



**Politicising Climate:**

**The Alternative to Eco-Austerity**

# An Rabharta Glas – Green Left

## Politicising Climate: The Alternative to Eco-Austerity

ARG-GL Climate and Labour Programme as of 2 June 2023.

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## Foreword

For the many workers, carers, students and others who have become politicised by the climate emergency, the prospects for the required radical transformation of economy and society in Ireland and globally seem dismal. The IPCC was clear in its latest report. Enough resources and capital exist in the world to avert planetary catastrophe, but the ruling economic system prevents action.

This document is aimed at those struggling to operationalise their political concerns around climate, the cost of living and how to be effective activists in their workplaces, homes and communities. It puts forward two central arguments.

Firstly, that climate inaction and climate burnout are a result of depoliticisation of a very political problem. We need a way of seeing, discussing and doing climate action that places the issue in the central position that it occupies, that means recognising it as a fulcrum issue for capitalism globally.

Secondly, that workers and carers who are presently subjected to eco-austerity by those in power are the only class with the interest and capacity to produce a pathway to a decarbonised economy. In this sense, there is no 'transition' without revolutionary change.

We see the operational objective of climate politics as producing agency among workers and carers, alongside an eco-socialist industrial strategy and programme of state investment and legislation for taking utilities, transport and housing into public control, and a reform agenda for agriculture which renders Ireland a major contributor to global food security and equity.

The intended audience of this document is therefore those it seeks to empower: workers and carers. We will be using the ideas expressed here to engage trade unions and other political actors in communities and workplaces towards the development of a concrete eco-socialist decarbonisation plan. I hope you find the document an engaging read—its purpose is to make us think differently on the biggest issue facing humanity. I would like readers to engage with us to advance the dangerous idea that the most radical action can be the most viable, and that those who are currently powerless can render possible the unimaginable in pursuit of a better world for all.

In solidarity,



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Lorna Bogue,  
Leader of An Rabharta Glas–Green Left  
June 2023



## Climate crisis and eco-austerity: Labour must act

Thanks to decades of climate science and activism, the idea that capitalist development is undermining the sustainability of the planet and therefore threatening human existence is now mainstream. Since the Paris Agreement of 2015, the transition to a post-carbon world is a legislative (if not practical) reality in many countries globally. But we live in a moment when this climate 'policy' is being converted from a technocratic science to a crude class politics of eco-austerity. This moment is the real-time failure of green politics and of neoliberal rule, but more importantly a moment when eco-socialists can illuminate a pathway to a socialist decarbonisation. Rather than the planet, its flora and fauna, capital, land or 'the economy' being the central focus, climate politics is only actionable when presented as a people-oriented prospectus.

Both socialist and liberal approaches to the climate crisis, in Ireland and internationally, fall victim to symmetrical foundational problems. On the one hand, the mainstream liberal approaches to climate politics espoused by green and social-democratic parties in several European Union member states take the framework conditions of a capitalist economy and society for granted as unquestioned, immovable and immutable. The existing relations and conditions in economy and society must remain static while enormous change occurs in the subjectivities of production and consumption within what is often referred to as an Overton Window. On the other hand, socialist approaches to the climate emergency, whether following a de-growth or a more orthodox Marxist line, wait deterministically for the unchanging juggernaut of the contemporary 'model' of capitalism to produce conditions for revolution. Revolutionary imperative and momentum, they argue, flow from these

changing conditions. Our central contention is not only that neither approach is correct, but that both lack the potential to rupture the present hegemony on climate politics accelerating us towards an entirely avoidable planetary catastrophe. By contrast, a non-predeterministic, eco-socialist understanding of the climate crisis seeks to foreground the contradictory nature of the climate question and of the relationship between the framework conditions and the economic subjectivities, to identify the contradictions which render radical change of both possible.

Rather than the climate emergency producing a politics as ‘the art of the possible’, neoliberal rule regulates what *is* possible. The fundamental proposal in this document is a revolution in possibility rather than a regulation of the possible. To do this, we need a suitable lens on climate politics and to focus on those who can be agents in bringing an end to the old world of neoliberal hegemony and to render possible a world of economic democracy. As eco-socialists we argue that these agents of climate action are workers and carers who are in collective control of their workplaces, communities and homes.

Governments have ceded control of most of their responsibilities to private actors during the neoliberal period, gradually weakening the State’s capacities in the process. Many competences which were for much of the twentieth century the responsibility of the state are now public-private affairs in the practice of ‘governance’<sup>1</sup>. It is in this context that the climate crisis is widely

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<sup>1</sup> In neoliberal political systems, passive governance has long-replaced active government as the hegemonic form of political authority. The role of the state in such systems has significantly realigned since the late 1970s away from dirigisme (‘directing’ authority) in charge of a mixed economy to a regulatory authority alongside private actors over a market-oriented economy.

understood as a hugely complex, amorphous set of disparate issues, allowing it to be regarded as intractable. But the various constituent elements of the climate crisis, from biodiversity loss to public health, are all underpinned by a prevailing capitalist political economy whose industrial output is reliant on fossil fuels. Put simply: capitalism's exploitation of labour is built and operates on resource extraction.

Even though the environmental breakdown is multiple and inter-locking, scaling from the smallest food niches to planetary-systems, from polluted brooks to acidification at an oceanic level, when it comes to climate *politics*, we see carbon as the first-order issue. The plethora of second-order issues are functions of this political economy rather than causes of the climate crisis themselves. Decarbonisation is the lynchpin of a relevant, viable climate politics which addresses the systemic factors of climate breakdown.

Our position is that despite increasing interest in climate activism, climate science, climate policy and technological innovation in the name of climate, there has yet to be formulated a coherent class-based politics of climate. Our further contention is that in the absence of the way of seeing that such a politics brings, how society is to address the most important issue for all of humanity is burdened by thought-terminating slogans and assumptions, i.e., those that follow the pre-set contours of political discourse allowed by the present neoliberal hegemony. The ruling class, and fossil fuel companies in particular, recognise the need to mystify climate through greenwashing primarily as a way to preclude the emergence of a radical climate politics in favour of a climate governance they can control. It is for this reason that many of the people who pour their life's work into fighting the climate crisis maintain

a dismal outlook on the future. A climate politics which generates pathways out of the climate crisis is the missing link, and eco-socialists who view the climate issue through a systemic class lens have an onus to provide a programmatic basis for climate action.

The major problem this programme document seeks to resolve is the notion of ‘environmentalism’ as its own category of political thought and activity. Green politics has failed at its decades-long attempt to elide class and ideological differences behind an environmental agenda. The challenge today is to present a pathway to a decarbonised socialist society based on programmatic analysis using a dual-power approach, one that is distinct from either a version of socialism updated for the climate crisis or trading off ecological priorities for social ones. Instead, a dual-power approach leverages state power on one hand and organisation in workplaces and communities on the other, producing a conscious and progressive working class as key agents of political change. In our view, eco-socialism must abandon ‘environmentalism’ as a category of its own in favour of a theory and practice of political change which inextricably links the shift from capitalism to socialism with decarbonisation. At its heart it requires a way of seeing the climate crisis in order to develop a political prospectus with programmatic proposals for state power in which workers and carers are the principal agents of change.

### **There is already a class politics of climate**

Apart from the fringe minority of political actors who deny the climate crisis, everyone who engages politically with climate—from an industrial capitalist to an eco-socialist climate activist—is grappling with difficult truths about the future of humanity and the planet. Climate scientists have had to bear a heavy



burden of proof in speaking about the truth of climate change in a period dominated by a capitalist class established on a fossil-fuelled means of production. Beneath all of the ideas for climate action in circulation in more recent years, many of which serve to obscure the crux of the climate emergency, lies an unassailable political truth. We must shift to a post-carbon world, but the only transition of which capitalism is capable comes at enormous human and environmental cost.

But the fact *that* the problem is acknowledged does not make obvious *what* needs to be done, and how we address this truth is governed at least as much by material concerns as it is by ideology. There is a prevailing view that the transition required can only be provided for within a capitalist framework. By this we mean industrial and financialised capitalism, that which is widely understood as a political economy which delivers growth through constant increases to 1) production and 2) the volume and velocity of exchange. It is because of these increases that it thus seems to some to be well placed to be the motor of the green revolution. Yet it is equally true that capitalism can only accomplish such increases by way of the maintenance of exploitative class relations. This takes form principally as the exploitation of a working-class and of natural resources by the owners of the modes of production, circulation, and distribution. Though they rarely admit it, those that accept the 'green' transition to be possible only within a capitalistic framework take it as given that class exploitation will by necessity be maintained post-transition too. For behind the standardly expressed imperative of capitalists to 'green' their operations, there stands the will to ensure the perpetual existence of markets into which to sell commodities and services, i.e., to ensure that the required

changes to the economic framework conditions are ones which accommodate the pursuit of profit through the exploitation of labour and natural resources.

It is the contesting of the inevitability of class exploitation both within and beyond the transition that we believe constitutes the heart of climate politics. Said otherwise, eco-socialist politics is motivated by the concern that the distribution of wealth and political power in the world is so unequal that the “transition” proposed so far by countries like Ireland is not only inadequate to curtail carbon emissions effectively but can only come at the expense of vast numbers of working-class lives across the globe. Given the prevalence already of the language of ‘transition’ we argue there is already a class politics of climate at play in green discourse, yet this perspective seems somehow lost in the way climate politics is practised, both in Ireland and in Europe generally. Most proposed ‘solutions’ to the climate crisis, including those put forward by many eco-socialists and well-meaning liberals, counterintuitively function to maintain a certain political-economic status quo. For example, the logic behind the ‘Green New Deal’ offered by the European Union is that the state takes a more enterprising role in the political economy of countries, channelling investment into the infrastructures and public goods required to move into a post-carbon world. But like the original New Deal, which fostered the environmentally devastating period of Fordist mass-production and consumption in post-war USA and Europe, the outer limit of possible change is a variant of the existing framework, in this case ‘green capitalism’, rather than any transformation beyond capitalism.

Similarly, the parliamentary game of climate policy and legislation takes for granted the nature of governance under neoliberalism—the state produces

targets and guidelines, as well as punitive taxation on consumers, none of which amount to any real cuts in emissions or the paradigm shift implied by rhetoric such as a 'just transition'. The churn generated by this is about coming up with a better selection of marginal, consumption-oriented climate policies than the parties of the centre-left and right. Are these ideas generative of a transition to a post-carbon world, or merely political performances of wishful thinking?

Those who reject the policy approach to climate politics in favour of protest or direct action also find themselves subjected to this form of rule. Protests, while a vital means of organising and campaigning for actors on the Left, can variously be downplayed by media, courted by political parties which will ultimately betray them or become an inadvertent safety valve for public pressure in the absence of other more concrete means of political expression. Environmental protest movements particularly have been the targets of state surveillance and infiltration, leading to organisational failure and personal injury to those affected.

In the case of climate politics particularly, with the urgency required for climate action, some ideas with radical intentions are easily co-opted and neutered by the ruling class. For example, the 'just transition' is something written into the present Irish government's programme for government, as though the inscription of such language without commensurate action satiates those who want a genuinely social and transformative approach to decarbonisation. But at the same time, the 'just transition' is offered earnestly by its proponents as something the neoliberal system is capable, if not willing, to pursue without over-stretching itself.

These are the mechanics by which the ruling class has succeeded in turning climate politics into a hamster-wheel pursuit, burning out urban protestor, rural campaigner and green policy-wonk alike. Neoliberal rule has to be understood as a hegemony. By this we mean a political system which is maintained not through direct consent, but indirectly. This is a legitimacy without popular endorsement, often given obliquely by the general population, even by groups who understand themselves to be opposed to it. If the alternatives we propose, or the protests we make, are things the ruling class is in a position to ignore then we inadvertently provide consent to be subjected to neoliberal rule rather than subverting it.

If the truth of neoliberal rule is that it is impermeable both to change-by-protest and in-system alternatives, we have the choice of either seeing or ignoring this truth. If we ignore it, we condemn ourselves to a fleeting catharsis of limited victories in the context of an overall defeat. If we accept it, it follows that we need a new way of seeing the problem of climate politics in a neoliberal setting, so that a relevant and radical political approach can be developed in the time allowed by the climate emergency, i.e. less than a decade.

## Climate Alienation

Mainstream discourse presents the issues of climate and of precarious labour as separate or unrelated to one another. If ever they are posed together, it is framed in terms of the positive spill-over effects that decarbonisation will provide via job-creation and new markets for green tech. This is the premise and promise of the 'Just Transition' climate policies: action on climate will

usher in a new mode of capitalism, and all the attendant opportunities that come with it.

Our position is that the problems posed by climate and labour are not tangential but intimately connected to one another. The lack of capacity people feel in being able to make an effective difference on climate action, and the pessimism and burnout that result, is not simply due to a subjective pessimism of the will but is grounded in the objective reality of this connection. That is, the present-day drought of climate agency is due to the *same processes* of neoliberal hegemony that has over the past half-century neatly disciplined workers and carers as mere consumers and passive subjects.<sup>2</sup>

What are these processes of alienation? From an everyday life perspective, such processes are experienced as a total lack of political agency, the thought that '*whatever politics is, it has nothing to do with me.*' It follows from such alienation that one feels a complete inability to hold to account or even influence the key industrial, financial and governance systems which hold sway over the economy and society. This can be as simple as accepting without a fight that your insurer can with impunity hike the premium on your health insurance policy (let alone the *de facto* requirement to have one in Ireland), to a fatalism that Ireland's prosperity can only come at the price of an economic environment which allows REITs to thrive and vulture funds to outbid and lease back apartment blocks to county councils.

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent history of this state disciplining of workers through the diminishment of the trade union movement, see Appendix 1.

We are often told that, by living in a democracy, ultimate political power rests with the people. Yet the vast majority of people who work or care for others in Ireland do not feel themselves to be in control of our collective destiny. It is not a question of apathy. Instead, the maintenance of this precarious, alienated labour is one of the most important economic conditions maintained by the State, for it is by such means that it minimizes for capital markets any possible volatility, real or imagined, that might come with calls for economic democracy. For the opposite state of affairs, a confident and properly politicised labour movement, is seen as possessing too much of a democratic element for the liking of 'investor sentiment' and its capital.

Our contention is that these same forces of depoliticisation are at the root of insufficient action on climate. For whether by accident or design, climate 'policy' continues this subjected role of labour as a necessity. Presently the politics of climate change maintains what we call climate alienation, following a logic that proceeds only with the most formal and performative level of democratic input. Put otherwise, the 'politics' of climate change is insulated as far as possible from any politicisation: significant decisions are presented as a set of eco-austerity measures already decided, to be imposed downward by a slightly reformed status quo of the same key industrial, financial and governance agents that have power over the rest of society. This political-economic status quo is itself never put in question, nor that new political formations are required. This is despite the fact that numerous studies have pointed out the transformation of society required to halt global emissions at the level required far exceeds what the status quo is capable of. Nor does it reckon with the fact that the maintenance of such a political-economic status

quo in perpetuity entails an ever greater decline and destruction of the *environmental* and *social* status quo that we all depend upon.

We argue thus that any effective eco-socialist climate action must first tackle this climate alienation through politicisation: it must be an undoing of the depoliticisation that is at the root of both the climate emergency and precarious labour. What this means is the production of agency among workers and carers *as* workers and carers, rather than as consumers and subjects. In principle this means that climate action is primarily labour action, and in strategic terms it means establishing *which* workers and carers are best-placed to advance a democratisation of climate action and *how* they can do this. The climate crisis will always be a crisis unless this form of agency, whose interest is social rather than individual, is prioritised.

So far this document has analysed the climate politics at work in Ireland and much of Europe and the anglosphere. Our interim conclusion is that any climate politics understood as 'climate policy' is doomed to fail, for it can only result in an eco-austerity that will generate climate alienation in those who care about the future, and a reactionary politics in those who do not. In the following pages, we shall outline *why* environmental policy approaches have structural aversion to radical proposals and politics, and thus cannot as a rule overcome climate alienation. In the same stroke, we shall present our own analysis which grasps the enmeshed problems brought forth by labour precarity and climate crisis, in their own proper complexity, and generates pathways toward an eco-socialist future.

## Climate politics: ways of seeing, ways of doing

When we have an intuitive sense that the way we perceive a social problem is somehow lacking in its explanatory power or not taking account properly of the scale, complexity or depth of the issue it is supposed to deal with, it is appropriate to search for other perspectives on the issue(s) in order to get a clearer picture. In the case of the climate crisis, one major aspect of socialist critique is that there is a contradictory relationship between the economic structures which govern both production and consumption, and the environment, one which is obscured by vested economic interests. Public policy, media discourse and political orthodoxy often invites us to debate these issues, but only within acceptable restricted and regulated parameters of possible action. For example, the notion that states could nationalise energy production across the European Union to accelerate decarbonisation is a truth that dare not speak its name.

We have argued so far that this type of environmentalism is entangled with climate alienation, and as such will always remain beset by depoliticisation: at best it will be a rarefied space for insiders or for seasoned campaigners, who with a good will undertake political action on behalf of planet or people. The core problem, as mentioned above, is that the politics attached to it is neutered, making it a theory of change without a revolutionary imperative.

Environmental campaigning as a defensive action is, by definition, limited, and a more operational prospectus is required to render climate's radical potential understood beyond the already converted. This is how most climate action is



undertaken in Ireland. But it is the potential for radical change to the existing political economy that campaigners can use to produce non-predetermined possibilities out of capitalism and into socialism in a decarbonised world.

Such non-predetermined yet actionable possibilities are what are known as pathways. Their most notable feature is that they define possibilities that, when taken, *increase* one's agency. Possessing the potential to make radical propositions, pathways pose a threat to the run-of-the-mill public policy approach. Furthermore the ruling class uses theoretical apparatus such as economic and ecological modelling in such a way as to render pathways as either the fringe-extreme, or exclude them altogether. Whether this is by intention or not, the result is the same: the approach that would open the possibility for global populations of people to have control over their own circumstances is foreclosed at the outset. It is for this reason that we see any approach or analysis that operationalises pathways is in opposition to the depoliticised determinism that is derived from technocratic policy-making.

What is required is an analysis that recognises pathways as they occur. It has been made clear that this is not possible within the logic of neoliberal governance, for the contradictory nature of problems identified by climate politics far exceeds its epistemological capacities. Pathways become visible when problems are recognised in their own proper complexity, and where climate politics is concerned, what must be recognised is that the complexity of its problems is always of a *dialectical* nature. Dialectical problems are those which exist in, and point to, an interconnected web of other problems, and thus any attempt to explain them piecemeal or in isolation deforms an adequate understanding of them. What's more, they resist immediate

solutions offered within the current framework of thinking: they demand a reconceptualization of how *we grasp* the problem itself before it can be presented in terms of solutions. For example, the neoliberal understanding can list off uncountable climate-related existential threats, from desertification to ocean acidification, increased flooding to food scarcity, bio-diversity collapse to further refugee crises. It can only do so however by presenting each of them as hermetically sealed-off from, or weakly related to, the others. But these myriad looming threats which make up the Climate emergency are very much related to one another and constitute a web of dialectical problems *par excellence*, at the centre of which is carbon.

A key marker of a process that is dialectical in nature is that of production of one's contrary. By this we mean activities and processes whereby there is an inadvertent production of that which opposes or erodes the very thing that produces it. For example, we have already mentioned how, within the neoliberal framework, politicians propose often to incentivise 'free' market forces to invest in green technological solutions: perhaps to increase crop yield or to capture atmospheric carbon, to stave off the worst effects of the crisis. Seen from within the status-quo, this would seem to be a solution to our dire situation. Yet grasping the Climate Emergency in its dialectical nature shows these purported solutions for our society to in fact be part of the process of effacing the very basis of its existence. For to recognise the dialectics at play is to recognise these deeper systemic aspects and causes of the problem: despite an investor directing his or her capital towards a well-meaning goal such as carbon capture technology, nevertheless the regulatory environment which allows him to make such actions, that of deference to unrestricted market forces, is that which has generated our problems in the first place. If the

neoliberal revolution has taught us anything, it is that market forces obey nothing but attaining the greatest short-term yield. So it is a profound naivety to imagine some strange Pentecostal moment where the investor class as a whole will relinquish that yield in order to direct their capital to the environment's salvation. This point is already becoming a reality, for since the sustained rising of interest rates by Central Banks seen in 2022, there has been a significant dearth in new green investment; it seems that capital only preferred to be green in the now by-gone period of Quantitative Easing (QE), i.e., only when it could not find a better yield elsewhere. So despite the good will of some, when such solutions are viewed as part of a dialectical process what becomes apparent is that it is a near farcical presumption that such 'green' morality will become widespread and normalised amongst market actors. Far from being the royal road to opportunity and societal prosperity, it will more likely be some form of a continuation of the last 50 years of unrestricted capital flows, those which have given rise to currents which look to completely destabilise society as we know it.

The key point from a dialectics-based analysis is that certain socially important issues are not merely a problem to be solved but an invitation to think through the contradictory causes of its nature and production. It is the insight that the actions available to address the problem depend on *how* one determines it: what background historical, environmental, and social conditions constitute it? But though it requires a rethinking of a given problem, this point is not simply a demand to get stuck in reflection. To grasp the world in its dialectical nature is to grasp it positively as always in motion, and to grasp the framework conditions of a capitalist economy not as given, but as historically contingent *alterable conditions*. This insight has revolutionary implications, ones that are

not just critical in scope, but also constructive towards a new conception of agency.

It is our contention that the possibilities one is afforded depend upon the conditions in which one finds oneself; for it is through them that one grasps their sense of agency and what they can do. To reveal those conditions as subject to change, as a dialectics-based analysis does, means that new forms of agency may be cultivated and developed. Rather than being bound to the possibilities of action available within the given conditions, we see the political imperative as that of expanding and transforming the space of possibility itself, allowing for pathways to spring up. For pathways are possibilities that increase and transform one's agency. This transformation in what is possible and the unleashing of new pathways is to be undertaken by enacting *a revolution in conditions*, i.e., in what we (as agents) and society (as a whole) are capable of. If people feel powerless to resolve the climate emergency, this is because to properly address the problem in an actionable way requires a total revolution of such conditions.

### Climate's potential for radical change

How might Capitalism be viewed within the dialectic framework just outlined? Capitalism is an economic system which relies on hegemony to maintain itself. But the hegemony we live under, and upon which capitalists rely, is incapable of maintaining the stable climate required for capitalism. The climate crisis is therefore as much a crisis for capitalism as it is for people and planet. In order to advance the concerns of people and planet, the contradictions of capitalism must be exposed and, ultimately, unravelled.

The current political hegemony is proving itself unable to secure the growth without constraints that the capitalist system requires to reproduce itself without being pitched into continual crises. An example of this is the paucity of plans for emissions reductions in most states meaning it is unlikely decarbonisation will occur at the rate required to halt global warming above 1.5C in the timeframe allowed. Ireland's Climate Act (2021) is a textbook example of a phenomenon occurring in many states, where the ruling hegemony acknowledges the problem of the required cuts in emissions but then avoids any action that might achieve it, leaving fantasy accounting to make up the difference even if, e.g., the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme has resulted in higher emissions in the limited set of industries it sought to partially decarbonise.

This is an exemplary case of how the ruling class uses its political power to turn an ecological problem into a technical one, or a wide and dynamic issue into a narrow reductive issue which requires technocratic solutions. Presented with a sunny optimism that markets can provide sufficient incentives for effective decarbonisation, it in fact reduces climate action to pricing and commodification, subject only to valorisation and the whims of market forces and investor sentiment. Such a climate policy turns carbon into what Karl Polanyi identified in *The Great Transformation* (1946) as a 'fictitious commodity', something which is not produced as a tradeable commodity *per se* but is artificially accorded a market 'value' to facilitate other flows in the economy. This produces a highly political outcome: the market is the sole medium for decarbonisation. Because carbon production is governed by the market, it is economised and thus the use of economic models is justified by the prevailing academic and governmental thinking on emissions and energy.

Such marketisation will be familiar to the Irish public, as it is redolent of the attempted privatisation of Irish Water in 2011. Then domestic water meters were being installed on the ostensive claim to aid state-led upgrades to water infrastructure, but in fact was the installation of the necessary technology for commodification of a public resource. Now we see the same logic is the case for carbon pricing: it is less an explanatory method of holding the producers of carbon to account, and more a cynical process of depoliticisation that places climate action outside of the hands of any true democratic deliberation.

Within Ireland, the normative assumption of climate politics is that any “transition” to a post-carbon economy is to be achieved within the present framework conditions. As mentioned above, a “just transition” is offered as a moral plea from an amoral ruling class to “bring people along” with the changes in the economy demanded by a capitalist class determined to preserve their ability to extract value at any cost to the working class and the environment. The ineffectiveness of this strategy ought to be clear to those who propose it, but such are the limited expectations of socialist gains under neoliberal rule that “transition” appears the only show in town.

We take this ineffectiveness as a demonstration that, after a 50 year history, neoliberalism has exhausted itself. Even at this critical juncture it can present no new ideas in order to preserve itself and the attendant positionality of the bourgeoisie that operate it. This suggests that this ideology, dominant as it has been, is now on permanent autopilot. The last living expression of neoliberal ideology in Europe was the wave of austerity in which Ireland was implicated following the 2008 financial crash. Since then, it has zombified, unable to adapt itself to the most recent crisis in capitalism (coronavirus) let alone to the next (climate).

Its rule continues as a zombie hegemony, not due to a monopoly of force or a strong economic rationale, but instead (reproduces) through passive consent of the citizenry. With the worsening economic crises affecting not just workers and carers in Ireland but increasingly sections of the petit-bourgeoisie, this gives it a half-life, a steadily diminishing influence, and leaves it open to be shattered by externalities. This is therefore to be seen as an opportunity rather than a constraint—the entire neoliberal edifice is held up by continued consent through custom and convention, rather than a living prevailing order. Taken together, both of these fractures open onto a vista of possibility for radical change unparalleled in our lifetimes.

Even the very notion of a “transition” offers one such vista: within its transformative promise on the part of those who offer it, there is contained a revolutionary expectation. Transition is offered as a euphemism for revolutionary change, owing to the rhetorical sensibilities of a governance paradigm transfixed upon stability over egalitarianism. Thus the word “revolution” is used in a climate political context as readily as “transition”. The replacement of the fossil-fuelled car as a ubiquitous commodity by electric vehicles is laughably but routinely considered “revolutionary”, as is the idea that fundamental changes in the economy are possible via behavioural “nudges” from established norms. This points to only dismal possibilities, a false revolution within the Overton Window without revolutionising what is possible.

We maintain the revolutionary expectation behind calls for a “just transition” must be stated more truthfully. For such neoliberal proposals offer a ‘revolution’ only as a consensus-based, gradual, modelled, deterministic shift

from one state of affairs to the other without any fundamental alterations to the political economy. But if we calculate that only a fundamental reordering of the economy can avert climate catastrophe, why fixate on language the neoliberal system is able to subvert? Why not instead make radical demands grounded on objective scientific truth? In leaving behind the impotent gradualism of “transition”, climate politics can offer a more hopeful vista to those who have been burned out and demoralised by the limits of in-system campaigning by dealing more overtly with climate’s centrality to the shift to a socialist world.

### The need for an eco-socialist programme

ARG-GL’s attitude to political change in the Republic of Ireland is that a programmatic approach, one informed by a dialectical analysis to determine revolutionary pathways, is needed to advance eco-socialist ideas. A programmatic approach is the coordinated development of political proposals on the basis of analysis of existing conditions. Rather than choosing reform via electoral politics over revolutionary organising outside the political system (or vice-versa), we see that Ireland’s particular context requires coordinated action on both fronts.

It is our contention that three decades of neoliberal rule has seen a drastic spatial reordering of economy and society in Ireland. This has in turn produced a large and diverse working class alienated from its agency and subjected to the narrow possibilities of ‘free’ market environment.



Our political programme is based on an analysis of these conditions and the political system, and has two main components. On one hand, a set of proposals for reforms using state power which collectively represents rupture with neoliberalism and takes major parts of the economy into public hands such as energy, health and industrial development. On the other, engagement outside the political system aimed at politicising workers and carers in workplaces, communities and social spaces - popularising a revolutionary consciousness among a progressive working class. This represents a twofold revolution in our capacities: the former seeks to transform the material conditions which shape the possibilities available to us; the latter to revolutionise political engagement from being merely an act of individual voting into the collective demand for greater democracy in the economic, industrial, and communal sectors of Irish life.

Class consciousness and state power are both pre-requisites for eco-socialism, and our programme combines both elements into a coherent political strategy. Operationalising this programme means advancing a dual power approach, where political and economic power is held in tandem by the state acting on an eco-socialist agenda and the representatives of a progressive and politicised working class in workplaces and communities. Only in this way may climate alienation be overcome, for it is our contention that this process would alter the political-economic framework conditions sufficiently to envisage a society where power is held collectively by workers and carers as the owners of the means of production and in which the coordinating role of the state flows from this.

## Pathways to a decarbonised eco-socialist society

So far this programme document has been about a way of seeing. The political challenge to be met is operationalising this way of seeing. The general approach of An Rabharta Glas – Green Left to political change is one of dual power. That is that actions need to occur both at the level of the State with a parallel strategy in workplaces and communities around the generation of class consciousness.

What we are proposing is that the way of seeing presented in this document is used to engage with individuals and organisations interested in advancing an eco-socialist climate politics to develop a counter-hegemonic strategy for a worker-led decarbonisation in Ireland. What sets this approach apart from normative proposals, including existing eco-socialist proposals, is a) that it operationalises pathways rather than models, and b) that any strategy lacking a counter-hegemonic logic is inadequate for the purpose of addressing the climate crisis.

Insofar as state power is concerned, our programme's key concerns are summarised in the following table. It is a priority of the party to engage with the identified agents of change—for the most part relevant workers and carers—in discussion on what is possible in their workplaces, communities and homes.

Area	Transitional Measure	Transformative Measure	Agents of change
Labour legislation	<p>Adoption of TULF Bill.</p> <p>Right to access for trade unions to workplaces established politically and in law.</p>	<p>Mandatory trade union recognition.</p> <p>Democratic ownership of the means of production.</p>	Trade unions, political parties.
Energy Production and distribution	<p>Phase out fossil fuel energy generation, with gap made up temporarily from purchase of nuclear generated electricity via NI interconnector and from French interconnector (due to be live from 2026).</p> <p>Price controls on the I-SEM operated through the CER. Investment in transmission and storage infrastructure to reduce energy loss. Bringing into public control of renewable energy companies and establishment of a public energy company with investment capital from taxation or EIB.</p> <p>Refusing planning permission for unnecessary low-employment high-intensity energy users e.g. data centres.</p>	<p>Ten year plan for full electrification of energy use.</p> <p>Nationalisation of all energy production in one single public utility company, allowing for energy pricing to be set by the state for industry and domestic use. I.e. removal of internal energy market and replacement with public utility.</p> <p>Investment in R&amp;D of new zero-carbon energy production. Promote decarbonised energy security worldwide by installing and transferring renewable energy technology to the Global South.</p>	<p>Electricity supply workers.</p> <p>Fuel transport workers (haulage, port, marine).</p>
Agriculture	<p>Decorporatisation: breaking up food conglomerates and expropriating property.</p> <p>Mandatory union recognition in food processors.</p> <p>Teagasc to be brought into full public control and populated with sustainability experts. Coillte Forestry Act amended to take privatised forestry back into public hands; promote community-oriented forestry model.</p> <p>Reforestation and rewilding.</p>	<p>Taking food corporates into public control and converting to social purpose (R&amp;D, processing, production, supply)</p> <p>Proliferation of worker-cooperative agrifood businesses.</p> <p>Moving from meat and dairy to tillage and alternative proteins; from export-oriented growth imperative to internationalist eco-socialist food policy.</p>	<p>Food processing workers.</p> <p>Haulage workers.</p> <p>Agricultural workers.</p> <p>Education workers.</p> <p>Forestry workers.</p> <p>Small farmers.</p>
Transport	<p>Introduction of low cost monthly ticket for public transport. Subsidising the purchase of zero-carbon forms of transport (e-bikes, not e-vs), procuring international cooperation on low-carbon forms of transport.</p>	<p>Nationalising all public transport routes. Investment in new rail routes including rail freight to all ports, Free public transport.</p> <p>Investing in sea-rail options to replace air travel.</p>	<p>Public transport workers.</p> <p>Private and platform economy transport workers (e.g. Uber, bus companies).</p>

		<p>Full electrification of transport including logistics and freight.</p> <p>Changing urban planning paradigm to supersede car use; pedestrianisation of urban centres.</p>	<p>Haulage workers.</p> <p>Private sector transport workers.</p> <p>Commuting workers.</p>
Housing	<p>Rent controls linked to income in tandem with sales price controls.</p> <p>Low-cost insulation measures and retrofitting social housing.</p> <p>Introducing minimum standards for BER of rental properties and functioning PTRB.</p> <p>Removing REITs/funds from market.</p> <p>Funding local government to CPO vacant and derelict property.</p>	<p>Large-scale public housing programme.</p> <p>Rent-controls based on land value.</p> <p>Implementing Kenny report recommendations on land zoning.</p> <p>HEA upskilling of workers to meet skills requirement of retrofit.</p>	<p>Local government housing workers.</p> <p>Tenants.</p> <p>Carers.</p> <p>Construction workers.</p> <p>Planners.</p>
Industrial Production	<p>Taking IDA into full public ownership and giving it a zero-carbon mandate.</p> <p>Moving industrial policy away from FDI towards R&amp;D with zero carbon objective.</p> <p>Increasing, enforcing corporation tax.</p> <p>Creating a state bank for investment by consolidating state-owned banks.</p> <p>State assistance for transition to democratised ownership of enterprises.</p>	<p>Industrial orientation towards production of universally-required goods and human development.</p> <p>Focus on decarbonised production of medical equipment, pharma, construction with a zero-carbon direction. R&amp;D focus on energy production and distribution technology.</p>	<p>Manufacturing workers.</p> <p>Sectorally-specific industrial workers (e.g. in pharma)</p> <p>Logistics and distribution workers.</p> <p>Public sector workers in industrial policy.</p>
Health and care	<p>Universal living wage for carers.</p> <p>Improvement of working conditions for healthcare and support workers.</p> <p>HSE reformed, nationalisation of private healthcare operations, increase in HSE resourcing.</p>	<p>Universal public healthcare provision.</p> <p>Zero carbon pharmaceutical industry and a public company with a specific aim of development and production of medicines for the global south</p> <p>Public care for the elderly.</p> <p>Free public childcare.</p>	<p>Carers.</p> <p>Nurses and healthcare assistants.</p> <p>Cleaners.</p> <p>Childcare workers.</p> <p>SNAs.</p>

## The Revolutionary Imperative: What You Can Do Now

ARG-GL's view is that the politics of climate advanced by the ruling class and their policy gardeners nevertheless is opening up a new vista for politicising the people it targets. An alternative climate politics is one which eschews the technocrats' need to deterministically model and foreclose the future in favour of using the contradiction of the ruling class's climate politics to build consciousness, agency and eventually class power among workers and carers. Already there are some specific things that could be done.

Trade Unions are in an excellent position to invest resources in alternative economic planning for whole sectors of the economy, for example in food production and security, in which workers in key sectors such as processing, logistics and retail are mobilised in a coordinated way.

Political parties, campaigners and educators can provide counter-narratives to the language of personal responsibility, for example on car use in a suburbanised country like Ireland. Alternatives such as a single state car insurance company and public-transport oriented public housing development are measures which are relevant to political campaigns and electoral cycles now which would not only be popular but would take the challenge of reducing car use out of the markets' hands and into public control. This stands in stark opposition to the Green Party approach of pricing people out of their only means of transport to work, study and provide for their families.

More generally what does it mean to be revolutionary when faced with the challenges of Climate politics? The word 'revolution' has become such

common currency today as to be at risk of being debased. On the one hand one hears of the rationalist 'green' revolution, i.e., a technocratic project that is ostensibly shorn of any politics. On the other there are those who would claim that this is a moment of revolutionary conditions and that all we need is the right politics to act upon them.

But just as climate without a politicising revolution is empty, so revolution without climate politics is blind. The problem that afflicts both of these positions is they propose a drab non-revolution within the exhausted potentials of neoliberal rule. What this means is that they operate within the confines of the possibilities offered by the market: either positively, in terms of marketplace opportunities; or negatively, seeing the effects of the market as offering opportunities to overthrow it.

We argue that both of these approaches are weak, because they seek a revolution in society's actual exhausted state, without a revolution in its potential. Such a latter revolution would be a contestation of the space of possibility itself—not merely to incrementally shift what is politically permissible, but to render possible the unimaginable.

Against ever increasing climate alienation borne by eco-austerity, such a change in the space of possibility is realised through building political capacities. This involves the creation of conditions such as politicising the unpoliticised and seemingly neutral spaces such as the workplace, supermarkets, schools, streets, homes, community centres, pubs, public transport stations and even petrol station forecourts. For there can be no true climate politics without labour politicisation.

For ARG-GL this building of a climate politics is a question of creating a revolution in conditions, rather than the hollow marketplace revolution or the perception of revolutionary conditions where there are none. What we propose is a revolution in capacity, in what we as a class are capable of doing. The ruling class—those who own, govern and manage—has already proved itself incapable of climate action in the interests of humanity. Only workers and carers have the interest, capacity and potential to advance an alternative to eco-austerity.

## Appendix 1: Trade Unions and Class Consciousness

As the primary means through which workers can improve pay and conditions, trade unions are thus an apparatus for building class consciousness. Over the last four decades we can see the usual cycles of economic bust and boom are accentuated by a longer term cycle of trade union decline starting in the late 1980s, which has yet to turn the tide. Neoliberalism has clearly been successful in taking the levers of power away from workers and carers albeit with trade union busting taking a different form in Republic of Ireland to the open and brazen method of its proponents in the United Kingdom, such that it has been dubbed 'delayed Thatcherism'. An eviscerated trade union movement is unable to grapple with emerging political economic questions like the climate crisis without significant reframing of its operational assumptions.

Rampant poverty and high unemployment and inflation in Republic of Ireland in the 1980s left the economy in a vulnerable position to adopting expedient short-termist solutions, and to easy indoctrination of the state by the mantras of neoliberalism; de-unionisation, labour market flexibility and precariatization. As we will see, these mantras trickled down to the public psyche and far outlived the Celtic Tiger.

In 1987, social partnership primed the state apparatus for a period of sustained escalation in wealth transference from workers and carers to the capitalist class. Introduced as part of a wider economic recovery plan amidst persistent industrial unrest, social partnership brought trade union officials, employers and government together to negotiate centralised wage bargaining for both the public and private sector, with the aim of 'industrial peace'. Class consciousness was to become an injured party in this process wherein power



was diverted both away from the grassroots trade union level further up the pecking order, and away from trade unions towards central government.

By 1990, having already dealt a blow to trade unions, social partnership was compounded with the eminently anti-union Industrial Relations Act without significant opposition from trade unions or any political party. This legislation operated as a containment on worker militancy, with measures to remove immunities trade unions had been entitled to, resulting in a greater risk of legal action and thus a deterrent to industrial action. Political and solidarity strikes were banned, the modalities of balloting workers, and trade union recognition and access to workplaces became far more restrictive.

There is clear causal link between the 1990 Industrial Relations Act and the subsequent foreign direct investment boom. Many of the multinational corporations arriving at that time were US-based and established non-unionised firms for which the state was now providing a lucrative environment. Internal procedures such as human resource management and on-site employee representative bodies became more commonplace and a narrative emerged that trade unions were no longer needed. Attempts were made to address the issue of union recognition with amendments in 2001 and 2004 after a high-level group was established bringing together representatives from corporate lobbying groups and trade unions but the interests of the capitalist class were kowtowed to, and statutory recognition was not legislated for.

After a failure to reach an agreement to austerity measures introduced after the economic crash, social partnership officially came to an end in 2009. The transfer of the burden of the bank bailout and subsequent arrangement with the Troika onto workers and carers arrived at a time when the rules of the game in industrial relations had changed completely and the fabric of trade

unions had been severely eroded. Trade union density decreased from 62% in the early 1980s to 34% in 2009. Centralised wage bargaining continues in the public sector but trade unions, and particularly in the private sector have not yet recovered.

The years since the 2008 economic crash and bailout have seen the rise of precarious work. It is as though the state gifted the capitalist class with the thwarted class consciousness and collective power of workers and carers. Across the public and private sector and a broad income range, neoliberal hegemony continues to sustain itself through zero-hours, temporary, if-and-when contracts, bogus self-employment, low pay, and with trade union density currently 24-28%, reducing to 16% in the private sector, one of the most worker hostile collective bargaining regimes in Europe.

That capitalism 'learned' how to reduce class consciousness by exercising hegemony over the state apparatus to aid its further expansion is just one conclusion reached by our analysis. Can this be used to identify pathways out of neoliberalism? Only if we foreground workers and carers in proposing state measures and politicisation rather than "bringing them along". This means using the power of state to leverage agency and political power to workers and carers, and the power of the labour movement to politicise workers and workplaces on the climate question as principal locations for climate action.

