

# **“Green capitalism is like social capitalism : a contradiction in terms”**

Friday 22 October 2010, by [TANURO Daniel](#) (Date first published: 2 July 2010).

**Contribution to the seminar organised by the “Ecolocollectif” during the Istanbul European Social Forum.**

Green capitalism is like social capitalism : a contradiction in terms. The fundamental reason is the same, namely that capitalism is based on the exploitation of natural resources in general, and of the human workforce in particular. This exploitation can only increase in time, because capitalism is productivist by nature. The mechanism is crystal clear: competition draws each capitalist to change human workforce for more productive machines, in order to get more profit than the competitors. This process implies not only an increase in the rate of exploitation of labor, but also a general increase in the exploitation of nature. Indeed, even if the relative energy -or matter- intensity of production decreases in time, thanks to the technological progress, even if the economy is more and more based on services, this is more than compensated by the general growth of material production. The result can only be an increase in the absolute quantity of energy and matter consumed, which is basically antagonist to the absolute limits of the biosphere. By the way, it is strange that Marxists had so much difficulties to cope with the ecological crisis. Indeed, this antagonism is present in the first pages of Marx's Capital, when he compares the production of use values to the production of exchange values and writes that the first is limited by human needs, while the second has no other limit than capital itself.

Whatever, this general theoretical approach of the antagonism between capitalism and nature is clearly confirmed by the example of global warming. As you know, global warming is by far the most important environmental threat we face today. Due to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, mainly CO<sub>2</sub> coming from the massive burning of fossil fuels, the temperature could rise by 5 to 6 degrees Celsius by the end of this century. This is more than the temperature rise since the last ice age, 20.000 years ago. As a consequence, such a warming would have huge ecological and social consequences. The time lacks to give details, but the two main dangers are the sea level rise and the growing fresh water scarcity in some parts of the world, like the Middle East. In Egypt, for instance, a one meter sea-level rise would constrain 10 million people to move. On the other hand, the water stress is a well known phenomenon in the region, due to a combination of droughts and capitalist use and appropriation of the resource.

If climatologists and other scientists are right, climate stabilization at the

best level needs a very radical cut in GHG emissions. The conditions can be summarized as follows:

- For the developed countries, at least 95% cut in the emissions by 2050, and at least 40% cut by 2020;
- For the developing world, a reduction between 15 and 30% relative to the baseline
- A global reduction by 85%, starting before 2015.

It is absolutely evident that capitalism cannot and will not fulfill these conditions. It is extremely easy to come to this conclusion: it boils down to have a look on the climate plans adopted by the main capitalist governments : indeed, on the basis of the 170 climate plans communicated to the UNFCCC secretariat after Copenhagen, one can project a temperature increase between 3.2 and 4.9°C, corresponding to a sea-level rise between 60cm and 2.90 meters. It should be noticed that these frightening figures do not take into account the possible disintegration of the ice caps in Greenland and the Antarctica...

Capitalist institutions know this “inconvenient truth”. They know climate change is a reality but they have no answer to it, but the growing appropriation of nature through the development of the carbon market - which potentially means the total appropriation of life on Earth - and the development of dangerous technologies - like nuclear power, carbon capture and sequestration and biofuels implying more genetically modified organisms, including micro-organisms. An example of this incapacity is the so-called Blue Map Scenario by the International Energy Agency : to achieve a global 50% cut - which is very insufficient - the IEA proposes the yearly building of 32 nuclear plants and 45 new coal plants equipped with carbon capture and sequestration, plus a massive development of biofuel production. These plans are not only totally insufficient and very dangerous: they're also completely absurd and practically unfeasible. As such they illustrate the decay of the bourgeoisie: despite her means, despite the fantastic progress in science and technology, this ruling class is not even in state to avoid a major catastrophe. On the opposite, it is actually preparing a massive murder against the poor, especially in the poorest countries.

Is it possible to avoid catastrophic climate change? I think the answer is “yes”, but it becomes more and more difficult . The technological potential of renewable sources equals 7 to 10 times the global energy demand. It could increase very quickly if science wasn't submitted to capitalist objectives. The problem is not the technology but the mode of production based on the profit. For two reasons. The first reason is obvious: in most cases, energy coming from renewable sources is still more expensive than energy coming from fossil fuels, and it won't change quickly enough, partly because the fossil lobbies control the type of green technology used, the rhythm of implementation, etc. At the moment, they invest less than 5% of their profit in the development of renewable energy, mainly biofuels. The second reason is less evident: the transition from fossil fuels to green energy needs the building of a new energy system. This implies huge investments. These investments imply energy.

And this energy, because it is mainly from fossil origin, at least when the transition begins, means more GHG emissions. The conclusion is: to achieve the necessary cuts in GHG emissions while building a new energy system, one has to produce and transport less material goods. Moreover, such a reduction has to be planned on a world scale in function of the fundamental human needs, because three billion people lacks the essential. Obviously, this is totally antagonist to the productivist and chaotic nature of capitalism. Capitalism can only produce less temporary, when it is in crisis, and we all know it does that in a very brutal way.

The only way to fight environmental degradation in general and climate change in particular is to fight capitalism itself. It is urgent, the ecological struggle cannot be delayed after the revolution. Moreover, productivism must be countered in the left, in the worker's movement. That's why an ecosocialist perspective is absolutely necessary. The average work time should be reduced radically, without wage losses. The energy lobbies should be expropriated so that energy could become a common good. The investments towards an efficient energy system based on the renewable should be planned democratically and realized independently of the costs, by public enterprises and services. All buildings should be insulated by ad hoc public enterprises, and public transport should be free, comfortable and frequent. Scientific research should be refunded and oriented towards social interests, under the control of the population. The patents on green energy technologies should be cancelled and technology transfer to the public sector in developing countries should be free. A great part of production should be re-localised, especially in the agriculture. We should oppose the privatization of water, forests, land and other resources. These are some of the demands we should fight for. They imply a global redistribution of wealth by different means, like the cancellation of the public debt, new taxes on the rich and the nationalization of the credit sector. People say: it is easier to tell than to do. My answer is: the first thing to do is to tell it, because it is the truth.

The second thing to do is to try to begin to change the relation of forces by introducing ecological demands in the class struggle. This is a very complicated task. Especially in the present situation, with a very low class consciousness, a massive unemployment, and trade unions bureaucracies asking for "more growth". Fundamentally, the success depends on the class struggle itself. Defeated workers in the automobile sector won't fight for their retraining in public transportation companies, for instance. There is no short way to solve that problem. Nevertheless, the process can be accelerated in a certain measure when ecosocialists take good initiatives. In Britain, for instance, within the framework of the broad British Climate Campaign, our comrades launched an association called "trade unionists against climate change". At the moment, they are campaigning in favor of "one million green jobs in the public sector", and were able to get important support from the TUC. In Belgium, we launched a NGO called "Climate and Social Justice". We too get important support in the unions. CSJ was at the initiative of the climate demonstrations on the global day of action, the last three years. The big environmental NGOs had no choice, but to participate. Moreover, in december last year, CSJ organized a special train from Brussels to Copenhagen, with 900 activists on board. More than 100 rank-and-file unionists participated. This big success opens new perspectives,

especially in the unions but also in the youth.

I am confident you too, in Turkey, could take initiatives of that kind and I wish you plenty of success.

**Daniel Tanuro**

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