

Capitalism, the Climate Crisis, and Canada's 'Relations of Mobility': Theoretical Interventions in Ecological Political Economy

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ABSTRACT: This paper approaches the intertwining crises of capitalism and climate change from an ecological political economy (EPE) perspective in order to highlight the fundamentally unsustainable character of Canada's contemporary relations of mobility and the possibilities for socio-ecological change. An important component of the nation's broader social relations, the 'relations of mobility' refer to the material and subjective systems governing how Canadian transport infrastructure is produced and how and why people and things move from one place to another. Unfortunately, the capitalist state has played a pivotal role in structuring these relations and as such it has little interest in significantly changing them. This highlights the need for a genuinely democratic, anti-capitalist politics aimed at obtaining power at the level of the 'state' – municipally, provincially, and federally – in order to change the relations of mobility for the better. This paper thus has three objectives falling under the rubric of EPE: First, it demonstrates how Canada's contemporary relations of mobility negatively impact the natural environment. Second, it historicizes the unsustainable origins of such relations within Canada's political economic structure, showing how the neoliberal capitalist state in particular is 'uninterested', 'unwilling' or 'incapable' of altering them. Finally, it makes a normative argument for the mobilization of a democratic, anti-capitalist politics as a means of confronting the unsustainable character of Canada's present relations of mobility and social relations more broadly.

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INTRODUCTION

Given the concurrent and interrelated crises of global capitalism and climate change, Canada's contemporary 'relations of mobility' – a component of the nation's broader social relations – are unequivocally unsustainable. This is to say that the material and subjective systems governing how Canadian transport infrastructure is produced and how and why people and things move from one place to another will not be able to continue in their present form for much longer. Change is required to avoid serious social and ecological upheaval. The instability of both domestic and global energy markets in recent years has manifested in rising costs for basic human needs like food, home heating, and transportation. The problems associated with anthropogenic climate change are all the more challenging for communities already threatened by rising living costs, as they become additionally vulnerable to the wrath of a planet attempting to recalibrate the biogeochemical cycles being altered by human activities. Add to this the growing disparity in wealth and power and the culture of austerity brought about from years of neoliberal capitalism, and the perversity of our present reality becomes frighteningly clear: This situation cannot go on.

Unfortunately, the capitalist state has played a pivotal role in structuring these relations, and has little interest in significantly changing them. This highlights the need for a genuinely democratic, anti-capitalist politics aimed at obtaining power at the level of state governance – in municipalities, provincial governments and federally – in order to change the relations of mobility for the better. With this in mind, this paper makes three interventions to the study of ecological political economy (EPE): First, it demonstrates how Canada's contemporary relations of mobility, as embodied within a complex web of social and politico-economic practices relating to transportation and conditioned by global capitalist productive processes, negatively impact the natural environment. Second, it attempts to situate the unsustainable origins of such relations within Canada's political economic structure by historicizing them alongside the development of both the Keynesian and subsequent neoliberal periods, showing how both of these iterations of capitalism brought about socio-ecological degradation. The paper goes on to examine how present neoliberal forms of the state in particular tend to be either uninterested, unwilling or incapable of altering the relations of mobility for the sake of ameliorating society-nature interactions. Finally, I draw some normative conclusions for EPE about the need to mobilize a democratic anti-capitalist politics as a means to con-

front the unsustainable nature of Canada's present relations of mobility (and social relations more broadly). Arguably, a nuanced understanding of the socio-ecological implications of a market-based transport sector could play an important role in generating new political expressions in Canada, advocating a shift toward critical EPE ideals – such as the decommodification of transport services, or the re-empowerment of public ownership within the transport and related sectors – as a means of addressing the twin crises of capitalism and climate change.

CANADA'S RELATIONS OF MOBILITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Canadian transportation sector has an enormous environmental impact, which, by extension, affects human wellbeing. In this sense, such impacts are 'socio-ecological' (Castree, 2001). In 'downstream' service provision alone, the transportation of freight and passengers is responsible for 27 percent of Canada's emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). That percentage is in fact immeasurably larger when the 'upstream' production supply chain of transport vehicles and related 'accessories' (such as fuel and infrastructure) are also included. As Environment Canada (2010) has noted, one of the main reasons why Canada's GHG emissions *grew* by 24 percent between 1990 and 2008 – when, according to original Kyoto Protocol commitments made by the federal state they should have *decreased* by 5 percent – is that there has been a large increase in the number of motor vehicles, in particular sport utility vehicles and heavy transport trucks. It is no wonder then that the sector, a voracious consumer of fossil fuels, is responsible for nearly a third of the country's energy consumption. Unfortunately, despite the existence of low carbon transport technologies more than 99 percent of the energy used in Canadian transport is derived from oil, a non-renewable resource whose production and use places a severe toll on the environment and the earth's climate (National Energy Board, 2009).

In addition to being a large contributor to climate change and the decline of non-renewable energy resources, the transportation of goods and people is also one of the largest sources of air pollution in Canada, leading to related problems such as acid rain, smog, and respiratory health problems (Environment Canada, 2004). The heavy reliance on motor vehicles in Canada's urban areas is also largely responsible for traffic congestion and the high costs of building and maintaining roads (Turcotte, 2008). Canada now holds the unenviable distinction of playing host to North America's busiest highway – the part of Highway 401 which stretches across the Greater Toronto Area – traversed by over half a million vehicles every day (Thün

and Velikov, 2008). These are just some of the socio-ecological impacts of transportation that have been documented by governmental agencies and transport analysts, mostly relating to the overuse of the dominant petroleum based modes – automobiles and airplanes. Less understood is the way that high rates of mobility and related production processes (including the construction of highways and road infrastructure) exacerbate the contamination and depletion of fresh water, the destruction of wildlife habitat and migration routes, the erosion and degradation of arable land, and so on. These often-overlooked impacts are important, as cumulatively such problems can undermine the ecological foundation of social life.

In light of the dire state of 21st century society-nature relations and of the negative contribution of Canada's existing transportation practices, a rather obvious course of action is required: *Canada must reduce its overall use of private automobiles, airplanes, and heavy-duty transport trucks (the three biggest culprits in terms of per capita use of petroleum), while building capacity for urban mass transit, more efficient inter-city passenger rail, and electric rail for freight shipping.* Less obvious is how to make this happen in a just, equitable and efficient manner. The task at hand is further complicated by the broader context of global capitalism and economic interdependency in which Canada's energy and transport sectors are situated. The economic and legal ties Canada shares with its trading partners places external limitations upon the likelihood and possibilities of political economic change. Nevertheless, a good place to start domestically is to use the powers of the state to support more ecologically friendly transport modes and discourage the use of less ecologically sensitive modes. Investing in public transit and more efficient transport technologies is essential in order to provide Canadians with affordable, energy efficient transport alternatives, but it alone is not enough. The harsh reality is that it is the very social relations which define mobility practices that are unsustainable (not to mention highly unequal²) in the first place. As such, the introduction of new energy-efficient transport vehicles on their own will fail to address these socio-ecological problems unless paired with hard cap restrictions on unsustainable transport practices or major changes to our collective social behaviour (which suggests changes to our political economic structure). This is why the state and various scales of

2 Put simply, the rich can and do travel much more than the poor. Affluent families in Canada have much higher *access* to the means of mobility, while lower income families pay a higher proportion of household revenue on transportation. In effect, the market imposes a *de facto* restriction of access to mobility upon lower income families and individuals. Statistically, the prototypical high-use car driver in Canada is male, between the ages of 45 and 54, and lives in a low-density suburban neighbourhood. There is a clear relationship between the indicators of gender, race and class, and access to mobility (Turcotte, 2008).

government will inevitably need to get involved and mobilize the range of tools at their disposal. The difficulty lies in transforming awareness of this problem into action towards social change, and more importantly, ensuring that such action occurs in a just, democratic manner while guaranteeing a decent quality of life for all Canadians.

NEOLIBERALISM, ENVIRONMENTAL COMMON SENSE AND THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

To trace the origins of unsustainability within Canada's relations of mobility one must delve into the material and subjective structures of the nation's political economy. The neoliberal turn in Canada and corresponding understandings of society-nature relations have reshaped the country's transport sector and reconstituted the scope of what is perceived of as 'feasible' governmental recourse to reform mobility relations or reduce fossil fuel consumption. In part this is due to the emergence in recent decades of a neoliberal variant of what can be called 'environmental common sense'. Neoliberal beliefs on the merits of private property rights, market competition and free trade have played a crucial role in shaping how Canadian policy-makers confront socio-ecological problems. As McCarthy and Prudham (2004, p. 275) have written, "neoliberalism and modern environmentalism have together emerged as the most serious political and ideological foundations of post-Fordist social regulation." While this relationship has given rise to an extensive literature on 'neoliberal nature' – that is, the way nature has fared under the intensification of market relations (see Bakker, 2009; or Heynen, McCarthy, Prudham, and Robbins, 2007) – very little attention has actually been paid to the ways that popular environmentalist beliefs amongst the polity and within civil society are pervaded by neoliberal logic as well, and the processes involved in this formation. The existence in Canada of what Bakker (2009) calls 'green neoliberalism' or what Albo (2007) calls 'market ecology' has thus brought ideological limitations to the types of policies, programs and actions that can 'fea-

sibly' be taken by neoliberal authorities at various scales of government to confront socio-ecological problems.

Due to prevailing neoliberal common sense 'wisdom(s)', the 'self-regulating market' is not only seen as a democratic arbiter of prices, it is also interpreted as a social tool to address environmental problems such as resource scarcity and pollution. A poignant example is the belief that the best way to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide is to create a market for the gas, which would theoretically enable private firms to profit from improving their greenhouse gas intensity. Within neoliberal conceptions of environmental common sense, the idea of the state imposing fixed limitations on resource use or pollution by firmly restricting usage or by setting pre-determined prices in order to influence citizen or corporate behaviour is often considered anathema to the current suite of policies. There are exceptions to this rule, but as demonstrated below this phenomenon is particularly pervasive within the Canadian transportation sector.

Neoliberal common sense was subsumed into Canadian transport policy throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Strongly held beliefs in the benefits of privatizing formerly state-owned transport corporations and 'opening' the sector to the market are showcased in a 1995 compilation of essays on Canadian surface transportation published by the Fraser Institute. Within, the editor (Palda, 1995, p. xi) writes the following:

"Transportation policy is a unique topic among academics. Unlike experts who debate welfare, education, and the debt, transport researchers seem to have a united outlook: the best prescription for the transport industry is fewer regulations, lower subsidies, and less government ownership."

Certainly not all transport researchers are as unified as Palda suggests, but the majority of commentators, influenced by the new neoliberal common sense, have indeed advocated a market path. Most importantly, those in political power have tended to share this viewpoint. As the federal government expressed in a policy paper regarding sustainable transportation, "the government of Canada believes that the transportation system of tomorrow should remain largely market-driven" (Transport Canada, 2003, p. 6). For decision-makers, this means ensuring a largely 'deregulated' and privatized transport sector, wherein state authorities use a minimal amount of influence to guarantee competition between privately owned firms vying for clients and a share of the mobility market. It means catering to those modes that are furthest

from state control (i.e. automobiles, airplanes, freight trucking), where questions of access, distribution and usage are most often determined by the wealth of producers and consumers, supply and demand. Further, neoliberal common sense compels authorities at various scales of government to pursue the sale of assets from the public sector to the private sector, supposedly as a means of fostering growth and reducing state spending, thereby tackling deficits and the debt (Cameron, 1997).

This contradictory common sense wisdom has found expression throughout the neoliberal world, not just Canada. As Docherty, Shaw and Gather (2004, p. 258) have plainly put it:

“[During the 1980s and 90s] transport was profoundly affected by the desire to reduce state involvement in the planning and delivery of public services. State provision of transport services was reduced in favour of the market, competition restrictions were reduced or removed altogether, and the procurement and financing of infrastructure became more dependent on the private sector as governments sought to reduce their spending and debt liabilities.”

These authors, however, argue that the transport sector has seen some level of retrenchment in recent years. They point to scholars Charlton and Gibb as perhaps the first to note the mediated nature of transport neoliberalization. As the latter have written, “[Despite the] undeniable prominence of liberalised transport systems, there is an apparent contradiction between the broad policy support for deregulation and privatization and the continued, and even enhanced, regulatory environment affecting many transport systems” (Charlton and Gibb, 1998). Nevertheless, the contradictory relationship between the professed theory of neoliberalism and the material actions of the state in practice (regulation, policy, security, etc.) does not necessarily suggest any scaling back of neoliberalism. As neo-Polanyist Hannes Lacher has pointed out, the pursuit of an orthodox form of market liberalism is practically impossible without creating widespread social and environmental havoc (Lacher, 2011), and with this in mind, the neoliberal state *must* engage in some basic forms of regulation and policy setting in order to set out a basic framework for capital accumulation and to secure private property rights. It is thus inevitable that transport neoliberalization would be accompanied by new regulatory frameworks that guarantee the sector's role in growing domestic product.

REGULATION AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CAPITAL ACCUMULATION

To further flush out these different types of regulation, let us consider the example of the Canadian freight trucking industry. It would be inaccurate to describe this industry as ‘deregulated’. The opposite is true – in literal terms it is highly regulated: the provinces regulate truck weights, dimensions, and even speeds indirectly through the control of highways and roads; the federal government regulates safety practices of the trucking industry through the Motor Vehicle Safety Act and closely oversees cross-border flows of freight. Nevertheless, this “patchwork quilt of regulations across the country”, as the Canadian Trucking Alliance calls it (Canada Transportation Act Review Panel, 2001), is better interpreted as a set of ‘rules’ to outline a framework of optimal efficiency, competition and profitability. Despite this ‘regulatory framework’, the trucking industry *does* exist in a highly neoliberalized setting: all trucking firms are private and compete for a share of the market with other private firms; these private firms are allowed to set their own rates and prices without government interference; foreign capital is welcome to invest in the industry; further, the industry plays an essential role in reinforcing existing systems of free trade with the rest of North America. From a neoliberal standpoint, the provincial and federal governments have no interest in imposing ‘hard cap’ regulations that genuinely intervene in the freight trucking market, nor are they willing to restrict the role of the sector in facilitating capital accumulation – as doing so would severely hamper a key component of Canada’s economic growth engine. As one government report acknowledges, the commercial trucking industry produces revenues in the area of \$20 billion annually – 40 percent of the transportation component of Canada’s GDP (Ibid.).

It is in this light that ‘soft’ regulations – such as those described above – are actually *required* in a neoliberal political economy in order to set up a framework for capital accumulation. In fact, the Canadian Trucking Alliance has lobbied for *more* comprehensive regulations, precisely because it believes the present lack of a definitive framework of rules “hampers trucking industry productivity, competitiveness and profitability, and impedes optimization of the industry’s safety and environmental performance.” (Ibid.). As the example shows, a neoliberal environmental common sense has delimited the scope of possible interventions that can be taken by state institutions: ‘Soft’ regulations are allowable, if not necessary, while radical forms of state intervention (such as the nationalization of the entire industry or specific firms, capping firms’ usage of fossil fuels, setting shipping prices, etc.), are simply not considered ‘feasible’. And yet, thinking

socio-ecologically, the latter interventions are the types of regulations needed to confront the damaging contribution of the trucking industry to fossil fuel use and anthropogenic climate change.

The Janus-faced character of regulation in the Canadian transport industry (and the problematic nature of these terms in general) has been identified by Keil and Young (2008, p.743), who note with irony how “since the 1980s the federal government, which has constitutional authority over transportation, has moved generally towards deregulation while remaining strategically interventionist.” On the one hand, the state has moved towards privatizing former Crown corporations involved in transportation and transferring ownership of the major airports in the country to private (albeit non-profit) agencies, while on the other hand the state has continued to play a regulatory role in terms of securitizing (in the case of airports) and expanding (in the case of highways) transport infrastructure. Again, these so-called ‘market interventions’ have actually *helped* to set up a framework for accumulation, further reified the federal state’s primary interest in economic growth, and guaranteed its role as an enabler of entrepreneurial activity.

DE FACTO PRIVATIZATION AND CAPITAL ACCUMULATION

The neoliberalization of Canada’s transport sector is perhaps most noticeable in successive waves of privatization. Privatization has not only transformed the role of the state from ‘provider’ (of goods and services) to ‘enabler’ (of competition, consumerism, productivity, efficiency, etc.), it has also worked at limiting the capacity of the federal state to use publicly owned assets as policy tools. Neoliberal common sense has not only advocated the privatization of transport service providers such as Canadian National Railways and Air Canada; it has also aimed at privatizing former public manufacturers such as Ontario Bus Industries and Canadair, as well as former public enterprises involved in the provision of transport accessories and infrastructure (such as Petro Canada, a producer of the fuels required by transport vehicles – see Table 1).

Interestingly, although many privatizations occurred during the neoliberal era, there were in fact two prior historical moments during the Keynesian period that helped pave the way for privatization within and across various inter-regional transport modes. The first occurred in 1957, when a newly formed Conservative government “expressed itself in favour of competition, and allowed Canadian Pacific Airlines to break the trans-continental monopoly” hitherto held by the Crown-owned Trans-Canada

Airlines (Ashley and Smalls, 1965, p. 259). The second moment is marked by a similar phenomenon with respect to freight, which came about through the 1967 National Transportation Act (the first act of this kind in Canada).

Table 1: Transport-Related Crown Corporations: A History of Privatization and Commercialization

Name of Corporation	Brief History of Ownership	Status in 2013
Transport Service Provision		
Trans-Canada Air Lines/ Air Canada	Founded in 1937, and given a monopoly over trans-continental services; Privatized in 1988.	Private Corporation
Canadian National Railways	Incorporated through a parliamentary Act in 1919, taking over an agglomeration of formerly public and private railways. Privatized in 1995.	Private Corporation
VIA Rail	Officially incorporated as a Crown corporation in 1978 after CN began to rid itself of passenger rail. Now operates like a commercial enterprise.	Federal Crown Corporation (Commercialized)
Canadian National (West Indies) Steamships Company	A passenger steamship company founded in 1928, owned by the Canadian National Railway Company, and dissolved in 1958.	Obsolete
Northern Transportation Company	Became Crown company in 1944 through expropriation. Purchased in 1985 by the Inuvialuit and Nunasi Corporations.	Private Aboriginal Owned Company
Metrolinx/GO Transit	GO Transit started in 1967 as regional inter-city service. Merged with Metrolinx in 2009. Board is directed by both public and private sector.	Provincial Crown Corporation (Commercialized)
Transport Vehicle and Craft Production		
Canadair	Founded in 1944 to manufacture aircraft; nationalized in 1976; privatized in 1986.	Obsolete
Canadian Government Maritime Marine Limited	Incorporated in 1918 to build and operate merchant marine ships. Purchased in 1936 by three private British companies.	Obsolete
Ontario Bus Industries/ Orion International	Formed by the Ontario Government in 1975; privatized in 1993.	Private Corporation
Transport Accessory Provision and Management		
Petro-Canada	Founded as Crown corporation in 1975; privatized in 1991. Bought by Suncor in 2009.	Private Corporation
St. Lawrence Seaway Authority / St. Lawrence Seaway Mgmt Corporation	Established as Crown corporation in 1954 to plan, construct, and operate seaway. Re-established as a non-profit in 1998.	Crown Corporation

As Gratwick (2001, p. 3) notes, the Act “introduced the idea of competition between the modes as the cornerstone of the new (or more correctly, the first) clearly enunciated transport policy, together with a multimodal regulatory commission that would apply the new policy consistently across the whole transport spectrum.” These two moments in federal transportation policy are pivotal in the way they secured the rights of private enterprises to compete with nationally owned corporations.

Internationally, as a result of the neoliberal turn in the 1980s in Great Britain and the U.S. at the hands of Thatcher and Reagan, new global norms were developed in which it was believed that entire sectors of industrialized economies – in particular the transportation and energy sectors – would be best off in the hands of private enterprises (Harvey, 2005). By the time Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives came to power in Canada in 1984, the groundwork had already been laid for the wholesale neoliberalization of the transport (and related) sectors.

There are two main ways in which forcing Canadian Crown corporations into competition with the private sector during the Keynesian era sowed the seeds of neoliberalization and limited the capacity of the state. First, although the ownership of some transport firms remained in the hands of the state, those firms were now operating within an open market; they had to compete with private firms for customers; they had to focus their efforts on ensuring profitability (as opposed to serving the public); and they had to match their private competitors in ‘contributing’ to growth in domestic product. As such, they could no longer be used as policy tools to shape citizen behaviour (rather, they in turn were influenced by new market relations where supply and demand reigned supreme). Second, once a Crown corporation lost its monopoly over a subsector, it was only a matter of time before private lobbying emerged calling for the sale of said Crown assets, now easily justified on the premise that public subsidies were being ‘unfairly’ allocated to some firms while their competitors were left without public funding. At this time a rhetoric of government's role in ‘maintaining a level playing field’ for competing firms became commonplace.³

In some cases, privatization took place in spirit if not in law – a phenomenon referred to as ‘commercialization’ or ‘privatization by stealth’ (Whiteside, 2012). This outcome (in which a public enterprise

3 For example, a 1998 parliamentary review on passenger rail services in Canada strongly recommends “that the government ensure that, with regard to competition in the passenger rail sector, no undue hardship be placed on the private passenger rail operator by a passenger rail subsidy, thus ensuring a level playing field” (House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, 1998).

is forced to behave like a private corporation due to the neoliberalization of the sector at large) is exemplified today by VIA Rail – Canada’s last remaining Crown corporation involved in national-level passenger transportation. As the company notes on its website, over the last two decades VIA has “focused on reducing overhead, administrative and operating costs, while improving the quality of service to attract more customers and increase revenues” (VIA Rail, 2011). This is a mandate mired in neoliberal rationality that prioritizes profit and competitiveness over serving the public interest. VIA’s managers consider those who ride the train as ‘customers’, not the citizen ‘owners’ that a truly democratic conception of the public sector would imply. VIA was founded in 1977 as a concession to Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, as the latter corporations had no interest in owning passenger rail services facing decreasing profitability in the face of growing automobile and air travel. To this day VIA remains a fledgling, undercapitalized Crown corporation forced to rent track time from the (now private) rail freight companies. Without any considerable government support, it must compete in the free market against other modes of intercity passenger transport which (thanks to the present artificially low price of fossil fuels) are cheaper, faster, and more convenient.

Important to note here is the way that the neoliberalization of the inter-city passenger transport sector has reconstituted the way the Canadian state views this particular Crown corporation. Despite having a relative modal monopoly in passenger rail, the Canadian government shows no interest in using VIA as a tool to get passengers out of automobiles and airplanes, even though VIA has itself identified a role it could play in transporting passengers more efficiently (VIA Rail, 2007). Following a neoliberalized environmental common sense, the federal government believes that VIA’s role as an ecologically-friendly mode should depend on its corporate ability to compete with the other modes, that its role as a provider of more energy efficient inter-city travel should be decided by questions of competitive pricing and consumer choice. Even though the inter-city passenger transport industry is mediated by ‘soft’ regulations as well as some remaining subsidies and even in a limited sense ownership, the sector nevertheless exists in a neoliberalized setting where the primary motivation is to contribute to growth in domestic product through the generation of profit. Again, from a socio-ecological viewpoint, this is bad news as this fuel-efficient passenger mode is underutilized while more profitable (and polluting) modes continue to see growth.

A similar situation (in which the control of publicly owned transport enterprises is constrained by the neoliberal setting in which said enterprises are situated) can be witnessed at the municipal scale. Most Canadian cities still own systems of public transit. However, under the existing relations of mobility, public transit must compete against privately owned automobiles. Neoliberal common sense often leads citizens, urban planners, city councilors, regional newspapers, business improvement associations, etc., to protect the rights of private, individual commuters in automobiles from 'unnecessary infringements' upon their mobility. Policies aiming to make public transit and alternative transportation more attractive to commuters which might have the consequent effect of making automobile transportation more costly or inconvenient (or which require an increase in the rate of municipal taxes) are met with a tirade of criticisms about governmental infringements on consumer freedoms.

In Ottawa, for example, the city's recent proposal to build a dedicated bike lane on one cross-town street prompted an influx of criticisms regarding the supposed negative effect the bike lane would have on available parking spaces, and thus the profitability of local businesses which rely on automobile patrons (CBC News, 2011a). In another example, Ottawa's public transit service recently announced a major overhaul of its services, not for the purpose of increasing service hours (in fact, it significantly reduced them), but rather because it needed to 'optimize costly inefficiencies' by cutting \$22 million from its annual budget (in order for the city to avoid imposing a 5 per cent municipal tax hike). Neoliberal common sense made the former option an obvious choice for local officials (CBC News, 2011b). As the examples indicate, despite public ownership of the transit system, municipal governments typically hesitate to enact policies which might inconvenience automobile commuters or result in an increase of public spending, or require an increase in the municipal tax rate; such 'hard cap' regulations would supposedly hamper the localized processes of capital accumulation. This puzzle revolving around the centrality of automobility in Canada's contemporary relations of mobility leaves those concerned about the socio-ecological impacts of urban transportation in a tough situation: If restricting unsustainable forms of mobility is not 'feasible' under neoliberalism, how will such impacts ever be tackled given the present political economic setting?

ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

In these final pages I draw some conclusions about the need to transcend existing mobility relations by mobilizing an anti-capitalist politics at the level of the state. All three scales of political governance in the Canadian federal system – municipalities, provinces, and the federal government – play a role in structuring transport regulations and as such play a role in (re)producing Canadian mobility relations. Such relations have undergone significant change during the neoliberal period; such state entities no longer have the willingness, interest or capacity to genuinely alter the relations of mobility for the sake of the public good. This is not to suggest that the state has weakened its grasp on power, but rather that the powers of the state have been reconstituted; State intervention has largely been limited at an ideological level while its ultimate legal claim and sovereignty remains largely intact (see Held, 1999 for a discussion on state transformation). From the above analysis it would seem that neoliberal states are largely incapable of genuinely altering existing relations of mobility. I briefly summarize three ways in which this is the case.

Primary Interest in Capital Accumulation

A comparison of Keynesian and neoliberal political economies highlights the extent to which the capitalist state, in its present form, tends to prioritize economic growth above all else. Interestingly, the histories of capitalism, fossil fuel consumption, and economic growth are closely intertwined (Huber, 2008; McKibben, 2007). The combustion of fossil fuels has provided the foundation for high rates of production and consumption, leading to a cycle of capital accumulation which in turn has had drastic socio-ecological consequences. It was, however, during the Keynesian era that these relations began to intensify to such a degree that the ways in which people transported themselves and their goods became fundamentally unsustainable. In the post-war years, a ‘treadmill of production’ emerged in which the imperative for growth fed an ongoing process requiring an ever-increasing supply of ‘goods’, which in turn required more inputs of raw materials, chemicals and energy resources (Gould, Pellow, and Schnaiberg, 2008). This further intensified the relations of mobility, fueled by a seemingly endless supply of cheap crude oil. In short, this political economic system saw incredible growth in the socio-ecological impacts of transportation, perhaps most notably during the ‘Great Acceleration’ of anthropogenic climate change which occurred in the post-war Fordist decades (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, 2007).

Despite this, it is worth considering the extent to which the Keynesian state was more willing than the subsequent neoliberal state to pursue broad societal goals that mediated the impacts of growth. Arguably, this stemmed from the way in which the Keynesian state had a more reflexive ontology of the market. To be sure, the Keynesian political economy was firmly capitalist – and yet, the existence of welfare-statist common sense at the time allowed for some venues of restrictive intervention. For example, in Canada this was a time of increased centralization and planning, expansion of the public service and spending, widespread government intervention in market processes (including even determining 'made in Canada' prices for the oil sector and rail freight shipping), as well as the nationalization of enterprises into Crown corporations. While this political economic model undoubtedly contributed to socio-ecological problems, it nevertheless presented some limited opportunities for state agencies to prioritize collective goals over economic growth. Unfortunately, reducing the use of fossil fuels and restricting mobility were not political priorities at the time; in fact, these were both seen as positive developments contributing to a higher quality of life.

Arguably, one main contributing factor to a higher willingness to prioritize collective goals over capital accumulation during this period was the existence of a different political economic ideology, where market capitalism was ontologically understood as a force that could bring about a better quality of life, but which nevertheless had to be 'controlled' so as to prevent its worst and most insidious effects. In the neoliberal era that cautionary view of relentless growth has dissipated. Today the leading ideology always prioritizes capital accumulation over collective goals, because capital accumulation has itself become the means to the end. Neoliberal states may have a willingness to reduce the socio-ecological impacts of transportation, but this is continually trumped by an unwillingness to intervene in the processes of economic growth. Thus, there is something to be gained from trying to disarticulate the progressive elements of the Keynesian political economy (the state's increased capacities to pursue public policy and control markets), from the negative reactionary elements inherent to that system (the socio-ecological damage wrought by the capitalist mode of production).

The Myth of Non-Intervention and Deregulation

As the examples explored above suggest, there is an important distinction between two types of state 'intervention' in market processes. The 'soft' forms of regulation described above work at liberating the

processes of capital accumulation by setting the ‘rules of the game’; they are not ‘hard cap’ regulatory interventions that limit capitalist relations of production. The notion that the capitalist state is ‘non-interventionist’, or that it has an interest in ‘deregulating’ sectors is a myth (a concept Miliband identified long ago, see Miliband, 1969) – but it is important to recognize the form of intervention and regulations that are being employed. The neoliberal turn in Canada has worked at limiting the interest of federal, provincial and municipal governments to implement ‘hard cap’ regulations in the transportation sector (policies that restrict the most wasteful forms of mobility). Put differently, the historical experiences of neoliberalization in Canada (across various jurisdictional scales) have tended to diminish the willingness of various levels of government to use transportation policy and regulation as tools to confront socio-ecological problems by restricting unsustainable mobility practices. However, such restrictions are required if the Canadian polity has any hope of addressing the severe socio-ecological impacts of transportation.

The Loss of Assets and Ownership

Throughout the neoliberal era the logic of privatization has been pursued as a solution to public debt problems, with the irony of short-term capitalization juxtaposed with long-term asset value loss being lost on policy-makers.⁴ As Cameron (1997) has written, the privatization of public assets is akin to an absurd situation in which a homeowner sells their house in order to afford mortgage payments. Despite the absurdity of privatization at this level of theoretical abstraction, it has found salience in contemporary common sense, and most of Canada’s transport related Crown corporations have either been sold, commercialized or dismantled altogether. A key problem, as Cameron’s analogy implies, is that in selling these assets the public has lost a considerable amount of control, not only over the corporations in question, but across the whole sector. It is worth considering the increased capacity that the state would have in confronting existing relations of mobility if it had maintained ownership throughout the transport sector. If the sector was still publicly owned, governmental agencies (at multiple scales of jurisdiction) would have the ability to coordinate inter-modal shift, moving passengers and goods from more polluting modes to more efficient ones, without having to worry about guaranteeing the rights of private firms to compete on a ‘level playing field’.

4 In a recent example, finance minister Jim Flaherty announced that “there are some opportunities for some privatization of businesses that one questions why the government is in them anymore... So we’ll look at those and I expect that in the next year we’ll be able to make some announcements” (CBC News, 2010).

Democratic institutions would make transport planning and management decisions based on the needs of citizens, not the private interests of profit-driven firms. Yet this is not the case, and presently the private sector is known to lobby government against environmental action whenever its ability to profit is put at risk (McGregor, 2010).

WORKING TOWARDS AN ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITICS

Environmental implications have rarely been prioritized within Canadian political economic debates about the transport sector, whether relating to questions of production, ownership, use, or service allocation. This is a problem – the prevailing view of socio-ecological impacts as mere 'externalities' is dangerous, as it fails to consider the dialectical relationship between forms of human organization (modes of production) and the experience of the 'natural world'.

As argued above, neoliberalization in Canada has worked at limiting the capacity of various levels of government to truly regulate markets if such interventions restrict the processes of capital accumulation. Herein lies an integral problem of ecological political economy: Without relying on restrictive policies aiming to influence citizen or corporate behaviour, how are governments possibly going to enforce much needed changes in social relations (which we know are responsible for causing socio-ecological problems)? Of all the transport examples showcased above – in the freight trucking industry, inter-city passenger rail, and even localized public transit – government institutions are compelled to rely upon the market as a tool to address social policy, because setting a framework for accumulation has become the very purpose of regulation under neoliberalism.

To deal with this puzzle, EPE must work towards the articulation of 'good sense' conceptions of regulation and policy by recognizing the inbuilt structural flaws of neoliberal capitalism. While neoliberalized environmental common sense finds surface level 'solutions' to ecological problems *within* existing systems of production, good sense environmentalism calls the very mode of production into question as the source of the problem. The task of a critical EPE is thus to challenge and question existing structures of political economy and normalized solutions to socio-environmental problems, in part by interrogating the structural and social origins of such problems.

As explained above, the Keynesian era saw incredible growth in the socio-ecological impacts of transportation, but it also provided a more

reflexive ontology of capitalism, which in turn afforded the state some additional capacities to restrict capital accumulation when the public interest was at stake. This is by no means a call for a return to a Keynesian political economy. Rather, the claim here is that there may be lessons to learn from the relative capacities, strengths and weaknesses of state entities facing different political economic contexts. Arguably, Canadian municipal, provincial and federal governments would have a higher capacity to deal with the socio-ecological impacts of transportation if a) they had wide-ranging ownership and control over the sector; and b) the prevailing conceptions of environmental common sense considered ‘hard cap’ regulations a valid method of influencing the behavior and actions of citizens (as opposed to neoliberal common sense, which relies upon market fundamentalist notions of self-regulating, rational utility maximizing consumers). Theoretically, these two factors could furnish in the state a willingness to intervene in market processes for the purposes of socio-ecological protection. Yet such ideas are unlikely to be entertained without the mobilization of an anti-capitalist politics.

Good sense conceptions of EPE have a role to play in advocating new forms of state capacity. In a recent interview, Leo Panitch characterized the type of mobilization required in such anti-capitalist political formations: “[We need] organizations that are prepared, not just to make proposals to the state, but to risk going into the state. Maybe at first at the municipal level... we need to be prepared to say – ‘look, we will at some point be putting the question of state power on our strategic agenda’” (as quoted in Lewis, 2011). Such movements would do well to consider the socio-ecological implications of neoliberalism and recognize how socio-ecological problems are in fact best addressed by changing social relations. This can be done by more closely managing, coordinating, and in some cases restricting the processes of production and consumption.

To offer a few examples drawing from the discussion above and delving into the realm of the ‘ideal’, states (municipalities in particular) should take bolder steps in restricting the excessive use of single-occupancy vehicles; Major expansions to public transit systems certainly help, but the problem in full will not be addressed without more active interventionist steps to actually manage transport demand in urban areas (Winters, 2000). Similarly, the nationalization, centralization, integration, and de-commodification of transport services within provincial and federal states would go a long way towards furnishing these state authorities with the interest, willingness and capacity to implement more sustainable public transport practices while restricting wasteful

behaviours by private firms and individuals. For instance, such structural changes would enable the introduction of electrified inter-city rail infrastructure (for both passengers and freight) without raising the ire of the fossil fuel, automobile and airline lobbies, as the latter subsectors would be integrated into the state-owned transport-energy complex. But there is also room to think outside the box in terms of altering broader social relations which compel us to travel in the first place: This could include work-from-home legislation which offers no-unnecessary-commuting rights to workers (to save on unnecessary work trips across town during rush hour); new suburban rezoning laws which forbid the development of sprawling residential neighbourhoods that are fundamentally dependent on the services, resources and employment opportunities found elsewhere; public education and public health campaigns which foster new subjectivities about the merits of alternative forms of transportation, etc.

The lack of state capacity, as explained above, exists largely at an ideological level – at the level of common sense. There is no doubt that radical ideas of nationalizing (or reclaiming public ownership over) various firms within and across the transport modes, increasing the willingness to intervene in market processes, decommodifying public services, and ditching economic growth as the foremost political priority all run counter to contemporary neoliberal common sense beliefs. Yet as argued above, movement in this direction would significantly enhance the capacity of governmental institutions to implement the programming and policies needed to engender truly sustainable relations of mobility in Canada.

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