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European Social Forum

Needed: A climate revolution

- IV Online magazine - 2008 - IV404 - September 2008 -

Publication date: Monday 22 September 2008

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An overwhelming majority within the scientific community has reached an unprecedented consensus: The current climate change is primarily a result of human activities, and climate change will reach a critical point if no measures are taken. Meanwhile, world leaders and economic powers ignore these facts, and offer superficial solutions such as green consumption instead of a fundamental structural change.

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The scientific facts force us to modify the WSF slogan into something more accurate: Another world is not only possible, but necessary. The question is: How?

During the past weeks we have heard about the worst floods in 500 years hitting the northern part of India, which changed the course of the Kosi river, broke the banks of a dam and swamped hundreds of square miles as far as the borders of Nepal, leaving thousands dead along its route. At the same time we see pictures from the Caribbean islands getting hit by a series of forceful storms causing major havoc, flooding agricultural areas and transport networks. This has put the islands in a severe condition. Around 500 people have been killed and the death toll continues to rise as the islands have hit by yet another storm, Ike. And a few latitudes north, we once again witness displaced people in New Orleans, this time over two million fleeing to avoid the storm.

This shows not only that these disasters tend to hit the poorest countries hardest, but also that an increase in climate catastrophes is without doubt the very consequence of climate change. The only logical conclusion is therefore to act to be able to prevent a destabilized climate.

As if this was not enough, we at the same time heard the news about the rapid melting of the Siberian and Greenland ice, releasing methane (a greenhouse gas 22 times stronger than CO₂) from the bottom of the Siberian Ocean. This has been by far one of the most alarming scenarios expected in the course of climate change, which seems to be happening much earlier than the scientists expected.

In other words, we are facing a severe situation and we must act if we want to prevent the most extreme scenarios. We have access to scientific figures and raw data, various analyses of climate models, but above all, it is possible to prevent this development, despite the fact that the governments in power have failed to prevent the ongoing fossil machine from approaching devastation. They are indifferent to this issue, not because it is impossible to put an end to it, but because they are run by other interests. The only efforts made so far have been within the suffocating frames of the global economy. That includes the Kyoto protocol, which has turned out to be just another way for the fossil dependent industries to keep the wheels going by creating new markets by using pollution as a commodity. The economic logic behind it has not offered any real solutions, but has rather been feeding the fossil industries, and it has failed mainly because the Kyoto protocol is a part of the ideological force behind the present global economic policy.

The dominant ideological structure, including academia and established science, responds to this profound challenge with a business-as-usual attitude, and uses various economic instruments to allow capital to accumulate, and hope to fix, the carbon concentration in the atmosphere essentially by means of technological changes. The Kyoto protocol, which regulates planetary regime to limit carbon emissions, is entirely constructed along such lines. They turn over the managing of climate crises to the capitalist class itself, and next generation of protocols will undoubtedly do the same unless mass action from below stops it from doing so.

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The main reason our governments only offer us these solutions is that the global economic system cannot adjust itself to ecological limitations and is therefore the very antithesis to sustainable development. Capitalism is not only unsustainable: it promotes a culture of fatality, and is indeed suicidal – and must therefore end before it gets hit by irreversible global structural crises. These contradictions are, in the long run, threats to the very fabric of life on Earth as we know it, and they also make it clear that the process of production is symptomatic of a general tendency in capitalism to neglect the social dimensions of a conflict in general, and ecological limitations in particular.

That is why the market has failed us before and why it has not been able to solve problems of this magnitude. This system is failing us now by putting forward the Kyoto protocol, which represents a concrete example of the reductionist thinking and the arrogant ignorance of the neo-liberal economists concerning the climate issues. And with all certainty it will fail us in the future, since contemporary capitalism is not merely an ideology – it also constitutes the framework for our way of life. And most essentially: It can not be limited. If limited it would most definitely die. Limiting business-as-usual can be compared to limiting the breathing of competing runners: If we do that they will collapse – and probably die. Capitalism works in the same way, primarily because the expansion and commodifying of the world is the life blood of this system.

Ecological conditions are a part of all processes of accumulation, and processes of accumulation in turn tend to transform ecosystems. The current hegemonic system appears to be a severe destructive force and has, by commodifying everything, made us surrender to something that appears greater than us: Capital. From this standpoint, it seems that there are no other options except to engage in massive confrontations with the central institutions and forces that defend the economic world order. It is in and around such processes that a confrontational, yet reasonable, climate movement for the twenty-first century can arise.

When facing runaway climate change and a ruling class that is ignoring the consequences, the only option possible left is to speed up the birth of the antithesis to the current social formation. A new and universalistic approach to the climate issues is therefore as necessary and desirable as essential part of the political struggle. The only force that can break the chains of fossil Capitalism is a broad and radical popular movement that can mobilize all the forces struggling for a socially and ecologically sustainable society. We are right now seeing the signs of this kind of budding movements already, the most successful is the British one, but there are more under way in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Australia, USA and other countries, demanding a political change – a change diametrically opposed to the current hegemonic worldview that declares a limitless burning of fossil fuels and business-as-usual.

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