Abundance – An Impressionistic Response

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I'm just going to dive in and provide commentary with screenshots.

> *world—your world—in a chemical heat trap. Today, that seems barbaric. You live in a cocoon of energy so clean it barely leaves a carbon trace and so cheap you can scarcely find it on your monthly bill.*

"monthly bills" – why not progressive taxation + free at point of use? Good enough for parks and public schooling but not energy, even in our wildest dreams?

Abundance = picture a monthly bill, forever. But lower!

> *Out the window and across the street, an autonomous drone is dropping off the latest shipment of star pills. Several years ago, daily medications that reduced overeating, cured addiction, and slowed cellular aging were considered miracle drugs for the rich, especially when we discovered that key molecules were best synthesized in the zero-gravity conditions of space. But these days, automated factories thrum in low orbit. Cheap rocketry conveys the medicine down to earth, where it's saved millions of lives and billions of healthy years.*

We really gonna have this molecular revolution without taking on the patent regime underlying the pharma industry?

Ctrl+F search for 'patent' = 6 hits,[1] passing references, none interrogating critically.
Ctrl+F search for 'copyright' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'open source' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'free software' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'commons' = 0 hits.

Guess 'abundance' doesn't extend to freeing infinitely reproducible informational goods from the arbitrary scarcity of IP law. Pity.

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1 All 'ctrl+f' counts here count only in-line and substantive footnotes (i.e. exclude purely citational footnotes), so the numbers here will vary from the raw numbers you will see if you do your own ctrl+f search.

> *Your micro-earpiece pings: a voice text from a friend and his family, on their way to the airport for another weekend vacation. Across the economy, the combination of artificial intelligence, labor rights, and economic reforms have reduced poverty and shortened the workweek. Thanks to higher productivity from*

"Labor Rights" – After watching leading figures in the Abundance crowd mock the Job Guarantee for years, this is a rich line. Presumably 'labor rights' here do not include a right to a decent paying job.

Well, who knows, maybe that's unfair. Maybe they really do want an abundance of workers.

Ctrl+F search for 'job guarantee' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'full employment' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'labor movement' = 0 hits.

Ctrl+F search for 'Federal Reserve' = 1 hit, talking about the Fed's founding as an example of progress that required the 'focusing mechanism of disaster'.

Ctrl+F search for 'jobs' = 27 hits. Of these, only one (p. 20) really focusing on the macro-level, and only to reject the idea that 'closing the gates to immigrants' will get us 'more or better jobs.' This is a good line, and good to see they in-principle support 'more-or-better jobs,' but there's absolutely zero discussion of the macro-politics of full employment otherwise.

Ctrl+F search for 'New Deal' = 24 hits. This is a more varied list of references that I will engage with more thoroughly later, but worth noting that there is zero mention of the right to a job – the center jewel of the New Deal agenda, nor organized business (and Republican) opposition to it, which is partially why the book is able to describe Eisenhower as essentially 'acquescing to the New Deal era' vision of 'the federal government taking an active role in managing the American economy and protecting workers' simply because he supported a 'broader and stronger system of unemployment insurance' – ignoring that expanded UI was the conservative alternative to the New Deal-preferred Job Guarantee.

Ctrl+F search for 'Civil Rights Movement' = 1 hit, describing the 'buildup of procedural architecture' in the 70's as a result of 'liberal lawyers, inspired by the courtroom heroics of the civil rights movement.' Again, the March on Washington for *Jobs* and Freedom, and the Freedom Budget's centering of a Job Guarantee as the central economic demand of the movement through the 1960's and 1970's, culminating in the Humphrey-Hawkins bill of 1977, is entirely ignored.

Ah well, so much for 'labor rights'. I guess once you say it on page 2, you've established your bona fides and you can ignore it substantively for the rest of the book and still claim you think they're important and some idiots will take that seriously as a defense of its overwhelming ambivalence to the centrality of labor struggle to any meaningful progressive politics.

> *reduced poverty and shortened the workweek. Thanks to higher productivity from AI, most people can complete what used to be a full week of work in a few days, which has expanded the number of holidays, long weekends, and vacations. Less work has not meant less pay. AI is built on the collective knowledge of humanity, and so its profits are shared. Your friends are flying from New York to London.*

Lol, come the fuck on. Productivity and wage levels diverged a long time ago and the only reason Biden took any steps to reverse it was because of the efforts of the left to build power in the Democratic party from 2015-2020. But most of the abundance crowd hate the left, including Bernie, the only quasi-seriously pro-labor presidential candidate in my lifetime, more than they hate the Republican party.

Even the framing here frames the shared-wealth from AI-driven productivity boom as coming from the AI-side, i.e. some sort of redistribution of capital income, rather than higher wages.

Well, is that really fair fair?

> We are both liberals in the American tradition. The problems we seek to solve are mostly problems that exist within the zone of liberal concern. We worry over climate change and health inequality. We want more affordable housing and higher median wages. We want children to breathe cleaner air and

Oh well I guess if they support higher median wages, I stand corrected. I'm sure there will be discussions of how to achieve that as well as all the breathless talk of AI-driven productivity that gets the anti-labor Silicon Valley-friendly Dems frothing.

OMG, maybe here?!

What Happened in the 1970s?

> There's an odd website called WTF Happened in 1971? It's a long stack of charts, gathered magpie-like from all manner of books and papers and articles, recording the many ways society began to tilt on its axis as the '70s dawned. The most convincing of them are economic: starting in the '70s, wages began to stagnate, inequality began to soar, inflation began to rise, and housing prices began their inexorable march upward.

Unfortunately no. This story is all about housing and the turn to excessive regulation.

> Real wages stagnated over these decades, but they didn't fall. The action was in housing prices, which rose and rose. This was something new. Prior to 1970, housing wasn't a prime asset. You bought a home to live in it. But that changed in the 1970s. Inflation was part of the reason. One of the main aims of federal

I guess when you have a hammer, everything looks like housing construction.

Maybe here instead?

> Progressivism's promises and policies, for decades, were built around giving people money, or money-like vouchers, to go out and buy something that the market was producing but that the poor could not afford. The Affordable Care Act subsidizes insurance that people can use to pay for health care. Food stamps give people money for food. Housing vouchers give them money for rent. Pell Grants give them money for college. Tax credits for child care give people money to buy child care. Social Security gives them money for retirement. The minimum wage and the earned-income tax credit give them more money for anything they want.
>
> These are important policies, and we support them. But while Democrats focused on giving consumers money to buy what they needed, they paid less attention to the supply of the goods and services they wanted everyone to have. Countless taxpayer dollars were spent on health insurance, housing vouchers, and infrastructure without an equally energetic focus—sometimes without any focus at all—on what all that money was actually buying and building.
>
> This reflected a faith in the market that was, in its way, no less touching than that offered by Republicans. It assumed that so long as enough money was dangled in front of it, the private sector could and would achieve social goals. It

This is, of course, a very 'liberal' framing of the minimum-wage. It increases money in people's pockets but doesn't actually increase any output.

If only it were pared with, oh I don't know, a serious discussion of full employment and a job guarantee (labor macro-history? Never met her - see above).

Or heck, even just public direction job creation.

Ctrl+F search for 'job creation' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'job program' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'create jobs' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'direct hire'/'direct hiring' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'public worker' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'public employee' = 1 hit.

> experimenting with using public projects to expand their housing stock. But social housing will rise or fail for the same reasons that all building projects rise or fail. It doesn't matter whether the worker hammering in nails is a public employee or a private contractor. The government still needs to build those homes affordably and quickly. And that's not possible under the rules and strictures that liberals have designed within the governments they run.

Public, private, what's the difference, really.

Digression:

There's a whole separate, parallel issue of the often contentious dynamic between tech-utopianism and labor politics that is going to be important in understanding how to get from 'here' to where the authors want to get to. I wonder if they address that? (holding my breath!)

Ctrl+F search for 'luddite' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'privacy' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'cypherpunk' /'cyberpunk' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'cryptocurrency'/'crypto' = 1 hit – referring to the get-rich-quick crypto bubble.
Ctrl+F search for 'surveil'/'surveillance' = 1 hit – describing conservative small-government rhetoric as superficial given their support for government surveillance (true, but that's a bipartisan value!).
*Ctrl+F search for 'technology politics'/'politics of technology, * = 0 hits.

OMG, Neil Postman cite alert!

> To take technology seriously as a force for change is to take it seriously as infused with values and, yes, politics. The relationship is bidirectional. It is not just that the politics we have will affect the technologies we develop. The technologies we develop will shape the politics we come to have. A world where renewable energy is plentiful and cheap permits a politics that is different than a world where it is scarce and pricey. A world where modular construction has brought down the cost of building opens different possibilities for state and local budgets.
>
> In 1985, the great technology critic Neil Postman wrote, "to be unaware that a technology comes equipped with a program for social change, to maintain that technology is neutral, to make the assumption that technology is always a friend to culture is, at this late hour, stupidity plain and simple."[17] The corollary is also true: to have no program to harness technology in service of social change is its own form of blindness.
>
> Too often, the right sees only the imagined glories of the past, and the left sees only the injustices of the present. Our sympathies there lie with the left, but that is not a debate we can settle. What is often missing from both sides is a clearly articulated vision of the future and how it differs from the present. This book is a sketch of, and argument for, one such vision.

But wait :(it's just a bland argument for modularism and some much about how it is equally naive to declare government the problem as the solution.

> But let us not be naïve. It is childish to declare government the problem. It is just as childish to declare government the solution. Government can be either the problem or the solution, and it is often both. By some counts, nuclear

The wise man bowed his head and solemnly declared, etc.

Caveat: Lest I be accused of overstating the critique (the horror!), ***yes, the book does acknowledge that the state is often behind the creation and development of important technologies***.

> Beyond merely regulating technology, the state is often a key actor in its creation. An American who microwaves food for breakfast before using a smartphone to order a car to take them to the airport is engaging with a sequence of technologies and systems—the microwave, the smartphone, the highway, the modern jetliner—in which government policies played a starring role in their invention or development. Federal science spending is so fundamental to the overall economy that a 2023 study found that government-funded research and development have been responsible for 25 percent of productivity growth in the US since the end of World War II.[18] "There is widespread agreement that scientific research and invention are the key driver of economic growth and improvements in human well-being," the Dartmouth economist Heidi Williams said. "But I think researchers do a poor job of communicating its importance to lawmakers, and lawmakers do a poor job of making science policy a major focus."[19]
>
> The pandemic proved the necessity of invention yet again. The mRNA COVID vaccines saved millions of lives and spared the US more than $1 trillion in medical costs.[20] But they might have never existed if it weren't for Karikó's force of will—and the cosmic luck of an extremely well-placed Xerox machine.

But for a book obsessed with regulatory barriers to abundance, it doesn't actually address the legal regimes behind the end-scarcity these systems have generated or engage with serious attempts to build alternative production systems to those of the scarcity-oriented IP legal regime (like the free software movement; Dean Baker's artistic freedom vouchers; Benkler's commons-based peer production, anti-academic publishing, the public money, public code movement, academic opposition to Elsevier, etc).

It also doesn't deal with the Eben Moglen question of 'how much can we convert from finite hardware to infinitely reproducible symbolic software, and once we do, not deny access of all the world's knowledge, arts, culture, and useful knowledge to anyone'. You know, abundance.

Ctrl+F search for 'wikipedia' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'one laptop per child' = 0 hits.

Figures.

Scarcity Is a Choice

> This book is dedicated to a simple idea: to have the future we want, we need to build and invent more of what we need. That's it. That's the thesis.
>
> It reads, even to us, as too simple. And yet, the story of America in the twenty-first century is the story of chosen scarcities. Recognizing that these scarcities are chosen—that we could choose otherwise—is thrilling. Confronting the reasons we choose otherwise is maddening.

Here are some of the artificial scarcities that have dominated my professional career – I wonder how many I'll see in the rest of this book?

Scarcity of money – thanks to flawed and/or anachronistic understanding of currency, modern monetary regimes, taxation, public debt, 'government borrowing', etc.

Ctrl+F search for 'public debt' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'national debt' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'modern money' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'taxation' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'currency' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'borrow'/'borrowing' = 1 hit – unrelated usage.

Scarcity of jobs – thanks to central banks ('independent' inflation-obsessed monetary policy), macroeconomic orthodoxy (NAIRU), liberal political ideology (opposition to direct public job creation and job guarantees on anti-socialist basis), business class opposition (see, e.g., Kalecki), tech-utopianism (including 'fully automated luxury communists').

Scarcity of knowledge, arts and culture – thanks to anochronistic and increasingly criminalized IP law regimes (patent, copyright) and underfunding of public research, the arts/creative/cultural sector, the privatization of the university.

Ctrl+F search for 'the arts' = 1 hit, reference to the need for approval from 'the Arts Commission' as another regulatory barrier to building housing.

Scarcity of social reproductive systems – thanks to general under-remuneration and non-recognition of care work, gendered work, and the need for communitarian systems of childcare and child raising.

Ctrl+F search for 'care economy' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'childcare' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'gendered labor' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'pre-k' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'literacy' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'public school' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'public education' = 2 hits – tangential mentions.

Jim from the office deadpan stare.

The Supply-Side Mistake

At the heart of economics is supply and demand. Supply is how much there is of something. Demand is how much of that thing people want. Economies balance when supply and demand meet and derange when they part. Too much demand chasing too little supply causes shortages, price increases, and rationing. Too much supply pooling around too little demand brings gluts, layoffs, and depressions. Supply and demand are linked. At least, they are in the real world.

Okay so we're doing the econ101 bullshit thing. No discussion of monetary production economies, of administered pricing, of the cambridge capital controversies, etc. Just a nice, simple, x-on-a-graph and that gets us all the economic logic we need to understand complex economic systems.

"As simple as possible and then a little simpler."

The words "supply side" are coded as right-wing. They summon memories of the curve that the conservative economist Arthur Laffer jotted on a napkin in the 1970s, showing that when taxes are too high, economies slow and revenues, paradoxically, fall.[1] This led, in part, to decades of Republican promises that cutting taxes on the rich would encourage the nation's dispirited John Galts to work smarter and harder, leading economies to boom and revenues to rise.

Tax cuts are a useful tool, and it is true that high taxes can discourage work. But the idea that tax cuts routinely lead to higher revenues is, as George H. W. Bush said, "voodoo economics." It has been tried. It has failed. It has been tried again. It has failed again. These failures, and the Republican Party's dogged refusal to stop trying the same thing and expecting a different result, made it vaguely disreputable to worry about the supply side of the economy. It's as if the nonsense of phrenology made it sordid for doctors to treat disorders of the brain.

The authors are careful not to say it explicitly, but this is implicit deficit-phobic politics and committing the sin of money illusion by reifying and reinforcing the logic that it's important to have high revenues for their own sake, regardless of where they come from or their economic impact, as well as the idea that we need these revenues in order to continue funding the government.

Laffer isn't the only one peddling "voodoo economics" – there's an abundance of it in this paragraph alone.

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ledger. When Americans in 1978 heard that "government cannot solve our problems, it can't set our goals, it cannot define our vision," the words didn't come from Ronald Reagan. They came from President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, in his State of the Union address.[2] This was a preview of things to come. In 1996, the next Democratic president, Bill Clinton, announced that "the era of big government is over."[3] The notion that the US government cannot solve America's problems was not unilaterally produced by Reagan and the GOP. It was coproduced by both parties and reinforced by their leaders.

Yes.

Of course, this was also extended proudly by Obama, but they're careful not to name him overtly in this section. Courageous enough to punch the left, yes, but only pick fights with people you are sure you're funded well enough to beat.

These are important policies, and we support them. But while Democrats focused on giving consumers money to buy what they needed, they paid less attention to the supply of the goods and services they wanted everyone to have. Countless taxpayer dollars were spent on health insurance, housing vouchers, and infrastructure without an equally energetic focus—sometimes without any focus at all—on what all that money was actually buying and building.

This reflected a faith in the market that was, in its way, no less touching than that offered by Republicans. It assumed that so long as enough money was dangled in front of it, the private sector could and would achieve social goals. It revealed a disinterest in the workings of government. Regulations were assumed to be wise. Policies were assumed to be effective. Cries that government was stifling production or innovation typically fell on deaf ears. A blind spot emerged. Political movements consider solutions where they know to look for problems. Democrats learned to look for opportunities to subsidize. They gave little thought to the difficulties of production.

It's very funny that even in a section criticizing a 'throw money at the market to fix the problem' cash-demand-style liberalism, the authors are only able to characterize the problem as failing to consider the problems of production, rather than the implicit theory of production that this represents.

"Anything but direct job creation!" "Anything but public ownership!" "Anything but socialism!"

next minute

Omg, why have we failed to build anything?!

Step 1: defer to markets. Step 2: ???. Step 3: Production crisis!

I mean, seriously. Look at this compact little narrative of the past 15 years of Democratic policymaking:

> persuade employers to hire and consumers to spend. The 2009 stimulus was too small, and while we avoided a second Great Depression, we sank into an achingly slow recovery. Democrats carried those lessons into the COVID pandemic. They met the crisis with overwhelming fiscal force, joining with the Trump administration to pass the $2.2 trillion CARES Act and then adding the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act and the trillion-dollar infrastructure bill on top. Democrats made clear that they preferred the risks of a hot economy, like inflation, to the threat of mass joblessness.
>
> They succeeded. But solving the crisis of the pandemic economy created a new crisis for the post-pandemic economy: too much demand. Supply chains that had been battered by the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine began to break. Inflation returned with a vengeance. The conversations we had with the Biden administration's economists were different from the conversations with the Obama administration's economists, even when they were the same people. They needed companies to make more goods and make them faster. They needed more chips so there could be more cars and computers. They needed ports to clear more shipments and Pfizer to make more antiviral pills and shipping companies to hire more truckers and schools to upgrade their ventilation systems. They needed more supply and, if they could not get that, less demand.
>
> "If car prices are too high right now, there are two solutions," Biden said. "You increase the supply of cars by making more of them, or you reduce demand for cars by making Americans poorer. That's the choice."[10]

You know what the Biden stimulus didn't actually directly? Good care, cultural, and/or public sector jobs. High tech investments, direct cash grants, market-based support etc. All indirect methods of trying to boost demand by getting someone else to do the production 'out there'. Certainly better to boost demand than not, even during a pandemic that brought with it an unprecedented supply shock.

But Biden carried on the Obama-and-Carter legacy of "anything but direct job creation" and "full employment is what the Fed says it is", and so we get what we get: 4% unemployment becomes the ceiling, and we all applaud the Fed raising rates whenever inflation rears, because we literally can't think of any other way to deal with price stabilization on a sustained basis but to throw millions of people out of work and weaken labor bargaining power.

There's a legacy of 'scarcity' that this book should be acknowledging when discussing inflation and demand/supply at the macro level, but I'm not holding my breath.

Ctrl+F search for 'Volcker' = 0 hits.

Shocked.

> stagnates is *change*. When you grow an economy, you hasten a future that is different. The more growth there is, the more radically the future diverges from the past. We have settled on a metaphor for growth that erases its most important characteristic.

I know, I know, I'm beating a dead horse. But this is why there's such a profound difference between the kind of "full employment is what the Fed's NAIRU models say it is" definition of full employment that the abundance folks believe in, and the kind of Job Guarantee-based, Kalecki class-war, Vickrey 'chock-full' full employment of WWII, when real productive output doubled in six years (in real terms, even as inflation was also high).

It's really, really hard to overestimate just how underjuiced our economy is because of our collective refusal to embrace a labor-centric full employment vision undergirded by a Job Guarantee. That's not an exclusive 'demand' story, that's a supply side story. An abundance story, if you will.

> Dig within the equations that power modern economics and you'll find that growth comes from one of a few places. An economy can grow because it adds more people. It can grow because it adds more land or natural resources. But

"More people"? What about more workers? So much discussion of supply-side thinking and building, and labor is just...not present in this narrative. Weird. So weird.

> grouped under the sterile label of productivity: How much more can we produce with the same number of people and resources? When productivity surges, what we get is not more of what we had, but new things we never imagined.

Productivity goes up when labor markets are tight and labor is expensive. Full employment, come on. Just say it. Just once. It won't hurt, I promise.

> Our era features too little utopian thinking, but one worthy exception is Aaron Bastani's *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, a leftist tract that puts the technologies in development right now—artificial intelligence, renewable energy, asteroid mining, plant- and cell-based meats, and gene editing—at the center of a post-work, post-scarcity vision.[11] "What if everything could change?" he asks. "What if, more than simply meeting the great challenges of our time—from climate change to inequality and ageing—we went far beyond them, putting today's problems behind us like we did before with large predators and, for the most part, illness? What if, rather than having no sense of a different future, we decided history hadn't actually begun?"[12]
>
> It is routine in politics to imagine a just present and work backward to the social insurance programs that would get us there. It is equally important to imagine a just—even a delightful—future and work backward to the

Big thinking is post-work thinking. We gotta build! Just not with, you know, the working class.

> But we focus on the left for larger reasons. This book is motivated in no small part by our belief that we need to decarbonize the global economy to head off the threat of climate change. To the extent that the right simply does not

There is a reason the Sunrise Movement and others centered a Job Guarantee in any serious and non-reactionary vision of decarbonization. Because labor justice is economic justice and any transition without labor justice is not going to be progressive and do huge damage.

Ctrl+F search for 'Green New Deal'/'New Green Deal' = 2 hits – in same section complaining about excessive regulations (no mention of the Green New Deal's labor-centric vision).

> A good way to marginalize the most dangerous political movements is to prove the success of your own. If liberals do not want Americans to turn to the false promise of strongmen, they need to offer the fruits of effective government. Redistribution is important. But it is not enough.

It's funny to read this shortly after this section:

> commuters to move easily on mass transit systems. We have many disagreements with the modern American right. But we focus, in this book, on the pathologies of the broad left.
>
> One reason for that is we don't see ourselves as effective messengers to the right. There are people seeking complementary reforms in that coalition, such as James Pethokoukis, author of *The Conservative Futurist*; the economist Tyler Cowen, who has called for a "State Capacity Libertarianism";[18] and the array of policy experts organized in the Niskanen Center. We wish them well.

Horseshoe theory at its best, but Klein and Thompson, who presumably believe in *their own* political leanings over those of the right, have decided that the most dangerous political movement for *them* is the broad left.

Let the less-correct right-leaning centrists fight the right-leaning strongmen: the real fight is between the most-correct centrism (left-leaning) and the most dangerous political movement (those to its left).

"We might lose to the Right, and if so thems'll be the breaks, but even if we win, the Left will be in our way, so we gotta focus on clearing them out first if we're ever to succeed in making the world better."

Modern Liberalism in a nutshell.

Postscript:

> Liberals should be able to say: *Vote for us, and we will govern the country the way we govern California!* Instead, conservatives are able to say: *Vote for them, and they will govern the country the way they govern California!* California has spent decades trying and failing to build high-speed rail. It has the worst homelessness problem in the country. It has the worst housing affordability problem in the country. It trails only Hawaii and Massachusetts in its cost of

This is a good rhetorical line, but of course its far more damning of Klein/Thompson than it is of the Left.

Does anyone really believe that California, yet alone San Francisco is the utopia that Bernie Sanders dreams of? Has anyone actually met the median elected Democrat in California? Or indeed the median Democrat?

This line is a pithy condemnation of the Democratic party, of 'progressive' liberalism, of the Nancy Pelosis and Kamala Harris's and Gavin Newsoms of the world. Klein/Thompson are right that if that's the best that the Democratic Party can offer the country, the Democratic Party is fucked.

But unless your entire political spectrum is that of the American post-1970's consensus, it is not in any realistic sense a condemnation of the 'Left'. When I close my eyes and try to imagine the 'abundant' future of the Green New Deal or of a genuinely pro-labor political system, I am not envisioning San Diego or Davis, California (sorry).

> needed to build a good life. We call for a correction. We are interested in production more than consumption. We believe what we can build is more important than what we can buy.
>
> Abundance, as we define it, is a state. It is the state in which there is enough of what we need to create lives better than what we have had. And so we are focused on the building blocks of the future. Housing. Transportation. Energy. Health. And we are focused on the institutions and the people that must build and invent that future.

Maybe there was a computer glitch the first time. I'll try again.

Ctrl+F search for 'full employment' = 0 hits.

Oh well.

Chapter 1:

“housing follows the laws of supply and demand” (snort)

Ctrl+F search for ‘interest rates’ = 0 hits. Huh.

> In *The New Geography of Jobs*, Enrico Moretti, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley, explains why. A century ago, the American economy produced primarily physical goods. Now we make ideas and services. Some of those are encoded into physical goods, but even then, production often happens elsewhere. The iPhone made Apple, based in Cupertino, California, phones are assembled in Foxconn factories in Shenzhen, China.[12] Microsoft and Alphabet mostly sell bits of intangible code. Tesla’s value lies in the software and battery advances that have taken electric vehicles from the automotive equivalent of granola to the sleek, fast cars of the future.

Gotta say the refusal to actually talk about proprietary IP laws here feels a little conspicuous to me. These companies don’t “sell code”, they control proprietary IP and use that to prevent other people from copying code, ie manufacturing artificial scarcity. I mean seriously, look at this:

> anywhere can also be purchased anywhere. Omnipresence is yet easier for digital products, where all that’s needed is a download or the quick flash of an advertisement across a browser screen. Less than half of Apple’s revenue comes from North America.[13] Slightly more than half of Alphabet’s revenue is international.[14] The same holds for Tesla.[15]

I wonder if any interest groups that would otherwise be receptive to the ‘abundance’ agenda might be very resistant to having attention drawn to supply-reducing implications of government-imposed legal regulations on the limitless reproduction of bitstreams and ideas, I mean copyright/patent law.

> learned in the making of things—a theme to which we’ll return. The economic frontier is where new discoveries allow for the making of new things that can be sold to ever more people.

Seriously? The economic frontier is where you can *enclose* (privatize) the value of new things you make. Otherwise you’re in Richard Stallman’s world of free software, and we *hate* communism in America, don’t we, folks.

> New York leads the world in finance. San Francisco and Silicon Valley lead the world in technology. New York has tried hard to take Silicon Valley's crown. But if you look for multibillion-dollar technology companies in New York, you will find few of them. Where New York City has seen technological success is where code serves finance: Bloomberg is a multibillion-dollar technology business built around providing data to financial firms. Banks like Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase now employ thousands of software engineers.[17] The same is true, in reverse, in San Francisco. There are successful banks and investment firms, but they mostly serve technology companies.

That's a hell of a description of the industry model of Wall Street and Silicon Valley.

> There is an old finding in political science that Americans are "symbolically" conservative but "operationally" liberal.[30] Americans talk like conservatives but want to be governed like liberals. The Tea Party–era sign saying "Keep your government hands off my Medicare" is perhaps the most famous example of this divided soul. Americans like both the rhetoric and reality of low taxes, but they also like the programs that taxes fund. They thrill to politicians who talk of personal responsibility but want a safety net tightened if they, or those they know and love, fall.

Reactionary taxpayer money trope (and misleading description of government financing). Drink!

Seriously though, this is where a discussion of not just macroeconomics, but finance is important. Money is not a scarce, finite good. It is created endogenously every time banks (and other leveraged financial entities, down to households) extend credit.

We do need ways to manage overall effective demand levels, as well as to create 'reflux' mechanisms to the extent we want to spend significant amounts beyond the growth rate of the economy. But we don't need to do that through regressive taxes on average people, and we certainly don't need to do that through reifying incorrect narratives about how the government spends and finances itself.

I know that Klein knows better. The abundance folks have been close enough to the MMT Wars to know that even if they disagree with their policy conclusions, they are right on the operational details.

He's just avoiding this conversation and being loose and slippery with language to play into normie priors. It's a pity for a book that's supposed to be about confronting the necessary harsh truths to get to the world we need, and it's a double pity given his seemingly sincere mea culpa for carrying water for Paul Ryan's deficit-fearmongering bullshit back in the day. This is, unfortunately, just doing the same thing but more gently and in blue-language coding.

> This leads to a reality many prefer not to acknowledge. If homelessness is a housing problem, it is also a policy choice—or, more accurately, the result of many, many, many small policy choices. The writer Matthew Yglesias, who spent a decade trying to persuade liberals of where they've gone wrong on housing,[48] illustrated this nicely in a 2021 essay.[49]

I'm not a housing policy guy, I've never pretended to be one and I'm not going to start now. So this impressionistic response to the book is not going to spend much time on the core policy issue the book wants to discuss, so if anyone wants to dismiss what I have to say here's the smoking gun to do so.

That said, I do support quite a lot of 'state-of-emergency' style exceptions to standard process limitations in the name of a big bold agenda, as long as the kinds of politicians whose underlying values I trust and whose general goals I agree with are the ones leading it, while (unsurprisingly) simultaneously vociferously opposing it when done by people with opposite values and goals.

Or to put it another way, do Klein/Thompson really think that the Left would oppose supporting some fast-tracking housing construction programs if it was President Sanders, Senate Majority Leader Warren, and Speaker Ocasio-Cortez designing and pushing them? Or is the true problem, perhaps, that people whose politics suck, and whose track record is ratfucking over the stakeholder groups that the left cares about (the very poor, working class, minorities, etc) are trying to moralize and bully them into supporting policies that, when wielded by others, could end up just supporting housing developers and reinforcing existing class inequalities?

I say all of that in response to the graf above in the immediate sense, and in response to the overall politics of the book and broader abundance movement in the general sense. Call me biased, call me 'part of the problem', 'a representative of the groups' or whatever else, but I am not particularly interested in taking lessons about how to make the world better in the progressive direction from Matt Yglesias and his ilk when he's shown, time and time again, whose side he is on when it matters.

Keep your crocodile tears for the homeless and get back to me when you support abundance when it pisses off *your* people, not just happens to align with the kind of hippie-punching you've made your career and name off all the way to a multi-million dollar life of comfort and hobnobbing with elites and right-wing assholes.

Aside: the next section, which I've already screenshotted and so don't need to again, is fittingly about what happened in the 70's, which again misses the actual interesting history of austerity in New York City, the neoliberalisation of the Democrats, the decline of labor unions, and all that stuff, instead to focus on housing prices and take potshots at Nader and 'legal proceduralism'.

> The problem the New Deal faced was straightforward. People had too little and they needed much more. But by the time Johnson took office, the difficulties of deprivation had been joined by diseases of affluence. In his 1958 bestseller *The Affluent Society*, John Kenneth Galbraith described an America cosseted by new comforts yet unable to shake a sense that something had gone fundamentally awry:
>
> > The family which takes its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground.... They picnic on exquisitely packaged food from a portable icebox by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings. Is this, indeed, the American genius?[60]
>
> Modern American liberalism may have been born in the New Deal. But it was reborn in its aftermath. It matured into a political movement with a divided soul. Much of midcentury liberalism evolved in reaction to the excesses and consequences of New Deal liberalism. "One of the most consequential conflicts in postwar America was between two systems of values," writes Jake Anbinder in "Cities of Amber." "An older *growth politics* which extolled the benefits of metropolitan development, and a newer *antigrowth politics* which rejected the idea that such development improved society."[61]

I know, I know, just the old leftie in me, but I find this history to be so blinkered as to be not at all useful as a roadmap for the Democratic party.

The New Deal hit the wall of anti-communism and its failure to internally deal with the race issue, not to mention the failure of the 1945 Full Employment bill to get the crown jewel of the New Deal agenda – the job guarantee – enacted.

By the time you get to Johnson, urbanism and racial tensions are inextricably intertwined, and the 'countervailing powers' vision of the New Deal rebuilding with labor and business and government at the same table has settled into the neurotic repression of 1950's Cold War militarized keynesian corporatism: IBM, White Picket Fences, high marginal tax rates, Hoover's FBI, redlining, the space race, and eventually Vietnam War. Think Joseph Heller's '*Something Happened*'.

If that is what 'growth' and 'development' looks like, it's no surprise the younger generation went flower power, 'tune in and drop out', and rejected it wholesale, even while new radical environmental, civil rights, and labor movement efforts pushed for a wholesale reimagining of what Coretta Scott King called a 'peacetime' full employment economy.

Complicating this simple history story would, of course, require talking about race, the civil rights movement, labor struggle, etc. And that's inconvenient when we *gritted teeth* just. want. to. talk. about. housing.

> facially similar National Environmental Policy Act. CEQA became a potent weapon against the construction of new homes. "Between 1972 and 1975, twenty-nine thousand proposed homes in the Bay Area—roughly a fifth of the region's total housing production at the time—were subject to environmental litigation," Anbinder writes.[74]

I said I wasn't going to say anything specific about housing policy, and now I'm violating that almost immediately, but in my experience as an Australian growing up in Sydney, homeowners will do absolutely every fucking thing they can do protect their property values, including creatively repurposing well-meaning rules.

This doesn't mean that every rule capable of being twisted is necessarily a bad rule or that it needs to be scrapped to overcome its unintended abuse, but it does mean that there needs to be some sort of meta-process for being able to tell the difference between proper compliance/improper abuse of the rule's teeth, and in my experience as an American lawyer and law professor, the American legal system is extremely bad at being able to temper hyper-formalistic process with a common sense-based release valve.

Usually it either fails to be tempered whatsoever, or it opens up new opportunities for counter-abuse of the rule's relaxation by another powerful interest group because it's only such a group that has enough political muscle to ram the change through over the original powerful group's resistance.

This generalized observation is separate from, but also complementary to, other reviewers' observation that to the extent that 'middle class homeowners' are an extremely powerful political force (again, I'm from Australia – this is basically the class around which our entire country revolves), it's unclear why they are ever going to let this abundance agenda of 'building more housing' get through.

Is the plan to appeal to tech overlords to subvert middle class democracy in order to hobble the homeowner vanguard? Maybe the answer will come later in the book – I await with bated breath.

> We think now of the Interstate Highway System as one of the grand achievements of the postwar era. The reaction at the time, particularly among

Do we?

> Robert Caro published *The Power Broker*, his study of how Robert Moses carved up New York, in 1974. Much of what Moses was building was highways. And he was not alone. Moses might have been distinctive in his power, but planners were slicing highways through communities all across the nation. Cities fought back, culminating in the so-called highway revolts, in which residents organized to block the roads being cut into their neighborhoods—and, in doing, built connections and coalitions and tactics for opposing all manner of development.

I lived in Harlem for five years when I first moved to the United States. If Moses is your hero of development...man. Rough.

> Anti-growth politics could, and often did, tip into a kind of misanthropy aimed at newcomers. Those who already lived in a place were its stewards, its guardians, its voice. Those who wanted to move to that place were recast as a consumptive horde. Harold Gilliam, who wrote the "This Land" column for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, put it grimly. "Ultimately, every conservation problem is a population problem. Every effort to save some vestige of

I am not actually sympathetic to NIMBYism, but again, if your worldview is "everyone who had a problem with Robert Moses and/or gentrification was a misanthropist," you might be a fucking racist.

Solidarity with my neighbors and the families I taught music to in Harlem who didn't deserve to have their kids suck down highway exhaust just for being black, fuck this bullshit, and fuck people who take it seriously. If you can't envision a future for development without displacing and/or poisoning the lungs of the children of communities poorer then you don't deserve to be in the policy design seat.

Especially if you're not even serious about how financing works in the first place. I'm not going to defend some overly inflated public housing development budget per se, but I'm not going to indulge the "I guess we have to poison some kids" bullshit of people who insist we don't have the money to pay for things without even taking seriously how public finance works, and so far this book hasn't shown it is interested in doing anything of the sort.

> To the extent that degrowth has a specific climate plan, it is to shut off or scale down areas of production it deems destructive, like military investment, meat and dairy production, advertising, and fast fashion. There is some appeal to this. All of us can identify some aspect of the global production system that seems wasteful, unnecessary, or harmful. The problem is that few of us identify the same aspects of the global production system.

Yes, sure. That's politics. Some people want to invest in public schools, others want to invest in golf courses. Pick the right side and fight for it.

> But to suggest such a thing is to court political ruin. People want to eat meat, and they want that meat to be cheap and plentiful. The right accuses the left of scheming to ban hamburgers for a reason. The left denies those accusations and leaves direct confrontation with the meat industry out of its legislation for the same reason. There is no near-term politics that will ban meat consumption or redistribute it from richer countries to poorer countries.

As far as I know, the 'abundists' aren't picking a fight with meat producers either. Indeed, they don't seem to be even willing to pick a fight with homeowners. Just the Left.

Is this serious politics? I support lab grown meat and vertical farms, the Left isn't the enemy of those solutions in my experience. The Republicans hate that shit. How's Tyler Cowen going in that fight?

> For all the radicalism of his book, even Hickel flinches from the task he sets for himself. He does not suggest anything akin to ridding the world of the factory farms that produce most of our beef. Instead, he proposes "to end the subsidies high-income countries give to beef farmers" and notes that "researchers are also testing proposals for a tax on red meat."[4] Fine proposals. But not the revolutionary upheaval that will cut our emissions rapidly enough to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.[5] And that is even assuming you could pass a global or multinational tax on meat. Which you could not.

Again, I don't know Hickel personally, but this seems like a pretty ridiculous strawman argument from people that have spent a career avoiding taking hard positions when they know it won't be politically well received. At this point, we don't have the tech to scale up lab-grown meat, and to the extent that's being developed it's silicon valley-funded companies that will likely bring with any new innovations a new form of Amazon/Uber style corporatism that is going to fuck over a lot of people who rely on farming for a living.

If Klein/Thompson won't even say the words labor politics, I really don't have any interest in them lecturing others for not tackling the farmers head-on. The way you avoid a Dust Bowl-style farmer wipeout in any serious transition away from cattle herding is to offer the children of farmers better opportunities to work in a future economy.

You know, jobs, and labor politics.

> with even greater force. If you cannot imagine convincing people to change their desires in the presence of energy abundance, how do you imagine convincing them to accept the rapid, collective scarcity that degrowth demands?

I'm not a degrowther, but framing climate/environmental justice as solely a matter of energy is going to get you to ask stupid questions like this.

There are all sorts of forms of pro-social *production/consumption/recreation* that are not very environmentally taxing: music, massages, comedy, hiking, family care, community gardening, artisanal/craftwork, hanging out in bars, god forbid even sex and dating. What would it take to invest in that kind of economic revitalization at the expense of all the other stuff? That's not 'scarcity' as I think of it.

> But the first step to building the clean economy of tomorrow is building the clean economy of today. That is a daunting task.

A lot of nice language/words in support of clean energy, obviously hard to disagree. But again, where's the labor politics in all of this? Where's any serious discussion of the difficulties of a Just Transition?

"The Green New Deal but FUCK THE LEFT" is not a vision for building anything in any just manner.

Of course, if you want to strawman the countervision you're positing your preferred approach against, you focus on fully automated luxury communism and 'pro-scarcity' degrowth, not a pro-social, pro-public, pro-labor alternative to market-driven production built upon tight full employment, an expansive vision of public fiscal capacity (ie the Green New Deal), and genuine abundance in the things that can be produced near-without limit (informational goods).

But that politics – the politics of labor, of non-proprietary technology/culture, is not the politics of Silicon Valley abundists, is it.

> For decades, American liberalism has measured its successes in how near it could come to the social welfare system of Denmark. Liberals fought for expansions of health insurance and paid vacation leave and paid sick days and a heftier earned-income tax credit and an expanded child tax credit and decent retirement benefits. Worthy causes, all. But those victories could be won, when they were won, largely inside the tax code and the regulatory state. Building a social insurance program does occasionally require new buildings. But it rarely requires that many of them. This was, and is, a liberalism that changed the world through the writing of new rules and the moving about of money.

For the unfamiliar, this sounds like some standard nordic-love. But Denmark is notoriously market-friendly and loose in its labor market design. It is not the public jobs-centric vision of 1990's Sweden, or the union-centric vision of Norway. Maybe some American liberals have Danish fever, but to conflate this with the entirety of the left's imaginary, and then critiquing it for not building, is to conflate the most market-centric/neoliberal social democratic country in the region with its left-edge and then criticize the Left for not caring about production.

Some of us do care about building things, which is why we also don't look to Denmark! Pick better antagonistic examples!

> The climate crisis demands something different. It demands a liberalism that builds. The Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act add up to about $450 billion in clean energy investments, subsidies, and loan guarantees. This is how the scale of such bills is normally described in Washington: by a price tag. The more money, the bigger the bill. That is an incomplete measure, at best.
>
> If we could build faster, the numbers could rise. If we could build cheaper, the money would go further. That $450 billion is only an estimate. Many of the subsidies in these bills are open-ended. They will go to as many projects as can use them. These bills could spend trillions of dollars if we can build that infrastructure fast enough. They could spend far less than $450 billion if projects become too hard to permit. They could waste tens or hundreds of billions on projects that are never completed. What matters is not what gets spent. What matters is what gets built.

The non-mentioning of the Green New Deal and its intentional centering of labor is becoming quite obvious. This is a fair critique of Bidenism, it's not a fair critique of the left that cares about full employment and production. Ironically, when I think of people who believe in cash transfers uber alles, I think of Yglesias, Klein's wife Annie Lowrey (a longtime UBI advocate), and Matt Bruenig, a anti-Job Guarantee leftist that a lot of these liberals like and find to be one of the smarter wonks on the left.

Some of left doesn't suffer from the disease of money illusion, which is why they need to be erased from this narrative for it to remain coherent.

> We looked into it, and it turns out that all those countries also have governments. So the problem cannot simply be government. Nor is the problem unions—another favored bugaboo of the right. Union density is higher in all those countries than it is in the United States.

This is a good line (don't tell Josh Barro!).

I wonder how many people who self-identify as abundists, or who are leading 'the groups' within that movement would agree?

I wonder if Derek Kaufman, former global head of fixed-income trading at hedge fund Citadel, 'Third Way' board member, and founder of the 'Inclusive Abundance Institute' would say unions aren't the problem? Billionaire John Arnold? What about Walton family or Michael Bloomberg?

> The more organized groups you have, Olson says, the more fights over distribution you'll have, the more lobbying you'll have, the more complex regulations you'll have, the more bargaining you'll get between groups, and the harder it will be to get complex projects done. Affluent, stable societies have more negotiations. And that means they have more negotiators. There's great good in that. It means people's concerns can be voiced, their needs can be met, their ideas can be integrated, their insights can be shared. It also means that it becomes difficult to get much of anything done. This is why China can build tens of thousands of miles of high-speed rail in the time it takes California to fail to build hundreds of miles of high-speed rail. China does not spend years debating with judges over whether it needs to move a storage facility. That power leads to abuse and imperiousness. It also leads to high-speed rail.
>
> But Olson, who died in 1998, was right when he said that affluence is a gift that comes with costs. And those costs concentrate in the areas of the economy in which the number of groups that have to be consulted mounts. From this

I can appreciate this framing, even while holding to my earlier point about California etc not being particularly representative of a meaningful 'left' politics. But the key question then becomes, to me: if you're going to reduce the power of some 'groups', or alternatively, boost the power of specific decision-makers/stakeholders to circumvent or override the power of other groups, which ones?

It's one thing to oppose giving a lot of groups 'veto' power, it's another thing to expect them to happily cede power to a group, person, institution, or process that has shown they don't consider their interests whatsoever or deprioritize them systematically. So then the question becomes: which coalition of interests do you want to accommodate to reach a minimum critical mass to get it done, which groups do you want to reduce their veto while still considering their interests in a process they don't control, and which groups do you want to reduce their power/influence entirely at their expense?

Again, going to my earlier example: does anyone really think that the Left would oppose granting Bernie Sanders extensive powers to override any red tape in the pursuit of a progressive 'abundance' agenda? Or is the broad skepticism on the left at their approach coming from the kinds of people or groups that Klein/Thompson and their compatriots have clearly indicated they are comfortable getting into bed with in order to 'get shit done'?

Goethe once said "Nothing shows a man's character more than what he laughs at." I'd offer a corollary: Nothing shows a man's politics more than which group he's willing to throw under the bus to achieve his goals.

So who, exactly, is the Abundance movement (with a heavy heart, sigh), saying we should throw under the bus to achieve abundance? And to the extent the Left dreams of a different kind of abundance, who are they saying we should throw under the bus?

> One of Olson's insights is that a complex society begins to reward those who can best navigate complexity. That creates an incentive for its best and brightest to become navigators of complexity and perhaps creators of further complexity. "Every society, whatever its institutions and governing ideology, gives greater rewards to the fittest—the fittest for *that* society," Olson writes.[67] A young country that is still in its building phase creates opportunities for engineers and architects. A mature country that has entered its negotiations phase creates opportunities for lawyers and management consultants.

I get that this is supposed to be a dig, but 1) this country has always been built for lawyers and always been about negotiations. Come on, this is like American History 101. Even the bloody Fed was a 'compromise'.

Also, where is labor in this story? "best and brightest" is such liberal-coded language. This country created opportunities for *white men* for the majority of its history, and everyone else second. That story is far more important than which specific industry those white men went into (and again, the vast majority of the most powerful ones still...went into law).

And while we're at "what's missing from this story" – where are the bankers? They've been around the entire time too. You can make a case that now it's quant trading as opposed to old vanilla banking or whatever, but like, was there ever a point in U.S. history where Harvard's graduating class was producing more architects than lawyers? Engineers than bankers?

Ironically, it would take a lawyer to enact a job guarantee, to redesign IP laws, to enshrine gender equality and develop a framework to properly remunerate social reproductive labor – all abundance-increasing changes. It would take lawyers to draft new performance, licensure, accreditation and training standards to ensure schools and universities were actually training workers with the skills and knowledge to 'build' the way we need.

Hell, it would take a lawyer to design some sort of international comparative standards-framework that would allow the U.S. to learn from and implement best regulatory practices from the countries that Klein is talking about without coming at the cost of safety and environmental concerns that the U.S. is rightly concerned with.

But why let that get in the way of a good story told by 'wonks' who are obsessed with policy while shitting on the lawyers who are responsible for making it work, when there are hard-hat engineers and architects to romanticize over.

But behind these victories, Nader's revolution created a new layer of government: democracy by lawsuit. The number of lawyers and cases soared in the 1970s and 1980s. The result, Sabin argues, was a new kind of liberalism, which regarded government not as a partner in the solution of societal problems but rather as the source of those very problems.[77]

When the PBS news anchor Jim Lehrer asked Nader why he was qualified to be president in 2000, Nader told him, "I don't know anybody who has sued more [agencies and departments]."[78] Nader and his Raiders believed in government. They defended it from conservative assault. When they criticized it—when they fought it, sued it, restrained it—they did so to try to make it better. But those same laws and processes were available for anyone else to use, too. You can bog clean energy projects down in environmental reviews. You can use a process meant to stop the government from building a highway through your town to keep a nonprofit developer from building affordable housing down the block. "It was as if liberals took a bicycle apart to fix it but never quite figured out how to get it running properly again," Sabin writes.[79]

I'm not much of a Nader fan – I think the 'micro' turn of the left in this period came at the expense of a more fundamental macro politics that I have spent much of my career trying to resuscitate/recenter. But this is such dodgy/crude storytelling – "Nader succeeded but also is the worst!".

The problem was the anti-government turn more broadly in the Democratic party. The Atari Democrats that become the New/Third Way Democrats that are now bankrolling...the Abundance movement and Niskanen etc. Carter and his anti-labor, anti-macro, anti-full employment politics etc.

The fact the "same laws and processes" were available for others to use (and abuse) is because those others had power and wielded it. Do we really think they wouldn't have done it anyway?

This is like blaming woke language for the resurgence in outright white nationalism and cultural reaction. "If only we didn't have DEI programs and woke language we wouldn't have MAGA or Charlottesville." Stupid stupid stupid.

We already had those bad force, it isn't the fault of a few people who got a few wins on the board that the other side eventually worked out how to twist them negatively again. That's just water eventually running back downhill again, as it always does outside of the rare moments someone manages to defy gravity and push it up.

The whole bit on adversarial legalism strikes me as both true at one level but also missing a larger point. Lawyers have been at the center of this country from the beginning, as has federal-state tensions, judicial supremacy etc. This stuff isn't some late 20th century invention, you can find all of that stuff in the late 18th/early 19th century.

Again, how is this presented as some novel insight? Are we talking about the same United States, where like 35 out of 55 of the delegates at the Constitutional Convention were lawyers?

> When you make legal training the default training for a political career, you make legal thinking the default thinking in politics. And legal thinking centers around statutory language and commitment to process, not results and outcomes.

Not to play the lawyer card here, but I don't think this is an accurate description of all lawyering. I worked as an attorney for children, the "best interest of the child" standard is pretty fucking vague and there were basically no rules of procedure in family court. I spend my time now thinking about finance and monetary law, and trust me, there's not much 'commitment to process' in the legal structure of the Federal Reserve, nor do private contract lawyers spend much time obsessing over statutory language. 'Getting shit done' and getting *over* procedural hurdles is a lot of what lawyers think about, not creating barriers. "Pick up the phone" etc etc.

Now, I can say that, and *also* think this is also probably true:

> management consultants and financiers. In politics, it will be lawyers. There is nothing wrong with lawyers. There might be something wrong with a country or a political system that needs so many of them and that makes them so central to its operations. That might be a system so consumed trying to balance its manifold interests that it can no longer perceive what is in the public's interest.

But again that gets us back to the big glaring omission in this book so far – what politics, exactly, is being proposed?

Shifting power to a more parliamentary system, where the legislature has more power over the judiciary and can ignore adverse rulings, and where the head of government is subordinated within legislature and as a result has a democratic mandate that harmonizes fiscal and executive power rather than putting them at odds, makes sense to me. As does embracing the political superiority of both 'the mob' and organized labor over legal proceduralism, recognizing the historical preferencing of legal norms and processes of bourgeois/middle class interests at the expense of the poor.

But that's not really what this book seems to be hinting at when it says the problem is excessive legalism – that the solution is more parliamentary politics and a revitalized labor movement. Certainly not going to get you friends at Niskanen or with billionaire backers.

> In 2020, J. B. Ruhl and James Salzman published a paper titled "What Happens When the New Green Deal Meets the Old Green Laws?" They began by imagining a presidential debate in which two opposing candidates describe their vision for remaking America's energy infrastructure. One candidate proposes doubling down on oil and gas production, building more freeways, and crisscrossing the country in natural gas pipelines. The other candidate imagines an all-out race to an economy built atop renewables, with electric vehicle chargers everywhere and a national high-speed rail system anchoring American transit. "These two infrastructure agendas could not be more different in vision, but they are very much alike in one key respect," Ruhl and Salzman noted. "Each is an environmental impact assessment and project permitting nightmare."[92]

See above re: whether the Left would support a 'state of emergency' decreed by Bernie Sanders in support of a Green New Deal, vs one enacted by Michael Bloomberg.

Like, this just doesn't land at all with me, to be honest.

> environmental laws and rules. "Most people do not like the idea of an oil pipeline or electric transmission line running through their backyard," write Ruhl and Salzman. "Guess what—they do not like the idea of wind turbines or solar panels in their backyard, either."[93]

"The government is going to come and install solar panels on your roof for free to lower your electricity bill and save the environment, so scary!"

"The Keystone Pipeline will destroy Native Land"

"These are the Same, To Me."

Stop insulting the reader's intelligence. These two aren't the same in any meaningful sense because at the point you get the Sanders Green New Deal Presidency, you've already changed the political landscape, and the whole point of the Green New Deal is to do good things while at the same time stopping fucking over those historically fucked along the way.

Would some conservatives try to cynically wield proceduralism to oppose solar panels because they believe the Green New Deal is basically communism? Yes. Would Ralph Nader be there to defend them in the name of his 1970's legacy? I sure as hell hope not.

When you've got the politics on your side, you bang on the politics. When you don't you bang on the procedure. When you have neither, the other side hits you with the politics and the procedure. You want less procedure, start with better politics and once the trust is rebuilt the need for procedure fetishism goes away. It's not that hard.

Chapter 3:

I don't have much to say about all this zoning stuff, it's out of my lane. I found Sandeep's review convincing that a lot of these anecdotes were misleading/missing key parts of the stories they were presenting.

I could say a lot more about finance, macro and labor, but the book doesn't want to talk about them at all. It can't even meaningfully acknowledge the difference between public and private funding capacity. Instead we hear all the ways public dollars have excessive strings, and nothing about how the private sector is limited by profitability considerations, and more fundamentally, hard budget constraints (vs the 'great infinity sign in the sky' that the federal government enjoys, even over state/local governments).

> "Federal funding is probably more restrictive than any other," Marston continued. "Every year we get money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The city often gives their share to us, but on top of the auditing and tracking that the federal money comes with, they add on their own conditions, like we can't use it for staffing. Just all this stuff that gets added on in the process."[24]

Which gets to the same problem of the book's obscured politics mentioned above by the time we get to the 'everything bagel liberalism' critique:

> One problem liberals are facing at every level where they govern is that they often add too many goals to a single project. A government that tries to accomplish too much all at once often ends up accomplishing nothing at all.

What is really being asked here, as I read it, is that to keep things moving you have to throw some stakeholders under the bus. So again, 1) which ones does the abundance agenda want to throw under the bus, 2) what's the theory of politics that this particular coalition will be successful, and 3) why should anyone left of Obama trust this coalition given who is currently championing it?

At the risk of being accused of being exactly the kind of target of this critique, my background is in early childhood music education. You have to raise the 'whole kid' and the performance has to address every aspect – posture, rhythm, pitch, dynamics, phrasing, etc – to be successful. When you're trying to raise happy, healthy, well-rounded children, everything is, indeed, everything – there's no "give me the cliff notes" or "what's the bottom line" or any of that shit. That narrative is attractive to billionaire donors and silicon valley bros used to reducing everything to 0s and 1s but it doesn't work for the environment or safe, vibrant communities.

I'm a toasted poppy with scallion person myself, but if the choice is an everything or a plain with plain cream cheese, it's a no brainer. Bread *and* roses, thanks.

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construction by 26 percent.[39] Government cannot do everything itself. But it needs enough know-how to oversee the projects it is doing.

Two whole pages about how outsourcing to the private sector is bad, and then we get this flaccid conclusion. The problem is we have 4 managers per 1000 when we needed 5? Let's aim a little higher shall we.

At the EDD, the core technological layer was called the single client database, which runs on an IBM mainframe from the '80s.[43] Parts of it are written in a programming language called COBOL, which dates back to 1959. COBOL is almost never used today, and it is hard to find engineers who know how to program in it. Making matters worse, parts of the single client database were designed to run on those old monochrome displays that showed green text on a black background. Because nobody makes those displays any longer, the staff used virtual emulators to access the system—they would run software on new computers that could mimic the constraints of old computers.

What?! The entire banking sector runs on COBOL. There are definitely benefits to upgrading but part of the reason it hasn't happened is that COBOL is actually very effective in what it does.

Then came more layers. In 2002, the EDD contracted with Deloitte to bring their work online. Deloitte built one system to access the IBM mainframe through a web browser. It built another system to corral and manage

I'm not going to go on some GNU/linux rant, but when you prioritize market-driven technology, you get proprietary balkanization and a limited focus on interoperability. And this isn't just the tech the government uses, or the companies it outsources to build the tech (although those are part of it). It's the entire broader tech ecosystem, it's Microsoft and Google and Amazon etc etc. Capitalism encloses, that's its logic. You want commons and universal systems, you fund it with public money upfront and you insist it stays open.

> It's worth taking seriously what Carroll says there. These were risks. There are reasons these rules are in place. No-bid contracts can enable corruption as well as speed. There are reasons not to put down asphalt when it's raining. But in turning these questions from choices into rules, we have taken discretion and judgment away from people like Carroll. We prefer that projects go badly by the book. We minimize some risks but make delay and high costs routine.
>
> The emergency declaration allowed Shapiro to make choices. He chose to use union labor but to gore a lot of other interests and processes. I-95 reopened in just twelve days—not the "months" initially forecasted. Shapiro did "one heck of a job," President Biden said.[56] His popularity swelled, and he began to be mentioned as a possible future presidential candidate. Turns out people like it when their government gets things done.

In general I support expanded federal preemption and eminent domain powers in the pursuit of a Green New Deal, with all the caveats above that it matters immensely – dispositively even – who is actually doing the governing and making the decisions when those powers are extended.

I'm also not convinced based on these 'anecdotes' that these are the single biggest impediments to getting stuff done in government, as opposed to, you know, concerted opposition to public ownership, the expansion of the public sector, general opposition to strong labor rights, prioritization of market logic, and decades of delegation to private sector actors/market-driven production.

And again, before being accused of being unfair, ***yes, you can find sections in the book that say we need a robust government sector that builds.*** But you also don't see any discussion of actually how to expand the federal workforce, how to rebuild trust in government workers themselves, how to make government jobs well-paying and proudful, how to create and sustain government direct production, how to restructure the logic of production away from markets and towards planning, etc.

Instead, we get lines like "government cannot do everything itself. But it needs enough know-how to oversee the projects it is doing," and anecdotes about how Governor Shapiro saved the day by invoking emergency powers to hire the right private contractors. And we get this kind of low-key dog whistle to neoliberalism/centrism even while trying to cover their bases and sound progressive:

> Liberals have chosen to trust elected politicians and government workers less and trust regulatory and judicial processes more to ensure that government delivers. That may have made sense in a past era, but given the problems we face now, it is a mistake. Whether government is bigger or smaller is the wrong question. What it needs to be is better. It needs to justify itself not through the rules it follows but through the outcomes it delivers.

No, the government *does* need to be bigger as well as better. Why not just acknowledge that? And we need better wages and labor rights for government workers as much as red tape-cutting. Why not actually engage meaningfully? Why is that stuff completely missing from this book after page 2? These writers have had some time to reflect on how to negotiate compromises to sate powerful stakeholders. Is it so unreasonable to be suspicious that maybe it's to make it attractive to some, uh, 'groups'?

Chapter 4:

Talking about science funding woes without talking about underfunding of America universities, and the administrative bloat and deprofessionalisation that has come with neoliberal funding and student debtification is notable to me.

> The world is filled with problems we cannot solve without more invention. In the fight against climate change, the clean energy revolution will require building out the renewable energy that we have already developed. But decarbonization will also require technology that doesn't exist yet at scale: clean jet fuel, less carbon-intensive ways to manufacture cement, and machines to remove millions of tons of carbon from the atmosphere.

I've done my IP rant a few times, but once again, the omission here is deafening.

> If progressives underrate the centrality of invention in their politics, conservatives often underrate the necessity of government policy in invention. "The government has outlawed technology," the investor and entrepreneur Peter Thiel said in a debate with Google CEO Eric Schmidt in 2014, echoing a popular view among techno-optimists and libertarians that government laws mostly block innovation. But many of Silicon Valley's most important achievements have relied on government largesse. Elon Musk is now a vociferous critic of progressive policy. But he has also been a beneficiary of it. In

I get that this is an airport book aimed at normies, but this undergraduate 'both side-ism' shit is insulting to people's intelligence. And again, progressives don't underrate invention, in my experience, they're suspicious of people that equate innovation with private market-based profit-seeking corporations in silicon valley. This book does absolutely nothing to dissuade them of that suspicion.

> Republican administrations. Musk has become a lightning rod in debates over whether technological progress comes from public policy or private ingenuity. But he is a walking advertisement for what public will and private genius can unlock when they work together.

"Private genius"? Bootlick harder, seriously.

> expansion. But while the dominant fight in Washington is typically about how we *buy* health care, we rarely talk about the health care that *exists to be bought*. After all, in the future, progressives don't just want everyone to have an insurance card; they want that card to provide access to a world of treatments that liberates patients from unnecessary disease and debilitating pain.

Vomit. Health care is a service you provide. It's not a commodity.

Ctrl+F search for 'Medicare' = 3 hits – none discussing direct public provisioning.

> Beyond merely regulating technology, the state is often a key actor in its creation. An American who microwaves food for breakfast before using a

We could be having a really interesting conversation about how to prevent the re-privatization of bsaic research funded by public dollars (cough cough Google). But we won't, will we.

> But progress was painfully slow, and the NIH rejected practically all of their grant applications. "People were not interested in mRNA," Weissman said. "The people who reviewed the grants said, 'mRNA will not be a good

For every one of these stories, we could be telling ten about how lack of perceived profitability/monetization led to important scientific innovations being shelved by the private sector, and what that implies for a liberalism dependent on market-driven 'innovation' as its primary driver, which even the Democrats prefer today. Any guesses why we aren't hearing that in this story?

Ctrl+F search for 'profit' = 1 hit – in the introductory 'vision for the future', referring to sharing the profits of AI productivity.
Ctrl+F search for 'profitability' = 0 hits.
Ctrl+F search for 'monetization' = 0 hits.

> How can we possibly account for this puzzle: more scientists, more money, more years of education, more knowledge, more technology, and more papers —but, in many fields, slower progress? In 2008, the Northwestern economist

This seems a bit myopic – surely there's been, uh, some changes in the university model?

> If keeping up the pace of scientific progress demands more resources, it points to a clear solution: recruit more scientists and spend more money. These aren't bad ideas; they might be great ones. "As a share of the economy, government-funded R&D has declined in the last sixty years," the economist Heidi Williams said.[47] If scientific spending is fundamental to economic growth, this suggests that the US has hugely underinvested in basic research.

Couldn't be this simple, could it?

More money and more scientists might help the US fight the knowledge burden. But it doesn't solve what we've called the Karikó Problem. In fact, in the same way that throwing housing vouchers into a market with insufficient supply raises home prices, throwing more money into a flawed science system might exacerbate its problems.

Let's define the Karikó Problem like this: American science funding has become biased against young scientists and risky ideas. What is most obvious is that American science is getting older. In the early 1900s, some of the most

The idea that the NIH has become deeply biased against risky and novel research—and too fixated on funding only those projects that are practically guaranteed to succeed—is so widespread that it has become "the biggest cliché in science," said Azoulay, the MIT economist.[57] In 2012, Gregory Petsko, a

Again, I understand that this is an airport book designed to be simplistic in its storytelling, but shouldn't it at least address the obvious facial connection between underfunding in general, and a prioritization of older scientists and safer ideas? Even a cursory discussion of finance would help here – when market exuberance is high, all sorts of increasingly risky ventures get financed. When markets are risk-averse, there is a flight to 'safe' assets.

Of course universities and grant-funding institutions take less risks and prefer people with extensive track records when they have less money to give out. There's less room for error in showing return on investment. Guess it might be that simple after all.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Thomas Edison proved a new model: the corporate research lab. Inside the two-story shed he built in Menlo Park, New Jersey, Edison oversaw a team of "muckers"—his term for professional experimenters—who fleshed out his sketches and helped him invent, among other things, the incandescent lightbulb and the first instruments for recording sound and video. Edison's team-based success became too obvious to ignore, and other companies copied him, with magical results. In the 1930s, DuPont's Experimental Station developed synthetic rubber, nylon, and Kevlar. Meanwhile, the university scientists who worked outside these labs mostly relied on funding from private philanthropies, such as the Rockefeller Foundation.

In all these triumphs, one actor was notably absent: the federal government. Washington played almost no role in supporting innovation before the 1900s, outside of a few programs that subsidized research in farming, agriculture, and defense. But just as World War II reshaped borders and rules around the world, so too did it reshape the US innovation system.

Come on. No discussion at all of the patent system and how it encouraged innovators to come to the U.S.? The federal government had no role at all (except for establishing and enforcing legal monopolies)? Really? Weak shit. Really weak shit.

> The country emerged from World War II with a new way of thinking about science and innovation: *this is a job for the government*. In 1945, Bush drew on the lessons of the war to draft a blockbuster report on the future of American innovation titled "Science, the Endless Frontier." The most important idea that emerged from the Bush report was the primacy of "basic research"—a term Bush meant to refer to science at universities and research centers that seeks to understand the world "without thought of practical ends." Bush wrote:

Nothing about the changing IP landscape of this industry/sector? Nothing? Bueller?

> Shannon feared. As science funding became more entrenched inside the federal government, politicians did what they do best. They created paperwork. In the

I'm no fan of excessive paperwork and grants are annoying. But you know who else create ridiculous grant-related paperwork? Billionaire philanthropists pushing non-government 'private sector' alternatives to public funding models. Little dogwhistles to pro-market forces.

And wait, this *isn't* the Niskanen wing of the abundance movement? Are they sure?

> I'm going to buy a Corvette with the grant money?"[75] The rules exist for a reason, Doench acknowledged. Some scientists in the past probably abused their funding. But just as environmental laws passed in response to twentieth-

Come on, this is so glib and flippant I can't believe even he is taking himself seriously when he says it. Again, I'm not a fan of a lot of unnecessary paperwork, but this is in the same section as talking about how much political hay is made of spurious spending. Surely at least *some* discussion of how to avoid high-visibility scandals of misuse of government grant funding in order to avoid those scandals destroying trust and faith in government funding in general is in order?

> While Karikó flashed the intelligence of a future Nobel-winning scientist, she wasn't world-class at a skill that Azoulay calls "grantsmanship"—the ability to write winning project proposals.[77] "There is a hidden curriculum for navigating grants, and it is critical for success as a scientist today," Azoulay said. "But those skills are weakly correlated with scientific potential, and they might be negatively correlated."[78] We have—even if by accident—designed a system that often privileges the game of performing the act of science over the actual practice of science.

Like performing the act of having a novel substantive policy vision over the actual act of having one in order to garner press attention and get generous donor funding and support from third way Dems seeking to rehabilitate their brand and punch left…

Neither liberals nor conservatives have articulated a clear politics of invention. Neither have prioritized the rigorous analysis of public policy in sciences.

This is Dean Baker erasure.

Ctrl+F search for ‘Dean Baker’ = 0 hits.

The US has thrown tens of billions of dollars annually into scientific discovery. But it hasn’t brought as much progress as we’d expect. As we explained in the previous chapter, we have haphazardly burdened the scientific process with the same flavor of procedural kludge that has slowed down other critical parts of the economy. What’s more, as we’ll explain in this chapter, we

Absolutely no discussion of any private sector equivalent, yet alone philanthropy sector. And what about that single line acknowledgment earlier about the relative underfunding of science in the U.S.? All that gone in this narrative.

And that’s before you get to the rise of the ‘stay in research only long enough to cash out’ model. Universities are under wholesale attack from the right, but does that matter? Apparently not.

And if a lot of this was driven by the Cold War, what does its end imply? What is China doing differently with its universities?

Seventy years ago, the *New York Times* had anticipated that America’s solar energy revolution would lead to “limitless energy.” But rather than treat limitless clean energy as a project of national urgency, the US treated solar panels as a trifling inessential, with no long-term plan to make or deploy them at scale. And we lost decades of progress because of it. In Germany, between 1990 and 2015, the share of electricity production that came from renewable energy like solar rose from about 3.5 percent to 30 percent.[42] But in the US over the same period, solar’s share of electricity stagnated. These were wasted decades,

Genuinely confused by this – the section right before this ascribes the decline of solar progress in the U.S. to Reagan’s hostility. This makes it sound like there was a continuous policy of neglect for 40 years. Which is it? Partisan climate/energy politics or long-term planning failure?

> For the past few decades, the eureka myth has walked hand in hand with another attractive fable: that the US government is helpless as an investor in new technologies. One useful summary of this view came from a 2012 *Economist* essay, which claimed "governments have always been lousy at picking winners,

What about "governments have always been lousy at building things directly?" Even the choice of 'question' focuses on private production and governments funding/picking among private options. It's giving pure neoliberal right here.

> The smartest question, then, is not *if* the government should intervene in markets, but how to do so. Nearly one hundred years ago, the economist John Maynard Keynes offered an elegant answer in his 1926 book *The End of Laissez-Faire*. "The important thing for government is not to do things which individuals are doing already, and to do them a little better or a little worse; but to do those things which at present are not done at all," he wrote. If technological progress requires money or resources that are beyond the scope of any one company, and government does nothing, progress slows down. This is

Are you kidding me? Keynes is cited but only in support of correcting market failures? One of the things governments can do is ensure a tight full employment economy. Seems important to a story of building..abundance.

> OWS solved problems by enabling the private sector rather than commanding it. With few exceptions, such as the Veterans Administration, "no federal employee was directly involved in manufacturing, packaging, shipping, or injecting a single dose of any Warp Speed COVID vaccine," Mango wrote in his book on the program. "We let one of the biggest pharmaceutical distributors in the world (McKesson) handle the vaccines, let the most successful delivery companies in the world (UPS and FedEx) deliver the vaccines, let those entities who knew best how to vaccinate millions of Americans (CVS and Walgreens) conduct vaccinations."[60]
>
> Finally, the simplest part of OWS is perhaps the most important: the vaccines were free. The federal government bought out the vaccines from pharmaceutical companies, which allowed them to sell the shots to the public for any price they wanted. They chose the price of $0.00. For much of 2021, the most cutting-edge biotechnology in America was also the cheapest therapy in the world.

Getting close to the end of the book, the dogwhistling getting louder now. Whatever we are advocating, we PROMISE we aren't advocating public ownership and socialism! That stuff about a stronger government sector, don't worry, it was really all about financing and 'picking' private sector winners, and ultimately guaranteeing market-produced output and subsidizing it for consumers.

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course into a glide path. In 2020, the US government similarly identified the bottlenecks to rapid vaccine development and removed them. In both cases, the government served as a chief national problem solver, molding its policies to fit the moment. It is a vision of a new kind of entrepreneurial state. It is the government as a bottleneck detective.

Subtle rhetorical moves here, but the impact is undeniable. A government that removes bottlenecks is a government not actually doing the pushing-down-the-pipeline itself. The private sector does the stuff, the government works out whats in the way and removes it. It's the sweeper in curling, someone else (ie private market actors) is responsible for pushing the stone.

Remember, this is a government that as presented in the book might as well have no workers – the authors have emphatically made sure not to mention government employees at almost every step in their story (except for the brief section against outsourcing, but that ended with advocating more 'oversight' and emphasizing empowering decision-makers to cut through red tape and make risky decisions. The government is just politicians, and agency heads, regulators, and state-of-exception dictators. So who is doing the building? Well, not the 'public sector', and not the labor movement (because we're not talking about them either). That leaves...oh that's right. Markets and private sector companies.

And just in case it wasn't clear, here's the opening on the section on the government as 'Bottleneck Detective':

The US faces complex challenges in housing, energy, science policy, invention, and innovation. Solving them must begin with the appreciation that these are different industries, with different constraints, enmeshed in different markets.

The world is comprised of social problems like housing, energy, science, invention, and innovation. These are structured as **industries**, enmeshed in **markets**, with **constraints** that government must **detect and remove**.

Wait, why are you calling us warmed over neoliberals? Isn't this how everything thinks/sees the world? Except the no-growth, procedurally fetishist, anti-building-stuff Left, of course!

[corporate donor button here].

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should. Imagine somebody is trying to build a new kind of rocket, and you're the czar of rocket innovation policy at the Department of Defense. You have $1 billion that you can use to accelerate the invention. There are several things you can do. You can give the company $1 billion as a simple grant ("here, have the money for nothing"). You can make it a loan ("pay me back later, plus interest"). You can create a so-called loan guarantee ("if you default on a $1 billion loan, I'll pay the lender in full"). These are all examples of *push funding* because the up-front money pushes forward innovation.

But there is another, very different way to use that $1 billion. You can dangle a reward if the rocket company meets some target—say, the construction of three new rockets. As opposed to push funding, this is called *pull funding*. If push funding pays for effort, pull funding pays for success.[72] Warp Speed used both. With push funding, it covered the early expenses of several vaccine makers. With pull funding, it promised to buy a certain number of vaccine doses, provided that the therapies received FDA authorization.

Pull funding is efficient because it only pays out if the technology pans out

I love this example, note what is missing here? Direct public sector production.

This policy—a promise to buy a certain number of early products to accelerate their invention—is called an "advance market commitment," or AMC. An AMC is particularly effective when the world needs an abundance of a brand-new technology that is currently too expensive. For example, pharmaceutical firms assumed that African buyers wouldn't pay back their investment in vaccines. So the commitment to pay for millions of doses unlocked an invention that otherwise wouldn't exist.

This AMC model could unlock other inventions. One of the most devilish

Love to MARKET.

The most important lesson of AMCs is that they make government a more active agent of invention, by identifying bottlenecks in public demand and filling them. "The US often makes financial commitments contingent on

This isn't even trying to be subtle anymore. The government is not "filling" them, it's paying private market actors to fill them. Come on.

Not going to bother screenshotting any of the discussion of AI. You're welcome to bet yourself whether there's any discussion of public ownership, data privacy, or labor politics in it, or whether it's all about energy costs and the need for 'America First' investment strategy.

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wouldn't have caused much geopolitical angst in America. But the US government determined that because Sputnik was a Soviet instrument, the achievement was a crisis that required a response. And in that crucible of insecurity and inspiration, the US created a set of institutions that ultimately put a man on the moon and the internet in our pockets.

The moon race is remembered today as a necessary and broadly popular response to the Soviet threat. But one of the most misunderstood aspects of the space race is that the Apollo program survived because of political persistence, not because of its popularity. In its brief history, the moon mission polled

What institutions?! Surely not, I don't know, a government agency? Today we have SpaceX, so what's the difference, really.

Seriously, there's a lot of valor-stealing from the public sector in this book – at moments it's mentioned fondly, but every time we get into brass tacks practicalities, it's always private actors with government money or 'winner-picking' etc. Overall there's an ambivalence, if not outright disregard, on what rebuilding the actual public sector would and could look like, and that's before we get to the question of public vs private finance.

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writes. The Cold War wasn't just an arms race or a military conflict with the Soviet Union. It was a competition over whose philosophy of government would produce the best outcomes for people. Eisenhower needed to prove that "he could take better care of his ordinary citizens than the leaders of Soviet communism could provide for theirs."[3] That meant embracing the policies of Roosevelt and the Democrats, who had succeeded in raising America's living standards after the Great Depression.

In the 1970s, the New Deal order collapsed beneath the weight of crises it could not contain—stagflation and the Vietnam War, most notably. But there was more to it than that. Abroad, the horrors and absurdities of communism became clearer. At home, millions of oppressed Americans marched, sat-in, and organized for rights. A change in values took hold. The promise of collective action lost its luster. Nurturing the dignity and genius of the individual, in the face of regimes that seemed to squelch both, became the reigning ethos.

Fitting to end where we began – erasing the Job Guarantee, the struggle for full employment, and labor politics from the New Deal and its aftermath, both in Eisenhower's opposition and in the recentering of the Job Guarantee in the politics of the 1960s and 1970s (remember, the Humphrey-Hawkins bill was in 1977, and passed over Carter's general opposition and attempts to gut its most Job Guarantee-esque provisions, which nevertheless survived in some form until being rendered dead letter by Carter's Fed Chair nominee, Volcker, who drove the final nails into the coffin of the labor movement with high interest rates in the 1980 – all history completely missing from this book).

> Eisenhower had kept.[6] Much of even the liberal legislation of the age—including the major environmental bills we've discussed throughout this book—worked by centering the individual, making it easier for Americans to slow the government by suing it. The Soviet Union collapsed, proving the

The Job Guarantee in its purest form involved a legal right to sue for a job. Notably, this was the most contentious part of its vision, and the one that never made it into either the 1946 or 1977 bills. Again, Klein has been close enough to Job Guarantee discourse for the past decade that the omission of any discussion of all of that is deliberate in this book.

> Liberals might detest the language that Trump and Vance use to demonize immigrants. But blue America practices its own version of scarcity politics.

Yeah, like the Federal Reserve. And people who talk about 'taxpayer money' and the importance of independent central banks. You know, the authors of the book.

> We see it in the climate movement, which helped persuade the Biden administration to pass a slew of bills intended to expand the supply of clean energy and pull forward needed innovations like green hydrogen. Environmentalists realized that sacrifice and scarcity was a losing politics. They needed a strategy that married the life Americans want with the clean energy the planet could tolerate. Investments in solar and wind installation, in electric vehicle plants and factories to manufacture next-generation batteries, have rocketed upward since.
>
> > It will also require opposing visions of scarcity that are gaining adherents on the left. The values of the degrowther movement have gained momentum among Western intellectuals. The environmental devastation that has accompanied modernity seems like an equation with an obvious solution: If this is what progress has wrought, then regress is necessary. If this is the cost of going forward, then we must go backward. In its strongest versions, this philosophy is too politically impractical to gain many adherents or wield much power. But its weaker manifestations are everywhere and have been since "Small Is Beautiful" became a rallying cry in the '70s.
> >
> > Comparatively, abundance is a return to an older tradition of leftist thought. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels acknowledged that capitalism was superior to its predecessor, feudalism, at producing goods and wealth. "The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together," they wrote.[23] They did not want to end this revolution in production. They wanted to accelerate it.

Come the fuck on. The Green New Deal centered **labor**. La-bor. Wor-kers. The people who actually "build" stuff, not Donald Fucking Trump the real estate billionaire who stiffs actual workers every chance he gets.

> Just as feudalism blocked production that only capitalism could unleash, so did capitalism constrain an abundance that a new paradigm might unleash. Core to this analysis of the economy was an idea that has come to be called the "fettering of production."[24] Marx observed that many companies' obsession with profit kept the entire economy from exploring ideas that threatened incumbent margins or failed to produce immediate returns. Among capitalism's many sins, Marx wrote, was that it prevented the most wondrous and useful technology from being invented and deployed in the first place. An economy run amok with useless fettering serves the rich few at the expense of the poorer many.
>
> Marx's aim was not to turn the production machine off, but to direct its ends toward a shared abundance: to unburden the forces of production and make possible that which had been impossible to imagine. There is much he got wrong, but one need not be a communist to see the wisdom in this analysis.

This is so rich. After an entire book that ignored not only the labor question, but indeed money and finance and macroeconomics entirely, to try to steal Marx's valor here is just so on the damn nose. He had a pretty clear sense of what he saw as the next steps post-capitalism ('lower form' communism, on the way to eventual 'higher-form communism'), and it involved replacing capitalist 'money' with 'labor certificates' that were earned by all eligible workers for hours worked. Or, to put it another way, a 'labor standard' for money. The kind of thing a Job Guarantee begins to get us closer towards.

> What we are proposing is less a set of policy solutions than a new set of questions around which our politics should revolve. What is scarce that should be abundant? What is difficult to build that should be easy? What inventions do we need that we do not yet have?

To go back to my original list, what I don't see much interest in is resolving the scarcity of jobs, of care work, of remuneration for gendered labor, and removing IP barriers to new ideas and inventions. I certainly don't see much interest in making it easier to build worker coops, or a labor movement, or inventing technology that respects people's privacy and autonomy and empowers them to organize themselves politically against oligarchs and fascists. A lot of ire against environmental regulations, zoning, and safety standards around housing production, and against government red tape and oversight in federal grants. But not the other stuff.

> To pursue abundance is to pursue institutional renewal. One of the most dangerous political pathologies is the tendency to defend whatever your enemies attack. Decades of attacks on the state have turned liberals into reflexive champions of government. But if you believe in government, you must make it work. To make it work, you must be clear-eyed about when it fails and why it fails.

Government direct production? Government workers? Anything positive to say? Ah well.

But before the future, the present. "Establishing a political order demands far more than winning an election or two," Gerstle writes.

> It requires deep-pocketed donors (and political action committees) to invest in promising candidates over the long term; the establishment of think tanks and policy networks to turn political ideas into actionable programs; a rising political party able to consistently win over multiple electoral constituencies; a capacity to shape political opinion both at the highest levels (the Supreme Court) and across popular print and broadcast media; and a moral perspective able to inspire voters with visions of the good life. Political orders, in other words, are complex projects that require advances across a broad front.[30]

Nothing about actual popular mobilization, organizations, membership-based groups, etc. A few nice words to unions being fine as part of the building process, but no meaningful engagement with their theory of politics. Where is the actual public in this? Just being told who to vote for every four years.

The populist paucity of abundance liberalism.

> Political movements succeed when they build a vision of the future that is imbued with the virtues of the past. In the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt pitched his expansive view of government as a sentinel for American freedoms—of speech, of worship, from want, from fear. Five decades later, Reagan hailed the same virtues, this time by casting government as freedom's nemesis rather than its protector.

Snort. As FDR said: "Government by organized money is just as dangerous as organized mob – unless, you know, they support our abundance agenda, in which case, welcome aboard the train!"

> Abundance contains within it a bigness that befits the American project. It is the promise of not just more, but more of what matters. It is a commitment to the endless work of institutional renewal. It is a recognition that technology is at the heart of progress, and always has been. It is a determination to align our collective genius with the needs of both the planet and each other. Abundance is liberalism, yes. But more than that, it is a liberalism that builds.

Chasing Duck Meme "Whose doing the building, huh? Who are the people doing the building?!"

Behind this book lurk more conversations with more people than we can thank here. But we've particularly benefited from a community of thinkers and writers who've been chiseling away at these ideas, including Alex Tabarrok, Brink Lindsey, Henry Farrell, Heidi Williams, Jennifer Pahlka, Jesse Jenkins, Jerusalem Demsas, Marc Dunkelson, Matthew Yglesias, Noah Smith, Patrick Collison, Rogé Karma, Saul Griffith, Steven Teles, Tyler Cowen, and the folks at the Institute for Progress. Special thanks go to Heidi, Jesse, and Jerusalem, for

Know us by the company we keep, etc.

Postlude:

Okay, so I read the fucking thing. No one can dare accuse me of not reading it.

But BOY am I officially done forever with being lectured about the importance of abundance and building by people who don't actually care about empowering the people who actually build by making sure there's enough jobs for all of the ones who want to, backstopped by a legally enforceable right.

If we want real abundance, we need more workers, more lawyers, less centrist-wonk-wannabe journalist-pundits, and less of the Abundance Movement.