

## **Anti-Statist Populisms: Finding Left-Right Common Ground and a Way Forward**

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**ABSTRACT:** The authors examine how today’s “polycrisis” is fueling polarized, anti-statist populisms on the left and right while deepening distrust in institutions and enabling authoritarian neoliberalism. Arguing that overreliance on formal politics constrains effective responses, proposed is a radical-imagination thought experiment that searches for left–right common ground without collapsing into centrism. Drawing on abolitionist, anarchist, and feminist anti-statist traditions, criteria of radical imaginaries are outlined—values, organizing principles, and practices—that shift power, rebuild democratic engagement, and mend social fractures. Advanced are three strategies: reclaim the social from market rule, reorient welfare governance toward an ethic of care, and build dialectic solidarity.

**KEYWORDS:** Abolitionism; Anarchism; Anti-Statist Populism; Feminist Anti-Statist Traditions; Polycrisis

### **Introduction**

In this moment, the United States, the globe’s superpower, has devolved into extreme left-right political polarization and social fracture with alarming international implications. All of life, including the climate emergency, history, science, and basic human decency, has been weaponized for power and greed. This creation of a polycrisis – also defined as a permacrisis, metacrisis, or omnicrisis – is underscored by chaotic uncertainty and flirtations with fascism. In this paper, we examine the rise of so-called populisms, their varied anti-statist positions, and the constraints imposed by an overreliance on formal politics. We propose a thought experiment that urges a ‘radical imagination’ beyond the division, destruction and disinformation of populisms. How might the ideological right and left find common ground? How can we reinvigorate a progressive politics that can win over the right? Can we imagine a way forward to replace fear with hope, resentment with collective action, and hatred with shared responsibility for the future we are creating? We examine these questions by first reviewing responses to the current polycrisis. From there, we briefly examine three strategic anti-statist frameworks of past and present to consider criteria (values, organizing principles, and practices) that shift power dynamics, invite democratic engagement, and mend hostile social and political fractures as a new way forward towards a strengthened and caring democracy. Finally, drawing on these anti-statist frameworks, we propose a reconfigured welfare state that is freed from market rule, replacing competition and possessive individualism with dialectic solidarity and an ethic of care.

Our analytical approach is based on our respective and shared research interests that have explored dynamics of social exclusion and inclusion (Good Gingrich & Lightman, 2015), symbolic

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violence (Good Gingrich & Young, 2019; Good Gingrich, 2010) and liberation (Mulé, 2016, 2019). Specifically, for example, Good Gingrich's theoretical and empirical research traces the dynamics of social exclusion that generate economic, socio-political, spatial and subjective divides, with a view toward defining ideals, policies and practices of social inclusion and social healing (Good Gingrich, 2016). Mulé is theorizing queer liberation in which differences are not only recognized, but respected and celebrated; that work is carried out in coalitions, and that the pursuit of liberation not cease until the most marginalized have been emancipated (Mulé, 2021; Mulé & Garang, 2025).

### **The Polycrisis Context**

Societies across the globe are facing interconnected crises at multiple levels that have converged, causing an amplification with unsettling effects on the populace, especially those most marginalized. The crises include a global climate emergency (Laursen, 2021; Angus, 2024), international health risks (Cullen & Murphy, 2021; Pease, 2023), ongoing colonial violence (Dirik, 2018; Laursen, 2021), mass migration and displacement (Laursen, 2021; Angus, 2024), labour market and income polarization (Kurer, 2020; Angus, 2024), and food and housing unaffordability (Taylor-Gooby, 2016). This polycrisis has been met with intense distrust and division, along with deep disappointment in institutions and initiatives that are ostensibly intended to provide social and economic supports, promote social inclusion, and build community (Berman, 2019; Sandel, 2018; Curtis, 2020). Perhaps as never before, there is widespread recognition that existing economic, political, and social systems are inadequate to address interconnected crises of our time. A collective cynicism – even malaise – has settled in for a wide range of sociodemographic groups in societies facing the day-to-day pressures of making ends meet with limited prospects for financial security (Angus, 2024; Kurer, 2020), while governments of the day insist that “the economy is great, it’s just your ‘vibes’ that are bad” (Urback, 2024). People from opposing political persuasions are left feeling vulnerable, powerless, fearful, angry, and distrustful.

Of great consequence is that both conservative and liberal governments of the day subscribe to “economic fundamentalism”, claiming that an economy driven solely by greed and those with the most money is the natural order (Angus, 2024). Scholars point to the abuses of neoliberalism as a defining feature of this moment (Berman, 2019; Curtis, 2020; Kiely, 2020; Samuels, 2016). Specifically, progressive and conservative governments alike have propped up global neoliberalism that benefits elites and disempowers ordinary citizens (Sandel, 2018). Charges of corruption and even criminal activity by political leaders are commonplace (Berman, 2019; Curtis, 2020), and public outrage gives way to weary indifference (Kiely, 2020; Sandel, 2018). Consequently, general public confidence in state institutions has declined, reflecting a broader lack of trust in traditional governance to solve major problems, and demands for radical systems change are rising up from so-called populist movements on the political right and left (Laursen, 2021).

### **The Failure of the Left and Right**

Taking full advantage of pervasive discontent and grievance, far-right political campaigns are gaining control across much of the globe. The rise of the radical right alerts us to the failure of progressive politics to offer a meaningful alternative (Sandel, 2018). Three intersecting characteristics of various contemporary populist ideologies are important to our current context and our search for a way forward: the separation of society into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, the ‘pure people’ or idealized ‘us’, and ‘the corrupt elite’ or demonized ‘them’ (E. Laxer et al., 2025; Mudde, 2021); a distrust of others, institutions and evidence (Vivès et al., 2025); and a ‘scorch the earth’ approach (Heydarian, 2022). Specifically, for example, right-wing populists

typically divide people into the strong versus the weak, the winners versus the losers, the superior versus the inferior, offering up opposing positions of “with us or against us”. By contrast, the left tend to identify with the victim rather than the aggressor, separating humanity into the oppressed and their oppressors, the colonizers and the colonized, the good and the bad. The far-right commonly insists on racial or religious purity as a condition of membership, while left-wing fundamentalism typically demands ideological purity (Burston, 2025).

Dividing even their own base and weakening their influence, the left is prone to an essentialist conception of politics, or identity politics, that undermines solidarity, particularly among working classes, and foments competition and micro-fractures (Mouffe, 2018; Özkırımlı, 2023). Current trends in progressive left politics can be characterized by a move from solidarity to one of group-identity (Thompson, 2025). On the other hand, the core message of radical right-wing parties is a mixture of ethnic nationalism—or nativism—and antiestablishment populism, and a common rallying issue has been opposition to immigration fueled by the demonization of immigrants (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019). Furthermore, hyperbole, false targets and conspiracy theories are necessary to preserve the ‘us’ and ‘them’ split (Burston, 2025; Lim, 2023). Outright lies, particularly from the current US administration, are routinely reported as “news” and fact-checking has largely become a practice of the past, suggesting a desensitization to and normalization of blatant dishonesty in a “post-truth society”. Far-right populism typically utilizes a politics of nihilism, which accompanies a politics of fear. Taken to an extreme, the current authoritarian-right US government gained some political support through simple destruction – of public buildings, state departments, and legal processes.

Though the populist right and left draw distinctively different lines demarcating ‘us’ and ‘them’ (E. Laxer et al., 2025), the binary thought structure, or splitting, is similar, as are the consequences of conflict and social division. Splitting and the projection of badness onto an external object, the ‘other,’ is the basis of racism, homophobia, and xenophobia. A paranoid conception of ‘us’ is dependent on the devaluation, dehumanization, and hatred of the other, of ‘them.’ More to the point, the projection of badness onto the other endows the self with a false and grandiose sense of pure goodness. We suggest that it is common for groups aligned with the populist right as well as the left to be organized and defined by the primitive processes of splitting and projection to maintain illusions of group purity and exceptionalism. Splitting and projection is at the root of deepening forms of anti-politics, of political disengagement and acquiescence of authoritarian rule.

Populist movements of the left and right are inclined to mis-identify the source of their grievances. For example, McLaren (2022) observes that the truckers of the Canadian ‘Freedom Convoy’ failed to identify the real problems facing drivers in the trucking industry, such as “employer abuse, wage theft, dangerously long hours, and racism” (p. 869). Similarly, the splintered lefts have struggled to find a common adversary, purporting various inadequate analyses of the sources of injustice in our time. Anti-statist and anti-government positions on the left find a degree of harmony with far-right populist and authoritarian rhetoric in their opposition to the laws and politics of neoliberal governments, thus sharing in the erosion of trust in public institutions and democracy, and setting the stage for the rise of neoliberal authoritarianism. The failure to distinguish the market from the state in perception and practice represents capitulation to neoliberal ideology and market rule.

Although the anti-statist, anti-establishment, and the anti-institutional elements of populism often foster hostility towards the welfare state, recent populist leaders such as Trump, Johnson,

Salvini and Le Pen have shifted away from anti-welfare state stances towards supporting a more specific, at times expansionist, ethno-exclusionary welfare state (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021). Similar to ‘fascist outbursts’ of the past, authoritarian-leaning leaders pretend to be anti-elite, even anti-capitalist, but shift the target of popular grievances to political adversaries, ethnic minorities, and welfare recipients (Lim, 2023). While the current American right-wing purports an anti-statist position, this holds only for a non-Trumpian government (Lennard, 2022). Moreover, and having far-reaching implications, the current insurgence of authoritarian neoliberal governments (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021) aggressively advances the neoliberal ‘common sense’ that shapes all of society solely by market principles, economizing every sphere and human endeavour (W. Brown, 2020). Various versions of neoliberal authoritarian rulers (in Poland, the United States, and until recently, Hungary, for example), mobilize all branches of government, including social welfare, to (re)distribute wealth to the oligarchic class (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021; Lim, 2023). This anti-statist posture of authoritarian neoliberal movements is thus disingenuous, a lie.

The potency of the broadly defined left has been diluted by in-fighting and internal division. Contributing to the splintering of the left is the rise of ‘faux populist’ leaders (Moscrop, 2024) who “ride ordinary people’s outrage against the establishment into office, then hand the keys to the One Per Cent” (Lukacs, 2022). In Canada, politicians such as Pierre Poilievre, the official leader of the federal opposition, and conservative Ontario Premier Doug Ford claim to be on the side of workers and ‘for the people’, while serving the interests of corporate elites (Evans & Fanelli, 2025). Fake populists have won over segments of organized labour in recent years – for example, 17 labour unions endorsed Doug Ford for re-election in early 2025. The ‘transactional politics’ practised by some unions contributes to bitter divisions within a struggling labour movement (Tufts, 2025). Division feeds division when building worker solidarity requires countering right-wing populist sympathies within their own base. Furthermore, the New Democratic Party (NDP), the traditional party of labour in Canada, has been accused of misunderstanding who the working class is (Moscrop, 2024), giving evidence to ‘a yawning chasm’ that now separates the left from working class politics (Fanelli et al., 2024).

The populist left and right come together around the rejection (at least rhetorically) of the status quo and the established order. Both the far right and populist left have been accused of being short of constructive ideology (Brooks, 2025), taking an indiscriminate stand *against* without reference to a vision or direction. Thus, in the absence of a progressive option that offers a real alternative to market rule, and a politics of division, disinformation, and destruction set the conditions for the rise of neoliberal authoritarianism. The failure of the broadly defined left to meet this moment in Canada (and across the globe) points toward the urgent need for a different way forward.

### **The Canadian Context: A Critical Moment**

Even though we do not (yet) see extreme expressions of neoliberal authoritarianism in Canada as in the US, and political trust levels remain relatively high (Dawson, 2025), indications of slippage are occurring with increasing frequency. Evidence of a Canadian autocratic trend include, for example:

- The selective rolling back of state securities and protections through underfunding public services such as healthcare and education (Amin & Raphael, 2026), for example, is accompanied by the active rolling-out of insecurities and denial of human rights for a targeted ‘Other’. The state of insecurity is selectively delivered by provincial governments’ use of the

Notwithstanding Clause (e.g., Alberta, Ontario and Quebec) to deny trans rights or collective bargaining rights. At the federal level, perhaps to appease the Trump administration, the Liberal government of Canada adopted Bill C-12 in March 2026, jeopardizing human rights, privacy and due process for refugees and asylum seekers, and ignoring concerns from a broad range of experts.

- Lies and scapegoating mobilize fear and direct anger. For example, in the Canadian political landscape, Pierre Poilievre has repeatedly utilized rhetorical tactics of the far-right. In an interview with American podcast host and MAGA supporter Joe Rogan in March 2026, Poilievre inflated immigration numbers, denied proven health and environmental consequences of Alberta's oilsands, shared debunked health advice, and repeated the false claim that safe supply drugs end up in the hands of children (Hodson et al., 2026). A common strategy of conservative leaders in Canada, such as Pierre Poilievre, Doug Ford (Ontario Premier) and Danielle Smith (Alberta Premier), is to accuse previous or current liberal governments for a wide range of social and economic problems, such as inflation and the affordability crisis. Further, a politics of fear and nihilism has made its way into the Canadian landscape. In 2023, Poilievre initiated the slogan 'Canada is broken,' claiming the Liberal government's 'big spending' and 'gatekeeping' has caused immense damage to the Canadian economy, without offering evidence or viable alternatives. Relatedly, a sense of victimization by a perceived 'Other' (Critchlow, 2020; Thomas & Tufts, 2016; Wilson, 2021) – immigrants, international students, and temporary migrant workers – fuels the politics of fear and 'anger regimes,' characterized by exclusionary and unstable solidarities, worker demobilization and job precarity, and hollowing out of democratic institutions (Lendvai-Bainton & Szelewa, 2021).
- At a time when Canadians are faced with an affordability crisis and provincial social assistance rates have failed to keep pace with inflation, trapping recipients below the poverty line (Catney, 2024), government spending is redirected from providing public services (such as health care and higher education) to bailing out failing commercial ventures and subsidizing corporate profits. While instances of corporate takeover (or handoff) of public resources are numerous at both the federal and provincial levels, one blatant example is the direct investment of the Canadian federal government in the fossil fuel industry. It is estimated that the Trans Mountain Expansion Project (TMX) has cost taxpayers \$35.6 billion since the purchase of the oil pipeline from Kinder Morgan in 2018—a project that some economists argue never was commercially viable and is likely to recover less than half of the total outlay (Kalegha & Mattei, 2025; G. Laxer, 2019).
- The (re)distribution of wealth to the rich is often accompanied by corruption and nepotism. The RCMP criminal investigation into the Ontario Greenbelt land swap, initiated in October 2023, follows investigations by Ontario's Auditor General and Integrity Commissioner which revealed a 'rushed and chaotic' process that gave developers with close ties to the government an estimated \$8.3 billion in benefits. In April 2026, the Ford government passed significant and retroactive changes to the province's freedom of information laws, exposing efforts to keep key evidence in the ongoing investigation (personal cellphone records) secret (Ferguson & Welsh, 2026).

Altogether, the (re)distribution of wealth and income toward greater inequality in Canada has been remarkably effective. Initiated in the US with a dramatic reduction in income tax for higher income brackets in the early 1980s, a range of policies and instruments have facilitated the transfer of income and wealth to the very rich. Fearing that the US would gain a competitive edge in the global economy, other neoliberal governments across the globe followed suit. In Canada,

poverty rates and reliance on social assistance among certain socio-demographic groups such as immigrants are on the rise (Foley et al., 2024), while the wealth of the top 20% of Canadian households who control 65.5% of national wealth (as of early 2026) (Marentette, 2026) and the top 1% who control 26% of national wealth (Skilleter, 2024) continues to soar. Inequality, no matter how it is measured, has increased since the late 1970s in Canada (Xuereb et al., 2025). We see that the extreme wealth of billionaires allows them to buy political influence, shape policy, and isolate themselves from an increasingly unequal society. As a result, the gap in wealth and political interests between the top 1% and the rest has expanded, with a relative convergence between the various socioeconomic classes beneath them.

### **Crisis and Opportunity**

Crisis was central to Milton Friedman's neoliberal campaign—to have ideas and alternatives to existing policies at the ready when that crisis occurs (or is manufactured) to direct the course of action (Friedman & Friedman, 1982). Progressive groups are thus presented with an extraordinary opportunity in this moment. The crises wrought by the politics of greed and plunder in the now blatant American oligarchy has brought the adversary into sharp relief, galvanizing opponents (Osno, 2025) and diverting attention from false targets such as immigrants and welfare recipients. Recent protests challenge the capitulation of the state to racial capitalism (Akbar, 2022; Mouffe, 2018). It has never been more obvious. The extreme concentration of wealth means an extreme concentration of power: the power to shift ideology and public opinion, to buy media, to influence policymaking, and affect the electoral process. Even before the second Trump presidency, Mouffe (2018) observed a 'populist moment' in the growing anti-establishment discourse uniting the 'people' against the 'oligarchy'. In March 2026, when an estimated eight million people from across the US, Canada and Europe participated in 'No Kings' protests, some marched with a banner reading, 'We protect our democracy. People over billionaires.' As outrage against the unprecedented wealth and power of billionaires is spreading, left social movements are turning to 'non-reformist reforms' as frameworks to reconceive social and political change – towards "the reconstitution of life, death and democracy" (Akbar, 2022, p. 2497).

Because non-reformist reforms emerge from theories of change rooted in building popular power, we look to re-emerging and existing sites of struggle: abolitionist, anarchist, and feminist anti-statist frameworks. While a thorough review of these movements, their distinct and overlapping histories and contemporary expressions, would surely enlighten and enliven a vision for a way forward, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this short article. We focus our attention on operating values, worldview, and 'common sense,' particularly those that contradict market ideology, of each framework. A critical reflection of movements that pursue the good of the commons and social care (Gottlieb, 2022) via mutual aid (Izlar, 2019; White et al., 2017) provides the conceptual tools to reexamine and assess existing governance models and abuses of power. From a pragmatic view, our inquiry looks for common ground – for spaces of 'dialectic solidarity' that make room for difference and take seriously the grievances of the ideological left and right; to coalesce around a way forward, to share an understanding of what we are against, and also to share a vision of what we are *for*. Our search is not for a centrist position, which history has shown us tends to be weak and prone to capture by market neoliberalism (Lim, 2023). Rather, we aim toward a progressive political foundation that offers common ground for opposing political positions, holds broad appeal and relevance, and promotes solidarity.

These anti-statist frameworks do not necessarily reject the state but rather consider a reconfigured state and economic system that better address material needs of the populace

regardless of political affiliations. Guiding questions for our inquiry include: What are core values, organizing principles, and practices that shift power dynamics? How might these principles be applied for a critical reflexive analysis of existing institutions and political structures? How can diverse social groups find solidarity to empower each other toward a shared vision for change? What lessons can be learned from uncovering, reclaiming, and re-legitimizing the margins?

*Abolitionist frameworks.* We are experiencing a resurgence of the abolitionist perspective (Simon, 2021). Today abolitionists question the effectiveness of current systems, challenging the values behind current resource distribution (i.e., criminal justice vs. community development). Abolitionism ultimately calls for a reordering of our social order regarding the prioritization of shared values (Day & McBean, 2022; Rasmussen & Kim, 2024; Weber & Pendleton, 2023). Protest against the carceral state—that is, the sphere of the state tied to policing, prosecution, jails, and prisons and the far-reaching institutions, practices, and policies of surveillance and punishment that extend to the social welfare system—was mobilized through a series of social movement events and formations from the late 1990s (Gruen, 2022; Vitale, 2021).

Abolition returned to public prominence in the wake of the 2020 protests against the police murder of George Floyd (Rasmussen & Kim, 2024). Radical abolitionism has a long history, first expressed in the 1800s in the anti-slavery movement (Hayward, 2022; Krohn, 2023; Schoolman, 2022). More recently, social movements across the globe are pushing for broad systems change (Qutami, 2023; Ritchie, 2023), questioning long-standing assumptions and the tools needed to reshape society (Maylea, 2021). Abolition is a commitment to eradicating and replacing harmful systems with effective ones that centre the marginalized. Hence, the abolition perspective seeks radical systemic changes over incremental reformations, yet not necessarily without a reformational process (Fryer, 2025). This includes defunding the police (Another Toronto is possible, 2024), redirecting police funds to mental health and social services (Cummins, 2023; Glauser, 2020; Watson et al., 2021), prison abolition (Bagaric et al., 2021; Martinot, 2014; Mathiesen, 1998; McQuade, 2020; Papendorf, 2006; Shaw, 2009), Two Spirit and queer abolitionism (Daring, et al., 2012; Dias, 2024; Nguyen, 2023), and abolitionist social work (Copeland, 2023; Fortier, ND; Fortier et al., 2024; Rasmussen & Kim, 2024; Sonsteng-Person et al., 2023; Toraif & Mueller, 2023). Abolitionism requires us to imagine beyond what is to what could be; to envision a more effective social system outside of the established norm. Additionally, abolition work would be an evolutionary process of assessment and reassessment towards more just systems, institutions, and processes.

*Anarchist frameworks.* As an extension of abolitionism, anti-statist frameworks start from a critique and rejection of established institutions and systems, advancing anarchistic modes of transformation in their place. Scholars draw attention to anarchist expressions of social welfare that have emerged in recent years, as the neoliberal conditions of austerity and privatization have indirectly generated systems of mutual aid that place emphasis on autonomy, solidarity, social care, and direct and local forms of democracy (Izlar, 2019). Raekstad (2020) notes that the recent wave of movements from the Arab Spring to Occupy “used the language of democracy to critique our most basic institutions – both political and economic – and have changed the way many people think about politics, arguably leading to a spread of anarchist tactics of direct action and prefiguration along with the re-emergence of left populism in the growth of parties like Syriza and Podemos and candidates like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn” (p. 931).

Seitz (2022) posits that we shift attention from state supporters and opposers to mutually beneficial political-economic transformation. Dating to the nineteenth century, anarchists typically reject the notion of a state that stands above society, directing it, and instead proposed grassroots ground level assemblages comprised by and for the people (Daring et al., 2012). Similarly, anarchist frameworks are against capitalism, and also “build alternatives to capitalism right under its nose” (Franks et al., 2018). Anarchist perspectives are, at most, cautious of social welfare systems of democratic states, as the state and its laws are perceived to function to reinforce colonial power (Dirik, 2018; Sawatsky, 2024). Literatures on anarchism highlight systems of self-governance “based on the direct participation of the community through local communes with committees, councils, cooperatives and academies ... to generate a meaningful concept of self-determination” (Dirik, 2018, p. 225).

In essence, people decide for themselves the kind of society they wish to live in and what activities are needed to implement it, which in turn empowers them (Plender, 2025). Such movements have been disparaged and dismissed and sometimes considered dangerous because of associations with violence and revolutionary upheaval. Scholars note that the violence of agents of the state is too often overlooked and excused (Dirik, 2018). Furthermore, there have been a number of nonviolent anarchists who set up alternative organizations that advocated for educational or spiritual transformation (Anisin, 2019) and have been influential in the field of social work regarding community development (Anisin, 2019; Baldwin, 2019; Izlar, 2019; LeFrançois, 2022; Naert et al., 2024; Sawatsky, 2024). Indigenous thought undergirds these perspectives and demands a commitment to decolonialism (Benally, 2022; Dunlap, 2022; Warburton, 2021).

*Feminist Anti-Statist Frameworks.* Consistent with abolitionist and anarchist frameworks, feminist anti-statist frameworks challenge the authority and hierarchical structures of formal politics, advocating instead for community-level responses that foster trust and mutual care. These approaches emphasize the concept of the commons, universality, and collective care, drawing on feminist perspectives that foreground an ethic of care as a basis for radical political judgments (Lewis, 2018; Shola Orloff, 2011; Ticktin, 2021).

Scholars such as Baines (1998), Freedburg (1993), and Tronto (1995) have long argued that care-centered politics can extend from the home to broader society, supporting a strengthened and caring democracy that transcends oppositional politics. Recently, scholars and activists are developing, for example, anti-carceral/abolitionist feminist approaches to community safety, with a particular emphasis on de-escalation responses to individual and interpersonal crises. These approaches include creating climates of community safety that emphasize collective responsibility (Cullen & Murphy, 2021) and mutual aid (Spade, 2020). These frameworks critique the limitations of formal equality and advocate for equity-based approaches that dismantle systemic oppression and promote substantive justice. By centering collective care and inclusivity, feminist anti-statist perspectives encompass abolitionism and anarchism, offering practical strategies for bridging social and political divides, challenging depoliticization, and reinvigorating public engagement in civic life.

### **Radical Imaginaries**

A practical way forward must be radical at its core, envisioned through an alternative worldview or epistemology. The Latin meaning of the term ‘radical,’ which is useful here, translates to ‘root’. In this sense, ‘radical’ means to go to the root of matters, to delve deeply into the fundamental causes, origins, or essential principles. We argue that the insidious (and not-so-

insidious) takeover of political thought by market dogma across the political spectrum goes to the source of the crises of our time.

For this brief overview, we highlight precise features of anti-statist frameworks or worldviews that guide us toward a paradigm shift and may serve as foundational values of a radical imaginary for a reconciling political project. We argue that these principles are inherently radical, as they respond to the root of the crises of our time: (1) reclaiming the social from market rule; (2) (re)turning the left hand of the state to an ethic and function of social care; (3) building dialectic solidarity.

*Reclaiming the Social from Market Rule.* Political ideologies tend toward a unified, fixed and unstructured monolithic perception of the state. More precisely, the state and markets are often taken as a unit, as a singular inevitability, particularly in critiques from the political left. The anti-statism of political left movements opposes authority and hierarchy, the police state, and the capital elite. From the right, anti-statist rhetoric is generally anti-government, especially opposed to ‘big government’ and social welfare spending, but in favour of ‘free’ markets and on the side of capital (Dunleavy, 2011). To the contrary, Pierre Bourdieu (1998) analyzes the state as divided against itself, opening space to free the welfare state from the market. Bourdieu argues that the state is split between the left hand and right hand of the state that, to varying degrees, are founded on and organized by contrasting systems of capital. The right hand of the state is made up of all legislation and agencies and social actors linked to financial markets – both international and national – as well as the regulating forces, including the military, police, courts and prison system. Conversely, the left hand of the state is constituted by all sorts of people who deliver social services and programs, especially those who are called ‘social workers’ (Bourdieu, 1998). Invoking feminine, maternal characteristics, its primary responsibility is *caring* for its citizens – in particular, those individuals and groups who are ‘left out’ or ‘fall through the cracks’ or who suffer various forms of social exclusion (Good Gingrich, 2016).

Key principles of market logic are consumerism (or material accumulation), competition, individual autonomy or ‘free’ choice, and individual self-interest. The unqualified and exclusive alignment with the logic and (im)morality of the market represents more than a collaboration or partnership between the state and the market – it constitutes a corporate takeover of sorts, whereby the state and all its constituent parts – including, most consequentially, the left hand of the state – has been bought out by global market interests, thus imposing the market as the only game in town (Good Gingrich, 2016). Yet the market does not need to rule. We can make space for radical imaginaries, or new ways of understanding and interpreting our current context – through a fundamental change in basic assumptions and ways of thinking.

An *ethic of care* directly challenges competitive rationality and requires the dismantling of interlocking systems of domination, including white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, and anthropocentrism. Disentangling or freeing the welfare state from the pathology of market rule emerges from and returns to social ideals; a commitment to social rights and shared responsibility through public dialogue and collective action. Such social goals are necessarily rooted in a deep awareness of our common fate: that we all live the conflict and violence wrought by the dividing practices of the market. Anarchist frameworks align closely with an ethic of care rooted in mutual aid, local engagement and shared responsibility (Heckert, 2010).

To practice democracy as a way of life is to augment engagement in formal politics with collective action and mutual support in the communities in which we live. Rejecting charitable hierarchies between giver and receiver, anarchist care emphasizes equality, reciprocity, embodiment, and interdependence. Although care has been historically feminized and devalued

within patriarchal cultures, it is neither weak nor apolitical. Rather, care functions as a powerful social practice that generates alternative forms of personal and collective value and reclaims its political and transformative potential (Wilde, 2022; Plender, 2025; Kneafsey et al., 2008).

An ethic of care promotes values such as gender equality and diversity, extending to the natural world, and has drawn some upper- and middle-class votes to left-wing parties according to their values and cultural identities (Gottlieb, 2022). Additionally, recurring recessions and widening inequality have revealed the continued importance of the state in welfare provision and redistribution across class positions, including among upper- and middle-income groups seeking income security (Lim, 2023). Mouffe (2018) notes that high-income professionals have reasons to support universal social insurance policies, joining the ‘people’ against the neoliberal ‘oligarchy’. Universal social supports challenge market-driven models that perpetuate exclusion and polarization.

Collective care demands that we acknowledge and respect grievances on all sides of social and political fractures, recognize that every person brings something of value, and ensure that everyone has work to contribute to the collective good. The development and operationalization of a radical ethic of social care and reclaiming a ‘public’ or inclusive sense of ‘us’ and shared responsibility are critical to imagining and creating a new way forward, to challenging depoliticization and acquiescence, and to fending off powerlessness and despair. These are key strategies to bridge social and political divides, to engage those who are disaffected and despairing in the work of cultivating a collective consciousness and reinvigorated public.

*Building Dialectic Solidarity.* To move beyond the ever-shifting exclusions of tribalism or identity politics requires a dialectic and integrative worldview and guarding against the primitive impulse of splitting of self and ‘other’ into good and bad (see, for e.g., Dennis, 2022; Zienert-Eilts, 2020). Dialectical thinking reconciles opposing viewpoints, embracing complexity rather than choosing between familiar binaries. It integrates contradictions—holding two seemingly opposite truths simultaneously to foster deeper understanding, reduce rigid thinking, and promote flexible problem-solving (Mascolo et al., 2024). Hope is found in the dialectic, as collapse and renewal are both stories of this moment (Hervey, 2025).

A dialectic worldview recognizes the nearness of good and bad, that polar qualities exist in all of us and are exhibited in all social movements, political parties, organizations, and so on. The truth of the social world – and of ourselves – is in paradox. A dialectic worldview – to hold paradox – is the foundation of a vibrant and healthy collective consciousness. Dialectic solidarity, then, positions the “self as a catalyst of the common good, acting in dialectic solidarity with the Other to mitigate the abuses of power” (S. Brown, 2011, p. 2). Ambitions of group purity and exceptionalism, self-perfection and superiority become irrelevant. Dialectic solidarity creates space for an expansive working-class consciousness—one that is more accurate to a broader Marxist definition. A radical praxis exploits the relative proximity and common interests of those who work for a living, regardless of income or occupational status—over and against those who make money from money, and cuts across lines of gender and race.

An effective dialectic solidarity engages strategies to gain and hold onto the support of upper and middle classes. Drawing on Karl Polanyi’s analysis that fascists gained political power through support from capitalist elites, Lim (2023) cautions that uniting the masses is not enough to prevent the rise of neoliberal authoritarianism and a ‘fascist outburst.’ Progressive politics must also devise strategies to weaken and divide elite support of radical right-wing politics, and to bring some capitalist elites on their side. Perhaps inspired more by the obscenities of the American oligarchy than progressive politics, we see such division developing among members of the 1% all across

the globe. Recognizing the deleterious consequences of concentrations of wealth, groups of the super rich Canadians such as Patriotic Millionaires (<https://patrioticmillionaires.org/>) and the Resource Movement (<https://www.resourcemovement.org/>) are advocating to tax themselves (see Hennessy, 2026), presenting as unlikely allies. Furthermore, calls for a Global Wealth Tax – a proposed annual 2% tax on incomes over \$1 billion – are gaining traction (Chancel et al., 2026). A taxation system that is fair and built on the principle that work and wealth should play by the same rules can pay for a social welfare system that functions outside market rule according to an ethic of care.

### **Conclusion**

An important objective of our contribution is to inspire and promote the re-imagination of *systems*, specifically social welfare governance, ideology and practice, that legitimize and build on diverse, concealed and devalued perspectives, worldviews, and values. A reconciling political project requires us to forge space for radical imaginaries, for new ways of understanding and interpreting our current context through a paradigm shift – through a fundamental change in precise basic assumptions and ways of thinking. In summary, we propose three key strategies to bridge social and political divides; to restore trust in the collective, in a public; and to (re)engage a disaffected, despairing and divided public in political and civic life.

First, to commit to dialectic worldview and guard against a more primitive splitting of the self and other into good and bad. Second, to disentangle the state from market values and operating principles, to aim toward more precision in our critique, to reclaim the dual (at least) functions and economies of the state, and to recognize the potential to define appropriate values and operating principles for each. Third, to look to the left *and* to the right, up *and* down, to build a big coalition and nurture expressions of the ‘public’, the commons, that accept and value the reality of difference, prioritizing relationships over positionalities, and broadening circles of belonging (Klein, 2025).

We propose that future research and debate for forging reconciling space and political practice might address the following:

- Critical analyses of lessons to be gleaned from alternative governance models, such as abolitionist frameworks, anarchist movements, anti-statist feminist perspectives, and Indigenous models of social care and shared authority;
- The advancement of methods and metrics that incorporate *care* objectives into economic rationality and extend the economic calculus from a singular market perspective to social and environmental concerns to more accurately analyze the cost-benefits of public policies and government spending;
- Strategies for public conscientization and politicization toward solidarity, decolonization, accountability, reparations, and social inclusion.

In this polycrisis moment, critical analysis and radical imaginaries are necessary for holding hope, increasing depth and accuracy of understanding, encouraging active engagement in shaping our shared future, and building dialectic solidarity.

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