

The Second Ecosocialist Manifesto

*“The world is suffering from a fever due to climate change,
and the disease is the capitalist development model.”
— Evo Morales, president of Bolivia, September 2007*

Humanity’s Choice

Humanity today faces a stark choice: ecosocialism or barbarism.

To the barbarities of the last century — 100 years of war, brutal imperialist plunder and genocide — capitalism has added new horrors. Now it is entirely possible that the air we breathe and the water we drink will be permanently poisoned and that global warming will make much of the world uninhabitable.

The science is clear and irrefutable: climate change is real, and the main cause is the use of fossil fuels, especially oil, gas, and coal. The earth today is significantly hotter than it was a few decades ago, and the rate of increase is accelerating.

Left unchecked, global warming will have catastrophic impacts on human, animal, and plant life. Crop yields will drop drastically, leading to famine on a broad scale. Hundreds of millions of people will be displaced by droughts in some areas and by rising ocean levels in others. Chaotic, unpredictable weather will become the norm. Epidemics of malaria, cholera and even deadlier diseases will ravage the poorest and most vulnerable members of every society.

The impact will be most devastating on those whose lives have already been ravaged by imperialism many times over — the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and indigenous peoples everywhere. Climate change has justifiably been called an act of aggression by the rich against the poor.

Ecological destruction is not an accidental feature of capitalism: it is built into the system’s DNA. The insatiable need to increase profits cannot be reformed away. Capitalism can no more survive limits on growth than a person can live without breathing.

Under capitalism, the only measure of growth is how much is sold every day, every week, every year – including vast quantities of products that are directly harmful to humans and nature, commodities that cannot be produced without spreading disease, destroying the forests that produce the oxygen we breathe, demolishing ecosystems, and treating our water and air as sewers for the disposal of industrial waste.

Capitalism has always been ecologically destructive. From power plants in the U.S.A. to the forests of Indonesia; from tar sands in Canada to oil wells in Nigeria, the global drive for profit has caused untold damage to nature.

In our lifetimes, these assaults on the earth have accelerated. Quantitative change is giving way to qualitative transformation, bringing the world to a tipping point, to the edge of disaster. A growing body of scientific research has identified many ways in which small temperature increases could trigger runaway effects – such as rapid melting of the

Greenland ice sheet or the release of methane buried in permafrost and beneath the ocean – that would make catastrophic climate change inevitable.

If capitalism remains the dominant social order, the best we can expect is unbearable climate conditions, an intensification of social crises and the spread of the most barbaric forms of class rule, as the imperialist powers fight among themselves and with the global south for continued control of the world's diminishing resources. At worst, human life may not survive.

Capitalism is the primary enemy of nature, including humanity. Abolishing it has never been more urgent.

Capitalist Strategies for Change

The world is awash with strategies for contending with ecological ruin, including the ruin looming as a result of the reckless growth of atmospheric carbon. The great mass of these share one common feature: they are devised by and on behalf of the dominant global system, capitalism.

It should not surprise that the same system which drives the ecological crisis also sets the terms of the debate about the ecological crisis. For capital commands the means of production of knowledge as much as of atmospheric carbon. And just as it would be inconceivable for capital to awaken and turn itself into an ecologically rational system of production, so must it pretend to be able to heal the wounds it has inflicted on the earth. Accordingly, its politicians, bureaucrats, economists and professors send forth an endless stream of proposals, all variations on the theme that the world's ecological damage can be repaired without disruption of the free market and of the system of accumulation that commands the world economy.

But a person cannot serve two masters, here, the integrity of the earth and the profitability of capitalism. One must be set aside, and since money rules our world, the needs of mere nature – and therefore of human survival — will be deferred under capital so that accumulation may continue. There is every reason, therefore, to radically doubt the established measures for checking the slide to ecological catastrophe.

And indeed, beyond a cosmetic veneer, essentially equivalent to the plantings in the atria of corporate headquarters, the reforms over the past thirty-five years have been a monstrous failure. Individual improvements do of course occur. Yet these inevitably become overwhelmed and swept away by the ruthless expansion of the system and the chaotic character of its production.

One fact can give an indication of the failure: in the first four years of the 21st Century, global carbon emissions were nearly three times as great per annum as those of the decade of the 1990s, despite the appearance of the Kyoto Protocols in 1997.

Kyoto employs two devices: the “Cap and Trade” system of trading pollution credits to reach certain reductions in emissions, and projects in the Global South--the so-called “Clean Development Mechanisms” (CDMs)--to offset emissions in the industrial nations.

These instruments all rely upon market mechanisms, which means, first of all, that atmospheric carbon directly becomes a commodity, hence under the control of the same class interest that created global warming in the first place. Capitalists are not to be compelled to reduce their carbon emissions but in effect, bribed to do so, and in this way, allowed to use their power over money to control the carbon market for their own

ends, which needless to say, include the devastating exploration for yet more carbon resources. Nor is there a limit to the amount of emission credits which can be issued by compliant governments under the control of capital.

When we add to this the literal impossibility of verification or of any uniform method of evaluation of results, it can be seen that not only is this regime incapable of rationally controlling emissions, it also provides an open field for evasion and fraud of all kinds, along with the neo-colonial exploitation of indigenous people as well as their habitat. As the *Wall Street Journal* put it in March, 2007, emissions trading "would make money for some very large corporations, but don't believe for a minute that this charade would do much about global warming." The *Journal* called the carbon trade "old-fashioned ... making money by gaming the regulatory process."

And yet this worthless system remains the chosen path. All of the U.S. Democratic Party presidential hopefuls affirmed the Cap and Trade model in a recent debate. And in December, 2007, at the Bali interim climate meetings held to prepare the way for the replacement of Kyoto, which expires in 2012, opened the way for even worse abuses in the period ahead. Bali avoided explicit mention of the drastic goals for carbon reduction put forth by the best climate science (90% by 2050); it more or less completely abandoned the peoples of the South to the tender mercy of capital, giving jurisdiction over the process to the World Bank; and made offsetting of carbon pollution even easier. In sum, Bali was an orgy of neoliberalism, as no fewer than 300 corporations registered as NGOs in to gain access to the trough of pollution credits.

A tremendous world-wide radical response to the predatory system of climate regulation, and to all aspects of the life-threatening ecological crisis, is underway. It has made itself felt at Bali and elsewhere, with the simple, and life-affirming principle that the only rational and just solution to the climate crisis is to keep carbon in the ground in the first place.

Beyond the great range of valuable interventions proposed by this "movement of movements," one singular and overarching perspective is beginning to be discussed: that in order to affirm and sustain our human future, a revolutionary transformation is needed, in which all particular struggles are to be seen in the light of a greater struggle against capital itself. This larger struggle cannot be merely negative. It must announce a different kind of society, and this we name ecosocialism.

Stop Capitalist Ecocide! The Ecosocialist Alternative

Capitalist attempts to solve the ecological crisis have failed: only a profound change in the very nature of civilization can save humanity from the catastrophic consequences of climate change.

The ecosocialist movement aims to stop and reverse this disastrous process. We will fight to impose every possible limit on capitalist ecocide, and to build a movement that can replace capitalism with a society in which common ownership of the means of production replaces capitalist ownership, and in which the preservation and restoration of ecosystems will be a fundamental part of all human activity.

In other words, ecosocialism is an attempt to provide a radical civilizational alternative to the capitalist/industrial system, through an economic policy founded on non-monetary criteria: social needs and ecological equilibrium. It combines a critique of both "market

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ecology,” which does not challenge capitalism, and of “productivist socialism,” which ignores the earth’s natural limits.

The aim of ecosocialism is a new society based on ecological rationality, democratic control, social equality, and the predominance of use-value over exchange-value. These aims require both democratic planning that will enable society to define the goals of investment and production, and a new technological structure for humanity’s productive forces. In other words: a revolutionary social and economic transformation.

Emancipation of gender is integral to ecosocialism. The degradation of women and of nature have been profoundly linked throughout history, and especially the history of capitalism, in which money has dominated life. To defend and enhance life, therefore, is not just a matter of restoring the dignity of women; it also requires defending and advancing those forms and relations of labor that care for life and have been dismissed as mere “women’s work” or “subsistence.”

In order to stop the catastrophic process of Global Warming before it is too late, we must introduce radical changes in:

1. the energy system, by replacing the fossile fuels that are responsible for the greenhouse effect (oil, coal) with clean eolic and solar, sources of power;
2. the transportation system, by drastically reducing the use of private trucks and cars, replacing them with free and efficient public transportation;
3. present consumption patterns, which are based on waste, inbuilt obsolescence, and conspicuous competition.

To avoid endangering human survival, entire sectors of industry and agriculture must be suppressed (nuclear energy, armaments, advertising), reduced (fossil fuels), or restructured (automobiles) and new ones (solar energy, ecologically-sound agriculture) must be developed, while maintaining full employment for all. Such a change is impossible without public control over the means of production and democratic planning. Democratic public decisions on investment and technological change, must replace control by banks and capitalist enterprises in order to serve society’s common good.

Far from being “despotic”, planning is the whole society’s exercise of freedom: freedom of decision, and liberation from the alienated and reified “economic laws” of the capitalist system, which has controlled individuals’ lives and death, and locked them in what Max Weber called an economic “iron cage.”

The passage to ecosocialism is an historical process, a permanent revolutionary transformation of society, culture and attitudes. This transition will lead not only to a new mode of production and an egalitarian and democratic society, but also to an alternative way of life, a new ecosocialist civilization, beyond the reign of money, beyond consumption habits artificially produced by advertising, and beyond the unlimited production of commodities that are useless and/or harmful. It is important to emphasize that such a process cannot begin without a revolutionary transformation of social and political structures based on the active support, by the vast majority of the population, of an ecosocialist program.

To dream and to struggle for a green socialism does not mean that we should not fight for concrete and urgent reforms now. Without any illusions about “clean capitalism,” we

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must try to win time and to impose on the powers that be — governments, corporations, international institutions — some elementary but essential changes:

- drastic and enforceable reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases,
- free public transportation
- taxation on polluting cars,
- progressive replacement of trucks by trains
- shifting of war spending to the ecological reconstruction of homes and workplaces.

These, and similar demands, are at the heart of the agenda of the Global Justice movement and the World Social Forums, a decisive new development which has promoted, since Seattle in 1999, the convergence of social and environmental movements in a common struggle against the system.

Global Warming will not be stopped in conference rooms and treaty negotiations: only mass action by the oppressed, by the victims of ecocide can make a difference. Third World and indigenous peoples are at the forefront of this struggle, fighting polluting multinationals, poisonous chemical agro-business, invasive genetically modified seeds, and so-called “bio-fuels” that put corn into car tanks, taking it away from the mouths of hungry people. Solidarity between anticapitalist ecological mobilizations in the North and the South is a strategic priority.

This Manifesto is not an academic statement, but a call to action. The entrenched ruling elites are incredibly powerful, and the forces of radical opposition are still small. But those forces are the only hope that the catastrophic course of capitalist “growth” will be halted. Walter Benjamin defined revolutions as being not the locomotive of history, but as humanity reaching for the emergency breaks of the train, before it plunges into an abyss.