

BOOK REVIEW OPEN ACCESS

Is it Really Too Late? On Recent Debates About the Climate Crisis, Capitalism, and the Question of Transition

How We Sold Our Future: The Failure to Fight climate Change by J. Beckert, Polity Press, 2025

Overshoot: How the World surrendered to Climate Breakdown by A. Malm and W. Carton, Verso, 2024

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1 | Introduction

2024 was the warmest year ever recorded with a 1.6°C global average temperature increase while emissions are still rising. Compared to the first Trump presidency, the second feels like a tectonic shift with regards to how the unfolding climate crisis is portrayed in Western political discourse and politically dealt with under heavy influence of almost a decade of Trumpism and the rise of the far right. The liberal political agenda of ‘green growth’ has been watered down under nationalist pressures to encompass energy security and autonomy—as in the EU—or even completely abandoned—as in the US. Yet, it would be misleading to read this shift as the ascent of ‘climate denialism’ into the echelons of power. It rather resembles a situation of intentional neglect of the ruling classes with regards to climate mitigation. In fact, despite the ‘anti-climate science rhetoric’ of Trump, the unfolding climate crisis has increasingly moved to the heart of his nationalist agenda; it is just read through the racist articulations of immigration swarms, bordering, and militarism. Recall that one of the main reasons behind Trump’s obsession with Greenland was that the *melting* arctic would open frozen sea corridors with Russia and new sites for mineral extraction. This agenda is backed by an unprecedented concentration of wealth and power at the US American Tech-Finance-nexus within the core of global capitalism, where a small fraction of the capitalist classes holds significant control over unimaginable financial resources *and* the digital communication infrastructures spanning the planet. In other words, we find ourselves in the unstable world of escalating

wealth inequalities and capitalist competition where proposals of ‘green growth’-style climate mitigation are increasingly sidelined against the backdrop of military expansion and nationalist rivalries. Against this backdrop, another approach has taken centre stage: ‘adaptation’.

This essay discusses two books that speak to the question of whether ‘it is too late already’ to do anything about the climate crisis, albeit from very different perspectives. Both books foreground the need for a realistic political outlook by grappling with ‘the question of what makes up meaningful politics when catastrophe is already a fact’ (Malm and Carton 2024, 52). While the authors agree that what remains of effective mitigation would require a revolutionary overhaul of capitalism and that ‘green growth’ is an impossibility (in line with a large body of work in fields such as in eco-Marxism, e.g., Burkett 1999; Foster 2000), they identify different causes of the problem and come to very different conclusions of what is to be done.

However, this review argues that the question of whether ‘it is too late already’ for climate mitigation is distracting because both possible answers can be used to justify almost any political agenda (revolutionary or reactionary) from maintaining to overthrowing capitalism. It is a co-opted question that represents defeatism disguised as ‘scientific’ debate. Part of the problem is that the political implications that follow from both answers are often justified by reference to the (im-)possibility of the ‘revolution’. When we ask ‘if it is too late’ and answer with

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'yes', it is easy to rule out radical change by declaring a revolution to be unrealistic and thus impossible. If the answer is 'no', a political project that corresponds to the urgency of the unfolding crisis is difficult to imagine as anything but the necessary and desired Revolution—used as a shortcut, a placeholder for the messy and complicated question of how to make radical social change happen. This kind of magical thinking is fed by an abstract idea of revolution as a singular event of a mass uprising overthrowing the existing social order. The Revolution becomes the necessary *and* easy way out of the conundrum of what is to be done about the climate crisis. In other words, *what* is to be done is implicitly foregrounded at the expense of the crucial issue of *how* to make a revolutionary transition to overcome capitalism happen. Instead, I argue that sociological research should centre the question of 'how' when thinking about a revolutionary overhaul to address the climate crisis—in other words, thinking revolution as a concrete social and political *process* of transition—and suggest that durable democratic political organisations are part of the answer.

Beckert's (2025), *How We Sold Our Future: The Failure to Fight Climate Change*, suggests that 'it is too late' for effective climate mitigation. Its title hints already at the author's pessimistic outlook on the questions of what can and should be done about climate change. In an intellectual lineage that goes back to Talcott Parson's systems theory, Beckert's structural functionalist account does not identify any possibilities for transformative social change to overcome capitalism, and it remains sceptical that any alternative social system could be built on a less destructive relation to nature. This idealist account of capitalism as an economic system based on competing future-oriented narratives erases the material dimension of class conflict and instead reads social struggles as conflicts between different, all-encompassing abstract ideas. While the book recognizes that radical social change through the articulation of ideas about a more just and equitable society alone is impossible, it remains blind to the limits of its own theoretical assumptions premised on social stability. That is why, instead of the question of social change, the main concern of Beckert's book is the question of how to maintain social order under capitalism within the unfolding climate crisis.

Taking a more optimistic outlook than it seems from the book title, Malm and Carton's (2024) *Overshoot: How the World surrendered to Climate Breakdown* draws on a historical materialist framework that understands capitalism as based in a historically specific set of social relations and centres class conflict as the driver of history. Against this backdrop, the book explores 'overshoot' as an ideology legitimating the status quo based on the idea that a certain temperature limit (e.g., 1.5°C) could temporarily be exceeded because non-existent technologies would eventually help to remove emissions from the atmosphere and bring the temperature back down again within the initial limit. Since this reasoning renders all debates about temperature limits *ad absurdum*, the authors stress the necessity of a socialist revolution for which it could never be too late. This is because overthrowing capitalism is a historical necessity that has (if anything) become ever more urgent, particularly from the perspective of people in the peripheries who are suffering the most from the unfolding climate crisis. Accordingly, the book is concerned with finding revolutionary political possibilities to fundamentally challenge (and overcome) the current social order.

This review focuses on the books' perspectives on the question of whether 'it is already too late' for effective mitigation efforts, and the political implications that the authors derive from their answers to this question. But first let me clarify what I am referring to here. The question of whether 'it is too late already' has two answers which are both true and which stem from the physical reality of the unfolding climate crisis documented in consecutive IPCC reports and on which both books agree:

1. 'No, it can't be too late because it will only get worse': despite the already unfolding disastrous consequences of the climate crisis, those will only get worse the longer the concentration of GHG in the atmosphere increases.
2. 'Yes, it is, too late because it cannot be avoided anymore': climate change is *already* an unfolding crisis that will literally lead to more severe catastrophes the longer emissions continue (and even if emissions would be reduced to zero tomorrow, there is a time lag effect between the existing concentration of emissions and temperature response).

The seeds of the main political implications of both books are already contained in the functionalist dimensions of their (albeit very different) theoretical frameworks. While both books agree with (1), they ultimately slip into (2) to justify their opposed political implications: Beckert's book argues that it's too late for a revolutionary overhaul of capitalism because (2) it is too late for effectively mitigating the climate crisis. Malm & Carton argue that it's too late for anything *but* a Revolution conceived as an *event* or *rupture* because (2) would imply that there is no time left for seeking a *process* of transition to overcome capitalism.

By foreclosing the possibility of a *radical* transition—not in a liberal sense of 'green transition' but rather in the form of Poulantzas' (2000) 'democratic road to socialism'—both books sideline the pressing question of *how* to (re-)build mass movements on a democratically run, durable organizational basis that confronts the dominant classes and could enable the radical transformation of the state with the aim of overcoming capitalism. I argue that such a foreclosure is unhelpful and problematic (in the case of Beckert) or premature (in the case of Malm & Carton), and that the functionalist dimensions of the theoretical frameworks that help the authors to establish that foreclosure remain unconvincing. The structural functionalist interactions of society's subsystems in Beckert's account can only lead to political compromise because its theoretical framework neglects social conflict by default, and thus (in a self-defeating manner) also the possibility of a collective political subject that could radically challenge the capitalist order. In contrast, the functionalist dimension of Malm and Carton's account is characterized by a highly deterministic reading of global finance as an abstract and automatically unfolding process of money capital circulation depicted as serving the function to facilitate the breakdown of fossil capital. That is why the authors centre the ultimately misleading question of how to politically intervene in the global financial system to bring down capitalism.

Instead, this review proposes to recenter the question of transition in concrete, historical terms in sociological research on the climate crisis through a reengagement with the question of

the state (see Battistoni 2023)—a question that implicitly lurks behind both accounts. This analytical lens can help to foreground the social and political *process* of building Left political counterpower in a truly democratic and anti-imperialist manner, which is a necessary condition and strategic orientation for a chance of overcoming capitalism.

2 | Malm and Carton: Overshoot as Class Project

Malm & Carton's thesis is that 'Overshoot' represents an ideology as *class project* seeking to legitimize the continuation of fossil fuel extraction through foregrounding carbon removal, adaptation, and geoengineering as technological solutions to address the climate crisis while postponing actual mitigation efforts. The authors posit that cultural and political beliefs and values represent the ideological formation that reflects the underpinning material relations: 'it is class power that is dressed up in ideas' (p. 84). However, the book remains short on an explanation as to whether or how the 'constructivist Marxist' lens that the authors propose moves beyond the contested notions of ideology as 'false consciousness' or always already 'functioning' as to reproduce capitalist social relations. It also remains unclear what role (if any) the overcoming of ideological 'distortions' play in the spontaneous uprising of the masses to overthrow fossil capital. I will return to this point.

By taking this critical perspective on ideology, the book demonstrates how concepts such as 'temperature limit', 'carbon budget', or 'net zero' emerged as central building blocks of 'overshoot' as ideology by highlighting their historically contingent nature. It provides an excellent account of a dimension missing from Beckert's book: the politics of knowledge production in climate science. The book traces the ways in which scientists—in a move prompted by policy makers and welcomed by fossil capital—modelled a completely hypothetical amount of 'carbon removal' based on a speculative technology called 'Bioenergy, Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS)'. This technology did *not* (and still does not) exist but served to quantify the future removal of large amounts of CO₂ from the atmosphere to cancel out actual emissions. Temperature targets could thus be missed *because* this technology would suck and permanently store carbon from the air, reduce the concentration of CO₂, bring down the temperature, and thus finally meet the target initially set (the idea of 'overshoot'). Unsurprisingly, politicians and corporate executives loved the idea. Suddenly they could declare even more ambitious targets (1.5°C was born!) despite *rising* emissions: just include more BECCS in the underlying modelling! 'Through this sleight of hand, any given target could be both missed and met and any missing rationalised as part of the journey of meeting it, like Schrödinger's cat simultaneously alive and dead.' (p. 87). Overshoot functions by rendering the objectively required revolutionary overhaul of the capitalist system, to drastically cut emissions, an impossibility because it is portrayed as both 'too late already' *and* unnecessary since carbon removal would eventually save the day—and if not, 'we can't do anything' about it anymore (sorry, people in the peripheries!). Thus, Overshoot's function is 'antirevolutionary': to render revolution to abolish class relations as inconceivable and unnecessary.

The second part of the book conceptualizes the relations between fossil and financial capital to unpack 'the problem of asset stranding'. Based on an understanding of capital as 'value in motion, money always swimming through the world and swallowing it so as to make more of itself' (p. 106), the authors establish a deterministic account of money capital circulation as an abstract, automatically unfolding financial process flowing around the globe. Because share prices of fossil fuel companies are based on expected profits from *future* oil and gas production, the implementation of stringent climate policies to limit production would pulverize the share prices of Exxon, Shell, BP & co. From the liberal idea of the 'carbon bubble' the authors derive the deterministic assumption that if prices dropped in one part of the system, this would trigger investors to divest from other parts, or even to flee the fossil fuel sector altogether—a looming market panic of unprecedented proportions. Thus, a political intervention is possible *anywhere* in the geographically dispersed configuration of fossil capital because of how the authors depict *global* finance as serving the function of facilitating the breakdown in an undifferentiated manner. This functionalist reading of finance leads them to focus on the question of how to intentionally trigger this 'climate Minsky moment', and how to leverage the resulting crisis to overcome capitalism altogether.

3 | Beckert: Maintaining Social Order

The thesis of Beckert's book is that '[t]he power and incentive structures of capitalist modernity and its governing mechanisms are blocking a solution to climate change' (p. 4). To analyse the 'social model of growth' (p. 121) identified as the driver of capitalist modernity, Beckert draws on a modified Habermasian framework distinguishing between the 'system' and the 'lifeworld'. These are distinct social spheres with their own operating logics—profit and growth versus unselfish, ethical behaviour oriented towards 'the commons' as per Elinor Ostrom. The system—constituted by the integrated subsystems of 'the economy', 'the state and politics', as well as 'citizens and consumers'—has been 'parasitic on and destructive towards' the lifeworld which can be found in 'close family relationships and friendship ... but also in the sphere of civil society ... [such as] the various national and international climate movements' (p. 171). Intellectually indebted to Parson's structural-functionalism, Beckert's analytical approach is anchored in multi-causal relations between the three interlinked subsystems—with 'the economy' in the dominant position—serving a specific function to uphold the status quo. Businesses need profits, the state needs taxes, and citizens as consumers need to consume to form their social identity via consumption choices—a structural functionalist circle par excellence which universalizes its core theoretical premise (social stability) across historical and national contexts and ultimately portrays this premise as its analytical conclusion. Somehow 'we' all contribute to or benefit directly or indirectly (qua consumption, labour, or investments) from fossil fuel production, and don't want real mitigation policies because these would make us in one way or the other worse off: 'Business, the state, and citizens play into each other's hands' (p. 102).

The main issue with Beckert's structural functionalist framework is that it fails to grasp how the relations of property, class,

and power under capitalism permeate and condition all three ‘subsystems’ that Beckert tried so neatly to keep apart. It is from this ‘separation’—that fails to account for the complex and differentiated totality of capitalism and remains blind to its contradictory and conflictual nature—that the main theoretical tensions and analytical shortcomings of Beckert’s account arise and where the seeds of his political implications are planted. For instance, not accounting for the fact that private property rights are manifestations of class relations leads Beckert to misread the basis of economic power, how economic power is translated into political power, and results in the erasure of class conflict. In Beckert’s account, all citizens are in the same position in relation to ‘the economy’ and ‘the state and politics’: citizens supposedly consume goods, work for firms in ‘the economy’, and exercise political power mainly via voting or joining demonstrations. I trust that the reader will understand the absurdity of this conceptualization by giving the following example: imagine a citizen and compare her to tech centibillionaires such as Elon Musk. Beckert’s account implies that both essentially exercise political influence in the same ways (through voting, etc.) and thereby obfuscates that under capitalism (1) economic power is ultimately anchored in a set of property relations that enable capitalists like Elon Musk to own and/or effectively control a number of companies including X, Tesla, and SpaceX, the shares of which make up most of the ‘wealth’ that *Forbes* attributes to him; and (2) the capacity of direct and indirect political influence on the operations of the state ultimately stems from this economic power. However, Beckert raises—yet does not examine—an important question absent from Malm & Carton’s account of how pension interests of Western middle classes have become integrated into the financial interests of fossil capital *qua* finance, but draws the wrong conclusion (i.e., that ‘we’ all invest in fossil fuels). Further, ‘the economy’ is bracketed away from ‘citizens’ while holding complete control over ‘the state and politics’—a deterministic and ahistorical reading of the state as a mere instrument of ‘the economy’ which reinforces the analytical limits of the book.

What would it take to break the circle? Beckert (correctly!) locates the limits to radical social change in private property: ‘the growth imperative is a *structural* part of the system of competitive markets and private property rights. I have already outlined how this works: *the owners of capital* drive forward the dynamic processes of constant innovation and growth to increase their wealth. To halt this process, it would be necessary to abolish private property rights to capital itself and thus to draw a line under capitalism. Nowhere is this a realistic political prospect’ (p. 119; my italics). While the agents of change remain unclear, the term ‘the owners of capital’ seems to refer to corporations, while billionaires and ‘the rich’ are rendered as passive ‘citizens’ who spend money on luxury goods with a higher carbon footprint. But what about the other side of the coin? The book argues that rigid, ahistorical, objective sets of ‘material’ versus ‘non-material’ interests *alone* would determine the possibility and efficacy of collective political action. After putting the climate crisis into the bucket of ‘non-material’ interests, diagnosing the lack of ‘a viable political programme’ as well as of ‘a broad-based social movement against capitalism’ (p. 158–9), Beckert denies the very possibility of political subjects that could challenge capitalism, declares that ‘we’ have run out of time for a Revolution, and concludes that a compromise between capital,

the state, and citizens around climate adaptation policies is the only feasible option left.

4 | Is it Really Too Late for a Radical Transition?

Both books agree that radical social change can only be achieved through (albeit differently conceptualizations of) confrontation and struggle while private property rights represent a limit within ‘structurally determined guardrails’ (Beckert 2025, 157) to any attempt of revolutionary overhaul of the capitalist system. While Beckert sees a conflict of ideas unfolding between ‘the economy’, ‘the state and politics’, and ‘citizens’, Malm & Carton read class struggle through the materialist lens of an open confrontation between the antagonistic interests of financial/fossil capital (including the ‘propertied’ classes) and ‘the popular masses’—I will get back to this point below.

However, both books rule out the idea of overcoming capitalism through a radical transition to an alternative social and economic system, albeit for different reasons. While Beckert’s book argues that the structural barriers of capital’s domination over the state as well as citizens’ desire for consumption make a radical transition via political reforms impossible, Malm & Carton argue that ‘this crisis will not wait for a *long* march to strip elites of assets’ (p. 236), so a socialist revolution—conceived in abstract terms—to expropriate fossil capital is the only option left. Even though both books do not see a radical transition as a viable political option, there are several insights in both books that can help us illuminate some open questions—about political subject formation and the state—that spring from the problem of transition to address the climate crisis.

Beckert raises the crucial point that even a forceful combination of strategic electoral voting, mass demonstrations, and direct action at the local scale *alone* will be insufficient for a radical transition. This is because these political practices operate on the main assumptions of social democracy: that political and social change is possible through putting pressure on politicians in one way or the other (or replacing them by running for office) to enact ‘better’ policy reforms while leaving the structural set-up of the state untouched. Beckert’s liberal functionalist framework—despite its manifold shortcomings—makes abundantly clear that this avenue cannot lead to the required radical social change. In short, the articulation of ‘more just’ political ideas alone is not sufficient to overcome capitalism. Yet, having assumed away any possibility of political subjects in conflicts over the climate crisis through abstract notions of ‘interests’, the questions of revolution *and* radical transition become inconceivable because of the erasure of class conflict. Tellingly, Beckert does not engage with the vast literature (let alone experiences of political struggles) on these questions (e.g., a lineage that goes back to Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, and an extensive body of anticolonial and anti-imperialist scholars including, but by no means limited to, Antonio Gramsci, Walter Rodney or Samir Amin). One cannot help but wonder about the politics underpinning the standpoint from which Beckert articulates the perspective of how ‘to act wisely’ (p. 157) in times of global environmental breakdown with highly unevenly distributed consequences for peoples in core and periphery countries (and,

of course, for different peoples *within* countries). In the introduction, the book highlights the importance of such a reflection: 'the crucial question is: who is "we"? Change requires actors who are willing to act' (p. 5). The reader may expect a clarification of who the subject of Beckert's 'considered realism' is or how the author's own perspective is implicated in the processes of knowledge production which are entangled with *colonial legacies* that underpin the uneven global reproduction of capitalism. But instead, the book opts to take the view of an outside observer reminiscent of a Weberian ideal of *Wertfreiheit*.

Beckert acknowledges that people in the global South will suffer the most from climate impacts and that 'climate protection' requires financial transfers to 'the global South'—which 'is perhaps the key political message of my book' (p. 168). However, a reader who is broadly familiar with the current German political context may wonder if the motivating question of the book might speak to the rise of the far-right conjuring up racist imaginaries of mass migration from peripheral countries posing an existential threat to Western ways of life. When climate protection becomes a question of how to 'maintain' social order in core countries such as Germany and conditional on transfer payments to peripheral countries to presumably prevent people from fleeing the increasingly devastating structural conditions of capitalism under which they suffer, the book's account may resonate with some in the conservative, white middle class in Germany. But it is difficult to ignore that the book's political implications play not only into the AfD's 'law and order' obsession with strengthening borders and policing the 'Heimat', but also render invisible (at best) or even knowingly tolerate (at worst) the increasing devastation of the foundations of life in peripheral countries at the expense of finding political compromises with capital and the state in the core. Such an uneasy 'compromise' between labour and capital in the Western core—the hallmark of West Germany's corporatism after WWII which still seems to be one of the fixations of Beckert's book—has not only eroded under neoliberalism, but even before always meant exploitation, dispossession and 'underdevelopment' for people in the peripheries (Rodney 2012), which make up the vast majority of human beings on this planet. Whether the author acknowledges the potential future implications of this historical fact in the concluding chapter or not, it certainly undermines the moral foundations of his 'considered realism' that remains blind to the realities of race and class, and caught up in the ideology of overshoot.

In a Marxian spirit of radical theorizing through political practice grounded in the experience of local resistance struggles against extractivism, Malm & Carton ask what could be done given '[t]he scalar mismatch between any actually existing subject of resistance and the task at hand'? (p. 51). The authors locate the point of rupture in financial markets and seek a trigger that could 'induce the panic', that is, *any* political intervention that calls into question private property in the sphere of fossil fuel production, in particular forms of direct action while not ruling out 'militant action' (p. 51). Once the financial crisis is unfolding, the authors see a potential revolutionary subject in the alliance of local resistance groups and 'Luxemburgian masses' forcing through the expropriation of private fossil fuel assets via nationalization of 'a major producer of fossil fuels, be it a nation or a corporation' (p. 247–48) to end

fossil fuel production. Instead of discussing the seriousness of Malm & Carton's propositions about the 'mass subject' given the phrasing of the relevant passages in the book, I take them at face value.

Three major tensions underpin Malm & Carton's account of revolution, which stem from an abstract conception of a popular subject that relies on the functionalist reading of the 'iron laws' of global capital circulations (and the resulting questions of *where* and *how* the 'climate Minsky moment' could be 'triggered'). It is only when the latter (is about to) come to a standstill that the former can manifest itself, albeit in an undefined way.

The first tension results from the question of *where* the 'climate Minsky moment' and subsequent global financial meltdown could be 'triggered'. The book does not pose the question of whether fossil and financial capital are global, part of an emerging 'multipolar' world order, or subsumed within the international spheres of US American Empire (Panitch and Gindin 2012). This matters because in the case of the latter, this would mean that the limits to a revolution would be conditioned by their relation to the US Empire. For as long as the US military runs on oil, the US state would mobilize whatever forces are required to secure its oil supply. Regardless of whether a socialist revolution in France would nationalize Total, it is highly unlikely that a 'climate Minsky moment' would swamp financial markets and 'fossil capital' would implode (rather, oil prices would skyrocket), unless there was a real spectre of a *global* socialist revolution. But then the authors risk running in circles when the revolution becomes the outcome *and* precondition for the 'climate Minsky moment'. In short, the strategic point of political intervention that Malm & Carton *generally* locate in fossil fuel extraction assets is misguided.

The second tension concerns the issue of collective political consciousness in the relation between 'local resistance' and 'mass uprising'. Probably *the* key question that Malm & Carton's book poses is how the scale between 'place-based resistance' and the uprising of 'Luxemburgian masses' could be breached. The gap between the two is of remarkable (or revolutionary) significance. Looming in the background here is an orthodox conception of ideology as 'false consciousness' suggesting that 'the masses' just have to 'wake up' and see 'fossil capital' for what it really is, and then they would—as they are becoming conscious of and for themselves as a collective political subject—seek to overthrow it. Alas, there is no guaranteed 'awakening' of the masses. Of course, the authors are fully aware of this since their point is not to derive a blueprint for a revolution, but to identify points of strategic intervention that could be leveraged to harness greater political potential. However, as the process of building collective political consciousness for radical change is neglected, one cannot help but wonder if the assumed subject is the climate activist occupying a coal mine.

The third tension is related to the question of political organization and concerns the relation between the 'popular masses' and a form of political counterpower that could manifest in a 'dual power' situation to threaten the existing state. Malm & Carton conceive of a revolutionary situation as one that 'would be marked by some popular subject launching a challenge to

fossil capital so profound as to express a generalised refusal to abide by it any longer, while this same capital and its guardians would be so shaken in their capacity to rule as to lose their grip: *dual power* putting society on a knife's edge. Transition would then be a real prospect' (p. 71; my italics). While the authors qualify this description of the unfolding revolutionary moment as a 'fever dream' in which everyone concerned about the climate crisis is rising up, the difference between 'local blockades' and 'masses' that are *organized* to a degree that would enable the expropriation of fossil fuel companies via nationalization is substantial, especially when the political horizon is to overcome capitalism.

While Malm & Carton were quick to rule out the question of transition, I wonder if their excellent book does not pose this question in the concluding discussion of the Yasuní struggle against fossil interests in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The authors highlight the 'decades of mass mobilization' involving a variety of actors from social movements and indigenous peoples who deployed various tactics—from sabotage to litigation to a campaign winning a national referendum on leaving oil in the ground—and represent, according to the authors, 'the finest model so far, in its nearly perfect sequence from grassroots activism via referendum to *hopefully* execution by the state' (p. 246–248; my italics).

Malm & Carton's 'model' raises important issues for the question of transition, which Poulantzas' discussion on the potentials and limits of 'a democratic road to socialism' (Poulantzas 2000, 260) can help illuminate. Poulantzas unpacks the false dichotomy between two supposedly diametral opposed strategies targeting 'the state' to overcome capitalism: (1) the 'dual power' strategy that originated in the works of Lenin—a situation in which a second form of organized political power (e.g., one based on workers' councils) is built *outside* of the apparatuses of the existing state only to reach a situation in which the former can completely destroy, replace, and thus overcome the latter; and (2) the transformation of the state and its apparatuses (e.g., parliament, judiciary, police, military, etc.) through building political power *within* and *outside* of the state as part of 'a democratic road to socialism'. The first strategy tends to rely on an instrumentalist view of the state (i.e., a 'thing' to be taken and manipulated by social classes to serve their own interests), while the second one is underpinned by a social *relational* conception of the state as one which is already 'traversed by internal [class] contradictions' (Poulantzas 2000, 255).

Malm & Carton rely on an instrumental conception of the state that is firmly in the grip of the capitalist class interests. However, the question that is missing from the picture is if and how the capitalist state itself could be transformed, and the role that a political party can play in this process. With regards to the Ecuadorian 'model', the success of the popular referendum hinges on the actual implementation by state powers to outlaw oil exploration but brackets the issue of how this (albeit important!) kind of reformism could feature in overcoming the Ecuadorian state altogether. The revolutionary situation envisioned by the authors leaves open the question of how a 'mass uprising' could lead to a situation of 'dual power' that threatens the existing state, and how the dangers that come with Leninist 'vanguardism'—in which an elite takes over the revolutionary process—can be avoided.

This Leninist conception of 'dual power' that underpins Malm & Carton's account, as Poulantzas argues, remains ineffective (as demonstrated by the Bolshevik experience) and risks containing already the seeds of authoritarian statism if it neglects to sufficiently address the question how forms of direct democracy can continuously integrate the popular masses with the emerging political organization that comes to challenge the existing state. Furthermore, Poulantzas argues that any (1) dual power strategy of 'taking over and replacing the state' would always require some degree of (2) transforming the existing state apparatuses. To bring this back into the realm of climate politics, it is difficult to imagine how for instance degrowth inspired principles to organize the economy differently could be instituted *without* building on and at the same time radically transforming some of the already existing state apparatuses (e.g., the constitutional set-up, Treasury, or Ministry of the Environment), abolishing others (e.g., private property, the police), *and* creating new ones, for example, for planning purposes. What the false dichotomy between (1) and (2) obscures is that the precondition for both is a process of building collective, radical political consciousness that goes hand in hand with creating some form of an organizational capacity for collective political action. It is just inconceivable how a state could be 'taken over and replaced' or 'transformed' via continuous political engagement (even *if* we assumed that those were different things) without some form of interlinking organisations such as political parties, workers councils, labour and renters unions, farmer associations, or local activist chapters that would allow for the *coordination* of various forms of radical political action.

For this, the key question is how to build collective political consciousness on a durable organizational capacity in a truly democratic manner for collective political action based in popular power that would enable us to transform the state towards the goal of overcoming capitalism while recognizing that this process will always be based on a continuous confrontation with the dominant classes and thus part of already ongoing anti-capitalist struggles for liberation. A necessary precondition to build a Left counterpower for which it cannot be too late is finding ways to link up labour, anti-racist, feminist struggles, and anti-capitalist climate activism with each other. What is at stake here is also the question of how to utilize but fundamentally rethink the party as a political organization, for example by restricting salaries to the average wage and introducing a term limit for mandates. To prevent the risks of falling back into reformism, it is key to establish structures within the political party to integrate the interests of mass popular movements as vital accountability mechanism in a way that ensures the continuous intervention of those movements through direct democratic means. The question of when—as part of this process of building a durable organizational capacity for collective political action—to aim for radical breaks via mass mobilisations versus when to push for 'non-reformist' reforms should be read against this backdrop. This process needs to incorporate a degree of flexibility that 'will allow us to seize opportunities when they arise' (Heron and Dean 2022) because the timing and unfolding of revolutionary moments cannot be anticipated. While the reality of existing states points towards the need for country specific strategies, those will have to be based on an international outlook and a bedrock commitment to anti-imperialism based on which alliances with indigenous peoples can be forged (as Malm & Carton highlight).

To build the broader mass base it is paramount to articulate resistance against fossil and financial capital together with the demands for workers' rights, housing justice, and Palestinian liberation. While probably all tactics of resistance (including the ones highlighted by Malm & Carton) will be needed, the question of which tactic to choose should not be the sole focus. The strategic direction is pointing to the question of how to build an organized form of political counterpower that is based on the direct democratic intervention of a mass movement to confront and transform the state and overcome capitalism. There is no ready-made plan for how to do this (on this, Beckert is right!), nor can there be. In the end, those ideas and practices cannot be articulated from the ivory tower while seeking a compromise with capital and the state; they are forged in and through the struggle, which will always have to be resolutely confrontational in character. And this struggle will also always need feverish dreams.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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