

The Motion

“Preventing human induced climate change requires strong government intervention to regulate the mode of production.”

Arguing Against the Motion

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Climate change is a consequence of the current mode of production, which is an inherent part of our current system. In order to address climate change, a radical transformation of the mode of production is necessary. Since governments are locked-in within the current system, they are not in the position to start or lead this radical transformation.

This locked-in status is based on a steady competition between states. Governments are more concerned about competitiveness and economic growth than environmental problems. The increase in free trade agreements and the consequence of a race to the bottom of environmental standards proves this point. Binding directives have emerged in the free trade area, which prohibit member states from being stricter in their environmental criteria than required by the directive involved.

It is also highly unrealistic to think that politicians would dare to propose the radical transformation that is necessary. They would not be able to stay in power by doing so. Politicians are rather worried about the next election than about long-term effects of the current mode of production on the environment. Consequently, with regards to Beck's question on the stance of modernity, governments stay within the growth paradigm.

Additionally, traditional, local and indigenous knowledge varies from region to region and is embedded in the people. It is a crucial source with regards to sustainable development. Governments cannot take into account all regional and industrial peculiarities. Governments are operating within the neoclassical growth paradigm, which is based on 'hard sciences' and does not understand the evidence base of traditional knowledge. Moreover, regulating modes of production from a central position endangers natives' modes of production because it bears a threat of standardization within it. Traditional, indigenous and lay knowledge could be lost.

With this in mind, it is also crucial to think about informal knowledge and voluntary action that are embedded in these local communities. Strong, formal governmental interventions can crowd-out these voluntary contributions and take away the basis for its reproduction. For example, after the tsunami hit the Nicobar Islands the government coordinated the “modernization” of the Islands, which led to a loss of their sustainable mode of production.

Climate change policies will not be able to bring about sufficient change in the mode of production without active engagement from below. This is what Beck calls the ‘missing sociological link’ or cosmopolitan solidarity across different classes, social groups and ideologies, which cannot be realised through an expert and elitist discourse on climate change. For it to be successful a much broader social change has to take place. As

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Kallis said, "big social change never appeals to the 'kings' and 'priests' of the time". Social change does not occur through top-down, government-led interventions, it has a somewhat revolutionary aspect.

As Wallerstein explained exquisitely: “when the system is far from equilibrium...small social mobilizations can have very great repercussions”. Thus, social change and adequate responses to the climate crisis will not happen through the ensemble of political and economic institutions which only reinforce the current system but through bottom-up movements.

There are several reasons why bottom-up and grassroots movements can address the climate crisis more effectively. The first one is that grassroots movements, such as Greenpeace, Via Campesina, People’s Summit on Climate Change or 350.org, are much more effective as they incorporate knowledge of local people and organisations and are in a much better position to go to the roots of problems and deal with them in the most appropriate way. They focus on a specific cause and they embody this specific interest much more than political parties do. This is important with regards to Ajzen and Fishbein’s argument that general attitudes have little or no effect on actual practices. For example in Japan the anti-nuclear movement is very popular and has the support of the public, while the Green party’s performance at elections is just moderate.

Secondly, people identify themselves much better with grassroots organisations and with specific topics than with political parties and thus are more socially accepted. They have the potential to mobilise critical masses and connect people all over the world to offer that ‘missing sociological link’. Most politicians only think in election cycles, which makes it impossible to implement regulations, which might only have positive effects in 10-20 years but most certainly have immediate costs.

Instead of relying on government action a stronger capacity building of the people needs to take place by bringing lay people, activists, non-governmental organisations and academics together. In addition to that, bottom up movements can also emerge from co-operations between companies. The strong social relations among these actors will foster a fundamental and holistic process of change. An excellent example is Mondragon, the biggest cooperative in the world including 250 businesses and 95000 employees who are co-owners and take part in decision-making processes. Through models represented by Mondragon, companies will have the incentive to change the productive forces and social relations of production if it is coming from their employees and strong union movements, and not from the government whose regulations won’t be effective as the companies can always relocate and avoid having to comply because the government is far more detached from business practices than other firms which may act as role models and competitive benchmarks.