

# Ecosocialism and degrowth: the criticism and anti-capitalist projects to get out of the ecological crisis

## Ecosocialismo e decrescimento: as críticas e os projetos anti-capitalistas para saída da crise ecológica

Michael Gonçalves Cordeiro\*  
Adriana Lucinda de Oliveira\*\*  
Gláucia Lélis Alves\*\*\*

**Abstract:** In this article, we intend to discuss, using ecosocialist and degrowth theories and projects, two perspectives that seek to combine the radical critique of the capitalist system and its intrinsic logic of destruction of the environment, with a sustainable society project, based on another pattern of civilization. We chose to use centrally the productions of the two main authors of these two currents with an impact on Brazilian social thought: the Brazilian Marxist living in France Michael Löwy and the French Serge Latouche, respectively exponents of ecosocialism and degrowth. We seek critically debate the main arguments of criticism of the destructive logic of capital and the respective societal projects, as well as to point out the existing and possible articulations in both perspectives.

**Keywords:** Environment. Ecosocialism. Degrowth. Societal projects. Ecological crisis.

**Resumo:** No presente artigo pretendemos discutir com as teorias e projetos ecosocialistas e do decrescimento, duas perspectivas que buscam conjugar a crítica radical ao sistema capitalista e a sua lógica intrínseca de destruição do meio ambiente, com um projeto de sociedade sustentável, assentado em um outro padrão de civilização. Optamos por nos valer centralmente das produções dos dois principais autores destas duas correntes com incidência no pensamento social brasileiro: o marxista brasileiro radicado na França

\* Mestrando em Desenvolvimento Territorial Sustentável pela Universidade Federal do Paraná – UFPR e especialista em Questão Social pela Perspectiva Interdisciplinar pela mesma instituição. Assistente Social do Centro de Referência de Assistência Social (CRAS) da Prefeitura Municipal de Garuva/SC. E-mail: michaelcordeiro016@gmail.com.

\*\* Doutora em Políticas Públicas pela Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR), com Mestrado em Desenvolvimento Regional pela Universidade de Blumenau (FURB) e em Serviço Social pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), bacharel em Serviço Social pela UFSC. É docente titular do curso de Serviço Social da UFPR e do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Desenvolvimento Territorial Sustentável. E-mail: adrilucinda@gmail.com.

\*\*\* Doutora e Mestre em Serviço Social pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). Assistente Social pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Goiás (PUC-GO). Professora adjunta da Escola de Serviço Social da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. E-mail: glelissas@yahoo.com.br.



This content is licensed under a Creative Commons attribution-type BY

Michael Löwy e o francês Serge Latouche, respectivamente expoentes do ecossocialismo e do decrescimento. Buscamos tanto debater criticamente os principais argumentos de crítica a lógica destrutiva do capital e os respectivos projetos societários, assim como apontar as articulações existentes e possíveis em ambas as perspectivas.

**Palavras-chave:** Meio ambiente. Ecossocialismo. Decrescimento. Projeto societário. Crise ecológica.

Recebido em: 13/03/2023. Aceito em: 03/08/2023

## INTRODUCTION

The current ecological crisis, intensified at least since the 1970s, has a multi-causal dynamic and diverse effects, many still unknown in their existence, others in their deepness and extension. It is about a global crisis that challenges the existing frontiers between countries and solutions that are limited to these frontiers. In spite of the global nature of the crisis, it does not affect the different regions of the planet homogeneously, expressing itself in a particular way between central and peripheral countries, and among different social groups, peoples, traditions and cultures.

As it is already common knowledge in studies on the environment and development, since the 1980s, the concept of Anthropocene has been used to define this new epoch as the one in which the effects of humanity would be globally affecting the planet, printing a new geological age. Among the changes that have been produced, there are those related to climate, loss of stratospheric ozone, ocean acidification, biogeochemical cycles of nitrogen and phosphorus, changes in the integrity of the biosphere, in the use of soil and water resources, in the aerosol loading in the atmosphere, in addition to the introduction of new entities and chemical pollution (ARTAXO, 2015).

Indicators of the size of the crisis in which we are mired and sinking progressively and rapidly are the results of the first part of the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Foundation*, by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published in 2021. Since 2011, according to the report, greenhouse gas concentrations have continued to increase, reaching an annual average of 410 parts per million (ppm) for carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), 1866 parts per billion (ppb) for methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and 332 ppb for nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) in 2019. Each of the last four decades has been successively warmer than any decade before 1850 according to the results presented, and in 2011-2020 the global surface temperature was 1.09°C higher than 1850-1900, so that greenhouse gases have been the main driver of tropospheric warming since 1979.

Future projections indicate that global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least mid-century under all considered emission scenarios. Even under a very low emissions scenario, the average global surface temperature between 2081-2100 is likely to be 1.0°C to 1.8°C higher compared to 1850-1900. In a very high emissions scenario, projections range from 3.3°C to 5.7°C (IPCC, 2021).

The catastrophic consequences of these and other changes that the mentioned data reveal become increasingly present in the daily life of the population. A more recent example is the heavy rains that led to the flooding of southern Bahia, resulting in dozens of deaths and thousands of homeless people (cf. MONCAU, 2021), and the same phenomenon in Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco, a city indicated by the IPCC as one of the twenty most vulnerable cities to the effects of climate change in the world (GREENPEACE BRASIL, 2022). It is evident that despite being immediately experienced and perceived, these events are not so directly linked to the factors of climate change in the population's consciousness.

Seeking to face this global reality under development, actions have been carried out by international organizations and a portion of the nations of the world. These actions formally begin with the 1972 United Nations (UN) Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. In the same year, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) was created to coordinate international actions for environmental protection. In 1987, the *Brundtland Report* was published, placing the concept of sustainable development in the spotlight. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), known as ECO-92, took place in Rio de Janeiro. This resulted in protocols to face the crisis, among which the Global Agenda 21 stands out. In 2000, the UN General Assembly established the eight "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs), with environmental sustainability among its objectives. In 2010, the Johannesburg Declaration was created by Rio+10. Finally, in 2012, the Rio+20 Conference took place. From it, a new agenda was established in 2015, the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", which established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Another international instrument created to face the environmental crisis is the Conference of the Parties (COP), linked to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an international treaty resulting from the 1992 Conference in Rio de Janeiro, which meet annually to review progress in implementing the Convention. In 2015, COP-21 took place in Paris, which resulted in the "Paris Agreement", and from that measures to reduce the effects of climate change were defined. It was the first time in history that 195 heads of state met to discuss a common resolution, therefrom the particularity of this Conference and the importance of the agreement.

However, different authors and theoretical currents that debate the environmental issue and the ecological crisis (we will see two in this article) have pointed to the limits of these actions proposed by the international organizations. The absence of criticism of the capitalist system and its intrinsic and necessary logic of reproduction of this crisis is at the heart of the reasons given for these limits.

In this article, we propose a reflection from two theoretical perspectives and projects of society that seek to combine the radical critique of the capitalist system and its intrinsic logic of destruction of the environment with a project of a sustainable society, based on another pattern of civilization. These are ecosocialist theories and projects, which make up the broad field of the Marxist tradition, and the project of the ecological and developmental current of degrowth.

To that end, we opted for bibliographical research (MAY, 2004), we chose to use centrally the productions of the two main authors of these two currents with an impact on Brazilian social thought: the Brazilian Marxist living in France Michael Löwy and the French Serge Latouche, respectively exponents of ecosocialism and degrowth - without, however, excluding other important contributions to the understanding of both perspectives.

In addition to this introduction and of considerations, the text is divided into chapter on ecosocialism, in which the critique of capitalism is combined with your overcoming project, emphasizing the particular incorporation of the marxian legacy, and another chapter on degrowth, following the same exposure method (MARX, 2011) from the previous chapter and aiming to dialogue with this, seeking points of contact and dissent.

With this work, we wish to provide a greater opening to radical (anti-capitalist) theories and projects, including ecosocialism and degrowth, moving towards an overcoming, at least theoretical, of the non-anti-systemic alternatives to the ecological crisis, still guided by the conception of sustainable development within the framework of the capitalist system and the limits of the proposals of international organizations.

### **Criticism and the ecosocialist project**

In a work published for the first time in 1983, the well-known Marxist historian Perry Anderson stated in its last pages that within the Marxist tradition, the ecological movement - along with the feminist movement - was one of the main initiatives that took place in recent years in the sense of bringing together institutional discourses and ideals of transformation, that is, of approximation between renewed theory and practice, highlighting the work of André Gorz.

Since that historical moment, there has been a growing ecological concern within Marxism, both because of a resumption of the writings of Marx and Engels from the point of view of environmental problems, in which we could cite reference authors such as John Bellamy Foster (2005) and his work *Marx's ecology: Materialism and nature* and more recently Kohei Saito (2021) with his *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, as well as by those who, from the Marxian legacy, seek to critically investigate the ecological crisis and the recent transformations of capital, as in the monumental work of István Mészáros entitled *Beyond capital: toward a theory of transition*.

It is in the midst of this movement that the ecosocialist project becomes evident which, according to Michael Löwy (2014), is a project that is based on the union between the “red” of the Marxist critique of capitalism and the socialist project and the “green” of ecological critique of productivism. This project emerges at the end of the 20th century, more precisely in the 1970s, with authors from different parts of the world among its pioneers, as Manuel Sacristán from Spain, Raymond Williams from England, André Gorz from France, James O'Connor from United States and Frieder Otto Wolf from Germany. Before that, ecosocialism was an issue within the eco-Marxist current, also inspired by Murray Bookchin's social ecology, by Arne Naess and by the critique of the growth of Paul Ariès. Even after its development in the 1970s, the term ecosocialism only started to be used in the following decade, as of the use of this name to designate a political current in the German Green Party at the time. In Brazil, the figure of Chico Mendes is highlighted by the author as one of the precursors in the materialization of this convergence between socialism and ecology<sup>1</sup>. But the expansion of ecosocialism as an alternative Marxist current for ecology takes place mainly at the beginning of our century, with the publication of the International Ecosocialist Manifesto in 2001 and the foundation of the International Ecosocialist Network in 2007. Recently, in 2014, there were two conferences representative of this expansion,

---

<sup>1</sup>“Due to its articulation between socialism and ecology, agrarian reform and defense of the Amazon, peasant and indigenous struggles, the survival of humble local populations and the protection of a heritage of humanity - the last great tropical forest not yet destroyed by capitalist ‘progress’ - Chico Mendes’ combat is an exemplary movement, which will continue to inspire new struggles, not only in Brazil but in other countries and continents” (LÖWY, 2014, p. 18).

the European Ecosocialist Conference in Geneva and the Ecosocialist Conference in Quito (LÖWY, 2005; LÖWY; DIAS, 2019).

### **The ecosocialist embodiment of the legacy of Marx and Engels**

Socialism and the theoretical basis of ecosocialism, therefore, have their origin in the legacy of Marx and Engels. Despite the capital importance of the work of these thinkers, it is not the purpose of this article to address the role of ecology in their works. We only aim to indicate the mode of appropriation of ecosocialism by the legacy of Marx and Engels, of which we identify at least two fundamental influences: the critique of capitalism and the socialist project.

Regarding the first influence - the analysis and criticism of the capitalist mode of production -, it is necessary to consider that Löwy's ecosocialism works from a critical view of the contribution of Marx and Engels' thinking to the ecology and the ecological challenges of the 21st century. In other words, it seeks, in a way, to carry out a balance of the precursors of the Marxist tradition with regard directly or indirectly to ecology, rejecting a dogmatic reading of their works. For Löwy, the thought of Marx and Engels has a contradiction "between the productivist principles of certain texts and the intuition that progress can be the source of the irreversible destruction of the environment" (LÖWY, 2014, p. 37), and it is necessary to recognize this contradiction in order to build an ecosocialism at the height of the current crisis.

Initially, it is necessary to consider that, in the interpretation of LÖWY (2005, p. 19), "ecological themes do not occupy a central place in the Marxian theoretical framework" and that his writings on the theme, due to their plurivocal nature, can and are the object of different interpretations. In Löwy's (2005, p. 24; LÖWY, 2002, p. 123) analysis, Marx and Engels show "a non-critical stance on the industrial production system created by capital and a tendency to make the 'development of productive forces' the main vector of progress", with moments of their work exposing a certain evolutionist content, supporters of a philosophy of progress, of scientism, and an uncritical position before the productive forces. This position is expressed, for example, in the "very uncritical admiration of Marx for the 'civilizing' work of capitalist production and for its brutal instrumentalization of nature" (LÖWY, 2005, p. 24-5; LÖWY, 2002, p. 123). It is important to emphasize that the central point of the criticism is the absence of the notion of the natural limits of the development of the productive forces in the work of Marx and Engels<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding the influence of the project of a socialist society based on overcoming capitalism, maintaining the critical line, Löwy (2005, p. 33) states that Marx and Engels "frequently seem to conceive socialist production simply as the collective appropriation of forces and the means of production developed by capitalism", resulting in "a kind of substantial continuity between the capitalist and the socialist productive apparatus". As a result, the problem of the environment is excluded from this conception of transition to socialism.

On the other hand, in the work of the founders of the Marxist tradition, the need for the insuppressible relationship between society and nature is present, a fundamental of greater importance, which here can only be mentioned. Furthermore, in the work of Marx and Engels, there is a type of theory of the rupture of the metabolism between society and nature, resulting

---

<sup>2</sup> In Brazilian social thought, this criticism had already been made, for example, by Celso Furtado (2008, p. 76). According to the author, "liquidating the social relations proper to capitalism does not necessarily mean moving towards an egalitarian society if the logic of specific accumulation of industrial civilization is maintained [...] Which explains why anti-capitalist ideologies, founded on the idea of accumulation-progress, have operated as an auxiliary line in the planetary diffusion of these values [of the bourgeois revolution]".

from the productivist logic of capital, which appears in a fragmented way in several moments of their works, notably in volume 3 of *Capital* (LÖWY, 2005).

Without getting deeper, from these premises, the following conclusion is important to think about the constitution of ecosocialism and the role of Marx and Engels' thinking: "Marx and Engels lack an ecological perspective as a whole", but "it is impossible to think of a critical ecology that is up to the contemporary challenges without taking into account the Marxian critique of political economy, the questioning of the destructive logic induced by the limited accumulation of capital"; neglecting this criticism leads to elaborations that do not go beyond the search for corrections of the excesses of the system (LÖWY, 2005, p. 37).

These indications are important to show not only the relative marginalization of the ecological problem in the work of Marx and Engels but also within the tradition that was built from their theoretical concepts. In relation to the Marxist tradition as a whole, ecosocialism represents a recognition of the importance and the seeking for a systematic treatment of ecological issues, considering the Marxians contributions and from Marxism, but aiming to overcome "its productivist dross" at the theoretical level and the bureaucratic authoritarianism at the practical-political plane of the Soviet experience of socialism (LÖWY, 2014, p. 44).

The ecological question is, in my view, the great challenge for a renewal of Marxist thought at the beginning of the 21st century. It demands from Marxists a radical break with the ideology of linear progress and with the technological and economic paradigm of modern industrial civilization [...] The Achilles heel of Marx and Engels' reasoning was, in some "canonical" texts, an uncritical conception of capitalist productive forces – that is, of the modern capitalist/ industrial technical/productive apparatus – as if they were "neutral" and as if it was enough for revolutionaries to socialize them, to replace their private appropriation with a collective appropriation, making them function for the benefit of the workers and developing them in an unlimited way. I believe it is necessary to apply to the productive apparatus influenced by capital the same reasoning that Marx proposed, in *The Civil War in France* (1871), for the theme of the State apparatus: The working class cannot be satisfied by taking the state machine as it is and making it run on its own." *Mutatis mutandi*, workers cannot be satisfied with taking the capitalist productive "machine" as such and making it work on its own: they must radically transform it (LÖWY, 2005, p. 39).

In addition to the critique of capitalism and the socialist project, it is possible to identify yet another essential component of the Marxian and Engelsian legacy to ecosocialism: the dialectical-materialist method. It is this method that enabled Marx and Engels to criticize political economy and lay bare the logic of capital, and which enables the ecosocialism the analysis of the contemporary ecological crisis. A concrete example of the centrality of the method for ecosocialist theories is given to us by Löwy & Fernandes (2020, s.p.):

[...] the socioecological struggle is a good example of the need for a dialectical Marxist vision of the individual and collective agency. This translates into two levels: one is the complementarity between individual initiatives, for example, vegetarian food, and structural changes, such as ending subsidies to the meat industry or defending the forest against the destructive expansion of livestock. For ecosocialists, it is not a matter of opposing one initiative to another but of winning vegetarians to social struggles. Socioecological mobilizations, and a

possible revolutionary process of transition to ecosocialism, are not possible without the individuals, a large number of them, joining this collective struggle.

It is important to point out that the method is the foundation not only for the concrete analysis of the movement of reality but for the construction of coping strategies, that is, for the ecosocialist project. Still in relation to this, the same author states that “ecosocialism can contribute to the convergence of struggles, by revealing, *with the help of historical materialism*, the intimate relationship between capitalist exploitation, racism, patriarchal domination and the destruction of nature” (LÖWY; FERNANDES, 2020, s.p. - *bold added*). In the same lines, Barreto (2021, p. 218) argues that “in the case of climate change, the category of totality has, in addition to ontological centrality, a practical centrality” given that “the phenomenon of climate change is irredeemably global”.

### **The ecosocialist criticism**

The ecosocialist project of intertwining Marxism with ecology, based on a critical review of the contributions of Marx and Engels, suggests the replacement of the “mechanistic scheme of the opposition between the development of the relations of production that hampered it with the much more fruitful idea of a transformation of potentially productive forces into effectively destructive forces” (LÖWY, 2014, p. 49). According to James O’Connor (1992), it is necessary to consider that in addition to the contradiction between productive forces and production relations, there is a contradiction between productive forces and production conditions in capitalism, that is, capitalism has a dynamic of self-destruction via the destruction of workers, urban space and nature. The Italian eco-Marxist Tiziano Bagarolo (1992 *apud* LÖWY, 2005), in turn, suggests a critique of development apologetics by replacing the traditional scheme of the contradiction between productive forces and production relations with the transformation of potentially destructive forces into effectively destructive ones (including to the environment).

In an exposition based on a more systematic analysis of recent trends in the capitalist mode of production, the Hungarian Marxist Mészáros (2011, p. 267) states that “with the consummation of the historical rise of capital and the activation of the absolute limits of the system [ ...] the destructive factor of ‘total costs of production’ [...] becomes increasingly disproportionate and ultimately prohibitive”. It turns out that, contrary to an *a priori* statement such as those mentioned above, it is about a historical fact of transition from the “practice of ‘productive destruction’ of capital reproduction to a phase in which the predominant aspect is that of an ever greater and more irremediable destructive production.” We quote Mészáros’ position to demonstrate, on the one hand, a position that seems to us to be more qualified on the problem and, on the other hand, that it is a controversial issue within the Marxist tradition.

According to Löwy (2005; 2002), ecosocialism is based on two central arguments: the first one is that the mode of production and consumption of advanced capitalist countries cannot be expanded to the rest of the globe given the existing natural limits<sup>3</sup>; the second one that the development of capitalism directly threatens the very existence of the human species and the natural environment. “The limited rationality of the capitalist market, with its immediate calculation of losses and profits”, advocates Löwy (2005, p. 50; 2002, p. 130), “is intrinsically

---

<sup>3</sup> Over again, we find similar considerations already in Furtado (2013, p. 174): “[...] the hypothesis of extending the forms of consumption that currently prevail in central countries to the capitalist system as a whole has no place within the apparent evolutionary possibilities of this system”.

contradictory to an ecological rationality, which takes into account the long temporality of natural cycles”. As we indicated earlier, ignorance regarding the necessary connection between productivism and capitalism represents the central limit of the main ecological currents and/or that guide an ecological development within the scope of capitalism, resulting in illusory or unfounded propositions, such as facing the ecological crisis by the control of excesses or a clean (or green) capitalism (LÖWY, 2005; LÖWY, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

Without rejecting the idea of development, according to Fernandes (2020), ecosocialism shatters it, ridding it of its capitalist and colonial facets with a view to enriching it with qualitative notions of a good life. Thus, the ecosocialist project runs counter to developmental and productivist ideologies, including those within socialist circles and leftist theories. Also, according to the author, the development of peripheral countries, with a view to ending poverty, is not an antithetical pole of an energy transition and climate action, but must be based on a socialist transition plan, given the limit of development in the interior of the capitalist logic.

Ecosocialism also rejects ecocapitalist paths or green economy solutions, as a false path, as they seek to reconcile the mitigation of environmental impacts with the maximization of profits, that is, solutions via the market. “The result”, according to Fernandes (2020, s.p.), “has been a very slow crawl towards the decarbonization of energy, which represents much more a diversification of private and public energy supply infrastructures than a transition itself”.

### **The ecosocialist project**

After briefly exposing the incorporation of the legacy of Marx and Engels by ecosocialism and the criticism of the capitalist mode of production and the pseudo-solutions that do not incorporate a radical negation of its logic, we are in a position to expose the ecosocialist proposal to face the ecological, development and concrete utopia crisis.

O’Connor (1998 *apud* Löwy, 2005) perceives ecosocialism as the movements and theories that aim to subordinate exchange-value to use-value, aiming at ecological socialism of production organization based on real social needs, ecological limits and democratic control. Löwy (2005; LÖWY, 2009) adds to this definition the need for collective ownership of the means of production and democratic planning with a view to reorganizing production and investment objectives and a new technological structure of productive forces.

The ecosocialist project, by showing the limits and inadequacies of partial reforms, points to the need for a *change in civilization*. Such a change implies at least the following transformations (LÖWY, 2005; LÖWY, 2009):

- Contrary to commodity fetishism and the autonomization of the economy, the implementation of an economic policy based on non-monetary and extra-economic criteria. It implies a qualitative change in development by putting an end to the waste of resources, orienting production towards the satisfaction of authentic needs<sup>5</sup>;

---

<sup>4</sup>“Ecologists are wrong if they think they can do the economics of the Marxian critique of capitalism: an ecology that does not realize the relationship between ‘productivism’ and the logic of profit is doomed to failure – or worse, to recovery by the system. Examples abound... The absence of a coherent anti-capitalist stance led most European green parties – in France, Germany, Italy, Belgium – to become simple ‘eco-reformist’ supporters of the social-liberal management of capitalism by center-left governments” (LÖWY, 2005, p. 46).

<sup>5</sup>This implies, among other things, for Löwy, the end of the advertisement: “It is a branch of production that is not only useless from the human point of view but is also in contradiction with real social needs. While advertising is an indispensable



- The replacement of the micro-rationality of profit by the social and ecological macro-rationality;
- A profound technological reorientation aiming to replace current non-renewable energy sources, assuming control of both the means of production and the technological investment decisions;
- Instead of reducing the population's consumption, the reorganization of the type of consumption, no longer based on waste, accumulation and commercial alienation;
- A local, national and international democratic planning capable of defining the products that should be subsidized or distributed free of charge, which energy options to use, how to reorganize the transport system for social and ecological purposes and how to repair existing damage to the environment;
- The construction, as a consequence, of an alternative way of life and, therefore, of a new civilization, no longer based on "having" but on "being".

Another ecosocialist, David Schwartzman, further argues that are essential for an ecosocialist transition:

- 1) A global high efficiency solar energy infrastructure, replacing fossil fuels and nuclear energy; 2) Application of the containment and precautionary principles to environmental policy (including industrial ecology, organic agriculture centered around and in green cities); 3) Progressive dematerialization of technology, global availability of state-of-the-art information technology; 4) Increase of human population density centered in green cities, elimination of sprawl leaving extensive biospheric reserves, managed to preserve biodiversity (SCHWARTZMAN, 2009, p. 5).

This perspective of structural transformation, however, does not dispense with immediate reforms, provided that these are taken as moments of dynamization of a transition between "the minimal demands and the maximum program" (LÖWY, 2005, p. 60). Among the immediate demands, Löwy (2005, p. 60) cites:

- the promotion of cheap or free public transport - trains, subways, buses, trams - as alternatives to the smothering and pollution of cities and countryside by the individual car and the road transport system;
- the fight against the debt system and the ultra-liberal "adjustments" imposed by the IMF and the World Bank on the countries of the South, with dramatic social and ecological consequences: mass unemployment, destruction of social protections and food crops, destruction of natural resources for export;
- defense of public health, against air, water (groundwater) or food pollution by the greed of large capitalist companies;
- the reduction of working time as a response to unemployment and as a society's vision that privileges free time over accumulating goods.

Löwy (2005; LÖWY, 2009) also highlights the need for immediate action to drastically limit greenhouse gas emissions, a general moratorium on transgenics, banning chlorofluorocarbons,

---

dimension in a capitalist market economy, it would have no place in a society in transition to socialism. It would be replaced by information about products and services provided by consumer associations. The criteria to distinguish an authentic need from an artificial need would be its permanence after the suppression of advertising" (LÖWY, 2009, p. 47).

strict regulation of industrial fishing, taxation on polluting cars and prioritizing public transport over individual transport.

From the same ecosocialist starting point, but with a different vision - which denotes the diversity of positions within not only the Marxist tradition, as we have already seen in relation to Mészáros, but within the scope of ecosocialism itself -, from the centrality given to the perspective of the totality, Barreto (2021, p. 219) questions the idea of incremental progress of reforms constant in Lowy. According to the author,

[...] restrictions release capital, which cannot, by its very nature, settle into immobility. That capital released at one place in the system needs to find another space of action to carry out its expansive movement. From the point of view of totality, only the redistribution of capital in its expansive dynamics exists. From a materiality point of view, there is absolutely nothing to guarantee that the impact reduction accomplished at the local level will translate into overall impact reduction.

For Barreto (2021, p. 228), unlike Lowy, the metabolism of capital “is incompatible not only with a generic idea of long-term ecological sustainability but also with any short-term and unambitious notion of relief or slowdown of our destabilizing impact on the planet’s climate”. This conception is close to the theoretical conception of Mészáros. According to him, the intrinsic and necessary expansionist rationality of capital is in contradiction with any consideration, even the most elementary ones, of rational control of global human and material resources. This implies the complete ineffectiveness of the local or punctual limitation of the system (MÉSZÁROS, 2011, p. 258-9)<sup>6</sup>.

Returning to Lowy (2005), this process of changes and transformations implies an ethics radically different from the ethics sustained by the current system or by the non-ethics of the objectivity of the logic of the market. In a confrontation with the ethics of individual behavior, ecosocialism defends an ethics: *social*, focused on changes in economic and social structures based on collective movements and organizations; *egalitarian*, which goes against the necessary logic of maintaining and deepening inequalities between central and southern countries; *democratic*, which defends the democratization of the economy and the democratic control of production; *radical*, which proposes to go to the root of the problems, proposing revolutionary transformations, paradigm shifts and a new civilization model; and, finally, *responsible*, both with future generations and with our own generation, which must be allied to the principle of utopian hope.

Finally, it is also important to note the ecosocialist concern with the convergence of protests and struggles, especially the indigenous and peasant struggles, which have long denounced the environmental disaster and built resistance. There is a demand for convergence with different social struggles, as well as between different ecological currents with anti-capitalist projects, ranging from the ecology of the poor, mentioned by Alier (2011) to, with reservations<sup>7</sup>, currents such as degrowth, which we will talk about next.

---

<sup>6</sup> “[...] the unavoidable need to ensure the sustainable management of the conditions of socio-metabolic control and production in the appropriate global context turns out to be something irremediably beyond the reach of the capital, no matter how far and how dangerously the system is stretched” (MÉSZÁROS, 2011, p. 259).

<sup>7</sup> “Some ecologists believe that the only alternative to productivism is to stop aggregate growth or replace it with negative growth – named ‘degrowth’ in France. In order to do this, it is necessary to drastically reduce the excessive level of consumption of the population and give up individual houses, central heating and washing machines, among others, to reduce energy consumption by half. As these draconian austerity measures and other similar risk being very unpopular,

## The degrowth

Degrowth, as presented by Latouche<sup>8</sup> (2009), is a movement that goes from the criticism of the “mismanagement of the engine of progress” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. XIV<sup>9</sup>) – green algae that progressively suffocates the whole of society – to the proposal of a concrete utopia of degrowth – like the wisdom of the snail that knows the limits of its growth –, going from one to the other and from these to that one. As defended, degrowth is “a political slogan with theoretical implications” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. 4), whose main objective is to criticize and abandon the goal of unlimited growth – which is driven by the unbridled pursuit of profit. It is emphasized that degrowth is not a proposal for reforming the system but for the foundation of a society based on a new logic.

In addition to a post-capitalist perspective as in the ecosocialism, of a new logic (a new civilization in Löwy) – despite, as we will see, differences between the two concrete utopias – Latouche’s degrowth has in common a critique of the concept of sustainable development. In summary, according to the author, sustainable development is a way of maintaining the current development path, conserving the logic of profit and current habits. In sustainable development, only marginal aspects of the system are questioned, while its logic remains untouched. As he states, “denounce the ‘frenzy of human activities’ or the mismanagement of the engine of progress does not make up for the lack of analysis of the capitalist and mercantile techno-economic megamachine” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. XIV)<sup>10</sup>.

In the same critical line of naive views, Latouche (2009) turns against the mechanistic solutions of population control, both the pessimist who affirms the end of humanity in case of maintenance of the rhythm of population growth, proposing conservative solutions of birth control, as well as the optimistic one, which focuses on the prominence of the development of productive forces in relation to population growth. In contrast, Latouche questions the isolation of the issue from its fundamental problem, that is, the logic of the economic system itself. Quoting Frans de Waal, he argues that the issue is not exactly the management of overpopulation but the egalitarian division of resources.

The same criticism, in both cases, can be found, for example, in the aforementioned Mészáros (2011, p. 251). Regarding the population growth, it states that the “defenders of neo-Malthusian solutions” do not understand that “the capital itself is absolutely incapable of imposing limits, regardless of the consequences, not even the total elimination of humanity”, not being a matter of an individual psychological problem. Considering the optimistic perspectives attributed to the productive forces, Mészáros (2011, p. 254) considers any claim to solve current problems by

---

some degrowth advocates play with the idea of a kind of ‘ecological dictatorship’” (LÖWY, 2009, p. 45). In Löwy’s opinion, this is a purely quantitative conception of both the growth and the development of the productive forces.

<sup>8</sup> Degrowth is not a homogeneous movement, therefore, Latouche represent only one of its fractions. According to Flipo (2012), the culturalist fraction, with origin in anthropology and coming from Marxism, that’s why, including, the importance of your debate on the side of ecosocialism.

<sup>9</sup> We followed the numbering as in the edition we are using, which starts with Roman numerals and from the first chapter onwards the count starts (from page 1) with Arabic numerals.

<sup>10</sup> “Saying that infinite growth is incompatible with a finite world and that both our production and consumption cannot exceed the biosphere’s regenerative capacities is evidence easily shared. In return, the undeniable consequences that these same productions and consumptions must be reduced (by some two-thirds in the case of France) and that the logic of systematic and unrestricted growth (whose core is the compulsion and the addition to the growth of finance capital) must therefore be questioned are much less well-accepted, as well as our way of life. As for the designation of the main responsible, it seems frankly blasphemous” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. XIV).

science and technology to be an illusion, given that the “ground of *viable* science and technology” is “strictly subordinated to the absolute demands of capital expansion and accumulation.

If not from sustainable development, where does degrowth come from? There are two sources, explains Latouche (2009): the culturalist critique of the economy on one hand, with André Gorz, François Partant, Jacques Ellul, Bernard Charbonneau, Cornelius Castoriadis and Ivan Illich, since the late 1960s, questioning progress, science and technique; and the ecological critique of economics on the other, with Sergei Podolinsky in the 19th century and Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and Kenneth Boulding in the late 1970s. Thus, we see similarities between the sources of degrowth and ecosocialism.

Unlike the degrowth critically cited by Löwy, the one proposed by Latouche is not negative growth, nor does it aim only at quantitative changes; on the contrary, it requires a radical qualitative change: a degrowth society, degrowth in a system based on another logic (LATOUCHE, 2009). And like in ecosocialism, degrowth embraces that the “alternative to productivism is placed at all levels: individual, local, regional, national and global” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. 96).

The need for a concrete utopia that puts on the agenda a new logic of society is based on the conception that the current system is doomed to growth, as it is organized on the basis of unlimited accumulation. Latouche analyzes what he considers to be the “three ingredients necessary for the consumer society to continue on its diabolical carousel” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. 17), namely, advertising, credit (or profit) and programmed and accelerated obsolescence - factors also mentioned by Löwy, as we have seen (except for the latter but which appears in other texts).

This concrete utopia, based on a realistic analysis of reality, aims at a cultural revolution that must culminate in a refoundation of the political. It is a political project of construction and a user-friendly economic and autonomous society. The project of transforming social logic to build a degrowth society, according to Latouche (2005), is planned in the systematic articulation of eight interdependent changes, called the “‘virtuous circle’ of eight ‘Rs’” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. 42). Those are:

- Reassess social values. The prevalence of altruism, cooperation, pleasure in leisure, the importance of social life, the place, autonomy, the sensible, the relational, the harmonious insertion with nature, etc., all this, evidently, goes against the prevailing values in today’s society.
- Reconceptualize the way we apprehend reality, destroying the economic imaginary of the artificial creation of need, the conceptualization of wealth and the poor and, thus, refund and transform our imaginary;
- Restructuring the productive apparatus and social relations according to the proposed new social values;
- Redistribute wealth and access to natural heritage, eliminating inequalities in this matter between North and South, classes, generations and individuals;
- Relocate, that is, “to produce locally, whatever is essential, products intended to satisfy the needs of the population, in local companies financed by savings collected locally”. And yet, recover the territorial anchoring of politics and culture (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. 49);
- Reduce: impact on the biosphere, health risks, mass tourism and working time;
- Reuse/recycle, the need to reduce waste, combat to planned obsolescence and the recycling waste.

Degrowth (at least the one proposed by Latouche), as mentioned earlier, has in common with ecosocialism the seeking for a concrete utopia that, however, has differences both in the end and

the means. Both demand a transformation in culture, legal structures, production relations and productive forces. However, degrowth assumes a revolutionary perspective strongly influenced by theorists such as Cornelius Castoriadis and André Gorz, from a pacifist path of revolution, which is not altogether antagonistic to ecosocialist proposals but has a specificity that marks its differences, and that has as background the basis itself not exactly Marxist of degrowth: the consideration that there was an exhaustion of the class struggle, given the triumph of capital and that the “vanquished of this centuries-old confrontation, although more numerous than ever, are nevertheless divided, unstructured, deculturated, and do not constitute (or no longer constitute) a revolutionary class” (LATOUCHE, 2009, p. 90-1). On the other hand, from the consideration that capitalist civilization is inexorably heading towards its ruin, there is no longer a need for a revolutionary class to overthrow it, and the revolution becomes necessary due to the lack of guarantee that with the collapse of capitalism the society we want will emerge, hence the importance of cultural transformation, of legal structures and production relations, combining radicalism with reformist policy (LATOUCHE, 2009).

To introduce yet another element to think about the question of the role of the working class, both in relation to the means proposed by degrowth and by ecosocialism, Barreto (2021, p. 228), in criticism of the ecological voluntarism that sometimes stands out in some ecosocialist texts, argues that

If everything leads us to believe that we have entered a climatic “period of consequences”, the priority task is to know, as much as possible, the likely directions of these consequences and, therefore, the ends that continue to be achievable. Then, to rigorously delimit the “space for action of concrete alternatives”, frankly contemplating which of these actions can be in fact constituted as adequate means to achieve the purpose. The most sterile posture, it seems to me, consists of defending and protecting *a priori* a certain type of action, no matter how traditional, consecrated or successful it has been historically.

Despite this, the difference in perception between degrowth and ecosocialism of the means of overcoming capitalism is more striking than the ends, especially due to greater openness on the part of degrowth as to the possible means for the realization of a new society. As stated by Latouche (2009, p. 108),

What is lacking are neither perspectives nor solutions but conditions for their implementation. It is possible to imagine several scenarios with a smooth transition, with very progressive measures of the necessary reductions. The important thing is the radical change of direction. Therefore, it is important to create the conditions for such a change. The detailed elaboration of the project aims precisely to favor these conditions.

Even with the difference in perception exposed above, which is in fact significant, the degrowth program, as we can see below, is not incompatible with the immediate actions proposed by ecosocialism. Latouche (2009, p. 97-100) cites the following aspects of the degrowth transition program:

- “Redeem an ecological footprint equal to or less than one planet”;
- “Integrate into transport costs the damage generated by this activity, via appropriate eco-taxes”;

- “Relocate activities. Above all, questioning the considerable volume of displacements of men and goods on the planet”;
- “Restoring peasant agriculture, that is, stimulating production that is as local, seasonal, natural, and traditional as possible”;
- “Transform productivity gains into reduced working time and job creation, while unemployment persists”;
- “Boosting the ‘production’ of relational goods, such as friendship or knowledge”;
- “Reduce energy waste by a factor of 4”;
- “Heavily taxing advertising expenses”;
- and “Decree a moratorium on techno-scientific innovation”.

In fact, what we observe are fundamental confluences between degrowth and ecosocialism, both from a theoretical and practical-political point of view. The latter was briefly presented earlier; as for the former, the fundamental importance of Marx and Engels in the critique of capitalism and its productivist limits are also pointed out by Latouche (2009, p. 127), including the appropriation by socialist experiences:

If we do not insist on the specific critique of capitalism, it is because it seems pointless to us to talk about yesterday’s news. Essentially, this criticism was made and done well by Karl Marx. However, it is not enough to question capitalism, it is also necessary to question the entire growth society. And in this Marx is wrong. Questioning the growth society implies questioning capitalism, but the reverse is not necessarily true. More or less liberal capitalism and productivist socialism are two variants of the same project of a growth society, based on the development of productive forces that would supposedly favor the march of humanity towards progress.

Despite the emphasis on the critique of modernity, which assumes important particularities in the theory of degrowth, and that we cannot develop here, the critique of what the ecosocialists pointed out as an uncritical view of Marx and Engels regarding the development of the productive forces, of neutrality of it, is also identified by Latouche (2009, p. 128), as well as the Marxism that does not consider the ecological issue - a limitation also pointed out by Löwy, as we have seen.

By failing to integrate ecological requirements, the Marxist critique of modernity suffers from terrible ambiguity. The capitalist economy is criticized and denounced, but the growth of the forces it unleashes is called “productive” (when they are at least equally destructive). After all, from the point of view of the production/employment/consumption trio, this growth is credited with all or almost all benefits, even if, from the point of view of capital accumulation, it is considered responsible for all the plagues: the proletarianization of workers, their exploitation, their impoverishment, not to mention imperialism, wars, crises (including, of course, ecological ones), etc. The change in the relations of production (in which the necessary and desired revolution consists) is thus reduced to a more or less violent alteration of the status of those entitled to share the fruits of growth. From there, one can argue endlessly about its content but without questioning its principle.

We end this discussion with the degrowth project - seeking to indicate contacts with ecosocialism - with the words of Latouche (2009, p. 130-1) himself in relation to ecosocialism: “Degrowth can be considered ‘ecosocialism’”, he says, “especially if socialism is understood, with

Gorz, ‘the positive response to the disintegration of social ties under the effect of mercantile relations and competition, characteristic of capitalism’”.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite the existing differences, both degrowth and ecosocialism are directly opposed to the current system. As a result, they go in another direction regarding other ecological and development theories, some very in vogue such as development as freedom, ecodevelopment, or even sustainable development, which question the ways of the system but not its fundamental structure and dynamics, that is, its logic.

It is necessary to always bear in mind that within the socio-metabolic system of capital, “Any attempt to deal with the problems reluctantly admitted must be undertaken under the prohibitive weight of fundamental laws and structural antagonisms of the system”, as Mészáros (2011, p. 223) explains, hence the necessary failure of the corrective measures of the international organizations that we mentioned at the beginning and of those theories that are aligned with them. These theories fail at their foundations by failing to grasp that “*capital itself is absolutely incapable of imposing limits*” (MÉSZÁROS, 2011, p. 251) and that “the inevitable need to ensure the sustainable management of the conditions of socio-metabolic control and production in the appropriate global context reveals itself as something hopelessly beyond the reach of capital” (MÉSZÁROS, 2011, p. 259).

Based on what we saw in both projects, in relation to the predictions of the scientists outlined in the introduction, it is necessary to consider, like Löwy (2009), that there is a trend of increasing variations in the predictions - such variations are moreover commented on in the aforementioned report. As a result, the “question is no longer simply about the planet we will leave to our children and grandchildren but about the future of the current generation.” As Latouche (2009, p. 12) states in a cartoonish way, we are going head-to-head against the world, “aboard a pilotless superfast car, with no reverse gear and no brakes, which is going to crash against the limits of the planet”. Finally, Mészáros’ statement that “people concerned with the environment will lose the battle for comprehensive rationality and legitimate constraint of the economy before it even begins if their goal does not involve radically changing the structural parameters of the capital system itself” (MÉSZÁROS, 2011, p. 263), remains more current than ever.

## REFERENCES

- ALIER, J. M. **O ecologismo dos pobres: conflitos ambientais e linguagens de valoração**. São Paulo, Contexto, 2011.
- ARTAXO, P. Uma nova era ecológica em nosso planeta: o Antropoceno? **Revista USP**, São Paulo, v. 103, p. 13-24, 2014.
- BARRETO, E. Mudanças climáticas e a tarefa dos ecossocialistas: pelo abandono do voluntarismo geológico. **Economia e Sociedade**, Campinas, v. 30, n. 1 (71), p. 211-234, 2021.
- FERNANDES, S. Ecossocialismo a partir das margens. **Jacobin Brasil**. 2020.
- FOSTER, J. B. **A ecologia de Marx: materialismo e natureza**. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 2005.

FURTADO, C. O mito do desenvolvimento econômico. In: AGUIAR, R. (Org.). **Essencial Celso Furtado**. São Paulo: Penguin Classics Companhia das Letras, 2013.

FLIPO, F. Introdução à história do conceito de decrescimento na França. In: LÉNA, P.; NASCIMENTO, E. (orgs). **Enfrentando os limites do crescimento: sustentabilidade, decrescimento e prosperidade**. Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2012.

FLIPO, F. . **Criatividade e dependência na civilização ocidental**. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008.

GREENPEACE BRASIL. Pernambuco: abandono e crise climática. **Greenpeace**, 2 jun. 2022. Recovered from: <https://www.greenpeace.org/brasil/blog/tragedia-em-pernambuco-abandono-e-crise-climatica/>. Consulted in 5 de jun. 2022.

IPCC. **Climate Change 2021**. Edited by Masson-Delmotte et. al. Cambridge University Press: In Press. 2021.

LATOUCHE, S. **Pequeno tratado do decrescimento sereno**. São Paulo: Editora WMF Martins Fontes, 2009.

LÖWY, M. From Marx to Ecosocialism. **Capitalism Nature Socialism**, v. 13, n. 1, p. 121-133, 2002.

LÖWY, M.. **Ecologia e socialismo**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2005.

LÖWY, M. Ecosocialismo e planejamento democrático. **Crítica Marxista**, v. 28, p. 35-50, 2009.

LÖWY, M.. Os piores cenários possíveis. **Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil**, 2 dez. 2009. Recovered from: <https://diplomatique.org.br/os-piores-cenarios-possiveis/>. Consulted in 5 jun. 2022.

LÖWY, M.. **O que é ecosocialismo?** São Paulo: Cortez, 2019.

LÖWY, M.; DIAS, M. Fontes e recursos do ecosocialismo. **Revista de Filosofia**, v. 2, n. 51, p. 405-408, 2019.

LÖWY, M.; FERNANDES, S. Tempos de barbárie pedem ousadia. **Jacobin Brasil**, 2020.

MARX, K. **Grundrisse: manuscritos econômicos de 1857-1858: esboços da crítica da economia política**. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2011.

MÉSZÁROS, I. **Para além do capital**. São Paulo, Boitempo, 2011.

MAY, T. **Pesquisa social: questões, métodos e processos**. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2004

MONCAU, G. Entenda o que está causando as chuvas que deixaram o sul da Bahia embaixo d'água. São Paulo: **Brasil de Fato**, 28 dez. 2021. Recovered from: <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2021/12/28/entenda-o-que-esta-causando-as-chuvas-que-deixaram-o-sul-da-bahia-embaixo-d-agua>. Consulted in 7 jun 2022.

O'CONNOR, J. La seconde contradiction du capitalisme: causes et conséquences. **Actual Marx**, 12, 30-40, 1992.

SAITO, K. **O ecosocialismo de Karl Marx: capitalismo, natureza e a crítica inacabada à economia política**. São Paulo, Boitempo, 2021.

SCHWARTZMAN, D. Ecosocialism or Ecocatastrophe? **Capitalism Nature Socialism**, v.20, n.1, p. 6-33, 2009.