

Review of Malcolm Harris 2025. *What's Left*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

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“To confront the challenge of climate security we must replace capitalism with socialism” Many on the socialist/communist left share this position, but this is not a strategy rather a rhetorical goal. The actual struggle for climate security, specifically to still have a chance to avoid much worse climate catastrophes than now witnessed, to fulfill our commitment for a future for all the world’s children, must begin under the present dominant capitalist global system. Harris’ new book, *What's Left*, argues emphatically yes, there is an imperative need to map out a strategy to confront the planetary crisis centered on the climate crisis. His very well documented book does just that in a way that should inspire a lot more thinking and concrete action.

Harris argues for a metastrategy, starting with Marketcraft (e.g., the Inflation Reduction Act, the IRA), then creating public power (with the Tennessee Valley Authority, the TVA

an historic example), followed by his version of communism (e.g., agroecological coops in Cuba). Harris’ metastrategy happens to be consistent with what I proposed in Schwartzman, 2025b and in Schwartzman and Schwartzman, 2019. Realizing this implied progression is contingent on both national and global class struggle guided by an ecosocialist agenda.

Starting with Marketcraft, Harris defines it as the political practice to “accomplish the subordination of the market to society in practice” (p. 35). Harris recognizes both the positive and negative impacts of the IRA, including an important victory for public power in “Build Public Renewables Act” in New York (p.101-102), led by the socialists of DSA. This is an example of the non linearity of the three stages, rather to be taken as a guide to progressively build ecosocialist capacity to challenge the hegemony of capital. Harris emphasizes the critical role of organized labor in this process, with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) history of class solidarity being a instructive example. (p.247-248), with pro-union provisions of the IRA being a recent example (p.245). The potential positive role of green capital is recognized as a counterweight to fossil capital (p. 246), whose defeat is arguably the critical goal in the near future as I argued in Schwartzman, 2025b. As Harris emphasizes “National marketcraft does not always have a great answer, and there is no such thing as decarbonization in one country” (p.61). The imperialist world system with its extreme inequalities, in particular the extractivist agenda of green capital, must be challenged in the struggle for climate security, with Harris citing the seminal work of Max Ajl (2021).

Especially in the stage of communism, Harris points to indigenous communities as a critically important ally of global organized labor. “Part of this Indigenization of Marxism is the reclamation of an indigenous place in the Eurocentric history of resistance to capitalism and alternative models of communal life.” (p.151). In the consideration of communist/anarchist resistance (Harris often lumps the two together), he digs into the valuable experiences in

Venezuela and Cuba, focusing on agroecologies created by local cooperatives, developing connections between rural producers and urban consumers.

The positive examples coming from China are also discussed starting with a marketcraft approach (p.65), with Belt and Road initiatives, culminating in socialist-oriented development building a “health-enhancing society” (p..245).

The Green New Deal is mentioned, but its implementation especially in urban communities is not discussed. There is one brief mention of public banking (p. 234), but this initiative for “more socialism, less capitalism” deserves a fuller discussion. For example, in DC, the establishment of a public bank receiving revenue instead of Wall Street banks could significantly promote the creation of social housing (<https://www.dcpublicbanking.org>).

On p.73 of Harris’ book, Mariutti’s The dirty secret of the solar industry is cited. I challenge Mariutti’s pessimistic assessment on two counts.

First, of course in the current energy regime dominated by fossil fuels the energy used to create the solar technology will have a significant GHG footprint. As renewables replace fossil fuels this impact will be reduced as the renewable (wind/solar) infrastructure reproduces itself. It is important to note that China is already showing the way forward:: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-clean-energy-just-put-chinas-co2-emissions-into-reverse-for-first-time/>. Of course, the phaseout of fossil fuels must accelerate globally to have a chance for climate security.

Second, the low Energy Return/Energy Invested ratios (EROI) cited by Mariutti are based on old data. See my challenge in Schwartzman, 2025a, The Energy Return Over Energy Invested (EROI) of Energy Technologies Issue.

In the communism stage, the potential role of a global Subject challenging transnational capital, with coordination by ecosocialist/communist parties should be considered (see Schwartzman and Engel-Di Mauro, 2022). Wagar’s (1989) World Party introduced this role in his science fiction novel.

Climate science should inform our political practice. Therefore, we should not yet accept defeat on the challenge to effectively keep warming at no more than the 1.5 deg C target. The near term defeat of fossil capital and its political instruments can still avoid overshoot of the target above the level necessary to trigger dangerous climate tipping points. See my article at <https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/overshoot-and-the-1-5-degree-celsius-warming-target/>.

The Israeli war on the people of Gaza is not mentioned in Harris’ book, but he does recognize this ongoing genocide in his Baffler article review of Abundance [<https://thebaffler.com/latest/whats-the-matter-with-abundance-harris>] which cites my following 2011 article, so I quote from my HM blog

piece:[<https://www.historicalmaterialism.org/overshoot-and-the-1-5-degree-celsius-warming-target/>].

In conclusion, meeting the goal of defeating fossil capital requires, in the very near future, organising a transnational movement strong enough to demilitarise the global economy, with the dissolution of the Military Industrial (Fossil Fuels Nuclear State Terror) Complex. This will be a key objective in the implementation of a Global Green New Deal, increasingly guided by an ecosocialist agenda. So little time, such a formidable challenge, but dare to struggle, dare to win!

We owe this commitment to the children of the world. My optimism (or wishful thinking) is informed by the global upsurge of the movement to end Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people, with growing ties to the climate justice struggles and organised labour. In 2011, I wrote an article entitled “The Path to Climate Justice Passes through Gaza” [p.38, <http://www.ijan.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-JNFeBookVol4.pdf>] , i.e., climate security for humankind will only be achieved with the end of the Israeli blockade of Gaza, termination of Israeli apartheid regime, and the full realisation of the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people.” Little did I know then how powerfully this connection would burst into reality.”

Acknowledgment. This review was the result of Harris recently highlighting my work in his Baffler article, a review of Abundance [<https://thebaffler.com/latest/whats-the-matter-with-abundance-harris>]. He never interviewed me for this article, so I was very pleasantly shocked when it was brought to my attention. We corresponded and he got the publisher to send me his book for review.

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