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Ecosocialism

Introduction to the Manifesto for an Ecosocialist Revolution: Work Less, Live Better

- Features -

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Presentations of the Fourth International [Manifesto for an ecosocialist revolution - Break with capitalist growth](#) at a public event organized in the Philippines in September 2025 by Maral Jefroudi “[Introduction to the Manifesto for an Ecosocialist Revolution: Work Less, Live Better](#)” below and Daniel Tanuro [Manifesto for an Ecosocialist Revolution: Possible consequences in the Philippines](#)”.

Being the result of a collaborative process of writing, discussion and amendments over three years, the Ecosocialist Manifesto is a collective work of the 4th International. However, it builds upon years of critical Marxist thought that has rejected economic determinist readings of Marx, and the stageist or mechanic understandings of a theory of revolutionary change. It is also founded on the collective knowledge that has been produced by socialist feminists, particularly those engaging with social reproduction theory, for decades. So we can see the Manifesto, which presents a clear and scientific study of the historical moment: the catastrophe we live in, in continuity with and as a part of an emancipatory tradition.

Yet, the manifesto goes beyond that. It formally and unapologetically breaks with the capitalist productivist notion of growth, suggests a lively debate on the needs and priorities of societies, and democratic, collaborative ways of doing it without subjugating the voice of the marginalized to the “greater good.” It does all of these while underlining that efficiency and democracy do not have to be sacrificed to each other. Here I am to expand some of these points of continuity and the call for democracy in building the “good life” the manifesto campaigns for.

Manifesto’s clear continuity with marxists feminism comes in centering good life and free time in its vision for a future society. Marxists feminists engaged in social reproduction theory have read capitalism through the lens of labour power, its production and reproduction. While discussions over productive and unproductive labour have kept us busy for years to understand the place of reproduction sphere in capitalism, family as the core institution of this reproduction sphere, where labour power is reproduced at the lowest cost possible and care is rendered exclusive but not sufficient to those belonging to it, survived. Making and unmaking working class families have been an ongoing process.

Labour power, as a “peculiar commodity” in Marx’s terms, is unique as a “commodity” the production and reproduction of which is mostly done outside the capitalist production sphere: the home. The peculiarity of labour power has many aspects. Different to other commodities, which are produced for the market, reproduction has not yet become a labour market-oriented activity even in the most dystopic moments of crises. A peculiar commodity which stays with its seller even after the exchange takes place.

Therefore what we observe instead is a process of commodification of labour and the land, an ongoing process, which like many aspects of capitalist mode of production (i.e. formal/real subsumption of labour relations) has not yet been fully realized. A process that has faced resistance from the early ages of capitalism against privatization of commons, indigenous peoples’ struggles over their land, workers’ struggle for 8- hour work, welfare rights, etc. A process of accumulation of wealth through extraction of surplus value that goes hand in hand with their dispossession (of people from commons, of women of their skills, etc.) in a continuous manner.

Marx’s labour theory of value brings us to the centrality of political struggle in determining the value of labour power, in terms of wage relation. In a nutshell, according the labour theory of value, “socially necessary labour time” to produce a commodity determines its value. It is socially necessary time as we are talking about a variable depending on the time and place and not individual capabilities. While it is easier to determine how many hours of abstract

labour has to be spent to make a coffee cup even in its most extravagant form, what is necessary for the reproduction of labour power definitely needs more discussion. Marx says it is the “level of civilization” that is effective in this relation. “Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we fight for roses too,” quotes the Manifesto. “A good life for all requires that basic human needs- healthy food, health, shelter, clean air and water are met. A good life is also a chosen life, fulfilling and creative...” When we acknowledge that class struggle is intrinsic to the formation of the working class itself, and that it is not secondary to the objective conditions of being a worker, it is the fight over what a good enough life for a worker is what we talk about. It is not possible to determine what socially necessary labour time is to reproduce the labour power if we do not agree on what the conditions of that life is. Manifesto urges a debate over the needs of the society, a debate that needs to take place locally, a debate that acknowledges the material limits of resources and yet doesn’t subsume the needs of the marginalized and the minorities to the “common denominator” of the majority.

Ecosocialist struggle has to be feminist and anti-racist

Even though we know that capitalism has not invented gender oppression or racism, we are certain that it has used the current racist and sexist constellation of power dynamics for its own means. With the separation of the production sphere with the reproduction sphere in an unprecedented way compared to previous class societies and historically pushing women to the reproduction sphere to do the labour necessary to reproduce life or at least taking the main responsibility of organizing it, capitalism has helped shape the current version of discrimination based on gender, which does not only oppress women but also LGBTQI+ people and others who do not live a life that fit to the norms of the family that is organized around reproducing labour power at the lowest cost possible. Women are not only the main producers of life in the domestic sphere, they also compose the majority of care workers all around the world. So paid or unpaid, care work is mostly done by women. By proposing to socialize care work, the manifesto simply means making them the business of everybody. While reorganizing the activities related to social reproduction, it also underlines that this reorganization will care not to reproduce gender stereotypes, either. Because while differences exist and will continue to exist between people, it is the social organization of those differences that creates oppressive systems, not the differences themselves.

Therefore, the manifesto calls for a feminist, anti-racist struggle, not only because we are against all forms of oppression but also because we know these oppressions are integral to the functioning of capitalism as we know it. Whether capitalism needs gender oppression or racism to function is a question of political theory. What we know is there’s no historical era in capitalism when it was not racist or sexist and thus anti-capitalist struggle has to be anti-racist and anti-sexist as well. From the initial accumulation of capital that led to industrial capitalism through slavery and plunder, to the re-configuration of the industrial reserve army based on the power dynamics of the era by positioning marginalized segments of the society against each other, capitalist organization of labour relations has helped create gendered and racialized identities.

When Marx discusses the limits of the working day in Capital Volume 1, he gives the example of slavery and plantations to demonstrate situations where the incentive to create “absolute surplus value” by lengthening the working day can function without restrictions. It is only possible to increase the working day beyond what is socially acceptable when the production goes beyond the satisfaction of local needs and focuses solely on producing surplus value. It is only possible to increase the working day when replacing the source of labour power can be seen more profitable than reproducing the labour power. It is when labour power (literally humans) can be bought as a commodity in the world market (i.e. slave trade), totally disembedded from its social network, that reproduction of its capacity can be dismissed. The history of industrial capitalism in Europe reveals this dual attitude (local/disembedded) towards labour. A modern version of this racist approach to labour, which shapes the composition of the industrial reserve army and the making of surplus populations can be seen in farms where undocumented seasonal workers are employed, in textile workshops where undocumented refugees work, or at domestic work where foreign, almost all women, care workers’ passports are confiscated by their employers.

Our main wealth: Free time

The priority of capitalism is not to cater to the needs of the people, but to produce profit. We want a system of production that prioritizes the needs of people and not profit, because that's the only way we can survive on this planet. "True wealth does not lie in the infinite increase of goods – having – but in the increase of free time – being" states the Manifesto. This state of being, of existing, does not only require having access to basic necessities for the reproduction of labour power but also the free time to be able to have a fulfilling, chosen life. Manifesto calls for liberating free time from being a residual category. Not what is left of the working time but an end in itself, the main resource necessary to build a meaningful life together. So we are in fact carrying the historical flag of the struggle over shortening the workday. We need free time to learn new skills, help each other, engage in meaningful activity and build communities. Freed time is the necessary condition to maintain processes of collective, inclusive, democratic deliberation that will organize our society. Manifesto states that "the ecosocialist break will bring double transformation of work: quantitatively we will work less, qualitatively it will create conditions for making work an activity of good life - conscious mediation between humans and the rest of nature."

While the current wage relation, the constant creation of surplus populations, the separation of production and reproduction spheres and invisibilizing what's going on in the latter reproduce class relations as well as power dynamics shaped by specific oppressions, the way to get out of it is embedded in the experiences that are shaped by these relations of exploitation and oppression. The Manifesto underlines the importance of self-organization of marginalized communities and segments of the society and the integration of the knowledge derived from these experiences into collective deliberation processes. Disabled people, women, racialized people including migrants and indigenous populations are agents of the change we struggle for.

One of the main strengths of the Manifesto comes in exposing the relationship of the exclusion of the marginalized segments of society in deciding what is good for the society. The people who are hardest hit by the current system are also the people who are systematically excluded from the design and implementation of its policies. This exposure comes with a strong commitment to democracy. There's no one-fits-all remedy. Each specific context would have its own issues and priorities. However, the principle of "decentralize as much as possible, coordinate as much as necessary" and organization of inclusive, democratic deliberation processes are indispensable for the change we are working for. It's through these processes that the decisions of what to produce and how to produce within the limits of material resources can be given. Another important point in the manifesto: When the Manifesto discusses the necessity of convergence of struggles, it is underlined that the goal is not to reach at "the greatest common denominator" in terms of demands, which can be to the detriment of the most marginalized groups. The convergence of struggles is "a process of dynamic articulation, which raises the level of consciousness through action and debate, in mutual respect."

Whenever a revolutionary project is discussed, it is unavoidable to come to the question of utopianism vs. realism. Are we talking about a world in the future or about now and here? The Manifesto starts from here and now and suggest concrete demands that opens the way for a revolutionary change. It is right that our imagination is limited with the social conditions we live in, our history, and the dominant ideology. However, even within these limitations we are aware of our chains as we move. (R. Luxemburg)

By mapping the ecosocialist alternatives in detail, including but not limited to public prevention plans against disasters, food sovereignty, socializing energy, finance and Big Tech, employment guarantee, education reform and expanding commons, the Manifesto underlines the importance of transitional demands that push the system with a perspective for an ecosocialist future. The commitment to democracy is not only a matter of idealism. We know that the marginalized segments of the working classes, including but not limited to, the women, the queer folk, indigenous populations, migrants, and disabled people, experience the crises of capitalism more than others. When liberated from the system's individualised traps of guilt and failure and reconstructed through collective deliberation and organization, it is those experiences that will lead our perspective for imagining and building alternatives.

We are also aware that we cannot create islands in capitalism without an overall system change, but we do not

underestimate the constructive power of the experiences that imagine and try to create examples of a post-capitalist relationships in today's world in the form of living communities, cooperatives, strike commissions, etc. Even if they may fail in the long run they enrich our collective imagination for a post-capitalist world. We are doing the same, it's not the first time revolutionaries are talking about socialization of tedious tasks or social reproduction. Early Russian revolutionaries had also imagined collective canteens, socializing child care and breaking with the traditional family, particularly through the work of Alexandra Kollontai and her comrades. That experience was lost in 1930s with Stalinist counterrevolution, but it stays with us and have helped develop our own alternatives. The manifesto is aware that you cannot win people by arguments alone. Partial victories give people courage.

Our slogan is an easy one for people to rally behind: "Work less, live and work better, live a good life." As simple as it is, it involves a lively debate wherever we are on what a good life in a planet with limited resources mean. What should be our priorities, what are the alternatives to the institutions we want to get away with? How are we going to build them? The Manifesto for sure has a lot of answers to combat the ecological catastrophe that we are currently going through and it encourages communities to fight against this destruction here and now. But it also goes beyond it by encouraging all of us to fight against capitalist society's norms of a good life and break that ideological blockade by proposing our alternatives.

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