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Environment

The energy climate plan of Barack Obama: A real turn, new dangers

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The energy-climate question is one of those areas where the policy of Barack Obama could be most radically distinguished from that of George W. Bush. Under the leadership of the new president, in fact, the United States should quickly adopt an obligatory plan of reduction of greenhouse gases, invest massively in renewable energies and play an active role in the negotiation of a new international treaty to take over from Kyoto, in 2013. The turn is undeniable. We should take note of it, but we should also measure its limits... and dangers.

Since it slammed the door of the Kyoto Protocol, the Bush administration has refused any timetable for obligatory reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. As an alternative it argues in favour of voluntary commitments by companies and a policy of support for technological innovation. The least that can be said is that this orientation has not produced the effects that were anticipated: between 1993 and 2005, the CO₂ emissions of the US energy sector increased by more than 15 per cent. Obama is adopting a radically different approach, promising a law whose objective would be to reduce emissions by 80 per cent in 2050, compared to 1990. To do this, his programme envisages in particular a system of exchange of emission rights (“cap-and-trade”) with a fixed ceiling, an annual rate of obligatory reduction, accelerated implementation of “clean” technologies, massive investment in research and development and a series of measures in favour of energy efficiency.

The objective: to restore the leadership of the USA

It should be noted that Obama’s starting point is not the rescue of the climate but the safeguarding of the world leadership of the United States, in particular in the strategic domain of energy. “Barack Obama’s Plan to Make America a Global Energy Leader”: that is the title of the energy-climate chapter in the programme of the new president [1]. Obama reproaches Bush for having increased the dependency of the United States on oil, and therefore on the producer countries and their hostile regimes, and to have committed the US army massively in Iraq rather than in Afghanistan. According to him, Bush’s policy has led the USA into a dead end where it is weakened in relation to the European Union and to China, while losing absolute control over its back-yard in Latin America. Obama thus incarnates the project of a total geostrategic reorientation aimed at restoring the hegemony of the empire in a context of sharpened competition between imperialist powers and new rising capitalist powers. His energy-climate programme must be analyzed within this framework.

This link between climate and geostrategy appears clearly in the way in which Obama positions himself with regard to the big emergent countries. Let us remember that the refusal of an obligatory fixing of emission quotas was not the only reason for Bush’s opposition to the Kyoto Protocol. A second reason was that the Protocol does not impose any limitation of emissions on the club of five - China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa. On this point, the senator from Illinois is in strategic agreement with his predecessor, but dissociates himself from him on the tactics to follow: according to him, by refusing any domestic fixing of quotas, Bush played the game of India and China, not to mention that the EU benefited from the US withdrawal to install itself in a position of leadership on the question of the climate (and to take the lead in the market for renewable energies). In this respect, it is significant that Obama does not plan to follow the example of Australia, which ratified Kyoto in Bali, in December 2007: his project is not to get back into line but to take the reins of the negotiation of a

new post-Kyoto climate agreement, so that this agreement corresponds to the interests of American capitalism.

To take the reins, but how? Considering the discredit of the USA on the climate question, which was obvious during the Bali Conference, the turn must be radical and spectacular. This is a condition of success. Time is short: events will unfold in quick succession until the Copenhagen conference in December 2009. It is thus essential that Washington starts by unilaterally adopting its own plan to fight against global warming, and this plan has to be constraining and ambitious. This is the price to pay in order to approach the two following stages: 1) to take back leadership from Europe; and 2) to form a front with the EU in order to impose on the emergent countries a deal that will be favourable to the multinationals of the North. The EU will balk but it can only fall into line with this perspective: it also wants to impose constraints on the big emergent countries, but it cannot do it without Washington.

Reduction of emissions: the 80 per cent mountain turns out to be a molehill

Let us now look at the contents of the plan itself. According to the fourth report of the IPCC, the developed countries, taken overall, must reduce their emissions by between 80 and 95 per cent between now and 2050 (compared to 1990) [2]. This Herculean effort is necessary in order not to too much exceed a rise of 2°C compared to the pre-industrial period, while respecting the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” between countries of the North and South. At first sight, Obama’s objective is – just - in conformity with this recommendation of the scientists. Except that, since an average American consumes annually about twice as much fossil fuels as a European - for a standard of living that is scarcely higher - the other countries of the North would have to agree to make an effort of reduction proportionally greater than that of the United States, so that the developed world as a whole achieves the minimum goal laid down by the IPCC [3]. So we can look forward to some lively inter-capitalist disputes. They will give invaluable indications as to the relationships of forces.

Another remark, much more important, relates to the intermediate stages. According to the IPCC, it is out of the question that the rich countries wait until 2030 or 2040 to start to decrease their emissions: they must start immediately and reach a first stage of between 25 and 40 per cent reduction in 2020, compared to 1990. However, the energy-climate programme of Obama is far from satisfying this condition: between now and 2020, its aim is only to bring US emissions back to their level of 1990. To put things in perspective, let us remember that the United States, if they had ratified the Kyoto ‘Peanuts’ Protocol, should have brought their emissions down to 5 per cent below the level of 1990... between 2008 and 2012. Obama is not taking much of a risk here: even if he were to occupy the White House for two terms, most of the hard work would be for his successors, after 2020. Tomorrow, the beer will be free...

To guide the transition towards 2050, the new president has opted for a system of exchange of emission rights, following the example of the one that has functioned in Europe since 2005. His programme goes even further than the “energy-climate package” of the European Commission for 2012-2020: it envisages the auctioning of all rights. Part of the revenues from this sale would be used to finance the development and the deployment of clean energies, to invest in energy efficiency and to face the costs of the transition. These costs include in particular assistance to those on low incomes who are confronted with the increase in the price of energy (various mechanisms are envisaged, such as the reinforcement of the system of premiums for insulation of houses and the creation of special funds so that the poorest can pay their electricity and energy bills).

In the context of the economic recession, it is doubtful whether Obama will keep this promise of auctioning all rights. The European experience is instructive in this respect. Let us remember that the

Commission, in 2005, started by distributing rights free and distributing too many of them, which allowed the electricity companies, among others, to pocket enormous superprofits (even making the consumers pay on their electricity bills the market price of the rights that they had received for nothing!). Within the framework of the “energy-climate package“, Brussels, last January, proposed a full-scale auction in the electricity production sector and the maintenance of free (or partially free) distribution of rights in the sectors most exposed to international competition (without specifying which). Since then, the stock exchanges have had their troubles and a series of member states, shouting that it is a crime against competitiveness, are threatening to torpedo the energy-climate package. What will the EU do when the time comes to decide, between now and December? It will probably maintain its course for a 20 per cent reduction in emissions in 2020. Its credibility is at stake here, especially now that its leadership on the climate question is threatened by the USA. But we can bet that it will give some ground on the sale of rights... and that US employers will put Obama under very strong pressure to do the same [4]. In that case, there will be a shortage of money to implement the plan. We will come back to this in the conclusion. (Since this article was written, the EU indeed decided to change its “climate package”, cancelling the auction of rights for industry and for utilities burning coal in the new member states)

The twists and turns of ‘cap-and-trade’

To appreciate the effort of reduction of the emissions promised by Obama, we cannot be satisfied with quoting the objectives for the horizon of 2020 and 2050: we have to know to what extent these objectives will be reached by structural measures on the territory of the United States. In order to understand this point, it is necessary to recall that the Kyoto Protocol (1997) makes it possible to replace reductions in emissions in the North by “clean” investments in the South, on the one hand, and on the other hand to replace reductions in emissions by plantations of trees - in other words by absorption of atmospheric carbon. These two mechanisms are very much open to criticism. Instituted by the Kyoto Protocol and pompously baptized “Clean Development Mechanism” (CDM), the first was studied in detail by researchers at Stanford University, who showed that more than 50 per cent of the carbon credits exchanged within the framework of the CDM do not correspond to any real reduction in emissions! As for the second mechanism, it is disputed, in particular for its imprecision (the quantity of carbon absorbed by trees varies according to many parameters, and global warming is likely to transform carbon sinks into sources) as well as for its non-structural character (when the trees are cut down and the wood is burned, the carbon returns to the atmosphere).

The CDM and carbon sinks are pseudo-solutions. However, the more governments and the business world are obliged to admit reality and the danger of global warming, the more they orient towards these pseudo-solutions, and the more they exert pressure to be able to resort to them without obstacles. Barack Obama does not say what proportion of the American effort of reduction would be replaced by compensatory purchases of credits. His programme contents itself with affirming that “US emitters who are subject to obligations within the framework of the exchange of rights will be authorized to compensate for some of their emissions by investing in low-carbon energy projects in the developing world”. Concerning carbon sinks, he evokes the development of incentives rewarding forest owners, farmers and ranch owners who plant trees, restore meadows or adopt cultivation methods making it possible to capture atmospheric carbon dioxide. No detailed estimate is provided.

Dingell-Boucher: no “domestic” reduction before 2029!

We can however approach the possible ways of concretizing these principles by examining a project presented very recently to the US Congress by John Dingell and Rick Boucher [5]. Dingell and Boucher, two Democratic friends of Barack Obama, are respectively president of the committee on energy and trade of the House of Representatives, and chair of the sub-committee on energy and air

quality. Many observers consider that their draft is very likely to be used as a basis for the future law on the rescue of the climate. However, what does this document say? That companies will be able to fulfil part of their commitments by buying carbon credits generated by domestic or international projects, and that their quota of credits will increase as the ceiling of authorized emissions decreases: from 5 per cent of obligation to reduce during the first five years, the quota will gradually go up to 35 per cent in 2024 and beyond.

Now there is an ingenious system: the more the climatic constraints increase, the more they open up to companies the possibility of withdrawing from the obligation to reduce emissions. You only had to think of it. Because that is really what is involved: if you relate the progression of the quotas of carbon credits to the envisaged progression of total reductions in emissions in the Dingell-Boucher proposal, (6 per cent in 2020, 44 per cent in 2030 and 80 per cent in 2050, compared to 2005), what do we see? That a company which took maximum advantage of the possibility of buying credits could defer until... 2029 the obligation to bring its own emissions below their level of 2005 [6]. It is obvious that many companies will choose this solution, for the simple reason that the carbon credits coming from the CDM or the forest sinks are much less expensive than the investments necessary to decrease emissions of CO₂. And then, between now and 2029, a lot of water will run under the bridges of the Potomac. If Obama is indeed inspired by the project of his colleagues, US employers will not exactly have a pistol put to their heads.

Long live “clean”...coal?

Let us now look at the “clean” technologies that Barack Obama proposes to deploy. The new president has four priorities: “clean coal”, biofuels, nuclear power and the “clean car”. This enumeration should be enough to vaccinate against Obamania all those who have a minimum of social and ecological consciousness. This is unfortunately not the case: following the example of social democracy, the European Green parties are dancing around throwing rose petals on the triumphal road which leads Obama to the White House. So we will make some comments, concentrating on clean coal and biofuels. Basically, “clean coal” does not exist, neither for the miners, nor for the populations living around the mines, nor for the environment in general. The expression refers to the technique known as capture and sequestration of carbon (CSC). It consists of extracting CO₂ from smoke as it leaves large industrial facilities which emit a lot (power stations, cement factories, iron and steel mills) and putting it in an intermediate state between the solid state and the gas state (“supercritical state”) before injecting it at great depth into impermeable geological layers. This mode of storage of CO₂ is already practised on a large scale in the North Sea, by the Norwegian company Statoil [7], but it is an exception. CSC still seems far from being operational.

We can discuss the system itself. It goes without saying that CSC does not constitute a structural answer to climate change: even though it is enormous, geological storage capacity is inevitably finite, and the risks of escape of CO₂ cannot be excluded. However, in our opinion, we could possibly have recourse to CSC (as, moreover, to other non-structural measures) within the framework of a plan of transition towards an economy without fossil fuels. Provided that it gives indispensable guarantees in terms of sealing the geological reservoirs and of ecological impact, CSC could help to counter the threat of a new wave of construction of nuclear plants, while making it possible to plan the reconversion with maintenance of social rights of the millions of workers whose existence depends on the extraction of coal.

This is a discussion, and the opinion defended here is disputed by other environmentalists. But this not what we are discussing with Barack Obama. What the president-elect is in fact envisaging is not a transition but a new coal era. “Coal is our most abundant energy source and it is a decisive component

of the economic development of India, China and other growing economies”, he writes in his programme. The next part of the document is explicit: “Obama thinks that the imperative fight against climate change demands that we avoid a new wave of construction of conventional coal-fired power stations in the USA and that we work in an aggressive way to transfer low-carbon coal technologies to the whole world”. So it really is question of new mines and new coal-fired power stations (which would operate for a minimum of 30 years), in the United States and in the whole world!

We come back here to the remark made at the beginning of this article. Obama’s objective is first and foremost not climatic but geostrategic: he wants to reduce dependence on imported oil and to make the United States the world energy leader, in order to restore the hegemony of the empire. Concerning coal, the calculation is clever. Firstly, the proven reserves of coal correspond to three hundred years of consumption at the current rhythm. Most of these reserves are located in the United States and coal is a major export product of the US economy (with probably a 45 per cent increase in 2008) [8]. Secondly, India, China and South Africa also have very important deposits that they are afraid of not being able to continue to use freely - for the simple reason that coal, for the same energy efficiency, produces twice as much CO₂ as natural gas. By selling them CSC technology, the USA could solve this problem and gain allies in the climate negotiations. Thirdly, “clean coal” would open up to US capital a vast field of foreign investment. Apart from the fact that these exports of capital would contribute to increased imperialist control, they would in addition make it possible to generate the precious cheap carbon credits which US companies will need in order to continue to pollute until 2029 and beyond. Long live ecological... biofuels?

Mutatis-mutandis, Obama’s calculation on coal is in continuity with the creation by George W. Bush of the Asia Pacific Alliance for the Climate, involving in particular the USA, Australia, India and China. A similar continuity appears in the field of biofuels. As a senator of Illinois - the third-ranking American state in the production of ethanol from maize - Obama has very strongly committed himself to support for this harmful industrial production, which has experienced a boom thanks to the incentives liberally offered by the administration. When George. W. Bush announced his decision to increase from 5 to 36 billion gallons the quantity of ethanol that would be obligatorily added to gasoline in 2022, the planet resounded with protests in the name of the fight against hunger, the stability of the price of food products and ecology. There has been nothing like that with Obama. The new president, however, promises to go even further than his predecessor: his programme envisages increasing the ethanol quota in gasoline to 60 billion gallons in 2030 - almost double [9]. “Maize ethanol is the biggest success as regards commercially-available alternative fuel”, he says. And he goes on, not without a certain demagoguery: “We should fight the efforts of the big oil companies and agribusiness that are aimed at undermining this nascent industry”.

Faced with the “real concerns” raised by the conversion of fallow land into maize energy crops (with the use of pesticides, the pumping of water resources, an increase in food prices), Obama is committing himself to developing second generation biofuels, in other words the production of ethanol from cellulose - and not from sugar. The technology necessary for this production is almost ready and giant machines have been developed to “harvest” the young rapid-growth trees which would provide the raw material. Hallelujah? No. Second generation biofuels do not as such make it possible to eliminate the conflict between the agriculture-based food and energy industries. To do that, it would be necessary to prohibit arable land being allocated to the plantation of rapid-growth trees, and to maintain this prohibition even if cellulose-based ethanol is ten times more profitable than food crops. Supposing that the market would allow such obstacles to the search for profit, it remains the case that the conversion of fallow and poor-quality land into industrial woods for cellulose-based production of ethanol will have a very heavy ecological impact, in particular in terms of biodiversity (monocultures with use of

pesticides).

Who will pay?

Through his campaign and his energy-climate plan, Barack Obama held out the prospect that the fight for the world leadership and the energy independence of the United States will create jobs. According to him, the investment over ten years of 150 billion dollars of public funds in the development and deployment of clean energies and in the improvement of energy efficiency (objective: + 50 per cent in 2030) would make it possible to create 5 million jobs. Jobs for American workers who are “the best in the world”. Jobs which “will not go to other countries”. Jobs in the building in America of American clean cars running on American gasoline and ethanol, whose sale will be boosted by tax credits to American taxpayers. Protectionist, popular, even populist accents are very much present in this discourse. Thus, Obama has promised to tax the excessive profits that the oil companies are pocketing by benefiting from windfall profits, and to distribute the revenues collected so that every family receives 1000 dollars to pay its energy bills...

There is a small problem: this programme was conceived before the stock exchange maelstrom. Where will the 150 billion dollars come from for subsidies to clean energy, knowing that 700 billion dollars were absorbed in the rescue of Wall Street and that tax revenues are decreasing with the recession? Where will the money come from to increase the premiums for the insulation of the houses of those on low incomes? Obama wants 10 per cent of the electricity consumed in the United States in 2012 to come from renewable sources... which are more expensive, and the extra cost will be passed on to customers' bills. Who will put money into the special fund intended to limit the increase in electricity bills for those who are the most disadvantaged, if the employers refuse the auctioning of emission rights? And how will American workers react if the ambitious objectives concerning biofuels lead to spiralling prices for basic food products? Does the Obama team hope to circumvent these difficulties by increasing even more the enormous American budget deficit? Wouldn't this be creating a new dependence on hostile regimes?

It is too early to answer each of these questions in detail. But the European precedent enables us to draw an important lesson: capitalist energy and climate policy, with its premiums and its incentives, its market in rights and credits, its feed-in tariffs, its green certificates and its taxes, is at the centre of the overall offensive against the working class and the poor. The more capitalist governments are convinced that they have to do something to save the climate, the more their climate policy will increase social inequality. The more united they are, the more they will try to impose unjust solutions on the poor countries, and on the poor in the poor countries. That is the danger that is appearing today.

Obama's victory marks a real turn in the energy and climate policy of the United States. We can only be delighted by the defeat of McCain who - although his proposals were not so far from those of his rival - had chosen as his running mate a thinly veiled climate negationist: Sarah Palin. But the American workers and the peoples of the world will not take long to notice that this turn will be carried out at their expense. In order to oppose it, it will not be enough to say “no”: it will be necessary to propose another climate and energy policy, anti-capitalist and internationalist. An ecosocialist policy.

[1] “Barack Obama's Plan to Make America a Global Energy Leader”, consultable on the BarackObama.com site

[2] Contribution of Working Group III to the 2004 report of the IPCC, page 776.

[3] 8 tons of emission per person (tep) per annum in the USA, against approximately 4.5 tep in the

European Union.

[4] “Obama’ s Energy Plan May Be Curbed But Not Halted”, Reuters,
<http://www.planetark.org/avantgo/da...>

[5] House Committee on Energy and Commerce, 202-225-2927, “Executive Summary of the discussion draft”,
<http://energycommerce.house.gov>.
See also the memorandum to the members of the Committee (October 7, 2008)

[6] “Dingell and Boucher draft climate bill: Likely No CO2 cut until near 2030”,
<http://climateprogress.org>

[7] The Sleipner project has allowed Statoil to inject a million tons of CO2 per annum since 1996 into a confined saline aquifer, located 800 m below the sea-bed.
<http://www.statoil.com/statoilcom/S...>

[8] “US Coal Exports Seen as Target in Climate Fix”, Reuters,
<http://www.planetark.org/avantgo/da...>

[9] Custom Biofuels Sector Sees Ally in Obama”, Reuters, 6/11/2008,
<http://planetark.org/avantgo/dailyn...>

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Food sovereignty: we can feed the world

VIVAS Esther
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We live in the context of a multiple systematic crisis: economical, ecological, alimentary, care, energetic... And the capitalist system, far from providing answers to a crisis that itself has generated, bets for a gateway characterized by the same concepts: major privatization of the public services, plundering of the natural resources, technological answers to climate change, giving subsidies and financial grants to private companies and banc institutions.

The food crisis shows one of the most dramatic faces of the current capitalist system, with more than a billion people in the world, one out of six, who starves, especially in countries from the Southern hemisphere. Paradoxically, in the last twenty years, while population has been growing at a 1.14% yearly rate, the production of food has increased in more than a 2% rate. Therefore, and evaluating this data, we can conclude that currently we are producing enough food to feed the population of the whole

world. Then, where does the problem lie? Well, that if there is not enough income to pay the price, people cannot eat.

The neoliberal policies applied to agriculture in the last thirty years (green revolution, delocalization, free trade, depeasantization...), have lead us to an increasing food and alimentary insecurity. Food has become a business, a privatized good in the hands of a few companies from the agrifood industry, which have the support from governments and international institutions.

Having to face this situation, summit after summit, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the G20, together with the main companies of the sector, are telling us that in order to overcome this crisis a brand new green revolution is necessary, as well as more transgenics and free trade. They want us to believe that the policies that lead us to this current situation will help us overcome the problems generated by these policies themselves.

Local, peasant-like and ecological agriculture

But the alternatives exist. The relocalization of agriculture in the hands of the peasants, will allow us to guarantee a universal access to food. And this has been proven by the results shown in an extended international investigation which lasted four years and which involved more than 400 scientists, carried out by The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), an evaluation project supported by the World Bank, in partnership with the FAO, the UNDP, the UNESCO, government representatives, private, scientific and social institutions, etc., taking as a model the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Evaluation of the Ecosystems of the Millennium.

It is interesting to observe how, in spite of the fact that the report was backed up by all of these institutions, it concluded that the agro-ecological production would provide those least favored, the poorest population, with monetary and alimentary income, at the same time that would provide a surplus for the market, becoming a better guarantee for food and alimentary security than transgenic production. The report issued by the IAAST supported the local, peasant-like and familiar production, and the redistribution of the land in hands of the rural communities. The report was rejected by agribusiness and filed away by the World Bank, even though 61 governments quietly approved it, with the exception of the United States, Canada, Australia, among others.

A research study by the University of Michigan (2007) positioned itself along the same lines, concluding that agro-ecological farms are highly productive and capable of guaranteeing food and alimentary security all around the globe, on the contrary to industrialized agricultural production and free trade. Their conclusions pointed out, even taking as a reference their most conservative estimates, that organic agriculture could supply at least the same amounts as done currently; although, their researchers considered that, a more realistic estimate would be that ecological agriculture could increase the global production of food by 50%.

In the area of commercialization, and in order to break the monopolies of major distributions, has proven essential to support short circuits of commercialization (local markets, direct sales, groups and cooperatives of agro-ecological consumption...), avoiding intermediaries and mediators, and establishing closer relationships between producers and consumers based on trust and mutual understanding, which will lead to a growing solidarity between the countryside and the cities. Currently, the broad distribution (supermarkets, chain discounts, hypermarkets, etc.) monopolize the commercialization chain of food, obtaining the maximum benefits at the expense of exploiting workers, peasants and the environment.

Food sovereignty proves to be the best alternative to end world hunger. It is a matter of returning the

control of the agricultural and food policies to the people (peasants, workers, consumers, women...), as well as their access to the land and the common goods (water, seeds...). A food sovereignty which will have to be deeply feminist, recognizing the role of women as a guarantee of food to a global level, and fighting against the oppression, not only of the capitalist system, but also of the patriarchal system.

Esther Vivas

* Contribution to the working group on agro-ecology, food sovereignty and degrowth at the Second Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity. March 26-29th 2010, Barcelona.

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Without women there is no food sovereignty

VIVAS Esther
2011

A shorter version of this article is also available on ESSF (article 26777): [La Via Campesina: Food Sovereignty and the Global Feminist Struggle](#)

Systems of food production and consumption have always been socially organized, but their organization has varied historically. In the last few decades, under the impact of neoliberal politics, the logic of capitalism has been imposed upon the ways in which food is produced and consumed (Bello, 2009). [1]

This article analyzes the impact of agro-industrial policies on women and the key role that peasant women in the Global North and South play in the production and distribution of food. It analyzes how the dominant agricultural model can incorporate a feminist perspective and how the social movements that work towards food sovereignty can incorporate a feminist perspective.

Campeasinas and invisible women

In the countries of the Global South women are the primary producers of food, the ones in charge of working the earth, maintaining seed stores, harvesting fruit, obtaining water and safeguarding the harvest. Between 60 to 80% of food production in the Global South is done by women (50% worldwide) (FAO, 1996). Women are the primary producers of basic grains such as rice, wheat, and corn which feed the most impoverished populations in the South. Despite their key role in agriculture and food however, women; together with their children; are the ones most affected by hunger.

For centuries, peasant women have been responsible for domestic chores, the care and feeding of their families, the cultivation, exchange and commercialization of household gardens; charged with

reproduction, production and community—all the while occupying an often invisible domestic and social sphere. The main economic transactions in agriculture have traditionally been undertaken by men in markets, with the purchase and sale of animals, and the commercialization of large quantities of grains in the private and public sphere.

This division of roles, assigning women as the caretakers of the house as well as the health and education of their families, and granting men the “technical” management of land and machinery, maintains the assigned gender roles that have persisted in our societies through the centuries and into the present (Oceransky Losana, 2006).

The figures speak for themselves. According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 1996), in many African countries women represent 70% of the field labor; are responsible for supplying 90% of the domestic water supply and are responsible for between 60 and 80% of the production of food consumed and sold by the family. They account for 100% of the processing of foods, 80% of the activities of food storage and transportation, and 90% of the labor involved in preparing the earth before planting. These numbers demonstrate the crucial role that African women have in the production of small-scale agriculture and the maintenance of their families’ subsistence.

In many regions of the Global South however—in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia—there is a notable “feminization” of salaried agricultural work, especially in non-traditional export-oriented sectors (Fraser, 2009). Between 1994 and 2000, according to White and Leavy (2003), women made up 83% of new employees in the non-traditional agro-export sector. In this way, for the first time, many women have paid jobs with economic gains that give them more power in decision making and the possibility of participating in organizations outside of the family (Fraser, 2009). However, this dynamic shift has been accompanied by a marked gender division in job duties: on plantations, women perform the unskilled work such as gathering and boxing while men bring in the harvest and plant.

The incorporation of women into salaried labor means a double burden of work for women who continue to care for their families while at the same time working to obtain income—principally in precarious jobs. Poorer labor conditions than those of their male counterparts, along with inferior pay for the same jobs, forces women to work more hours in order to receive the same income. In India, for example, the average salary for day labor in the agricultural sector is 30% less for women than men (World Bank, 2007). In Spain, women make 30% less, and this difference can be as high as 40% (Oceransky Losana, 2006).

Impact of neoliberal policies

The application of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 80s and 90s in the Global South on the part of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, further aggravated already difficult conditions for much of the population in those countries and hit women especially hard.

The shock measures imposed by the SAPs consisted of forcing Southern governments to withdraw all subsidies for staples like bread, rice, milk and sugar. Drastic reductions in public education, health, housing and infrastructure spending were imposed. The forced devaluation of national currency (to cheapen exports) diminished the purchasing capacity of local populations. Increased interest rates to attract foreign capital generated a speculative spiral. These SAPs added to the extreme poverty of many in the Global South (Vivas, 2008).

Structural Adjustment Policies and privatization had major repercussions for women in particular. As Juana Ferrer of the International Gender Commission of Via Campesina illustrates: “In the processes of privatization of public services, the most affected people have been women. Women have been affected

above all in the fields of health and education where they have historically carried [the most] responsibility for their families. ... In the measure [to which] we do not have access to resources and public services it becomes more difficult to lead a worthwhile life for women” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 30).

The collapse of the countryside the Global South and the intensification of migration to cities has led to a process of “de-peasantization” (Bello, 2009). In many countries this process has not taken the form of a classic rural to urban movement, in which ex-peasants go to the cities to work in factories as part of the industrialization process. Rather, migration has been characterized by a process of “urbanization disconnected from industrialization” in which ex-peasants, pushed into the cities, are then fed back to the periphery (favelas, slums), many living off the informal economy and comprising the “informal proletariat” (Davis, 2006).

Women are an essential component in these national and international migratory flows. Migration leads to the dismantling and abandonment of families, land, and processes of production, while increasing the burdens of family and community on the women who stay behind. In Europe, the United States and Canada women who do migrate take work that European and North American women have not performed for years, thus reproducing an invisible spiral of oppression, as the Global North externalizes its care, social and economic costs to communities of migrant women origin.

The inability to resolve the current health care crisis in Western countries has resulted in the incorporation of large numbers of women into the labor market. Additionally, the aging population of Western countries and the non-responsiveness of the state to their needs has served as an alibi for the importation of millions of “caretakers” from the Global South. As is noted by Ezquerro (2010) “[This] diaspora fills the function of making the incompatibility between the rise of the capitalist system and the maintenance of life in the Centre invisible, and deepens the crisis of care and other crises in the South. ... The ‘international chain of care’ becomes a dramatic vicious cycle that ensures survival of the patriarchal capitalist system” (Ezquerro, 2010:39).

Access to land

Access to land is not a guaranteed right for many women. In numerous Southern countries laws forbid this right, and in those countries where legal access exists there are often traditions and practices that prevent women from property ownership. As Fraser (2009) explains, “In Cambodia, for example, although it is not illegal for women to own land, the cultural norm dictates that they do not possess land; although they are responsible for farm production and agriculture, women have no control over the sale of land or how it is transmitted to children” (Fraser, 2009:34).

In India, Chukki Nanjundaswamy of the peasant organization Karnataka State Farmers Association [2] notes that the situation of women with regards to land and health care access is very difficult: “Socially Indian peasant women have almost no rights and are considered an ‘addition’ to males. Rural women are the most untouchable of the untouchables within the social caste system” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 16).

Access to land for women in Africa today is even more precarious due to increased deaths from AIDS. On the one hand, women are more likely to be infected, but when one of their male relatives who holds title to the land dies, women have great difficulty accessing control. In many communities, women have no right to inherit, and therefore lose their land and other assets when they are widowed (Jayne et al, 2006).

Land is a very important asset—it allows for the production of food, serves as an investment for the future; and as collateral it implies access to credit, etc. The difficulties women have securing access to

land is one more example of how the capitalist and patriarchal agricultural system hits them especially hard. Furthermore, when women do hold title to land, it is mostly lower value land or extension properties.

Women also face more difficulty in obtaining loans, services, and supplies. Globally, it is estimated that women receive only 1% of total agricultural loans, and even so, it is not clear who in the family exercises control over those loans (Fraser, 2009).

These practices do not only exist in the Global South. In Europe, for example, many women farmers work under complete legal uncertainty. Most of them work on family farms where administrative rights are the exclusive property of the owner of the farm—and women are not entitled to aid, planting, lactic share, etc.

As Elizabeth Vilalba Seivane, secretary of Labrego Galego in Galicia explains, the problems of women in the field—in the South and the North—have much in common despite some obvious differences, “European women are more focused on fighting for our administrative rights on the farm, while elsewhere profound changes are demanded that have to do with land reform or access to land and other basic resources” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 26).

In the US, Debra Eschmeyer of the National Family Farm Coalition explains practices that show this inequality: “For example, when a women farmer goes alone to seek a loan from a bank it is far more complicated [than] if a male farmer seeks a loan” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 14).

Agribusiness vs. food sovereignty

Today, the current agro-industrial model has proven unable to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, in addition to being destructive to the environment. We are facing a food and agricultural system with a high concentration of companies along the entire chain. It is monopolized by a handful of multinational agribusinesses and backed by governments and international institutions that have become accomplices, if not co-beneficiaries, in an unsustainable food production system. This model is an imperialist tool aimed at political, economic and social control over the Global South by the North’s major economic powers like the United States and the European Union (Toussaint, 2008; Vivas, 2009).

As Desmarais (2007) notes, the food system can be understood as a broad horizontal chain that has been taking more and more away from production and consumption in favor of the appropriation of various stages of production by agribusiness, leading to the loss of peasant autonomy.

The food crisis that erupted during 2007 and 2008, caused a strong increase in the price of staple foods [3], highlighting the high volatility of agriculture and the food system. It also introduced the figure of over one billion hungry people in the world—one person in six, according to data from the FAO (2009).

The problem is a not a lack of food, but rather the inability to access it. In fact, grain production worldwide has tripled since the 60’s, while the global population has only doubled (GRAIN, 2008). We can see that there is enough food to feed the entire global population. However, for the millions of people in developing countries who spend between 50% and 60% of their income on food (up to 80% in the poorest countries), rising prices make it impossible to access.

There are fundamental reasons that explain the deep food crisis. Neoliberal policies applied indiscriminately over the past thirty years on a global scale forced vulnerable markets to open up to the global economy. Payments of debt by the South led to the privatization of formerly public goods and services (water, agricultural protections). Add to this a model of agriculture and food production in the service of capitalist logic, and you have the main contributing factors to the situation that has

dismantled a once-successful model of peasant agriculture that had guaranteed people's food security for decades (Holt-Giménez and Patel, 2010). This has had a very negative impact on people, particularly women, and the environment.

Food Sovereignty is a powerful alternative to this destructive agricultural model. This paradigm promotes "the right of peoples to define their own agricultural policies and ... to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and the domestic market" (VVAA, 2003: 1). Food sovereignty seeks to regain the right to decide what, how and where to produce what we eat. It promotes the idea that the land, water, and seeds are in peasants' hands, and that we deserve to control our food systems.

There is an inherent feminist perspective incorporated in food sovereignty. As pointed out by Yoon Guem Soon, a Korean peasant woman and representative of Via Campesina in Asia: "Feminism is a process for getting a decent place for women in society, to combat violence against women and to claim and reclaim our land and save it from the hands of multinationals and large companies. Feminism is the way for rural women to take an active and worthy role within society" (La Via Campesina, 2006:12).

La Via Campesina

Via Campesina is the world's foremost international movement of small farmers. It promotes the right of all peoples to food sovereignty. Via Campesina was established in 1993 at the dawn of the anti-globalization movement, and gradually became one of the major organizations in the critique of neoliberal globalization. Its ascent is an expression of peasant resistance to the collapse of the rural world caused by neoliberal policies, and the intensification of those policies as embodied in the World Trade Organization (Antentas and Vivas, 2009a).

Since its founding, Via Campesina has promoted a "female peasant" identity that is politicized, linked to land, food production and the defense of food sovereignty—built in opposition to the current agribusiness model (Desmarais, 2007). Via Campesina embodies a new kind of "peasant internationalism" (Bello, 2009), that can be viewed as a "peasant component" of the new international resistance presented by the anti-globalization movement (Antentas and Vivas, 2009).

In 1996, coinciding with the World Food Summit at the FAO in Rome, Via Campesina highlighted food sovereignty as a political alternative to a profoundly unfair and predatory food system. This does not imply a romantic return to the past, but rather recovers knowledge and traditional practices and combines them with new technologies and new knowledge (Desmarais, 2007). As noted by McMichael (2006), there is a "mystification of the small" in a way that rethinks the global food system to encourage democratic forms of food production and distribution.

A feminist perspective

Over time, Via Campesina has incorporated a feminist perspective, working to achieve gender equality within their organizations, and building alliances with feminist groups, including the international World March of Women, among others.

At the heart of La Via Campesina, the struggle of women is situated at two levels: defending their rights as women within organizations and society in general, and the struggle as peasant women together with their colleagues against the neoliberal model of agriculture (EHNE and La Via Campesina 2009).

Feminist work in Via Campesina has taken important steps forward since its inception. In the First International Conference in Mons (Belgium) in 1993, all the elected coordinators were men. In the final

declaration the situation of rural women hardly received any mention. Although it identified the need to integrate women's needs in the work of Via Campesina, the conference failed to establish mechanisms to ensure participation of women in successive meetings. Thus, at the 2nd International Conference in Tlaxcala (Mexico) in 1996, the percentage of women attending was 20% of the total: the same as at the 1st International Conference. To address this issue, a special women's committee was created (later known as the Women's Committee of La Via Campesina) and methods that permitted better representation and participation were enacted.

This move facilitated the incorporation of feminist analysis in Via Campesina. Thus, when Via Campesina publicly presented the concept of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit of FAO in Rome in 1996, women contributed their own demands. These included the need to produce food locally, and they added the dimension of "human health" to "sustainable agricultural practices," demanding a drastic reduction in harmful chemical inputs and advocating the active promotion of organic agriculture. Women also insisted that food sovereignty could not be accomplished without greater female participation in the definition of rural policies (Desmarais, 2007).

For Francisca Rodriguez of the peasant association ANAMURI in Chile: "Acknowledging the reality and demands of rural women has been a challenge in all peasant movements. ... The history of this acknowledgement has gone through various stages of struggle for recognition from within, to break with the chauvinist organizations ... over the past twenty years, rural women's organizations have gained [an] identity ... we have reconstructed as women in a half-labored rural locale," (Mugarik Gabe, 2006:254).

The work of the Women's Commission helped promote exchanges between women from different countries, including women-specific meetings to coincide with international summits. Between 1996 and 2000, the Commission's work focused mainly on Latin America—through training, exchange and discussion—and rural women increased their participation in all levels and activities of La Via Campesina.

As Annette Desmarais noted, "In most countries, agricultural and rural organizations are dominated by men. The women of La Via Campesina refuse to accept these subordinate positions. While acknowledging the long and difficult road ahead, women accept the challenge with enthusiasm, and vow to carry out a major role in shaping the Via Campesina as a movement committed to gender equality" (Desmarais, 2007:265).

In October 2000, just before the 3rd International Conference of La Via Campesina in Bangalore (India), the 1st International Assembly of Women Farmers was organized. This allowed for greater participation of women in the organization. The Assembly adopted three major goals: 1) to ensure the participation of 50% of women at all levels of decisions and activities of La Via Campesina, 2) to maintain and strengthen the Women's Commission, and 3) to ensure that documents, training events and speeches of Via Campesina did not have sexist content or sexist language (Desmarais, 2007).

Members at the conference agreed to change the institutional structure to ensure gender equity. As Paul Nicholson of La Via Campesina notes: "[In Bangalore] it was determined that equality of man and woman in spaces and positions of representation in our organization opened a whole internal process of reflection on the role of women in the struggle for women peasants' rights. ... The gender perspective is being addressed now in a serious way, not only in the context of parity in responsibilities, but also a profound debate about the roots and tentacles of patriarchy and violence against women in the rural world." (Food Sovereignty, Biodiversity and Cultures 2010: 8).

This strategy forced the member organizations of Via Campesina at national and regional levels to rethink their work in a gender perspective and to incorporate new measures to strengthen the role of women (Desmarais, 2007). Josie Riffaud of the Confédération Paysanne in France, states that: "the

decision was critical of [lack of gender] parity in the Via Campesina, as allowed in my organization, the Confédération Paysanne. We also apply this measure.” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 15).

As part of the 4th International Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004; the 2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers brought together more than a hundred women from 47 countries on all continents. The main lines of action that emerged from the meeting were to take action against physical and sexual violence against women; both domestically and internationally; demand equal rights and invest in education. As its final statement states: “We demand our right to a dignified life, respect for our sexual and reproductive rights; and the immediate implementation of measures to eradicate all forms of physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence. ... We urge states to implement measures to ensure our economic autonomy, access to land, health, education and equal social status.” (2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers, 2004).

In October 2006, the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina was highlighted in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Participants included women from agricultural organizations in Asia, North America, Europe, Africa and Latin America; with the objective of analyzing and discussing the meaning of equality in the field from a feminist perspective, and a plan of action to achieve it. As one of the presentations—Sergia Galván’s Women’s Health Collective of the Dominican Republic—pointed out, the women of La Via Campesina had three challenges ahead: 1) to advance the theoretical discussion to incorporate the feminist peasant perspective in mainstream feminist analysis, 2) continue work on autonomy as a vital reference for the consolidation of the movement of rural women, and 3) to overcome the feeling of guilt in the struggle for higher positions of power over men (La Via Campesina, 2006).

The World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina emphasized the need to further strengthen the articulation of women of La Via Campesina, and created mechanisms for a greater exchange of information and specific plans for struggle. Among the concrete proposals were the articulation of a global campaign to combat violence perpetrated against women, to extend the discussion to all organizations that are part of Via Campesina, and to work to recognize the rights of rural women in demanding equality in access to land, credit, markets and administrative rights (La Via Campesina, 2006).

At the 5th International Conference in Maputo, Mozambique, in October 2008, La Via Campesina hosted the 3rd International Assembly of Women. The assembly approved the launch of a campaign targeting all forms of violence faced by women in society (physical, economic, social, sexist, cultural, and access to power) which are also present in rural communities and their organizations.

Work that aims at achieving greater gender equality is not easy. Despite the formal equality, women face obstacles when traveling or attending meetings and gatherings. As Annette Desmarais (2007:282) noted, “There are many reasons why women do not participate at this level. Perhaps the most important is the persistence of ideologies and cultural practices that perpetuate unequal gender relations and unfairness. For example, the division of labor by gender means that rural women have less access to the most precious resource, time, to participate as leaders in agricultural organizations. Being involved in reproductive, productive and community work makes it much less likely [for women] to have time for training sessions and learning as leaders.”

It is a struggle against the tide, and despite some concrete victories, we face a long fight in our organizations; and, more generally, socially.

Weaving Alliances

La Via Campesina has established alliances with various organizations and social movements at the international, regional, and national levels. One of the most significant alliances has been with the

World March of Women, a leading feminist global network that has called for joint actions and meetings, and has collaborated in activities: the International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali in 2007, among others.

The original meeting between the two networks was under the anti-globalization movement, and its purpose was to agree on counter-summits and activities within the World Social Forum. The incorporation of a feminist perspective within Via Campesina generated more solidarity, and this has built over time. At the Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 in Sélingué, Mali a meeting was convened by leading international social movements such as Via Campesina, the World March of Women, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, and others to advance strategies within a wide range of social movements (farmers, fishers, consumers) to promote food sovereignty.

Women were a major catalyst in this meeting, as organizers and participants. The Nyéléni Forum in Sélingué was named in honor of the legend of a Malian peasant woman who struggled to assert herself as a woman in a hostile environment. Delegates from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Oceania attended the meeting and identified the capitalist and patriarchal system as primarily responsible for the violations of women's rights, while reaffirming their commitment to transform it.

The World March of Women has taken up food sovereignty as an inalienable human right, especially for women. Miriam Nobre, coordinator of the international secretary of the World March of Women, participated in October 2006 at the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina in the global feminist movement. The 7th International Meeting of the World March of Women in Vigo, Spain in October 2008, held a forum and exhibition for food sovereignty, showing the links between the feminist struggle and those of peasant women.

The success of this collaboration is embodied in the dual membership of women who are active members in the World March of Women, and La Via Campesina. These experiences encourage closer ties and collaboration between both networks, and strengthens the feminist struggle of rural women that is part of the broader struggle against capitalism and patriarchy.

Conclusion

The current global food system has failed to ensure the food security of communities. Currently more than a billion people worldwide suffer from hunger. The global food system has had a profoundly negative environmental impact; promoting an intensive agro-industrial model that has contributed to climate change and collapsing agro-biodiversity. This system has been particularly detrimental to women.

Developing alternatives to this agricultural model requires incorporating a gender perspective. The food sovereignty alternative to the dominant agro-industrial model has to have a feminist position to break with patriarchal and capitalist logic.

La Via Campesina, the largest international movement for food sovereignty, is moving in this direction: creating alliances with other social movements—especially feminist organizations and networks such as the World March of Women—to promote networking and solidarity among women in North and South, urban and rural areas, and between them and their companions. As Via Campesina says: “Globalize the struggle. Globalize hope.”

Esther Vivas

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[1] For a more detailed analysis of the historical evolution of the global food system see McMichael (2000).

[2] All women farmers mentioned in this article are part of member organizations of La Via Campesina.

[3] According to the index of food prices by FAO, recorded between 2005 and 2006, an increase of 12% the following year, in 2007, an increase of 24% between January and July 2008, a rise about 50%. Cereals and other staple foods were those that suffered the largest increases (Vivas, 2009).

* <http://esthervivas.com/english/with...>

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On Cooperation – “If the whole of the peasantry had been organized in cooperatives, we would by now have been standing with both feet on the soil of socialism”

“Given social ownership of the means of production, given the class victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, the system of civilized cooperators is the system of socialism”

LENIN Vladimir

6 January 1923

– I –

It seems to me that not enough attention is being paid to the cooperative movement in our country. Not everyone understands that now, since the time of the October revolution and quite apart from NEP (on the contrary, in this connection we must say—because of NEP), our cooperative movement has become one of great significance. There is a lot of fantasy in the dreams of the old cooperators. Often they are ridiculously fantastic. But why are they fantastic? Because people do not understand the fundamental, the rock-bottom significance of the working-class political struggle for the overthrow of the rule of the exploiters. We have overthrown the rule of the exploiters, and much that was fantastic, even romantic, even banal in the dreams of the old cooperators is now becoming unvarnished reality.

Indeed, since political power is in the hands of the working-class, since this political power owns all the means of production, the only task, indeed, that remains for us is to organize the population in cooperative societies. With most of the population organizing cooperatives, the socialism which in the past was legitimately treated with ridicule, scorn and contempt by those who were rightly convinced that it was necessary to wage the class struggle, the struggle for political power, etc., will achieve its

aim automatically. But not all comrades realize how vastly, how infinitely important it is now to organize the population of Russia in cooperative societies. By adopting NEP we made a concession to the peasant as a trader, to the principal of private trade; it is precisely for this reason (contrary to what some people think) that the cooperative movement is of such immense importance. All we actually need under NEP is to organize the population of Russia in cooperative societies on a sufficiently large-scale, for we have now found the degree of combination of private interest, of private commercial interest, with state supervision and control of this interest, that degree of its subordination to the common interests which was formerly the stumbling block for very many socialists. Indeed, the power of the state over all large-scale means of production, political power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with the many millions of small and very small peasants, the assured proletarian leadership of the peasantry, etc. — is this not all that is necessary to build a complete socialist society out of cooperatives, out of cooperatives alone, which we formerly ridiculed as huckstering and which from a certain aspect we have the right to treat as such now, under NEP? Is this not all that is necessary to build a complete socialist society? It is still not the building of socialist society, but it is all that is necessary and sufficient for it.

It is this very circumstance that is underestimated by many of our practical workers. They look down upon cooperative societies, failing to appreciate their exceptional importance, first, from the standpoint of principal (the means of production are owned by the state), and, second, from the standpoint of transition to the new system by means that are the simplest, easiest and most acceptable to the peasant.

But this again is a fundamental importance. It is one thing to draw out fantastic plans for building socialism through all sorts of workers associations, and quite another to learn to build socialism in practice in such a way that every small peasant could take part in it. That is the very stage we have now reached. And there is no doubt that, having reached it, we are taking too little advantage of it.

We went too far when we reintroduced NEP, but not because we attached too much importance to the principal of free enterprise and trade — we went too far because we lost sight of the cooperatives, because we now underrate cooperatives, because we are already beginning to forget the vast importance of the cooperatives from the above two points of view.

I now propose to discuss with the reader what can and must at once be done practically on the basis of this “cooperative” principle. By what means can we, and must we, start at once to develop this “cooperative” principle so that its socialist meaning may be clear to all?

Cooperation must be politically so organized that it will not only generally and always enjoy certain privileges, but that these privileges should be of a purely material nature (a favorable bank rate, etc.). The cooperatives must be granted state loans that are greater, if only by a little, than the loans we grant to private enterprises, even to heavy industry, etc.

A social system emerges only if it has the financial backing of a definite class. There is no need to mention the hundreds of millions of rubles that the birth of “free” capitalism cost. At present we have to realize that the cooperatives system is a social system we must now give more than ordinary assistance, and we must actually give that assistance. But it must be that assistance in the real sense of the word, i.e., it will not be enough to interpret it to mean assistance for any kind of cooperative trade; by assistance we must mean aid to cooperative trade in which really large masses of the population actually take part. It is certainly a correct form of assistance to give a bonus to peasants who take part in cooperative trade; but the whole point is to verify the nature of this participation, to verify the awareness behind it, and to verify its quality. Strictly speaking, when a cooperator goes to a village and

opens cooperative store, the people take no part in this whenever; but at the same time guided by their own interests they will hasten to try to take part in it.

There is another aspect this question. From the point of view of the “enlightened” European there is not much left for us to do to induce absolutely everyone to take not a passive, but inactive part in cooperative operations. Strictly speaking, there is “only” one thing we have left to do and that is to make our people so “enlightened” that they understand all the advantages of everybody participating in the work of the cooperatives, and organizes participation. “only” the fact. There are now no other devices needed to advance to socialism. But to achieve this “only”, there must be a veritable revolution—the entire people must go through a period of cultural development. Therefore, our rule must be: as little philosophizing and as few acrobatics as possible. In this respect NEP is an advance, because it is adjustable to the level of the most ordinary peasant and does not demand anything higher of him. But it will take a whole historical epoch to get the entire population into the work of the cooperatives through NEP. At best we can achieve this in one or two decades. Nevertheless, it will be a distinct historical epoch, and without this historical epoch, without universal literacy, without a proper degree of efficiency, without training the population sufficiently to acquire the habit of book reading, and without the material basis for this, without a certain sufficiency to safeguard against, say, bad harvests, famine, etc.—without this we shall not achieve our object. The thing now is to learn to combine the wide revolutionary range of action, the revolutionary enthusiasm which we have displayed, and displayed abundantly, and crowned with complete success—to learn to combine this with (I’m almost inclined to say) the ability to be an efficient and capable trader, which is quite enough to be a good cooperator. By ability to be a trader I mean the ability to be a cultured trader. Let those Russians, or peasants, who imagine that since they trade they are good traders, get that well into their heads. This does not follow that all. They do trade, but that is far from being cultured traders. They now trade in an Asiatic manner, but to be a good trader one must trade in the European manner. They are a whole epoch behind in that.

In conclusion: a number of economic, financial and banking privileges must be granted to the cooperatives—this is the way our socialist state must promote the new principle on which the population must be organized. But this is only the general outline of the task; it does not define and depict in detail the entire content of the practical task, i.e., we must find what form of “bonus” to give for joining the cooperatives (and the terms on which we should give it), the form of bonus by which we shall assist the cooperative sufficiently, the form of bonus that will produce the civilized cooperator. And given social ownership of the means of production, given the class victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, the system of civilized cooperators is the system of socialism.

January 4, 1923

– II –

Whenever I wrote about the New Economic Policy I always quoted the article on state capitalism which I wrote in 1918 [“Left-Wing” Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality; part III]. This has more than once aroused doubts in the minds of certain young comrades but their doubts were mainly on abstract political points.

It seemed to them that the term “state capitalism” could not be applied to a system under which the means of production were owned by the working-class, a working-class that held political power. They did not notice, however, that I use the term “state capitalism”, firstly, to connect historically our present position with the position adopted in my controversy with the so-called Left Communists; also, I argued at the time that state capitalism would be superior to our existing economy. It was important for

me to show the continuity between ordinary state capitalism and the unusual, even very unusual, state capitalism to which I referred in introducing the reader to the New Economic Policy. Secondly, the practical purpose was always important to me. And the practical purpose of our New Economic Policy was to lease out concessions. In the prevailing circumstances, concessions in our country would unquestionably have been a pure type of state capitalism. That is how I argued about state capitalism.

But there is another aspect of the matter for which we may need state capitalism, or at least a comparison with it. It is a question of cooperatives.

In the capitalist state, cooperatives are no doubt collective capitalist institutions. Nor is there any doubt that under our present economic conditions, when we combine private capitalist enterprises—but in no other way than nationalized land and in no other way than under the control of the working-class state—with enterprises of the consistently socialist type (the means of production, the land on which the enterprises are situated, and the enterprises as a whole belonging to the state), the question arises about a third type of enterprise, the cooperatives, which were not formally regarded as an independent type differing fundamentally from the others. Under private capitalism, cooperative enterprises differ from capitalist enterprises as collective enterprises differ from private enterprises. Under state capitalism, cooperative enterprises differ from state capitalist enterprises, firstly, because they are private enterprises, and, secondly, because they are collective enterprises. Under our present system, cooperative enterprises differ from private capitalist enterprises because they are collective enterprises, but do not differ from socialist enterprises if the land on which they are situated and means of production belong to the state, i.e., the working-class.

This circumstance is not considered sufficiently when cooperatives are discussed. It is forgotten that owing to the special features of our political system, our cooperatives acquire an altogether exceptional significance. If we exclude concessions, which, incidentally, have not developed on any considerable scale, cooperation under our conditions nearly always coincides fully with socialism.

Let me explain what I mean. Why were the plans of the old cooperators, from Robert Owen onwards, fantastic? Because they dreamed of peacefully remodeling contemporary society into socialism without taking account of such fundamental questions as the class struggle, the capture of political power by the working-class, the overthrow of the rule of the exploiting class. That is why we are right in regarding as entirely fantastic this “cooperative” socialism, and as romantic, and even banal, the dream of transforming class enemies into class collaborators and class war into class peace (so-called class truce) by merely organizing the population in cooperative societies.

Undoubtedly we were right from the point of view of the fundamental task of the present day, for socialism cannot be established without a class struggle for the political power and a state.

But see how things have changed now that the political power is in the hands of the working-class, now that the political power of the exploiters is overthrown and all the means of production (except those which the workers’ state voluntarily abandons on specified terms and for a certain time to the exploiters in the form of concessions) are owned by the working-class.

Now we are entitled to say that for us the mere growth of cooperation (with the “slight” exception mentioned above) is identical with the growth of socialism, and at the same time we have to admit that there has been a radical modification in our whole outlook on socialism. The radical modification is this; formerly we placed, and had to place, the main emphasis on the political struggle, on revolution, on winning political power, etc. Now the emphasis is changing and shifting to peaceful, organizational,

“cultural” work. I should say that emphasis is shifting to educational work, were it not for our international relations, were it not for the fact that we have to fight for our position on a worldscale. If we leave that aside, however, and confine ourselves to internal economic relations, the emphasis in our work is certainly shifting to education.

Two main tasks confront us, which constitute the epoch—to reorganize our machinery of state, which is utterly useless, in which we took over in its entirety from the preceding epoch; during the past five years of struggle we did not, and could not, drastically reorganize it. Our second task is educational work among the peasants. And the economic object of this educational work among the peasants is to organize the latter in cooperative societies. If the whole of the peasantry had been organized in cooperatives, we would by now have been standing with both feet on the soil of socialism. But the organization of the entire peasantry in cooperative societies presupposes a standard of culture, and the peasants (precisely among the peasants as the overwhelming mass) that cannot, in fact, be achieved without a cultural revolution.

Our opponents told us repeatedly that we were rash in undertaking to implant socialism in an insufficiently cultured country. But they were misled by our having started from the opposite end to that prescribed by theory (the theory of pedants of all kinds), because in our country the political and social revolution preceded the cultural revolution, that very cultural revolution which nevertheless now confronts us.

This cultural revolution would now suffice to make our country a completely socialist country; but it presents immense difficulties of a purely cultural (for we are illiterate) and material character (for to be cultured we must achieve a certain development of the material means of production, we must have a certain material base).

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, January 6, 1923

* Written: January 4 & 6, 1923 First Published under the title “On Cooperation”: Pravda (No. 115-116) May 26-27, 1923 Source: Lenin’s Collected Works, 2nd English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Volume 33, (p. 467-75) Transcription/Mark-up: Brian Baggins

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English > Forums & movements > On: Common Goods & Environment > Climate
Fourth International: 16th Congress
Mobilization for the climate and anti-capitalist strategy
TANURO Daniel
25 February 2010

Report presented to the Sixteenth World Congress of the Fourth International for the “Climate change”

discussion.

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Three billion human beings lack the essentials of life. The satisfaction of their needs requires increased production of material goods. Therefore increased consumption of energy. Today, 80 per cent of this energy is of fossil origin, and consequently a source of greenhouse gases which are unbalancing the climatic system.

However, we can no longer permit ourselves to unbalance the climate. We are probably no longer very far from a “tipping point” beyond which phenomena which are uncontrollable and irreversible on a human timescale are likely to be set in motion, which could lead to a situation that humanity has never experienced and which the planet has not experienced for 65 million years: a world without ice. A world in which the sea level would rise by approximately 80 metres compared to its level today.

The total disappearance of ice is certainly not for tomorrow: the process could take up to a thousand years. But it could be set in motion in twenty, thirty or forty years and involve a rise in the sea level of several metres before the end of the century. To prevent this happening, it is necessary to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, therefore to completely do without fossil fuels within two or three generations.

Do without coal, oil, natural gas? It is possible: the technical potential of renewable energies is sufficient to take over. But in practice, in the very short period of time we dispose of, the energy transition is possible only if it goes hand in hand with an important reduction in energy consumption. A reduction so great that it cannot be only attained by an increase in energy efficiency: a reduction of material production and of transport of goods is necessary.

This is enough to understand and to make people understand that humanity is facing a gigantic challenge. A challenge of a completely new nature, which will dominate the twenty-first century. A challenge which contributes to determining the conditions of intervention of revolutionary Marxists and of the workers’ movement in general.

Capitalism cannot rise to this double challenge. Neither on the social level, nor on the environmental level. More exactly: it cannot rise to it in a way that is acceptable for humanity (I will come back later on this). The reason for this incapacity is the same on the two levels: the purpose of capitalism is not the production of use values for the satisfaction of finite human needs, but the potentially infinite production of value by many and competing capitals, organised around rival states.

A capitalism without growth is a contradiction in terms, says Schumpeter. The relative dematerialization of production is certainly a reality, but it is more than compensated for by the increase in the mass of goods produced. This accumulation dynamic constitutes the fundamental reason for which “green capitalism” is an illusion, in the same way as is “social capitalism”. There are green capitals, without any doubt, there are even more and more, and they generate considerable surplus value. But they do not replace dirty capitals: they are added to them, and the latter, because they dominate, determine the rhythms, the technological choices and the modalities of introduction of the former.

The recent past does not leave any doubt on this subject. Look at Barack Obama: at the time of the presidential campaign, he promised to make the polluters pay, in order to massively support green energies (150 billion dollars in 10 years) and to help the most underprivileged layers in society to handle the increase in the price of energy. This policy was supposed to create five million jobs. But along came the subprime crisis and of all these intentions, there remains nothing. In the USA as in the EU, the polluters will receive rights to pollute for nothing, sell them at a profit and pass on the price to the consumers.

Capitalist climate policy reinforces the capitalists who are destroying the climate. Thus we can see in action the power of the fossil energy lobbies and the sectors which are linked to them, such as cars, shipbuilding, aeronautics, petrochemicals and others. This confirms the Marxist analysis according to which monopolies have the power to slow down the equalization of rates of profit. In the case of fossil fuels, this power is all the stronger in that it is anchored in the ownership of deposits, mines etc, therefore in ground rent. The result is laid out before our eyes: in all countries, climate plans do not represent even half of what would be necessary in terms of reduction of greenhouse gases emissions. Moreover, these plans are deepening social inequality and are accompanied by a headlong flight into dangerous technologies: nuclear energy, the massive production of biofuels and the capture and geological sequestration of CO₂ (supposed to make coal “clean”).

It is within this general framework that we have to look at the farce of Copenhagen: the ultra-mediatised conference supposed to lead to a new constraining and ambitious international treaty to take over from the Kyoto Protocol ended in a rout: without targets in hard figures, without deadlines, without even a reference year from which to measure reductions in emissions.

Moreover, Copenhagen could well mark a turn towards a policy even more dangerous than that of the Protocol. By the agreement they concluded, in fact, the 25 big polluting countries were largely freed from the scientific pressure of the IPCC and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It was a horse-traders' agreement between imperialism and the new rising capitalist powers, who shared out the atmosphere on the backs of the peoples, the workers and the poor of the entire world. It is very much to be feared that the Cancun Conference in December will confirm this turn. In that case, on the basis of current national climate plans, we can project a rise in the average surface temperature between 3.2 and 4.9°C in 2100 (compared to the eighteenth century).

We should be wary of falling into a catastrophism with eschatological undertones. Some apocalyptic discourses, indeed, only invoke urgency in order to argue for sacrifices and to conjure away the responsibility of capitalism. But there is no doubt that a rise in temperature of 4°C would lead to real social and ecological catastrophes.

It is a question here of taking the exact measure of the threat. It is not the future of the planet which is at stake, nor life on Earth, nor even the survival of mankind. Apart from an asteroid dropping on us, a large-scale nuclear accident is probably the only thing that can threaten the survival of our species. Climate change, in any case, does not threaten it. But it threatens to seriously worsen the conditions of existence of the 3 billion men and women who already lack the essentials of life. And it threatens the physical survival of a few hundred millions of them, those who are the least responsible for global warming.

Mike Davis, in *Late Victorian Holocausts*, described in detail the horrible famines which caused tens of millions of victims at the end of the nineteenth century. These famines were the combined result of an exceptional sequence of El Nino and of the formation of the world market in agricultural produce. It is

the repetition of such tragedies that we must expect. With the difference that this time the drama will be due entirely to the thirst for profit of big capital, in particular of the monopolistic sectors based on fossil fuels. This enables us to define precisely the reasons for the inability of capitalism to meet the challenge. “There is no situation without a way out for capitalism”, said Lenin. Indeed. But this time the way out is likely to be particularly barbarous.

The ecological crisis and the social crisis are one and the same

It is obvious that the ecological crisis and the social crisis are one and the same crisis: the crisis of the capitalist system. The expression “ecological crisis” is misleading: it is not nature which is in crisis, but the relationship between society and nature. It is not the climate which is in crisis, and its disturbance is not due to “human activity” in general: it is due to a certain type of this activity, historically determined, based on fossil fuels. The ecological crisis, in other words, is nothing but a manifestation of the deep systemic crisis of capitalism.

It is absolutely obvious that satisfying the right to development and to social needs in general at the same time as carrying out the gigantic reductions in emissions which are necessary in the coming forty years is possible only if you adopt a radical anti-capitalist perspective. Esther Vivas will come back to our political tasks in the second part of this report. I will confine myself here to listing the principal measures which are necessary: to remove useless or harmful production; to plan the transition towards another energy system; to establish renewable sources and to develop energy efficiency, independently of the costs (according to thermodynamic rationality, not profit); to transfer, massively and free of charge, clean technologies to the peoples of the South, via the public sectors of the countries concerned; to set up a world fund for adaptation to the effects of global warming in poor countries; to support peasant agriculture against agribusiness; to relocate a substantial part of production, in particular agricultural production; to redistribute wealth by making inroads into the revenues of capital; to radically reduce working time and work rhythms, without loss of wages, with hiring of extra workers; to expropriate the credit and energy sectors....

People say: “it is easier said than done”. No doubt, but the first thing to do... is to say it. And that is what we must do initially, as an International: say it. That will not isolate us, on the contrary. The fight against climate change gives really considerable credibility to the anti-capitalist alternative. The very scale of the problem, its global character, its urgency, the monstrous injustice of the foreseeable consequences: all that makes it possible to introduce directly and in very simple terms the need for a radical rupture with the generalized production of commodities.

Considering the enormity of what is at stake, it is much more than a policy option that is posed: it is a choice of civilization. Through the climatic danger, capitalism makes it possible for us to rehabilitate communism for what it really is: a project of civilization worthy of the name. The project of a human community self-managing common natural resources in a rational and careful way, in order to allow everyone to live well. Faced with vaguely anti-liberal projects, the fight against climate change reinforces our choice of a clearly anti-capitalist line, as it does our refusal of any participation in governments which manage capitalism.

Strategically, the fight for the climate is not distinguished for us from the general struggle of the exploited and oppressed. It can only be carried out effectively by them: the working class, young people, women, the poor, small farmers, indigenous people. The working class has to play an important role there, because only it can provide the foundations of another mode of production in which it will decide what is produced, how, why, for whom and in what quantity.

At the same time, it is an understatement to say that the environmental question in general, and the fight for the climate in particular, is difficult to introduce into the workers' movement. This difficulty results from the situation of the workers as the most exploited class, divorced from its means of production, divorced in particular from nature as a means of production, and which sees these means of production appropriated by capital confronting it as hostile forces.

The conclusion which results from this is that the possibility of integrating ecology into the class struggle depends on the class struggle itself. The more the workers are beaten, atomized, demoralized, the more they will see the defence of the climate as a threat, and the more the capitalist class will be able to really use the protection of the climate as a pretext to attack them even more. In such a context, ecological consciousness can progress only in the alienated form of an inner conflict between the consumer convinced of the necessity to behave in a sober and responsible fashion and the producer preoccupied by the loss of his employment.

On the other hand, the more the workers are successful in their struggles, the more they will gain confidence in their own strength, the more they will be able to deal with the ecological question by bringing to it collectively, as producers and as consumers of their own production, the anti-capitalist solutions that are essential.

A better relationship of forces between in favour of the exploited and oppressed is the necessary prerequisite for an anti-capitalist solution to the climatic crisis, in other words of any acceptable solution. But this prerequisite is by no means sufficient, and does not allow us to put off until later the fight for the environment. Indeed, in addition to its urgency, the ecological question has a certain number of specific characteristics such that the formation of an anti-capitalist class consciousness comes up against even greater obstacles here than in other fields.

Three conclusions flow from this:

Firstly, the importance of building a political instrument, an anti-capitalist political party capable of presenting analyses of the double crisis, social and ecological. Seldom has the need for a revolutionary party and a revolutionary International, acting as a collective intellectual, been so obvious;

Secondly, the importance of a programme of demands making it possible to link concretely the social and ecological dimensions of the capitalist crisis. The key point here is that the climatic crisis, by giving a new topicality to the idea of a completely different kind of society, rehabilitates at the same time the concept of the transitional programme, capable of establishing a bridge between the current situation and this global alternative;

Thirdly, the importance of social dialectics to help the working-class vanguard to play its role. It is no accident that peasants, indigenous peoples and youth are on the front lines in the social mobilization for the climate. Young people are fighting for their future, against a monstrous society in which those in authority know what is happening, but let it happen. As for the peasants and indigenous peoples, unlike the workers, they are not divorced from their means of production, in particular the land. Faced with a capitalist system which has condemned them to death, they have understood that the fight for the climate is part and parcel of their overall struggle and confers upon it a formidable additional dimension of legitimacy. "The peasants can cool down the planet that agribusiness is heating up" said an official statement of Via Campesina a little before Copenhagen. The workers can also cool down the planet. By producing for needs, not for profit, by radically reducing working time, etc. The convergence of the social movements can help them to become aware of the enormous force that they

represent. There lies in particular the importance of the Cochabamba conference convened by Evo Morales.

The Fourth International will call itself ecosocialist

By adopting this Draft Resolution, the Fourth International will call itself ecosocialist. Some people refuse this label, saying: “what use is it, socialism is enough”. Among the adversaries of ecosocialism, there are those for whom nothing has changed, who refuse that the pure schema of the October Revolution should be polluted by the ecological question. They are not, as far as I know, present in our ranks. Moreover, there are comrades who, while accepting the radical innovation of the combined social and ecological crisis, regard ecosocialism as an unnecessary concession to political ecology. That is not what it is about.

We can discuss at length whether or not there was such a thing as an ecology of Marx. Personally, I believe Marx was much more of an ecologist than we have said he was. But that is not what is really important.

What is really important is that all the Marxist currents missed the ecological question, that some of them continue to miss it and that all of them still have difficulty in responding to it in a convincing way.

Calling ourselves ecosocialists is first of all a way of saying “we have understood” or, at the very least, “we know that we must understand something which we did not understand”. It is a new label on the bottle, a little bit like the new shirt that Lenin said had to be put on. A new label can be useful.

But ecosocialism is much more than a label. Though the concept is still work in progress, we can indicate a series of points on which it is substantially different from socialism as generations of militants conceived of it, and as our own current conceived of it.

The starting point is that to stabilize the climate implies a different energy system. Not only other technologies to produce electrical power, heat or movement, but also a different kind of agriculture, a different rationality and a different organization of space. The building of this new system will inevitably be a long-term task, requiring the destruction of the capitalist productive apparatus. The taking of political power is only the starting point of this upheaval.

The new energy system that must be built implies necessarily the decentralization of the production of electric power – which is in particular a prerequisite for the rational use of heat - and the relocation of a part of its production. Decentralization and relocation are perfectly compatible with the project of world socialism, and essential to its democratic self-management. However, it cannot really be disputed that these two concerns do not emerge spontaneously from our programmatic tradition, which rather puts the accent on world planning of production and exchanges.

Another new set of problems relates to the importance of living labour. Our programme allocates a major role to the need to invest living labour in services such as personal care, teaching, health, etc. So these problems are not foreign to us. But, for all the other sectors, we rely on the idea that machines and robots will make it possible to free, to the maximum degree, producers from the burden of physical work. This idea must be called into question, because taking care of the ecosystems requires an intelligence and a sensitivity which can be only be brought by human labour. This is particularly obvious in the case of agriculture: in order to “cool the Earth”, as Via Campesina says, it is necessary to replace agribusiness by peasant or co-operative organic agriculture. That inevitably implies greater investment in human labour (which means neither the return to primitive agriculture nor the end of

progress, but another form of progress).

Lastly, the very conception of nature needs to be re-examined. In the context of the capitalist ecological crisis Marxism can really no longer be satisfied with looking at nature solely from the point of view of production, i.e. as a stock of resources, a platform for work and a dumping ground for waste. We must also learn how to look at nature from the point of view of nature itself, from the point of view of large-scale exchanges of matter and of the operating conditions of the ecosystems, which in the final instance determine the living conditions of humanity. There are invaluable indications on this subject in Marx, we have to take hold of them and develop them.

On all these points, the resolution only opens up a process of ongoing theoretical work to which the International will have to come back. But it is important as of now to send out a signal, to show we are moving. In Copenhagen, in December, a breach opened. For the first time, a mass mobilization on global environmental issues took on the character of a social struggle against the system in place: “Change the system, not the climate”, “Planet not profit”. This internationalist movement will develop. It offers us considerable potentialities. An anti-capitalist tendency did not wait for us to develop. We must reinforce it.

Daniel Tanuro

* Daniel Tanuro, a certified agriculturalist and eco-socialist environmentalist, writes for “La gauche”, (the monthly of the LCR-SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International).

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Naomi Klein: Climate change, unions, and a united left agenda

Posted on September 4, 2013

“This is a green labour revolution I’m talking about. An epic vision of healing our country from the ravages of the last 30 years of neoliberalism and healing the planet in the process.”

UNIFOR is a new union, created by the merger of the Canadian Autoworkers and the Canadian Energy and Paper Workers Union. Author and journalist Naomi Klein spoke at UNIFOR’s founding convention in Toronto on September 1, 2013.

OVERCOMING ‘OVERBURDEN’: THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND A UNIFIED LEFT AGENDA

Why unions need to join the climate fight

by Naomi Klein

I’m so very happy and honored to be able to share this historic day with you. The energy in this room — and the hope the founding of this new union has inspired across the country — is contagious.

It feels like this could be the beginning of the fight back we have all been waiting for, the one that will chase Harper from power and restore the power of working people in Canada.

So welcome to the world UNIFOR.

A lot of your media coverage so far has focused on how big UNIFOR is — the biggest private sector union in Canada. And when you are facing as many attacks as workers are in this country, being big can be very helpful. But big is not a victory in itself.

The victory comes when this giant platform you have just created becomes a place to think big, to dream big, to make big demands and take big actions. The kind of actions that will shift the public imagination and change our sense of what is possible.

And it’s that kind of “big” that I want to talk to you about today.

Some of you are familiar with a book I wrote called *The Shock Doctrine*. It argues that over the past 35 years, corporate interests have systematically exploited various forms of mass crises — economic shocks, natural disasters, wars — in order to ram through policies that enrich a small elite, by shredding regulations, cutting social spending and forcing large-scale privatizations.

As Jim Stanford and Fred Wilson argue in their paper laying out UNIFOR’s vision, the attacks working people in Canada and around the world are facing right now are a classic case of The Shock Doctrine.

There’s no shortage of examples, from the mass slashing of salaries and layoffs of public sector workers in Greece, to the attacks on pension funds in Detroit in the midst of a cooked up bankruptcy, to the Harper government’s scapegoating of unions for its own policy failures right here in Canada.

I don’t want to spend my time with you proving that this ugly tactic of exploiting public fear for private gain is alive and well. You know it is; you are living it.

I want to talk about how we fight it.

And I'll be honest with you: when I wrote the book, I thought that just understanding how the tactic worked, and mobilizing to resist it, would be enough to stop it. We even had a slogan: "Information is shock resistance. Arm yourself."

But I have to admit something to you: I was wrong. Just knowing what is happening – just rejecting their story, saying to the politicians and bankers: "No, you created this crisis, not us" or "No, we're not broke, it's just that you are hoarding all the money" may be true but it's not enough.

It's not even enough when you can mobilize millions of people in the streets to shout "We won't pay for your crisis." Because let's face it – we've seen massive mobilizations against austerity in Greece, Spain, Italy, France, Britain. We've occupied Wall Street and Bay Street and countless other streets. And yet the attacks keep coming.

Some of the new movements that have emerged in recent years have staying power, but too many of them arrive, raise huge hopes, and then seem to disappear or fizzle out. The reason is simple. We are trying to organize in the rubble of a 30 year war that has been waged on the collective sphere and workers rights. The young people in the streets are the children of that war.

And the war has been so complete, so successful, that too often these social movements don't have anywhere to stand. They have to occupy a park or a square to have a meeting. Or they are able to build a power base in their schools, but that base is transient by its nature, they are out in a few years.

This transience makes these movements far too easy to evict simply by waiting them out, or by applying brute state force, which is what has happened in far too many cases.

And this is one of the many reasons why the creation of UNIFOR, and your promise of reviving Social Unionism – building not just a big union but a vast and muscular network of social movements – has raised so much hope.

Because our movements need each other.

The new social movements bring a lot to the table – the ability to mobilize huge numbers of people, real diversity, a willingness to take big risks, as well as new methods of organizing including a commitment to deep democracy.

But these movements also need you – they need your institutional strength, your radical history, and perhaps most of all, your ability to act as an anchor so that we don't keep rising up and floating away. We need you to be our fixed address, our base, so that next time we are impossible to evict.

And we also need your organizing skills. We need to figure out together how to build sturdy new collective structures in the rubble of neoliberalism. Your innovative idea of community chapters is a terrific start.

It's also important to remember that you are not starting from scratch. A remarkable group of people gathered a little less than a year ago for the Port Elgin Assembly and produced what they called the Making Waves agenda.

The most important message to come out of that process is that our coalitions cannot just be about top-down agreements between leaders; the change has to come from the bottom up, with full engagement from members.

And that means investing in education. Education about the ideological and structural reasons why we have ended up where we are. If we are going to build a new world, our foundation must be solid.

It also means getting out there and talking to people face to face. Not just the public, not just the media, but re-invigorating your own members with the analysis we share. But there's something else too. Another reason why we can't seem to win big victories against the Shock Doctrine.

Even when there is mass resistance to an austerity agenda, and even when we understand how we got here, something is stopping us – collectively – from fully rejecting the neoliberal agenda. And I think what it is, is that we don't fully believe that it's possible to build something in its place. For my generation, and younger, deregulation, privatization and cutbacks is all we've ever known.

We have little experience building or dreaming. Only defending. And this is what I've come to understand as the key to fighting the Shock Doctrine.

We can't just reject the dominant story about how the world works. We need our own story about what it could be.

We can't just reject their lies. We need truths so powerful that their lies dissolve on contact with them. We can't just reject their project. We need our own project.

Now, we know Stephen Harper's project – he has only one idea for how to build our economy.

Harper's one idea

Dig lots of holes, lay lots of pipe. Stick the stuff from the pipes onto ships – or trucks, or railway cars – and take it to places where it will be refined and burned. Repeat, but more and faster. Before anyone figures out that this is his one idea, and what has allowed him to maintain the illusion that he is some kind of responsible economic manager, while the rest of the economy falls apart.

It's why it's so important to this government to accelerate oil and gas production at an outrageous pace, and why it has declared war on everyone standing in the way, whether environmentalists or First Nations or other communities.

It's also why the Harper government is willing to sacrifice the manufacturing base of this country, waging war on workers, attacking your most basic collective rights.

This is not just about extracting specific resources – Harper represents an extreme version of a particular worldview. One that I sometimes call "extractivism". And others times simply call capitalism.

Extractivism

It's an approach to the world based on taking and taking without giving back. Taking as if there are no limits to what can be taken– no limits to what workers' bodies can take, no limits to what a functioning society can take, no limits to what the planet can take.

In the extractivist mindset, labour is a commodity just like the bitumen. And maximum value must be extracted from that resource – ie you and your members – regardless of the collateral damage. To health, families, social fabric, human rights.

When crisis hits, there is only ever one solution: take some more, faster. On all fronts.

So that is their story – the one we're trapped in. The one they use as a weapon against all of us. And if we are going to defeat it, we need our own story.

Climate change – Don't look away

So I want to offer you what I believe to be the most powerful counter-narrative to that brutal logic that we have ever had.

Here it is: our current economic model is not only waging war on workers, on communities, on public services and social safety nets. It's waging war on the life support systems of the planet itself. The conditions for life on earth.

Climate change. It's not an "issue" for you to add to the list of things to worry about it. It is a civilizational wake up call. A powerful message – spoken in the language of fires, floods, storms and droughts — telling us that we need an entirely new economic model, one based on justice and sustainability.

It's telling us that when you take you must also give, that there are limits past which we cannot push, that our future health lies not in digging ever deeper holes but in digging deeper inside ourselves – to understand how ALL our fates are interconnected.

Oh, and one last thing. We need to make this transition, like, yesterday. Because our emissions are going in exactly the wrong direction and there's very little time left.

Now I know talking about climate change can be a little uncomfortable for those of you working in the extractive industries, or in manufacturing sectors producing carbon-intensive products like cars and planes. I also know that despite your personal fears, you haven't joined the deniers like some of your counterparts in the U.S. – both of your former unions have all kinds of great climate policies on the books.

And this isn't some recent conversion either: the CEP courageously fought for Kyoto all the way back in the 90s. The CAW has been fighting against the environmental destruction of free trade deals even longer. [Former CEP President] Dave Coles even got arrested protesting the Keystone XL pipeline. That was heroic.

But ... how to say this politely? ... I think it's fair to say that climate change hasn't traditionally been your members greatest passion.

And I can relate: I'm not an environmentalist. I've spent my adult life fighting for economic justice, inside our country and between countries. I opposed the WTO not because of its effects on dolphins but because of its effects on people, and on our democracy.

The case I want to make to you is that climate change – when its full economic and moral implications are understood — is the most powerful weapon progressives have ever had in the fight for equality and social justice.

But first, we have to stop running away from the climate crisis, stop leaving it to the environmentalist, and look at it. Let ourselves absorb the fact that the industrial revolution that led to our society's prosperity is now destabilizing the natural systems on which all of life depends.

I'm not going to bore you with a whole bunch of numbers. Though I could remind you that the World Bank says we're on track for a four degrees warmer world. That the International Energy Agency –not exactly a protest camp of green radicals – says the Bank is being too optimistic and we're actually in for 6 degrees of warming this century, with "catastrophic implications for all of us". That's an understatement: we haven't even reached a full degree of warming yet and look at what is already happening.

Climate change is happening now

97% of the Greenland ice-sheet's surface was melting last summer – as Bill McKibben says, we've taken one of the great features of the planet and broken it.

And then there are the extreme weather events. Hell, I was in Fort McMurray this summer and the contents of the town's museum – literally, its history – was floating around in the water.

I was trying to get interviews with the big oil companies but their headquarters in Calgary were all empty as the downtown was dark and the city was frantically bailing out from the worst flood it has ever seen. And not even the provincial NDP had the courage to say: this is what climate change looks like and we are going to have a lot more of it if those oil companies get their way.

We know that this climate emergency is only getting more dire. And our excuses about why we can't do anything about it – why it's somebody else's issue – are melting away.

But engaging on climate does not mean dropping everything else you are doing and turning into a raving environmentalist. Because I know that the fights you are already waging against austerity, against new free trade deals, against attacks on unions have never been more important.

Which is why I'm not calling you to drop anything.

Climate change is at the heart of all our existing demands

My argument is that the climate threat makes the need to fight austerity all the more pressing, since we need public services and public infrastructure to both bring down our emissions and prepare for the coming storms.

Far from trumping other issues, climate change vindicates much of what the left has been demanding for decades.

In fact, climate change turbo-charges our existing demands and gives them a basis in hard science. It calls on us to be bold, to get ambitious, to win this time because we really cannot afford any more losses. It enflames our vision of a better world with existential urgency.

What I'm going to show you is that confronting the climate crisis requires that we break every rule in the free-market playbook — and that we do so with great urgency.

Climate action = The left agenda

So I'm going to quickly lay out what I believe a genuine climate action plan would look like. And it's not the market-driven non-sense we hear from some of the big green groups in the U.S. – changing your light bulbs, or carbon trading and offsetting. This is the real deal, getting at the heart of why our emissions are soaring.

And you will notice that a lot this will sound familiar. That's because much of this agenda is already embraced in the vision of your new union, not to mention everything you have been fighting for in the past.

First of all, we need to revive and reinvent the public sphere. If we want to lower our emissions, we need subways, streetcars and clean-rail systems that are not only everywhere but affordable to everyone.

We need energy-efficient affordable housing along those transit lines. We need smart electrical grids carrying renewable energy. We need garbage collection that has, as its goal, the elimination of garbage.

And we don't just need new infrastructure. We need major investments in the old infrastructure to cope with the coming storms. For decades we have fought against the steady starving of the public sphere.

Again and again we've seen how those decades of cuts have left us more vulnerable to climate disasters: superstorms bursting through decaying levees, heavy rain washing sewage into lakes, wildfires raging as fire crews are underpaid and understaffed. Bridges and tunnels buckling under the new reality of heavy weather.

Far from taking us away from the fight for a robust public sphere, climate change puts us right in the middle of it – but this time armed with arguments that raise the stakes significantly. It is not hyperbole to say that our future depends on our ability to do what we have so long been told we can no longer do: act collectively. And who better than unions to carry that message?

The renewal of the public sphere will create millions of new, high paying union jobs – jobs in fields that don't hasten the warming of the planet.

But it's not just boilermakers, pipefitters, construction workers and assembly line workers who get new jobs and purpose in this great transition.

There are big parts of our economy that are already low-carbon. They're the parts facing the most disrespect, demeaning attacks and cuts. They happen to be jobs dominated by women, new Canadians, and people of color.

And they're also the sectors we need to expand massively: the care-givers, educators, sanitation workers, and other service sector workers. The very ones that your new union has pledged to organize. The low-carbon workers who are already here, demanding living wages and respect. Turning low-paying low-carbon jobs into higher-paying jobs is itself a climate solution and should be recognized as such.

Here I think we should take inspiration from the fast-food workers in the United States and their historic strikes this past week. They are showing how this organizing can be done. Maybe it will turn out to be the first uprising in a sustained rebellion fighting for both real wages and real food! One in which the health of the workers and the health of society are inextricably linked.

It should be clear by now that I am not suggesting some half-assed token "green jobs" program. This is a green labour revolution I'm talking about. An epic vision of healing our country from the ravages of the last 30 years of neoliberalism and healing the planet in the process.

Environmentalists can't lead that kind of revolution on their own. No political party is rising to the challenge. We need you to lead.

How to pay for it

So the big question is: how are we going to pay for all this? I mean, we're broke, right? Or so our government is always telling us.

But with stakes this high, crying broke isn't going to cut it. We know that it's always possible to find money to bail out banks and start new wars. So that means we have to go to where the money is, and the money is with the fossil fuel companies and the banks that finance them. We have to get our hands on some of their super profits to help clean up the mess they made. It's a simple concept, well established in law: the polluter pays.

We know we can't get the money by continuing to extract more. So as we wind down our dependence on fossil fuels, as we extract LESS, we have to keep MORE of the profits.

There's lots of ways to do that. A national carbon tax and higher royalties are the most obvious. A financial transaction tax would be a big help. Raising corporate taxes across the board would too.

When you do that, suddenly, digging holes and laying pipe isn't the only option on the table.

Quick example. A recent study from the CCPA compared the public value from a five billion dollar pipeline – Enbridge Gateway for instance – and the value from the same amount of money invested in green economic development.

Spend that money on a pipeline, you get mostly short-term construction jobs, big private sector profits, and heavy public costs for future environmental damage.

Spend that money on public transit, building retrofits and renewable energy, and you get, at the very least, three times as many jobs...not to mention a safer future. The actual number of jobs could be many times more than that, according to their modeling. At the highest end, green investment could create 34 times more jobs than just building another pipeline.

And how do you raise five billion dollars for public investments like that? A minimal national carbon tax of ten dollars a tonne would do the trick. And there would be five billion new dollars every year. Unlike the one-off Enbridge put on the table.

Environmentalists, and I include myself here, have to do a much better job of not just saying no to projects like Northern Gateway but also forcefully saying yes to our solutions about how to build and finance green infrastructure.

Now: these alternatives makes perfect sense on paper, but in the real world, they slam headlong into the dominant ideology that tells us that we can't increase taxes on corporations, that we can't say no to new investment, and moreover, that we can't actively decide what kind of economy we want – that we are supposed to leaving it all to the magic of the market.

Well – we've seen how the private sector manages this crisis. It's time to get back in there. This transition needs to be publicly managed. And that will mean everything from new crown corporations in energy, to a huge re-distribution of power, infrastructure and investment.

A democratically-controlled, de-centralized energy system operated in the public interest. This agenda is increasingly being described as “energy democracy” and it's not a new idea in the union world – Sean Sweeney of the Global Labor Institute at Cornell University is here today, and many fine trade unions – including CEP – have been working on this agenda for years. It's time to turn energy democracy into a reality here in Canada. “Power to the people” is a terrific slogan to start with.

As you all know, there have been some modest attempts by provincial governments to play a more activist role in bringing about a green transition, while resisting the pressure to double down on dirty energy.

But in those cases, we're starting to see something very disturbing. In the provinces where governments have taken the most positive, bold action, they're getting dragged into trade court.

And that brings me to the last piece of a real progressive climate agenda.

Trade

It's time to rip up so-called Free Trade deals once and for all. And we sure as hell can't be signing new ones.

You've fought them for decades now, since the CAW played such a pivotal role in the battle against the first Free Trade deal with the US. You've fought them because they undermine workers rights both here and abroad, because they drive a race to the bottom, because they hyper-empower corporations.

And you were right – even more right than you knew. Because not only is corporate globalization largely responsible for soaring emissions, but now the logic of free trade is directly blocking us from making the specific changes needed to reduce climate chaos in response.

A couple of quick examples.

Ontario's Green Energy plan is far from perfect. But it has a very sensible “buy local” provision so that wind and solar projects in Ontario actually deliver jobs and economic benefits to local communities. It's the core principle of a just transition.

Well, the World Trade Organization has decided that this measure is illegal. The CAW is already in a coalition fighting back – but more green policies will face the same corporate challenges.

Here's another example. Quebec banned fracking – a courageous move that has been taken up by two consecutive governments. But a US drilling company is planning to sue Canada for \$250- million dollars under NAFTA's Chapter 11, claiming the ban interferes with its “valuable right to mine for oil and gas under the St. Lawrence river.”

We should have seen this coming. A WTO official was quoted almost a decade ago, saying that the WTO enables challenges against “almost any measure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

In other words, these maniacs think trade should trump everything, including the planet itself. If there has ever been an argument to stop this madness, climate change is it.

The battle lines have never been clearer. Climate change is the argument that must trump all others in the battle against corporate free trade. I mean, sorry guys, but the health of our communities and our planet is just a little more important than your god-given right to obscene profits.

These are moral arguments we can win.

And we don't have to wait for governments to give us permission. Next time they close a factory making fossil-fuel machinery – whether cars, tractors, or airplanes – don't let them do it.

Do what workers are doing from Argentina to Greece to Chicago: occupy the factory. Turn it into a green worker co-op. Go beyond negotiating a last, sad severance. Demand the resources – from companies and governments – to start building the new economy right now.

Whether that's electric trains or windmills. Watch that factory turn into a beacon for students, anti-poverty activists, environmentalists, First Nations. All fighting together for that vision.

Climate change is a tool. Pick it up and use it. Use it to demand the supposedly impossible.

It's not a threat to your jobs, it's the key to liberation from a logic that is already waging a war on the entire concept of dignified work.

So all we need is the political power to make this vision a reality. And that power can be built on the urgency and science of the climate crisis.

If we stay true to a clear vision that these changes are what is required to stave off an ecological collapse, then we will change the conversation.

We'll escape from the clutches of narrow free-market economics, where we are constantly told to ask for less and expect less and we will find ourselves in a conversation about morality – about what kind of people we want to be, about what kind of world we want for ourselves and our kids.

If we set the terms of that conversation, we back Stephen Harper up against the wall.

We finally hold him accountable for the lethal ideology he serves – the one that he has been hiding behind that bland and boring mask of his.

That's how you shift the balance of forces in this country.

If UNIFOR becomes the voice for a boldly different economic model, one that provides solutions to the attacks on working people, on poor people, and the attacks on the Earth itself, then you can stop worrying about your continued relevance.

You will be on the front lines of the fight for the future, and everyone else – including the opposition parties – will have to follow or be left behind.

First Nations

I believe that a key to this shift is deepening your alliance with First Nations, whose constitutionally guaranteed title to land and resources is the biggest legal barrier Harper faces to his vision of Canada as an extraction and export machine – a country-sized sacrifice zone.

As my friend Clayton Thomas Mueller says, imagine if the workers and First Nations actually joined forces in a meaningful coalition – the rightful owners of the land, side by side with the people working the mines and pipelines, coming together to demand another economic model?

People and the earth itself on one side, predatory capitalism on the other. The Harper Tories wouldn't know what hit them.

But this is about more than strategic alliances. As we tell our own story of a different Canada to stand up to Harper's story about endless extraction, we will need to learn from the Indigenous worldview. The one that understands that you can't just take and take, but also care-take, and give back whenever you harvest. That five-year-plans are for kids, and grownups think about seven generations. A worldview that reminds us that there are always unforeseen consequences because everything is connected.

Because building the kinds of deep coalitions that we need begins with identifying the threads that connect all of our struggles. And indeed that recognize they are the SAME struggle.

I want to leave you with a word that might help. Overburden.

Overburden

When I was in the tar sands earlier this summer, I kept thinking about it. Overburden is the word used by mining companies to describe the "waste earth covering a mineral deposit." But mining companies have a strange definition of waste. It includes forests, fertile soil, rocks, clay – basically anything that stands between them and the gold, copper, or bitumen they are after.

Overburden is the life that gets in the way of money. Life treated as garbage.

As we passed pile after pile of masticated earth by the side of the road, it occurred to me that it wasn't just the dense and beautiful Boreal forest that was "overburden" to these companies.

We are all overburden. That's certainly the way the Harper government sees us.

- Unions are overburden since the rights you have won are a barrier to unfettered greed.
- Environmentalists are overburden, because they are always going on about climate change and oil spills.
- Indigenous people are overburden, since their rights and court challenges get in the way.
- Scientists are overburden, since their research proves what I've been telling you.
- Democracy itself is overburden to our government – whether it's the right of citizens to participate in an environmental assessment hearing, or the right of Parliament to meet and debate the future of the country.

This is the world deregulated capitalism has created, one in which anyone and anything can find themselves discarded, chewed up, tossed on the slag heap.

But "overburden" has another meaning. It also means, simply, "to load with too great a burden"; to push something or someone beyond their limits.

And that's a very good description of what we're experiencing too.

Our crumbling infrastructure is overburdened by new demands and old neglect. Our workers are overburdened by employers who treat their bodies like machines. Our streets and shelters are overburdened by those whose labour has been deemed disposable. The atmosphere is overburdened with the gasses we are spewing into it.

And it is in this context that we are hearing shouts of "enough!" from all quarters. This much and NO further.

We heard it from the fast food worker in Milwaukee, who went on strike this week holding a sign saying, "I am worth more" and helped set off a national debate about inequality.

We heard it from the Quebec Students last summer, who said "No" to a tuition increase and ended up unseating a government and sparking a national debate about the right to free education.

We heard it from the four women who said “No” to Harper’s attacks on environmental protections and indigenous rights, pledging to be Idle No More, and ended up setting off an indigenous rights uprising across North America.

And we are hearing “Enough” from the planet itself as it fights back in the only ways it can. Everywhere, life is reasserting itself. Insisting that it is not overburden.

We are starting to realize that not only have we had enough – but that there is enough.

To quote Evo Morales, there is enough for all of us to live well. There just isn’t enough for some of us to live better and better.

To close off, I want to read an excerpt from Article 2 of your brand new constitution.

Words that many of us have been waiting a very long time to hear. Words that you may have already heard today, but they bear repeating. Here goes...

“Our goal is transformative. To reassert common interest over private interest.

“Our goal is to change our workplaces and our world. Our vision is compelling.

“It is to fundamentally change the economy, with equality and social justice, restore and strengthen our democracy and achieve an environmentally sustainable future.

This is the basis of social unionism — a strong and progressive union culture and a commitment to work in common cause with other progressives in Canada and around the world.”

Brothers and Sisters, all I would add is: don’t say it if you don’t mean it.

Because we really, really need you to mean it.

Thank you.

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