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"Resistance is the only way"

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Almost a year has passed since the IPCC released its reports on how rapid climate changes are taking us towards a disaster. The reports have made the issue more obvious and less controversial: the conclusion of this is that the climate threat can no longer be ignored.



Foad Rad had a chat with Michael Löwy, veteran of the Fourth International, the socialist world movement, and a well known sociologist about climate change and the need for a new world system.

You mention that global warming is accelerating at a much faster pace than earlier climate models have indicated. How much faster?

* It is difficult to estimate exactly, what we do know is that global warming is a fact and that it is accelerating ever faster. Today we also know that many of the scenarios presented in IPCC's reports will take place, not in the year 2100 or even 2050. No: these scenarios will take place much sooner than that.

* We can already see several obvious examples of ecosystems collapsing. Global warming is passing several critical points which heighten the risk of it moving into an uncontrolled, self-reproducing mode; Runaway climate change.

What stance should the left movement take, considering this situation?

* The first thing we must do is reach out to the public with the message that global warming is a fact that it will manifest itself during the coming decades and, therefore, we cannot wait any longer and must act now.

* The second thing we have to do is take a stance on how the climate is developing. Since there already is a risk that things can derail, we will have to put our demands much higher than the goals set by EU, the Stern Report, the Kyoto treaty and other goals set by bourgeois governments. It is very important to tell people this so that they realise that the climate goals of the ruling class are not enough to prevent a human and, primary, planetary disaster.

Should we not support the climate policies of current governments?

* Today's governments are simply incapable of preventing the suicide which capitalism is paving the way for. However, this is not due to lack of collective will on behalf of the ruling class or lack of understanding. Rather it is because the capitalist system does not allow limitations. That makes ecological and social adaptation impossible.

* Profit is the main driving force behind capitalism and this requires unlimited expansion, unlimited accumulation and commodification. Those a few, but essential parts of the continuous reproduction of the system. Aside from all other technicalities, this is the ideological aspect of the climate issue. Hence, we should therefore draw the ideological conclusion that the bourgeoisie cannot handle the seriousness and the responsibility which the climate issue contains.

* The cause of the problem is not perverted aspects of bourgeoisie governments, but rather the capitalist system

itself. That is something the public must become aware of. What they must also become aware of is that there is an alternative, not an abstract one, but something very concrete and conceivable, ecosocialism, which is the common and democratic control of production for social needs and within ecological boundaries. This is nothing mystical or Utopian, in the negative sense of that word, but a necessity.

How should the left establish ecosocialism as an alternative to today's system?

* Even if the goal is an ecosocialist society, we must remember that this is not relevant during the initial stage, because people do not usually lend their support to what they construe as abstractions, but rather mobilise behind real changes in their everyday life. Therefore it is important to support concrete demands from the public which go against the capitalist logic. Political parties do not necessarily have to be the driving force, but people who put forth concrete demands from their own experience.

* We cannot mobilise people for an ecosocialist revolution now, but instead we begin with making concrete and direct demands to those in charge in order to decrease global warming. For instance, if a government does not support international climate treaties, the first priority is to remove the government since it ignores climate science, and replace it with one that does not, even if it is a bourgeois one.

* In Australia, mobilisation from the people achieved exactly that. Through demonstrations, gathering upwards of 150 000 people, the Liberal government, who had not signed the Kyoto treaty, was replaced. This represented progress even though the replacement was a right-wing Labor government.

* We must hence fight for concrete local demands, as in Ecuador where the indigenous people stopped oil companies pumping up the oil, or like the Parisians demanding free public transportation, or peasants in Brazil fighting deforestation of the rain forest. All such demands are important and must be supported. With every victory we have to put forth new demands in a dynamic process, which increasingly challenges the capitalist logic.

How should a globally weak left go about accomplishing this?

* The climate struggle will not primarily be an ideological struggle between capitalism and socialism, rather popular concrete demands in opposition to powerful economic interests.

* For example, in Brazil the different rural constellations (such as family agriculture and smaller peasant corporations) stand against the multinationals and the commercialisation of agriculture, something which has strengthened the antagonism and actually led to the killing of several peasants. This is a struggle we must support in order to prevent further deforestation and money being ploughed into the ethanol industry, when farmers can and want to produce ecologically. Even if the opposition is not socialist, it is a struggle containing several clearly anti-capitalist aspects.

* The struggle must therefore be fought from already-existing antagonism and conflict between local people and globalised capital. In all these spontaneous struggles, where people challenge powerful interests, there is a tendency towards collective organising. This experience of the struggle is the only hope we have today.

Today we see all governments in advanced capitalist states talk about the climate and their desire to solve the climate issue, and at the same time making huge investments which strengthens fossil-fuel society's grip on us. How can we unravel the climate policy of the ruling class?

"Resistance is the only way"

* Bourgeois governments deal with this crisis in a systematically erroneous way and this is something inevitable. Also, it is not possible to place hope in the hands of the green parties because they do not perceive the fundamental contradiction between capitalism's insatiable thirst for fossil fuel and ecological crisis. That is something which manifests itself in their policies, which do not reach further than eco-reformist proposals. Aside from this, the green parties are often used as an alibi by bourgeoisie governments.

* The only way is to visualise the already-existing contradictions, but I do not think there is a universal way of approaching this. Every country and each situation has its specific prerequisites, different needs and demands that must be satisfied. In Brazil we have deforestation, and burning of the Amazon rain forest, which contributes to enormous greenhouse gas emissions and the decimation of one of Earth's greatest carbon dioxide sinks. Which ever way one looks at it, the situation in the Amazon forest is acute and may inevitably lead to human disaster.

* But at the same time awareness increases among people who put ever harder pressure on passive governments who talk beautifully about preservation of the rain forest but, by agreeing contracts with commercial companies, in reality are part of deforestation.

* Today this issue unites the peasant movement, Christian churches, the local population, different left and environmental organisations and even international organisations that worry about this catastrophic development. All these have joined forces to coordinate the struggle against the agrobusiness, and here we have a struggle where concrete political demands are being made.

* The attempts to save the Amazon forest could fail since there are powerful parties such as cattle raisers, commercial soy bean growers, and ethanol producers. They are being challenged. However, the peasants have no alternative to challenging these powerful interests.

* With enough support they can turn the policy in a different direction. This is just an example of how we can create strong enough bonds between different forces so as to the people organize to change the conditions for the struggle.

How do you view the future?

* The scientific reports do not give much hope, but a good sign today is that the Ecosocialist International Network is growing and next year the second international conference in the Amazon will be held to mobilise the fight against deforestation. That brings hope.

* Bertolt Brecht once said: "If you fight you might lose, if you don't you have already lost". Resistance is the only way.

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