

“Your Money or Your Life”: Money and Socialist Transformation

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There seems to be a “common sense” feeling amongst anti-capitalists that money is a somewhat useful, if dangerous, tool; it seems wholly ‘uncommon’ sense to question the existence of money as if it were capital.¹ Capital is the problem, not money. We might well only need to hand the current management of money over to a more reliable authority and exert some brainpower to fundamentally re-conceptualise—or even simply re-tweak money—so that the handy social practice can ably accompany us at least half way to post-capitalism or remain as a principle within production and exchange within socialism.

In contrast, non-market socialists argue that moving beyond money is a fundamental, first and final step of socialist transformation (Rubel and Crump 1987; Nelson and Timmerman 2011). Significant socialist practices, such as non-monetary commoning in production and non-market sharing in exchange, must simultaneously drive socialist transformation and be the end point of socialist revolution. In short, revolutionary practices substitute the decision-making role of money by direct control of planning, production and exchange by all the people—or it will not be socialism at all.

Clearly, a “no-money” position is a necessary but insufficient condition for creating sustainable and fair social relations and collective sufficiency within Earth’s limits. The non-market ecosocialist pathway focuses on use rights and use values, building collectively sufficient local communities directly governing production and exchange. These communities network with neighbouring through to global communities to collaboratively manage joint resources, for global solidarity and cultural activities. In this kind of networked community-based socialism, peoples’ needs are expressed as use values and the powers vested in their use rights to commons facilitate direct decision making without recourse to money. Indeed—as we have learned from our experiences in capitalism—monetary exchange and production rationalised through markets and prices only interrupt and frustrate the exercise of direct power and substitute or contort the balancing of social and environmental values, which are based in use values rather than exchange values.

In short, a no-money strategy distinguishes non-market socialists, who advocate delinking from, opposing, and moving beyond capitalism by producing and exchanging without use of money. This position assumes that any monetary economy—where money is a ‘universal equivalent’, a measure and means of exchange, means of delayed payment and apparent store of value—is inclined to capitalism. Monetary practices reproduce social relations and politics central to capitalism, and block the necessary transformation to production and exchange based on social and environmental values. Given that monetary values (prices) largely conflict, rather than align, with social and environmental values, this strategy combines ‘where we are going’ with ‘how we get there’.

In its ecosocialist form, this route de-emphasises, marginalises and, ultimately, dissolves the state — as well as money — to vest control, instead, in neighbourhoods that are locally-centred economic and political units. These cells, as it were, exercise a degree of autonomy nonetheless limited by respect to universal socialist principles and details of external compacts made with neighbouring and other collective working groups managing broad commonly-held and managed resources, and sharing cultural, creative and intellectual activities across the globe.

In contrast, many anti-capitalist movements already trying to move in the direction of commoning in production and sharing in exchange have little sense of money as a barrier, emphasising community control of it rather than avoidance (Mellor 2010, 2016—this issue). All this despite widespread experimentation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with cooperatives working within the conventional market and centring on primary and secondary production and the tertiary financial sector, clearly showing exactly how debilitating and dangerous market values are in constraining choices based on social and environmental values.

Furthermore, many radical adherents and edgy practical activists experimenting with socialist, anarchist or degrowth projects today regard money as a common-sense—not simply capitalist—tool, even if warily. As such alternative currencies and community banks abound with the intent of assisting in the struggle for post-capitalism. Unfortunately, such practitioners—like those in the wider Social and Solidarity Economy community—lack clarity when it comes to money, production and exchange (Nelson 2013). Associated theorists do little better in creating arguments to develop rich discourse.

In *Postcapitalism: A Guide to our Future*, UK economics journalist Paul Mason (2015) talks of

instituting an “Office of the Non-Market Economy, tasked to nurture all businesses where free stuff is produced” but at the same time cautions “we should not fetishize the non-profit aspect of things”: “the postcapitalist form of the co-op would try to expand non-market, non-managed, non-money-based activity against the baseline of market activity it starts from.” Double-speak? The market is—or is not?—the source of all good. Mainstream socialist and anarchist works concentrate on democratic planning where money is deprioritised or repurposed in hazy ways. For instance, the Parecon (“participatory economy”) model is often considered to side-step money but, in fact, relies on monetary income to reward public work (Albert 2014). Ecosocialist Michael Löwy (2015) correctly criticises the supposedly money-free “participatory economy” approach specifically for falling back on logarithms and pricing in economistic ways. Yet Löwy neither clarifies nor details how money will or will not be used in his own highly political discussion of democratic (vs elitist and bureaucratic) socialist planning.

This article argues against any common-sense logic that money can assist in socialist transformation and urges greater clarity in associated discourse, as follows. An analysis of capitalist operations shows that growth is not simply a characteristic tendency of capitalism but rather an essential outgrowth of its deficiencies. Marx saw these deficiencies as fundamental and indicated that the end of capitalism was an end to “money” in Part I of *Capital*; money is not a tool but a social relationship reproducing inequity, competition, distrust and alienation. Capitalists and capitalism are inconceivable and, in practical terms, impossible without money; money refusal and the development and defence of non-monetary forms of livelihood amount to a continuous critique of capital and demonstration of alternative (or at least “hybrid”) socialist forms. In fact, contemporary resistance movements have grown constructive skills to move beyond money—as well as beyond capitalism—in a practical development of “green materialism.” What remains is wide-ranging discourse on moving beyond money sooner rather than later. The final section sketches a non-market ecosocialist vision.

Growth

Trade and production for trade ultimately depend on some singular measure combining a means of exchange and a store of value, in order for capitalist managers to compare traded goods and services, and to account for and guide making their production as “efficient” as possible, i.e. specifically efficient in abstract monetary terms. Acting as the grand comparator, the universal

unit of account is a central enabler of the capitalist dynamics of competition, efficiency, profit and growth — the hub of the capitalist wheel. This is the social imaginary around which all goods and services are evaluated. Without it the individual capitalist, particular sectors and capital in general could not manage and their accounts as $M \rightarrow M'$.

While it is reasonable to criticise capitalists for making seemingly unreasonable profits, capitalist growth is a more complex process than a simple expression of personal greed, power and the protection of self-interests. Production for trade forces capitalists to act in ways that perpetuate and exaggerate the expansion of capitalism both intensively and extensively. Production for the market is so uncertain that the only way of maximising security is to seek as much money and lose as little money as possible in trade. In as much as capitalists depart from that principle they heighten their risks of losing money (capital) and becoming bankrupt. Lowering production or keeping it stable is not simply counter-intuitive but also carries high risks of economic suicide for capitalists who try to follow such a course. Competition through use of money forces cost-cutting and maximising chances for greater profit irrespective of many damaging qualitative, social and environmental consequences.

Producing in private competing firms to trade, i.e. for money, means unending growth; a growth economy is intrinsic to the dynamic of market economies. Economic growth is the expression of generalised profit-making, universalising an individual capitalist's aims: $M \rightarrow M' \rightarrow M''$. Private companies compete with one another in the market to make the most profit and gain competitive advantage. The competitiveness and secrecy of the capitalist firm pressures all to sell as much as they can, expand their market, and demand as high a price per unit as consumers can bear. At the same time, cutting any cost of production, whether wages, materials, equipment, workspaces or the time it takes for production, is optimal for profit making because producer–consumers or outright consumers are likely to purchase the cheapest amongst similar use values.

This kind of purely monetary cost cutting leads to a myth of generalised “efficiency” in capitalism. But this is solely abstract monetary efficiency—often conflicting with social and environmental needs or only achieving social or environmental efficiencies coincidentally. While production for trade occurs in a competitive environment, given that asking prices need to be attractive to potential buyers, this bottom line pressure impacts on both environmental (sustainability) values and social values such as wages.

Productive activities are always interconnected with various chains and networks, some supplying inputs, others buying outputs. Businesses operate in an insecure environment when it comes to prices, supplies and markets for their goods and services. This is where capitalism is a game and, like all games, involves skill, knowledge, experience and luck. The profit imperative is associated with uncertainties around input and output prices, especially future prices. Because of all the uncertainties in the game of capitalism, owner–managers are forced to set an asking price which is likely to be the maximum current price that purchasers are likely to be prepared to pay. Thus, the incessant focus on trade, making of profits and expanding production for trade under capitalism, the escalation of private ownership and social reproduction of monetary values, all of which contributes to growth in monetary terms. Growth is not optional but rather implicit in the ordinary everyday running of capitalism.

Furthermore, while there are models—such as Marx’s “simple commodity production”—that theorise over a stably reproducing economy of producer–traders who, say, receive a ‘fair’ reward, no such mode of production exists in practice. Rather, similar real models, such as peasant markets, tend to be reliant on yet marginal to a capitalist or non-capitalist mode. This is significant because certain discourses, such as those on fair trade, float the vision of an ideal stable state of reasonable charges and remuneration to all. This assumption flies in the face of the essential characteristics and dynamic of free trade—independent moves, haggling and competition—expressed in prices, including for labour.

Profit making has driven capitalist practices and the compulsion to expand, such as colonialism and neo-colonialism resulting in underdevelopment in an uneven modern world system (Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989). Increasingly since the 1960s, the combined effect of planetary limits, population growth, multiple kinds of capitalist activities and hyper-consumerism has made our life on Earth unsustainable — leading to calls for stabilising and rationalising market production to conform to peoples’ basic needs. Yet, the imperative for profit making and growth make it impossible to establish or maintain the kinds of models floated as solutions, such as a stable no-growth or a steady state economy (CASSE undated) or even the type of transitional strategy of degrowth proposed by, say D’Alisa et al. (2014). To achieve no expansion and necessary reduction, we would need to transcend the capitalist practice of competitively producing for the market to make profits, i.e. working consistently and uniformly, $M \rightarrow M'$.

Even replacing typical capitalist enterprises with “not-for-profit” cooperatives, as advocated by

those calling themselves Post Growth (MacLurcan 2016), will not actually extricate us from a profit-making system or growth economy. So-called non-profit enterprises aim to make a profit but distribute it in ways that depart from normal business practice — following the guidelines of, therefore privileged, cooperative members, which might mean expanding the enterprise and/or distributing the profits to stakeholders or communities of interest. Like those following voluntary simplicity in an over-consuming society, businesses practicing degrowth (read as making less money) make themselves wholly vulnerable to market forces, in which case we risk losing more control over means of production rather than appropriating more.

Reforms simply based on substituting conventional companies with non-profit cooperatives fails to address the unsustainable drive to growth, social inequities associated with distribution according to prices, and generalised environmental problems in avoiding and minimising social and environmental costs arising from most kinds of production for trade. Throughout the history of capitalism there have been benevolent employers, environmentally aware and concerned owners and managers, and people who have argued for the state to regulate for social and environmental standards, but all market-based activities need to respect rules of the market, the monetary discipline of capital and, thus, drive growth.

Finally, capitalism is characterised by conflict between capitalists and workers whose interests, however, seem to coincide under conditions of strong growth which, in turn, becomes yet another systemic pressure for growth. Growth is not only a characteristic tendency of capitalism but also an essential outgrowth of a key deficiency. Capitalism has no operating processes for stability or reducing production. There can be no genuinely socialist economy that would allow production to wax and wane according to people's and Earth's needs — no steady state economy, no degrowth economy — with production and exchange based on monetary principles. Growth — growing investment — is innate to monetary economies, i.e. to capitalism.

Indeed, growth, competition and profit imply expansive and intensive drives to manage more and more people and to artificially transform non-human nature. Capitalist practices approach, distort and package use values using the dominating framework of market values, prices, exchange values, which amounts not only to an assault on nature but also to most of us who are simply either cogs in, or powerlessly marginalised from, capitalism. Today, globally, we witness over-consumption, massive waste and obesity alongside food shortages, starvation, famine and absolute poverty.

From this perspective, the compulsion to make profits that result in growth can be seen as an effect of trying to overcome the weaknesses of a monetary economy—deficiencies that arise from the lack of collective control over, indeed secrecy of, privatised production, competition and associated marketing and waste together with the insecurities and vagaries around the sufficiency of money as private savings of credit, all contributing to anxieties around having as much money as possible. Meanwhile, paradoxically, pro-capitalist ideologies—such as neo-liberalism—promote such growth as capitalism’s strength.

Money is a Social Relationship

Following a previous draft in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (“*A Contribution*”) Karl Marx 1970/1859, 28) starts *Capital I* by examining the cell of capitalism, the commodity, which is simultaneously a “use value” and an “exchange value.”² He explains that all use values can be expressed quantitatively, for instance apples can be weighed in kilograms and measured in centimetres and compared with one another, but that commodities are brought into a market relationship with one another via their exchange value, their price, with money as the “common denominator.” Significantly, this relationship is actually between the first and second owners of the commodities. Marx unpacks the critical contrast between the qualities or purposes of a good or service, its use value, and the dominant “quantitative relation,” its exchange value. (Marx 1970/1859, 28.)

Marx considered that this introduction would “present the greatest difficulty” to readers because money had been an unfathomable concept for longer than two millennia and given that “the commodity-form of the product of labour” and “value-form of the commodity” took the “money-form” (Marx 1976/1867, 89–90). Indeed, later, Louis Althusser (1971, 79–80, 85–86) counselled worker-readers to skip Marx’s first couple of chapters. I regard this the worst possible advice and, instead, suggest dwelling on them. As autonomist Marxist Harry Cleaver (1979) ably shows in *Reading Capital Politically*, they provide the building blocks for a revolutionary analysis of contemporary capitalism — a point further emphasised by autonomist John Holloway (2013).

The first part of *Capital* not only introduces Marx’s focus but the essence of his analytic approach, which he believed of great strategic significance. For instance, in the process of

producing for trade and working specifically for money, work becomes standardised and interchangeable: “uniform, homogenous, simple labour,” “in which the individual characteristics of the workers are obliterated,” in short “*abstract general labour*” (italics as in original). Therefore, all at once, in producing for trade and in monetary exchange, the standard for the quantitative relation comes to represent “materialised labour” and “the qualitative difference between their use-values is eliminated.” (Marx 1970/1859, 29) Furthermore, in production for trade, managers and consumers alike are submitted to the marketplace discipline of money. The market obliterates the human agency, which has produced the commodity; objectifies the socially necessary labour-time as value per se; and, through the price, defines the commodity in terms of its social wealth, thereby eliminating any sense of the use value either of the commodity or the labour that created it. In one stroke, we readily understand both why capitalists do not appreciate environmental and social values and why they never will.

We also appreciate the alienation implicit in production for trade; in capitalism heightened individuality means powerlessness. Monetary value is the hub of market dynamics, dominating personal and social decision-making over production and exchange, distracting and subverting value associated with needs of humans and Earth. Marx’s analysis heightens the absurdity of contemporary efforts to try to make prices reflect environmental values, as in carbon and water trading schemes or pricing forests and other environmental “assets.” Similarly, the pointlessness of calculating and trying to institute wages for housework, as well as the irony of speaking of “social capital,” “human capital” and “natural capital”. In my opinion, difficult as it might be to grasp, this painstaking ethnography at the start of *Capital I* is Marx at his finest.

Marx reveals the absurdity of market values, shows how completely distinct production for the market and trade is from a genuine effort to meet basic human needs, and iterates use values as the roots, the ground of, exchange values—in contrast to their fetishisation in the market, in prices. Rather than ignore nature, as he has often been accused of doing, Marx pre-empted current analyses by 150 years showing that market players ignore and degrade the natural environment. Furthermore, Marx’s (1976/1867, 173) political conclusion was that:

The religious reflections of the real world can ... vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves to him in a transparent and natural form. The veil is not removed

... until it becomes production between freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control.

We need to work towards production and exchange beyond the market and its monetary principle, integrating direct control and socialist values of respect, community and solidarity.

Careful readings of Marx clearly show that money, not only capital, is a barrier to instituting and maintaining socialism. Non-market socialists are accused—especially by other socialists—as being “utopian socialists”—meaning we argue for an impractical road to, or kind of, communism. In fact, Marx opposed those reformers who thought that they could simply redefine money, issue it on different terms, regulate it in different ways, or give goods and services prices before they reached the market which, he showed was impossible or a contradiction in terms (Marx 1970/1859, 76–86). He called *them* “utopian socialists,” i.e. people who underestimated money as the “ultimate product of commodity circulation” and simultaneously “the first form of appearance of capital” (Marx 1976/1867, 247). Marx especially criticised utopian socialist Proudhon for not appreciating that capitalism had evolved from money as a chicken did from an egg. Proudhon thought the social system could be altered by monetary and price reform. Marx retorted that democratisation of credit was impossible because money, credit and debt were tools of exploitation and control. In effect, a gun cannot be used to make love.

I have described elsewhere how, in the early years of Cuban communist and Soviet power, party elites seriously discussed instituting a moneyless economy (Nelson 2011, 32–44). Many of the Russian leaders, such as Trotsky and Stalin, expected money would disappear as communism developed (Bettleheim 1968, 60; Rosdolsky 1977, 130). In Russia, they decided to abolish money but not monetary accounting. The debate on replacing a monetary unit of account with one based on labour, in terms of time or energy used, occupied an enormous volume of literature in 1920 and 1921, and was influenced by the work of Austrian economist Otto Neurath.

However, any advance to a moneyless communism halted when all state industries were directed to follow principles of precise economic accounting, including demanding money for taxes, and state-produced goods and services. This renewed the reliance on cash, not merely money as a unit of account, and renewed freedom to trade, and exchange goods and services at a profit. While Lenin (1973, 184–5) acknowledged that this would “inevitably lead to... a revival of capitalist wage-slavery,” he referred to the New Economic Policy as merely “retreating in order

to make better preparations for a new offensive against capitalism.” But, his tactical retreat became entrenched as permanent practice.

A great economic debate occurred in Cuba in the mid-1960s, partly around whether or how to diminish the role of money — also described more fully, replete with sources, elsewhere (Nelson 2011, 32–44). It suffices here to report that, in Cuba, Che Guevara followed Marx’s position that ‘value’ relates directly to abstract labour, not to wants or available resources. Guevara decided that administered prices involving state sectors were not market prices, therefore the law of value did not apply; planning should not mimic market forces but planners should consciously take non-economic factors into account, thus undermining the law of value. Belgian economist Ernest Mandel supported Guevara’s position. Che Guevara believed that socialism was the negation of money and commercial relations, but lost the debate with his presidential comrade Fidel Castro, who agreed with abolishing money some time in the future, but not immediately. While Charles Bettelheim supported Castro in the debate, he argued that Soviet communism was in fact state capitalism because it used monetary economic calculation (Bettelheim 1968).

Non-market socialists conclude that maintaining money facilitates management by an elite and inequity in remuneration as well as failing to address disconnects between price signals and use of nature to advance environmental sustainability. Yet the questionable approach followed in Cuba and Russia is mimicked in the recent history of the Catalan Integral Cooperative (CIC), which I select to critique specifically because I regard it highly, as one of the most advanced and impressive current experiments in the Global North.

CIC anti-capitalist Eric Duran—underground since early 2013 but heavily active in the cooperative—argued, in an interview conducted in March 2014 (Gorenflo et al. 2014), that its intent has been “to generate a self-managed free society outside law, State control, and the rules of the capitalist market” yet the “eco” currency developed by the group reproduces market characteristics such as “freely assigned” prices. In that interview, Duran advanced that:

The technology behind the blockchain, on top of the concept of a decentralized P2P [peer-to-peer] currency, represents a great leap forward on the road to decentralization of power, and we think it holds the power to make the current banking and financial systems obsolete ...

With this in mind, Bitcoin, Litecoin and Freicoin are accepted currencies in the CIC for the payment of various common services. In time, we may understand the possibilities technology has given us to create our own cryptocurrency, which will incorporate the features we feel are essential for any community currency...

Based in this process, we could say that the integral cooperative promotes an economy “with” a market, but it’s not a “market economy”. Within our movement, economic activity is subordinated to political process, or, put another way, the assembly takes precedence over the market.

While the decentralised and horizontal CIC assembly structure in Catalan is a decisive advance on the Cuban and Russian political structures, the key warning non-market socialists would make is that use of money threatens to create a competing, or centralising, power base within the complex structure of assembly decisions and that direct decision-making over what to produce, how to produce and for whom obviates needs for currency, a unit of account or credit. In as much as some engagement is necessary with the mainstream economy in the transition, this is probably best approached using some version of a “common purse” as CIC apparently does with respect to education and health.

Market Democracy And Green Materialism³

Acknowledging money as a tool of power and the organising principle of capitalism leads to the conclusion that the most successful non-violent revolutionary strategies to undermine capitalism take over production and trade by instituting direct democracy in money-free ways. Such strategies sidestep, challenge and oppose capitalism on its failure to recognise, respect and fulfil basic human and Earth needs and, conversely, must offer constructive models to achieve this vision. But how might this be achieved? It not only requires reappropriation of Earth’s resources but also instituting quite different forms of social decision-making and using Earth sustainably for our basic needs. We— projects such as CIC—are already experimenting in these directions. This section outlines an ecosocialist concept of “green materialism” demonstrating how anti-capitalist movements today correspond to Marx’s “new materialism” as famously elaborated in his eleven *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) and how the defining characteristics of anti-capitalist currents offer the bases for replacing the organising principle of our society, money, by direct democracy.

Marx's work very self-consciously and conscientiously approached the world as full of potential for a future that breaks with the present, not just the past. His views were based on a philosophy of revolutionary being and practice, a concept of active agency. With such agency growing numbers of activists have become conscious of — and dedicated to — practices aligned to visions of an environmentally concerned revolutionary socialism, “ecosocialism” (Michael Löwy 2015: xi). Ecosocialists redefine the contemporary conjuncture and potential, and break with parliamentary democratic politics to adopt a holistic field of action against the state and the market. Their direction runs parallel with Marx's Thesis 10 in *Theses on Feuerbach*: “The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity”. Ecosocialism aims to replace individualistic, bourgeois society with a collective and creative sense of humanity.

Marx's “new materialism,” a “green materialism,” is essential to a neo-socialist, ecosocialist, vision and strategies of anti-capitalist movements today. Contra climate change sceptics and liberal market fundamentalists who argue that ‘there is no alternative’, Marx's materialism was a form of philosophical realism acknowledging a world ‘out there’ beyond individual or collective thought control. The “new materialism” contrasted to the “old materialism” in Thesis 10 was sensuous, practical, real, critical and revolutionary. Marx's approach integrated two realities, our natural and, by extension, artificial environment and our social reality. So a green materialist perspective points to the strategic need to address two challenges simultaneously: on the one hand the ecological and, by extension, artificially built environment and, on the other hand, our social organisation — so we can fulfil the basic needs of everyone while taking into account the regenerative limits and ecological needs of Earth.

The Occupy movement has been impressive because of its spontaneity and generality, demonstrating a broad disenchantment with representative democracy, i.e. market-based economies, across the world. The general assembly models, endorsement of horizontalism, direct engagement between crowds and speakers, the naming of the “1%” against the “99%,” and “occupy” identifying their chief method or demand, definitely put capitalists on alert. Of course, Occupy did not invent such approaches and methods but rather brought to the fore techniques developed both within a century-long tradition of solidarity, anarchism and socialism and highlighting models developed since the 1960s with the rise of movements such as the new left, women's liberation, independence, black rights, the peace and non-violence movements and many environmental struggles. For instance, many women's liberation associations organised in

the 1970s by way of regular general assemblies and horizontally with working groups and revolving coordinators (in contrast to feminist associations with conventional organisation). Furthermore, Occupy was inspired and supported by those experimenting with sharing economies, social and solidarity economies, alternative forms of production and gift exchange, fair trade and simple living.

The Occupy movement evolved and spread from protests, mid-May 2011, when Movimiento 15-M Indignados protesting against both austerity policies and their political “representatives” in city squares across Spain decided to occupy them. Also, 2011 was a year of flourishing democratic uprisings, now known as the “Arab Spring.” When, in mid-September 2011, Occupy Wall Street erupted in Zuccotti Park in New York City’s financial district, the protest spread through the media spawning Occupy movements in dozens of countries and across sectors and issues. If Occupy in all its variants has seemed as motley a crew as those struggling in the Spanish Civil War—promoting all kinds of reforms and revolutionary ideas—it remains a central reference point, an outcome and platform for contemporary social and environmental movements. Thus, the initial excitement that, with Syriza, “Occupy may be about to win its first national election” (Weschler 2015) and the disappointment that the Syriza Party and anti-austerity movement diverged and proved an all too brief “confluence ... a mere marriage of convenience that ended in a bitter divorce” (Karyotis 2015).

Typified by the Mexican Zapatista, anti-globalisation, Occupy and ecosocialist movements, anti-capitalism is often characterised as a break with the traditional left rather than a flowering of Marxism. The narrow interpretation of the traditional left reads Marxism as workerist, organising in parties and communist states. This is strange if only because precursors to the twentieth century Mexican, Russian, Spanish and Cuban socialist uprisings included anarchist, syndicalist, peasant and national liberationists. Similarly, the new left of the 1960s and 1970s was characterised by environmental, peace, women’s liberationist and autonomist strains. All these currents argued with and against narrow revolutionary organisation and intent. Today global resistance, radical ecology and left variants of identity politics continue and develop that heritage.

Argentinian Ezequiel Adamovsky (2011, 89–124) distinguishes current anti-capitalism from the traditional Left because of its focus on ten ways of operating:

1. Anti-power, counter-power; “disempowering’ the state” rather than “‘taking over’ it”

2. Autonomously—"the expansion of *power-to* undermines *power-over*"
3. With presence: "Each time they create self-managed, non-commercial, and egalitarian spaces, the revolution is taking place."
4. Using horizontalist structures, i.e. non-hierarchical assembly-based organisations sharing knowledge and skills
5. In de-centred ways—constantly re-negotiated voluntary and flexible networks
6. Integrating a multitude of types of people and liberationist causes
7. Strategically, responding to specifics; learning through listening rather than laying down a general program and propagating a line
8. In local–global—*vs* national state-focused—struggles against capitalism
9. Using direct action and civil disobedience—being the point/power
10. Developing a constructive creative culture *vs* an intransigent them–us culture.

Taking a big-picture view of these ten descriptors, three points stand out. First, anti-capitalist movements have a characteristic unity of purpose and organisation. Second, their common characteristics are incredibly ecological in both manifestation and cohesion; they reflect an ecologist's holistic perception of the way the natural world functions as interlocking, antagonistic yet balancing aspects, self-sufficient and dynamic. Third, this evolution of Left activism is remarkably close to Marx's radical view of what it really means to be human.

Therefore, in resisting capitalism, it is useful to refer to Marx's logic not just his profound economic analysis. Marx's methods can be easily and usefully applied to our current political, economic and environmental conjuncture—a conjuncture in which a critical climb in carbon emissions is leading to potentially cataclysmic climate change. His philosophy is appropriate and significant still—arguably even more so—today. Marx's philosophy developed contra civil society perspectives that markets and the state are the natural way of things and the way things ought to be. Marx's "new materialism" envisioned scientists and activists who saw the world without capitalist blinkers or religious distortions, humbly responsible for their collective being, continuously re-aligning thinking with changes in their political (i.e. economic) and environmental realities.

Marx's new materialists today, anti-capitalists, are what I refer to as "green materialists," all recognising a world out there, a world that we only partly understand, that we are always in the process of trying to understand better so that we can improve it. My reason for applying this

green materialist framework is to show continuity between socialists of the nineteenth century and anti-capitalist twenty-first century movements. Marx's materialism was a form of "philosophical realism" acknowledging a world "out there" beyond individual or collective thought control, a belief in "the existence of something other than the mind and its contents" (Ruben 1977, 4–5). That is, we sense a world of which we are a part, a world of things both separate from us and associated with us in various ways.

Marx developed this radical, revolutionary materialist view of the world and our role in it as a reaction to strongly prevailing conservative views that tended to rationalise traditional, religious and capitalist ways of being and operating. Contemporary examples of anti-materialism are climate change deniers who argue that there is no observable evidence of global warming and liberal market fundamentalists who argue that "there is no alternative." The sources of such "phenomenologist" views is the mind and ideals—as if we are all-seeing, all-controlling masters of the universe who can simply decide that the world will take on a particular form, and it will.⁴ Capitalism reinforces idealism as money allows people to invest in wondrous visions, which are, in fact, realised by workers whose creations are taken from them in exchange for money. Investors see the world as a blank sheet. All they need to do is to throw out some money and *voilà!*— gods creating the world, as we know it. Nonsensical views of climate change deniers and pro-capitalists parallel characteristics of the idealistic "old materialism" that Marx challenged.

Marx's "new materialism" was sensuous, practical, real, critical and revolutionary. Furthermore, John Bellamy Foster (2000, 1) argues that "the development of both materialism and science promoted—indeed made possible—ecological ways of thinking." Ecology focuses on the interrelations between organisms and their environments, between us and all other beings and matter on Earth. Marx insisted in his writings and politicking that labour and nature produced wealth, using a metabolic perspective of economic activity (Foster 2000, 168). Indeed, Russian Marxist Bukharin (1969, 104) would write pithily that:

Nothing could be more incorrect than to regard nature from the teleological point of view: man, the lord of creation, with nature created for his use, and all things adapted to human needs. As a matter of fact, nature often falls upon the "lord of creation" in such a savage manner that he is obliged to admit here superiority. It has taken man centuries of bitter struggle to place his iron bit in nature's mouth.

Just as Marx saw a distinctive and nurturing world “out there,” he was especially curious as to the particular way that the capitalist economy worked beyond our control, as if behind our backs. In other words, there was not simply a physical, but also a social, behavioural “other” or politico-economic reality. This effect was particularly heightened once we instituted money as the organising principle of our society, creating a world of use value and exchange value, joined and opposing like two sides of the one coin. This is why Marx referred to money as the “form” of capital, while its content was the key dynamic between worker and capitalist. Note that Marx uses “form” here in an intrinsic way. We cannot extricate this monetary form from its capitalist relation any more than we can talk about a self beyond our bodies — only an idealist would do that.

Foster (2000, 168) points out: “it was the contradiction between use value and exchange value engendered by capitalism that Marx considered to be one of the foremost contradictions of the entire dialectic of capital.” By placing monetary values on nature as property, on effort as work and things as commodities, we reframed the world and reprioritised its contents. Capitalism forces us to subjugate social and environmental values (use values) to abstract, magical—even godly—monetary values (Nelson 1999). Socio-economic inequality is intricately bound to the monetary dynamic of more and less. Similarly, the values necessary to account for ecological sustainability are eliminated, dominated or mangled in a world where monetary values, prices and profits, rule. Thus, today, we have to address two crises of “the money-system” or “the money power” that we call capitalism. The first crisis requires us to fulfil everyone’s basic needs rather than continue living in an unequal world of overconsumption and starvation. Indeed, the second crisis demands us to take account of the regenerative limits and ecological needs of the Earth.

The no-money line has a philosophical and political position of confronting capitalists with the fact that their system is neither environmentally nor socially efficient and, in fact, has disturbed our balance with nature so much as to have set us on the course of species destruction. This, and associated points related to fulfilling all people’s needs—but drawing the line at unsustainable wants—offers the ethical justification for recovering the means of production under collective control. As we feel confident of replacing capitalism with a workable improvement and establish collectively governed hybrids and models to demonstrate such, the transition is on its way.

Marx’s analysis of capitalism was not just accurate but also profound. It was a deep analysis based on a philosophical appreciation of the risks to humanity of being falsely alienated from nature

and being forced to work for money and capitalists. Instead, Marx argued, we could collectively engage directly with nature, as in organising as commoners producing and exchanging for collective sufficiency — ditching the organising principle and power of money on which capitalism is formed (Nelson and Timmerman 2011).

A Non-Market Ecosocialist Vision

Marx was averse to elaborating on how socialism might operate. Indeed, it is a principle of deep direct people power that this kind of detail would be popularly determined rather than simply signing up to some pre-determined vision. Yet such decision-making needs to begin in participatory discourse involving both strategic and end-game considerations. Today, the urgency of environmental deterioration of Earth and heightened economic, social and political crises means that anti-capitalists ought to be hotly debating where we are going and how activist campaigns fit with how we plan to get there.

There has been a rash of journalistic proposals published in the last few years — such as Paul Mason's (2015) *Postcapitalism* — though the overwhelming response to such has been theoretic and rhetorical. On the ground, in the North especially, it is concerning that so much activism proliferates in a theoretical grey area. Much neglect of theory comes from a distrust in narrowness or being told what to do, in short, a distrust and lack of understanding of theoretical discourse as potential action in and of itself. A collectively governed society requires discourse to inform collective decision-making on future (and past) activity. Theories and engagement between activists as theorists are critical frameworks for communicating, driving action and reflecting in constructively critical ways on past action.

Despite, or perhaps because of, lack of action beyond simple and fragmented demands related to specific issues and areas, there is a popular feeling that capitalism is bankrupt and our future on Earth is wholly jeopardised. Tackling climate change is just the tip of the iceberg of broad spread ecosystem catastrophes expressed, for instance, in deforestation, overfishing, needless cropping and grazing for overconsumption of meat, and the collapse of bee colonies. Interestingly, anti-capitalists have common approaches but little in the way of a common vision; we have certain common principles, yes, but no concrete holistic image towards which to work.

To contribute to the kind of discussion we need to have to promote cohesion and cooperation, I simply sketch a non-market ecosocialist vision without practical examples or discussion of the transition due to the demands of space. I refer readers to the limited practical examples spelled out in the chapters on the Twin Oaks Community (Virginia, US) and Catalan squatters in the collection *Life Without Money*, which stand as potential transitional models (Kincade et al. 2011 and Cattaneo 2011). This sketch is not intended to be a summary draft for a manifesto but a response to the common question: “How on earth could we operate a society without money?” At the same time, I urge activists to consider the critical need to work towards unity of vision. I am not calling for a false unity or unity for unity’s sake but, unless we apply ourselves in a concerted way to change our practices in systemic ways, we have no future as a species.

Following Adamovsky’s (2011, 89–124) ten descriptors listed above, imagine a global network of collectively sufficient, cell-like communities each responsible for the sustainability of the local environments that they live off. Imagine each diverse community empowered, relatively autonomous, present, organised horizontally internally, networked in seamless ways locally and globally, caring for the Earth. Collectively satisfying everyone’s basic needs, we would be fulfilling our real human potential as creative active beings. In short, the defining characteristics of anti-capitalist currents offer the democratic and materialist bases for replacing money as the organising principle of society.

This simple vision of cell-like communities of variable sizes based on a bioregional rationale, assumes that the most direct and efficient form of socialism requires as-local-as-is-feasible production focusing on people’s basic needs, implying that future distribution is decided simultaneously with collectively agreeing on productive goals and ways of achieving them. Say, each person contributes a number of hours to collective production as a community obligation and, in return, has their basic needs met. Each household guesstimates their basic needs, say annually, while working groups report on the capacity of the local area and capability of locals to fulfil various needs. As this system is established, this planning mainly relies on updating previous calculations and taking account of seasonal, natural factors. There is similar communication and negotiation on goods and services which rely on produce from neighbouring or as near-as-possible communities. Essentially the plan for production is collectively formed and avenues for and end point distribution are inbuilt; we are producing corn, apples, solar electricity, potable water and towels for particular, already identified, householders.

This is not barter but better described as a non-equivalent exchange or even better as a social “compact”. Decision-making focuses on bio-physical, environmental and social measures and values; it is like non-monetary peasant and remnant contemporary household production and consumption. Complex bio-physical and social efficiency is paramount in limiting throughput in production and associated exchanges; just as certain groups Indigenous forest dwellers have (had) customs for living off their territory in a sustainable manner, non-market ecosocialist settlements use commoning and sharing to reproduce their needs, live from and replenish their local environs. Money has no place where grassroots political decision-making replaces production for trade and market exchanges.

Similarly, so-called “alternative” currencies that serve functions of legal tender or the ‘universal equivalent’ on which capitalism depends, are redundant. In non-monetary socialism, reward for work is the security of having life-long basic needs met with continuous input in making decisions on both local production and the terms of exchange (compacts) with as-local-as-feasible neighbour-producers. There is personal, but no private, property: the entire Earth is commons with clear, efficient and universal principles and terms for commoning. Such a vision suggests that advancing specifically non-monetary socialism — consciously breaking with monetary production and exchange — is of crucial strategic significance. When a no-money line is followed through in a socialist transition there is no ground from which opposition can mount a capitalist counter-revolution. In as much as experimental and founding models convince their members and observers of their efficacy in meeting basic, social and environmental needs then the revolution will spread and succeed.

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¹ This article draws on several previous papers of mine, most heavily on two recent ones: "A non-market ecosocialist exit from capitalism" presented at the 7th Annual Conference in Political Economy:

International Trends and National Differences, 7–9 September 2016 at the School of Economics and Management, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, and “Non-Monetary Degrowth is Strategically Significant” presented at the 5th International Degrowth Conference: Walking the Meaningful Transformations, August 30–September 3, 2016, in Budapest, Hungary.

² This section draws from Nelson A. and Timmerman F. (2012) “Money or socialism?” Paper presented at the 2012 Historical Materialism Australasia Conference, Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, 20–21 July.

³ This section draws heavily from a paper, “New Materialism is Green Materialism” presented at the Historical Materialism Australasia 2015: Reading Capital, Class & Gender Today conference, University of Sydney, 17–18 July.

⁴ Arguing contra idealist interpretations, Russian Marxist Nikolai Bukharin (1969, 54) wrote that it was clear as day that mind was “the offspring” of matter: “A zero cannot think; nor can a doughnut — or the hole in it — think; nor can “mind” think without matter.../ Matter existed before the appearance of a thinking human.”