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## High Road Policy

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# Defining and Advancing High Road Policy Concepts, Strategies, and Tactics

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## Defining and Advancing High Road Policy Concepts, Strategies, and Tactics

### Abstract

[Excerpt] This Special Edition of *High Road Policy (HRP)* outlines a vision that opponents of the status quo can choose to stand for. It does so by proposing succinct answers to three basic questions:

- What is the High Road?
- What is High Road Policy?
- Through what means can High Road Policy be advanced?

By answering these questions, this Special Edition of *HRP* aims to provide readers with a clearer understanding of what “High Road Policy” – both the concept and the journal – is all about. Concerning the latter, *HRP*’s Aims and Scope state that the outlet is committed to publishing on “policies, proposals, campaigns, governance arrangements, and other practical strategies for advancing a more democratic economy.” What follows is: (1) an overarching conceptual framework onto which those “policies, proposals,” and so forth can be mapped to determine how compatible they are with a High Road agenda; and (2) a plan of action that (a) articulates a theory of change and (b) introduces three interdependent strategies for implementing that theory of change, thereby supplanting the status quo with a democratic, fair, High Road system over time.

### Keywords

high road, dual power, solidarity economy, anti-racism, cooperation

### Comments

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# HIGH ROAD POLICY

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## Special Extra Edition: Defining and Advancing High Road Policy

*Concepts, Strategies, and Tactics*

### Introduction

Almost immediately after launching *High Road Policy* early in March 2020, the global community was racked by crisis. COVID-19 brought stark death tolls,<sup>1</sup> widespread but still racially disparate impacts on health and well-being,<sup>2</sup> and rampant unemployment.<sup>3</sup> Yet, even as economic indicators plummet to historic lows and tens of millions of residents are being stripped of their jobs, income, and healthcare all at once, billionaires are getting richer.<sup>4</sup> Large corporations are profiting.<sup>5</sup> Environmental regulations are being weakened.<sup>6</sup> And militarized local police forces are committing acts of violence against peaceful protestors and demonstrators in the streets of a purportedly democratic society.<sup>7</sup>

Those demonstrators and protestors – many of whom are first-time activists<sup>8</sup> – are being mobilized by growing numbers of video-recorded incidents of police brutality against persons of color, a perpetual (though too often undocumented) injustice that was punctuated by the abhorrent murder of George Floyd by on-duty police officers in Minneapolis, MN in May 2020.<sup>9</sup>

While these multiplying atrocities can be difficult to keep track of separately, their convergent paths in recent months are demonstrating to the

public just how inseparable they really are. Scores of previously apathetic persons are starting to see<sup>10</sup> how racial and economic inequities, health disparities, environmental injustices, and related social problems come together like a loose-fitting puzzle.<sup>11</sup> “Loose-fitting” in the sense that the cracks between the pieces are now plain enough for many to see the racialized, discriminatory, damaging structures that lie below.

Neither the notion that the prevailing political-economic system is unfair nor the recognition that most crises exacerbate existing racial and social inequities are new. What *is* arguably different right now is that these talking points have made their way out of grassroots organizations and academic research and into the mainstream public discourse. For what seems like the first time in modern American political history, powerful establishment leaders – from House Speaker Pelosi (D-CA)<sup>12</sup> to Senator Romney (R-UT)<sup>13</sup> – are signaling at least some degree of support for proposals calling for systems change. At the same time, recognized advocates for systems change from outside of the political establishment are unseating long-time incumbents<sup>14</sup> – and giving the growing demand for a more equitable society a stronger and louder voice in governmental decision-making.<sup>15</sup>

To carry that momentum forward, it is critical to do more than stand in opposition to the status quo. One must also stand for an alternative to it. Without a clear vision for such an alternative and concrete ideas about how to move toward it, the existing system will win the day. It will win because it's designed to win. Built-in, reinforcing feedback effects make it such that substantial "effort is required just to stay in place," let alone progress to something different.<sup>16</sup>

This Special Edition of *High Road Policy (HRP)* outlines a vision that opponents of the status quo can choose to stand *for*. It does so by proposing succinct answers to three basic questions:

**WHAT IS THE HIGH ROAD?**

**WHAT IS HIGH ROAD POLICY?**

**THROUGH WHAT MEANS CAN HIGH ROAD POLICY BE ADVANCED?**

By answering these questions, this Special Edition of *HRP* aims to provide readers with a clearer understanding of what "High Road Policy" – both the concept and the journal – is all about. Concerning the latter, *HRP's* Aims and Scope state that the outlet is committed to publishing on "policies, proposals, campaigns, governance arrangements, and other practical strategies for advancing a more democratic economy."<sup>17</sup> What follows is: (1) an overarching conceptual framework onto which those "policies, proposals," and so forth can be mapped to determine how compatible they are with a High Road agenda; and (2) a plan of action that (a) articulates a theory of change and (b) introduces three interdependent strategies for implementing that theory of change, thereby supplanting the status quo with a democratic, fair, High Road system over time.

**What is the High Road?**

Because answers to this first question are readily available from existing sources, this section is intended only as a summary introduction.

For deeper engagements with the "High Road" concept, readers can consult the foundational writings of Joel Rogers<sup>18</sup> and his colleagues,<sup>19</sup> as well as our own recent extensions of that work.<sup>20</sup> For present purposes, a short answer to the question is that the High Road describes a society that is constantly progressing toward three *ends*:

**Shared prosperity:** equal opportunities for all humans to "participate in and benefit from" the activities that produce improvements in human well-being;

**Environmental sustainability:** "efficient use, maintenance, and restoration of the environmental services needed to support human life"; and

**Participatory democracy:** governance according to the maxim of "of, by, and for the people."<sup>21</sup>

Those three ends are pursued through *means* that are founded on four essential pillars. Specifically, moving to the High Road requires:

**Anti-racism**  
"actively tearing down, with the intent to fully eradicate, the sources of racial, social, economic, environmental, and political inequity and injustice that presently transcend all scales of our shared society";

**Restoration/reparation**  
"actively investing in, and developing mechanisms that convey, material and symbolic reparations to the people, places, and ecosystems on which inequitable, extractive institutions and policies have thrust disproportionate levels of harm";

**Cooperation/solidarity**  
"actively building new and reinforcing existing mechanisms that produce solidarity and trust and promote cooperative tendencies among diverse members of society"; as well as "actively creating new and reinforcing existing mechanisms that decenter human activities on the planet, realigning and rescaling those activities so they promote the healthy, unimpaired functioning of ecological systems"; and

**Prefiguration**  
"actively defunding or otherwise withdrawing [current] economic support from Low Road

institutions, programs, and regulatory systems, and...[immediately] redirecting those [existing] resources to...anti-racist, reparative, restorative, cooperative, solidaristic High Road alternatives.”<sup>22</sup>

Taken together, these elements provide both a vision for and a map or conceptual framework of the High Road. By overlaying specific actions, proposals, or entities onto that map/framework, it is possible to evaluate how well they advance the High Road vision. Elsewhere we developed a six-question checklist, along with an accompanying decision tree, to help facilitate such evaluations.<sup>23</sup> Rather than reproduce those tools here, we note only that *policies* that fail to move society toward shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and participatory democracy via anti-racist, reparative, cooperative means – in the here and now – are not High Road policies. Likewise, *organizations* that fail to uphold, or actively undermine, the goals and values articulated above are not High Road organizations.

These observations raise an important question(s): what is High Road Policy (and what are High Road organizations)? To answer this question, it is necessary to be clear on what we mean by *policy* and *organization*.

## What is High Road Policy and What Does It Do?

Policy is a messy concept that gets defined in different ways depending on the context. This project embraces an encompassing definition of the term:

“Policies are the written or unwritten guidelines that governments, organizations and institutions, communities, or individuals use when responding to issues and situations.”<sup>24</sup>

In other words, *policy* is not the same as *law*. Law is merely an official, formal subset of policy. Other varieties of policy – both formal and informal – include regulations, budget allocations, interpretations of rules and patterns of rule

enforcement, hiring protocols, compensation structures, standard operating procedures, media decisions on what is newsworthy, curricular choices, funding priorities, community norms and conventions, household roles, and countless others.

When viewed through this lens, *policy* becomes virtually indistinguishable from how Elinor Ostrom – a renowned political scientist who won the 2009 Nobel Prize in economics – defined *institutions*:

“...an institution is...a widely understood rule, norm, or strategy that creates incentives for behavior in repetitive situations...Institutions may be formally described...or...emerge informally... Alone or in a set of related arrangements, they are mechanisms for adjusting behavior in a situation that requires coordination among two or more individuals or groups of individuals.”<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, we tend to use the terms *policy* and *institution* somewhat interchangeably in our writing on the High Road.<sup>26</sup>

When people are linked to one another by a particular set of *policies* (or *institutions*), it is often because they are participants in the same *organization*. An organization is:

“a set of [policies] and participants who have... common...goals and purposes, and who must interact across multiple action situations at different levels of activity... Organizations are the product of human effort to order relations by removing uncertainty in repetitive interactions.”<sup>27</sup>

In this general sense, organizations include political jurisdictions, formal governmental bodies, incorporated businesses (for-profit and not-for-profit), social networks, issue-based coalitions, informal civic associations, households, geographic communities, and any number of other entities.

As with *policies*, there is a seemingly endless variety of *organizations*. More important than trying to come up with comprehensive inventories for either of these concepts is to articulate the fundamental property of social life implicated

in their definitions: In a society, *policies* are enacted, animated, and contested by people in *organizations*. Although not stated explicitly in the preceding definitions, both lived experience and instructive scholarship<sup>28</sup> suggest a corollary to this fundamental property: *People* and *organizations* are linked by *networks* wherein positions and relationships are characterized by varying degrees of *power*.

From these two premises, and the definitions on which they are based, society can be conceived as falling along a continuum that ranges from the Low Road to the High Road (Figure 1). These two “ideal types” can be summarized by the predominant impulses or tendencies that characterize four key components of the societal system: People, Organizations, Networks, and Power.

At the Low Road extreme: People are incentivized to take mostly self-interested and status-seeking actions; Organizations are internally and externally competitive and antidemocratic; Networks are hierarchical and often oppressive for those who occupy lower positions; Power is concentrated; and Policy rewards and reinforces these impulses and tendencies.

At the opposite extreme (i.e., the High Road): People are incentivized to take mostly solidaristic and altruistic actions; Organizations are internally

and externally cooperative and democratic; Networks are flatter, relatively open, and well-connected at all positions; Power is dispersed and conducive to self-determination for all people and organizations; and Policy rewards and reinforces these impulses and tendencies.

As Figure 1 illustrates, no society lives at either extreme, nor are positions on the continuum fixed. There are always forces pushing in the opposite direction (see the red arrows in Fig. 1).<sup>29</sup> Still, as the schematic diagram shows, policy is highly self-reinforcing. Society is, in other words, subject to tipping points. When the balance of power shifts in favor of Low Road policies and organizations – i.e., most people are incentivized to act in pursuit of status and self-interest, most organizations engage in socially and environmentally destructive competition, most networks form into inequitable hierarchies, and power concentrates at the top of those hierarchies – evolutionary dynamics often take over. The policies that generated the prevailing patterns are selected for. Because those policies work for the people and organizations who possess disproportionate levels of power and who occupy the top positions in relevant networks, those people and organizations use their power and networks to reproduce and reinforce Low Road policy. Such exercises of power push society farther down the Low Road.

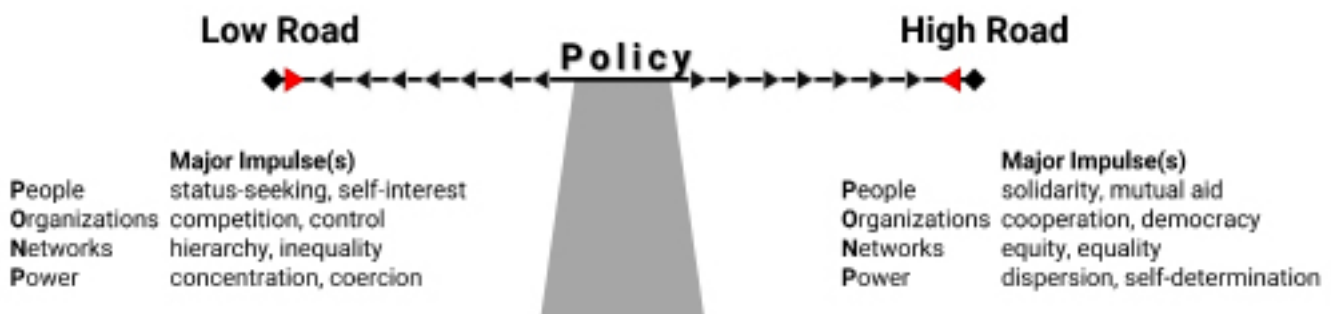


FIGURE 1. THE LOW ROAD - HIGH ROAD CONTINUUM

In times like the present, when multiple intersecting crises are killing and eliminating economic security for millions of people, and where most crises were either initiated or exacerbated by Low Road policies, the self-reinforcing dynamics just described seem impossible to reverse. The situation lends itself to the conclusion that “There Is No Alternative”<sup>30</sup> – that the fight for a different system is unwinnable.

But Figure 1 shows otherwise. Recall that there is no such thing as a purely Low Road or a purely High Road society. People and organizations pursuing High Road ends through anti-racist, inclusive, cooperative means are always present, no matter how far down the Low Road the rest of society has traveled. For instance, eco-villages, community land trusts, people’s assemblies, worker cooperatives, community gardens, mutual aid networks, and numerous other associations intentionally form and structure themselves – via their organizational *policies* – to resist many or all of the Low Road’s worst impulses (refer to Fig. 1, on left). Policies and actions that strengthen such people and organizations – e.g., by linking them into effective networks that have the capacity to expand – can gradually shift the balance of power away from the Low Road. If that shift is strong enough to eventually reach a tipping point, then the evolutionary dynamics that once reproduced and reinforced the Low Road can be harnessed and made to work in the opposite direction – propelling society farther *up* the High Road.

This optimistic story of gradually shifting power from the Low to the High Road until the latter becomes the predominant system is sometimes referred to as a *dual power theory of change*. *Dual power* refers to the coexistence of “two powers” in society – one inclusive, cooperative, and democratic (i.e., the High Road) and the other hierarchical, coercive, and inequitable (i.e., the Low Road). The two powers perpetually “compete for [political and economic] legitimacy” in the population.<sup>31</sup>

A *theory of change* is an “explanation of how a group of [people] expects to reach a commonly understood long-term goal.”<sup>32</sup> For many people and organizations who share the common long-term goal of a High Road society, the journey to that end requires interventions that systematically increase the relative strength and legitimacy of the democratic power in society’s dual power structure,<sup>33</sup> at the expense of the coercive power.<sup>34</sup> Such interventions are the domain of High Road Policy.

**High Road Policy** is therefore any mechanism that (1) strengthens the relative power of people, organizations, and networks that are advancing High Road goals and values, (2) weakens the relative power of people, organizations, and networks that are undermining High Road goals and values, and/or (3) attempts to right the wrongs of earlier Low Road policies. Any given High Road policy will arguably perform one or more of the following functions:

- adjust personal and/or organizational behavior to be more anti-racist, cooperative, solidaristic, and sustainable in the present;
- withdraw personal and/or organizational support from existing Low Road organizations;
- shift personal and/or organizational support to existing High Road organizations;
- establish equitable, inclusive, sustainable, democratic organizations and networks that reproduce and reinforce anti-racist, cooperative, solidaristic behavior over time;
- repair the damage from racist and environmentally destructive actions that were made possible by Low Road policies.

The list of specific policies that fit this definition is limitless and will only continue to grow as people and organizations find creative new ways to resist Low Road tendencies and impulses. This publication, *High Road Policy (HRP)*, aspires to be a record of concrete examples of such innovations – a sort of playbook for systems change. While readers can find initial entries to

that playbook in *HRP*'s regular edition memos, the remainder of this Special Edition describes three overarching, interdependent strategies for advancing High Road Policy, and, thus, for animating the dual power theory of change.

## Through What Means Can High Road Policy Be Advanced?

There are at least three non-mutually exclusive strategies – each of which subsumes a range of tactics – for bringing the dual power theory of change to life and for shifting the balance of power from the Low to the High Road. The strategies are all necessary, should be deployed together and operate concurrently, and must be designed to feed into and support one another. The strategies can be loosely named: (1) Prefigure, (2) Disrupt, and (3) Capture.

### PREFIGURE

As noted above and expanded on elsewhere in our work for this project,<sup>35</sup> one strategy for advancing the High Road is to Prefigure it – to use resources available in the present to model the High Road society that is envisioned for the future.<sup>36</sup> This strategy contains a host of electoral and non-electoral tactics that center on forming new High Road organizations, networking those organizations to one another, promoting that network to people and organizations that are weakly connected or unconnected to it, providing culturally competent education and training on High Road policies at every node on that network, and spreading “narratives of the possible” within and beyond the borders of that network to demonstrate that there **are** more equitable and democratic possibilities<sup>37</sup> beyond the Low Road (contrary to the “There Is No Alternative” argument).

Potential High Road organizations to be built as part of this strategy include, among others:

- inclusive eco-villages and other intentional communities<sup>38</sup> that organize around and practice

- High Road values;
- independent grassroots political parties;<sup>39</sup>
- local mutual aid networks;
- labor unions;
- inclusive worker self-directed enterprises;<sup>40</sup>
- community land trusts;
- purchasing and hybrid cooperative enterprises;
- consumer and producer cooperatives;
- time banks;
- community gardens;
- independent and trustworthy media collectives; and
- public- and community-owned banks, credit unions, utilities, and energy grids.

All these organizational forms and numerous others like them at least partially reject the Low Road mandate to put profits ahead of people and planet – to put personal wealth accumulation before sustainable, shared prosperity. Many of them are guided by High Road values and operate according to High Road policies in pursuit of High Road goals. And many accomplish these objectives in successful and inspiring fashions – which brings up the question of why, then, these types of organizations are so few in number compared to Low Road organizations.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the most convincing answer lies in the self-reinforcing, evolutionary dynamics pictured in Figure 1. In short, for as long as the Low Road power has dominated society’s dual power structure, people and organizations at the top of the hierarchy have been building and sustaining a policy agenda that intentionally disadvantages the types of High Road organizations listed above.

For example, eco-villages and other intentional communities typically require a minimum amount of land on which to establish their desired settlements. However, land is a highly scarce – and therefore valuable – “commodity” in a Low Road system that was set up for private ownership and is unfriendly to cooperative land tenure models.<sup>42</sup> The upshot is that many of the eco-villages that get established are formed by relatively affluent, often disproportionately white,



educated persons who can afford to buy into a more sustainable lifestyle.<sup>43</sup> Such exclusivity is antithetical to the High Road vision.

Similarly: the prevailing use of first-past-the-post elections in the U.S. all but guarantees that viable independent political parties will neither emerge nor successfully elect candidates,<sup>44</sup> save for in a handful of exceptional local contests;<sup>45</sup> pro-business policies have systematically “gutted” labor unions since at least the 1970s;<sup>46</sup> inconsistent or missing legal definitions and lack of supporting infrastructure make obtaining funds to start worker-owned enterprises exceedingly difficult;<sup>47</sup> and decades of being told that “government is the problem, not the solution” has convinced many Americans that the private sector is the standard bearer when it comes to providing efficient banking, utility, telecommunications, and energy services.<sup>48</sup> (It’s not.<sup>49</sup>)

The cumulative result is that, where High Road organizations exist, they often do so in states of precarity, in watered-down forms, or both. While there are clearly exceptions to this (or any) sweeping generalization, the reality is that the “Prefiguring a High Road system” strategy lacks the unilateral force to shift the balance in society’s dual power structure (Fig. 1). As such, it needs to be accompanied by at least two other strategies.

## DISRUPT

Prefiguring an alternative political-economic system by establishing High Road organizations and demonstrating new, more equitable and democratic possibilities in the present is something like planting a sapling in the deepest pothole on a neighborhood street. Driving over the pothole causes increasing damage to residents’ cars over time; but they accept and ignore that damage if alternative paths to their destinations are difficult to find or more costly to take. But suppose that activists plant a tiny sapling in the pothole. This tactical change to the landscape might focus residents’ attention on the pothole

and cause them to reflect on the damage it is doing to their vehicles. It might even motivate some residents to find and take alternative paths to their destinations. Or, residents might continue to drive over the pothole, ensuring that the sapling never grows into a mature tree capable of occupying more road space in the future.

The point is that, if prevailing Low Road policies make it so that High Road organizations are like saplings standing in lanes of oncoming traffic, then merely planting trees will not lead to a new forest. For the envisioned forest to have any chance at emerging, existing traffic and land use patterns need to be Disrupted.

As a strategy for advancing the High Road, Disruption subsumes many tactics, some of which are listed at the end of this section.<sup>50</sup> The common thread that runs through these tactics is that they work to systematically withdraw political and economic support from the people and organizations – and, by extension, the policies, networks, and power structures – that hold the Low Road in place.

Even when Disruption is carried out by individual persons (e.g., a lone activist participating in a hunger strike or a single shopper refusing to patronize anti-union firms), it is generally geared toward *collective* withdrawal from the Low Road. On their own, individuals rarely effect substantive change by denying a firm their labor, divesting their resources from organizations that profit off climate change or extreme inequality, or voting for a candidate from outside a two-party system. Large organizations (e.g., firms, banks, electoral systems) are structured to absorb these minor changes at the margins – an individual worker is quickly replaced, the loss of a working-class account barely registers at a multi-billion-dollar bank, etc.

However, as any good text on organized labor will tell, when individuals band together to withdraw support from the Low Road, their collective

power becomes meaningfully Disruptive.<sup>51</sup> When Disruption threatens the status quo and those who benefit from it, the threatened parties are often forced into making concessions that can move society – however incrementally – away from the Low Road extreme pictured in Figure 1.

For a recent example, consider the growing influence of widespread Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd. Actions are still very much in progress, meaning that it is too early to discuss the overall impacts of the movement. However, even at this stage, the tens of thousands of demonstrators pouring into streets across the U.S. (and the world<sup>52</sup>) have inspired “sweeping police reform” in Congress,<sup>53</sup> commitments to disband the police in Minneapolis, removal of racist symbols from cities, corporations, major sporting events and television, and much more.<sup>54</sup> Consumers are collectively shifting support to Black-owned businesses, and powerful organizations are responding to these actions by pledging billions of dollars to fight racial and economic inequality.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, whereas powerful people and organizations are clearly able to change racist (and other Low Road) policies in society, they almost never do until mass Disruption threatens their positions and forces them into (re)action. The implication is that Disruption has maximal potential as a force for High Road policy when and where it can be sustained – for, once actions end, those in power are likely to return to business as usual, minus any concessions they were forced to make in response to the Disruptive tactics.

The above is not to say that Disruption is an ineffective or non-essential strategy. Current events show just how misguided such a conclusion would be. Rather, the lesson is that, like Prefiguration, Disruption will not *unilaterally* shift the balance of power in society toward the High Road (Fig. 1). Mass Disruptions like Occupy Wall Street and the current BLM demonstrations

are usually time bound. When they cease, so does the pressure on powerful people and organizations to change.<sup>56</sup>

These observations underline our earlier claim that Disruption needs to be combined with other strategies (i.e., Prefiguration and Capture) if High Road policy is ever going to predominate in society’s dual power structure. Further, they suggest that temporary acts of macro-Disruption (e.g., Occupy, labor strikes) need to be surrounded in time and space by ongoing acts of everyday micro-Disruption (e.g., divestment, boycotts). While it is beyond the scope of this section to enumerate every tactic that counts as Disruption of the Low Road, the following partial list covers some of the most common examples, both macro and micro.

- expose and publicize unethical exercises of power by powerful people and organizations to mobilize withdrawal of their supporters (e.g., use power maps to document when elected officials seem to use their power for the benefit of campaign contributors);
- strike (participate in a collective work stoppage to demand change<sup>57</sup>);
- protest (engage in a prolonged campaign for change<sup>58</sup>);
- demonstrate (temporarily mobilize to highlight a problem<sup>59</sup>);
- boycott and divest (withdraw consumer support and financial resources from Low Road organizations<sup>60</sup>);
- take legal action (e.g., file a lawsuit against a Low Road organization that is violating worker or community rights<sup>61</sup>);
- register formal complaints with accountable organizations (e.g., National Labor Relations Board, Occupational Health and Safety Administration);
- vote Low Road enablers out of elected office.

## CAPTURE

To build on the prior section's opening analogy, suppose that activists Prefigure a new forest by planting saplings in every deep pothole on a neighborhood street segment. Next, those activists Disrupt existing traffic patterns by blocking off the street segment to prevent vehicles from running over the newly planted trees. They then *withdraw* some of the time and resources they spent consuming market goods to *invest in* watering and nurturing the saplings. Over time, the saplings grow into a miniature forest. However, once the forest reaches the ends of the street, it has no room to grow – it's enveloped by street segments that the activists (and the trees) have yet to reclaim.

The takeaway is that no matter how successful Prefigurative and Disruptive strategies are at building High Road organizations and spreading High Road Policy, the fruits of those labors are tightly circumscribed by the status quo. The Low Road might cede varying patches of land to the High Road here and there; but, outside of those small pockets, the former's imposing footprint stretches in all directions, benefiting from well-funded repaving and maintenance programs. Consequently, to avoid being swallowed by the Low Road, it is necessary to proactively search for where it is vulnerable, and to Capture and claim those spaces for the High Road.

Of the three broad strategies for advancing High Road policy, Capture is perhaps the most daunting and demanding. The Low Road is massive in scale. It is built to make complete withdrawal from it virtually impossible. Its inequitable policies remain in effect long past when their suboptimal outcomes are discovered because it is set up to be rigid – to keep itself in place by ensuring that policies “change slower than life changes,” so that life becomes adjusted to and reproductive of those policies.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the Low Road normalizes and legitimizes itself by making us all part of it.<sup>63</sup> By limiting our imaginations,

convincing us that There Is No Alternative. By making us choose between fighting for a fairer system or fighting for our survival in the existing system. And by teaching us that survival or success comes via consumption rather than from self-determination.<sup>64</sup>

Capture is about taking back our imaginations and asserting our agency – not just as individuals, but as organizations. As a strategy, it includes any tactic that applies pressure to existing organizations, causing those organizations to bend – and eventually break – toward the High Road. Examples include:

- organize workplaces (i.e., forming labor unions);
- vote High Road champions into elected offices at all levels of government;
- work with organizational participants to develop educational and training programs on High Road principles;
- create mechanisms for owners to transfer firms to employees rather than sell or shutdown;
- advocate for public ownership and provision of essential services (e.g., health care, housing, banking, utilities, water, telecommunications) and other equitable policies;
- advocate for public takeover of destructive, publicly traded Low Road organizations (e.g., “quantitative easing for the planet” aimed at acquiring fossil fuel corporations and gradually ramping down, and then eliminating, production<sup>65</sup>);
- require firms to pay living wages;
- end public giveaways for large multinational corporations;
- strengthen civics and democracy education programs in schools; and so many others.

The reason that Capture is such a demanding strategy is that it entails changing longstanding beliefs and norms about how the world works and how we operate within it. It means moving outside the “this is how we've always done things” box. As such, it must be at once unrelenting, and

unrelentingly patient. The Low Road is presently a complex network of wicked problems. It cannot be brought down by a single shot of some magical silver bullet. Instead, generations of High Road champions are going to be needed to infiltrate and recalibrate (from within) the full range of organizations that are currently trapped on the Low Road.

This strategy of progressive Capture requires constant self-reflection and critical analysis, coupled with undying optimism and a willingness (and ability) to recognize when and where inroads are being made. That is, the strategy demands that we never give up, that we keep our heads up, and that we remain flexible. Victories will come as Prefiguring and Disrupting build off-ramps from the Low Road in specific places and times. Those welcome detours will both inspire others like them, and work to shift the balance in society's dual power structure. When those victories are celebrated and reinforced by a committed strategy of Capturing, the whole grid can eventually be remade into a diverse system of equally and equitably accessible paths that enable all people and organizations to march up the High Road, together. *High Road Policy* – both the concept and this journal – is about building that system.

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## About High Road Policy

*High Road Policy* is a quarterly issue memorandum published by the Cornell University School of Industrial Labor Relations (ILR) through its Buffalo Co-Lab. It aims to contribute actionable insights to contemporary policy and political discourses in and beyond the regions and communities of Upstate New York. Content for memoranda comes in part from the Co-Lab's Data for Equitable Economic Development and Sustainability (Good DEEDS) program, which democratizes local and regional data for the purposes of: empowering residents and institutions; informing public policy debates; and providing an empirical basis for ensuring that change and development in Upstate communities follows the High Road to shared prosperity for all residents, from the present to all future generations.

## Notes

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