CLIMATE VANGUARD



Towards Eco-Socialism: A World in Transition

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About Climate Vanguard

Climate Vanguard is a youth-led organisation empowering youth movements through radical political education.

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Introduction

The world is convulsing with crises: poverty, imperialist wars, rising fascism, and accelerating ecological breakdown. These are all symptoms of capitalism, a social system that organises society around profit rather than the satisfaction of human needs.

Today, it is technologically possible to ensure good lives for all and a habitable planet for generations to come. But to do this, we must break from capitalism. Reforming this cruel system will not do, nor can we merely cultivate small, isolated alternatives. Instead, our task is to build a different social system that centres human flourishing and ecological stability. In other words, we must build eco-socialism.

The many real-existing socialist projects of the past century, including the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Vietnam, Burkina Faso, and Venezuela, offer a legacy of revolutionary experience from which today's movements can and must draw lessons. These countries demonstrate both the possibilities that emerge when capital's control is challenged and production is organised around human needs and the contradictions that arise during this process.

This brief sketches a vision of the primary stage of eco-socialism in the Global North, organised around three pillars of transition: democratisation, decommodification, and decolonisation. This vision is neither a blueprint nor an endpoint. Rather, it should serve as an active framework to orient and motivate our struggle.

Democratise the Means of Production

Under capitalism, the ruling class determines what is produced, how workplaces are organised, and how wealth is distributed in society. Working-class people are excluded from the process of making these decisions, even though they impact our lives immensely. Capitalist society is therefore, fundamentally, anti-democratic. We live under the *dictatorship of capital*.

Eco-socialism is based on the opposite premise: the people should collectively govern the means of production and the wealth they produce.[a] This is real democracy, where the world's majority assert control over the economy and all institutions that shape everyday life.

This can only be done at scale through state power, which affords the working class the capacity to democratise the 'commanding heights' of the economy. Major industries (e.g. steel, construction, pharmaceuticals), finance, energy, transport, communications, and other important productive assets are expropriated and brought under social ownership.



Figure 1: Computer manufacturing at the VEB Kombinat Robotron in the German Democratic Republic.

With key assets in public hands, the working class can plan production around social and ecological needs rather than profit maximisation. This allows us to ensure that everyone has access to a decent and purposeful job, as profit-driven forms of employment are eliminated and labour is redirected towards socially necessary work, like agriculture, ecological restoration, and care work.

The control over land, the most foundational means of production, must likewise be reorganised through a programme of eco-socialist agrarian reform. Land is owned and stewarded communally, with more

a The means of production are the non-human things required for producing goods and services, such as tools, machinery, energy, and raw materials.

localised agroecological farming enhancing food sovereignty and restoring ecosystems. The state prioritises investment in public services in smaller communities and provides people, especially those who have been historically disenfranchised from land ownership, access to land and meaningful employment in land stewardship. This helps make life outside major cities more materially viable and socially desirable. Rather than concentrating productive activity and human populations in ever-expanding cities, we can build more balanced settlement patterns, where people have flourishing relationships with the land and with one another. In doing so, we can overcome the widespread social alienation that capitalism gives rise to.

In the **People's Republic of China** (PRC) state-owned enterprises retain a dominant position in numerous strategic sectors including energy, telecommunications, transport, and mining. This gives the state significant capacity to coordinate investment and production at a national scale, allowing for the pursuit of consciously determined social, economic, and ecological goals.[1] This is how China has become the world-leading producer of renewable energy, despite it being less profitable than fossil fuel production.[2]

The same principle of public ownership extends to land. Urban land is owned by the state, and land in the countryside and suburban areas is generally owned by rural collectives.[3] Individuals and firms can acquire legally defined rights to use land, but they do not acquire private ownership of the land itself. This arrangement prevents land from becoming a fully privatised commodity and gives the state and rural collectives significant control over its allocation and use. It also ensures the state retains an important lever for directing urban development, infrastructure construction, and agricultural production in accordance with broader economic plans.[4]



Figure 2: Over the span of 12 days, a Chinese state-owned construction company built two hospitals to treat COVID-19 patients in Wuhan in early 2020. *CNN.*

Democratising the economy is contingent on a struggle to democratise the state itself. The state as we know it – the capitalist state – largely serves to protect the anti-democratic social relations that capitalism relies on: private property rights, poor labour and environmental regulations (i.e. the conditions for profitability), the violent repression of resistance, etc.

Democratising the state requires a party of the working class winning power and transforming the very essence of the state.[b] This includes dismantling institutions that enforce capitalist class power, such as the military, while expanding the administrative capacities that support communities and ecosystems, such as public education and socialised healthcare. New initiatives must also be introduced, such as a national jobs programme for ecological restoration. To execute state functions, community representatives are directly elected to the state at various levels of government, paid an equal living wage, and subject to strict recall procedures and term limits.



Figure 3: Fidel Castro addresses a crowd in front of the presidential palace in Havana, Cuba, January 1959. *Harold Valentine/AP.*

Practically, social ownership can take many different forms, balancing central coordination and decentralised decision-making. Resources and industries that cannot be planned in isolation, i.e. the aforementioned commanding heights, ought to be publicly owned and planned at a national or in some cases even international level.

At the same time, people should be able to exercise as much direct control as possible over the institutions and productive resources that affect their lives. Things like regional food systems, housing construction, and education can be managed by workers and communities themselves. This localised production should be organised according to locally

b For a more in-depth exploration of these topics, see Climate Vanguard's briefs Eco-Socialism and the State and The Eco-Socialist Party.

determined needs while operating within wider social, ecological, and economic plans.

The commune is a form of democratic organisation in which communities are organised into local institutions that manage socially owned resources. At the same time, they coordinate with regional and national institutions that are responsible for broader development objectives.

The **El Maizal Commune** in north-western Venezuela comprises 27 communal councils and 2,335 hectares of collectively stewarded land.[5] Prior to the commune's establishment in 2009, much of the land had been under the private ownership of large landholders, sitting idle.[6] Today, commune members use it primarily for growing crops and raising livestock. The produced goods are provided to El Maizal's inhabitants and surrounding communities at affordable prices. Surpluses are democratically invested in improving production, supporting producers, and funding construction projects, such as housing and school infrastructure.[7]

The commune has also developed agricultural processing and distribution facilities, a gas distribution system, and a brick-production plant, further enhancing the commune's productivity and sovereignty.[8] As El Maizal member Carlos Terán put it, "our productivity has made us self-sustainable and the profits go directly to the people."[9]

Additionally, El Maizal collaborates with other Venezuelan communes through the Communard Union, a national organisation of over 50 communes.[10]



Figure 4: An assembly at El Maizal Commune in northwestern Venezuela. *Comuna El Maizal/Twitter.*

Constructing eco-socialism relies on what Chilean Marxist Marta Harnecker identified as *popular protagonism*.[11] To cultivate it, people must engage in popular struggle and establish institutions through which they can collectively govern social life and production. Beyond communes, these could include workers' committees, tenants and communal councils, and public-commons partnerships. Their exact form and function will differ according to the society and moment in which they emerge, yet their purpose is the same: to empower people to actively determine how society is organised.

Democratisation ultimately serves to advance human development, expanding people's capacity to collectively shape the conditions of their own existence.

Decommodify the Means of Survival

Under capitalism, life's essentials are commodified. To access the means of survival (i.e. housing, food, energy, etc.), people must sell their labour power to capitalists in exchange for a wage.[c] Today, billions of people rely on the market for survival, with almost half the global population living on less than $8.30 per day.[12,d]

This dependence on wage labour and commodity markets is historically distinctive to capitalism. While humanity has lived under many forms of exploitation throughout history, in most societies, people maintained some customary access to the means of survival. Through the process of primitive accumulation, capitalism severed people's direct relationship with the things necessary to ensure their own subsistence, with land being, far and above, the most important.[e]

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c Labour power is the capacity to work. It is not the same thing as actual labour or the specific work done by an individual, but rather the potential to do work over a certain period of time.

d $8.30 per day is the poverty line for upper-middle-income economies.

e Primitive accumulation is the historical process through which people were dispossessed of their direct access to land and other means of subsistence, creating the conditions for capitalist production and wage labour.

However, under eco-socialism, things work differently. With production and distribution decisions subject to democratic control, the following needs are decommodified:

Energy: Zero-carbon energy becomes a universal basic service. The energy system is rapidly electrified and expanded through a supergrid combining large-scale solar and wind with local, community-owned renewable energy. Critical minerals, including lithium, nickel, and cobalt, are sourced through just supply chains, respecting labour rights, Indigenous sovereignty, and ecological limits. A mass retrofit campaign insulates homes and installs ground-source heat pumps.

An immediate moratorium is placed on all new fossil fuel projects. Existing fossil fuel companies are nationalised, allowing their workers and infrastructure to be reorganised as part of the eco-socialist transition. Fossil fuel production and consumption is rapidly phased out in line with a 1.5°C decarbonisation pathway and workers retool fossil infrastructure into a public utility of carbon waste management, sucking carbon out of the air and safely storing it underground.

> In July 2021, 422 workers at the former GKN factory near Florence, Italy were abruptly dismissed by the British investment fund that owned it.[13] Rather than allow the factory to be closed and production relocated, the workers formed a collective, **Collettivo de Fabbrica GKN**, and have occupied the plant ever since.[14]
>
> Working together with scientists, they developed a plan to convert the factory from producing automotive parts to socially and ecologically useful goods like photovoltaic panels and electric cargo bikes. Their struggle demonstrates how workers can defend productive capacity from capital and redirect it towards the ecological transition.[15]

Transport: Private transport companies, including automotive manufacturers and airlines, are brought under public ownership and reorganised around social and ecological needs. Public transport is

massively expanded, electrified, and made accessible to all, providing a viable alternative to private car ownership.

Light rail, metro, bus, cycle infrastructure, and pedestrian routes are rolled out *en masse*. Regional public transport is free. Mass aviation is phased out and replaced by high-speed rail for continental travel and passenger ships for intercontinental travel.

> The PRC has carried out an enormous expansion of transport infrastructure over the last decades, made possible by coordinated public investment and planning.
>
> As of 2025, the PRC had built over 48,000 kilometres of high-speed rail, an increase of more than 7000% since 2008.[16] Its rail network recorded 2.8 billion journeys between January and July 2026, the highest figure ever reported for this period and a 4.1% increase from the same period in 2025.[17]
>
> Meanwhile, in cities, extensive bus and metro systems form "the backbone of urban transportation operations," comprising more than 75% of the country's total urban passenger flow.[18]



Figure 5: China's high-speed rail network evolution, 2024. *Brilliant Maps.*

Education: Free, high-quality education from preschool through university is guaranteed for all. Competitive, bureaucratised capitalist education systems are replaced with liberatory pedagogies focused on human development and social needs. Trade schools are fully funded to upskill an eco-socialist workforce.

Places of education are treated as vital institutions of social reproduction, with robust mental health care, nutritious meals, ample time for play, emotional intelligence programmes, and connection with nature integrated into all curricula.

In 1945, the German Central Administration for National Education was founded in the Soviet occupation zone in what would formally become the **German Democratic Republic** (GDR) four years later.[19] It was tasked with creating an antifascist, secular, and socialist education system. This gave rise to a comprehensive public school system designed to provide equal educational opportunities to all children, regardless of their social background.[20]

In 1949, the GDR's first constitution enshrined the equal right to education, including adult education, and established education as a free public service.[21] The system also provided opportunities for working adults to pursue further education and for students and workers from other countries, particularly from the Global South, to study and train in the GDR, with their education financed through the state budget.[22]

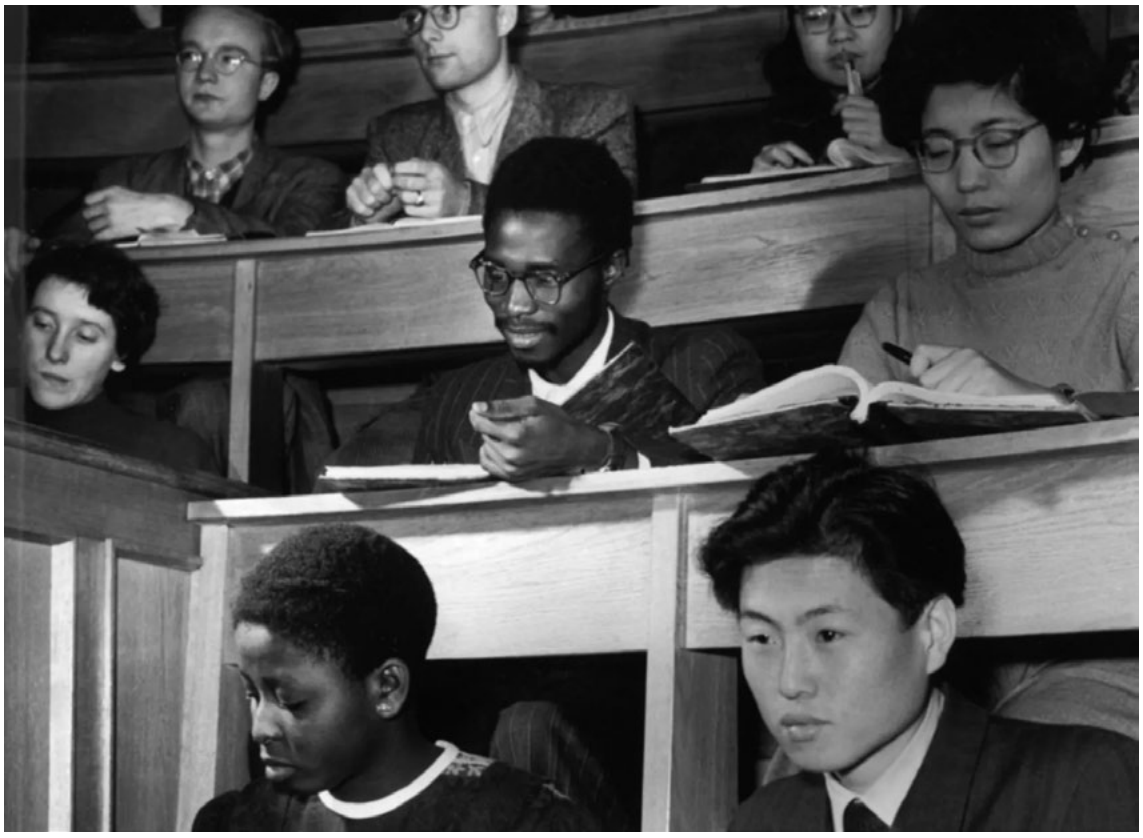


Figure 6: Foreign students in a lecture hall at Karl Marx University in Leipzig, c. 1960. *bpk/Max Ittenbach.*

Food: The corporate food system is dismantled and reorganised around meeting human needs rather than profit. Everyone is guaranteed access to nutritious and delicious food through a network of collectively organised agroecological farms, food distribution schemes, and community canteens.

The early **Soviet Union** experimented with the collectivisation of housework, including food provisioning.[23] After the 1917 October Revolution, the socialist state rapidly expanded public cafeterias where meals were inexpensive and sometimes even free. By 1920, there were nearly 700 of them in Petrograd alone.[24] Over the following two decades, they developed "factory kitchens," which prepared food for distribution to public and workplace cafeterias.[25]

Not only did they provide people with regular, nutritious meals, but they also socialised the reproductive labour of cooking. This helped liberate women from domestic work and free up their productive capacity for other ways of contributing to society.[26]

The system was ultimately undermined by failures of food supply and distribution, but it nonetheless exemplifies how food provisioning can be organised as a collective responsibility rather than an individual burden.[27]



Figure 7: A man prepares food in a Soviet factory kitchen in the early 1930s. *Alexander Rodchenko.*

Housing: Everyone is guaranteed more than just a shelter, but a home – a comfortable space to rest and be with loved ones. Priority is placed on redistributing second homes and underused housing, and on mass retrofit, rather than resource-intensive new builds.

Housing is organised to provide adequate private space while encouraging communal forms of living that bring people of different generations and walks of life together, with shared kitchens, gardens, childcare and recreation areas, and community spaces. Regular participation in collective life helps combat the social isolation of capitalist society.

In 1956, 11 years after socialist **Yugoslavia** was founded, the First Yugoslav Forum on Housing and Construction identified a 'Right to Residence' as a fundamental condition of a dignified life. This was materialised through large-scale programmes of socially owned housing, most notably in New Belgrade, a district of Belgrade built after WWII to address the country's severe housing shortage.[28]

Housing blocks were planned as neighbourhood units, with social infrastructure, including schools, childcare, and green space, integrated into the residential environment. Housing communities also gave residents a role in managing their buildings and neighbourhoods.[29]



Figure 8: A neighbourhood built in Yugoslavia in the 1970s.

Healthcare: Healthcare is a public service, provided free at the point of use. Health services are expanded to appropriately address both physical and mental health, including the widespread alienation and anxiety produced by capitalism. Greater emphasis is placed on preventative care and addressing the social and environmental conditions that produce ill health, including poverty, poor housing, pollution, unhealthy work, and social isolation.

Areas often neglected or stigmatised by for-profit healthcare systems are appropriately accounted for, including trans and gender-affirming healthcare, elder care, reproductive healthcare and abortion, disability services, and addiction treatment.

> **Cuba**'s National Health System is state-run and administered across different levels of government, allowing healthcare to be coordinated nationally while remaining rooted in communities.[30] The Ministry of Public Health sets national policy and coordinates with provincial and municipal governments, whose health departments, in turn, oversee local hospitals.[31]
>
> Municipal health departments coordinate an extensive network of polyclinics. These provide primary, diagnostic, and specialist services. Their community-based care emphasises both treatment and prevention, offering services such as health education and nutritional guidance.[32] Cuba's free education system sustains its robust medical system, resulting in the country having one of the highest doctor-to-population ratios in the world.[33]
>
> The country's commitment to providing high-quality health care to those in need extends beyond its borders through a longstanding programme of medical internationalism. For example, during the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, 165 Cuban health professionals were deployed to Sierra Leone. The brigade spent six months providing treatment and supportive care, helping reduce the fatality rate in the emergency treatment centres where they worked from 80-90% to 24%.[34]

Technology: Technology and communication infrastructure are developed as social goods. High-speed internet as well as telecommunications and digital infrastructure are universally accessible. Media and

communication platforms are democratically governed. Publicly funded innovations are freely shared rather than enclosed as private property.

Automation and artificial intelligence are strategically deployed within ecological boundaries to reduce socially necessary labour and improve working conditions. This helps to increase the time people have at their disposal for care, learning, leisure, and political participation. Technological development is integrated into democratic planning, prioritising renewable energy, medicine, agroecological farming, and ecological restoration.

Project Cybersyn, developed in **Chile** under president Salvador Allende, used computer technology to strengthen democratic economic planning. The aim was to connect state-owned factories through a communications network capable of transmitting information about production in near real time.[35] Far from seeking to displace human decision-making entirely, the system was designed to empower workers and planners with better information with which they could identify problems, coordinate responses, and better manage the economy.[36]

Sadly, the project was still in its infancy when a US-backed coup deposed Allende and installed dictator Agosto Pinochet in 1973.[37]



Figure 9: Screens in a prototype Cybersyn Operations Room.

Decolonise the Economy, Society, and Nature

Imperialism and colonialism have structured the world around the appropriation of labour, resources, and land in the Global South for the benefit of the Global North.[f] This has produced centuries of unequal development and concentrated enormous wealth in the hands of the ruling classes, first and foremost, of imperialist countries.

Eco-socialism therefore cannot be built without confronting the imperial relations that shape our world. We must decolonise the economy, society, and nature.

1. Economy

Building eco-socialism requires transforming the economic relationships between countries. In other words, we must dismantle the imperial division of labour through which wealth and productive capacity have been concentrated in the Global North at the expense of the South.

Debt and Reparations: Illegitimate debts are cancelled, freeing countries of the Global South from debt burdens that constrain their ability to invest in socio-ecological development. Grant-based ecological reparations and development transfers are provided according to historical responsibility, recognising the Global North's vastly disproportionate contribution to climate breakdown and the wealth it has accumulated through centuries of unequal exchange.[g]

Production and Trade: Production is localised where possible, and international trade is reorganised around mutual development. Countries exchange resources, goods, and knowledge according to collectively

f For a deeper explanation of imperialism and colonialism, see Defining Imperialism, Colonialism, and Neo-Colonialism.

g Unequal exchange is the process where countries in the Global North systematically obtain more value from international trade than countries in the Global South, contributing to global inequalities in wealth, development, and productive capacity.

determined needs. The goal is not to isolate countries from one another, but to build an international economy in which every society has the material capacity to meet the needs of its people without impoverishing others or exhausting their ecosystems.

Technology Transfer: Intellectual property barriers on essential technologies are dismantled. Renewable energy, agricultural, medical, and other technologies necessary for the mitigation of and adaptation to climate breakdown, as well as human development more generally, are freely shared. Scientific knowledge and publicly funded research are treated as a global commons.

The **Council for Mutual Economic Assistance** (COMECON) was an organisation for economic cooperation established in 1949 by the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.[38] It was later joined by Albania, the GDR, Mongolia, Cuba, and Vietnam. A number of other countries, including the PCR, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Angola, and Mozambique, were also associated with the organisation.[39]

COMECON was founded in response to the US Marshall Plan, a programme through which the emerging superpower supported the reconstruction of Western Europe after WWII.[40] It allowed the US to strengthen its influence over the economies of recipient countries by making aid dependent on their integration into a US-led global order. In contrast, COMECON sought to strengthen member states' sovereignty through economic cooperation and coordinating national economic plans around shared economic needs.[41]



Figure 10: A COMECON meeting in Romania in 1978. *Radio Prague International.*

2. Society

Police and Prisons: The capitalist state has developed extensive institutions of coercion to defend existing property relations and suppress challenges to ruling-class power. Under eco-socialism, these institutions must be transformed to serve the interests of the working and oppressed majority.

This does not mean abandoning collective security or imagining that violence will disappear overnight. An eco-socialist society must be capable of protecting people from violence, organised crime, and counter-revolution, while simultaneously addressing the social conditions that reproduce harm. The police and prison systems inherited from capitalism are progressively transformed and ultimately replaced as their functions are assumed by democratic institutions.

Punishment and confinement give way, wherever possible, to prevention, rehabilitation, and transformative justice. Secure institutions remain necessary for people who pose a serious threat to others, but their purpose is protection and rehabilitation rather than retribution. As conditions that produce harm, including poverty, homelessness, and untreated illness, are systematically reduced, the necessity for coercive institutions likewise diminishes.

Borders: Migrant justice is central to reckoning with the long history of colonialism. The influx of migrants displaced by ecological breakdown and imperialist violence are welcomed and offered full social rights, including a home, healthcare, education, and dignified work. Migrant workers have the same labour rights and protections as everyone else, removing the ability of employers to use immigration status to suppress wages and undermine working conditions.

In the long term, reparations to the Global South, the development of its productive capacity, and the cessation of imperialist violence create the conditions for people to remain and thrive in their own communities if they wish. As the material inequalities that make

migration a necessity for survival are dismantled, borders lose their coercive and exclusionary function.

Military: The imperial military apparatus of the Global North is dismantled. Foreign military bases are closed, nuclear arsenals are dismantled, and imperialist military alliances are dissolved. Military resources and productive capacity are redirected towards social provisioning, ecological restoration, and adaptation to climate breakdown.

International solidarity and cooperation become the basis of foreign policy, with already established eco-socialist states supporting the self-determination and development of people struggling against capitalism and imperialism.

An eco-socialist society must nevertheless retain the capacity to defend itself against counter-revolution and imperialist aggression. Armed forces are therefore transformed from instruments of imperialist domination into a people's defence force under democratic control.

Community: Decolonising society entails transforming the social relations through which capitalism reproduces individualism, alienation, and oppression. These are combated through large-scale investment in parks, libraries, theatres, leisure centres, sports facilities, community kitchens, and other shared spaces. In addition, expanding the commons enables a rediscovery of collective belonging, safety, and purpose.



Figure 11: Thong Nhat Park in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Political education and accessible programmes of community healing help people confront the legacies of racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, queerphobia, and transphobia.

The **Black Panther Party** organised to provide immediate material support to Black and impoverished communities in the US, including through free breakfast programmes, health clinics, legal support, transportation for elderly people, and self-defence patrols.[42] These 'Survival Programs' brought people together around the meeting of their shared needs, creating spaces in which community members could build relationships, organise, and develop their capacity for self-determination. They also served to expose the racial and economic inequalities embedded in US state institutions.

These lessons were reinforced through the education provided in the Panthers' Liberation Schools, whose curricula taught Black history, critical thinking, social responsibility, and awareness of social injustices.[43]



Figure 12: Children at the Intercommunal Youth Institute, a school run by the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, 1971. *MoMa.*

3. Nature

Land: Land is the oldest enclosure. Its privatisation has driven the ecological degradation and vast wealth inequality we see today. As discussed above, the eco-socialist state enacts agrarian reform that

brings land under social ownership and stewardship. Indigenous peoples regain sovereignty and control over their ancestral territories through Land Back.

Far from simply a programme of redistribution, Land Back is part of a broader transformation in humanity's relationship with nature, one that moves away from treating land as a commodity or an inexhaustible resource towards reciprocal care for the ecosystems on which we depend. Indigenous ecological knowledge and stewardship should be supported alongside collective efforts to restore degraded ecosystems, protect biodiversity, and rebuild people's material and cultural relationships with the natural world.

Hydrosphere: Oceans, lakes, rivers, and other major bodies of water must likewise be protected from the extractive development that has enriched the world's ruling classes. Marine and aquatic ecosystems are restored. Access to water resources is managed equitably between countries and communities, as is the wealth generated from their use.

Atmosphere: Centuries of fossil-fuelled development have allowed the Global North to consume a vastly disproportionate share of the planet's capacity to absorb greenhouse gases, driving climate change while leaving the Global South less ecological space to develop. Decolonising the atmosphere means reversing this dynamic. Global North countries must rapidly decarbonise and undertake large-scale programmes of carbon drawdown to return atmospheric CO_2 concentrations below the safe limit of 350 ppm, while providing climate finance to the Global South in recognition of their historical responsibility.

> Amílcar Cabral, the leader of the **African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde** (PAIGC), understood colonialism as reshaping Guinea-Bissauan and Cape Verdean agriculture to serve Portuguese interests, e.g. through the expansion of export-oriented cash crops at the expense of more diverse forms of local production.[44]

National liberation therefore encompassed reclaiming control over not only land and production, but the ecological relationships through which communities sustained themselves.

The PAIGC manifested this principle in the liberated zones it established during its guerilla struggle against its Portuguese colonisers. In these zones, the PAIGC developed more diversified forms of agricultural production and built schools, health centres, and democratic institutions.[45]



Figure 13: Amílcar Cabral (in front, wearing glasses) visits a cassava plantation a liberated zone of Guinea-Bissau. *Amílcar Cabral Foundation.*

Conclusion

This is not *the* eco-socialist vision – merely a synthesis of ideas to spark conversation, debate, and, hopefully, political organising. Ultimately, the concrete shape of eco-socialism can only emerge through the struggles of working and oppressed people as we organise to transform the conditions of our lives, learn from the successes and failures of past and contemporary socialist projects, and develop new forms of popular power.

The journey ahead will be winding and steep. But, as the history of real-existing socialism shows us, capitalism is not eternal. The glimmers of an eco-socialist world already shine in the liberatory struggles across the globe that carry forward their legacy.



Figure 14: Palestinians participating in the Great March of Return in Gaza, 2018. *Getty Images.*

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