

Climate change - Heatwave: A very serious warning!

Wednesday 1 August 2018, by [TANURO Daniel](#) (Date first published: 25 July 2018).

It is difficult - not impossible, but it will be done after the fact - to establish with certainty that the current heatwave in Europe is due to climate change.

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What is certain, however, absolutely certain, is: 1 °) that this weather event is consistent with the projections of climatologists who study “global warming”; 2 °) that the multiplication of extreme weather phenomena like this obviously reinforces the idea that it is the “anthropogenic” climate change that is making us sweat, threatening our water resources (among other things)... and that can even dramatically kill people, as in Greece.

The result of only one degree of global warming

The moment is therefore well chosen to draw attention to the following fact: what is happening now is the result of global warming of only 1°C of the average surface temperature of the Earth compared to the pre-industrial era. One small degree is therefore enough to generate phenomena as disturbing as forest fires in Sweden (not so long ago it was in Siberia...), floods in the Philippines (recently it was in Pakistan), and temperatures so high in the big cities of India that, if it continues like that, any human activity could become impossible for a good part of the year, for physiological reasons!

We are talking about average surface temperature. As the joke says, the guy who has his feet in an oven and his head in a fridge can have an average temperature more or less normal. Nevertheless, this person may be, let us say, in very poor health... It is the same thing with the climate system. For a number of reasons, global warming is fastest in some parts of the northern hemisphere, especially over the Arctic. Recently, in northern Finland, a temperature higher than 30°C was recorded. In Greenland - but also on the Antarctic Peninsula - the warming observed for several decades is two to three times higher than the global average...

Another look at the Paris agreement

But let's get back to that global average. One degree, I was saying. What is happening before our

eyes thus allows us to begin to imagine what would be the meaning of the global warming of 2.7 to 3.7°C that the specialists project for the end of the century in the hypothesis that all countries would respect the promises made in Paris, during the COP21. (NB: This hypothesis is optimistic: look at Trump!) Such a level of warming would be absolutely catastrophic. Conclusion: The current commitments are totally inadequate. But we already knew that. What we did not know, on the other hand, or not enough, is that staying below 2°C in relation to the pre-industrial era is almost as inadequate. In any case, such a level of warming would not allow us to avoid very big problems.

In Paris, the governments set themselves the goal of staying “well below 2°C and continuing efforts not to exceed 1.5°C” of average global warming. This double-trigger formula is kind of bizarre. What is the key objective: 2°C or 1.5°C? The lawyers are discussing the issue. In addition, it is an objective on paper, with no real constraint. Finally, as has just been pointed out, there is a gulf between this paper objective and the reality that the commitments made by governments are preparing for us, as part of their “nationally determined contributions”. In view of the consequences of the current warming – of only one degree, I insist – the conclusion is imperative: it is vital, essential, not to exceed 1.5°C and to cool the planet to the maximum. The \$64,000 question is this: is this objective still achievable?

Temporarily exceed 1.5°C?

The Royal Society has recently devoted an extensive publication to this subject. It comprises more than fifteen contributions by renowned experts [1]. What emerges is indisputable: in the capitalist, and therefore productivist, framework, 1.5°C of global warming will be exceeded in a few decades. It goes without saying that the venerable Royal Society does not formulate things in these terms; I am making a translation for you. To judge the reliability of it, suffice it to mention that, according to the most radical estimates (not the only ones, but all the same!), the amount of carbon that could still be injected into the atmosphere without exceeding 1.5°C (what is called the “carbon budget”) would correspond to... four years of emissions at the current rate. So, we are literally more than ever on the razor’s edge, and global emissions continue to increase...

Some of the authors published by the Royal Society therefore imagine a temporary overrun of 1.5°C, subsequently compensated for, by the end of the century, by artificial cooling. This cooling would be induced by having recourse to “negative emission technologies” (technologies that could remove carbon from the atmosphere). This is mainly bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration, i.e. the use of biomass as an alternative energy source to fossil fuels, coupled with burial in the Earth’s crust of CO₂ produced by combustion...

I have already said all the bad things that I thought about these “negative emissions technologies”. It is not ruled out that mankind will be ultimately forced to resort to this, to avoid something worse, but, basically, these technologies come down to putting off to the future the problem of infinite growth on a finite planet. There is only one of these “technologies” (it is not really one) that is fully acceptable – and even advisable, immediately: the generalization of organic peasant agriculture of proximity, also including quality forestry – focusing on the absorption of CO₂ and the protection of biodiversity, showing respect for (and under the control of) populations, particularly indigenous ones. All the rest is geo-engineering solutions that do not dare to say their name, tricks of apprentice sorcerers...

We are really playing with fire... and ice!

A very strong argument against the supporters of the temporary overrun with later compensation is developed by one of the authors in the publication of the Royal Society. It consists of simply pointing out that during the overrun period the climate system can cross tipping points with very serious consequences, which no ulterior compensation will be able to erase. It is here that the information on super-warming in areas such as Greenland and the Antarctic Peninsula becomes fully understandable. This super-warming, in fact, unfortunately makes it very possible – not to say probable – that the overrun period will cause a qualitative acceleration of the dislocation of the ice caps in these regions. But if the ocean levels rise by one metre or more (that is a low estimate!) before the end of the century, no negative-emitting technology can do anything about it afterwards...

Let us note in passing: in terms of rising ocean levels, we cannot be content with projections on the horizon of 2100: in reality, the increase corresponding to a warming of a given magnitude will inevitably continue for about a millennium, with significant effects for at least three hundred years. Let us take an example: according to one of the contributions published by the Royal Society, a warming limit of 1.5°C in 2100 would result in 2300 in higher ocean levels than those caused in 2100 by warming without any mitigating measures!... (This increase, according to the authors, would be more than 80 cm, but we should be careful: this figure does not include the contributions of the phenomena of dislocation of the ice caps, which are impossible to predict and to model!).

Sound the tocsin everywhere

It must be repeated once again: the situation is extremely serious and urgent. It is a total illusion to believe that capitalist governments will be able to provide the necessary answers. On the one hand, these responses can only be anti-the advocates of growth, anti-productivist, therefore anti-capitalist, and urgency necessitates that they be of great radicality. On the other hand, it is enough to see what these governments are doing concretely for the moment and we will have understood: they are working to revive growth through austerity against working people, they are working to revive the arms race (production that is useless and harmful par excellence!) To support this growth, they are working to help “their enterprises” (those of their capitalist friends) against the competition, they are involved in driving out migrants. (Whereas their policy will force hundreds of millions of people to migrate to escape the consequences of climate change). Incidentally, they are also dealing with the various scandals of corruption and abuse of power which inevitably accompany their neoliberal policies... Concretely, on a daily basis, the current climate change is the least of their worries. The Belgian government’s 2019 budget is perfectly representative of this detestable reality.

The way forward is more than ever that of the popular struggle, of the most massive mobilization, the most decided and the most unitary possible. Next October, the IPCC [2] will publish its special report on 1.5°C. In November, the COP will have on its agenda the key issue of additional measures to bridge the gap between the Paris objective and the nationally determined contributions of the governments.

Those are two opportunities to take to the streets all over the world, in millions and tens of millions. Take to the streets to demand that all means be mobilized and that those responsible for the mess pay in order to stay under 1.5°C of global warming in a framework of social justice. Take to the streets to demand the immediate cessation of unnecessary and harmful production (with retraining of the workers concerned). Take to the streets to demand public plans to drastically reduce energy consumption and organize a rapid transition to renewables, involving the expropriation of the multinationals that control this sector and the banks that finance their criminal investments. Take to

the the streets to support the peasant unions fighting against agribusiness and the indigenous peoples fighting to save the forest. Take to the streets for freedom of movement and installation, against the rising barbarity. Take to the streets to demand the right to live of orangutans and all species threatened with extinction by the destructive madness of capital.

The climate change caused by the race for profit is at the heart of a crisis of civilization. The time has come to dare to opt for an ecosocialist and ecofeminist civilization, a sober civilization that loves and cares for the Earth. As we (especially women, patriarchy imposes it!) take care of our children. As the peasants take care of their vegetable gardens in permaculture.

Daniel Tanuro

P.S.

- Translation IVP, 31 July 2018:
<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5631>