

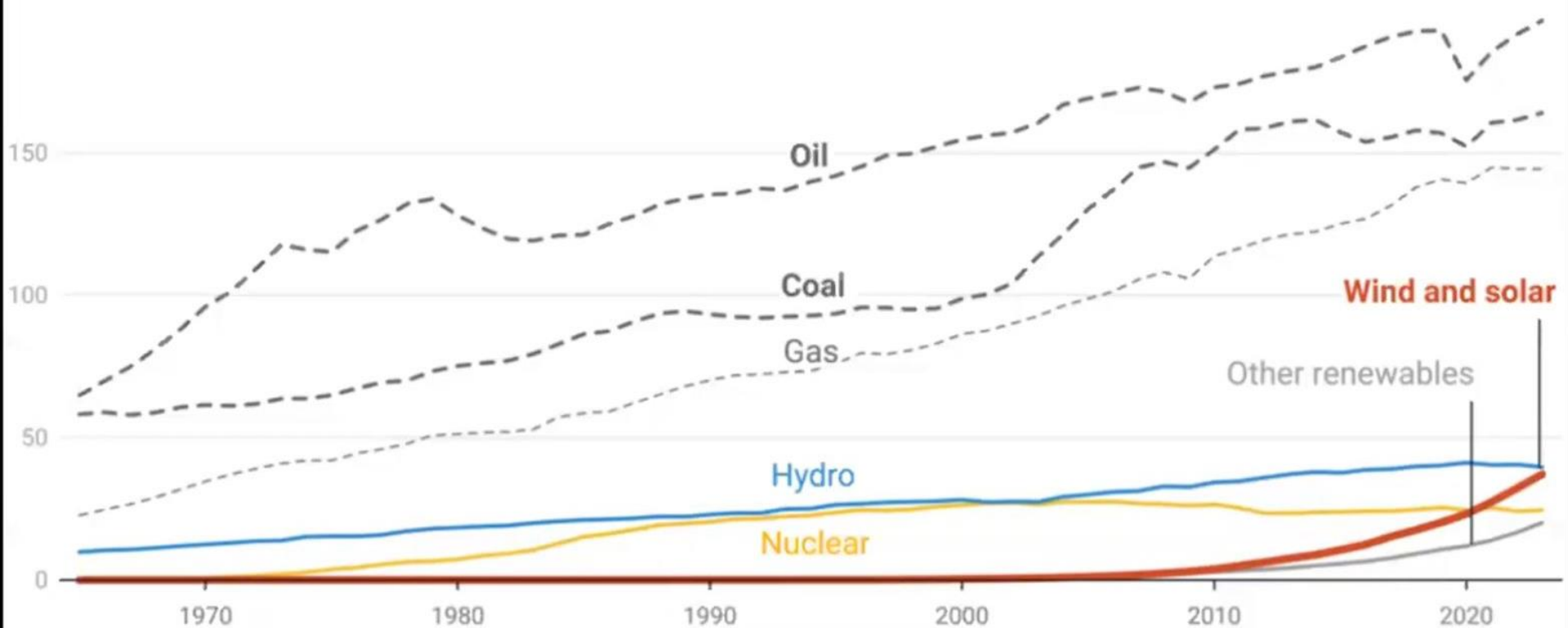


Coal, Cotton & Capitalogenic Crisis

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Why World History Matters to
Our Climate Politics

Global primary energy demand by fuel, exajoules



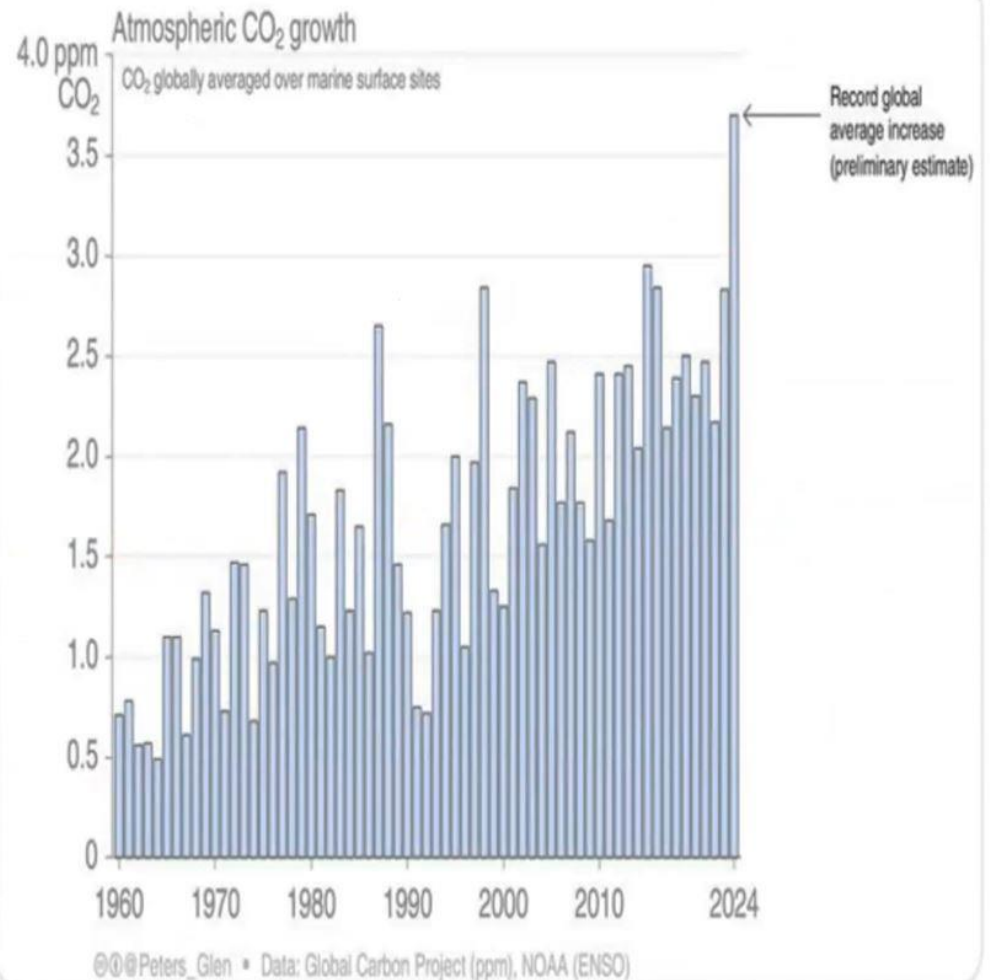
Source: Energy Institute Statistical Review of World Energy 2024.

CarbonBrief

What Transition, and For Whom?

The problem is not the energy source, the problem is capital's biospheric dictatorship.

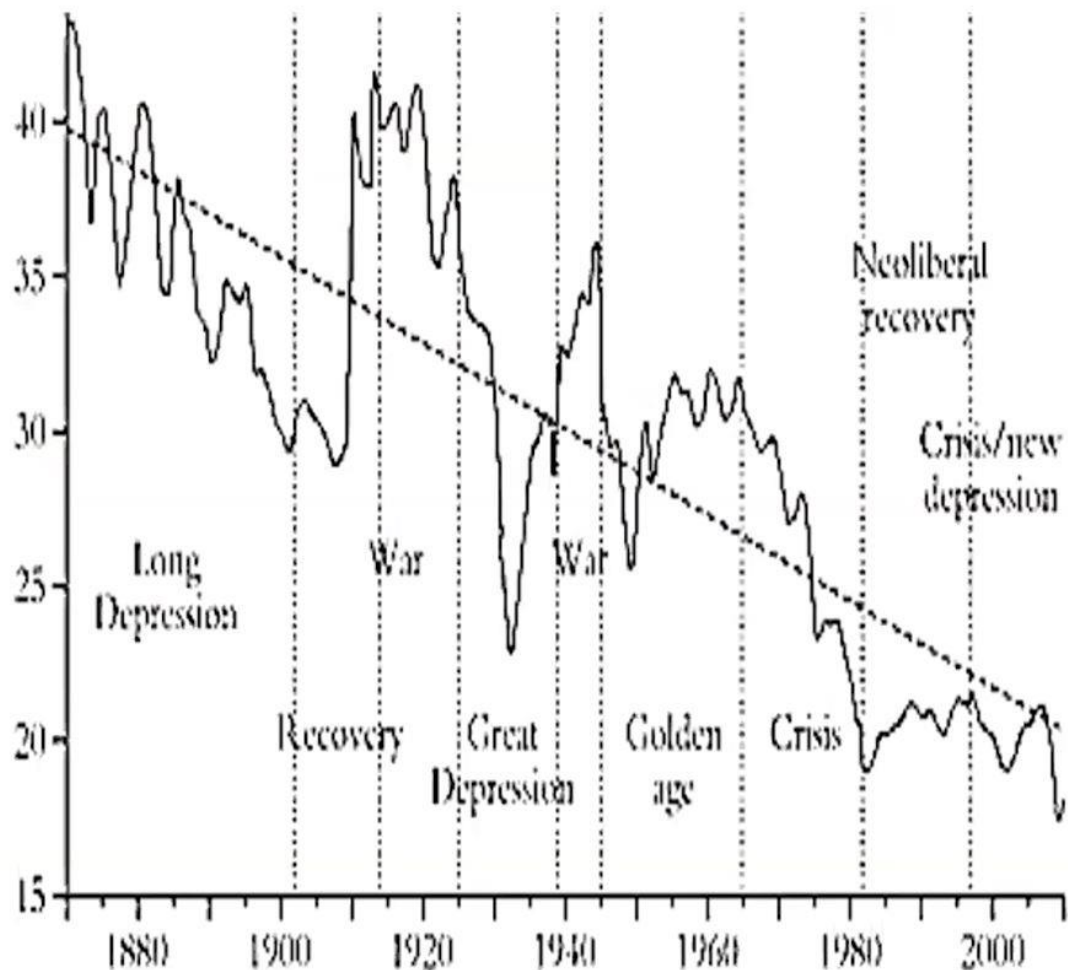
The
Problem is
Not Fossil
Fuel



Blow up a pipeline, and you can slow global warming for a day; shut down the relations that made the pipeline, and you can stop it for good. (But not overnight.)

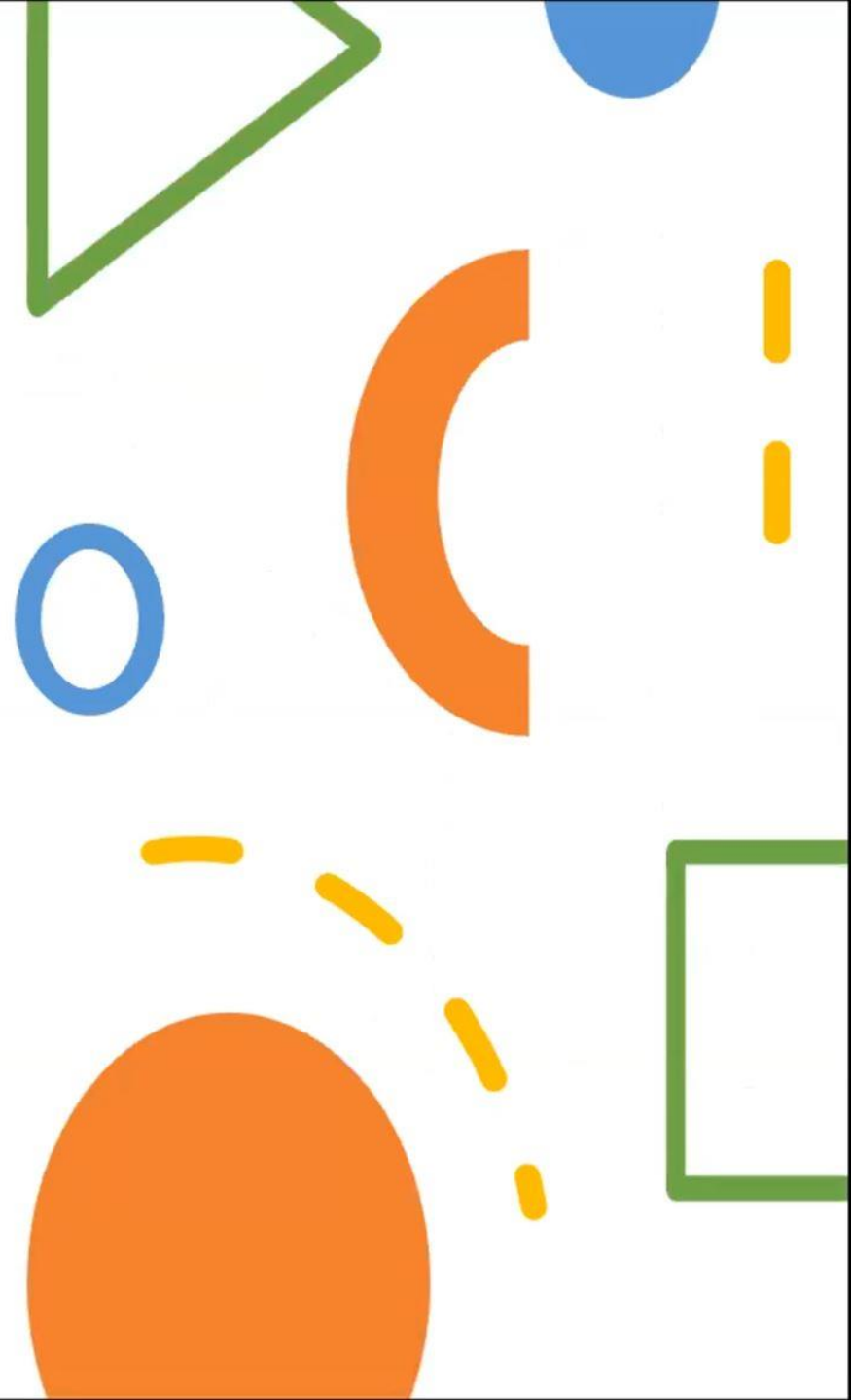


The Problem is Capital

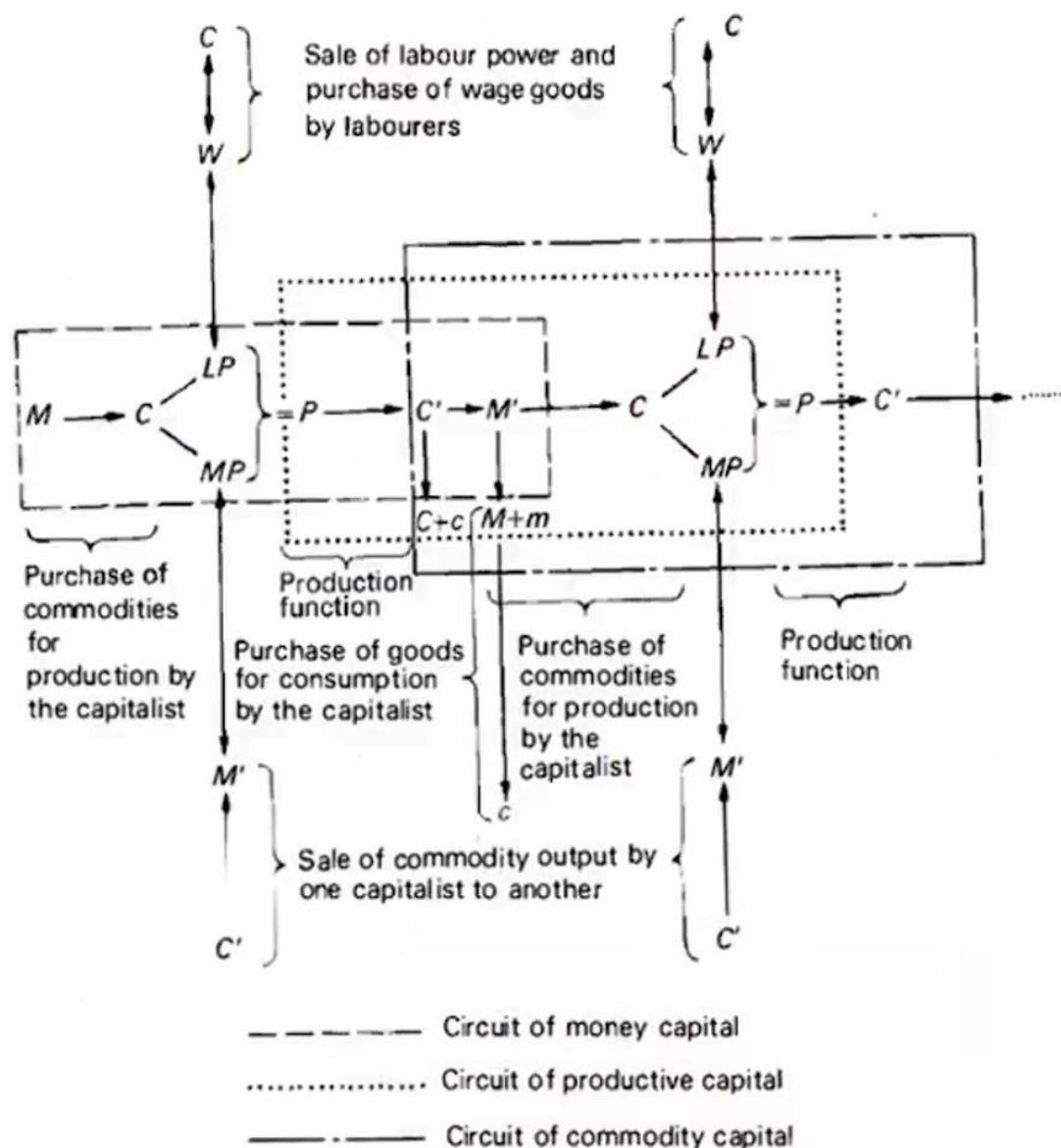


Praxis & the Theory of Capital

Theory matters. From the standpoint of the proletariat, theory is always adjudicated on the ‘real ground of history.’ Theory is therefore a “theoretical struggle” that is fundamental to socialist strategy in the climate crisis: a worldwide class struggle in the web of life.



The ('One-Sided') Circuit of Capital in the Era of Cheap Nature



Fossil Capital? (Look for the 'F')

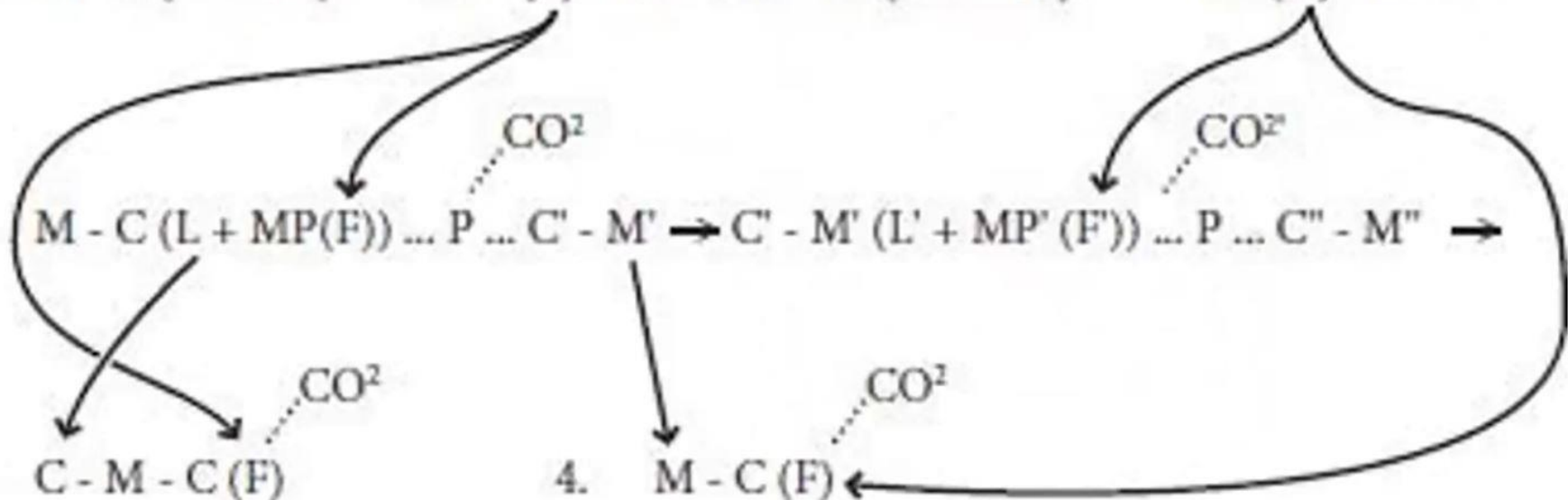


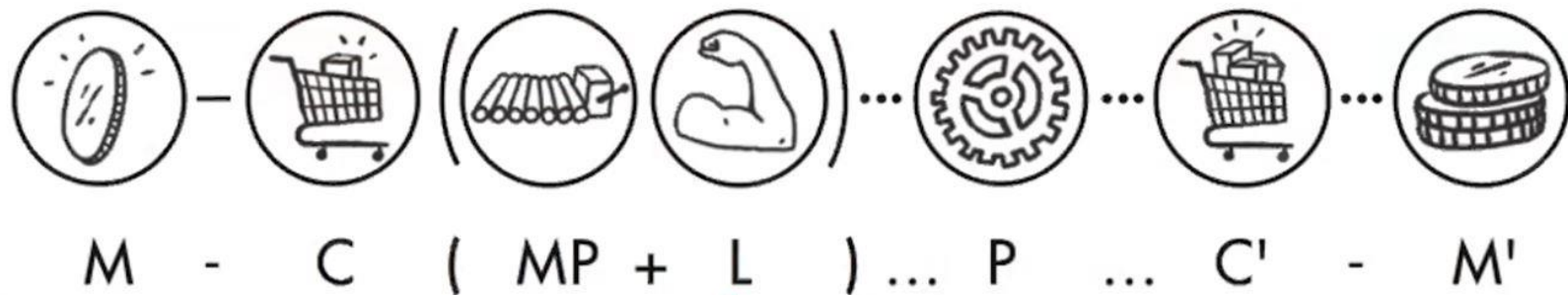
1. $M - C (L + MP) \dots P \dots C' (F) - M' \rightarrow M' - C' (L' + MP') \dots P \dots C'' (F') - M' \rightarrow$

2. $M - C (L + MP(F)) \dots P \dots C' - M' \xrightarrow{\text{CO}^2} C' - M' (L' + MP' (F')) \dots P \dots C'' - M'' \rightarrow$

3. $C - M - C (F) \xrightarrow{\text{CO}^2}$

4. $M - C (F) \xrightarrow{\text{CO}^2}$





Marx, Nature & the Logic of Capital in the Web of Life

Conventional Marxism ignores Marx on energy and other raw materials used up in commodity production ('circulating [constant] capital'). This was Marx's "general law of underproduction" (*Capital* III). The faster the pace industrialization ('fixed capital'), the greater the appropriation of Cheap Natures. Exhaustion and class conflict follows. As the price (value composition) of energy and raw materials rises, the rate of profit falls.

Capitalist production,
therefore, develops
technology, and the
combining together of
various processes into
a social whole, only by
sapping the original
sources of all wealth –
the soil and the
labourer.

– Karl Marx

‘Resources Become’ – *through labor*
(Zimmerman, and Moore :)

Fossil
Capitalism?
Materialisms,
Vulgar &
Dialectical



Raymond Williams, "We have mixed our labour with
the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be
able to draw back and separate either out"

Marx's General Law of Underproduction, I

Identifies the circuit of capital *as* a socio-ecological relation, albeit one whose substance (value as 'economic equivalence') is necessarily blind to "natural distinctness" (1973: 141). In this model, "the rate of profit is inversely proportional to the value of the raw materials" (Marx, 1967 III: 111).



Marx's General Law of Underproduction, II

The cheaper the raw materials and energy, the higher the rate of profit. Why? Because “constant” capital is comprised of moments. One is fixed capital, comprising machinery, but also other extra-human forces of production such as animal power, that outlasts the production cycle. The other is *circulating* capital, which is not to be confused with the *circulation* of capital in its monetary forms



Marx's General Law of Underproduction, III

The dynamism of capitalist production, observes Marx, leads the 'portion of constant capital that consists of fixed capital... [to] run significantly ahead of the portion consisting of organic raw materials, so that the demand for these raw materials grows more rapidly than their supply.' Here, the 'overproduction' of machinery (fixed capital) finds its dialectical antagonism in the 'underproduction' of raw materials (circulating capital).



Marx's General Law of Underproduction, IV

This law, like the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (in which it's embedded), is a dialectic of tendencies and counter-tendencies. The issue is not overproduction *or* underproduction. It is how the two *fit together* in successive eras of accumulation.



Marx's General Law of Underproduction, V

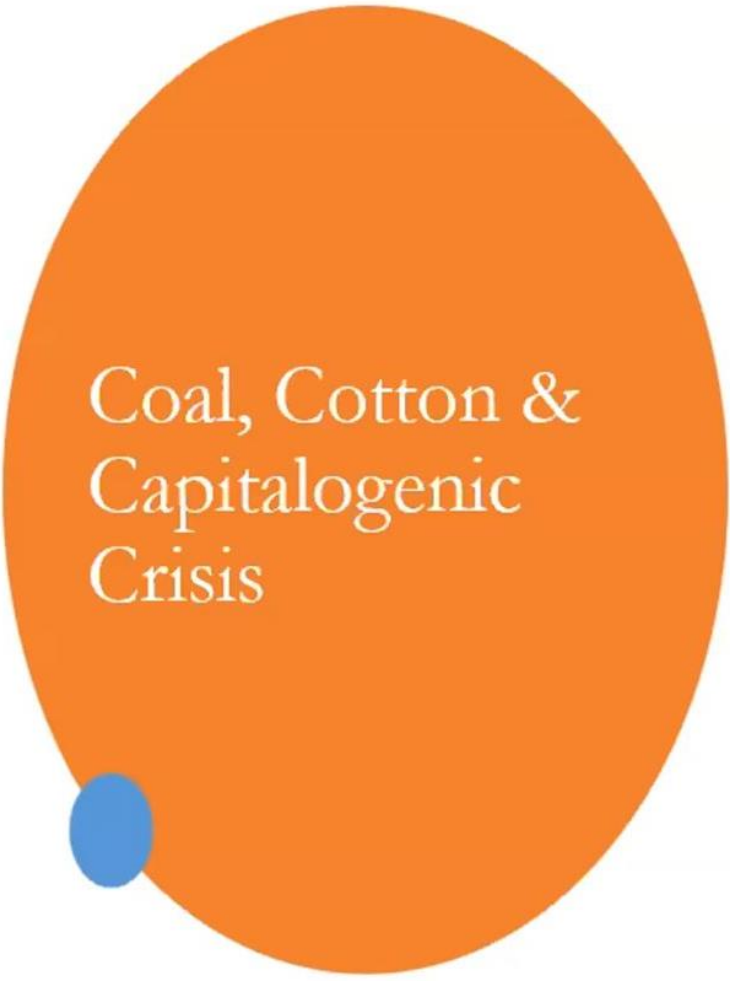
A labor-metabolic theory of accumulation crisis (joined to the exhaustion of the 'soil & the worker'):

'The value of raw material... forms an *ever-growing component* of the value of the commodity product in proportion to the development of the productive power of labour, not only because it passes wholly into this latter value, but also because in every aliquot part of the aggregate product the portion representing depreciation of machinery and the portion formed by the newly added labour both continually decrease.'



Marx's Class Struggle Theory of Life

- I. Production is 'twofold': irreducibly socio-ecological.
- II. Production is 'twofold': joining the production of subsistence with inter-generational procreation.
- III. Labor is a 'specifically harnessed natural force.'
- IV. Labor "activates." Engels: 'Labor Created Man.'
- V. Labor "activates." Marx: new "potentialities slumbering within nature."
- VI. Cooperation is a force of production.
- VII. Against bourgeois Prometheanism. Engels: "nature's revenge."



Coal, Cotton & Capitalogenic Crisis



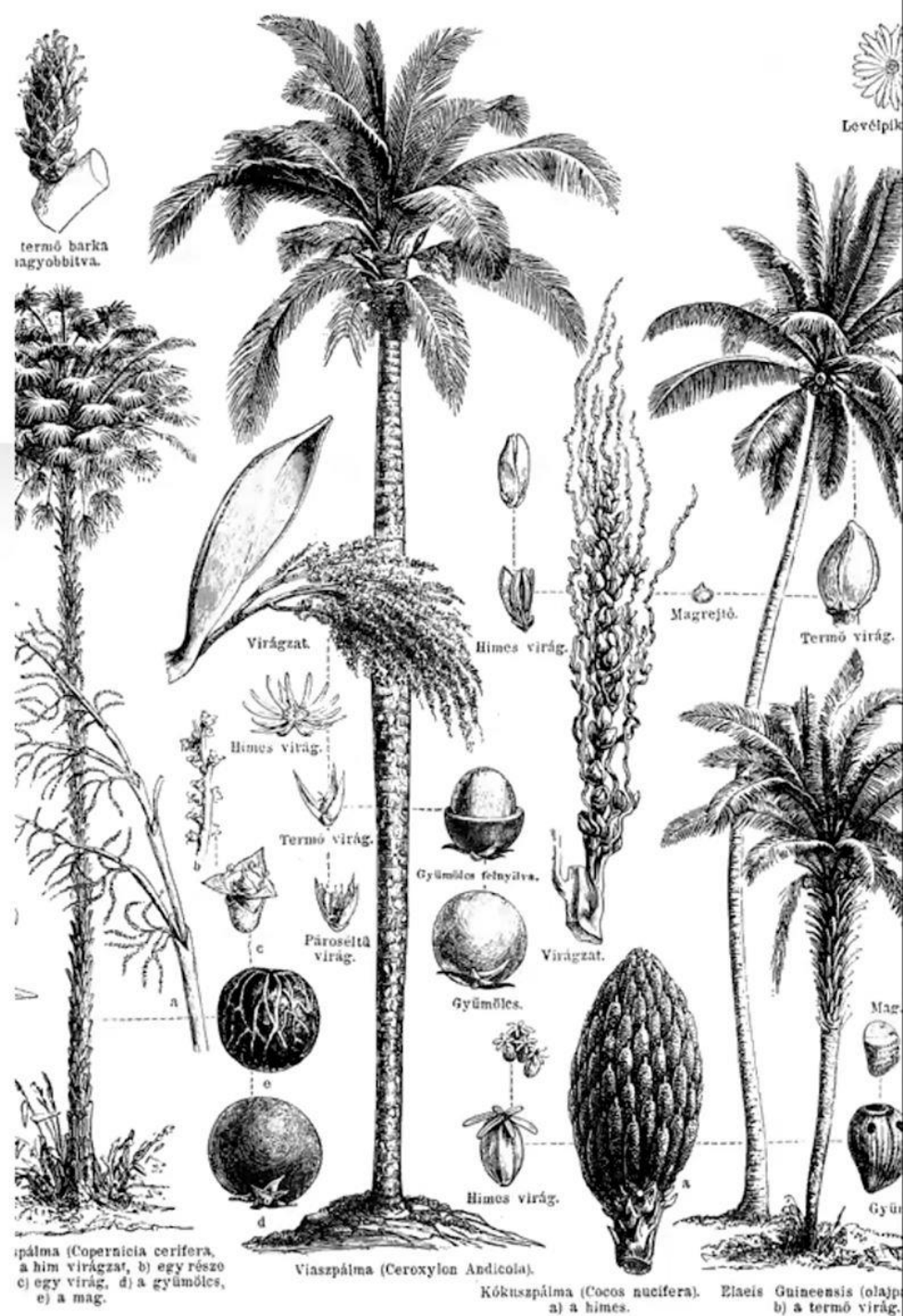
Labor activates. Coal is just
a rock in the ground. Only
under definite geohistorical
circumstances – *of capital,*
class and empire – does it
become fossil fuel.

The Coal Mining Revolution is a Sixteenth-Century Development

Coal production rose from 50,000 tons (1530) to 210,000 tons (1560), to 1.5 million tons by 1630. By this point, most of England's important coalfields were being exploited. Production soared, doubling to 2.9 million tons of coal by the 1680s. Output increased another 300 percent by 1780.

The Great Proletarianization is a 'Long' Seventeenth- Century Development

(In the midst of the first – partial
– capitalogenic climate crisis,
1550-1700.)



Climate Forcing/Climate Fixing Dynamic

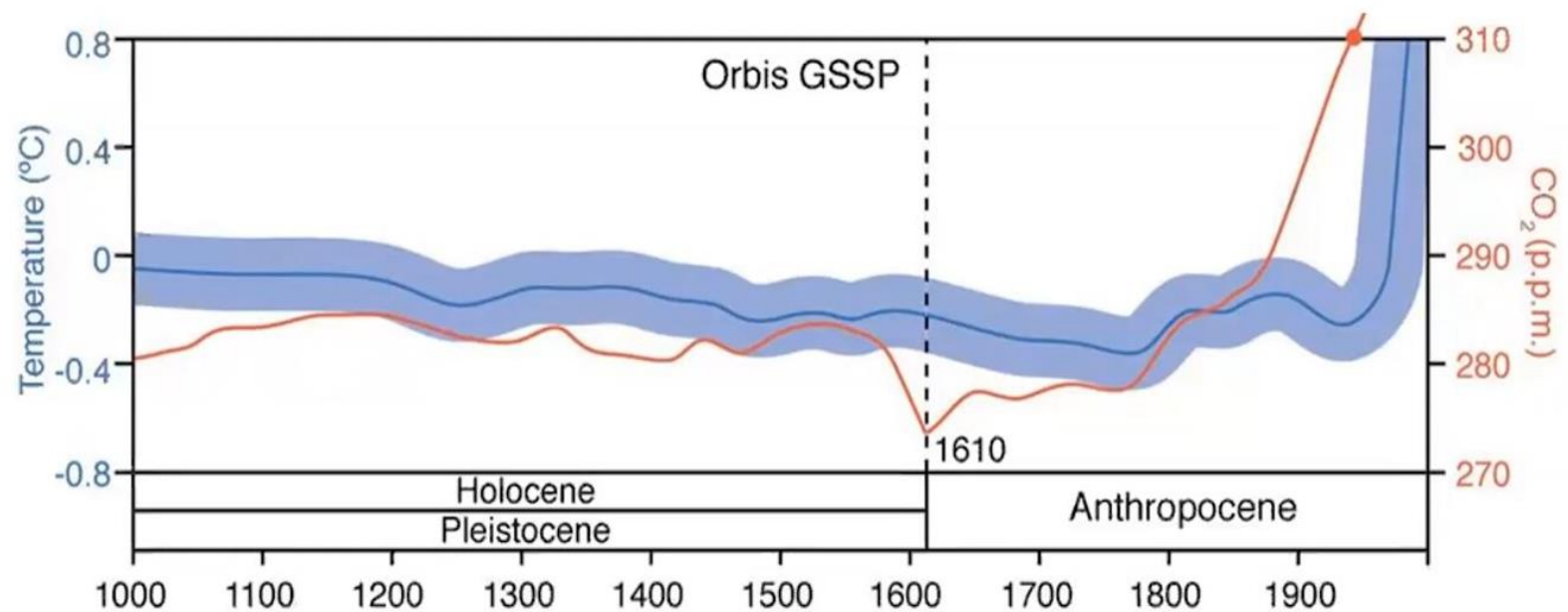
*The Great Proletarianization,
1550-1750*

Tilly's proxy: illustrative.

Table 3. Estimates of the European Proletarian Population in 1550, 1750 and 1843, Based on Blaschke's Figures for Saxony (in Thousands)

CATEGORY	TOTAL POPULATION	PROLETARIAN POPULATION	NON- PROLETARIANS	PERCENT PROLETARIAN
<u>1550</u>				
Rural	61175	15661	45514	25.6
Urban	10325	1600	8725	15.5
Total	71000	17261	54239	24.3
<u>1750</u>				
Rural	113100	68539	44561	60.6
Urban	18150	8131	10019	44.8
Total	131250	76670	54580	58.4
<u>1843</u>				
Rural	146453	115844	30609	79.1
Urban	63194	32671	30523	51.7
Total	209647	148515	61132	70.8

The Orbis Spike: Capitalism's First Great Climate Crisis



A New Industrialization: Cheap Cotton and Dispossessing Humanity, I

A New Genocide and a New
Slavery in the American
South



Indian Removal Act 1830





*A New
Industrialization
Cheap Cotton
and
Dispossessing
Humanity, II*

Slave Markets, Cotton Gin
and the 'Second Slavery'
(Tomich)



Climate Apartheid, Climate Fixing & 'the' Industrial Revolution



'The' Industrial Revolution begins on the Plantation, employing 'Force as a Permanent Weapon'



20-50 percent of English capital formation in the late eighteenth century comes from the plantation complex.
(Bourgeoisification)

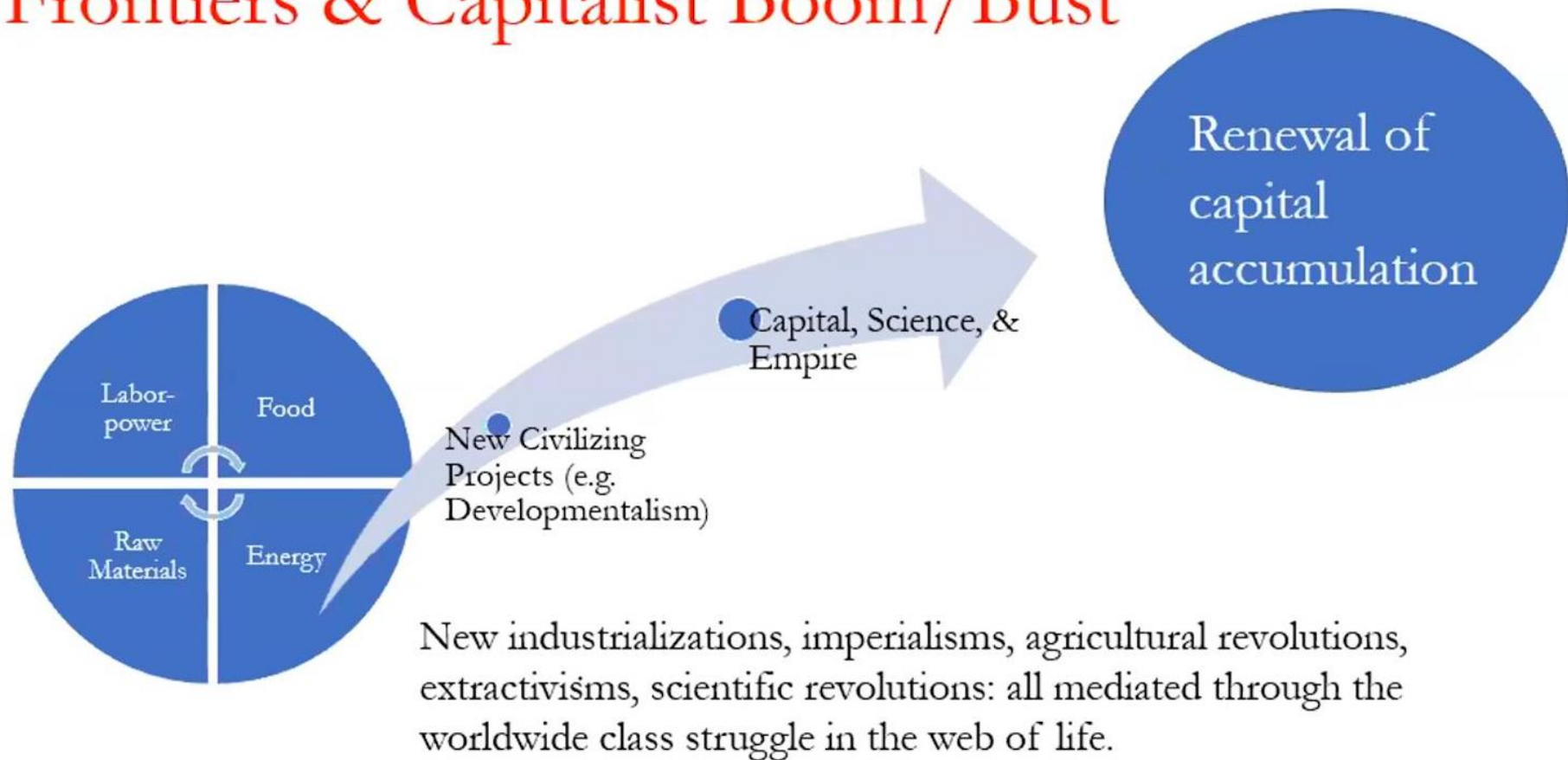


Textile exports to sugar colonies decisive to British industrialization.



The 'factory' invented in the sugar colonies.

The Rises & Falls of Cheap Nature: Frontiers & Capitalist Boom/Bust

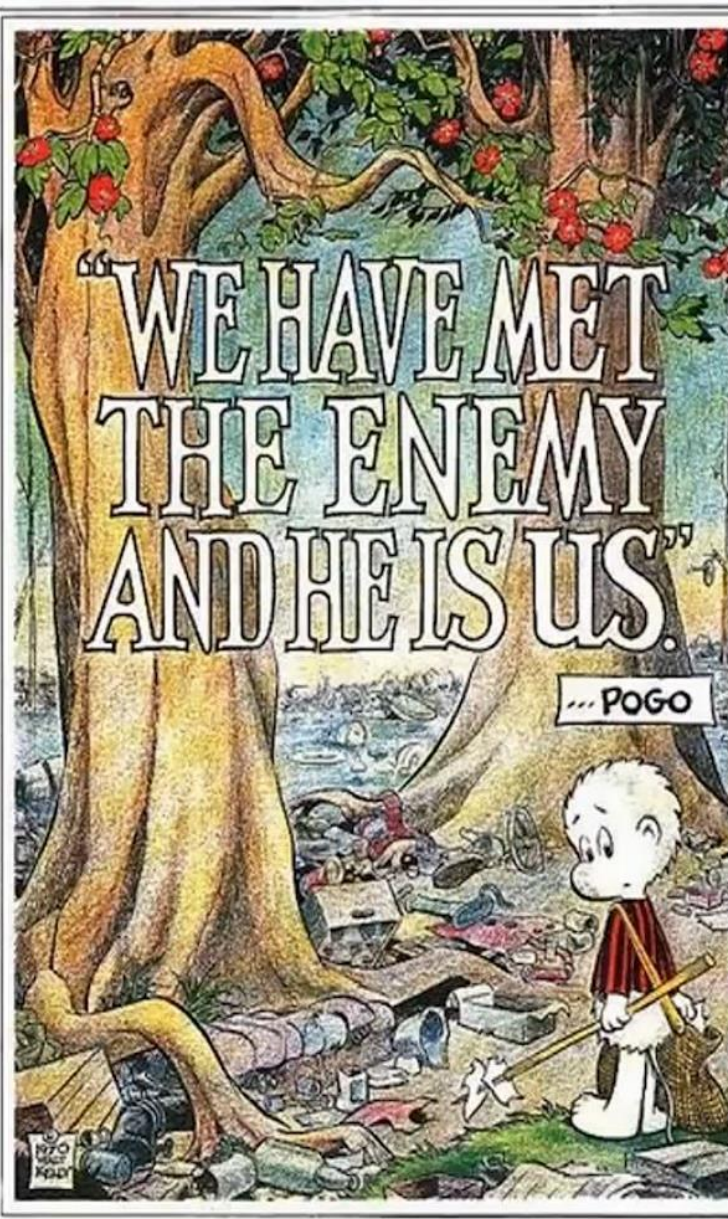


Not a One-Off: The Cycle of Cheap Nature

Class formation is always politically-constituted in and through the web of life, instantiated in specific Cheap Nature projects.

Cheap Nature projects are concrete geohistorical formations of 'science, capital and empire' designed to appropriate the unpaid work/energy of 'women, nature, and colonies.' This enables the revival of accumulation through new regimes of socially-necessary unpaid work. This is the real basis of accumulation and class formation – bourgeoisification and proletarianization, even if my focus is today on the latter.

Cheap Nature projects in the capitalist world-ecology animate a twofold dynamic. One is the political accumulation of the conditions of a good business environment, securing low-cost and expanded supplies of the Four Cheaps: labor, food, energy and raw materials. The second is geocultural devaluation, premised on bourgeois naturalism, which creates ideologies of labor-market segmentation through racial and gender categories – themselves expressions of Naturalism.



Malthus, or, Pogo at Nature's Mighty Feast

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he had a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has **no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no cover for him. She tells him to be gone and will quickly execute her own orders,** if he do not work upon the compassion of some other guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come, fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall... The guests learn too late their error, in countering those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all her guest should have plenty, and knowing that she could not provide for all, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full.

Transition? What Kind of Transition, and For Whom?

Key dimensions of the unfolding epochal crisis:

- I. Worldwide, but uneven, stagnation, owing to the massive overaccumulation of capital.
- II. Overaccumulation is a chief symptom of the exhaustion of Cheap Nature, whose features comprise political instability and conflict along with geophysical contradictions.
- III. The climate crisis is epochal but not existential. Even James Hansen recognized this. Peak fossil fuel consumption is on the immediate horizon.
- IV. The climate crisis is a crisis of capitalism with decisive political implications. One is the present transition in the North Atlantic is towards a new climate consensus that seeks to balance the costs of climate adaptation and mitigation on the bottom 80 percent. This is the politics of planetary managerialism and Good Science.
- V. The climate crisis also signals the crisis of liberal democracy, terminated by centrist-liberal forces themselves.
- VI. A “just transition” must prioritize the radical extension of popular democracy and be willing to defend those efforts against the military-intelligence-tech alliance of the Washington-Pentagon-Davis axis.
- VII. Climate is not everything. But climate change is *in* everything. We must prioritize building solidarities for effective democratization that push back against a new Malthusianism, under the signs of the Anthropocene and state-of-emergency politics, including Climate Emergency politics.