

Eschatology & Genesis

The politics of prepping for collapse,
but not in the bad, fascist way

By J. V. Marsch

Greetings.

I have come to set the scene for you - after all, that is my function. It is the night of the last day, and the night before the first. The Old Sun has set...Tomorrow the New Sun will rise, and my siblings and I will greet it. Tonight...no one knows. Everyone sleeps.

--Gabriel, Dr. Talos's Play

It's a strange phenomenon that as the world enters a long, slow decline, most conversations about preparing for collapse are dominated by the far right.

Every right wing influencer and their mother has, at some point, leveraged fears about the collapse of civil society to sell their knuckle-dragging audience male health supplements or disaster preparedness kits. It's all snake oil, and though part of me has to respect a good scam whenever I see it, I can't help but feel confused seeing the way in which the right has coopted, in their own funny little way, disaster prep.

Prepping has always been a bit of a blind spot for the left. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that any principled revolutionary socialist expects there to be a class war in-between now and the onset of socialism and in a sense, this is disaster encouragement rather than prep. But more and more, collapse is becoming less an abstract concept and more a lived reality for many around the world. The long, terminal decline of capitalism has forced proles worldwide to contend with a system that is increasingly incapable of meeting even the most basic requirements of social reproduction. Capitalist agriculture is destroying its own material foundation through soil erosion. A warming planet is leading to more extreme weather events. Economic growth has stalled and employment has become dangerously precarious. The welfare functions of capitalist states have been massively undercut, and mass human migrations have begun as our fellow proles flee wars and collapsing states. Collapse, to me, should not be seen as a final event whereby everyone has to get their go-bag and flee to their underground bunker in the woods, but as something that has been happening for a long time now. It has been, and will continue to be, a long drawn out process, where the norms of life under capitalism slowly fall away in a series of upheavals. Catastrophic for some, barely noticeable for others.

In the face of these crises, socialist agitators and organizers need to have an understanding of collapse and its relationship to the class struggle. Importantly, we need to distinguish our project of disaster preparedness from the reactionary project of prepping by the far right. In

so doing, we can begin to understand how we might build independent proletarian capabilities that presage the coming classless society.

The bad

Everyone is scared, and many are making contingent plans for some disaster event, whether that be war, a wildfire, the looming threat of unemployment or simply being unable to meet your next rent payment. But it's important to recognize that not all methods of preparing for a disaster event are inherently progressive. Like all social movements, they have a class character, and this is nowhere more obvious than in what we might creatively call the bad fascist kind of prepping.

The bad fascist kind of prepping is probably what you've seen on social media if you've engaged with this stuff in any way. It's a fetishization of collapse, an excitement in the coming social turmoil that will see only the strong survive and society purified and rid of all its weak or poisonous elements. There's no surprise that at its worst, this becomes fertile recruiting grounds for white supremacists posting on TikTok or paranoid suburbanites bringing AR-15s to confront BLM protestors, ostensibly to protect their McMansions or fast food franchises, but really to try and fill the suburb shaped voids in their hearts with violence. Collapse in this worldview is vulgarly Darwinian, encouraging the survival of the "fittest" - society is being destroyed from within by some kind of fifth column, usually either leftists, Jews, immigrants or some combination of all three. If it seems contradictory that collapse here is both good in the sense that it purifies but bad because it's being caused by all of society's enemies, well, it both is and isn't.

At its extreme, the bourgeois answer to political and economic conflict is always violence. Capitalism necessarily presents itself as a rational mode of production, or at the very least, one that obeys laws very different to its actual laws. Simply put, this is because of commodity fetishism. The reality of the exploitation that constitutes profit is necessarily masked by an economy of things - an economy that seemingly operates rationally and trades commodities not based on the amount of social labor congealed inside of them, but by their inherent qualities or

the demand for them. The fundamental contradiction of capitalist society, exchange value vs use value, is hidden. The fundamental source of profit, surplus value, is also hidden. Everything about the commodity economy appears natural. Therefore, the cyclical crises attendant to our mode of production appear as aberrations in a rational system: they can be solved with a degree of finality that does not involve reckoning with the social reality of capitalism. Of course, this is not the case. But my point is that capitalism necessarily covers its tracks by virtue of the very social relations that make it up. It forces us to look for answers to the problems it creates everywhere except in the social relations of the mode of production itself

Because of this, capitalist politics can only amount to individuals operating seemingly freely within a marketplace of ideas with better or worse solutions to the various crises we face (all solutions that, we must remind ourselves, fundamentally ignore the real social context of collapse). When profit rates stagnate and civil society decays, it couldn't possibly be on account of the core contradictions that make up our society. No, those contradictions appear natural. It must be because the wrong people are in power or are influencing society in the wrong directions.

As the capitalist system begins its drawn-out collapse, political projects across the spectrum have had to come up with answers for why nothing seems to be getting any better and, increasingly, what to do in case it all falls apart. For the far right, this coalesces into a reactionary attempt at preparing for the worst based on "weathering the storm" and weeding out the most troublesome elements of society. What's needed in this political framing is a purge, a cleanse, a draining of the swamp. Real fears around collapse turn into opportunities for long held prejudices to turn violent, and, for the bad fascist kind of preppers, this is something they have been waiting for. This kind of prepping presents itself as resistance, but we have to ask ourselves, resistance to what? Certainly not to capitalism, nor really to politicians or even specific capitalists.

Collapse in this regard is both a foregone conclusion and a state of reality to be actively encouraged. In their essay "Is Left Survivalism

Possible?” Özgür Yılmaz states that

Apocalyptic narratives are frequently intertwined with the belief in Aryan purity, reinforcing a vision of an inevitable final battle that will determine the fate of civilization. Today’s fascists often employ Christian eschatological metaphors, invoking the idea of an impending Armageddon in which divine intervention punishes sinners through disasters, wars, and crises. These catastrophic events are not merely seen as destruction but as necessary precursors to a purified world order, offering a moral justification for political and social cleansing. Over time, this apocalyptic rhetoric delineates clear battle lines between the righteous and the corrupt, further solidifying a binary worldview that fuels reactionary mobilization. By constructing a framework where collapse is framed as both inevitable and desirable, right-wing apocalypticism fosters an exclusionary, militant mentality that not only anticipates but actively prepares for societal breakdown as a means of ushering in a new order.¹

And yet this “new order” need not be anything particularly new. Prepping for the apocalyptic right involves removing the unwanted elements from society in order to simultaneously create a future utopia and return to an ill-defined and idealized period in the past. From here, we see wannabe homesteaders on social media living off grid with a carefully curated cottagecore aesthetic. These movements romanticize pre-industrial skills and idealize the (cis and hetero) family as the foundational unit of society. The misogyny embedded in this worldview is easy to see: women and children are relegated to domestic roles in service of the husband. What’s less immediately apparent, however, is the deeper contradiction at its core, namely, the fantasy of self-sufficiency itself. True self-sufficiency is effectively impossible. Even in cases where a family relocates to rural Idaho and claims nominal self-sufficiency through growing pota-

toes, harvesting chicken eggs and homeschooling their children, the vast amount of labor “external” to their family compound embedded in their tools, clothes, homes, roads, and utility infrastructure goes suspiciously unacknowledged. Self-sufficiency is not only a myth but is completely undesirable. It runs counter to the entirety of the human social project. The reactionary romanticism of the prepper, survivalist and homesteader reminds us less of the utopian futures of Le Guin or Bookchin, and more of middle class tories like Tolkien and his conservative ilk. Utopia becomes something to regress to, not build towards. It is not a society without class, of free and equal producers, but a world without pasteurisation or the Bureau of Land Management.

The good

Against this collapse fetishization, Yilmaz, taking their lead from Walter Benjamin, argues that a left prepper strategy

need not be a passive acceptance of catastrophe. It holds potential as a politically-engaged critique of industrial capitalism’s unsustainability. By framing collapse not as an inescapable fate but as a call to re-think economic and social structures, collapsology could serve as an impetus for radical transformation rather than mere survivalist retreat. Instead of simply chronicling decline, a left-leaning collapsology could challenge the systems driving ecological and social devastation, mobilizing action rather than reinforcing despair.²

And I think this is broadly true. Collapse has many meanings and looks very different across its diverse conditions. But in a capitalist context, it means nothing more than the inability of our given set of social relations to manage the social and ecological crises they have created. It’s worth being more specific here about why these events (civil unrest, power outages, extreme weather events, soil erosion, etc.) create opportunities for organizing, lest we fall into the collapse fetishizing of the right. The collapse we are referring to as socialists is not the kind of collapse

that sees everyone become independent homesteaders or petty warlords. Nor is it simply the collapse of state power, of war or of the biodiversity crisis. What we are referring to is the specific set of conditions that lead to the collapse of capitalism's hold on the proletariat, both ideologically and materially, and the opportunities this creates for building a classless society. Simply, the death throes of capitalism.

Towards and against collapse

In Worker's Councils, Anton Pannekoek gives a reasoned approach to what we might call the revolutionary motives among the proletariat.

The dominant and deepest impulse in humanity as in every living being is our instinct of self-preservation. It compels us to defend our lives with all our powers. Fear and submissiveness also are the effect of this instinct, when against powerful masters they afford the best chances for preservation. Among the various dispositions in humankind those which are most adapted to secure life in the existing circumstances will prevail and develop. *In the daily life of capitalism it is impractical, even dangerous for a worker to nurture their feelings of independence and pride; the more they suppress them and tacitly obey, the less difficulty they will encounter in finding and keeping their job...*³(emphasis mine)

Let's pause here to emphasize this critical point. Most of our time as agitators or organizers is spent banging our head against the wall wondering why, if we have all the answers, the proletariat won't listen to us and do a god damn revolution. Capitalism is obviously ripping the world apart, we as a class obviously have the power to destroy it and build a better world, so why are so many of our fellow proles voting for effing Trump or Reform or, for that matter, Biden or Labour, when what we really need to be doing is building class power. Well, because that wouldn't really make sense. On an abstract level, it is obviously in everyone's best interest to rebel and build socialism. But on a concrete level, revolution

usually means violence and disruptions to supply chains (i.e. food). It is therefore not in anyone's best interest to stick their head out in even mildly rebellious ways if the threat of losing their well-being is at stake. If anyone reading this has experience organizing trade unions or strikes, you'll be very familiar with this timidity among our fellow proles when it comes to demanding even the smallest concessions from bosses. But Pannekoek continues,

When, however, in times of social crisis and danger all this submissivity, this virtuousness, is of no avail to secure life, when only fighting can help, then it gives way to its contrary, to rebelliousness and courage. Then the bold set the example and the timid discover with surprise of what deeds of heroism they are capable. Then self-reliance and high-spiritedness awake in them and grow, because on their growth depend their chances of life and happiness. And at once, by instinct and by experience, they know that only collaboration and union can give strength to their masses. When then they perceive what forces are present in themselves and in their comrades, when they feel the happiness of this awakening of proud self-respect and devoted brotherhood, when they anticipate a future of victory, when they see rising before them the image of the new society they help to build, then enthusiasm and ardor grow to irresistible power. Then the working class begins to be ripe for revolution. Then capitalism begins to be ripe for collapse.⁴

If we can create a synthesis of the ideas put forward by Yılmaz and Pannekoek, it would be something like this. Proles are motivated, like any other group, by material self-interest. To a certain extent, we can view socialism as a mode of production that organically unites self-interest with the common interest of society. This is part of the reason that Marx predicts high communism sees “work become life's prime want”.⁵ Capitalism, however, reinforces the atomization and competitiveness

brought about by private property both on an ideological and material level, seeing proles and capitalists act in a self-interested fashion that is oftentimes disconnected from the common needs of society. Capitalists produce commodities that are harmful and do not produce, or under-produce, commodities we vitally need. All us proles are in competition with each other for work. Thus, the goal of a communist political project today needs to be based, at some level, on finding ways to show our class that it is in fact in our best interests to act together as a class.

The way this ties into the collapse of capitalism should be getting more and more obvious every day. The collapse fetishizing right offers proles nothing in the face of global crisis but empty dreams of self-reliance in a complex and interdependent world. Socialist, however, are uniquely capable of showing that it is only in a world without class or private property that we are able to realize our full potential. To a very real extent, the only kind of prepping for collapse that would permanently work is just seizing the means of production. But this runs us into a seeming dead end. The commune building that would need to be at the core of a left collapsology is all but impossible in anything but the most dire of circumstances. Efforts in Ferguson, Seattle, etc. to create autonomous zones free from state interference are crushed quickly and relatively easily by the state. There are two solutions to the problem of state repression in this regard. We either wait for state power to decay to a point where these actions are possible or we seek out ways to fill in the cracks in civil society that this slow decay creates, simultaneously building something new and tearing down the old. Both seem utopian, and the former option should not be regarded as a strategy but a contingency plan, but I might claim that it's utopian to think that the latter is not becoming a necessary part of socialist organizing.

As we watch the slow decay of states attendant to the long, terminal crisis of capitalism, more and more of their welfare functions are being jettisoned. In a state like the United States, basic infrastructure components from transportation systems to simple utility networks are being left to rot (the Flint water crisis, for example, lasted a full decade). Decent healthcare in the US is a pipe dream for many proles. Sooner rather than

later, the soil erosion attendant to capitalist attempts to turn the natural flows of energy and nutrients in the earth into factory systems will compromise our ability to grow enough food. These voids left by a decaying capitalism create ample organizing spaces for any political project that can demonstrate real ability to fill in these gaps. Looking at the state of the globe, it seems obvious that any left political project worth its salt will need to find ways to not just prepare for this type of collapse, but find ways to urgently respond to them.

If that sounds like a daunting task for the same left that can't even agree on a name for Your Party, then perhaps we need to reframe what this left-collapsology would mean for us as organizers. No left political project will be able to immediately come up with ways to provide safe drinking water, organize worker's militias that replace the police and the army and grow enough food to detach itself from the capitalist world. But it will need to do these things at some point. And so the answer to how to organize in the face of capitalist collapse becomes the same as the answer to how to organize in the face of capitalist prosperity: we, as individuals and groups of organizers, must survey our local terrain, identify areas of conflict between the proletariat and state and economic structures specific to our environment and use those sites of conflict to push the class struggle forward. The difference between left-collapsology and more orthodox left political projects is that the former undertakes action with the explicit goal of providing for proles during periods of systemic decay, while also attempting to soften, as much as possible, the turbulence that accompanies revolutionary struggle by beginning to build independent social systems today.

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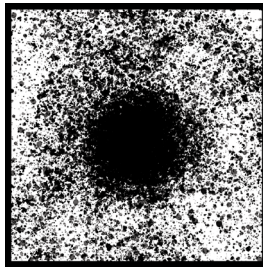
To bring it all together, we need to be mobilizing proles on two fronts: to protect communities from the worst of capitalism's death throes, and to ensure that in doing this, we are building towards a classless society. This makes a left prepper strategy stand in stark contrast to its right counterpart. Where the right-wing preppers fetishize a bizarre array of skills to be used independently of social context, a left-wing preparedness project

necessarily must be much more forward looking. It must analyze its social context and intervene in accordance with it, helping proles as part of our moral obligation as socialists, but also as part of a broader strategic gambit. Part of this project is research into new ways to organize production, part of this is direct action. But the more we are able to develop our own capabilities as a class before a large-scale collapse event, the better. The development of proletarian capacities in this context must be seen not as adjacent to the idealized class struggle, but as one of its primary engines.

References

1. Özgür Yılmaz (2025). "Is Left Survivalism Possible?", Cosmonaut Magazine.
2. Ibid.
3. Anton Pannekoek (1947). Worker's Councils.
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5. Karl Marx, (1875). Critique of the Gotha Program.

J. V. Marsch is a shadow of his former self.



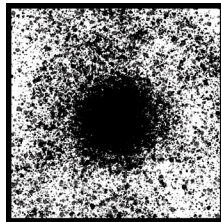
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J. V. Marsch attempts to understand what collapse means for the prospect of a modern socialist movement, while grappling with the perhaps inherently right-wing nature of prepping.



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