

# Confronting the Climate Change Crisis

An Ecosocialist Perspective

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*“Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations.” —Karl Marx*

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# **Confronting the Climate Change Crisis An Ecosocialist Perspective**

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## Confronting the climate change crisis

*(Climate and Capitalism, February 2, 2007)*

This month, we've been treated to the bizarre spectacle of George Bush and Stephen Harper each declaring their deep concern about "the serious challenge of global climate change." The U.S. president and Canada's prime minister, both long-time opponents of any action to limit greenhouse gases, now want us to believe that saving the environment has become a top priority of their governments.

Truly, the hypocrisy of capitalist politicians knows no bounds!

They and their corporate masters want to avoid action on climate change, and they have been doing just that for years. Their eagerness to clothe themselves in inappropriate green has everything to do with public relations — and nothing to do with saving the earth.

### Denying Science

Knowledgeable scientists agree that climate change is real, and that 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. If we don't stop it, by the end of this century the planet will be hotter than it has ever been since humans began walking the earth.

Left unchecked, this 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. Malaria and cholera epidemics are likely. The impact will be greatest in Asia, Africa, and Latin America — on the peoples whose lives have already been ravaged by imperialism many times over.

But that hasn't stopped corporations and politicians from claiming that they don't have enough information to decide whether the problem exists, let alone what can be done about it. Their denials have been supported by a bevy of climate change deniers who are frequently quoted in media reports on the subject.

A recent report from the Union of Concerned Scientists shows that the apparently large network of deniers is in fact a handful of people who make themselves seem more numerous by working through more than 30 front-groups. ExxonMobil, the world's largest publicly traded company, has been financial backer of all these groups — it paid them millions to "manufacture uncertainty" about climate change.

By no coincidence, ExxonMobil is the largest single corporate pro-

ducer of greenhouse gases. If ExxonMobil was a country, it would be the sixth-largest source of emissions.

Meanwhile, other corporate and government agencies have been working hard to divert attention away from corporate polluters and onto individuals. They blame individuals for not cutting back, not driving less, not insulating their homes and not using low-power light bulbs. The Canadian government's "One-Tonne Challenge" campaign, and the imposition of a "Congestion Charge" on automobile commuters in London, England, are cases in point: they both say individuals are to blame and should pay the cost of cleaning up the atmosphere.

Obviously conservation is important. But so long as the fossil fuel giants continue business as usual, individual efforts will have very little impact.

### **The Age of Greenwash**

Denying climate change and blaming it on individuals have worked well until now, but such tactics are now losing effectiveness.

The scientific evidence for global warning gets more overpowering every day. On February 2, the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will release a major report on its causes. Journalists who have seen drafts of the report say that it confirms that most global warming since 1950 has been caused by man-made greenhouse gases, and warns that warming in the next 25 years will be twice as great as in the past century.

More generally, despite the confusion and misinformation, public concern about climate change is growing. Voters and customers want action: polls show that the environment has now passed health care as the number one concern of Canadian voters.

"Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. ...

"At every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature — but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly."

— Friedrich Engels, *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man*

That's why George Bush and Stephen Harper are now demonstratively jumping on the green bandwagon and trying to grab the reins. That's why Bush felt compelled to mention global warming in his State of the Union message.

Even ExxonMobil is on side: the company says it has stopped funding climate-change-denial front groups, and its executives are meeting with environmental groups to discuss proposals for regulating greenhouse gas emissions.

Stephane Dion, recently chosen to lead Canada's Liberal Party, is setting the pace for politicians. While he was Environment Minister, Dion did nothing to stop Canada's greenhouse gas emissions from rising 30%. Now that he is leader of the Official Opposition, he says that he'll make the environment his top priority if he wins the next federal election.

Dion's real position on stopping greenhouse gas emissions was revealed in his response to expansion of the Alberta Tar Sands project. Extracting oil from tar sands generates two-and-a-half times as much greenhouse gas as conventional oil production. The Alberta Tar Sands project is the largest single reason why Canada's emissions have risen drastically since this country signed the Kyoto Accord. But when asked what he would do about it in May 2005, Dion shrugged: "There is no minister of the environment on earth who can stop this from going forward, because there is too much money in it."

That's the way it is in the age of greenwash — lots of talk about climate change, but no action that would interfere with the inalienable right of corporations to make money. Profits always come first, no matter how green the capitalist politicians claim to be.

## **Pollution Rights for Sale**

In fact, there are major efforts under way to convince those who are concerned about climate that the solution is to increase the polluters' profits.

Last year, the British government appointed leading economist Nicholas Stern to study the problem of climate change. His report identified the source of the problem:

"GHG emissions are an externality; in other words, our emissions affect the lives of others. When people do not pay for the consequences of their actions we have market failure. This is the greatest market failure the world has seen."

"Externality" is a term capitalist economists use when capitalist corporations don't pay for the damage they cause. Pollution is the per-

fect example — individual corporations pollute, but society as a whole bears the cost. Adam Smith’s invisible hand, which supposedly ensures the best of all possible worlds, doesn’t work on externalities.

A naïve observer might conclude that this means we should stop relying on markets, but not Nicolas Stern, and not most policy makers. Their solution to market failure is — create more markets!

The most widely proposed “market solution” to climate change — the one that is enshrined in the Kyoto Protocol — is to set goals for emission reduction, and then put a monetary value on the right to pollute.

If a corporation decides it is too expensive to cut emissions, it can buy pollution credits from some other company, or it can fund green projects in the Third World. Ontario Hydro, for example, might keep using coal-fired power plants if it plants enough trees in India or Brazil.

The well-known British journalist and environmentalist George Monbiot has compared this to the medieval practice of selling indulgences. If you were rich and you committed murder or incest or whatever, the Church would sell you forgiveness for a fixed price per sin. You didn’t have to stop sinning — so long as you paid the price, the Church would guarantee your admission to heaven.

The emissions trading schemes are actually worse than that. It’s as though the Church just gave every sinner a stack of Get Out Of Hell Free cards — and those who don’t sin enough to use them all could then sell them to others who want to sin more.

*Carbon Trading*, a report published by Sweden’s Dag Hammerskold Foundation, shows not only that emissions trading doesn’t work, but that it actually makes things worse, by delaying practical action to reduce emissions by the biggest corporate offenders. What’s more, since there is no practical method of measuring the results of emissions trading, the entire process is subject to massive fraud. Emissions trading has produced huge windfalls for the polluters — it instantly increases their assets, and does little to reduce emissions.

Another “market-driven” approach proposes levying taxes levied on corporate greenhouse gas emissions. But if the “carbon taxes” are too low, they won’t stop emissions — and if they are high enough, corporations will shift their operations to countries that don’t interfere with business-as-usual. In any event, it is very unlikely that capitalist politicians will actually impose taxes that would force their corporate backers to make real changes.

As Australian writer Dick Nichols has pointed out, anyone who argues that markets can overcome climate change has to answer difficult questions:

“Embracing capitalism — no matter how green the vision put forward — saddles pro-market environmentalists with a difficult case for the defence. They have to explain exactly how a system that has consumed more resources and energy in the last 50 years than all previous human civilization can be made to stabilize and then reduce its rate of resource depletion and pollution emission. How can this monstrously wasteful, poisonous, and unequal economic system actually be made to introduce the technologies, consumption patterns and radical income redistribution, without which all talk of sustainability is a sick joke?” (*Environment, Capitalism and Socialism*)

## No Capitalist Solution

Any reasonable person must eventually ask why capitalists and their governments seek to avoid effective action on climate change. Everyone, including capitalists and politicians, will be affected. Nicholas Stern estimates that the world economy will shrink by 20% if we don't act. So why don't the people in power do something?

The answer is that the problem is rooted in the very nature of capitalist society, which is made up of thousands of corporations, all competing for investment and for profits. There is no “social interest” in capitalism — only thousands of separate interests that compete with each other.

If a company decides to invest heavily in cutting emissions, its profits will go down. Investors will move their capital into more profitable investments. Eventually the green company will go out of business.

The fundamental law of capitalism is “Grow or Die.” Anarchic, unplanned growth isn't an accident, or an externality, or a market failure. It is the nature of the beast.

Experts believe that stabilizing climate change will require a 70% or greater reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the next 20 to 30 years – and that will require a radical reduction in the use of fossil fuels. At least three major barriers militate against capitalism achieving that goal.

- Changing from fossil fuels to other energy sources will require massive spending. In the near-term this will be non-profitable investment, in an economy that cannot function without profit.
- The CO<sub>2</sub> reductions must be global. Air and water don't stop at borders. So long as capitalism remains the world's dominant economic system, positive changes in individual countries will be undermined by countermoves in other countries seeking competitive advantage.

- The change must be all-encompassing. Unlike previous anti-pollution campaigns that focused on single industries, or specific chemicals such as DDT, stopping greenhouse gases will require wrenching change to every part of the economy. Restructuring on such an enormous scale is almost certainly impossible in a capitalist framework — and any attempt to make it happen will meet intense resistance.

Only an economy that is organized for human needs, not profit, has any chance of slowing climate change and reversing the damage that's already been done. Only democratic socialist planning can overcome the problems caused by capitalist anarchy.

### **Fighting for Change**

But that doesn't mean we should wait for socialism to challenge the polluters. On the contrary, we can and must fight for change today — it's possible to win important gains, and building a movement to stop climate change can be an important part of building a movement for socialism.

A radical movement against climate change can be built around demands such as these:

- Establish and enforce rapid mandatory reductions in CO2 emissions: real reductions, not phony trading plans.
- Make the corporations that produce greenhouse gases pay the full cost of cutting emissions.
- End all subsidies to fossil fuel producers.
- Redirect the billions now being spent on wars and debt into public transit, into retrofitting homes and offices for energy efficiency, and into renewable energy projects.

Corporations and conservative union leaders (including one-time radical Buzz Hargrove of the Canadian Auto Workers union) play on the fear of job losses to convince workers to oppose action to protect the environment. All calls for restructuring industry must be coupled

“The individual capitalists, who dominate production and exchange, are able to concern themselves only with the most immediate useful effect of their actions. ... and the sole incentive becomes the profit to be made on selling. ... In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result; and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different.”

– Friedrich Engels, *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man*



with opposition to layoffs. Workers must have access to retraining and relocation at the corporation's expense, at full union pay.

The movement must pay particular attention on the needs of the Third World. As ecology activist Tom Athanasiou has written, we must "spare the South from any compulsion to make an impossible choice between climate protection on the one hand and 'development' on the other." The people of the Third World have suffered centuries of poverty while their countries were plundered to enrich the imperialist powers. Now they are the hardest hit victims of climate change. They are angered, and rightly so, by any suggestion that they should now be forced to forego economic growth in order to solve a problem that was created by their exploiters in the North.

An effective climate change program will support the battles in the Third World against imperialist domination and distortion of their economies. It will oppose the export of polluting industries to the global south, support campaigns for land reform and to redirect agriculture to meet local needs, not export to the north. We must demand that our governments offer every possible form of practical assistance to assist Third World countries to find and implement developmental programs that are consistent with world environmental requirements.

The example of Cuba, a poor country with limited resources, shows what can be done. The World Wildlife Fund recently identified Cuba as the only country in the world that meets the requirements of sustainable development. Cuba achieved that while its economy was growing more than twice as fast as the Latin American average, so the problem isn't growth — it is capitalist growth.

## **Humanity's Choice**

In 1918, in the midst of the most horrible war that the world had ever seen, the great German socialist leader Rosa Luxemburg wrote that the choice facing the world was "Socialism or Barbarism."

As we know, socialism did not triumph in the 20th Century. Instead we had a century of wars and genocide — the very barbarism that Rosa Luxemburg feared.

Today we face that choice in a new and even more horrible form. Prominent U.S. environmentalist Ross Gelbspan poses the issue in stark terms:

"A major discontinuity is inevitable. The collective life we have lived as a species for thousands of years will not continue long into the future. We will either see the fabric of civilization unravel under the onslaught of an increasingly unstable

climate — or else we will use the construction of a new global energy infrastructure to begin to forge a new set of global relationships.” (*Boiling Point*, p. 17)

Gelbspan, like many environmentalists, pins his hopes on persuading capitalism’s decision makers that ending climate change is a “moral imperative.” Past experience, and an understanding of the imperatives of capitalism, show that to be a vain hope.

Instead, echoing Marx and Engels and Luxemburg, we must say that humanity’s choice in the 21st Century is EcoSocialism or Barbarism.

There is no third way.

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## The IPCC and the conservatism of consensus Exploding

(*Climate and Capitalism*, April 5, 2007)

Climate change deniers frequently argue that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change represents extreme voices with a vested interest in overstating the problem of global warming. A recent *National Post* editorial said the IPCC is “as alarmist as any scientific committee could be.” (March 22) This week, another editorial in the same paper referred to “the United Nations’ sensation-mongering panels on climate change.” (April 3)

Even writers who are more sympathetic to the IPCC often assume that the

forecasts offered in the Summary for Policy Makers in February by IPCC Working Group I (SPM-1) are outside limits — that the Panel’s high end estimates of temperature increase and sea level rise are worst case scenarios, that “realistic” estimates are much lower.

They couldn’t be more wrong. The IPCC is a conservative body, and the Summary is a conservative document that doesn’t come close to describing how serious global warming might be.

The issue of rising ocean levels illustrates the point clearly. A table in SPM-1 shows a minimum rise of 18 centimetres, and a maximum of 59 centimetres by the end of this century. That table has been widely cited as showing the best and worst cases.

In fact, elsewhere in the report the IPCC notes that the actual worst case figure might be 10 or 20 centimetres more, and that “larger values cannot be excluded.”

That takes the maximum to 79 centimetres or more — but even that is not the outside limit. Before the SPM-1 was released, meteorologist Bob Correll, chair of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment said that any prediction of less than a metre would “not be a fair reflection of what we know.” One of the world’s most respected climatologists, James Hansen of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, wrote last week that:

“it is impossible to accurately predict sea level change on a specific date ... [but] as a physicist I find it almost inconceivable that BAU [Business As Usual] climate change would not yield a sea level change measured in meters on the century time scale.” (“Scientific reticence and sea level rise” — <http://www2.blogger.com/arxiv.org/pdf/physics/0703220>)

Unlike the *National Post*’s editors, many writers who actually know something about science believe that the IPCC has understated the problem.

***New Scientist*, Feb. 9, 2007:** “the IPCC’s review process was so rigorous that research deemed controversial, not fully quantified or not yet incorporated into climate models was excluded. The benefit — that there is now little room left for sceptics — comes at what many see as a dangerous cost: many legitimate findings have been frozen out.”

***Scientific American*, April 2007:** “By excluding statements that provoked disagreement and adhering strictly to data published in peer-reviewed journals, the IPCC has generated a conserva-

tive document that may underestimate the changes that will result from a warming world, much as its 2001 report did.”

### **Is the IPCC Corrupt?**

Some green activists attribute the IPCC’s conservatism to political interference in the scientific process. David Wasdell, Director of the Meridian Programme at the UK-based Unit for Research into Changing Institutions, argued this position in a report published two weeks after SPM-1 was released.

In “Political Corruption of the IPCC Report?” Wasdell carefully compares the published Working Group I Summary for Policymakers to a previous draft. He argues that the final editing process watered down the draft. In particular, “any reference to possible acceleration of climate change [was] consistently removed.” He identifies 11 areas in which the published SPM-1 is less clear, less forceful, and less specific about the dangers of climate change. (<http://www.meridian.org.uk/Resources/Global%20Dynamics/IPCC/index.htm>)

Wasdell says that after the IPCC’s previous report was published in 2001, “the fossil-fuel industry recognised that the scientific information presented by the IPCC posed a massive threat to its future profitability and steps were taken to gain control of its process and agenda.” The Bush administration proceeded to replace two prominent U.S. representatives on the IPCC and “several other leading authors and review editors” with people who were “acceptable to the Washington Administration.”

As a result, the final version of SPM-1 was “consensually agreed line by line by governmental agents.” They produced a document that was “immediately welcomed and affirmed as acceptable to the Washington Administration.”

“The outcome is a document which lays a necessary but far from sufficient basis for the formulation of strategic policy. Despite the best efforts of the global scientific community, pursuit of goals based upon this Report may contribute to the sustained profitability of the hydro-carbon-based industries, but they do not get to first base in the task of preventing catastrophic climate change.”

### **Not Convincing**

Anyone familiar with Washington’s well-documented history of political interference in climate science will realize that Wasdell’s charges are credible. There is no doubt that Bush gang prefers to downplay (or

deny) the problem of greenhouse gas emissions and it is very likely that they tried to influence the IPCC process in a conservative direction.

But credibility isn't enough – it's necessary to prove the case, and Wasdell hasn't done that. His argument that the changes made between a draft and the final version result from political corruption is unconvincing.

In the first place, the document is a summary of a much longer report – so the real question is whether the summary represented the conclusions of that report more or less accurately than the draft. Wasdell doesn't discuss that.

More seriously, his evidence for “political corruption” amounts to no more than the far-from-surprising fact that the Republican administration replaced Democratic appointees with its own when it took office in 2001.

Many scientists agree that SPM-1 is too conservative, but the charge that the process was “corrupted” by U.S. political interference has won no support from anyone who is actually knowledgeable about the process.

Twenty Coordinating Lead Authors of the Summary, scientists from eight countries, have replied to Wasdell's charges, saying that he “appears to be ill-informed about the processes involved in drafting this report.”

“Any draft versions of the chapters or the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) were just that, documents in which inconsistencies were rectified, gaps were closed, and complicated matters were explained more clearly and in more accessible terms.... “[Wasdell mistakenly claims] that the Summary for Policymakers was written by and for the government delegations and changes were made to the scientific conclusions before and during the Paris plenary for political purposes. In fact, the Summary for Policymakers was written by the scientists who also wrote the underlying chapters....

“Those of us also involved in previous assessments were pleasantly surprised that there were far fewer alterations made to the text at this final meeting, and that there were very few attempts at political interference.” (<http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg19325960.900-climate-with-care.html>)

The Lead Authors don't say what those “very few attempts” were, but a published account of the debates preceding publication says that, “fears that the US delegation might try to veto the scientists' findings proved unfounded.” Rather, the Chinese delegates proved to be the

most determined advocates of softening the draft, and only one of their proposed changes was approved –

“after a 10-hour debate on the relative influences of solar and human activity, an exasperated meeting agreed to remove a sentence saying that the change in radiative forcing – the heat entering the system – that is attributable to human activities was ‘likely’ to have been at least five times greater than that due to changes in solar activity. The Chinese argued that the influence of the sun could be greater.”

If that’s the extent of political corruption of SPM-1, we don’t have much to worry about!

### **Scientific Reticence**

An alternative and more plausible explanation has been advanced for the IPCC’s conservatism that has important implications for future research efforts. Climatologist James Hansen of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies suggests the IPCC’s tendency to understate the extent and danger of global warming flows from the nature of the scientific method..

“I suggest that ‘scientific reticence’, in some cases, hinders communication with the public about dangers of global warming. If I am right, it is important that policy-makers recognize the potential influence of this phenomenon. “Scientific reticence may be a consequence of the scientific method. Success in science depends on objective scepticism. Caution, if not reticence, has its merits. However, in a case such as ice sheet instability and sea level rise, there is a danger in excessive caution. We may rue reticence, if it serves to lock in future disasters. ...”

Stefan Rahmstorf of Germany’s Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and a member of the German delegation to the IPCC, reinforces Hansen’s insight:

“I fully agree with what he writes about “scientific reticence.” His words echo my own experience very well. In many IPCC discussions I have noticed a strange asymmetry: people were very concerned about possibly erring on the high side (e.g., the upper bound of sea level rise possibly being criticised as “alarmist”), and not very concerned about erring on the low side (or some even regarding this as a virtue of being “cau-

tious”). ...

“Giving a low value is considered “safe”, it requires no courage for sticking your neck out, while giving a high number is considered risky and alarmist. I don’t think we are doing our job properly if we apply double standards to “low” and “high” estimates in this way. We need to dispassionately look at all the evidence, regardless of what is politically convenient or risky.” (RealClimate, March 28, 2007 — <http://www.realclimate.org>)

### **Conservative Consensus**

Reluctance to declare big conclusions until every doubt is eliminated is a normal part of scientific investigation, and it undoubtedly plays a role in “moderating” the IPCC’s reports. But there is more going on in this case: the IPCC process itself, the rules of the game, reinforce and amplify scientific reticence.

It’s important to understand that the IPCC itself does not “do science.” Its mandate is to assess and report on the current state of scientific knowledge about climate change. In “taking decisions, and approving, adopting and accepting reports,” the IPCC itself, and all of its working groups, are required to “use all best endeavours to reach consensus.”

Back in the 1960s, I had the frustrating experience of participating in meetings and conferences of the Canadian wing of Friends of SNCC. (SNCC – the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee – was then the most radical wing of the Civil Rights Movement in the southern United States.) For reasons that were never explained to me, the group operated by consensus – every decision had to be unanimous. The potential for a hostile individual or group to block all decisions was obvious, but because the participants actually wanted Friends of SNCC to succeed, anyone making a motion or proposal tried to frame it in a way that would be supported by everyone present. If that effort failed, long and tedious discussions usually produced the desired result – a lowest-common-denominator decision that everyone accepted.

The IPCC’s rules allow for the publication of dissenting views when consensus cannot be reached – but the Summary for Policy Makers includes no such dissents. Clearly the commitment to consensus was very strong and very effective.

The fact that consensus on such a complex subject was reached relatively easily shows that the authors of the initial drafts did just what members of Friends of SNCC did in Toronto decades ago. They limited

themselves to matters on which there would likely be unanimous agreement among thousands of scientists from 113 countries, including the most conservative individuals and delegations. And they succeeded.

None of this should be taken as criticism of the IPCC. It has a specific job to do, and it has done it remarkably well. In Hansen's words:

"IPCC reports may contain a reticence in the sense of being extremely careful about making attributions. This characteristic is appropriately recognized as an asset that makes IPCC conclusions authoritative and widely accepted. It is probably a necessary characteristic, given that the IPCC document is produced as a consensus among most nations in the world and represents the views of thousands of scientists."

### **A Parable**

*A repairman told a customer that his brakes urgently needed work, but the man didn't want to spend the money.*

*"Sir," said the repairman, "if you don't get these brakes fixed now, you may be in a fatal accident some time soon."*

*"But am I certain to be killed?" the car owner asked.*

*"Obviously I can't say that, but it could happen."*

*"Well I'm not going to throw away good money fixing those brakes if there's any chance at all that I might survive."*

Everyone would agree that the car-owner is acting irrationally: the possibility of brake failure is enough to justify the repair. But the response of many capitalist politicians and propagandist to the IPCC reports has been equally irrational. The outcomes forecast by the Panel are only "likely" or "very likely" – that means they aren't certain, so there is no need to act now.

What's worse, they use the IPCC's "very likely" conclusions as a weapon to discredit conclusions that are less certain but still possible. *The National Post*, for example:

"Mr. Gore claims sea levels will rise by as much as six metres in the coming decades due to planetary meltdown, when, in fact, even the United Nations' global warming committee ... predicts the rise will be no more than 40 centimetres." (March 22, 2007)

In reality, if global warming continues unchecked, it's 100% certain that the Greenland and Antarctic ice will melt and the oceans will rise even more than six metres. The only uncertainty is how quickly it



might happen.

The IPCC's very high standard for including scientific results makes it a highly credible scientific resource. But that same high standard weakens it as a guide for policy and action. If there is any chance that my brakes might fail, I want to know so that I can get them fixed. Similarly, just the possibility that inaction will produce an ecological catastrophe in this century is grounds for immediate radical change – and the people of the world need to know that so they can act.

But it will take a different kind of organization than the IPCC to spread that news.

### **Scientists and Marxists**

Despite its conservatism, Working Group I's Summary for Policy Makers has radical implications. Although it repeatedly hedges its statements with cautionary words such as "likely" and "probable," SPM-1 clearly states that global warming is real, that it is primarily caused by human-produced greenhouse gases. Those vital points directly challenge the Business-As-Usual climate agenda of the Bush administration and its allies in Canada, Australia and elsewhere, so the suggestion that it was corrupted to promote the oil industry's priorities makes little sense.

This doesn't mean that capitalist governments, including the Bush gang, didn't want to or didn't try to influence the process. It simply means that so far as outside observers can tell, the scientists involved – including the U.S. delegates – worked honestly and with a high degree of integrity to produce a document that accurately reflects the consensus of scientific opinion today.

But precisely because it is a consensus document, it does not include outcomes and trends that some climate scientists view as "possible," but on which there is not yet widespread agreement.

In particular, SPM-1 (presumably following the still-unpublished report it summarizes) generally assumes that climate change will occur in a straightforward linear fashion. It does not incorporate recent research that suggests the possibility of "abrupt" or "non-linear" changes that could rapidly accelerate global warming or even produce unstoppable runaway increases in greenhouse gas emissions and icecap melting.

As Marxists, we're not surprised to see scientific results that predict sudden transformations where "quantity turns into quality," and we may even be predisposed to think such dialectical outcomes are probable. But it isn't appropriate for us as Marxists (except for any of us who are also climate scientists) to take sides in scientific debates – or to prefer some particular scientific opinion because it appears to

correspond with our political/philosophical outlook. The ecosocialist movement must be informed by the best current scientific knowledge, but being socialists doesn't qualify us to judge the probable accuracy of a specific scientific forecast.

The IPCC's reports contain a wealth of data and analysis that every ecosocialist should be familiar with and publicize. But we shouldn't limit ourselves to the IPCC consensus. It's very important to break through the myth that the IPCC reports include the worst-case scenario. We must constantly stress that the IPCC's projections are conservative, that far worse outcomes are possible.

To do this, we should publicize the work of scientists whose work is not yet part of the consensus, but which provides more insight into the range of possible outcomes of global warming.

And we should support and encourage those scientists to make their views and conclusions part of the public policy debate. James Hansen is one scientist who is attempting to do this:

“The broader picture gives strong indication that ice sheets will, and are already beginning to, respond in a nonlinear fashion to global warming. There is enough information now, in my opinion, to make it a near certainty that IPCC BAU climate forcing scenarios would lead to disastrous multi-meter sea level rise on the century time scale. “There is, in my opinion, a huge gap between what is understood about human-made global warming and its consequences, and what is known by the people who most need to know, the public and policy makers. IPCC is doing a commendable job, but we need something more. Given the reticence that IPCC necessarily exhibits, there need to be supplementary mechanisms. The onus, it seems to me, falls on us scientists as a community.” (“Scientific reticence and sea level rise”)

Hansen has proposed that the U.S. National Academy of Sciences report “publicly, and in plain language” on “the threat to the great ice sheets posed by human-made climate change.” Such a report would be a powerful tool for green and socialist activists, and we should support his proposal.

The IPCC is what it is. It isn't an activist organization, and it doesn't include the full range of climate change possibilities in its reports. It produces summaries of the scientific consensus about global warming – and it is a profound commentary on how badly capitalism has damaged our world that the IPCC's conservative statements of fact consti-

tute a powerful indictment of the capitalist system.

For that reason alone, ecosocialists should publicize its work as widely as possible – and make up for its shortcomings through our own efforts.

## Exploding the myths of “carbon offsets”

*(Climate and Capitalism, Feb. 20, 2007)*

Carbon offsets are the modern day indulgences, sold to an increasingly carbon conscious public to absolve their climate sins. Scratch the surface, however, and a disturbing picture emerges, where creative accountancy and elaborate shell games cover up the impossibility of verifying genuine climate change benefits, and where communities in the South often have little choice as offset projects are inflicted on them.

In a previous post, I noted that the Canadian band Barenaked Ladies, like many rock bands worldwide, has been claiming that “carbon offsets” balance the greenhouse gases created during its tours. While not in the least doubting their sincerity, I recommended that they visit the spoof website CheatNeutral ([www.cheatneutral.com/](http://www.cheatneutral.com/))

Now I can recommend something much more substantial and convincing. *The Carbon Neutral Myth: Offset Indulgences for Your Climate Sins* demonstrates that the carbon offset industry is “state of the art greenwash.” This report argues that offsets place disproportionate emphasis on individual lifestyles and carbon footprints, distracting attention from the wider, systemic changes and collective political action that needs to be taken to tackle climate change. Promoting more effective and empowering approaches involves moving away from the marketing gimmicks, celebrity endorsements, technological quick fixes, and the North/South exploitation that the carbon offsets industry embodies.

Author Kevin Smith, a researcher with Carbon Trade Watch, argues that “the only effective way of dealing with climate change is to dramatically decrease our current rates of fossil fuel consumption. Offsets are providing a justification to maintain our carbon-intensive lifestyles, and delaying the profound changes we need to make in our societies.”

When companies like Climate Care and the Carbon Neutral Company sell the public carbon offsets, carbon savings expected to be made in the future are counted as savings made in the present. Offset companies give the idea that emissions are instantly “neutralised” when in

fact the supposed “neutralisation” can take place over periods of up to a hundred years. Regular offsetting worsens the problem because the rate at which carbon emissions are ‘neutralised’ is far slower than the rate at which they are generated.

The *Carbon Neutral Myth – Offset Indulgences for Your Climate Sins* is published by Carbon Trade Watch, a project of the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute. It offers in-depth research and case studies in support of its argument that:

- Offset companies breed complacency by selling ‘peace of mind’ to consumers, distracting from the serious task of tackling unsustainable consumption patterns and business practices.
- Limited research on the climate benefits of tree plantations into the carbon cycle is sold as fact while the offset companies quantify this supposed benefit into a sellable commodity.
- Tree plantations marketed as beneficial for the climate have seen people in the South expelled from their lands.
- Projects that look great on the website or in the leaflet are often, in practice, mismanaged, ineffective or detrimental to the local communities who have to endure them.

The full text of *The Carbon Neutral Myth* can be downloaded at [www.carbon-tradewatch.org/pubs/carbon\\_neutral\\_myth.pdf](http://www.carbon-tradewatch.org/pubs/carbon_neutral_myth.pdf).

## Barriers to a capitalist solution?

*(Climate and Capitalism, April 18, 2007)*

Following publication of a guest article by an author who argued that capitalism cannot solve the global problem, we received this email from John Riddell, co-editor of *Socialist Voice*:

Your post this morning was aptly introduced by this question: “Can capitalist society act quickly and effectively to avoid human and ecological catastrophe?” Note the carefully chosen words, “quickly,” “effectively,” and “catastrophe.” They suggest that the adequacy of the solution is a matter of opinion. For example, James Lovelock has suggested that our best option, at this point, is to survive as a community of 300 million people huddled around the poles. If capitalism could achieve that, would be it be an “effective” solution to avoid “catastrophe”?

How about writing off the Third World and building some domed cities running off solar power with room for everyone in North America and Europe who can buy their way in for \$1 million cash per person. Is that “effective”?

Only if we let them get away with it. It recalls to mind Lenin's thought that there is no economic situation from which capitalism cannot find an exit, provided that they have the political power to impose it.

It is extremely difficult for capitalism to react in a unified and effective manner to the ecological crisis. But we should bear in mind that capitalist ruling classes are very capable of reacting sharply and effectively, when they believe their survival is at stake. We got a taste of that in the 1970s, when they slapped on limits to fuel consumption in the U.S. — which were then withdrawn when their strategic concerns eased.

What capitalist classes really do well, of course, is wage war. The degree of centralization and structural adjustment they impose under war conditions is extreme. In the 20th century's world wars, the main warring powers slashed manufacturing for consumer needs almost to zero; mobilized immense resources to develop atomic weapons; withdrew resources and labour power from agriculture to a degree that created near-famine conditions for many of their populations; and of course herded tens of millions to the slaughter.

We do not know when or how sharply the capitalist classes will move on the climate crisis. But we do know that action on their part will be irresponsibly delayed in a manner that causes immense suffering and loss. And that if and when they move, they will take action not to protect us, the peoples of the world, but to protect their own class and its profits.

The urgent question today regarding climate change concerns not the endpoint — a capitalist or socialist economy — but the present moment. Specifically, will we leave it to the capitalists to solve this problem in their fashion, dooming the world's peoples in their immense majority to disaster, or will we act to impose our own solutions, designed to protect the world and its peoples?

The key question will be: who will rule — the owners of the giant corporations or the world's peoples?

In this manner, the struggle against ecological catastrophe will flow together with other streams in the variegated international movement against capitalist power.

## Five challenges for ecosocialists in 2008

(*Canadian Dimension*, November-December 2007)

The growing worldwide interest in ecosocialism is reflected in two political trends:

- Many people in the green movement are turning to Marxism to understand the ecological crisis, and are concluding that only socialism offers a way out.
- Many on the left believe that socialism will succeed only if it is based on sound ecological practice — and that the fight against capitalism’s destruction of the environment (especially through global warming) will play a central role in the fight for socialism.

As these parallel developments illustrate, “ecosocialism” is not separate from the existing left and green movements, and it is not a structured movement on its own. Rather it is a current of thought *within* existing socialist and green-left movements, seeking to win ecology activists to socialism, and to convince socialists of the vital importance of ecological issues and struggles.

In Canada ecosocialism is new, and still a distinctly minority current. Most progressive movements address ecological issues from time to time, but few have made them a key focus of their activity. And while socialist views are beginning to get a hearing in green circles, few ecology activists advocate anything more radical than the market-based “solutions” of the Kyoto Accord.

We might say that the central goal of ecosocialism today is to make the greens more left and the lefts more green. The path to this goal is still being worked out — we are learning as we go — but the time to accelerate the process is now.

The following points are offered as beginning points, that will certainly be amended through discussion and through practical experience. Ecosocialists in Canada should place these challenges high on their agendas in 2008.

**Get Out of the Ivory Tower.** In North America, the development of ecosocialist ideas has occurred mostly in academic circles. An impressive body of rigorous, well-argued ecosocialist theory has been created — but academic writing is rarely read by anyone except academics.

We must learn to explain ecosocialist concepts outside of the academy, in the forums that are heeded by green and socialist activists. *Canadian Dimension* is one such forum, websites and blogs like *Rabble.ca* and *Climate and Capitalism* are others.

An early priority should be the publication of popular articles and

pamphlets that make the case for ecosocialism. We don't need to water down our views, but we do need to explain them in plain language, unburdened with scholarly apparatus.

**Get Involved in Action.** Most socialist writing about climate change does a good job of analysing the nature and causes of the problem, and a terrible job of explaining about what to do now. All too often, a stirring condemnation of capitalism is followed by simple assurance that socialism will solve the problem. How socialism will come about and what socialists should do about climate change now — those are unexplained mysteries.

We need to bridge the gap between today's problems and the socialist future — we won't build mass opposition to capitalism by repeatedly intoning "Production for use, not for profit!" We need to be active participants in actions that protest and expose both the corporate polluters and their parliamentary representatives.

For example, various groups in Toronto have been organizing protests against Barrick Gold and its record of environmental destruction in the Third World. Such actions are an essential steps toward a mass anti-capitalist movement, and ecosocialists should be directly involved whenever possible.

More generally, we must be partisans of all forms of action that enable people to work together to challenge the powers that be, to protest the anti-environment policies of corporations and governments. These actions may take traditional forms, such as demonstrations, strikes, and rallies — but we should also expect and welcome innovative forms of action as new activists come to the fore.

**Defend Workers Rights.** A key feature of the Tory campaign against action on climate change has been demagogic warnings that stopping greenhouse gas emissions will kill jobs and hurt the economy. They hope that fear of economic hardship will prevent working people from listening to the green left.

Unfortunately, green radicals often feed that sentiment by appearing indifferent to the fate of the people who will be directly affected by economic change. Again and again I've heard speeches calling for shutting down the tar sands, or for immediately closing coal-fired power plants. Rarely is anything said about the thousands of men and women who will lose their jobs if those demands are won.

What's worse, some greens — especially some who stress personal lifestyle changes rather than social change — are often openly hostile to the labour movement and to working people's desire for decent jobs and a reasonable standard of living. This approach simply alienates

people whose support is absolutely essential.

One of the most important contributions that ecosocialists can make to the broader green movement is a clear focus on the rights of working people to useful jobs that don't destroy our planet. The workers in the tar sands and power plants are not responsible for greenhouse gases, and they should not lose one penny when their bosses are forced to clean up their acts.

At the very least we must insist on comprehensive retraining programs and fully subsidized relocation programs — at full union pay, with no loss of benefits or pensions.

At the same time, ecosocialists can play a critical role in persuading organized labour to join the fight against climate change, to give the lie to capitalist claims that working people have no stake in saving the world.

**Ally With Indigenous Movements.** There is a major exception to my previous statement that the left in Canada rarely focuses on ecological issues — the movements for Aboriginal rights. It is no exaggeration to say that indigenous peoples' groups are far ahead of the rest of the left in initiating and supporting campaigns against capitalist ecocide.

Just two recent examples:

- The successful Inuit campaign, led by Sheila Watt-Cloutier of Iqaluit, to persuade the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to hear an unprecedented challenge to U.S. policy on greenhouse gas emissions, on the grounds that climate change is destroying their way of life.
- The Ardoch Algonquin First Nation's occupation of land near Sharbot Lake, Ontario, to block uranium mining.

Supporting such campaigns — and learning from the people organizing and leading them — must be a central feature of any ecosocialist program that deserves the name.

**Promote Global Justice.** The president of Uganda has accurately called global warming “an act of aggression by the rich against the poor.”

Front-line battles against global warming are being fought in Nigeria, Ecuador, Brazil, Indonesia, Thailand and Bangladesh — and in dozens of other countries where global warming isn't just an inconvenience or a matter of concern to future generations, it's an immediate life-or-death threat.

There can be no question about which side we are on in those struggles. A central feature of our work must be publicizing them, building



## The war machine is addicted to oil

*(Climate and Capitalism, Feb. 18, 2007)*

Some statistics from *Energy Bulletin*:

The US Air Force has 5,986 aircraft. The US Navy has 285 combat and support ships, and about 4,000 operational aircraft. The US Army has about 28,000 armoured vehicles 4,000 combat helicopters and several hundred airplanes. In addition, the Army and the Marines have about 140,000 "High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles."

On top of all that, the US Department of Defense has 187,493 cars, trucks and buses. All of those vehicles use oil. Lots and lots and lots and lots of oil.

*Energy Bulletin* comments:

"Yes, the US military is completely addicted to oil. Unsurprisingly, its oil consumption for aircraft, ships, ground vehicles and facilities makes the Pentagon the single largest oil consumer in the world. By the way, according to the 2006 CIA World Factbook rankings there are only 35 countries (out of 210) in the world that consume more oil per day than the Pentagon.

"According to recently released 'Annual Energy Management Report,' in Fiscal Year 2006 the Pentagon consumed 320,000 barrels per day of site delivered oil, compared to about 360,000 barrels per day in 2005. Note that these and all other official figures do not include fuel obtained at no cost overseas, fuel consumed by contractors, fuel consumed in some leased and privatized facilities, and, not last but not least, oil consumed by certain leased and rented fleet vehicles.

"While the official figures for military oil consumption went down in 2006, the costs went to the sky. In 2005 DoD had spent slightly over \$8.5 billion for oil but this figure reached \$17 billion in 2006. Note that oil accounts for 85% of the DoD's \$20 billion energy consumption costs in 2006."

### **Reasonable conclusion**

By bringing the troops home from Iraq, abolishing the US armed forces, and closing down the Pentagon, we could significantly reduce US greenhouse gas emissions.

And we could increase the effect by getting Canadian soldiers out of Afghanistan and diverting the Department of National Defense's \$17 Billion annual budget to mass transit and alternative energy development.

And then Australia, and Europe, and Japan, and ...

solidarity campaigns, and demanding that Canada's government provide concrete aid. Canadian corporations that participate in the plunder of Third World resources and the destruction of Third World ecosystems must be exposed as ecological criminals.

Ecosocialists must begin, as the Cuban Ministry of Science and Technology recently stated, by "recognizing the responsibility of the highly industrialized nations for their historic emissions of greenhouse effect gases — an important component in the ecological debt of the North."

Paying that ecological debt must be tied to ecology activist Tom Athanasiou's insistence that we must "spare the South from any compulsion to make an impossible choice between climate protection on the one hand and 'development' on the other."

It is far easier to write socialist essays about climate change than to actively build movements against it. But, as Marx wrote, interpreting the world is not enough — the point is to change it. The time is ripe for ecosocialists to move beyond criticizing capitalism, into supporting, building, and learning from real movements for change. If we don't do so, all of our words and theories will be irrelevant.

## Ecosocialism and the fight against global warming: An Interview with Ian Angus

*(Socialist Voice, December 3, 2007)*

Ian Angus is a founder and coordinating committee member of the Ecosocialist International Network and editor of the web journal *Climate and Capitalism*. He was interviewed by the Greek newspaper *Kokkino* (Red), which published a slightly abridged version.

### **Let's begin with a large question — what is ecosocialism?**

**Angus:** Ecosocialism has grown out of two parallel political trends — the spread of Marxist ideas in the green movement and the spread of ecological ideas in the Marxist left. The result is a set of social and political goals, a growing body of ideas, and a global movement.

Ecosocialism's *goal* is to replace capitalism with a society in which common ownership of the means of production has replaced capitalist ownership, and in which the preservation and restoration of ecosystems will be central to all activity.

As a *body of ideas*, ecosocialism argues that ecological destruction is not an accidental feature of capitalism, it is built into the system's DNA. The system's insatiable need to increase profits — what's been

called “the ecological tyranny of the bottom line” — cannot be reformed away.

With that said, it is important to realize ecosocialist thought is not monolithic — it embodies many different views about theory and practice. For example, there is an ongoing debate about the view, advanced by some ecosocialist writers, that social movements have replaced the working class as the engine of social change.

Finally, ecosocialism is an *anti-capitalist movement* that varies a great deal from place to place. In the imperialist countries, it is a current within existing socialist and green-left movements, seeking to win ecology activists to socialism and to convince socialists of the vital importance of ecological issues and struggles. We might say that in the global north ecosocialism today focuses on making the Greens more Red and the Reds more Green.

In the Third World, by contrast, global warming is already a matter of life and death. People there are fighting environmental destruction — and the environmental destroyers — on a daily basis. The fights take many forms, including land occupations, road blockades, and sabotage, as well as more traditional actions such as petitions, rallies, demonstrations. Such protests occur daily in dozens of countries.

What we see there is a growing mass pro-ecology movement that incorporates socialist ideas — that’s especially true in Latin America, where anti-imperialist governments headed by Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Fidel Castro in Cuba, are pressing for strong anticapitalist, pro-environment measures.

A recent letter from Evo Morales to the United Nations illustrates that point and another — that in the fight to save the earth, a vanguard role is being played by indigenous peoples. As Morales said:

“[W]e — the indigenous peoples and humble and honest inhabitants of this planet — believe that the time has come to put a stop to this, in order to rediscover our roots, with respect for Mother Earth; with the Pachamama as we call it in the Andes. Today, the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the world have been called upon by history to convert ourselves into the vanguard of the struggle to defend nature and life.”

And he suggested a global political organization to combat global warming:

“We need to create a World Environment Organisation which is binding, and which can discipline the World Trade Organisation, which is propelling us towards barbarism.”

That's not just a clever turn of phrase. In that one sentence, Morales says that the environment must be given legal priority over capitalist profits and the neoliberal policies that protect them. That's a profound idea that the left worldwide should adopt and defend.

### **What is the Ecosocialist International Network?**

**Angus:** The Ecosocialist International Network was formed in October 2007, at a meeting in Paris that was attended by ecosocialists from 13 countries. Its main goals are to improve communication and coordination among ecosocialists worldwide, and to organize a major ecosocialist conference in Brazil in January 2009, in conjunction with the World Social Forum.

The EIN is a very loose and open organization. Its only organizational structure is a steering committee to plan the Brazil conference. Anyone who supports the broad goals of the ecosocialism is welcome to participate — more information is available on our website, [www.ecosocialistnetwork.org](http://www.ecosocialistnetwork.org).

### **How do you respond to socialists who argue that there is no need for specifically “ecosocialist” ideas or activity?**

**Angus:** In a certain sense they are correct. Marxism embodies a wealth of profound ecological thought, far more than many green activists realize.

But while concern for ecology was a fundamental part of Marx's thought, and the Bolsheviks were certainly aware of the issue, the sad fact is that the Marxist left ignored this issue for many decades. It's important to correct that — and to do so publicly and explicitly.

Using the word “ecosocialism” is a way of signalling loud and clear that we consider climate change not just as another stick to bash capitalism with, but as a critically important issue, one of the principal problems facing humanity in this century.

But there is more involved. Marxism is not a fixed set of eternal truths — it is a living body of thought, a method of understanding society and a tool for social change. Socialists whose views don't evolve to incorporate new social and scientific insights become irrelevant sectarians — we've seen that happen to many individuals and groups over the years.

Just as Marx and Engels studied and adopted ideas from the scientists of their day — Liebig on soil fertility, Morgan on early societies, Darwin on evolution, and many others — so Marxists today must learn from today's scientists, especially about the biggest issues of the day. Ecosocialism aims to do just that.

## Can capitalism solve global warming?

**Angus:** That depends on what you mean by “solve.”

Dealing with global warming includes two components — mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation means reducing greenhouse gas emissions so that global warming slows down and eventually reverses. Adaptation means making changes that will enable people to survive in a world where some climate change is inevitable, and where climate chaos is increasingly likely.

In my opinion, capitalism’s insatiable need for growth, combined with its massive dependence on fossil fuels as the dominant energy source, means that it is very unlikely that we will see an effective mitigation program from any major capitalist country.

Scientists say that if the average temperature rises more than 2 degrees, dangerous climate change becomes very probable. There is no sign that any of the industrialized countries will implement measures sufficient to stop such a temperature increase — anything they do will be too little, too late.

But if we do not succeed in bringing this system to an end, capitalism will undoubtedly adapt to the new climate. It will do what capitalism always does — it will impose the greatest burdens on the most vulnerable, on poor people and poor nations. Climate refugees will multiply and millions will die. The imperialist powers will fight against the global south, and amongst themselves, to control the world’s resources, including not just fuel but also food and other essentials. The most barbaric forms of capitalism will intensify and spread.

In short — yes, capitalism can “solve” global warming, but a capitalist solution will be catastrophic for the great majority of the world’s people.

“To make earth an object of huckstering — the earth which is our one and all, the first condition of our existence — was the last step towards making oneself an object of huckstering. It was and is to this very day an immorality surpassed only by the immorality of self-alienation. And the original appropriation — the monopolization of the earth by a few, the exclusion of the rest from that which is the condition of their life — yields nothing in immorality to the subsequent huckstering of the earth.”

—Friedrich Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*

## After Bali: Time for a Different Kind of Climate Politics

*Socialist Voice, January 13, 2008*

“We are ending up with something so watered down there was no need for 12,000 people to gather here in Bali to have a watered-down text. We could have done that by email.” —Dr. Angus Friday, Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States

In a narrow and formal sense, last month’s Climate Change conference in Bali achieved its objectives. The Kyoto Protocol is due to expire in 2012: the Bali gathering’s purpose was to adopt a roadmap for negotiating a new treaty — and that was done. A new roadmap, called the Bali Action Plan, was adopted unanimously at an overtime session, after the USA withdrew its objections.

As the New York Times pointed out, the dramatic U.S. capitulation really didn’t amount to much: “From the United States the delegates got nothing, except a promise to participate in the forthcoming negotiations.” [1]

That’s why the Bali meetings were a failure in any meaningful sense. They didn’t even discuss the Kyoto Protocol’s failure to produce results, failed to recognize the need for rapid action, and above all failed to adopt (or even recommend) any targets for emission reductions. The final resolution might better be called the Bali Inaction Plan — at best it is an agreement to discuss further, and maybe agree in 2009 on measures that might be implemented after 2012.

As an observer from the Institute for Policy Studies writes:

“The Bali ‘action plan’ does almost nothing to ensure that the people most affected by the worst impacts of climate change will receive the resources needed to survive impending climate chaos. This transition plan for replacing the Kyoto Protocol, which is so far being called the “Bali mandate,” instead entrenches the power of big business, and the global financial institutions that work on its behalf, without committing any government to tangible emissions reductions.” [2]

### **Expanding CDM**

The only concrete measure approved in Bali was a plan to take one of Kyoto’s worst features — the so-called Clean Development Mechanism — and make it worse. Under CDM, major polluters in the indus-

trialized countries can avoid reducing emissions in their home countries by investing in “clean” projects in the Third World. Morally, this is bizarre — the modern equivalent of paying the medieval church to be forgiven for sins. Worse, the CDM process is often corrupt, providing credits (and profits) for projects that don’t reduce emissions, or that would have been carried out anyway.

The Bali delegates approved a World Bank plan to add deforestation to the list of CDM options. As Simone Lavera, the managing coordinator of Global Forest Coalition, points out:

“The World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility ... presents an easy way of pretending to be generous and contributing to tropical forest conservation ... [It] encourages potentially unwilling developing countries to include their forests in the international carbon market after 2012, providing donor countries with access to an abundance of cheap credits that help them avoid painful emission reductions in their own countries.” [3]

The World Bank deforestation plan will encourage the enclosure and privatization of forests, overriding indigenous land rights claims and calls for land reform. The indigenous and other poor people who live in and depend on the forests will be pushed out, so that Third World governments and forestry companies can sell credits representing trees that they promise not to cut down. This plan is clearly another example of the practices condemned by Third World activists in the Durban Declaration of 2004, when they pointed out that CDM projects “appropriate land, water and air already supporting the lives and livelihoods of local communities for new carbon dumps for Northern industries.” [4]

### **Canada’s Role**

No one familiar with the Harper government’s record will be surprised that Canada played a particularly appalling role in the Bali talks. Working closely with the USA and Japan, the Canadian delegation did its utmost to eliminate action from the Bali Action Plan. Ottawa’s alignment with the Bush crew reached absurd proportions: Environment Minister Baird even copied his Washington mentors by holding out to the last minute and then dramatically withdrawing his objections so that the vote could be unanimous.

The U.S.-Canada do-nothing position was counterposed to a policy that wasn’t much better. The European Union, which is less dependent on coal and oil than its North American competitors, initially proposed to mention (not decide on) emission targets at the low end of what

scientists say is essential. They see such targets as a the royal road to windfall profits from carbon trading and clean development schemes. The poorest people and countries are pressured into making development choices determined not by their own needs, but by the desire of corporations in the north to avoid cutting emissions.

But when the U.S.-Canada-Japan axis objected, the EU quickly capitulated, replacing all mention of targets with a footnote reference to an IPCC document.

The Canadian Youth Climate Coalition sent a delegation of 21 young people to Bali, in the sincere belief that a strong and idealistic lobbying voice would make a difference. One student participant, using the web-name “jodafoe,” reported on the experience in the CYCC blog:

“I felt despair because of Canada’s climate change policy and the behaviour of its delegation, which served as a diplomatic wrecking ball to the process of international collective action. Minister Baird’s flippancy towards the issue was made clear to me when he refused to meet with the Canadian Youth Delegation, or appear at his own side-event to justify our national climate change plan, or when his press secretary told that me that our petition of 60,000 signatures was insubstantial.

“I am not an expert of politics but my first foray into the field has been far from welcoming. If this is politics, I want nothing to do with it.” [5]

### **Needed: A Different Kind of Politics**

Jodafoe is absolutely correct: if what happened in the conference rooms in Bali defines politics, then climate activists should have nothing to do with it.

But there is another kind of politics, and it too was represented in Bali — not in the official meetings, but in outside events and meetings that used the Bali event as an organizing opportunity and a springboard to action. There were many such activities, but one stands out as particularly important.

*Climate Justice Now!* While the official sessions droned on a meeting of 21 organizations that represent affected communities, indigenous peoples, women and peasant farmers, mainly from the Third World, agreed to create Climate Justice Now!, a coalition to improve communication and intensify actions to prevent and respond to climate change. Their initial statement concludes:



“Inside the negotiations, the rich industrialized countries have put unjustifiable pressure on Southern governments to commit to emissions’ reductions. At the same time, they have refused to live up to their own legal and moral obligations to radically cut emissions and support developing countries’ efforts to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts. Once again, the majority world is being forced to pay for the excesses of the minority. “Compared to the outcomes of the official negotiations, the major success of Bali is the momentum that has been built towards creating a diverse, global movement for climate justice. “We will take our struggle forward not just in the talks, but on the ground and in the streets — Climate Justice Now!” [6]

We can’t tell whether this project will win broad support or play a key role in building a global climate action movement. What is clear is that it points in the right direction, to a different kind of politics: away from backroom lobbying, and toward the mobilization of mass sentiment and action against global warming.

### **Towards a Movement Against Climate Change**

Canada has one of the worst records in the world for greenhouse gas emissions. That fact alone places special responsibility on activists in this country to confront our own government, to demand that it take immediate action to reduce emissions at home and to support climate justice for the countries and peoples who are most harmed by Canadian capitalist irresponsibility.

The beginnings of a broad movement against Canada’s climate change policies can be seen in the wide variety of actions that have taken place across the country in the past year.

- Marches and rallies such as those held on December 8 in cities across Canada.
- Sit-ins and occupations like the Sharbot Lake action against uranium mining.
- Smaller “guerrilla theatre” actions designed to attract media coverage and expose particular abuses.
- Teach-ins and other educational events such as the sustainability conferences that are being held on several university campuses this winter.

It’s much too early to say which forms of protest will prove most effective in building a movement. Our responsibility today is to participate wholeheartedly in actions as they develop, to provide concrete support, and to learn from the nascent movement’s experiences.

## **Independent Action — For A People’s Agenda**

It’s very likely that there will be a federal election in 2008. Climate change activists will adopt different positions, some favoring abstention, others supporting the NDP, the Green Party, or specific individual candidates. This will offer many opportunities for debate and discussion, opportunities that should be eagerly welcomed.

Our stress throughout should be on the need to build an independent movement that demands concrete action from politicians and parties of all political stripes.

To confront politicians and policy makers effectively, the green movement needs to advance its own People’s Agenda on Climate Change, a program that stresses both reducing emissions in Canada and advancing climate justice around the world. The specific details of such an agenda need to be worked out collaboratively by a wide range of activists, but the following are some of the demands we might raise.

- The experts in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have called for emission reductions of 25%-40% below 1990 levels by 2020, and 50%-85% by 2050. Regardless of what happens in international negotiations, Canada should unilaterally adopt and implement those targets.
- Emissions-trading plans and carbon-tax schemes are actually highly regressive taxes that mostly fall on poor people. Instead, Canada should impose hard limits on the emissions produced by the largest resource and energy companies.
- As the Climate Justice Now Coalition points out, the only really effective way to cut emissions is to leave fossil fuels in the ground. In Canada this means immediately stopping all expansion of the tar sands – and then shutting them down quickly. Greenpeace has rightly called the tar sands the “biggest global warming crime in history.” Stopping that crime must be a priority.
- Military spending and the federal budget surplus should be immediately redirected into public energy-saving projects such as expanding mass transit and retrofitting homes and office buildings. Tar sands workers and redeployed soldiers can play key roles in this effort.
- Canada must recognize its ecological debt to the Third World and to indigenous peoples. Paying that debt means cleaning up the damage that Canada’s capitalists have caused, providing concrete

assistance in adapting to climate change, and transferring the resources and technology needed for clean economic development.

The Bali conference failed to adopt effective measures against climate change: a treaty based on the Bali decisions would be worse than Kyoto. But Bali may also be remembered as the beginning point for a revitalized global movement for climate action and climate justice.

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*Climate and Capitalism* is an online journal focusing on ecology, climate change, and the ecosocialist alternative to capitalism and environmental destruction. It has three goals:

- To provide news and analysis to inform, educate and develop the green left around the world;
- To build an international movement against capitalist destruction of the environment and for ecosocialism;
- To encourage and facilitate collaboration and exchanges of views among socialists and ecology activists.

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