CLIMATE VANGUARD



Eco-Socialist Strategy

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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

From the war on Iran to the suffocation of Cuba and devastating drought in the sahel, there can be no doubt that now is the time of monsters. But there is also growing resistance to the ruling classes' oppressive onslaught on working people and the planet. It is incumbent on revolutionary organisations to stoke, concentrate, and direct this resistance in the long struggle for eco-socialism.

But how can this be done? In part three of this three-part series on eco-socialist transition, we aim to answer this question through an exploration of eco-socialist strategy.[a]

We first define eco-socialist strategy and the three interconnected levels at which it is developed. Next, we present the four verbs, or phases, of strategising in practice. Finally, we identify three steps that organisations can take to create the conditions for more advanced forms of eco-socialist struggle in the here and now, each brought to life through an inspiring case study.

What is Eco-Socialist Strategy?

In essence, a political strategy is a hypothesis for how to allocate available resources in order to build power and achieve a specific objective under particular conditions. When it comes to eco-socialist transition, the ultimate objective is to reorganise society in order to meet everyone's needs and regenerate ecosystems ravaged by over five centuries of capitalism and imperialism. This requires the democratisation of the means of production, the decommodification of life's essentials, including housing, food, healthcare, education, and decolonisation of the global economy.

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a Parts one and two of this series focus on the role of the state and the revolutionary party, respectively, in the struggle for eco-socialism. For practical help in developing your own organisation's strategy, please see our Eco-Socialist Strategy Toolkit.



Image 1: Japanese communist Sen Katayama speaking at the The First Congress of Communist and Revolutionary Organizations of the Far East in Moscow (1922).

On this basis, *eco-socialist strategy* is a hypothesis for how to synthesise social needs with ecological imperatives in order to build social power for revolutionary system change. It can be developed at three distinct levels: liberatory strategy, organisational strategy, and programme strategy. These levels of strategy are not isolated from one another, but exist in dialectical relation, with the broader levels influencing the smaller ones and vice versa.

Liberatory Strategy

The highest level of strategy is eco-socialist liberatory strategy – a *movement-level hypothesis* about how we can build capacities to shift the balance of power in society and carry out a revolutionary transition to eco-socialism.[1]

Liberatory strategy is specific to a *national* left movement ecosystem.[b] As outlined in part one of this three-part series, working-class contestation and control of the state is essential to a revolutionary process. This is especially vital for countries of the Global South, which, despite gaining

b A movement ecosystem is the interconnected network of organisations within a specific geography or issue area whose diverse roles, strategies, and relationships serve different functions, but together shape the collective capacity for social change (de Koning & Wopperer, 2024).

political sovereignty, have been denied economic sovereignty over their productive forces (i.e. the labour, resources, and machinery necessary to produce commodities).[2] It is within an international community of truly sovereign nation-states, each under control of the popular classes, that the conditions for international eco-socialism are born.[c]

To better understand liberatory strategy, we can look to historical revolutionary movements. In Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, for example, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) understood that building socialism first required gaining control over the country's productive forces by overthrowing imperialist domination.[3] In the words of PAIGC leader Amílcar Cabral, "national liberation takes place when, and only when, national productive forces are completely free of all kinds of foreign domination."[4] In practice, this meant developing the hypothesis that national liberation required organising the peasant masses against Portuguese colonial rule.[d]

Crucially, Cabral understood that national liberation was not only necessary to meet social needs, but also the only way to "defend the land" and put an end to colonialism's destruction of non-human nature.[5]



Image 2: PAIGC leader Amílcar Cabral.

As the example of the PAIGC demonstrates, liberatory strategy is not an organic thing that simply emerges from the aggregate activity in the movement ecosystem. Instead, it must be pre-meditated, consciously developed, and deliberately seeded by *leadership organisations,* like an advanced cadre organisation or, as explored in part two of this series, an eco-socialist party.

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c The popular classes refers to the broad majority of society whose lives are structured by exploitation, dispossession, and marginalisation under capitalism and imperialism and who have a shared material interest in democratic control over social life.

d This account highlights one aspect of the PAIGC's liberatory strategy, which in reality was far more complex. It also entailed, for example, the development of cadre drawn from déclassé and semi-proletarianised groups (Abdullah, 2006).

Liberatory eco-socialist strategy must not only determine how to build power for revolutionary transition, but simultaneously seek to preserve the planetary conditions for eco-socialism in the near term. Given the current ecological trajectory, we must wield already accumulated social power to win concessions that counteract Earth system collapse (e.g. universal zero-carbon public transport).

Importantly, the process of struggling for these concessions can itself contribute to building revolutionary social power. For example, it can provide opportunities to develop organisers' leadership skills and help strengthen movement coalitions. This, in turn, enhances our capacity to achieve further victories and creates better conditions for advancing the struggle.

Organisational Strategy

Moving down a level from liberatory strategy is organisational strategy. This is a *hypothesis developed by each organisation* within a national left movement ecosystem. It articulates how a specific organisation can both achieve its own objectives and contribute to eco-socialist transition.



Image 3: PAIGC school in the liberated areas of Guinea-Bissau, 1974. Roel Coutinho, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal Photographs (1973–1974).

A robust organisational strategy is characterised by three interrelated principles: (1) it is attuned to the organisation's role in the wider movement ecosystem; (2) it examines how organisational activities interact with prevailing conditions; and (3) it is iterative, designed to be adapted based on successes, failures, and changing circumstances.

Continuing the previous example, the PAIGC's organisational strategy involved formulating hypotheses about how the party would achieve its objectives, such as training cadre to raise the consciousness of the peasantry and expanding liberated zones, where the construction of a new society could begin.[6] These hypotheses were developed with an eye to how meeting these goals would advance the liberatory strategy for national liberation in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde.

It is also important that we distinguish between two different situations in which organisations might be developing and carrying out their strategy.

First, is the situation where a leadership organisation has developed and anchored a liberatory strategy within a given movement ecosystem. In this case, organisational strategies should be articulated and aligned with the movement-level strategy. This allows each organisation to understand its specific role in the process of building power for eco-socialist transition.

Second, is the circumstance where there is no movement-level liberatory strategy. In this case, an organisational strategy should aim to strengthen the movement ecosystem's overall capacity to engage in a politics of eco-socialist transition. Given how common this scenario is, it is given more attention in the final section of this brief, 'Struggling for Eco-Socialism.'

Programme Strategy

The lowest level of strategy is programme strategy. Nested within organisational strategy, programme strategy is a *plan of action that connects day-to-day work to broader strategic wagers.* It determines how to invest organisational resources, like time and money, and which tactics to deploy to advance organisational objectives.[7]

Programme strategy clarifies that tactics must always be subordinated to strategy. A particular tactic acquires a revolutionary character only insofar that it supports eco-socialist programme strategy, which is itself embedded within higher levels of eco-socialist strategy. This nesting connects tactical choices to organisation- and movement-wide strategic interventions.

When detached from this strategic scaffolding, tactics become little more than isolated political acts. A labour strike, for example, can be revolutionary when coordinated to build class power and advance systemic change, but it merely expresses a one-off grievance if disconnected from a broader organisation- and movement-wide strategy.

Moreover, situating the choice of tactics in programme strategy demonstrates that they must also be flexible. If conditions change, then

tactics should too. Tactical rigidity only slows us down, leaving us flat-footed and ineffective. As Lenin says, “refusing in advance ever to move in zigzags, ever to retract one’s steps,” is “ridiculous in the extreme.”[8]

Cabral and his PAIGC comrades exemplify this. Initially, they attempted to organise in urban centres, following the Marxist strategy of building social power among the industrial proletariat. The effort failed because it was detached from local conditions — namely, the lack of a large industrial proletariat in Guinea-Bissau as well as the strength and ruthlessness of Portuguese colonial forces in its cities.[9] After a massacre killed 50 participants in a dock workers’ and merchant seamen’s strike in August 1959, the party reoriented its activities towards building power among rural peasants.[10]



Image 4: Massacre in the Port of Pindjiguiti, August 1959.

Practising Eco-Socialist Strategy

So, how do we develop and put eco-socialist strategy into practice? We think of this as a process composed of four verbs, or phases, of strategising: analysing, hypothesising, implementing, and evaluating.[11] This method can be applied across all three levels of strategy. In this section, these verbs are explained in more detail, accompanied by a running example in the boxes.

1. Analysing

Strategy development starts with an analysis of our organising context. This includes an analysis of the dominant systems that we’re up against, an assessment of how these systems manifest in the current conjuncture, and a grounded vision of the better world that might emerge if our struggle is successful.[12]

Let's consider the fictional political organisation Millcaster Rise Up (MRU), which wants to combat the rising cost of living in their city. The members of MRU analyse how, under capitalism, the coercive laws of competition create a winner-takes-all dynamic leading to monopoly power. These monopolies can engineer prices of essentials like housing, energy, transport, and food in order to extract maximum profit. Because people (1) have no control over the market and (2) depend on it for daily survival, their wellbeing is harmed by monopolies.

MRU notes a particular manifestation of this dynamic in their city: surging bus fares. The bus company, formerly owned by the municipality, is now managed by a for-profit company. Because there is only one bus service in the city, the company is a natural monopoly. The organisation develops a vision of the future in which transport is democratised and decommodified. Workers run it for the benefit of the people, not profit.

2. Hypothesising

A hypothesis is the beating heart of strategy, outlining how capacities can be allocated to achieve a specific objective within particular conditions.

A good hypothesis is one that is specific and testable.[13] It requires meticulous study of the concrete conditions that we're organising in, our existing movement capacities, the sites of struggle that we might be able to exert leverage in, and the potential impacts of us doing so.

Based on its analysis, MRU creates a programme-level hypothesis: *"**if** we organise a multi-week bus boycott, **then** the municipal Department of Transportation will be forced to negotiate a reduction in bus fares, building momentum behind a working-class struggle to reduce the cost of living in the city."*

3. Implementing

A hypothesis is useless if it's not tested in real life. Following Mao, "social practice alone is the criterion of the truth."[14] To put a hypothesis into practice, we must develop a plan of action to guide our day-to-day political work.

MRU implements its programme-level hypothesis by coming up with a three-part plan of action: agitate, educate, mobilise.

It starts off by replacing corporate advertisements on the bus with agitational propaganda, asking commuters: *"Why is your money going to line the pockets of a company whose shareholders don't even live in Millcaster?!"*

The propaganda invites commuters to join a weekly assembly, in which organisers educate people on why bus fares are increasing and their plan of action to stop it.

Over time, MRU accrues a politically educated base willing to take direct action against the bus company, and by extension, the Department of Transportation. They start by petitioning the Department, before escalating to a protest outside its headquarters, and eventually, a multi-week boycott.

4. Evaluating

Evaluation allows us to test the effectiveness of our political work and informs the ongoing refinement of strategy. Its purpose is to confirm or reject our hypotheses, allowing us to revise both our analysis and our assumptions.

Importantly, evaluation is not limited to the end of a project. It takes place at every stage of delivery, creating a continuous loop of action and reflection.

After the multi-week bus boycott comes to an end, the organisation takes time to evaluate how effective it was. They succeeded in politicising some bus riders and the bus company certainly lost money, but the Department of Transportation did not come to the negotiating table. They assess that not enough people joined the boycott due to a lack of alternative transport.

Based on this evaluation, the organisation decides to focus its efforts on getting bus drivers to go on a sympathy strike, where drivers would still work, but not charge commuters any fares. They hypothesise that this would lead to a greater reduction in company profits, putting more pressure on the Department of Transportation to negotiate. It would also prefigure an alternative in which the bus is decommodified and run by the workers for the people.

Based on this evaluation, the hypothesis is adjusted: "***if*** *we organise a bus driver sympathy strike,* ***then*** *the Department of Transportation will be forced to negotiate a reduction in bus fares, building momentum behind a working class struggle to reduce the cost of living in Millcaster.*" The plan of action shifts to focus on 1-on-1 conversations with drivers, unionisation drives, and raising money for a strike fund. Political work with commuters also continues to help build support for strike action.

Struggling for Eco-Socialism

Many organisations are operating in contexts where there are no credible leadership organisations and, consequently, no movement-level liberatory strategy. In light of this reality, we identify three steps that organisations can take to create the conditions for more advanced forms of eco-socialist struggle. Through inspiring case studies, we bring each step to life.

Develop Organisational Structure

Organisational structure is what makes protracted and effective organising possible. It brings people together around a shared purpose and enables them to fulfill it.

To become more effective, organisations must develop well-functioning internal structures. Such a structure is equally leaderful and democratic. Those with the capacity and skills to take on more responsibility should lead the organisation, with members democratically empowering them to do so. At the same time, the organisation should create the conditions for a new leadership core to arise. This can be achieved through political education, skills training, and active involvement in different organising experiences. A more capable membership not only increases the leadership pool but, more importantly, also strengthens the organisation's ability to build social power.

The All-Chicago Tenants Alliance (ACTA) is a great example of an organisation with an effective structure. ACTA is a revolutionary socialist organisation working to build the class power of tenants against exploitative landlords, with the ultimate goal of socialising housing.[15] Democratised control of buildings, and land more generally, would give working-class people more control over their lives.

ACTA is composed of five levels of membership: volunteer, general membership, leadership, pre-cadre, and cadre. ACTA aims to develop every member to the cadre level. To become a cadre, members must go through a four-month training programme, which exposes "pre-cadre" to cadre



Image 5: All-Chicago Tenants Alliance.

roles, like meeting facilitation, note-taking, time-keeping, and criticism/self-criticism. Echoing Che Guevara, ACTA views every member as an "unfinished product" that can be transformed through political struggle.

Build Political Unity

Political unity around a shared eco-socialist ideology, systemic analysis, vision, and strategic orientation improves organisations' capacity to organise effectively. It allows them to accurately analyse the conjuncture and mount eco-socialist interventions. The objective of these interventions is not to impose the class struggle on the masses, but to shape existing struggles in a class-conscious, anti-imperialist direction. Communist intellectual Vijay Prashad calls this "risk in motion," i.e. a political wager on how to guide the organic motion of the masses towards revolution.[16]



Image 6: Energy Embargo for Palestine's action at the British Museum.

Energy Embargo for Palestine (EEFP) exemplifies risk in motion. EEFP is a British-based anti-imperialist climate organisation responding to the call from Palestinian trade unions to disrupt the flow of energy to Israel. It was founded in January 2024 by anti-Zionist climate activists who

had a high degree of political unity. They shared an understanding of imperialism as the primary contradiction in the world-system, responsible both for ecological breakdown and settler colonialism in Palestine. In the aftermath of October 7th, this political unity allowed them to develop an eco-socialist analysis of the new conjuncture. Unlike the rest of the climate movement, the EEFP founders identified the opportunity to fuse existing, widespread pro-environmental attitudes with the popular outrage against Israel's genocide.[e]

To bring this synthesis to fruition, EEFP has led and participated in a number of campaigns and actions over the last years. One such campaign targets the British Museum in London, which has a 10-year £50-million partnership with fossil-fuel giant BP.[17] As extensive research by EEFP has revealed, BP is fuelling the genocide in Gaza and sustaining the settler-colonial project in historic Palestine.[18] In alliance with other organisations, the campaign targets BP's social licence to operate, which the company relies upon to conceal its complicity in war crimes and planetary destruction. It also exposes how state institutions like the British Museum are fused with corporate interests, raising consciousness on the role of the state as an enabler of violent capital accumulation.

Ultimately, the campaign against BP, which clarifies the connection between ecological regeneration and global decolonisation, has served to deepen eco-socialist consciousness within both the climate and the Palestine solidarity movements. Through the work of organisations like EEFP, the interconnectedness of today's crises come into view.

Engage in Joint Struggle

Organisations must foster dialogue and develop relationships with different actors in the movement ecosystem. This strengthens the movement's capacity to make joint interventions and establish greater levels of eco-socialist unity, creating the basis for higher forms of eco-socialist struggle.

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e 52% of people in Britain say the government is not doing enough to protect the environment and nature (World Wildlife Fund, 2025), and in November 2023, the majority of people in Britain (59%) wanted a ceasefire in Gaza. In May 2024, 69% of people in Britain backed a ceasefire (Smith, 2024).

A good example of this is the Public Power New York (PPNY) campaign, which successfully passed the Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) in New York state in 2023. The BPRA requires the New York Power Authority (the state's public power provider) to plan, build, and operate renewable energy projects to meet New York's decarbonisation target – 100% zero-emission electricity by 2040.[19] The legislation also commits $25 million a year to retrain workers for a just transition, guarantees unionised jobs, and provides energy credits to lower income customers.[20] PPNY embodies the eco-socialist vision to democratise the means of energy production.

PPNY started in 2019 through the initiative of the New York City branch of the Democratic Socialists of America (NYC-DSA). The campaign was ultimately successful because NYC-DSA did the hard work of establishing common ground with other groups, including labour unions and climate organisations, and drawing them into the struggle for public power.[21] Ultimately, PPNY became a coalition of over 20 organisations that engaged thousands of volunteers and gained the endorsement of labor unions representing over one million workers.



Image 7: Public Power New York.

While the BPRA was in and of itself a tremendous victory, it also served as a means to establish eco-socialist convergence between groups, amass social power, and extend the struggle further. In the words of a NYC-DSA member involved in the campaign, the victory was "a signal not to rest, but to actually go harder because it's working."[22]

Conclusion

Eco-socialism provides the strategic framework for us to be effective organisers in our communities, linking social grievances with ecological necessities. Only through practice – by analysing our conditions, hypothesising about how to bring about change, implementing our wagers, and evaluating the efficacy of our efforts – will we be able to advance our struggle for a liberated world.

This concludes this three-part brief series on eco-socialist transition. In it, we first assessed the state as a key terrain of struggle and actor in the process of building a new world; then, we assessed the indispensable role of the eco-socialist party in the left movement ecosystem; and finally, we have unpacked eco-socialist strategy to build and channel social power toward revolutionary change.

Ultimately, whether and how eco-socialist transition comes to fruition is a matter of working and oppressed people uniting in collective struggle for a better world. It is our hope that these interventions contribute to strengthening that struggle.

If you're looking for some guidance for developing your organisation's strategy, then check-out our Eco-Socialist Strategy Toolkit.

Endnotes

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