

All right We are live Hi and welcome to Red Reviews the podcast where we talk about a variety of books from a Marxist and anarchist perspective And I'm joined by my co-host Justin Clark Thanks for joining me Justin Thanks Corey It's great to be here We're getting towards the fall months It's still fairly warm here in Indiana but you said it's been starting to get kind of chilly up in your up in your neck of the woods We did get our first snow today Oh wow It's already gone but it's showed up today We got some sleep last weekend There was like a period of like maybe 2 minutes It was it was last week when sort of the effects of Hurricane Milton where we got sleep for like 2 minutes and then it went away and all melting It was gone But but yeah so but I think that's all relevant because I you know as we were talking about the pregame you know I can I mean I'm only in my early 30s but I can tell you right now that the climate I live in today Feels very very different than the climate I grew up in You know everything feels like it's a month behind where it actually should be And and I think obviously that has to do with climate change And that goes into talking about our book tonight Now people are going to probably ask OK they're doing another degrowth episode I'm sorry I couldn't help myself I was inspired by a very interesting Jacobin piece by Lee Phillips and Matt Huber About the book we're talking about that inspired I'm like well I need to read this book I need to read this book because their review their review is quite damning of it I'm like OK and I respect them very very much Some of their points I think are fairly down I find I find that more and more I find spots where I think I disagree with Lee Phillips on I think that's fair I think that's fair So we've so we've talked about sort of the broad sort of the broad range of opinion about ecology and socialism and when we talked about Jason Hickel's excellent book Less Is More That book just sort of was very very good and very detailed and and I liked it very very much But it didn't have like a it wasn't particularly one particular tendency on the left Like it didn't have like a particular perspective It wasn't a Marxist book It wasn't a Marxist book specifically And this one is OK And so tonight we're going to be talking about Slow Down the Degrowth Manifesto by Kohei Saito Kohei Saito is a professor of philosophy in Japan He is a recipient of the Isaac Deutscher Award for his contributions into Marxist history and theory Isaac Deutscher was a very influential Marxist who wrote generation defining biographies of Trotsky and Stalin And wrote a variety of other really intriguing and interesting essays on Marxist And we might do one of his books on the podcast in the future But you know so for me I'm like OK well he's won the Deutscher Award OK so he's got his Marxist bona fides right He's legit He's legit But he has a very radical interpretation of Marx that often I think which is what makes Huber and Phillips a little a little upset with or disagree with rather not an emotional thing So it's a good book I like it a lot I think that he is doing something really different and interesting with interpreting Marx in a very new and vibrant way that is unlike traditional interpretations of Marxism on ecology Okay And so I think when you get into that you you get a sense of you know this this book also opens up like the classic debates about the early Marx versus the late Marx and are they different or are they the same Is there continuity or is there change Like that's part of the discussion here But also it's about Kohei Saito makes the case that Towards the end of his life Marx is questioning some of his fundamental assumptions about capital and about capitalism and about ecology So to kind of get us started with thinking about the book much like Hickel's book it starts with the discussion of where we are and what's going on with the world and with climate change and he he much like Hickel does he makes the case that the sort of Green New Deal style of sort of you know big sort of you know big gig or or sort of big kit versions of solving

this problem don't necessarily work and they don't work for a variety of ways Part of it has to do with the fact that degrowth fundamentally believes in creating an economy in which people's needs are met but that um That we have sort of a steady state where we're eventually either sort of having a sustainable use of energy and material throughput or we're going down where we're using less synergy or using less material Right Right And overall So that's what degrowth is That I agree with I don't think I mean I don't see any reason to disagree with that Yeah And I do think that the the challenge that we face is pretty dire I mean Saito lays out very clearly much like Hickel does that we are facing many environmental crises all at once You know we could very much see the destruction of the very core components of our ecosystem in our lifetimes whether it's components of the polar ice caps or the Great Barrier Reefs or coral reefs in general which are a big store of carbon To the the horrific effects of deforestation especially in the Amazon the the the inefficient use and the wasteful use of water and how water shortages will contribute to crop issues I mean we're in a situation where if current trends continue you know agricultural output could be halved by 2100 or earlier So there are real serious challenges and Saito makes the case as does Hickel that this solution of just sort of like grading capitalism doesn't work and and sort of like taking big kit socialism and sort of throwing like an eco sticker on it isn't going to work either And And part of it's the technologies aren't there so you know carbon sequestration technology is not particularly effective yet You also have the untried bio like sort of geoengineering Right yeah Where you could-- It almost like yeah Yeah where they could put aerosols in the air to sort of block the sun's rays I mean all of these but again these are very untested technologies Many of them are in their infancy The other thing and this isn't in the book but I do think is extremely relevant is the growth of AI and the use Of massive massive server farms and the growth of server farms to fuel this AI you know bubble that's in our tech sector right now And so you know Eric Schmidt one of the founders of Google basically just came out and said yeah Google's not going to make its its climate its climate goals It's just not And we don't care We're going to we're going to blast right through them because we think that with our investments in AI I will help us figure out the solution As if the solution isn't already there which it is Um And so I think I think that's all stuff that is fairly new I think that's not not fairly new but fairly it's fairly treaded ground We know that What's new about him is specifically his Marxism You know Hickel has a broadly sort of leftist perspective but it's not any one particular tradition whereas Saito is explicitly a Marxist um The earlier version of this book I think was called Marx and the Anthropocene and he's written a couple other books about these topics And he's he's sort of basing his view on a fundamental re-imagining of Marx and Marx's relation to ecology And so when we think about it the sort of the traditional way in which we think about Marx as we think about socialism is something that comes out of periods and stages of development We've talked about this before Traditional Marxism often looks at it as you go from sort of hunter-gatherer societies to uh to the development of agriculture then eventually you develop sort of the feudal system and the feudal mode of production and then feudalism transforms into capitalism mostly due to the crises and contradictions of feudalism And out of the crises and contradictions of capitalism will emerge socialism that that's the sort of traditional way of doing it And the way that we get to socialism is by expanding our places of production by growing our technological capacity by growing our economy to a place where eventually we can have a socialist economy That is built upon the foundations that

were laid in capitalism That's the traditional way of looking at Marxism And Saito kind of puts that on its head and says that towards the end of his life Marx had sort of a theoretical break with what he had written before OK And he talks about the he talks about how Marx sort of gave up on the the notion of progress like the sort of the idea of technological progress or the way that sort of assumed stages of productions You have to go through this to get to this You have to go through capitalism to get to socialism Yeah so those are Marx in his estimation changes And what changes him is his study of ecology So Marx starts studying the work of a guy named Justus von Liebig And and the influence of the concept of sort of the metabolic the notions of metabolism And that doesn't mean just like the metabolism like oh I burn this many calories a day but social metabolism but an economy's metabolism And how there is at some point going to be an irreparable rift between the capitalist mode of production and ecology And Marx is writing about that specifically in the context of um of Liebig's research on soil depletion in Europe So Saito takes that a step further and says well if you actually look at some of the stuff that Marx wrote that's unpublished that's not in Capital Volume One it's not in the Grundrisse of the notebooks You look at some of what he's written there and specifically his letter to his letter to a person named Vera Zasulich which is in 1881 Vera Zasulich was a Russian socialist who was in in support of these agricultural communes that were developing in Russia Remember within 1881 we're 20 years out from the abolition of serfdom Serfdom is abolished in letter not necessarily in practice but in letter in Russia in 1861 So we're barely a generation out from that decision where where Russia is already on its on its path to be going from being a a sort of feudal mostly agricultural society to becoming one that is capitalist and mostly industrial And in this letter to Zasulich which Saito sort of holds up as a big you know this is a big this is a big deal that this this piece of evidence is a really big deal and he sort of builds his case upon Marx's writings to Zasulich where Marx makes the argument of well maybe societies don't necessarily have to go through capitalism to get to socialism Maybe they can build their systems differently Maybe they can work on these agricultural communes And he specifically mentions Russia Russian agricultural communes as an example of this which we would see you know well over you know a half a century later in the agricultural communes in Spain during the 1930s when we've talked about that before too So there's evidence to suggest like in terms of the long-term thinking Marx may have been right but what Saito makes the argument of saying is that look see this is Marx sort of getting rid of his sort of mechanistic View of history where it has to go through certain stages It has to do this in order to get to socialism See he's sort of rejecting that He's rejecting that notion of of progress with a capital P Now some of that's true but I want to sort of I mean basically I I think there are many different versions of his letter to Sisulich She wrote three or four different drafts before he actually wrote to her and his actual reply to her ended up only being about 350 words And we're just gonna go through it real quick one of the things that's really frustrating about Saito's book despite how much I did like it he never just ever like directly just gives you Here's what he says He's always interpreting it and giving you quotes but he's never just given it to you So this is from March 8th of 1881 He marks his writing to Zazula She says Dear citizen Nervous complaint which has periodically affected me for the last 10 years has prevented me from answering sooner Your letter of 16 February Excuse me In that sentence he's referring to his health issues Mark's had a tremendous amount of health issues especially in the last 10 years of his life He would die in early 1883 So this letter is literally written within the last you know two years of his life I

regret that I'm unable to give you a concise account for publication of the question which you Which you did me the honor of raising Some months ago I already promised a text on the same subject to St Petersburg to many Still I hope that few lines will suffice to leave you no doubt about the way in which my so-called theory has been misunderstood So the letter he did write a letter to Ote Sestiveni Sepisky Um He did write them a letter and kind of laying out what he was discussing But Let's go back to the letter here because I think he pretty much gives you most of it in these short lines In announcing and analyzing the genesis of capitalist production I said at the heart of the capitalist system is a complete separation of the producer from the means of production the expropriation of the agricultural producer Is the basis of the whole process Only in England has it been accomplished in a radical manner But all the other countries of Western Europe are following the same course that comes from the French edition of Capital page 315 The historical inevitability quote UN quote of this course is therefore expressly restricted to the countries of Western Europe The reason for this restriction is indicated in Chapter 32 Private property founded upon personal labor is supplanted by capitalist private property which rests on exploitation of the labor of others on wage labor Umm In the Western case then one form of private property is transformed into another form of private property In the case of the Russian peasants however their communal property would have to be transformed into private property The analysis in capital there provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune But the special study I have made of it including a search for the original source material has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia But in order that it might function as such the harmful influences assailing in on all sides must first be eliminated and it must then be assured the normal conditions for spontaneous development Have the honor dear citizen to remain yours sincerely Karl Marx So this is very interesting I think that it's one piece of evidence and Saito hangs a lot on it but it's relevant So when we talk about historical inevitability Marx is making the argument that his announcement in Capital provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune So he's saying right now that you know I didn't touch this I didn't touch this You know I'm specifically referencing how capitalism has developed in Europe specifically Britain Most of my research was done in Britain at the British Library He lived in London for most of his life and most of his later life from the 1850s on 40s maybe And so right there he's saying that the Russian agricultural communes don't necessarily have to go through the exact phase of social production that England did or Germany did This is very interesting because it sort of puts to bed the notion that Marx believed in these very like kind of mechanistic deterministic stages of production that all societies had to go through And in many ways it kind of pre-stages in a radical sense the notion of permanent revolution which we get from Trotsky that idea that we can kind of jump over capitalism and get to socialism by development like we could just jump over it So that's there too So So now that's obviously a very different case but it's a notion of like you don't have to do these in like very rigid stages Do I think that this means that Marx is completely abandoning the materialistic theory of history No I don't No I think what he's doing is he's using historical materialism to analyze a very specific context in which development is very very different say in Russia where- Yeah like I don't know It seems pretty clear to me that he's just taking like okay well the conditions in this area had a different result and has different situations that will arise from You know socialism can arise from like he's actually taking into account the new material conditions

of other places Exactly The other thing too is that it's this letter is a piece of evidence that challenges the traditional notion of a sort of Promethean Marxism which is a different more traditional view of Marxism where it's that forces of production and the advancements of science and technology will allow us to create the conditions by which we build socialism and at the same time build a better ecology Now what's interesting there is that I don't necessarily think that the letter to Zizulich or any of other Marx's sort of notions of of his later considerations of ecology necessarily mean that he has given up on technology I don't think that's the case Right I I think what Marx was uh really doing was recognizing as you mentioned and as we've discussed that different places go under different conditions and as such you sort of view them objectively and try to come up with The best way to to go forward in terms of social development But I think what's interesting here is that he's not necessarily flat out saying what Saito says he's saying It's much more like a and when he says in the analysis in capital therefore provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune So he's basically saying like it doesn't necessarily mean that the Russian commune is the best way to go but it doesn't necessarily mean it isn't right So do I think that Saito might be overstating the case In the letter to Susulich maybe I think this I think him saying that Marx was a degrowth is a bit of a stretch I don't think that's necessarily true because because there's really no indication that that is the case I mean I think Marx understood the notion of the irreparable rift between capitalist development ecology Like that's pretty standard stuff we think about when it comes to the notions of science and technology like Marx is pretty bullish on technology as are most Marxists generally I don't think yeah I don't I don't think Marx is going to become an anarcho-primitivist anytime soon and I think that's not the case I think what Marx was grappling with in his study of science and his study of ecology and these different modes of communal production in his later years signifies I think a maturing of his thoughts It's not necessarily a complete like rejection of everything that came before but more of a more of a variation more of an evolution of his thought more towards recognizing that there may be different ways of getting to socialism than merely the ways that might be possible in say Western Europe specifically Britain Like any good scientific theory it incorporates new evidence and adapts to it Yes Yeah And Marxism was always seen that way right It was supposed to be seen as a science that would evolve based on information Now it's not a science in sort of the hard science sense but it is a social science and based on the methodology of historical materialism Now in their review for Jacobin Lee Phillips and Matt Huber basically say that DeCito was overstating the case That one letter to some Russian socialist in the 1880s before his death means that he was a degrowth This means nothing at all Or at the very least it means something in the sense that Marx was grappling with these questions but it doesn't seem like he was going to agree with every you know jot and tittle of whatever Saito was writing in terms of the notions of degrowth Right Because there are many more other instances in which Marx is talking about specific stages of development and he's talking about technological advancement as well So I think that that in general the site to maybe overstate his case yeah but I don't necessarily think that like that that he's wrong or that it's like completely and totally wrong But what I do think is that it's a recapitulation or at least What Phillips and Huber think is it's sort of a recapitulation of Malthusianism that it's basically saying oh there are these hard limits and we can't get past these hard limits and so we have to live with them And it's you know it's Phillips's notion of the austerity ecology And I mean my thinking on that is that it's sort of that has limits too

Like this idea that I mean we live in a natural world in a natural universe in which there are limits based upon just there are hard limits but but it's very hard to figure out exactly what those limits are So for example when Liebig was writing about soil erosion in the mid to late 1800s this was before the development of ammonia-based fertilizers Oh yeah yeah Those would come into play in the early 20th century And so we've seen a massive growth in agricultural yields precisely because of ammonia-based fertilizers Now those do have an environmental cost Yes And And in terms of water runoff in terms of overall soil depletion or erosion over time Yeah But there was a limit that was a natural limit and we use scientific technology to kind of get beyond that limit Right And so But I think it's safe to say that like those limits that are within our ecology maybe aren't as hard and fast as people think they are but they're but they are there right Like we keep talking about that you know we have to keep temperature rises below one below 1.5 degrees Celsius within the next 10 to 20 years if we want to stave off the worst effects of global climate change Like that that's a hard number that's been that has been developed via scientific research now What are ways that we can combat climate change There are many and many and one of the ways we could do that is just by changing the mode of production right Like if you move to a democratic system in which people's needs were met rather than simply the profit motive you could get rid of a lot of junk in the economy And in the latter half of the book Saito has a lot of really interesting examples One is Barcelona Spain And other examples of cities and small and other localities that have done some really interesting work in restorative agriculture that have been using you know ancient techniques from indigenous peoples to sort of rehabilitate the soil or to or to improve local habitats In Barcelona's case it's more of like participatory budgeting and and participatory economics um which we talked about in the Grace Blakely episode a little bit and about how when when communities are given participatory budgeting as an example participatory budgeting is something that we should all move towards regardless of the ecological benefits although of which there are many But one of the things that's nice about participatory budgeting is that we get a sense of when people are given a choice would you rather have more social services or would you rather have more cops They choose social services because they know that if they choose the social services they may not necessarily need the cops And so in places like Barcelona they've done some of that where they've been able to really invest in their communities and do the real care work that is essential That's the other thing Saito mentions in the latter part of the book that I like as well is that notion of care work you know which isn't particularly climate you know intense It's not particularly carbon intensive to be a home health aide or to be a cook or to be a daycare you know a daycare provider or a school teacher Like these are all things in which we care for people doctors right These are ways in which we can provide needed very needed services for people with a fairly low carbon footprint So there are those kinds of things that we can do And And so in general well I think maybe Saito might be over exaggerating the lengths to which Marx changed his mind I do think Marx evolved and and in interesting ways and I think that that that's worth consideration Yep for sure I I guess just to bring up a couple comments earlier in the stream Vulcan 999 said you can't talk about talk too much about degrowth There's a lot to cover OK thanks Thanks I hope I just hope people never get tired of it because I think it's a really fascinating debate and it's one that I I wanted to touch on this year as as we've been doing our show Some random geek popped in to say oh my God these leftists are talking about Karl Marx again We always I mean we have to talk about the old man I mean it's you

can't avoid it Yeah that's right Vulcan 999 also said I'm surprised Marx didn't consider that establishing a socialist society doesn't go in strict stages The development of societies don't play out in strict steps like a game of civilization That's true And I maybe I mischaracterized him but this and maybe not so like Marx himself but I was sort of talking more about like sort of classical like orthodox Marxism where it has to go through very specific stages and this eventually especially becomes the case um with Marxism Leninism in the 20th century It's very much about very much specific stages If you look at whether it was the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China like the PRC is very clear about how we get to socialism through capitalism They're very clear about that So maybe it's not so much Marx himself but it's Marxism as a discipline which is part of the reason he wrote to Zuzulich to sort of maybe clear up some of those misconceptions Yeah Vulcan 999 also said David Graber makes a good point about that when talking about agriculture in the dawn of everything Yes one of my favorite books Let's see I got it here on the shelf Get over here There it is There it is I think that's right I think that I also read a really interesting story about some indigenous communities They're doing some really interesting water reclamation projects I think here in the US using traditional methods and traditional materials to do water filtration It's Fantastic And that's what I do very much believe in I mean I think that in the past I've said things like you know big problems require big solutions And to some extent I do believe in that I mean I do think that there are some things that we have to do on a large scale in order to solve the problem This is where I kind of disagree somewhat with the sort of the degrowth style of say Saito that says everything should really be local although it could be But even if things are local they will require big projects whether it's some kind of Energy cooperatives right So he talks about in the book about energy cooperatives and we have rural co-ops here in America They're called REMCS Rural Electrification Management Cooperative or something like that I think But they're REMCS They were developed out of the New Deal It was they're a you know they are a A legacy of the New Deal are these programs of rural electrification where communities come together and collectively decide rates and collectively decide changes in materials and so on So you know where I grew up the middle of nowhere Indiana in Miami County Indiana there was Miami Cass REMC So my local power came you know at some point through a rural cooperative Cass County is next to Miami County It's where Logansport is It's to the West But anyway yeah so so yeah so I think I think that's right I mean I think that it's it's sort of a all of the above approach I'm not I'm not closing the door on the possibility of nuclear energy although I I do understand people's concerns with it I really do Yeah I was just talking to somebody the other day about Google recently bought like the 25 small nuclear reactors or something And you go OK well maybe I'm not in favor of that kind of thing with nuclear Well and the problem is is that that they're doing that all on the service of A I and and and and developing their their their cloud infrastructure to to provide the services they do through copilot I think is what it's called now Google's A I used to be called Bard but now it's called copilot now Microsoft Gemini Google's is called Gemini It used to be called Bard Microsoft's is copilot Just give them decent names Yeah I mean you know I think it's like ChatGPT It's like that doesn't particularly have a good ring to roll off the tongue But hey maybe people thought about that with Google back 20 years ago Although Google does roll off the tongue pretty nicely Yeah not bad But but anyway yeah so so yeah I do think that Giving power back to communities to develop programs of social betterment and and egalitarian and with sort of egalitarian and democratic goals I'm all for that I mean you

know I think that degrowth will require some big things I mean I do really believe that America in order to really combat climate change needs to invest in a you know in a federal high speed rail system that would replace a lot of what is Done by by cars and trucks You know I think if America moved more of its shipping back to trains and those trains were publicly run and publicly owned I think we would be able to hit some of our climate targets while being able to meet people's needs I think the other thing too is talking about what Saito calls the imperial mode of consumption where he talks about how you know and we've talked about this in in other in other episodes but you have the imperial core And then you have the periphery right The periphery is what we would traditionally call the Third World The periphery subsidizes the core Yeah And the core is like you know the OECD countries the United States you know Canada Western Europe you know anybody that belongs to NATO that's the imperial core right And so for us living in the core we do have a higher standard of living often as the result of the exploitation of people in the periphery For people who are who are in in countries that are essentially neo colonies of the United States or France or whoever This is a sticking point between me and my partner Pam is that every time I every time I talk about the rich she's like motherfucker you're the rich Yeah When you take the whole world into account you the middle class earner in Canada is the 1% Yes And Saito makes that argument too is that you know the richest 10% of the world are subsidized by the rest of the 90% Yeah And so we do have a very high standard of living relative to a very large chunk of the world Yeah That I do think is a huge problem for sure And The main critique I've heard of this is basically that it's a messaging problem Look it's it's you know Americans and and this is really this is how you know Huber and Phillips start their argument where they talk about how what are you talking about imperial mode of living like Americans Like their wages haven't kept up with productivity despite the fact that Americans are more productive than ever that we keep living with austerity where we're public goods keep getting slashed and privatized and destroyed and things keep costing more and more We get less and less for it Like Americans do live fairly precarious lives in ways that they didn't say a generation or two ago So it is important to say like oh you're part of the imperial mode of living Yeah that's technically true but all of us live poorly compared to what we could Yeah and all in the name of the most rich taking their profits off of the top of everyone Exactly Like maybe you could say that a phone would cost 10 times as much if we paid the African continent what they actually deserve for the materials But maybe we could make up for that if we took that out of the hands of the people who are profiting off it Right Because why does it cost 10 times more It costs that because they have to generate a profit right Exactly Yeah And it's predicated on growth that you have to have constant growth And the way to grow is by subsuming other economies Part of that is I mean that's how in a lot of ways globalization happened where you know former countries of the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia I just finished Michael Pranny's book on Yugoslavia where you know these countries were sort of they were they were stripped of their public parts And and and were sort of sold off at you know bottom bottom prices bottom of the barrel prices and and were privatized to the point where people's standard of living in Eastern Europe and and the former Soviet Union is far worse today than say it was 40 years ago when the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia still existed despite the fact that there were problems then That it's actually worse now in a lot of ways And same in America I mean arguably is the standard of living in America as good today as it was 40 years ago No I mean not in terms of your ability to have to get an

education your ability to buy a home your ability to put food on the table to be able to raise children Like no like our standard of living is worse today than it was 40 years ago Yeah like to think like You or I probably make more than our parents or grandparents did in terms of dollars real dollars like over Not real dollars but in like yeah like overall dollars But in real dollars adjusting for inflation we don't We don't We probably make way less actually Yes And Americans do Wages have not kept up with productivity in America since the 1970s The graph is astounding I've seen it in multiple books And so When you think about all of that it's really hard to go to people who are struggling in America and go see you're the problem your imperial mode of living That's the problem And it's like my big issue is that instead of like a good Marxist like analyzing well these are part of the broader structural forces and that's what the imperial mode of living is built upon Saito tends to not do that He tends to talk more about like well if people would just give this up or give that up and it's like no no no no no don't give me that sort of crunchy left shit Right Tell me you know recognize that the problem isn't so much that Americans live too high because a lot of Americans don't Yeah Most Americans can't afford you know a \$400.00 or \$500 or \$1000 emergency Most Americans can't Right Savings Most people most Americans don't have savings in the way that they did two generations ago Yeah So Americans live very precarious lives A lot of millions of Americans live in poverty including children So this idea that that they that oh they're living real high on the hog at the expense of the global peripheries is kind of bullshit because a lot of Americans don't live that well Yeah And well I think it's important to recognize that the problem isn't necessarily like the 10% although that would be a problem The problem is like the 1% or 110th of 1% the Uber billionaires the people who own everything Because even though we may not may have technically like a better mode of living than say somebody in In the periphery which is true in in many respects without a doubt that doesn't really mean that our standard of living is fantastic or that it's better because it's not Because you have to think about how in America there's an imperial core there's a ruling class core that feeds off of the periphery That's how any country is right So a lot of us have to have our our work is never fully is never fully benefited us and so It's very hard to kind of say oh well you need to give up things What Americans have had to give up a lot over the last four years So I think that's a hard sell But it's not that Saito is wrong It's just that the framing of it doesn't recognize those differences right You also have to put in the existing power structures and systems of exploitation And so that you can recognize all of the the various levels of it rather than just saying well you know you the guy that buys coffee every day at Starbucks you don't get to anymore Yes exactly Which I mean I'm not necessarily opposed to that Some of the things he talks about about sort of the cheap consumerism like I agree with that 100% I mean but part of it is is that Americans do not have a choice They don't Most Americans can't afford to spend money on like Certified organic artisanal carrots Like they just don't Like most Americans don't have that Most Americans don't know how to garden I certainly don't know how to garden He does mention in the book the victory gardens that were during World War 2 And there was a sizable percentage of the country in America who had gardens by the end of World War 2 which is I think a hell of a public achievement But again that all goes away by the 1950s I mean by the time you get into the heyday of American consumerism in the 50s and 60s that's gone You know that notion of of community gardens or shared sacrifice that's all done So you yes you can make the argument that American consumerism or that sort of imperial mode of consuming is a problem and I agree that it is And so That's always

been the question I always have about the growth is how do you square that circle of you want to meet people's needs and you want to build a life for people where they can where they can they can get their needs met you know food clothing shelter medical care education social you know social interaction all those good things How do you do that while at the same time lessening the overall economy that that seems difficult to me and I and I guess part of it is it's just recognizing that We live in a world that commodifies everything that the commodity form is is truly the problem And if you get rid of the commodity form and you go back to you know use value instead of exchange value because that's really the big difference right Classic Marxism you have use value which is like I have my my you know my water bottle My water bottle has use value to me It holds my water I can drink my water I can refill it I don't have to buy other plastic bottles It's useful to me right Whereas exchange value is it's like this in the market is worth a particular amount I bought this one at Goodwill for 2 bucks That was its exchange value OK mind you I bought this I think pre-pandemic So this would probably 5 bucks at Goodwill now But but so yeah like we have a we have a system that's built upon exchange value It doesn't matter what the use is it just matters if it generates profit via exchange Yeah And and so that's why you have a company like Shein which is like an environmental disaster Yeah or fast fashion in general But it's very hard for people who don't have a lot of money to buy clothes Yeah Like we used to talk I remember like about people going to Walmart right Like you'd say yeah they exploit their workers they don't pay them enough Maybe we shouldn't support them as a business But then you're like OK but how else am I going to pay for food when that's the cheapest place to buy it right Yes that's right And it's the same with clothing too You know there are a lot of people whose whose Whose options are limited in terms of clothing Having said that though my wife and I are having this conversation I think it's pretty relevant to this conversation is we were talking about clothing because my wife hates she and she's like vehemently against it as am I And and she was talking about how the reason that people use it so much is because it's one of the ways that they can get things that are on trend right affordably And my thought is why the fuck do we have trends Who gives a shit what the trends are Like you know that's like that's just like cap To me that's like pure capitalist propaganda Like I don't care what trend something is Is it not you know it's like you know and so it just becomes all of this cheap clothing that's made out of plastic that doesn't That doesn't disintegrate because a lot of Shein's shit's just made out of polyester and and so we're adding to all this plastic waste of a shirt you may only wear once and then you get a hole in it or bricks Hell it could rip while you're wearing it They will break down in a landfill but they will break down in your washing machine So it's like this very interesting mix And so the idea of trends is like absurd Like if we lived in a healthy flourishing society you wouldn't have this notion of trends You have clothes that would look attractive that would look nice but would also serve a function You wouldn't necessarily have to get brand new clothes every month or every quarter You know maybe you'd have few fewer items of clothing but ones that are more durable You know now am I perfect on that No I mean a lot of my clothes are Old Navy I like Old Navy a lot because they make affordable clothes for tall fat people And I'm a tall fat person so it's easier to buy clothes from them than it would you know because I can't There's certain stores I can't just walk into and buy pants off the rack on I'm too big Right So I know that if I buy from them I know it will fit me because I have that experience with them But all of my clothing every piece of clothing I own fits in one small closet in this office That's all I've got You know I don't I don't have anything else And

And so you know but that's me you know now as you can see am I immune from consumerism No I have a ton of books I love books I collect books I buy stuff all the time But most of the books that I buy are used Yeah you know I rarely buy new books Most of them are upcycled I buy them at book sales I buy them at new thrift stores or secondhand stores I very much believe in the not just the sharing economy but sort of the upcycled economy where you know here's where I'm going to do my little pitch again I I very much believe in something called like I don't know what you'd call it I'd call it the Federal Bureau of Repairs and Replacements The idea of you know like let's say your toaster breaks down and it's a very easy fix You can take it to the Federal Bureau of Repairs and Replacements They'll either repair it for you for free or for a very nominal fee You know like something like for \$5 we'll fix your toaster Perfect Because we live in a world now where if your toaster breaks down it is literally cheaper to buy a new one and throw the old one out than it is to fix it And that's a huge problem Same with shoes right Like most people don't fix their shoes 100 years ago most shoes were not mass produced and the ones that were mass produced were mostly probably military ones And you owned a couple pairs of shoes in your life And they constantly got resoled or refitted or whatever by cobblers They were made of leather or or some other material They would last for a long time Yeah there was like a profession for that Yeah yeah there was a full profession People people had professions Hell when I was a kid there were still shoe repair places I mean you know they were in the mall You could go to the mall and there was a shoe repair place So like I very much believe in all of that I mean I think that's the future you know for example like I use a laptop computer and MacBook that is 14 years old It's almost 15 years old OK I rebuilt it in 2018 I put a whole new hard drive in it and new RAM but I've had the computer for 14 years It's so old that the serial number on the bottom of it is wearing out but I have it and it works The iMac that I'm using to stream tonight is an iMac we've had Since I think 2015 I rehabbed that one too where I put the hard a new hard drive in it because it got fried when our power went out in January I love fixing things and I believe in fixing things but we don't live in a culture that believes in that And so like I think more than just like getting rid of the commodity form although I agree with that and like moving to a use based economy The other thing is also just moving to an economy that's predicated on Building things to last things that people could consume and enjoy for a long time that could be fixed or if they can't be fixed that they could be disposed of properly So one of the organizations that I absolutely love And have done incredible work and it's something I would support in our degrowth future is it's called the Ocean Cleanup It's a nonprofit that goes to all over the world and they've developed all these really interesting ways of getting plastic garbage out of the ocean and out of rivers and streams So they'll go to places like Guatemala and Sri Lanka and the Pacific garbage patch in the Pacific Ocean For those who don't know there is any massive massive Patch of garbage in the Pacific Ocean That's the size of some states some U.S states It's huge and and it's in sort of the middle of the Pacific Ocean because of ocean currents in the way that the tectonic plates move in that part of the world because you have the Ring of Fire in the Pacific ocean where that's where a lot of tectonic activity is a lot of volcanoes and stuff It's like like Hawaii you know or Polynesians or the Polynesian islands or whatever Polynesia But there's this giant Pacific garbage patch and they go out and they clean it up They go out and they fix it and they try to get rid of it And then they use the plastic that they find to make things So they'll make like you know in the past people have used plastic to make like fleece clothing Now We've talked before about how like plastic recycling largely is a scam

and it was one that was pushed by the plastics industry in order to sort of get the burden off of the producers and on to consumers Yeah And a lot of the sort of deep growth discussion often focuses on the consumer What can you do You know I can take shorter showers or I can You know wear clothes until they completely wear out or get them repaired And all those are good things Those are all things I believe in Sure But at the end of the day the problem is is that our economy is built upon on constant constant growth Because in capitalism you either grow or you die And so if we built a system that wasn't so predicated on growth we could live in a better world that would fulfill people's needs without having to make so much stuff You think of all of I think about this now especially as an adult All the plastic toys I had as a kid like all the toys that kids accumulate over the years and they just end up in the garbage Like they just end up in the garbage Yeah No it's Do we have any other comments or Sorry Well actually no no that's all right There was quite a few going on here I kind of lost track of things Oh sorry No it's all right I was thinking like I know I always go back to it but like in an interview a while ago I asked a guy about Degrowth And he said well like we really don't need the glow-in-the-dark plastic dog poop or whatever Yes you know it's like that's that's where I really think we could make some changes is like just the massive overproduction of things that end up in landfills because nobody actually buys them or nobody cares about owning them in any way Yep It's the crisis of over overproduction right This is one of the the chaos agents of capitalism I think about in terms of the making of masks during the pandemic you know since so much of American production was sent overseas we couldn't really make masks here And then we sort of retooled things to make masks And now we have too many of them when people made way too many because it's not on any rational basis It's all based upon profit Yeah Yeah So it seems like there's a few corners that could be cut right Oh yeah Like so for example I mean we can get this close to home I just got this in the mail It's like a little fidget toy OK And it's they're like magnetic and you can like move it around and like move stuff around It's cute But did I need this No You know the reason I bought it was because I'm a part of a of a online secret shopper network where I I buy products and review them So I'm as much of the problem as anybody But but but remember kids there is no ethical consumption or capitalism That's not to say that you can't make better choices You sure certainly shared when you can but just recognize we're we're all we're all to blame Yeah that's right All right Well I guess We're pretty close to wrapping it up So what are we covering next time So before we get into what I wanted to next time I just wanted to mention that people should read this book People should definitely check it out I think it's as good Is it as good as Jason Hickel's book No I think Hickel's is the best case for degrowth I think his book is the best case But I really like that Saito is Sort of reviewing Marx in a different way to try to get us to think differently about Marxism and ecology And I think that's really worth worth checking out So I like the book very very much and I'm glad we covered it And so I would recommend people read it and then read Matt Huber and Lee Phillips's response in Jacobin So you get kind of you can kind of read the debate and maybe we can put that in the show notes for sure but in terms of next time um I'm currently working on a talk that I'm going to be giving in two weeks And so the book that we're going to be covering in two weeks will also be the book I'm going to be talking about in that talk It's a book that's written in the late 1960s We're going back to Erich Fromm who I love very very much His form of Marxist humanism is very much my worldview in a lot of ways And in 1968 he put out a book called The Revolution of Hope Towards a Humanized Technology

And that's the book we're going to cover next time Cool I am obsessed with following all things tech I'm a huge fan of Paris Marx We've covered Paris's book on the show I also listened to Better Offline at Zitron's podcast which is fabulous And so that's what we're going to talk about next time is how technology in modern life Alienates us degrades us and how to build a world in which we can use technology for the greater good And to build that world beyond capitalism to build that world beyond the imperatives of the profit motive which kind of next time's episode will dovetail a lot with what we've discussed tonight Very cool I guess that just leaves Where can people find you As always you can find me here At justinclark.org all of my writing is there my my short book reviews blog posts that I've been putting out this year And then my the the written version of my talk will be on the blog within the next couple of weeks And then I'm still long It'll be probably long in the future not too long because I want to get it out before the end of the year But I'm also still working on that retrospective blog post about Green Day's American Idiot which turns 20 years Old this year And so the the special edition box set comes in the I'm getting it in the mail on Friday so I'm going to listen to all of it and listen to a lot of the demos and stuff and kind of give people a personal reflection on why American is very important to me Very cool And that'll be that And then as always please consider becoming a patron patreon.com/skepticalleftist Corey has done an incredible amount of work in the last few weeks He did a tweet or a thread today where he was like oh you were just recording yesterday I'm doing Red Reviews today I did this other thing I love it It's like so see how happy he is going on Yeah see how happy he is doing all that work Well you can make him more happy by supporting it Yeah So by becoming a patron you get the pregames the postgames here of Red Reviews and all of his other shows You'll also get them in advance It's only two days but it's still in advance It's still in advance You know two days in advance And then you know I don't know if we've ever talked about doing this at some point but if there was ever like a if we ever wanted to do like a Patreon Q&A where if we have particular patients patrons at a certain level we could do like a Q&A with them That would might be a good idea if people are interested in that Maybe throw that in the Discord or in the Patreon Say like hey would you like to do a Q&A with us like live Would you like to be in on it I'm happy to I'm open to that But yeah you know it takes a lot of work Corey puts a lot of work into the show and he does a fabulous job He makes my life so easy All I have to do is read these books and then Shoot off my mouth for an hour but he does all the other really hard work So please consider becoming a patron at patreon.com/skepticalleftist And yeah I guess for our we just last week we did the live stream I fast-paced that So it's coming out on two days for the public It's coming out again like an edited version two days before the election And then I just did a great interview with some Some psychoanalysts who talk about their book Gender Without Identity I'm fast pacing that So that's going to be out right the weekend after the election So there's some really cool stuff coming out pretty quick And then of course the next step the next Red Reviews that'll be edited is for Libertarian Communism So awesome awesome awesome And then the Judith Butler episode will come out which will complement your your conversation with the psychoanalysts I think hopefully Yeah Yeah no it's It's been amazing I look back and I'm like wow we've done a lot and it's great And I'm and we appreciate all of the really great comments tonight Really appreciate all of your questions and your comments Thank you guys for everybody who's been a part of the stream and thank you all for being a part of this community that we're building here For sure Thanks so much everybody and have a good one See you next time