; Alba, 2005; González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto, 2008; CGT *et al.* 2021).

Regarding network chatting with fellow affiliates, both Respondents 2 and 4 said that one of the reasons for which they joined the CGT was because they believed that they could spread degrowth ideas by sparking chats and debates with fellow members of the union. Respondents 4, 6 and 7 talked about how environmentally conscious CGT members at the SEAT factory had been able to talk about environmental issues with their colleagues and convince them of the scarcity of resources that their industry would face, thus convincing some of them to start pushing for an ecosocial industrial inside the SEAT plant.

My research also found that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can potentially be effective educational actors not only by educating affiliates and fellow workers, but also by pushing for changes in the public education system. In this regard, Respondent 5 explained that the Education Federation of the CGT in Andalusia had approved a motion in their Congress which encouraged trade unionists to push for including “*the ecosocial crisis as a transversal competence into the curricular design*”, as well as for creating “*a teacher training plan with this topic as a priority*” (FASE-CGT, 2023).

### 4.3. Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as defensive environmental actors

In this research, numerous instances emerged of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions acting defensively to safeguard workers’ livelihoods during ecosocial transitions. The discussions focused

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<sup>46</sup> <https://perulibertario.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/anarcosindicalismo-en-el-perucc81-testimonios-federacioc81n-anarquista-del-perucc81.pdf> Retrieved 8-3-2024, 22:31h.

<sup>47</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/formacion/formacion-y-debate-emergencia-climatica-crisis-capitalista-e-industria-en-huelva/> Retrieved 3-3-2024, 20:58h.

<sup>48</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/formacion/jornadas-de-formacion-capitalismo-verde-o-futuro-libertario/> Retrieved: 19-2-2024, 20:25h.

<sup>49</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/charla-debate-sobre-agotamiento-de-recursos-en-el-ateneo-libertario-la-idea/> Retrieved: 19-2-2024, 20:26h.

<sup>50</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/charla-debate-sobre-agotamiento-de-recursos-en-el-ateneo-libertario-la-idea/> Retrieved: 19-2-2024, 20:26h.

on the potential role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as defensive actors in ecosocial transitions that are not led by them, and their strategies to protect transitioning workers.

#### 4.3.1. The defensive role of trade unions in capitalist ecological transitions

Respondent 3 highlighted capitalism's core logic of wealth accumulation at the expense of the working class. He argued that, if the ecological transition is applied by capitalist forces, it is because they are trying to protect their privileges by adapting to the ecological crisis. Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, he asserted, would be at the forefront against capitalist ecological transitions, by resisting capitalist actions, such as layoffs and business closures, aimed at preserving elite privileges. He said that anarcho-syndicalists must work to ensure that labor protections remain intact amidst the ecological transition.

An example of such resistance is seen in the actions of the CGT at the SEAT Componentes factory in Martorell, where the shift from producing combustion cars to producing electric cars caused a decrease in the need of workforce at SEAT by 30%<sup>51</sup>. This led SEAT to plan cutting thousands of jobs<sup>52</sup>.

The three main unions at the factory (CCOO, UGT and CGT), opposed this, and demanded a viable car electrification plan without job losses. According to them, the decrease in demand of work could be solved with a reduction of the working week without a salary cut<sup>53</sup>. Extensive negotiations ensued, with the CGT calling for a two-hour strike on 05/03/2022 and 12/04/2022<sup>54</sup>, with which they demanded “*an industrial plan that guarantees activity, including for the SEAT Componentes center, where there are 1,200 workers and whose continuity is in danger due to the obsolescence of manual gearboxes with the arrival of the electric car*”<sup>55</sup>. General assemblies of workers held during the strikes debated demands like unpaid wages and an appropriate industrial plan amid the transition to electric cars<sup>56</sup>. After strikes and negotiations, a new collective agreement was signed, which included a voluntary departure plan for these 1,330 workers aged 61 or more, guaranteeing the rest of the jobs, and a salary increase of 6,5% (BOE, 2022). However, CGT protested the agreement, arguing that better terms could have been achieved if pressure was continued<sup>57</sup>.

Respondents 6 and 7, who were union delegates at SEAT, offered to me their view on this topic. Respondent 7, for instance, explained that the position of the CGT was that the loss of jobs could be prevented by reducing the working hours of each worker without salary cut, and redistributing all work. However, they explained that this proposal did not go through because,

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.publico.es/economia/vehiculos-electricos-plantilla-seat-quiere-plan-industrial-temor-3000-despidos-apuesta-coche-electrico.html> Retrieved: 8-1-2024, 20:48h.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.publico.es/economia/vehiculos-electricos-plantilla-seat-quiere-plan-industrial-temor-3000-despidos-apuesta-coche-electrico.html> Retrieved: 8-1-2024, 20:48h.

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.publico.es/economia/vehiculos-electricos-plantilla-seat-quiere-plan-industrial-temor-3000-despidos-apuesta-coche-electrico.html> Retrieved: 8-1-2024, 20:48h.

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.izquierdadiario.es/Paros-de-la-plantilla-de-SEAT-contra-las-propuestas-de-la-empresa-para-el-nuevo-convenio> Retrieved: 8-1-2024, 21:15h.

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.izquierdadiario.es/Paros-de-la-plantilla-de-SEAT-contra-las-propuestas-de-la-empresa-para-el-nuevo-convenio> Retrieved: 8-1-2024, 21:15h.

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.izquierdarevolucionaria.net/index.php/estado-espanol/general/2911-acuerdo-en-seat> Retrieved: 2-3-2024, 17:40h.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.izquierdarevolucionaria.net/index.php/estado-espanol/general/2911-acuerdo-en-seat> Retrieved: 2-3-2024, 17:40h.

according to them, most workers, including UGT and CCOO members, did not believe in the practical feasibility of such a proposal. Thus, they detected that, before an anarchosindicalist trade union starts pushing for ecosocial transformations such as the reduction of working hours without salary cut, it is important to educate and empower workers to believe that those ecosocial transformations can work. According to Respondent 7, they tried to use the day-to-day struggles at the SEAT to educate workers that “*another world is possible*”: Respondent 6 said that “*the fight is daily. [...] The fight is almost obligatory in order not to lose the rights that cost us so much*”, but that, in parallel to the daily struggles, “*we always send a message of an ideological nature, in the sense of that, of thinking that this the day-to-day struggles will become more and worse, that the earth is finite and that this exponential growth one day we are going to have to stop*”. When asked about which tools they used to educate workers, Respondent 6 answered: “*the informational sheet, the public workers’ assemblies, the informational pickets...*”. Respondent 7 said that another strategy that they used to convince workers that the reduction of working hours was possible was to organize strikes each weekend to show that production in the plant could be sustained even if each worker worked less hours.

Apart from discussing how they faced the massive dismissal of workers, Respondents 6 and 7 also explained another example of their defensive role in another ecosocial transformation implemented by SEAT. In this case, the ecosocial transformation involved reducing the consumption of water in the factory to comply with the drought regulations that were imposed by the Catalan government. To comply with the regulation, the factory managers wanted to close the showers of the workers at their dressing room. The CGT opposed this measure of closing the showers of the workers, stating that if a decrease in water consumption has to happen, it needs to only affect the production process, and not the working conditions of the workers.

#### **4.3.2. The defensive role of trade unions in degrowth transitions from the public institutions**

Respondent 7 emphasized that while public institutions have the capacity to implement degrowth policies, it often prioritizes preserving bourgeoisie rights over the working class during such transitions, as they are still bourgeois-dominated public institutions. Therefore, according to him, the role of anarcho-sindicalism is to prevent this uneven distribution of the burdens of degrowth.

An example of this resistance is seen in the struggle of the CGT at the Institut Municipal de Parcs i Jardins de Barcelona (“Municipal Institute of Parks and Gardens”). Due to the ongoing drought that affects Catalonia, the Catalan Government promoted restrictions on watering of plants in urban spaces, but allowing for survival watering of urban trees with underground non-drinkable water, which led the Barcelona City Council to outline a plan for watering them according to the regulations<sup>58</sup>. The Barcelona City Council’s plan changed the schedule of about 460 workers, whose normal schedule was from 7:45 to 15h: now they would have to also work during the afternoon, because the City Council considered it better to water in the afternoons[57,58]. The unions CCOO, UGT and USOC (*Unió Sindical Obrera de Catalunya* – “Syndical Workers Union of Catalonia”) agreed with the measure, but the CGT and the trade union *Intersindical-CSC* dis-

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<sup>58</sup> <https://beteve.cat/politica/barcelona-reg-selectiu-espais-verds-emergencia-sequera/> Retrieved: 22/02/2024, 22:08h.

agreed with it<sup>59</sup>. They argued against afternoon watering due to higher evaporation rates and due to the negative impacts on familiar conciliation of the workers<sup>60</sup>. Still, the unions acknowledged the need to adapt to drought while ensuring workers' rights were protected<sup>61</sup>. They initiated a partial strike demanding the reversal of the measures<sup>62</sup>.

Respondents 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 also suggested that anarcho-syndicalism could resist similar unjust Statist transitions under an ecofascist state, highlighting its role in challenging and overthrowing oppressive regimes.

#### **4.3.3. The defensive role of trade unions in degrowth transitions from the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)**

Respondent 3 highlighted the potential role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions to act defensively in forms of transitions that are usually proposed by degrowthers, such as building degrowth economies through the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). While acknowledging the positive aspects of SSE, he emphasized the need for watchdog oversight by anarcho-syndicalist unions to ensure labor rights within SSE companies.

According to him, in SSE, workers are repressed through “*emotional blackmail*”. He said that, “*it is a structural issue, because people in the social economy are getting paid shit [...]. You need to save costs and maximize well... maximize profits. You need to pay your bills every day and every month. And that will always make you dependent on... well... exploiting your subordinates, or yourself*”. Therefore, he thinks that “*it anarcho-syndicalism has the role of a watchdog to ensure that labor rights are actually respected within these companies SSE companies. Because it doesn't happen. 100% of the time they have junk in there*”. He therefore believes that the role of anarcho-syndicalism of protecting the workers in SSE companies is crucial for the SSE-led degrowth transitions.

#### **4.3.4. Protecting transitioning workers**

According to Respondent 1, the role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions would not only be to protect workers from unjust transitions, but also to provide guidance and coverage when transitions were inevitable according to degrowth criteria. He thinks that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions could decide on disappearing industries and facilitate affected individuals' transition to strategic areas desirable for degrowth. This view was shared by Respondents 2 and 4 as well. Several ideas of actions that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can take to protect affected workers during transitions emerged in the research.

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<sup>59</sup> <https://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/268419/embolic-vaga-parcial-jardiniers-barcelona-nou-pla-reg-sequera>  
Retrieved: 22/02/2024, 22:22h.

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/268419/embolic-vaga-parcial-jardiniers-barcelona-nou-pla-reg-sequera>  
Retrieved: 22/02/2024, 22:22h.

<sup>61</sup> <https://beteve.cat/economia/tercera-jornada-vaga-parcs-jardins-torns-rotatoris/> Retrieved: 22/02/2024, 22:29h.

<sup>62</sup> <https://beteve.cat/economia/tercera-jornada-vaga-parcs-jardins-torns-rotatoris/> Retrieved: 22/02/2024, 22:29h.

#### 4.3.4.1. Universal Basic Income(s)

Both Respondents 2 and 4 highlighted advocating for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) as a measure anarcho-syndicalist trade unions could take to support workers that are jobless and in the process of transitioning. However, Respondent 2, despite thinking that *“it could be considered necessary at this time and, in a certain way, an achievement”*, remained critical of it, saying that *“in the end it entails the postponement of the real problem and a continuity within the same capitalist logic, because the UBI still relies upon a monetary system and a State”*. Respondent 4 shared the same criticism. Respondent 4 proposed an alternative: a *“renta básica de la tierra”* (“universal rent of the land”), which instead of only providing money and therefore fully relying on the market and the State, would provide *“some money through a UBI, plus a piece of land to have food, and that has access to housing, healthcare and seeds, so that you could have a certain degree of self-sufficiency”*, thus not fully relying on the market and the State.

The CGT, in 2014, stated that it would consider the “Basic Income of the Equals” as a *“valid tool for social transformation and effective distribution of wealth”*<sup>63</sup>. According to them, it would distribute to everyone an income that is *“sufficient to satisfy basic needs”*, and it would be organized through a Basic Income Fund, which would be *“self-managed from the neighborhood or town through the neighborhood assemblies to cover collective needs. We talk about applying direct democracy in making decisions that affect the community”*<sup>64</sup>. They state that the Basic Income of the Equals is *“a tool that can enable the autonomy of people from below, autonomy to experiment with new individual and collective ways of living without the need to be exploited”*, and that *“this autonomy would allow us to decide whether it is necessary (ethical, sustainable...) or not to go to work in the construction of swamps, automobiles, airports, weapons, etc”*<sup>65</sup>. According to them, unions could play a role in the formation of communal Basic Income Funds, through catalyzing the formation of such collectivities by workers and by providing funds to them<sup>66</sup>.

#### 4.3.4.2. Mutual aid and solidarity boxes

Respondent 2 suggested the implementation of *“a solidarity box among workers to be able to support people who are transitioning to other sectors”*, which *“might not just be economic”*, but could also provide workers with other types of non-monetary goods, such as food. Respondent 4 similarly thought that *“we need to start communalizing mutual aid, which is going to be the only way that we have”*.

Similarly, the CNT has introduced a “confederal solidarity box” funded by union member affiliation fees<sup>67</sup>. According to them, solidarity boxes *“not only were used to support striking workers in a precarious situation that we cannot even imagine today, but they also took care of those benefits that the State currently covers at minimum levels. Unemployment, sick leave and other contingencies of this type were combated by aid and mutual support societies, preventing any repression for*

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<sup>63</sup> <https://cgt.org.es/la-renta-basica-de-las-iguales-una-herramienta-para-la-transformacion-social/> Retrieved: 24-2-2024, 18:54h.

<sup>64</sup> <https://cgt.org.es/la-renta-basica-de-las-iguales-una-herramienta-para-la-transformacion-social/> Retrieved: 24-2-2024, 18:54h.

<sup>65</sup> <https://cgt.org.es/la-renta-basica-de-las-iguales-una-herramienta-para-la-transformacion-social/> Retrieved: 24-2-2024, 18:54h.

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.cnt.es/noticias/una-caja-para-resistir-y-resistir-para-vencer/> Retrieved: 24-2-2024, 19:29h.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.cnt.es/noticias/una-caja-para-resistir-y-resistir-para-vencer/> Retrieved: 24-2-2024, 19:29h.

*protesting or stopping production, from turning into the most absolute poverty due to the lack of any income*<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> <https://www.cnt.es/noticias/una-caja-para-resistir-y-resistir-para-vencer/> Retrieved: 24-2-2024, 19:29h.



## 5. Discussion

This research addressed the question of how can anarcho-syndicalist trade unions contribute to the degrowth transition, to fill the gap that I detected in the literature.

Both degrowth and libertarian communism (the original aim of anarcho-syndicalism according to Damier, 2011) have been suggested as alternatives to capitalism. While ideologically close to degrowth (González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto, 2008, Shantz, 2012), their position towards degrowth is more complex than that, because anarcho-syndicalists are critical of some potential consequences of degrowth policies, particularly when they risk to disproportionately affects workers (Barca & Leonardi, 2018; Fernández Buey, 1992). Anarcho-syndicalism's focus on day-to-day struggles of the working class makes it wary of aspects of degrowth that could jeopardize workers' livelihoods.

This complex position towards degrowth can be explained by what Respondents 1, 3, 5 and 7 identified in the results: the idealist-materialist duality, which is the core of anarcho-syndicalism and which makes them aim for an utopian society but still have, at the same time, a strong focus on day-to-day struggles (those results are aligned with the findings of Damier, 2011). Thus, results show that the role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in the just degrowth transition is also shaped by this duality: the idealistic nature makes them willing to actively push for the establishment of ecosocial transformations that are in line with the degrowth principles, and the materialistic nature makes them protect the working class communities whenever a radical environmental transition can affect heavily their livelihoods, keeping the transition "just" by enforcing the fulfillment of the "distributional justice principle".

In short, results show that anarcho-syndicalism is aligned with the ideal of a degrowth society and with the criticism of capitalism and endless growth, but is critical to degrowth transitions whenever they disproportionately affect workers. I contend that this critical stance towards degrowth is an opportunity rather than a challenge for degrowthers, because thanks to it they can have a way of making sure that their degrowth policies do not inadvertently affect negatively the working class.

Interviewees generally agree that an alliance between anarcho-syndicalism and degrowth can be built on common grounds that both share. González Reyes & Ferriz Prieto (2008) and Shantz (2012) already outlined some of the common grounds (regionalism; autonomy, pluralism, cooperation, mutual aid, horizontality, slowness, feminist values, diversity), but from this essay, three new common grounds emerged: common values, common views on work, and common enemies.

Regarding the common values, results show that they are both idealistic, and the utopias that they envision (degrowth and libertarian communism, respectively) are rooted in horizontality, radical democracy, and mutual aid, etc. Respondents 2 and 4 note that anarcho-syndicalists' routine application of these principles in trade union organization makes them close to degrowth practices. Furthermore, according to Respondent 3, every anarcho-syndicalist, which imagines libertarian communism as feasible, more readily envisions degrowth's feasibility as plausible.

Regarding the common views on work, anarcho-syndicalism has the idealistic goal of eliminating jobs (paid work) and completely replacing it with a commonised unpaid reproductive work in a libertarian communist society (Kropotkin, 2017; 1892). Thus, theoretically, anarcho-syndicalism is against “jobs”, which eliminates the “jobs vs. environment debate” on a theoretical level. From the materialistic side, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions do care about jobs, and thus the “jobs vs. environment debate” sometimes appears on a practical level. However, I contend that collaboration between anarcho-syndicalist trade unions and degrowthers can help make the “jobs vs. environment debate” obsolete: together, they can find solutions in which jobs/livelihoods of workers and the ecology are not opposed, but rather they feed each other. They can do it because of anarcho-syndicalism’s ability to transform current exploitative, polluting, unnecessary work into socially useful and ecologically sound work, and because of its ability to democratically plan the economy according to needs and to biophysical limits. This opinion is shared by Shantz (2012), who also stated that both ideologies advocate for work: that benefits humans, ecosystems, and non-humans alike; that is organized around reproducing human and non-human life, and not reproduce capital; that is equally shared by every member of the community; that shares the surplus value equally as well; and that is adapted to biophysical limits.

The results suggest that anarcho-syndicalism can play a vital role in putting life in the center and transforming work towards reproductive work. Anarchosyndicalism offers a possibility to seize the means of production, as well as model for organizing work in a degrowth society, where the division between productive and reproductive work is eliminated: in a degrowth society, all workers can participate in a syndicate, through which the economy can be democratically planned according to biophysical limits and according to the marxist principle of “*from each according to their capacities, to each according to their needs*” (as Respondent 1 argued).

Regarding the common enemies, results show that both degrowth and anarcho-syndicalism oppose ecofascism, and that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions might be the best form to organize a degrowth class struggle to confront it, since trade unions have historically been one of the most successful organizations for workers’ class struggle.

The fact that they share values, enemies, and views on work renders them close enough to be able to form an alliance, which interviewees agreed that can materialize. Therefore, anarcho-syndicalism can play a key role in the just degrowth transition. This role can be either proactive or defensive, based on their idealist-materialist duality. As proactive actors, they can advocate for ecosocial changes both within and outside workplaces, while also educating workers on degrowth and influencing the public educational system to incorporate ecosocial topics. As defensive actors, they can shield workers from unjust ecosocial transitions designed by other actors, and can also provide coverage for transitioning workers. To do so, they use a combination of ruptural, interstitial and symbiotic strategies (Olin Wright, 2010), which I contend that is unique to anarcho-syndicalist trade unions and that puts them in a privileged position to effectively push for a just degrowth transition.

## **5.1. Discussing anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as proactive ecosocial actors**

When discussing their role as proactive actors, examples emerged of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions engaging both within and outside the workplace. According to the interviewees, the ide-

alistic nature of anarcho-syndicalism drives its interest in broader societal transformations, a prerequisite for them engaging in ecosocial changes outside workplaces. The consensus in the results was that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions should make an active effort to collaborate and create synergies with social movements. Anarcho-syndicalism must be the tool to enforce the demands of social movements, as they have the leverage power to confront State apparatuses and capitalism. For instance, the NSWBLF trade union functioned similarly, acting as the tool for environmental movements to safeguard natural and cultural sites (Burgmann & Burgmann, 2017). Those types of alliances are occurring in the CGT and the CNT at the moment, but there is still a large path to cover.

For instance, both unions have shown interest in partnering with conservationists. They utilized both protests and legal action against projects and developers, as seen in the opposition to Natura Encesa and the San Glorio ski resort. This approach led to halting the San Glorio project. They also participated in reforestation and reruralization efforts in Sierra de la Culebra (Zamora), in Huelva, and in Ruesta. Ruesta is noteworthy for illustrating the role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in creating and establishing commons, with an interstitial strategy according to Chertkovskaya (2022), since Ruesta is an alternative community that embodies the principles of rural life and degrowth.

Both union's involvement in positive ecosocial transformations outside of the workplace is not only limited to conservationism, but also in Environmental Health Conflicts (EHCs) (Navas *et al.*, 2022). The example of CGT workers acting as whistleblowers provided by Respondent 8 was significant in this regard: by challenging the polluting activities of their own company through whistleblowing, they contributed to a favorable court resolution. This example is interesting as it is another manifestation of the idealist-materialist duality: due to union repression by the company, trade unionists could not openly confront pollution due to risking their jobs (thus worrying about their material conditions), but, however, their "idealistic" nature led them to find a way to confront the company without endangering their jobs, which is whistleblowing information to environmentalists without making their opposition public.

The CGT also actively opposed macro-projects such as macrofarms and the CV-60, amongst others, demonstrating a critical stance against growth. The CGT also opposed nuclear energy, contributing to positive ecosocial transformations toward more ecological energy forms, notably the closure of the Santa Maria de Garoña nuclear plant. Legal battles and lawsuits, supported by protests organized by the union, played a crucial role in achieving this outcome<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, another relevant example of ecosocial struggles outside of the workplace is the support of anarcho-syndicalism to the climate movement, as they see the climate emergency as a threat for working class communities. The CGT's call for a General Strike for climate in Andalusia on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2020<sup>2</sup> is particularly noteworthy, as General Strikes are rarely employed by trade unions. A General Strike stands as the only legal ruptural strategy (and thus theoretically free from legal repression) capable of affecting the entire economy. This puts trade unions in a privileged position because of the leverage power that General Strikes have. Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions seem willing to employ this strategy for ecosocial transformations, and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/cgt-recurre-judicialmente-la-prorroga-de-la-central-nuclear-de-garona/>  
Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 14:48h.

<sup>2</sup> <https://rojoynegro.info/articulo/formalizada-convocatoria-de-huelga-general-en-andalucia-para-el-proximo-25-de-septiembre/> Retrieved: 18-2-2024, 17:22h.

therefore, I contend that the collaboration with them can be very fruitful for degrowthers in terms of achieving mass degrowth transitions through strikes.

In the majority of the examples above, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions were acting as the enforcing tools for social movements, using their leverage power for the benefit of social movements. For example in Natura Encesa, San Glorio, and Garoña, they lent to the social movements their legal capacity to sue, and in the example of the General Strike, they put their ruptural power to the service of climate activists. The strategies that they used were ruptural, interstitial and symbiotic (Olin Wright, 2010). General Strikes, protests and whistleblowing were ruptural because they were directly confronting the status quo. Reforestation and reruralization were interstitial strategies, since they were aiming to create bottom-up alternatives outside of the status quo. And the lawsuits were symbiotic, since they were using the tools provided by the status quo.

The fact that they utilized a wide array of strategies, including ruptural, symbiotic, and interstitial, to advance these positive ecosocial transformations underscores anarcho-syndicalism's characteristic pattern of having the willingness to employ every available tool to achieve its goals. I contend that this willingness stems from anarcho-syndicalism's idealist-materialist duality: due to it, anarcho-syndicalism is able to keep being radical despite being grounded in day-to-day struggles, and this radicalness makes it want to use every tool available to achieve its goals. Consequently, what makes a union radical is not the type of strategies that they use, but rather the intensity with which they use them: a radical trade union will use every tool available, including symbiotic tools, to the last resort. Such a combination of strategies is unique to anarcho-syndicalism, since, as Shantz argued (2012), bureaucratic general trade unions tend to be reformist and mainly use symbiotic strategies, only complementing them with ruptural strategies very occasionally.

Both the CGT and the CNT were able to use this unique strategy combination not only to push for ecosocial transformations outside the workplace, but also inside the workplace. They see organizing from within the workplace as a necessary step to build the material conditions for the broader transformation of society (Rocker, 1938).

When examining the unions' role in promoting ecosocial transformations from within the workplace, both Respondents 1 and 3 argued that it is also important that social movements also start organizing at the point of production, where workers have the most leverage power. I contend that if this happens, since there are multitude of people in social movements, the affiliation of trade unions would increase to a point in which they would probably achieve the critical mass needed for large scale transformations of society, similarly to what happened in the Sants Congress of 1918, which led to the unification of the catalan working class and which enabled them to enforce the large scale La Canadenca strike (Balcells, 1968).

Results show that the CGT and the CNT pursued positive ecosocial transformations that were mainly concerned with:

- a) The improvement of working conditions of ecosocial jobs.
- b) The enhancement of the utility of production.
- c) The democratic planification of the economy to make it adjust to planetary boundaries.
- d) The modification of the process of production to make it less polluting.

The CGT was observed to have participated in struggles that resulted in a direct improvement of the working conditions of workers whose jobs are important for degrowth, specifically, the examples of Bicing, TRAGSA and SAD. This is consistent with the findings of González Reyes *et al.* (2024), who said that improving the working conditions is a form of "confronting the ecosocial

degradation”. He said that this is one of the crucial steps that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can take for the just degrowth transition.

Regarding the enhancement of the social utility of production, it was observed in the examples of TRAGSA and NISSAN. The full nationalization of TRAGSA and the fact that older firemen were relieved from frontline duties (putting younger, more physically-prepared firemen, instead) improved firefighting capabilities, resulting in a positive ecosocial transformation and enhancing the social utility of firefighting (increased wildfire extinguishing capacity). At NISSAN, the fact that they managed to change production to producing electrical cars is also an improvement of the social utility of production.

Regarding the democratic planification of the economy to make it adjust to planetary boundaries, the NISSAN case illustrates how anarcho-syndicalist trade unions push for positive ecosocial transformations through democratic economic planning, which is a ruptural strategy because it involves taking control of the means of production. Even though their original plan was not applied, they still managed to change the production from polluting combustion car parts to less polluting electrical car parts.

Finally, regarding the modification of the process of production to make it less polluting, examples at FCC, Recambios Marinos, Delphi, La China, the Cofrentes nuclear plant, and the undisclosed company explained by Respondent 8 highlight how anarcho-syndicalist trade unions serve as environmental stewards, facilitating positive ecosocial transformations within the workplace by making the production process less polluting. This aligns with Mason & Morter’s (1998) findings that trade unions can be effective environmental stewards, as well as with Navas *et al.* (2022) findings that trade unions and working class communities often confront Environmental Health Conflicts.

The most commonly observed strategy that they used was that they put pressure to the companies through confronting them directly with ruptural strategies (such as protests and strikes) in order to gain momentum, and then using this momentum to be able to negotiate a collective agreement (a symbiotic strategy) from a better starting point, thus achieving a better outcome (as in the example of Bicing, TRAGSA and SAD). This combination of ruptural and symbiotic strategies has emerged repeatedly as an effective anarcho-syndicalist approach in this research. I contend that this ability to use symbiotic tools to solidify gains achieved through ruptural strategies is one of the reasons why anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can be effective actors for achieving transformations.

In the examples above, both the CGT and the CNT were concerned about positive ecosocial transformations from outside and inside the workplace, and those positive ecosocial transformations have elements that are aligned with the principles of degrowth. For example, the conservationist efforts are consistent with the degrowth ideal of a good life for humans and non-humans within planetary boundaries (Kallis, 2018). The opposition to CV-60 is consistent with the degrowth principle of respecting planetary boundaries (Raworth, 2012). The democratic planification at NISSAN is consistent with the degrowth ideal of planning the economy around meeting the needs of the people while adjusting to social and planetary boundaries (Raworth, 2012). Improving the public transportation system will be important for the degrowth economy, according to Albarracín *et al.* (2021). And improving the working conditions of care workers is consistent with the degrowth ethics of care (Kallis, 2018; D’Alisa *et al.* 2014). Therefore, I contend that, since I have proved that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can push for positive ecosocial

transformations that have common elements with degrowth, I have also proved that they can also be proactive actors in a fully deployed just degrowth transition.

Results indicate that apart from fostering degrowth-aligned ecosocial transformations from within and from outside the workplace, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can also foster them by serving as educational agents. Some interviewees saw education on ecosocial topics as a crucial previous step for the just degrowth transition, since being educated is a necessary previous step for self-managing the economy. Results show that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions educate workers on degrowth and ecosocial topics through organizing courses, workshops, editing educational materials (journals, books, fanzines, informational sheets, etc.), and chatting and networking with fellow affiliates. It was generally agreed that the reason why anarcho-syndicalist trade unions are good tools to educate workers on ecosocial topics is that trade unionists have greater legitimacy in a worker's eyes to speak about work-related issues, such as economic degrowth. Those results are consistent with González Reyes *et al.* (2024), who thought that trade unions could help in the degrowth transition by “creating ecosocial cultural frameworks”. Education, in this context, serves as an interstitial tool (Olin Wright, 2010), fostering alternative visions and empowering people to create bottom-up alternatives. My research also found that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can be educational actors by actively influencing the public educational system to incorporate ecosocial themes.

## 5.2. Discussing anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as defensive ecosocial actors

As we have previously argued, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions are aligned with degrowth principles, but will oppose it whenever it disproportionately affects workers. This defensive behavior exemplifies the idealist-materialist duality that characterizes anarcho-syndicalist trade unions. Their obligation is to make sure that degrowth transitions improve the conditions of the ecology and the working class at the same time.

I contend that in a *bottom-up* degrowth transition led by proactive anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, the “distributional justice” principle that characterizes just transitions would prevail, as the democratic planification of the economy by workers would not allow for workers to lose their livelihoods and be disproportionately affected by the degrowth transition that they themselves have planned. However, if the transition is planned *top-down*, workers' involvement in economic planning would be inexistent or very limited, and thus, respect for the “distributional justice” principle would not be automatically ensured. Even in *bottom-up* transitions (e.g., SSE), if they are pressured by competitive market forces, this issue may also arise. Results show that the role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, as radical democratic organizations for workers, is to catalyze the voices of workers and act in defense of their interests whenever the “distributional justice” principle is not respected.

For example, in the case of SEAT, the *top-down* energetic transition led by capitalist management disregarded the “distributional principle” because management was not concerned with workers' rights, negatively impacting them. The CGT organized protests and strikes. Later, taking advantage of the momentum generated by the CGT, both CCOO and UGT signed an agreement which guaranteed keeping some jobs and provided better leave pays for dismissed workers, albeit the CGT rejected it for not being good enough. While not fully meeting demands, this out-

come underscored anarcho-syndicalist trade unions' role as shields during ecological transitions, because the CGT managed to protect workers to some extent, making the capitalist energetic transition slightly more "just". The example of SEAT is also interesting because it shows how anarcho-syndicalists use the materialist-idealist duality in their favor to push for positive ecosocial transformations: as Respondents 6 and 7 described, CGT delegates were taking advantage of the day-to-day struggles that were happening at the factory to politicize and convince other workers that another world is possible (an anarchist and degrowth world). Thus, it is also an example of how trade unions can be effective educational actors because of their ability to approach workers with legitimacy (in this case, the educational strategies that they were using were network chatting, informational pickets, informational sheets, fanzines, etc).

Reading this example from a "green syndicalist" perspective, SEAT's case does not imply that keeping jobs at SEAT is crucial for a just ecological transition. In fact, according to Shantz (2012), green syndicalism opposes industrialism except in cases where industrial production is essential for life (medical supplies, etc). But, for green syndicalists, the de-industrialization of society must not happen through *top-down* decision making, as it was happening in the example of SEAT, but rather through democratic planification of the economy by workers and through voluntary abandonment of factories by the workers themselves, protected by anarcho-syndicalist trade unions (Shantz, 2012). It is the workers themselves that have to dismantle the factory system (and its work, its hierarchies, and its regimentation), and this may involve literal destruction as factories may be dismantled, or perhaps converted towards "soft" forms of localized production (Shantz, 2012).

Respondents 6 and 7 provided another example in which CGT workers at SEAT were acting defensively to protect the working class from "unjust" transitions. When the company tried to apply the drought regulations, it wanted to stop the showers of the workers instead of cutting down the consumption of water of the production process. Thus, the burden of the drought regulations would have fallen on the workers, while the production process would have remained unaffected. The unions' opposition to stopping the showers prevented workers from losing a key higienical protective measure, and actually ensured that the decrease in water consumption was absorbed by the production process, thus resulting in a "just" ecosocial transformation that had a significantly better ecological outcome in terms of reduction of water consumption.

Results also provided with an example of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions acting defensively during ecosocial transformations imposed by the public institutions. The CGT at *Parcs i Jardins de Barcelona* defended labor rights through a strike. Workers were overlooked in the *top-down* public-implemented transformation, as it was designed without accounting for the well-being of workers. Also, the lack of worker participation in designing watering measures led to a worse proposal for survival watering; had workers been involved, with their expertise in the topic, a better watering plan could have been devised. Thus, the result would have been better for ecology and for workers if unions had guaranteed worker's involvement in the planification, showing how unions can improve the utility of work and production with ecosocial criteria.

From the results stems that capitalists and the public institutions are not the sole agents capable of imposing unjust ecosocial transformations: despite the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) being deemed an interstitial strategy for degrowth (Cherkovskaya, 2022), SSE transitions may not always adhere to the "distributional justice principle". As Respondent 3 stated, SSE often entails worker exploitation (as showcased by the example of SAD workers' struggle, because the company Suara is a cooperative), and it is the duty of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions to avoid

this exploitation. Thus, even *bottom-up* strategies can lead to exploitative outcomes if those strategies suffer from the capitalist market pressures.

Finally, from the results it can be deduced that the role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions as defensive actors is to also act defensively when ecosocial transformations whenever those are applied by themselves. If they themselves proactively plan the degrowth transition, it is their duty to plan it so that it ensures coverage to the transitioning workers in a way that the “distributional principle” is automatically respected. Results provided with some insights on which tools can anarcho-syndicalist trade unions use to provide with this coverage. Two specific tools emerged: Universal Basic Income(s) and Mutual Aid and Solidarity Boxes. Despite remaining critical and not seeing it as a “finalist” solution, UBIs were seen as a potential tool to provide with livelihood support for workers. According to them, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions could play a role by promoting that the State provides UBIs to transitioning workers. The other tool were Solidarity Boxes: anarcho-syndicalist trade unions could use solidarity boxes to support workers that are jobless because they are transitioning towards more sustainable jobs, or to support workers who are striking to implement ecosocial transitions within their respective workplaces. The results are aligned with the findings of González Reyes *et al.* (2024), who wrote that one of the strategies that trade unions could use to push for the degrowth transition is to build “satisfactors of the needs”, that is, to create alternative mutual aid structures. Results are also consistent with Shantz (2012), who found that workers will feel more secure to transition to sustainable jobs and advocating for ecosocial changes in their workplaces if they know that important trade unions will provide them with coverage (Shantz, 2012).

The results show that, as defensive actors, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions also deploy a unique combination of ruptural, interstitial and symbiotic strategies (Olin Wright, 2010). In both SEAT and *Parcs i Jardins* I observed the characteristic pattern of putting pressure to the company through confronting them directly with ruptural strategies (such as protests and strikes) in order to gain momentum, and then using this momentum to be able to negotiate a collective agreement (a symbiotic strategy) from a better starting point. In addition, their capacity to create *bottom-up* interstitial alternatives to sustain transitioning workers makes them effectively be able to provide coverage to workers that are affected by degrowth policies.

### **5.3. Limitations of the research**

Despite that this research examines various cases of ecosocial transformations, it lacks an in-depth analysis of a single case. In order to test the findings of this research, an in-depth research of a single case study needs to be performed. Another limitation is the small size of the pool of interviewees, as well as the relative lack of feminine and youth participants, which might cause the opinions of the interviews to be too adult-male oriented. Future studies should include a more diverse participant pool to capture a broader range of perspectives, as well as a greater number of interviewees. Another important limitation is that for the documental review, and due to the difficulty of finding external sources and academic research on the activities of the CGT, I mainly had to resort to internal documents and newspapers of the trade union, which might represent a biased view of the struggles that I analyzed, despite the fact that I tried to correct this bias. Further research should try to aim for more objective sources, if available. Finally, another limitation is that this research was limited to Spanish anarcho-syndicalist trade unions. It would



be useful to expand this research beyond Spanish trade unions to include counterparts from other countries, to make it more representative of the anarcho-syndicalist world (as each trade union has its own particularities). In this regard, it would be especially important to expand the study to include anarcho-syndicalist trade unions from the Global South<sup>3</sup> such as the Persaudaraan Pekerja Anarko-Sindicalis<sup>4</sup> (Indonesia) or the Bangladesh Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://perulibertario.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/anarcosindicalismo-en-el-perucc81-testimonios-federacioc81n-anarquista-del-perucc81.pdf> Retrieved 8-3-2024, 22:31h.

<sup>4</sup> <https://ppasonline.wordpress.com/> Retrieved 9-3-2024, 10:52h.

<sup>5</sup> <https://bangladeshasf.com/> Retrieved 9-3-2024, 10:55h.

## 6. Conclusion

Capitalism is at the core of the ecosocial crisis. Degrowth has been proposed as an alternative to it that would avoid ecological destruction and would ensure conviviality. The debate on strategies to achieve degrowth is still vivid. This research intended to contribute to this debate by discussing the potential role of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in the just degrowth transition, studying the involvement of the CGT and the CNT in ecosocial transformations.

The research found that anarcho-syndicalism is aligned with degrowth principles and with the criticism of capitalism, but that it is critical to degrowth transitions whenever they disproportionately affect workers. This is due to the idealist-materialist duality that characterizes anarcho-syndicalism: while it has the ultimate goal of achieving an utopian society (libertarian communism, degrowth), it is at the same time rooted in day-to-day struggles to protect the working class. Results show that this involvement of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in the just degrowth transition is shaped by the idealist-materialist duality: the idealist side will make them be proactive actors, and the materialist side will make them be defensive actors.

As proactive actors, research showed that anarcho-syndicalist trade unions have the capacity to push for ecosocial transformations outside of the workplace by acting as the leverage tool for social movements. They can also push for positive ecosocial transformations within the workplace by improving working conditions, by confronting polluting activities, by democratically planning production to adjust it to planetary boundaries, and by enhancing the social utility of production, reason why this research argues that degrowthers should also start organizing at the point of production. Finally, anarcho-syndicalist trade unions can also push for ecosocial transformations by educating workers thanks to union's greater legitimacy in a worker's eyes, and by influencing the public education system to incorporate ecosocial topics.

As defensive actors, they can keep the degrowth transition "just" by enforcing the "distributional justice principle" (that workers should not be disproportionately affected by ecosocial transformations – Khalfan *et al.*, 2023), and, in addition, they can provide coverage to workers that are transitioning to sustainable jobs.

While acting in both proactive and defensive roles, they deploy a combination of symbiotic, ruptural and interstitial strategies to achieve their goals, which is unique to anarcho-syndicalism: they use them all at the same time and to the last resort. I contend that is precisely what makes anarcho-syndicalist trade unions able to effectively push for positive ecosocial transformations aligned with the principles of degrowth.

Thanks to this analysis, the literature on Environmental Labor Studies, Green Syndicalism, and Strategies for Degrowth is enriched with experiences of involvement of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in positive ecosocial transformations that are aligned with the principles of a just degrowth transition. I hope that this research provides a basis for further inquiries that intend to deepen the comprehension of this involvement. I contend that further research should focus on analyzing the limitations of this involvement: under what circumstances will anarchosyndi-

calism become fully reactionary towards positive ecosocial transformations, even if they are just ecosocial transformations? Understanding this might prove to be crucial.

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## 8. Annex

### 8.1. Questions of the interview

1. What's your age?
2. What's your sex/gender?
3. What's your nationality?
4. What organizations do you belong to?
5. What's your academic training?
6. What is your job?
7. Which union section are you affiliated to?
8. What is your experience in the trade union movement?
9. What has been your experience in the environmental movement?
10. As an environmentalist, you entered the trade union movement, or it was the other way around; did trade unionism lead you to environmentalism?
11. How do you think the ideology of your union has influenced your way of understanding environmentalism?
12. What do you consider to be a militant in a union?
13. Why did you join this union, and not others? What would you say is the main difference compared to other unions?
14. What do you understand by anarcho-syndicalism? What difference do you think there is with respect to other forms of trade unionism?
15. How would you build a powerful union from the perspective of your idea of unionism? How would you reinvigorate the trade union movement?
16. Have you participated in specific struggles related to the environment, within the union? If the answer is yes, what strategies have these struggles followed?
17. Which of these strategies do you think are the most effective?
18. What do you understand by "ecosocial transition"?

19. What do you understand by “Green New Deal”? Do you think the Green New Deal is a fair form of eco-social transition?
20. What do you understand by “degrowth”? Do you think degrowth is a fair form of ecosocial transition?
21. Do you think your union is more in favor of the Green New Deal or degrowth?
22. Which of the strategies that the union has used in the past do you think can be applied to achieve results for the ecosocial transition?
23. In general, what do you think union activity can contribute to the Green New Deal or to degrowth?
24. Imagine a society that has already achieved the ecosocial transition: what role do you think unions can play in this new society?
25. What new forms of alliance and common struggles can be imagined between trade unionists and ecologists/degrowthers?
26. How do you think the ecologists/degrowthers could improve the way they talk to workers to strengthen the alliance between the two movements?

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