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Green Republican Political Economy: Towards the Liberation from Economic Growth and Work as Disutility

John Barry¹

Abstract

This article focuses on green non-ecological critiques of orthodox economic growth and offers a distinctive green republican political economy argument in favour of democratising production as part of the 'just transition' to a sustainable, regenerative economy. Democratising production could, by enabling the realisation of some of the internal goods of work, reduce ecologically damaging orthodox economic growth. The article then proceeds to critically analyse the dominant conception of 'work as disutility' within both the history of modern political economy and more importantly within neoclassical economics. This (mis)conception of work is one that both neglects to recognise the internal values of work, frames a 'productivist and growth' oriented view of human labour which is used to justify 'despotic' workplace management practices. Hence liberating the macro economy from the imperative of endless growth, and at the micro economic/workplace level liberating production from capitalist productivity, could simultaneously enhance human freedom and flourishing and ecological sustainability.

Key words: green political economy, production, democratisation, work, employment

'Who, in the light of biophysical reality, can remain committed to the growth-forever vision? Apparently, our decision-making elites can ... *Their commitment is not to maximize the cumulative number of*

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people ever to live at a sufficient standard of consumption for a good life for all. Rather, it is to maximize the standard of resource consumption for a small minority of the present generation, and let the costs fall on the poor, the future and other species.’ (Daly 2013:4–5; emphasis added).

Introduction

One of the key and long-standing concerns of green politics and green political economy has been around ‘limits to growth’. While initially based on the ecological impossibility of endless orthodox (GDP) growth as a permanent feature of the human economy (Barry, 2016, 2018) – impossible to extend infinitely into the future or extend to the world’s population as a whole – green critiques of growth also have non-ecological, resource and pollution dimensions. These include concerns about the link between growth and inequality (within and between nations), the lack of connection (after a threshold) between human flourishing and continuing growth, and concerns around the negative impacts of the growth imperative on democratic politics and the further spread of democratic norms throughout society and the economy (Barry, 2012).

This article will focus on some of these non-ecological critiques of economic growth (as related ideas and practices of competitiveness, productivity, efficiency and maximisation) and offer a green political economy argument in favour of democratising production. It also argues that from an ecological sustainability perspective, democratising workplaces and production could, by enabling the realisation of some of the internal goods of work, reduce ecologically damaging orthodox economic growth. That is, the creation of a regenerative economy requires the democratisation of work, and attention towards its specifically *internal* values and goods when, following MacIntyre for example, it is viewed as a *human practice* as opposed to an *institution* (Barry, 2013). These internal goods, comprising, *inter alia*, creativity, autonomy and democratic decision-making, could, by constituting practices adding to human flourishing, decouple the sphere of production from being ‘locked into’ endless ecocidal economic growth. A key issue here is to distinguish formally paid employment from work, and the article discusses how dominant growth oriented measures of the economy only focus on employment and exclude and normatively disvalue unpaid work.

The article then proceeds to critically analyse the dominant conception of ‘work as disutility’ within both the history of modern political economy and more importantly within neoclassical economics. This (mis)conception of work is one that both neglects to recognise the internal values of work, frames a ‘productivist and growth’ oriented view of human labour which is used to justify ‘despotic’ workplace management practices. Here the article canvasses arguments for viewing modern employment as a form of ‘wage slavery’, and why from a green republican perspective we should be

concerned about it, and supportive of attempts to reduce the undemocratic unfreedoms of this condition. Of interest here from a green republican political economy point of view is that the main justification used for maintaining (and extending) workplace dictatorships and denying democracy in the workplace is efficiency and the maximisation of production. In a word, growth. The main argument presented here is that if work is an undesirable activity, this may be because of how production is organised, who controls it, and how the benefits from it are distributed, not because of work per se. One needs to look therefore at how work and employment are organised and structured.

From an ecological sustainability point of view, democratising work - which may reduce productivity - is, *ceteris paribus*, a positive policy option in that it can reduce negative impacts of economic activity and increase democratic decision-making within the sphere of production, as well as expand individual autonomy and creativity within that sphere. Democratising employment and recognising work, including re-orientating public policy away from a dominant focus on employment (and hence economic growth), allows for the possibility of 'post-growth' political economic objectives such as lowering the working week and shifting from wage-based private consumption to both lower consumption and forms of collective and shared consumption.

Green Political Economy and Consumption

'Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need'. *Fight Club*, 1999

Do good lives have to cost the earth? Can we have high quality lives with low carbon and environmental impacts? These are some of the complex questions we need to ask in the 21st century, the 'age of the Anthropocene', accelerating climate breakdown and exacerbating inequalities within and between societies. Providing answers and political/policy solutions - or more likely 'coping mechanisms' (Barry, 1999) - to these interlinked questions in the turbulent times ahead will (even if as yet we cannot see the urgency) dominate or at the very least profoundly frame and shape politics, economics, culture in the decades ahead from local to global scales. Or we should hope that addressing the existential crisis facing life on this planet, does dominate and frame human political thinking and acting, since if this does not happen, then, *ceteris paribus*, the outlook is grim (to say the least for future generations of the human and more than human worlds).

A key focus for understanding and navigating a way through and coping mechanisms for a climate changed and carbon constrained world, has to be *political economy* (not be confused with its contemporary bastard offspring, 'economics'), and green political economy in particular. On the one hand, green political economy calls attention to the metabolism between the human economy and the much larger ecosystem and biophysical processes

and systems on which it depends. That is, a green political economy focus draws, or should draw, our attention to the non-human energy and resource inputs and pollution etc. (including nonhuman agency) that is required, produced, transformed etc. as a result of human economic activities. On the other, green political economy, like other critical forms of political economy, such as drawn from Marxist, post-colonial or feminist thought, foregrounds human relations of power, ownership and control of human, and more than human, assets, capacities, products and the institutionalised organisation of the human economic sub-system.

Much work in critical green political economy has rightly focused on excessive consumption and consumerism in the minority/over-developed world. This work has revealed how the lifestyles, aspirations for and views of the 'good life' and associated economic structures of globalised capitalism, which largely serves the interests of the minority world (and the economic elite), have systematically locked the world into an ecocidal trajectory. This critical work on consumption and consumerism shows how, beyond a threshold, the 'iron cage of consumerism' (Jackson, 2013) within a growth oriented economy creates dangerous ecological risks, increases inequalities, status competition, ontological insecurity and anxiety. Consumerism can corrode solidarity and community and can, by orientating people inwards and to themselves (notwithstanding the very social character of consumerism), reduce people from being citizens to individualised and privatised consumers (Lynch and Kalaitzake, 2018), such as Foucault's 'entrepreneurial self' under neoliberalism. In short, consumerism as a permanent as opposed to a transient activity and goal, is unsustainable, unfair and undesirable. Just as the imperative of endless and infinite growth can lead to 'uneconomic growth' – that is cause more economic negatives than positives, and imperil long-term economic development – so consumerism (a key engine of modern growth) can pass a point where it reduces not adds to human wellbeing and flourishing.

Some of the green political economy research in this area demonstrates the multiple co-benefits of strategies to *socialise (and decommmodify) consumption* and separate ownership of goods and services from use and enjoyment for example (Barry, 2012). Other research stresses the need to recompose and reconstitute consumption in the minority world such as Ian Gough's argument for strategies and policies to recompose consumption (based on distinguishing needs from luxuries) and focused on attaining ecological sustainability and social equity (Gough, 2017). And while such critical work on consumption and consumerism is important and needed, my aim in this article is to focus on how green political economy should analyse, think about and reconfigure the organisation of production and human collective labour as part of any transition from 'actually existing unsustainability'. Or more specifically any 'just transition', given it is possible (and there are examples all around the world) of *unjust transitions* from high carbon and

high consumption ways of life and political economic orders (Barry and Mercier, 2018).

Democratising Work

‘The production of too many useful things produces too large a useless population’ (Marx, 1844/1959: 51)

In mainstream policy (and academic) discourse on the transition from our current unsustainable and ecocidal economic system, production figures largely in terms of finding technological solutions to ‘decouple’ increasing production from energy, pollution and resource use. That is, to find technological innovations to decouple endless economic growth (and consumerism) – as a permanent target of the human economic sub-system – from the non-growing, regenerative larger ecological and biophysical system of which that human economy is a part. That is to ‘green business as usual’. I have elsewhere viewed this ‘techno-optimistic’ strategy as both unrealistic (in fact some of the thinking and policy proposals in this space are mythical) and therefore dangerous (Barry, 2016). But they are also profoundly depolitical and depoliticising (if not outright anti-political), hence their appeal to vested interests and those supportive of the political economy status quo, or those who have lost hope or faith in political and democratic solutions to our ecological, resource and energy dilemmas. But such techno-optimist magical thinking to the human economic sub-system do not exhaust how we should approach analysing the sphere of production and the organisation of human work. For reasons that will be clearer below, I wish to maintain an important distinction between *employment* and *work*. I view employment as a sub-set of human productive labour or work, a key characteristic of which is that it is remunerated i.e. it is a form of wage labour. This common distinction between work and employment tracks another important distinction for green political economy between ‘formal’, money-based and measured economic activities (as captured by GDP most importantly), and what are variously termed practices, activities, relationships and exchanges within the ‘core’, ‘convivial’ ‘care’ and ‘reproductive’ human economy (Coote, 2010; Escobar, 1995; Illich, 1973).

I wish to make the argument that from a green (and republican) political economy perspective on a just transition away from an ecocidal growth economy, there are both ecological, sustainability and social, ethical reasons for and advantages of democratising work qua formally paid employment. In terms of the latter we can begin by asking how can we say a democratic society exists when the vast experience of the overwhelming number of its citizens is ‘wage slavery’ in formal, undemocratically organised employment? Consistent with long-standing green political arguments for greater democratisation of economic and political life (including decentralisation), the green republican asks ‘why should democracy end at the factory/office/classroom door?’ Here, green republicanism can be seen to

echo older socialist/Marxist critiques of the exploitation of labour under industrial capitalism and how some of these echo recognisably republican political concerns against domination and the constraining of human freedom. For example, Quentin Skinner notes the connections between Marx and his description and condemnation of wage slavery and republicanism

‘I am very struck by the extent to which Marx deploys, in his own way, a neo-Roman political vocabulary. He talks about wage slaves, and he talks about the dictatorship of the proletariat. He insists that, if you are free only to sell your labour, then you are not free at all. He stigmatises capitalism as a form of servitude. These are all recognizably neo-Roman moral commitments’. (Skinner, in Marshall, 2013)

Removing the compulsion to enter into employment (something contemporary greens have promoted via such policies as a universal basic income or services for example), and democratising employment via worker self-government would not only help realise republican goals of freedom as non-domination. Democratising employment could also enable the realisation of internal goods of human collective labour, especially in a post-growth context. But one of the obstacles intellectually and especially in policy terms standing in the way of reconfiguring employment along more democratic lines (and one that is both functionally useful for the growth obsessed political economy such as capitalism, and for the despotic, non-democratic organisation of employment) is a profoundly narrow and negative view of work.

The shadow of ‘Adam’s Curse’: the ideology of work as disutility

‘To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, You must not eat from it,” Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life’. (*Genesis*, 3:17)

Pain for women in childbirth and ‘painful toil’ for men is the Christian God’s gendered punishments for humanity for daring to eat of the tree of knowledge. And this negative view of work still holds in commonsense, ordinary and intellectual discussions of work. Since modernity the latter discussions have been dominated by political economy/economics and its view of work as ‘disutility’, something essentially negative and for which one requires an *external* reward in the form of wages. While defenders of capitalism, Weber’s analysis of the Protestant ‘work ethic’ comes to mind, saw work as ‘necessary pain’ for gain and/or salvation, even progressives and revolutionaries formed their utopian political alternatives to industrial capitalism in terms of minimising human labour through machinery and technology and presented non-work as central to the ‘good life’. Thus

Marxists and other anti-capitalist political ideologies echoed ancient Greek ideas of freedom as essentially ‘freedom from work’, in Marx’s case perhaps a secular revenge and exorcising ‘Adam’s curse’. The Greeks, like the Hebrews, also regarded work as a curse). The Greek word for work was *ponos*, taken from the Latin *poena*, which meant sorrow. Manual labour was for slaves and women in the domestic sphere. Free men did not do work but their leisure and status as free citizens was directly proportional to their freedom from work, allowing them the resources and time to pursue higher goals of warfare, philosophy, poetry, large-scale business, architecture or sculpture.

Fast forward this to the late 19th century and Marx’s son in law Paul Lafargue writing in praise of idleness and leisure and making the argument that it was capitalism that was preventing humanity from being liberated *from* work. Interested in profits and exploiting workers, the capitalist system he noted means that, “The blind, perverse and murderous passion for work transforms the liberating machine into an instrument for the enslavement of free men. Its productiveness impoverishes them” (Lafargue, 1883/1907: 30). Unlike for Christianity, it was not the truth, but machines that would set humanity free...from work. This point prefigures later green (and global southern/decolonial) arguments for ‘useful unemployment’ (Illich, 1978) and a rejection of Eurocentric and capitalist ideas of productive labour and how ‘the economy’ and ‘economics’ could or should be conceptualised (Barry, 2012).

In this way both defenders of capitalism, notably classical and later neoclassical economics, and critics of capitalism, agree (in some measure) on this essentially negative view of human (manual) labour. This thus leads to a narrowly *instrumental* view of work, especially work qua employment, most commonly found in neoclassical economics. The very language mainstream economics uses to describe employment and wages is revealing: wages ‘compensate’ for the painful disutility of labour. To compensate someone is to recognise a loss of something valuable that needs to be replaced with something else – ‘free time’ for ‘wages’. Against this view, one of the main green republican reasons for democratising employment is that this would allow the realisation of some of the *internal* goods of human labour, such as autonomy, authenticity, creativity, cooperation, and self-realisation (Barry, 2012, 2016). Yet all of these are summarily discounted in most mainstream political economic models and thinking with its ‘compensating wage’ model of work. Hence, there is a pressing need to challenge neoclassical/orthodox views of employment as ‘disutility’ –that is, primarily only engaged in to secure wages.

To do this we need fundamentally challenge the dominant neoclassical economics claim (and also dominant in commonsense thinking) that work is something that is intrinsically something bad, negative or a disutility. What are the origins of this claim/assumption (or more correctly ‘axiom’ in

orthodox economics – a value judgement ‘smuggled in’ and present/perceived as a ‘fact’ (Barry, 2018))? Apart from ancient Greek and Christian views, a main source are classical political economists such as Adam Smith who defined work as ‘toil and trouble’ (Smith 1976: 47), or early utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham who noted that ‘Insofar as labour is taken in its proper sense, love of labour is a contradiction in terms’ (1983: 104), and even a liberal proto-green such as John Stuart Mill opined that, ‘Work, I imagine, is not a good in itself. There is nothing laudable in work for work’s sake’ (Mill, 1984: 90). Dutiful Christian political economists to a man, this was the prevalent view of work (or more specifically manual labour) in modernity (also see Arendt, 1958). Human labour in short was a ‘necessary evil’ that simply had to be endured, not something that could or should be enjoyed, and if possible done by someone else, and ideally done by someone else the fruits of which could be enjoyed by those who did not do the work. That is, just as in antiquity, the sphere of production under capitalism outsourcing and owning the fruits of labour not labour itself. was the goal that should be pursued. *Human freedom consisted not in work but from it (including especially reproductive work).* This was a view enthusiastically promulgated by neoclassical economics, but with a new twist: not only was work disutility but should be managed and organised for the purposes of maximising productivity and profits.

Conceptualising work as ‘disutility’ also forms basis of another problematic assumption (found in both neoclassical economics and ‘commonsense’ views of the economy and the sphere of work and production). This is the pervasive view (primarily from a ‘management’ perspective but also found beyond this) of workers as actual or always potential ‘shirkers’, and the justification of the types of intrusive surveillance outlined in the next section. From a republican perspective concerned as it is with freedom as non-domination, there is something suspicious and paternalistic, if not patronising, of viewing work as something only motivated by and organised around external rewards i.e. compensation for which the worker is dependent upon someone else to determine and deliver (leaving to one side for the moment the bargaining power of the worker vis-à-vis whoever is hiring her). Such an instrumental view of work necessarily leads to (as well as being due to) dependency on the will (and power) of others. And such dependency of course creates the conditions for vulnerability and unfreedom as discussed below.

If work is a disutility, painful, toilsome and so on, it is rational and ‘natural’ to assume they will seek to avoid it – so from Marx’s ‘wage slaves’ we come to ‘work-shy idlers’, and a corresponding need to put in place employment-based processes to monitor, discipline and limit this. That is, productivity requires the non- and anti-democratic structuring of employment. The structuring of production involves power differentials, unequal bargaining positions, property rights, ownership and control, as well as the

management systems of governance that structure and organise conditions and internal processes of employment. Wage slavery, discipline, monitoring is the precondition for the 'productive unfreedom' under capitalism, with the threat of 'work shy idlers' simply a micro version of the structural imperative for capitalism to minimise employment costs at a macro scale. How else can we explain that almost every technological innovation under capitalism has led to less people working more and not more people working less? Or that these innovations have increased material output not human freedom?

Wage-Slavery and Productive Unfreedom: growth through discipline

'The slave is sold once and for all; the proletarian must sell himself daily and hourly. The individual slave, property of one master, is assured an existence, however miserable it may be, because of the master's interest. The individual proletarian, property as it were of the entire bourgeois class which buys his labour only when someone has need of it, has no secure existence'. (Engels, 1847/1925: 9)

Non- or anti-democratic forms of management and governance, such as we find in most, if not all, forms of modern employment are, from a green and republican point of view, forms of domination and alienation – 'despotic experiences of non-autonomy' on a daily and mass basis. We have already considered and dismissed the fiction of workers 'voluntarily' submitting themselves to such forms of 'despotic power', and associated ideas of unevenly based contractual relations between employees and employers. We can also note in passing that neoclassical economics assumes that individuals 'choose' whether to work or not, going so far as to view unemployment as 'voluntary leisure' (Spencer, 2006: 459).

Notwithstanding the limits of the paradigmatic republican case of unfreedom in the 'master-slave' relation, let us take modern employment as a form of wage slavery, and therefore why green republicans should be concerned about it, and supportive of attempts to reduce it not overcome the undemocratic unfreedoms of this condition. Take some examples from the USA to illustrate modern conditions of wage slavery and despotic rule in the sphere of employment and production (an outlier case granted but pioneer of innovations in production, including the control of workers, which other countries follow):

Consider some facts about how American employers control their workers. Amazon prohibits employees from exchanging casual remarks while on duty, calling this 'time theft'. Apple inspects the personal belongings of its retail workers, some of whom lose up to a half-hour of unpaid time every day as they wait in line to be searched. Tyson prevents its poultry workers from using the bathroom. Some have been forced to urinate on themselves while their supervisors mock them.

About half of US employees have been subject to suspicionless drug screening by their employers. Millions are pressured by their employers to support particular political causes or candidates. Soon employers will be empowered to withhold contraception coverage from their employees' health insurance. They already have the right to penalize workers for failure to exercise and diet, by charging them higher health insurance premiums. (Anderson, 2017)

While one cannot say this is true of every workplace, the point is that these 'private governments' control individuals qua employees, often (especially amongst non-unionised workforces) without any or much inclusion of the voice of workers, countervailing power by workers, or transparency and accountability in managerial decision-making. The scope of unelected, arbitrary power and authority bosses have over workers and thus the real and present danger of causing multiple and complex forms of on-going and sustained harms, dominating people, denying their liberty and dignity and so on, is such that it should be of pressing concern for civic republicans.

Of interest here from a green republican political economy point of view is that the main justification used for maintaining (and extending) workplace dictatorships and denying democracy in the workplace is efficiency, labour productivity and maximising production. In a word, maximising output growth while minimising inputs. Introducing democracy and worker voice into the workplace could lower productivity (and think of the constant media, government and orthodox economic research pointing out 'productivity gaps and weaknesses' which hold back a firm, a sector or a region) from exporting and producing more and growing. But what if such a linear and instrumental focus on enhancing productivity and orthodox efficiency were less dominant? Indeed, was seen as both ecologically irrational and socially deficient?

For straightforwardly ecological reasons around 'limits to growth' we could envisage a green republican policy preference for this. Relaxing or abandoning altogether the demands of productivity, efficiency and growth at the micro level of the firm would, *ceteris paribus*, contribute to the 'in build redundancy' or 'head room' (a key characteristic of any resilient system) at a macro-economic level required to ensure the human economy stays within the sustainability parameters of planetary boundaries. That is, introducing non-productivity goals and associated practices (such as those related to the realisation of some of the internal goods of collective human labour) within the productive sphere would contribute directly to a transition to a more resilient and sustainable macro-economy. To the oft asked question as to whether the transition to a green, less unsustainable economy and society requires more or less democracy, at least in this instance we have an unambiguous answer: *more democracy and the progressive democratisation of the productive sphere would directly create a less unsustainable economy.* More democracy less unsustainability – more freedom for less stuff basically,

and thus the unshackling of production (and technology) from the goals of efficiency, labour productivity, output maximisation and the ideology and imperative of economic growth. And capitalism... if Marx was in awe of, as well as in thrall to the productive power slumbering in the lap of social labour under capitalism, it seems clear that the liberation of social labour from growth and productivity etc. is also a liberation from capitalism (since capitalism is inextricably bound up with endless growth and capital accumulation).

What I point to here (notwithstanding it has not been fleshed out completely) is that how democratising employment (which I also think is a precondition for the realising of some of the internal goods of employment such as autonomy, self-direction, creativity and collaboration) is an obvious policy choice from a republican point of view as a way of both realising citizenship practices and cultivating its associated virtues and reducing forms of domination and unfreedom.

From employment to work

‘Having real control of our work and time not only means improving the quality of work, it also means expanding the proportion of our lives when we do not have to do paid work at all’. (nef, 2016: 36)

A strong case can be made that a post-productivist, post-growth political economy is also a ‘post-employment’ (whether market or state-based) one, and one in which unpaid, non-remunerated forms of work increases, even as formally paid employment is progressively democratised. Alongside the long-standing green economic proposal for a universal basic income, the reduction of the working week is another policy which restructures the economy to enable it to become more sustainable and meet non or more than economic human ends. As the new economics foundation puts it:

‘A “normal” working week of 21 hours could help to address a range of urgent, interlinked problems: overwork, unemployment, over-consumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, and the lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other, and simply to enjoy life’. (nef, 2010; 2)

A shorter working week could help break the habit of ‘living to work’, working to earn and earning to consume; help distribute paid work more evenly across the population, reducing ill-being associated with unemployment, long working hours and too little control over time; enable paid and unpaid work to be distributed more equally between women and men. It would enable what the new economic foundation terms the ‘core economy’ to flourish by making more and better use of uncommodified human resources in defining and meeting individual and shared needs outside the market economy and the state welfare systems.

The ‘core economy’ is the non-commodified set of assets, resources and relationships that sustain human life, the ‘common good’ of human sociality, it is related to what others have termed the ‘life world’, or has been called the ‘social economy’, and related (but problematic) terms such as ‘social capital’. These assets, resources and relationships do not have a market price, are produced for free (but not without human labour/work), and do not make profits or aimed to fulfil bureaucratic objectives of the state. It’s most important component is time, hence the positive impacts of restructuring the existing money economy via a basic income or reducing the formal working week would have on allowing more time for the core economy to grow, deepen and develop. So, while the formal, capitalist/money economy (which includes the state sector) would be governed by a ‘post-growth’ imperative macro-economically (even while allowing distributed growth between micro-economic sectors – i.e. differentiated as opposed to undifferentiated growth), a post-growth (and post- or low-carbon) sustainable economy (now expanded to include the core economy and to include work as well as employment) does allow and indeed call for expansion and growth of the core economy. And while a much more complicated story, the basic idea here is that beyond the social and ecological limits of the quantitative economy lies the limitless qualitative economy, beyond economic growth lies human social development.

Conclusion

‘If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen’. (Samuel Adams)

We have enough evidence that orthodox economic growth beyond a threshold undermines human well-being, is corrosive of community cohesion and social solidarity. There comes a point where in answering the political economy question ‘what the economy is for?’ involves the threshold beyond which economic growth becomes ‘uneconomic growth’. For this reason we need to remember that while the end or limiting of economic growth is a major problem for capitalism, this does not automatically translate into this being a problem for individuals or communities. But only if we adopt the invitation of a green republican political economy perspective, and begin to politically and creatively imagine ‘economic policy’ beyond ‘neoclassical economics’; the ‘economy’ beyond the ‘market’; and ‘work’ beyond ‘employment’.

Viewing productive work/employment as a ‘disutility’, and workers as ‘skivers’, both serve the ‘core state/social imperative’ of economic growth (Barry, 2018). Either the compensation of the later for the former (which is both a ‘you can’t break an omelette without breaking eggs’ argument’ and a

macro-economic version of wage compensation), or a generalised belief in a particular sense of 'social progress', can be used to explain how undemocratic and unfree workplaces are organised and legitimated with capitalist socio-economic orders. The productivity imperative within non-democratic workplaces results in both macro-economically ecologically unsustainable as well as illiberty-producing and unfreedom-reinforcing practices at the micro-economic level. In this way what is briefly sketched in this paper means that a new 'macro-economics of sustainability' (Jackson, 2017; Nadal, 2011) also requires what might be termed 'micro-economics of democratisation'.

A green republican political economy needs to challenge the ideology of growth within a consumer capitalist economic system, including proposing to move beyond carbon and indeed beyond the 'employment society'. In the interests of human flourishing, the creation of a sustainable economy which can also enable the flourishing of the more than human world, and creating a democratic and democratising society and economy, one that enhances human spheres freedom, while ensuring common goods, this political economy seeks to replace the 'live to work, work to earn, earn to consume' treadmill of contemporary production and consumption. Or rather contemporary productivism and consumerism. And key to this is to envisage political economies beyond orthodox, undifferentiated growth as a permanent feature of the human economic sub-system or view it as the measure of the progress of human society. As Ivan Illich noted, 'Wherever the shadow of economic growth touches us, we are left useless unless employed on a job or engaged in consumption' (Illich, 1978: 10). Time to step out of the shadows.

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