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Climate change/16th World Congress

Anti-capitalism and climate justice

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Today, climate change is an undeniable reality. The political, social and media impact of the Copenhagen Summit in December 2009 was a good proof of this. A summit that showed the inability of the capitalist system to give a credible response to a crisis that it has itself created. Green capitalism offers a series of technological solutions (nuclear power, capture of carbon from the atmosphere to be stored, biofuels and so on) that will have a major social and environmental impact. These are false solutions to climate change that try to hide the structural causes that have led us to the current crisis situation and raise the contradiction between the short term calculations of capital and the long rhythms of ecological equilibrium.

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The interpreters worked hard

Photo:Raoul

In this context, a movement able to challenge the dominant discourse of green capitalism, recognising the impact and the responsibility of the current model of capitalist production, distribution and consumption and linking the global climate threat with everyday social problems is urgent. Copenhagen saw the increased expression of the movement for climate justice, precisely to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the mobilizations against the WTO in Seattle. A protest which, under the slogan "Change the system, not the climate" expresses this diffuse relationship between climate and social justice, between social crisis and ecological crisis. But the success of the protests in Copenhagen contrasts with the weakness of demonstrations around the world, with some exceptions such as London.

The current crisis raises the urgent need to change the world from below and do so from an anti-capitalist and radical eco-socialist perspective. Anti-capitalism and climate justice are two struggles which must be closely linked. Any prospect of rupture with the current economic model that does not take account of the centrality of the ecological crisis is doomed to failure and any environmental perspective without an anti-capitalist orientation of a break with the current system will deal with the surface of the problem and end up being an instrument at the service of green marketing policies.

Slowing down climate change involves modifying the current model of production, distribution and consumption. A superficial and cosmetic retouching is of no point. Solutions to the ecological crisis mean taking up the foundations of the current capitalist system. If we want climate change we need to change the system. Hence, the need for a true eco-socialist perspective, or eco-communist perspective as Daniel Bensaïd said in one of his last articles.

Also, we must combat the thesis of green neo-Malthusianism blaming the countries of the South for their high rates of population growth and seeking to control the bodies of women, undermining our right to decide on our bodies. To fight against climate change means to fight poverty: the greater social inequality, the more climate vulnerability. It is necessary to convert productive sectors with a serious social and environmental impact (military, cars, extractive industries and so on), creating employment in ecologically just and social sectors such as organic farming, public services (health, education, transport), among others.

Putting an end to climate change means asserting the right of peoples to food sovereignty. The current agro-industrial model (delocalised, intensive, mileage intensive, oil-dependent) is one of the maximum greenhouse gas generators. An ecological, local peasant agriculture with short marketing circuits allow, as La Via Campesina say, the cooling of the planet. It should also incorporate the demands of native peoples, control of their lands and natural goods and their worldview and respect for the "pachamama", "mother earth", and defence of the "good life". Enhancing these contributions posing a new type of relationship between humanity and nature is key to addressing climate change and the commodification of life and the planet.

From a North-South perspective, climate justice involves unconditional cancellation of the debt of the countries of the South, an illegal and illegitimate debt and demanding recognition of a social, historical and ecological debt from North to South, the result of centuries of pillaging and exploitation. In cases of disaster, it is necessary to promote mechanisms of "popular relief". We have seen as climate change increases the vulnerability of the popular sectors, especially in the countries of the South. The earthquakes in Haiti and in Chile are two of the most recent cases. These threats necessitate networks of international solidarity of rank and file social movements allowing a channelling of immediate and effective aid to local populations. The initiative cannot be in the hands of an international "humanitarianism" empty of political content.

The fight against climate change is a fight against the current model of industrial production delocalised, "just in time", massive, dependent on fossil resources and so on. Union bureaucracies tail and legitimize policies of "green capitalism" with the farce of "green technology" to create employment and generate increased prosperity. It is necessary to remove this myth. The trade union left must call into question the current model of growth without limits by another "development" model in accordance with the finite resources of the planet. Climate change and environmental demands must be a central axis of combative trade unionism. Trade unionists cannot see ecologists as enemies and vice versa. All suffer the consequences of climate change and we need to act collectively.

It is wrong to think that we can combat climate change only by individual attitudes changing, and when more when half of the world's population lives in conditions of "chronic underconsumption", and is also wrong to think that we can combat climate change only with scientific and technological responses. Structural changes are necessary to the models of production of goods, energy and so on. In this respect, local-based initiatives pose practical alternatives to the dominant model of consumption, production, energy... they have a demonstrative character and raise awareness which is fundamental as a basis.

By its nature, talk of how to confront climate change implies discussing strategy, self-organization, planning and the tasks that lie ahead for those of us who consider ourselves anti-capitalists.

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