

**Lesson 2** Book Excerpt**Growing the Caring Economy, Shrinking the Careless One**

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A great deal of thought in recent years has gone into how reducing our use of material resources could be managed in ways that actually improve quality of life overall—what the French call “selective degrowth.”\* Policies like luxury taxes could be put in place to discourage wasteful consumption. The money raised could be used to support those parts of our economies that are already low-carbon and therefore do not need to contract. Obviously a huge number of jobs would be created in the sectors that are part of the green transition—in mass transit, renewable energy, weatherization, and ecosystem restoration. And those sectors that are not governed by the drive for increased yearly profit (the public sector, co-ops, local businesses, nonprofits) would expand their share of overall economic activity, as would those sectors with minimal ecological impact (such as the caregiving professions, which tend to be occupied by women and people of color and therefore underpaid). “Expanding our economies in these directions has all sorts of advantages,” Tim Jackson, an economist at the university of Surrey and author of *Prosperity Without Growth*, has written. “In the first place, the time spent by these professions directly improves the quality of our lives. Making them more and more efficient is not, after a certain point, actually desirable. What sense does it make to ask our teachers to teach ever bigger classes? Our doctors to treat more and more patients per hour?”

There could be other benefits too, like shorter work hours, in part to create more jobs, but also because overworked people have less time to engage in low-consumption activities like gardening and cooking (because they are just too busy). Indeed, a number of researchers have analyzed the very concrete climate benefits of working less. John Stutz, a senior fellow at the Boston-based Tellus Institute, envisions that “hours of paid work and income could converge worldwide at substantially lower levels than is seen in the developed countries today.” if countries aimed for somewhere around three to four days a week, introduced gradually over a period of decades, he argues, it could offset much of the emissions growth projected through 2030 while improving quality of life. Many degrowth and economic justice thinkers also call for the introduction of a basic annual income, a wage given to every person, regardless of income, as a recognition that the system cannot provide jobs for everyone and that it is counterproductive to force people to work in jobs that simply fuel consumption. As Alyssa Battistoni, an editor at the journal *Jacobin*, writes, “While making people work shitty jobs to ‘earn’ a living has always been spiteful, it’s now starting to seem suicidal.”

A basic income that discourages shitty work (and wasteful consumption) would also have the benefit of providing much-needed economic security in the front-line communities that are being asked to sacrifice their health so that oil companies can refine tar sands oil or gas companies can drill another fracking well. Nobody wants to have their water contaminated or have their kids suffer from asthma. But desperate people can be counted on to do desperate things—which is why we all have a vested interest in taking care of one another so that many fewer communities are faced with those impossible choices. That means rescuing the idea of a safety net that ensures that everyone has the basics covered: health care, education, food, and clean water. Indeed, fighting inequality on every front and through multiple means must be understood as a central strategy in the battle against climate change.

This kind of carefully planned economy holds out the possibility of much more humane, fulfilling lifestyles than the vast majority of us are experiencing under our current system, which is what makes the idea of a massive social movement coalescing behind such demands a real possibility. But these policies are also the most politically challenging.

Unlike encouraging energy efficiency, the measures we must take to secure a just, equitable, and inspiring transition away from fossil fuels clash directly with our reigning economic orthodoxy at every level. As we will see, such a shift breaks all the ideological rules—it requires visionary long-term planning, tough regulation of business, higher levels of taxation for the affluent, big public sector expenditure, and in many cases reversals of core privatizations in order to give communities the power to make the changes they desire. In short, it means changing everything about how we think about the economy so that our pollution doesn't change everything about our physical world.

\* in French, “*decroissance*” has the double meaning of challenging both growth, *croissance*, and *croire*, to believe—invoking the idea of choosing not to believe in the fiction of perpetual growth on a finite planet.