Theory in Action, Vol. 17, No. 4, October (©2024)
DOI:10.3798/tia.1937-0237.2426

Book Review: Kohei Saito, *Slow Down*: *The Degrowth Manifesto* (Translated by Brian Bergstrom). Astra House. 2024. ISBN: 978-1662602368 (Hardcover). 288 Pages. $17.99.

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It has been decades now since links between capitalism and ecological crisis have been the subject of the direct and sustained attention of radical theorists within anarchist and Marxist milieus. Today, it is finally easy to see how far advanced writers like Murray Bookchin and James O'Connor were in their basic sensibilities about the relationship between capitalism and ecology. In fact, our slowness to grasp their insights has even been part of the problem of ecology. One would like to say, "if only we were faster to recognize the incompatibility of capitalism with ecology," but perhaps recognizing that fact sooner would not have made it any easier to abolish capitalism and its deadly logic in the world.

Since Bookchin and O'Connor, there have been other great writers, from John Bellamy Foster to Andreas Malm to Matt Huber, to name only a few, who have worked hard to develop anti-capitalist ecological analysis in the present time. In my view, however, the most important theorist working in Marxist ecology today is Kohei Saito. As we will see, my view does not represent a consensus in Marxist ecology, as Saito has been fiercely rebuked by comrades in his own field.[2]

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[2] See Matt Huber and Leigh Phillips, "Kohei Saito's 'Start From Scratch' Degrowth Communism" in *Jacobin*, March 9, 2024, cited at https://jacobin.com/2024/03/kohei-saito-degrowth-communism-environment-marxism. I will use Huber and Phillips's notably severe review as the main example of Saito's Marxist critics.

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I. FROM MARXICOLOGY TO MANIFESTO

The standout strengths of Saito's analysis were not clear to me when I read his book *Marx in the Anthropocene*, which was published in English translation before *Slow Down.*[3] In that book, I found Saito's main focus to be a kind of "Marxicological" reading of Marx's texts aimed, even at pains, to substantiate the claim that Marx was already thinking about ecology and degrowth communism in his later works.[4] There, Saito argues that Marx was deeply concerned with metabolic rift and had turned away from a "productionist" alternative to capitalism. Metabolic rift refers to the breaking apart of the organic balance of human and non-human life on Earth life with the natural world, or ecology. That book, which I found fascinating and well-written, lived or died on the question of whether Saito's reading of Marx was convincing. If you were convinced, then you liked the book. If not, you could accuse Saito of a manipulative and ideological reading of Marx. Indeed, this issue of Saito's reading of Marx as a degrowth communist whose focus on metabolic rift was variously obscured or abandoned led many Marxists to denounce Saito. This remains the major axe to grind even now for writers like Matt Huber and Leigh Phillips, who claim that Saito discounts or discredits what other Marxists have written unless they "affirm the importance of metabolism." Huber and Phillips accuse Saito of "cherry-picking from the Marxist canon" to make Marx appear as a prophet on matters of ecology.[5]

I too got the impression that, for Saito, it was more important than it should have ever been to make Marx out to be exactly the kind of communist we need today over 140 years after his death. I do not understand why it should be important for any Marxist today to say that Marx already had exactly the theory we now need so long ago. Marxists work with Marx's theory, develop it for new applications to the present conditions of society, economy, and politics, and indeed, such

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[3] Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022). http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2023.2214853

[4] In this essay, I use the term "Marxicological" to indicate an approach to reading Marx aimed at precisely specifying, or strictly to grasp and insist upon, Marx's exact meanings and intentions. While this approach is important to any good understanding of Marx, and while I use it in my own university classes on Marx, it can be juxtaposed to approaches in Marxism that rely upon critical readings of Marx, extensions of his theory, novel applications, and developments of Marx's methods to account for deficits in his work.

[5] These lines from Huber and Phillips, op. cit. The article was published online, without page numbers, so it will be cited using op. cit., without page number specifications.

development and application should be the legacy of historical materialism. Marxism is Marx's theory beyond Marx's own life and times, and any materialist thinker must consider the changing conditions of their own life and times. This has been the understanding of Marxists after Marx, at least from as early as Antonio Gramsci. I shared some of Huber and Phillips's sensibility when reading *Marx in the Anthropocene*, but not when reading *Slow Down*.[6] In *Slow Down*, Saito has far more to offer towards a general analysis of capitalism, ecological crisis, politics, and the communism we need today. While *Slow Down* reproduces some of the same "Marxicological" arguments in *Marx in the Anthropocene*, those aspects are subordinate in *Slow Down* to Saito's rousing and energetic analysis full of provocative ideas for anyone interested in ecology, the limits of capitalism, and communism. (Before going any further, we should pause to appreciate the translator of *Slow Down*, Brian Bergstrom. I assume that the original energy of the text is Saito's, yet I was often seized by my own appreciation for the cleanliness of the English text.) Saito is a great writer, a pleasure to read. But he is also an original thinker, fully aware of the urgency of his subject matter, which is nothing less than the future of life on Earth. Hence, *Slow Down* is offered as a manifesto.

II. CLASS AND GROWTH

Saito makes a centerpiece out of a concept named by Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen, the "Imperial Mode of Living." This term specifies the mode of life in comparatively wealthy and technologically advanced societies of the Global North, where exorbitant lives of waste and abundance depend—often invisibly—upon "the lands and labor of the people of the Global South" (9).[7] Two of Saito's fiercest critics, Huber and Phillips, inaccurately characterize Saito as lacking class analysis and arguing that the "workers consumer too much." Huber and Phillips disingenuously claim that Saito characterizes working-class people as "downright imperial" and they falsely impute to him the claim that "workers in the developed world are imperialists whose everyday lives are a primary driver of ecological breakdown."[8] That is not even in the distant orbit of Saito's actual argument, so it's no wonder that Huber and Phillips muster no textual evidence for this caricature. In fact, before we

[6] Kohei Saito, *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*, trans. Brian Bergstrom (New York: Astra House, 2024).
[7] All in-text parenthetical citations refer to page numbers in *Slow Down*.
[8] Huber and Phillips, op. cit.

get to ecology, Saito frames his project from the start in terms of the class stratifications of the global economy. Some critics of degrowth communism adopt and redeploy an old capitalist scare tactic about forms of communism that place heavier burdens upon an already-exploited working class. But any honest and serious reader of Saito's work will see that he is in no way making such an argument.

Centrally, for Saito, the antagonistic logic of capital to the logic of ecology can be found in the capitalist imperative for growth. Capitalism can only exist as a system of extraction and accumulation, and without growth there is an economic crisis. But a system that "aims for unlimited economic growth, a global system of this sort will place the world's environment in danger" (11). Saito's premise is quite simple: If infinite growth is unsustainable on a small finite planet, then growth has its limits, and must inevitably be stopped. If the current level of extraction necessary for the imperial mode of living is unsustainable, and growth is ecologically catastrophic, then degrowth is the answer. And, if degrowth is also incompatible with capitalism, then there can be no future ecology without the abolition of capitalism.

Contrary to the above gripe of Huber and Phillips, the next and most pressing questions in *Slow Down* all deal with the supposedly negative consequences of degrowth on those already suffering in want of necessities. If the global capitalist system were to go in the opposite direction, what would be the practical and political aspects of a politics of degrowth? While Saito's answer will not satisfy all readers, he diligently addresses each chief concern with a seriousness that should generate good thinking even among unpersuaded readers. Saito refers to "the Productivity Trap" and "Growth Trap" of capitalist logic, which name and identify necessary limitations of capitalism as a system (39). More precisely, capitalism requires consistent economic growth driven by endless competitive production. Productivity and growth are irreducible requirements of capitalism, and it is because of them that capitalism must confront ecology. Production and growth reach a point where they cannot be sustained from an ecological point of view yet must be sustained from a capitalist point of view. This tension between economy and ecology sets the stage for Saito's insistence on the radical antithesis to capitalism, which he continues to call "communism."

The problem with leftist (indeed, even some Marxist) and liberal responses to the ecological crisis can be seen in the extent to which they remain trapped by production and growth. Saito is not opposed to electric cars and renewable energy. He is not against technology, despite Huber and Phillips's spurious assertion that Saito claims that if you are "pro-

technological you are also anti-ecological."[9] True, technological automation is no solution unless it is communist, because under capitalism, "automation means not the liberation from labor but the threat of replacement by robots—the threat of unemployment" (192). And Saito does pose two objections to programs that call for a technologically driven "green" capitalism. His first objection is that technological measures "are simply not enough," and his second is that efforts "to stop climate change cannot double as ways to further economic growth" (55). The main target of such a criticism is easy to see in any enthusiasm about a "Green New Deal" which promises that capitalist production and growth can continue unabated so long as they are shifted onto more ecologically sound terrain. Beyond these two basic problems with "green capitalism," something like the Green New Deal also promises to continue imperial modes of living. Saito understands that people concerned about ecology are drawn to so-called "solutions" that do not require any alteration in our forms of life. But he thinks this is far worse than wishful thinking. It is an ideological and willful ignorance, ultimately fatal. The harder truth is that, if we are serious about rising to the challenge, then "we must seriously consider following a path away from the large-scale, wasteful cycle of production and consumption of the Global North and toward the scaling down of our material footprint, starting at home" (65). This does not shift additional burdens onto the working class, nor does it treat the working class in an accusatory manner. Saito is a Marxist studying a global emergency, and thus, he makes no invitation to individual persons, workers or otherwise, to measure their private footprints or personal shopping habits. The clearest message of *Slow Down* is Saito's insistence on transformative solutions that go beyond self-congratulatory lifestyle politics.

III. RIVAL FUTURES

Saito imagines four possible futures. The first is climate fascism, which implicates a strong statist response to climate crisis, yet generates gross inequality of which the ruling class is the main beneficiary. A second possibility is barbarism, which implicates a weak state and the rampant inequality of everyone fending for themselves from radically unequal starting positions. It is worth noting that, in his elaboration of these two possible futures, it is precisely class analysis that grounds Saito's objections. A third possibility is what Saito calls climate Maoism,

[9] Huber and Phillips, op. cit.

which indicates a strong effort by governments to regulate and address ecological problems from above, but with little democratic steering from below. The fourth and final possibility, which Saito makes his case for against all the others is degrowth communism, which I discuss more fully below.[10]

Climate fascism and climate Maoism may prevent a slide into barbarism, but they both do so with the help of "some form of autocratic nationalism" (68). Beyond the various dangers of statism and barbarism, only degrowth communism, according to Saito, offers "a chance at survival while preserving ideals of freedom, equality, and democracy" (68). All paths are fraught, but what we simply cannot choose is the current reality: capitalism. "The essence of capitalism is that it will never stop growing in order to create profit. This is why now we can no longer afford to choose capitalism. Capitalism sees even the worsening of the global environmental crisis, climate change and all, as just another opportunity to make money" (69).

As noted, Saito has his critics on the Marxian left. However, in *Slow Down*, he takes on each major criticism one-by-one and, in my view, he meets and defeats them directly. That does not mean I have no critical appraisals of Saito, but rather, that *Slow Down* seems to me to immobilize the major and most common objections to degrowth communism. Many who hear the word "degrowth," for example, think the word means nothing more than "voluntary poverty," as if capitalist growth and Promethean production were an answer to poverty (70). This seems to Saito, and to me as well, as a major flawed assumption of those who associate productivism with counteracting poverty. Saito highlights the error by addressing Global North and Global South divisions of labor, showing that capitalist production and its growth logic do not effectively address poverty in Global South countries. The response of some Marxist critics is predictable: That is only because production is capitalist. But that assumes that comparable levels of production and growth would be necessary in a non-capitalist, or communist, mode of production. But why should anyone assume that? We know that production in capitalist societies was never regulated by consideration of the needs of working-class people. Marx himself was already clear in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* that capitalist work satisfies no real needs directly, but only indirectly by furnishing a wage that may be used as a means with which to satisfy *some needs*.[11] More

[10] Saito introduces these "four choices, four futures" on p. 66.

[11] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 109.

importantly, the growth logic of capitalism *does not even* address growing global inequality and problems of poverty in the Global North, as can be seen from OECD data, for example, in the declining share of income from 1970 to 2010 in the US, Japan, Germany, and France (71).

Against the assumptions of a productivist Promethean Marxism, Saito argues not only that degrowth is necessary for Earthly survival, but also that degrowth is incompatible with capitalism. As he puts it, those "who propose transitioning to a degrowth society while preserving capitalism are the ones who truly deserve to be called fantasists. Capitalism's very definition precludes any possible pairing with degrowth" (79). This point is crucial for a confrontation with those who advance, and wish to pursue, an "ecologically sane" form of capitalism. The fact is that, in a capitalist political economy, degrowth always indicates failure or crisis. Wealth and capital—which are not the same thing—must be accumulated, consolidated, and grown for macroeconomic health from a capitalist point of view. However, from an ecological point of view, this accumulation, consolidation, and growth can no longer be pursued without undermining the possibility of a livable, desirable future. Critics like Huber and Phillips either ignore this point of incommensurability, or they elide it with recourse to the same "practicality" that people who want a different world are always bludgeoned with.

Because "degrowth capitalism" is a contradiction in terms, degrowth communism appears as the necessary pairing. Saito is unapologetic in his embrace of the word "communism," which too many Marxists have given up. Many so-called Marxists prefer the word socialism to communism, and too many appear today much closer to Eduard Bernstein than Rosa Luxemburg, as far as they want something more palatable and "social democratic." It is no surprise that Huber and Phillips's piece was published in *Jacobin*, which has functioned for years as a *de facto* venue for recent Bernie Sanders campaigns in US electoral politics. In contrast to this, Saito is unequivocal in his insistence that we now need "a much more radical critique of capitalism… Yes," he says, "I am talking about communism" (83).

IV. COMMUNISM NOT "COMMUNISM"

In Chapter 4, Saito returns to Marx's *Capital* to make some of the points that are defining of *Marx in the Anthropocene*. He argues that Marx's concept of communism was never an aspiration to "Soviet-style one-party rule and nationalization" (87). Saito works instead with the concept of the commons, which has appeared variously in the works of

other unorthodox Marxists from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici. Saito focuses on Marx's concern with the metabolic rift that breaks the interdependent unity of human life with ecology. Saito insists that Marx's theory was opposed to capitalism because of its inevitable rift in metabolism, which would make sense if metabolic rift were indeed the ultimate proof of capitalist unsustainability. Saito argues that communism "is meant to topple the capitalism that destroys the Earth… We must all manage the Earth together as the ultimate commons" (88). Saito presents Marx as the author of this view, and defends Marx against the charge of Eurocentrism, highlighting how much Marx appreciated naturally arising communism in Indigenous societies around the world and outside the west. Naturally arisen communism is sometimes called, more problematically, "primitive communism," but Indigenous forms of life around the world certainly show more of the metabolic unity that would be broken by the industrial revolution, mass production, imperialism, colonization, slavery, and the imperial mode of living. Nonetheless, I do agree with Saito's critics that one of his least convincing claims, which he is clearly wedded to, is that Marx was himself a degrowth communist. I simply do not know why Saito is so insistent on this claim, and I also find it unconvincing.

One can certainly recognize some of Saito's evidence for Marx's agreement with the theory of degrowth communism. But it is hard to resist the conclusion that Saito overdetermines select passages, letters, and obscured lines, and that he heavily emphasizes the influence of Justus von Liebig's *Agricultural Chemistry*, which Marx was certainly reading and influenced by. I therefore agree with those critics (this includes Huber and Phillips) who find Saito unconvincing in reading Marx in line with Saito's own degrowth communism. However, "Marxicological" readers get stuck there. They cannot resist the temptation to jump ship over this quibble over Saito's reading of Marx. But this seems to me far worse than any interpretive overreach on Saito's part. If we go to war over whether Marx was or was not a degrowth communist, we risk displacing or ignoring Saito's arguments about capitalism and ecology. I like conversation about Marx's precise meaning and intention just as much as any other Marxist philosopher. I even revel in the fun. But such disagreement should not mean derailment from the major arguments of *Slow Down*.

The beating heart of Saito's major arguments is his claim that: "What has become clear at this point is that the only thing that can adequately address the present age of climate crisis is communism" because "ever-

expanding economic activity threatens to destroy the environment completely" and "if we don't use our own hands to stop capitalism's advance, we will witness the end of human history" (127). By the end of Saito's book, this conclusion is convincing and even appears inevitable. The problem lies in the imperative to stop capitalism with our own hands. What would that look like? What are our hands doing in such a "stopping of capitalism's advance?" Within anti-capitalist ecology, there are permutations of Marxian crisis theory according to which capitalism stops itself by bearing out the unsustainability of its own growth logic. Versions of such crisis theory can even be found in some unlikely non-Marxist places such as in Murray Bookchin and John Zerzan.[12] An optimistic crisis theory is potentially comforting, because according to it, the inexorable and inevitable disaster will come even if we keep our hands in our pockets doing nothing. The crisis will do the work of crumbling capitalism, and we will either be ready to make a transition to a new form of life or not. To his credit, Saito is not passively hopeful in that way. He is in no way suggesting we wait for some final crisis to save us. He wants an active politics, yet he also rejects what he calls "politicalism." Politicalism is the idea that we can address our problems by way of electing good leaders and making ecologically sound policy (132). Saito has no faith in this because politicalness operates within the boundaries of capitalism.

So, no optimistic crisis theory, no politicalness, but we still must end capitalism. Maybe we will all wake up and arise together demanding new forms of life in an ontological revolt? No, that is also not likely, because, according to Saito, "we find ourselves ever more obedient to capital as it infiltrates our lives, unable to do anything but execute what it commands" (138). He also rejects "geoengineering" and faith in some inevitable technological fix, the latter of which he calls an ideology (139, 143). All such technological fixes are bound to fail because they too accept the logic of capital and work within its limits. So, Saito's task will be to recommend a politics without politicalness that is not compatible with the preservation of capitalism and its logics of growth and production.

In Chapter 6, Saito argues against old tropes about capitalist abundance and communist rationing. Capitalism abolishes the abundance of any *commonwealth* by way of its radical privatization of what people want and need, a veritable conversion of abundance into the

[12] See Part 8 on Ecology in *Against Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by John Asimakopoulos and Richard Gilman-Opalsky (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018).

manufactured scarcity of bourgeois private property.[13] This is reminiscent of the famous lines in *The Communist Manifesto* where Marx and Engels counter fear-mongers who claim that communists want to take everything from everyone. There, Marx and Engels remind readers that "private property is already done away with for nine tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine tenths."[14] The private property of some is possible because of the expropriation of what could have been defended as a *commonwealth*. This is in some ways an old argument, but Saito develops it into an analysis of good and bad freedom. There is one concept of freedom according to which we human beings may choose "to put ourselves on the road to extinction by destroying the very foundation of our lives. But this is not a good freedom—let's call this a bad freedom" (169). In a certain sense, then, Saito is noting how some arguments about human freedom in the world today are arguments about our freedom to destroy the planet. He does not deny that we are indeed free to do so. But the freedom to destroy ecology and future life on Earth cannot be the only concept of freedom.

Against the freedom to go extinct, Saito develops an alternative, or good concept of freedom from Marx's *Capital*. Saito begins by thinking about freedom in relation to human needs. There is a full range of activities necessary for us to live. Necessity, for Marx, refers to the various modes of production and consumption we do as human beings to create and acquire what we need to continue to live. But if we only do what we must to maintain biological life, if that is all that we could do, then we would be deprived of freedom. A more robust conception of freedom could refer "to the range of activities that may not be strictly necessary for survival" but that are "necessary to be *human*. These include the arts, culture, friendship, romance, and even things like sports" (170). Marx advocated for this more robust form of freedom, beyond basic subsistence, and that is what Saito refers to as good freedom. Human freedom must include the capacity for the flourishing of our talents and proclivities in the direction of our desires and aspirations. Human flourishing, i.e., the realization of capabilities and desires, is not—at least not for communists—something that should only be

[13] Here, I am using the word "*commonwealth*" as a literal specification of wealth belonging to all in common, i.e., as part of the commons, and opposed to private wealth or wealth as private property.

[14] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," cited in *Karl Marx: Political Writings, Volume 1: The Revolutions of 1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 82. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvmd85j8.8

available to a minuscule subset of the population that can afford to pay for enriching experiences, education, cultural activities, art, food, health, and leisure, etc. Freedom to flourish must be available to everyone.

Connecting this with ecology, Saito argues that we must reject the scarcity of capitalist privatization and move towards a different kind of abundance. Saito's critics typically skip over this part of his argument, namely that *abundance is compatible with degrowth*. Degrowth does not mean the end of abundance, but only the end of a form of capitalist abundance that creates scarcity for most people on Earth. Degrowth does not mean less abundance of the *commonwealth*, but it does mean less capitalist scarcity, i.e., less expropriation of social and ecological abundance appropriated as the private wealth and power of the ruling class. As we have seen, Saito's harshest critics have argued that the last thing working-class people need is to have even less than they do, to be placed on an even stricter diet than they are already forced to accept. Saito's point is that capitalism has already done this. Degrowth communists reject it. Capitalism has defined abundance as private, as opposed to common. We want the opposite.

However, recall the dominant options for moving into the future. There are the strong statist administration Saito calls "climate Maoism," the oligarchic seizure of safety and resources he calls "climate fascism," or, finally, "barbarism." Having made his case against all three, Saito insists that degrowth communism is the only road into the future worth traveling. Degrowth is necessary for reasons of ecology. Communism is necessary, according to Saito, because "community self-governance and mutual aid are necessary to avoid a barbaric future ruled by far-right militias, radical groups like neo-Nazis, and organized crime syndicates like the Mafia… We must say it plainly—communism or barbarism!" (179-180). Each side, degrowth and communism, implicates the other because degrowth is incompatible with capitalist profit logic, extraction, and accumulation, and because communism specifies the positive content of anti-capitalist movement. As far as degrowth is a real movement against the present state of things, it is communist.

I imagine that many readers will find the two concluding chapters of *Slow Down* as offering too little too late. Saito focuses on "small seeds of change," often naming local projects in specific cities during fleeting moments (185). He argues we must transition to a use-value-based economy, thinking less about capitalist exchange values and more about what is necessary and useful for life on Earth. Such a transition in orientation and practice would not mean the end of production, but rather, a production redirected in terms of its purposes. If production

shifts from growth and accumulation to sustainability and *commonwealth*, the workday could even be shortened. Saito discusses other dimensions of degrowth communism, from abolishing the division of labor, to democratizing production, to prioritizing essential work. In his final chapters, Saito engages the late David Graeber's discussion of bullshit jobs, and appears to move towards a politics of revolt, self-management and mutual aid, which may lead some readers to view Saito as more anarchist than Marxist. Indeed, I see clear anarchist orientations and insights here, none of which are incompatible with Marxism. Huber and Phillips, for some reason, read Saito's appreciation of small things as Buddhist, not anarchist. I will not speculate as to why or how they overlook the anarchist sensibilities of Saito's Marxism. But all Marxists worth reading today have learned important lessons from the anarchists, and there is no reason to maintain and keep up ideological disputes from the second half of the nineteenth century.

Anarchist sensibilities aside, Saito is clearly grounded in Marx's work, working directly with and from Marx and Marxism in all his writing, and he claims communism—not anarchism—as the antithesis to our capitalist ecological end times. Saito's open Marxism, or philosophical willingness to engage texts and ideas and experiments across ideological divides, is not only refreshing, but politically necessary. Like many anarchists and Marxists interested in smaller things, Saito highlights lessons to learn from the Global South, and specifically from the Mexican movement of the Zapatistas in Chiapas. He also looks at environmental activism in South Africa, Barcelona and elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

Saito knows the enormity of the challenges we face, and he does not end with any fantastic pretensions. *Slow Down* contains no false hope, but it does reject hopelessness. In a culminating moment in the conclusion Saito says, "it would behoove us to remember the figure '3.5 percent.' That is the number that Harvard political scientist Erica Chenowith came up with in the course of her research into protest struggles as the percentage of the population that must rise up sincerely and nonviolently to bring about a major change in society" (231). He adds: "It seems entirely within the realm of possibility that enough people sincerely concerned with climate change and passionately committed to fighting it could gather to form a constituency of 3.5 percent" (232). Saito ends with this hopeful 3.5 percent, according to which, even if the cynics are right, and 96 percent of the world does

nothing at all, we may see enough revolt, collective action, protest, civil disobedience, and other upheaval and initiative (both legal and illegal) to win. Huber and Phillips call Saito's consideration of the 3.5 percent a "scholastic evasion of the necessity of mass politics."[15] Mass politics indeed! But where is the mass politics *they* call for? Do they think a post-Sanders campaign for democratically steered "socialistic" and ecological capitalism is "mass politics?" No, they cannot concede to that. If one were worried about a manipulative reading of Marx, the most common and destructive one of our times is that which recasts Marxism as a newfangled form of the democratic socialism Marx went to such great pains to demolish in *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

Saito is right to note that, as more people on the anti-capitalist left center ecology, and as more people committed to stopping the climate crisis identify capitalism as a root cause, some hope in the 3.5 percent is a real hope with empirical grounds. Someone will call it a desperate hope. Of course, it is indeed a desperate and tenuous hope, but it is no scholastic evasion, and as desperate as our times are, Saito's hope is far from a false one. In fact, if, as John Holloway has recently argued, we need hope in hopeless times, *Slow Down* is both urgent and essential.[16]

[15] Huber and Phillips, op. cit.
[16] See John Holloway, *Hope in Hopeless Times* (London: Pluto Press, 2022).