

# Ecosocialism, neomalthusianism and the population debate

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**“Face to neo-malthusian tendencies, we need a positive narrative. An important part of the answer should consist in arguing that the maximum number of people that can be supported by a certain mode of production is not the only parameter of the population debate. Another parameter, at least as important, is the minimum number of people necessary to have a certain mode of production functioning”**

Green capitalism is a contradiction in terms. The more the ecological crisis progresses, the more obvious it is that radical anticapitalist measures are the only possible exit strategy. This explains why climate negationism, although completely defeated by science, attracts more and more bourgeois policy makers and business leaders worldwide. Actually, the complete irrationality of climate negationism appears to these people as a very rational way to defend the irrational capitalist logic of accumulation. Clearly, the resistance of Trump, Bolsonaro, Morrison and others improves the risk of huge catastrophes, threatening the existence of hundreds of million poor people, especially in poor countries.

In this context, cynical neo-malthusian tendencies will most probably develop in the coming years, which of course goes together with rising racist, neocolonialist and anti-women attacks. To cope with this key ideological issue, it won't suffice saying that the Earth could feed eleven billion inhabitants, or more, and that the solar energy is more than sufficient to satisfy human needs. Neither won't it suffice admitting that population is an element of the environmental equation (the Kaya equation for instance) but cannot contribute to solve it because the demographic transition is a slow process. We need more than that. We need a positive narrative.

An important part of the answer should consist in arguing that the maximum number of people that can be supported by a certain mode of production is not the only parameter of the population debate. Another parameter, at least as important, is the minimum number of people necessary to have a certain mode of production functioning. How many people do we need to restore the ecosystems, save the biodiversity, stabilise the climate and repair the social wounds of neoliberal policies? In other words, how many people do we need to rationally manage the social metabolism, knowing that another relation between humans and nature presupposes another relation between humans?

Giving concrete examples can greatly change the ideological content of the population debate. Let's take the topic « fisheries », and compare industrial fisheries to small scale fisheries from different points of view: jobs, energy, climate, efficiency, marine biodiversity, subsidies paid by the collectivity and so on. The figures are astonishing.

Industrial fisheries and artisanal fisheries catch the same tonnage of fish each year for human consumption: around thirty million tonnes. The first - which receives 25 to 27 billion dollars in subsidies - employs around 500,000 people, consumes 37 million tonnes of fuel, dumps 8 to 20

million tonnes of dead animals into the sea, and transforms another 35 million tonnes into oil, or food for animals. The second – which receives only 5 to 7 billion in subsidies – employs twelve million people, consumes 5 million tonnes of fuel, rejects a negligible amount of catch, and transforms almost no fish into oil or food for animals. In addition, the comparative efficiency of the two systems is clear: one to two tonnes of fish per tonne of fuel for industrial fisheries, four to eight tonnes for small-scale fisheries!

The same kind of comparisons can be made for agriculture (agribusiness vs. agroecology), breeding (industrial overproduction of meat vs. small scale breeding and change in the diet) and forestry (extractivist forestry based on monocultures and plundering of the ecosystems vs. ecoforestry). It can also be done in the field of social policies (neoliberal destructive policies based on the profit and patriarchy vs. care policies worn equally by women and men, aiming at the well being of the people). The conclusion is crystal clear: an ecosocialist mode of production is good for the climate, good for the biodiversity, good for the employment, good for the society in general and good for the public finances. It doesn't need a drop in the population but a break with the absurd capitalist and productivist logic of domination and accumulation for the profit.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the number of people on Earth could grow infinitely: the demographic transition should and must be accelerated in a certain way by democratic, social and feminist measures (above all, a good social security with good pensions for all, and the full respect of the right of women to control their fertility, including the abortion right). Neither does it mean that there is enough job for all: a very radical reduction of the working time is necessary as a consequence of the fact that we must absolutely produce less (according to some researchers, 6 hours a week is, all other things being equal, the maximum compatible with the 2°C limit in the OCDE countries). But introducing the second parameter in the population debate (the minimum number of people necessary to a certain mode of production) makes it possible to quit the defensive position for an offensive one: a much better life is possible for all on Earth, humans and not-humans!

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- Global Ecosocialist Network. 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020:  
<http://www.globalecosocialistnetwork.net/2020/01/26/ecosocialism-neomalthusianism-and-the-population-debate/>

- About Daniel Tanuro

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