Documents of the Fourth International

Manifesto of Revolutionary Marxism in the Age of Capitalist Ecological and Social Destruction

International Situation; Social Movements; Role & Tasks; Minority Texts

Texts submitted for discussion at the 18th World Congress of the Fourth International by the International Committee of the Fourth International

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Agriculture is killing the planet

Alan Thornett writes on his Ecosocialist Discussion blog https://www.ecosocialistdiscussion.com/ .

This is a revised version of chapter 16 of my book Facing the Apocalypse—Arguments for Ecosocialism, published in 2019, which might be useful today in the current debates on the role of agriculture.

In 2007 and 2008, dramatic increases in world food prices created economic instability and social unrest, in the poorest regions of the world. Those 'normally' subjected to famine and starvation were joined by seventy-five million more.

It was this that triggered the Tunisian revolution in January

2011, which led to the Arab Spring.

A young Tunisian vegetable seller, the lone breadwinner of a family of seven, set himself on fire in front of a government building after police confiscated his unauthorised cartload of vegetables. It was followed by protests over food prices as well as corruption, social inequalities, unemployment and political repression.

In the Global South today, over 800 million people are malnourished and 40 million die every year from hunger or diseases caused by hunger. Another 2 billion people have no regular access to clean drinking water, and 25 million die every year as a result. Sixty-six million primary children go to school hungry across the developing world—23 millions of them in Africa.

The plight of these countries is compounded by the domination of the WTO the IMF and the World Bank. These are the neoliberal gatekeepers that have saddled them with massive debt and forced them to produce monoculture crops for the multi-national companies whilst their own farmers are bankrupt by subsidised competition from the Global North.

This destroys the economic and social conditions of these countries and distorts the markets in which they operate, and leaves them powerless to comate the gathering climate catastrophe.

Meanwhile, desertification, salinification and floods are making large areas of the planet unsuitable for growing food. Climate chaos is creating extreme weather events, in which loss of life and destruction of dwellings and infrastructure have inflicted death, disease and further poverty on millions.

The big question

The salient question, therefore, is not just whether enough food can be produced, and distributed, to feed the existing

human population of 7 billion (now 8bn-AT), or indeed the 9 or 10 billion people projected by mid-century without destroying the biosphere of the planet in the process. In other words without a massive extension of industrialised/intensified agriculture and by the ever-increasing use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, and mono-cropping techniques?

Already, 60 per cent of current global biodiversity loss—i.e. the sixth great extinction of species that we are witnessing—is directly due to food production including the catastrophic destruction taking place the Amazonian rain forest, the most environmentally rich and diverse habitat on the planet.

At the same time agriculture is a massive contributor to GHG emissions, including methane from livestock, nitrous oxide from the soil, CO_2 from machinery. Perhaps the most remarkable statistic concerning food production is that the GHG emissions generated by meat production for human consumption are at 17 percent is almost equal to the 20 per cent generated by the entire world-wide transportation system combined: cars, trucks, trains, ships and aircraft! Yes, cars, trucks, trains, ships and aircraft!

Industrialised/intensive farming

Today, 70 billion land animals (*i.e.* excluding fish) are slaughtered every year for human consumption. This has doubled in the last 50 years, and is set to double again by 2050.

Two-thirds of these are reared by industrialised/intensive methods—or Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)—as they are known in the trade. This requires vast quantities of corn, maize, and soy that could be eaten directly, and far more effectively, by the human population itself. There are now more than 50,000 facilities classified as CAFOs in the US, with another quarter of a million industrial-scale facilities

just below that threshold.

In his 2017 book *Dead Zone-where the wild things were,* Philip Lymbery– who is also author of *FARMAGEDDON-the true cost of cheap meat,* published in 2014–points to a study by the University of Minnesota found that for every 100 grams of grain fed to animals only a fraction convert into human food: i.e. 43 un the case of milk, 35 with eggs, 40 with chicken, 10 with pork, and just 5 in the case of beef. My contemporaneous review of *Dead Zone* can be found here.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation 2006 Report *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options*, concluded that global meat production will more than double to 465 million tonnes by 2050; and that milk production will grow from 580 million tonnes to 1,043 million tonnes in the same period. The environmental impact of livestock production will have to be cut in half, it says, just it concluded just to keep the damage at the present level.

Beef consumption

The average American consumes 120 kg of meat a year, and the average Britain 80 kg. Whilst these levels are stable at the moment, meat consumption in the developing countries is rising rapidly. The global livestock sector currently produces 285 million tonnes of meat altogether–or about 36 kg (80 lb) per person, if divided evenly.

This involves the use of huge quantities of mineral fertiliser and pesticides as well as antibiotics to control the infections that result from confining them in too small a space and of hormones to fatten them faster.

The methane produced by cattle is also huge, putting the equivalent of 2.8 billion tonnes of CO_2 into the atmosphere. Globally cattle produce 150 billion gallons of methane every day from their digestive processes–and methane is 86 times

more potent as a GHG than CO_2.

In their 2016 film *Cowspiracy* Kip Anderson and Keegan Kuhn concluded that livestock along with their feed, their waste, and their flatulence account for up to 32 billion tonnes of CO_2 per year, or 51 per cent of all worldwide CO_2 equivalents. Livestock also generate 53 per cent of all emissions of nitrous oxide (mostly from manure) which is a greenhouse gas with 298 times the warming potential of CO_2.

Soy beans and palm oil

Between 1960 and 2009, *global soy production* increased by nearly ten-fold, and it has doubled again since then. The USA used to be the major producer of produce of soy, but there has since been explosive growth in Latin America, particularly in Brazil. Today, China, at 55 million tonnes, is by far the biggest importer of soybeans and is expected to increase its imports by 5 per cent a year. Soy bean imports to Asia are also expected to grow from approximately 75 million tonnes in 2009 to 130 million tonnes in 2019.

The global palm oil trade is worth $40 billion a year, accounting for over 30 per cent of the world's vegetable oil production. Malaysia and Indonesia are now the two biggest palm oil producing countries and are rapidly replacing their abundant rainforests with oil palm plantations. They account for 84 per cent of the worlds palm oil production. In South America palm oil production has recently increased in Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala. The second largest global vegetable oil, soya, takes up 120 million hectares, producing 48 million tonnes of soya oil.

Chickenisation

If red meat is the most damaging to the planet, that does not mean that mass produced chicken is a benign product. Lymbery calls this chickenisation, and points out that around 60

billion chickens a year are currently produced for meat. It comes, he says, at a terrible cost to the birds as well as massive pollution of the environment.

He points out that:

Poultry meat and eggs are a major source of infection from another serious food-poisoning bug: salmonella. Keeping chickens in large flocks or in cages can dramatically boost the risk: studies have shown that caged hens are up to ten times more at risk of salmonella than birds kept free-range… Farmers routinely attempt to safeguard their birds against such bugs by dosing them with antibiotics… Indeed, half of all the antibiotics produced in the world are fed to chickens, cows, pigs and other farmed animals.

There are serious implications in this for human health in terms of antibiotic immunity.

Oceanic Dead zones

Philip Lymbery—as the tile of his book suggests—also points in some detail to the development of oceanic dead zones, or hypoxia as they are scientifically known, in what is possibly the most terrifying upshot of meat production. They are caused by agricultural run-off which often reach the sea via the river systems. They are not new but they are now multiplying rapidly.

He focuses on a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico that forms every year from February to October, and is the second biggest in the world. Dead zones are generated by a lack of oxygen, creating a lifeless bottom layer of water which most creatures are unable to tolerate. Bottom-dwelling animals with no escape – crustaceans for example – are wiped out.

Lymbery points out that the number of dead zones around the world doubles every decade. There are now more than 400 dead zones covering some 95,000 square miles. Most are found in

temperate waters off the coast of the USA and Europe. Some are also brewing in the waters off China, Japan, Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. The biggest in the world is in the Baltic. The Gulf of Mexico dead zone stretches from the shores of Louisiana to the upper Texan coast, covering an area the size of Wales.

The responsibility for dead zones, Lymbery says, is clear. It is the fertilizer used to produces the vast grain crops of the American Mid-West—an area of intensive corn and soya production where large amounts of nitrogen are applied to the soil every year to produce grain mainly for meat production. Whilst 160 million tons of nitrogen is produced every year for agricultural purposes, only a fraction of that which is spread on the fields ends up being absorbed by the crops: the rest ends up as run-off.

The run-off that feeds the Gulf of Mexico dead zone originates in the American Mid-West and arrives via the Mississippi River. The Mississippi drains from land in more than 30 states, making it by far the biggest drainage system in North America. Nitrogen applied to the vast cornfields of the Mid-West to increase the crop yield makes its way through the tributaries upstream into the Mississippi itself, and on into the Gulf of Mexico to fuel the dead zone. The more nitrogen is applied to the crops, the bigger the resulting dead zone.

Fresh water consumption

Another massive impact that agriculture on the planet has been it relentless consumption of fresh water.

Fred Pearce, in *When the Rivers Run Dry* points out, for example, contends that it takes between 2,000 and 5,000 litres of water to grow one kilo of rice. That is more water than most households use in a week. It takes 1,000 litres to grow a kilo of wheat and 500 for a kilo of potatoes. And when it comes to feeding grain to livestock to produce meat and milk,

the numbers become even more startling.

It takes 24,000 litres to grow the feed to produce a kilo of beef, and between 2,000 and 4,000 litres for a cow to produce a litre of milk. It takes 5,000 litres to produce a kilo of cheese and 3,000 litres to produce a kilo of sugar. It takes around 2,000 litres to produce a kilo jar of coffee, around 250 litres to produce a glass of wine or a pint of beer, and a staggering 2,000 litres to produce a glass of brandy.

He argued that:

The water footprint of Western countries on the rest of the world deserves to become a serious issue. Whenever you buy a T-shirt made of Pakistani cotton, eat Thai rice, or drink coffee from Central America, you are influencing the hydrology of those region—taking a share of the River Indus, the Mekong or the Costa Rican rains. You may also be helping the rivers run dry.

He introduces the concept of 'virtual water'—the water used in the production or manufacture of a product. Those countries exporting such products, he argues, are in fact exporting 'virtual water'. The USA, he says, is rapidly depleting crucial underground water reserves in order to export a staggering 100 cubic kilometres of virtual water in beef production alone. Other major exporters of virtual water include Canada (grain), Australia (cotton), Argentina (beef) and Thailand (rice).

The agricultural transition

During the twentieth century, agriculture underwent what is known as the agricultural transition—ushering in not just fertilisers and pesticides but mechanisation—bringing about the greatest change since agriculture was first developed by human beings some 13,000 years ago.

Today fewer and fewer people are farmers, agriculture employs

1.3 billion men and women: 40 per cent of the working population. Peasants are still the majority of working people in Africa and Asia.

Over the past two decades, in Asia, Africa and Latin America, peasants have faced ‘conservative modernisation’ policies, posing deep challenges to peasant societies in the attempt to adapt them to capitalist globalisation. Land grabs are now global phenomenon, undertaken by local, national and transnational elites as well as investors and speculators, with the complicity of government and or local authorities.

Land grabbing goes hand in hand with increasing control by big business over agriculture and food, through greater control over land, water, seeds and other natural resources. In this race for profit, the private sector has strengthened its control over food production systems, monopolising resources and gaining a dominant position in the decision-making processes.

The countries of the global South are often under the pressure of debt payments that have increased sharply in recent years.

Crucial tipping-points

Philip Lymbery argues that although the planet is remarkably resilient, we are now reaching a tipping point in its ability to take any more punishment; and that agriculture is playing a major role in this, feeding a global population that is now over 7 billion (now 8 billion AT), but swallowing up nearly a half of the planet’s useable land and two-thirds of its fresh water, and inflicting damage on the soil that is vital for the food we eat. As the human population rises, Lymbery argues, ‘so the quest intensifies for more land to cultivate’. Right now, we are in no danger of running out of food (distribution problems not withstanding), but the environmental damage attached to the way we are choosing to produce it may be irreversible.

An area of cereal cropland the size of France and Italy combined will be needed by 2050 to keep pace with the demand for food. Up to a fifth of the world's remaining forests, he argues, will be gone in the next three decades – much of it to grow crops for feeding animals for the meat trade:

Great swathes of extra cropland look set to join the chemical-soaked arable monocultures of East Anglia in England. The seas of swaying corn in the Midwest of America and soya in Brazil are set fair to extend still further. There'll be more fields of maize like the ones I saw in rural Asia… The encroachment of agriculture into the remaining wildlands, together with the onward march of industrial farming, will almost certainly cause irreversible damage to biodiversity, forests soil and water.

He is cautious about giving an opinion on the rising human population of the planet, but he is clearly concerned. 'To me', he says, 'the link is obvious. An extra billion people come with 10 billion extra farm animals, together with what that means in terms of land water and soil.'

Throughout human history, he goes on:

for better or for worse, *Homo sapiens* have outdone all comers, from the magnificent mammals like the bison that roamed the American plains in vast numbers, to birds like the passenger pigeons that once flocked in great grey rivers through the sky, and to species of fellow humans like the Neanderthals. Whatever has stood in our way, and more often just in our reach, we have erased it. Now we have met our match. The great irony is that our most fearsome competitor for food – livestock – has been put there by us.

The conclusion to all this is clear. Although food continues to be produced (globally) by small and medium sized producers, industrialised agriculture is the predominant producer and is now irreplaceable without major changes both in food

production and consumption, particularly in regard to the increasing demand for meat.

Food sovereignty

The problem is clear. Big business dominates our global food system. A small handful of large corporations control much of the production, processing, distribution, marketing and retailing of food. This concentration of power enables big businesses to wipe out competition and dictate tough terms to their suppliers. It forces both farmers and consumers into poverty. Under this system, around a billion people are hungry and around 2 billion are obese or overweight.

Peasant and farmer movement across the world are therefore fighting for 'food sovereignty'—a term coined in 1996 by *La Via Campesina*.

Food sovereignty, they argue, allows communities to maintain control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed. It seeks to create a food system that is designed to help people and the environment, rather than make profits for multinational corporations.

The food sovereignty movement is a global alliance of farmers, growers, consumers and activists. It is counterposed to the demands of governments around the world for 'food security' a concept that instead aims to ensure that the global demand for food is met by free market methods and ever more industrialised faming systems.

La Via Campesina is one of the biggest social movements in the world, bringing together more than 200 million small and medium-scale farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous peoples, migrants and agricultural workers from 70 countries. The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), with 1.5 million members, is one of the biggest components of *Via Campesina*. It campaigns for access to land by the poor and for land redistribution. It has led land occupations by the rural

poor, forcing the Brazilian government to resettle hundreds of thousands of families.

Small farmers lack access to natural resources—in particular land, water and seeds—since most of the best land is in the hands of the big transnational companies, which impose a model of agricultural production designed for export rather than for local consumption. They impose a commercialised, intensive agriculture, that puts economic interests before the needs of people.

Food sovereignty, on the other hand, puts the local agricultural producers at the centre of the system, supporting the right of the people to produce their own food independent of the conditions established by the market. It is about prioritising local and national markets, and reinforcing agriculture by promoting food production, distribution and consumption on the basis of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The industrial/intensive agriculture model threatens the existence of traditional farming and fishing and small-scale food production. Women have a central role to play: in the Global South they produce 80 per cent of food. At the same time women and children world-wide are the most affected by hunger and famine. In many parts of the Global South, the law denies women the right to own land, and even where they can legally own it, they are denied that right. As a result of this, many individual and groups of women are joining the farmers' movements to seek protection.

In Latin America those struggling for the rights of indigenous communities and the right to the land often face murderous repression, as in Brazil and Honduras. In Asia, in Africa—for example, in Mali—on all continents, peasant movements lead the mobilisations against land monopolisation.

Peasant women and men, landless people and indigenous peoples,

and especially women and youths and precarious farm workers, are dispossessed of their means of subsistence by practices which also destroy the environment. Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities are excluded from their lands, often by force, making their lives more precarious and in certain cases examples of modern slavery. Although the concept of food sovereignty relates most strongly to the countries of the impoverished Global South, it also exists in the Global North. In fact the first European forum on food sovereignty was held in Krems in Austria in 2011.

La Via Campesina's seven principles of food sovereignty are as follows:

Food as a basic human right. Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realisation of this fundamental right.

Agrarian reform. A genuine agrarian reform is necessary which gives landless and farming people – especially women – ownership and control of the land they work and returns territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; the land belongs to those who work it.

Protecting natural resources. Food Sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, especially land, water, and seeds and livestock breeds. The people who work the land must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources, and to conserve biodiversity free of restrictive intellectual property rights. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with security of tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agrochemicals.

Reorganising the trade in food. Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritize production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency. Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices.

Ending the globalisation of hunger. Food sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing control of multinational corporations over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organisations such as the WTO, World Bank and IMF. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital, and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for TNCs, is therefore needed.

Social peace. Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalisation in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanisation, repression and increasing incidence of racism against smallholder farmers, cannot be tolerated.

Democratic control. Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policy at all levels. The UN and its related organisations will have to become more open and democratic for this to become a reality. These principles form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision making on food and rural issues.

This article was first published in my book Facing the Apocalypse—arguments for ecosocialism published on December 2019.

George Monbiot

As additional reading on this would strongly recommend George Monbiot published an excellent book last year (2023) entitled: Regenesis–*feeding the World Without Devouring the Planet*, which picks up some of the themes that I have raised in the above article.

Agriculture, he tells us is: "the most destructive human activity ever to have blighted the Earth". That "We are farming the planet to death", and that "agriculture is the greatest single cause of both climate change and species extinction. "This, he says, is the 'grand dilemma' we face." It is a dilemma he confronts fearlessly, and with little regard to who's toes, or indeed vested interests, he might be trampling on. His alternative vision is the resurgence of nature – and he makes a very strong case for it.

My review of his book can be found here.

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Alan Thornett** is a retired trade union activist and ecosocialist writer. His books **'Facing the Apocalypse – Arguments for Ecosocialism'** and **'Militant Years: Car workers' struggles in the 60s and 70s'** are available from **Resistance Books

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Five reasons why agriculture

should be central to our ecosocialist vision

Agriculture (including marine and fishing) are important parts of the Scottish economy. Jess Spear from the Irish ecosocialist magazine Rupture writes about why it is central to an ecosocialist vision.

1. Industrialised agriculture is undermining our life support systems.

Wildlife populations are collapsing and many species, unable to scrape a living, are simply going extinct. Deforestation and land clearance destroys ecosystems and replaces them with monoculture crops (eg, wheat, barley, soy) or farmed animals. Big monoculture farms effectively starve wildlife of food and pollute the soil and adjacent lakes, rivers and streams. The continuing expansion of intensive farms means further destruction of ecosystems, more wildlife starvation, and more animals going extinct.

2. And fueling the rise of new pandemics.

Loss of habitat drives wildlife into areas inhabited by humans and increases contact between human populations and wildlife, which then increases the likelihood of zoonotic spillover (that is, infectious diseases jumping from animal to human). In fact, most human diseases originated this way. Big factory farms, with billions of chickens, pigs, and cows reared in often cramped and unsanitary conditions, are also breeding grounds for new pandemics.

3. Climate change will disrupt our food supply.

Millions of people are already suffering from food insecurity because of our rotten, for-profit food system. However, the situation stands to get worse with multiple extreme weather events happening simultaneously – such as a heatwave and

drought at the same time, as we saw this summer and last – lead to harvest failures and disrupt supply chains. A decrease in the overall food supply will undoubtedly lead to price spikes and more people suffering deprivation. We are already seeing this and should expect more to occur with increased magnitude and frequency as Earth's temperature rises. In fact, a study published this summer outlines how current models underestimate the risk of harvest failures in multiple breadbaskets.

4. Top-down changes in agriculture are fueling the rise of the far right.

Not only is the capitalist response to the climate and biodiversity crises inadequate, what little is being done is far too often unplanned and under the control of private industry. Farmers in Europe in particular are greatly impacted by new regulations meant to curb nitrogen fertiliser pollution. But, rather than working with small farmers and assisting them in the necessary transition away from intensive farming, governments have dragged their feet – in Ireland they continue to drag their feet – and now are forcing farmers to rapidly change the way they farm. This haphazard approach opens the door to the far right, who deny climate change and spread conspiracy theories about land theft. We should all take note of what took place in the Netherlands where the farmer-citizen movement, founded only four years ago, won the

municipal elections and immediately cancelled the new environmental policies.

5. We must oppose the new enclosures.

Since the economic crash in 2008, international investors have been buying or leasing huge tracts of agricultural land used by subsistence farmers or indigenous peoples. While the global working class, with its tremendous latent power and common interest in overthrowing capitalism, will undoubtedly play a leading role in transforming society, peasants and indigenous peoples are already battling big corporations and states that support them (and winning in some cases). Ecosocialists should support these struggles unconditionally. Additionally, we support the international peasant movement – La Via Campesina – for food sovereignty and for getting rid of the transnational agribusinesses dominating our food system.

Interview: Jess Spear- Agriculture and Eco-socialism

Rupture Radio By Rupture Media Jan 09,

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- *Was Marx a Degrowth Communist? by Diana O'Dwyer*
- *Five reasons why agriculture should be central to our ecosocialist vision, by Jess Spear*
- *Toward an Irish Marxist Political Economy, by Conor McCabe*
- *The Fight Against Extractivism, interview with Fidelma O'Kane (Save Our Sperrins)*
- *Trees, for example, Ash, by R.S.*
- *Pigs' Meat, poem by Ciarán O'Rourke*

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COP28: Trashing the UN is easy, but where is the alternative?

Alan Thornett writes on Ecosocialist Discussion blog about COP28 and debates the key issues raised.

Despite being held in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – the sixth biggest oil producer in the world, and presided over by a top oil executive with the biggest fossil fuel lobby ever seen at a COP conference, COP28 was a surprisingly productive event.

It met at a time of dramatic acceleration in global warming, of course. 2023 was not only the hottest year since records began, but it did so by an unprecedented margin. The global average figure for 2023 was 14.98°C, a massive 0.17°C above the previous record. For the first time, every day in that year was 1°C above the pre-industrial level. Almost half were over 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level, and two were more than 2°C above it.

It was against this background that COP28 agreed—after a heated debate and an overrun of the conference—that the conference agreed unanimously to call for "a transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science".

UN Secretary General António Guterres told the Guardian on December 13 that. "Whether you like it or not fossil fuel phase-out is (now) inevitable". "Let's hope it hasn't come too

late.” I agree with him on both points. Fossil fuel is now an obsolescent energy source in which investment will become increasingly problematic and which must be replaced by renewables with the utmost urgency.

He is absolutely right. It is an important strategic breakthrough that could eventually spell the end—or at least the beginning of the end—of fossil fuels and the fossil industry. He is also right to question whether it has come too late to save the planet from catastrophe, which only time will tell, unfortunately. We are, however, better placed to defend the planet with this agreement in place than without it.

It is of comparable importance, in my view, to the two key decisions agreed in Paris in 2015. The first was that global warming is anthropogenic, i.e., a product of human activity. The second was the recognition that achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 could only be achieved by holding the global average temperature increase over preindustrial levels to below 1.5°C.

A last-minute decision to remove all references to oil and gas sabotaged a similar proposal to phase out fossil fuels at COP26 in Glasgow in 2022. Remarkably, fossil fuels had never been mentioned as such before at a COP conference, presumably to avoid frightening the horses.

Johan Rockström, a hugely respected Earth systems scientist, a member of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, and the leader of the team that developed the concept of planetary boundaries, welcomed the decision.

He told the Guardian that the agreement is a “pivotal landmark” in the climate struggle. It does, he says, deliver on making it clear to all financial institutions, businesses, and societies that we are now finally—eight years behind the Paris schedule—at the true ‘beginning of the end’ of the fossil fuel-driven world economy.”

Greenpeace said that while there are still some important loopholes to address, this package is “a powerful milestone.” While much more campaigning will be needed over the next year to make this happen as soon as possible, “its game on from here!”

Other key decisions

The first item on the agenda in Dubai was the “loss and damage fund,” which was agreed upon in principle at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh. It was declared operational on the first day of COP28, with an initial $700 million to fill the fund. This is a drop in the ocean, however, compared to the $580 billion in damage that vulnerable countries will face by 2030.

A stocktake of the “Nationally Determined Contributions” was also conducted as a part of the “ratcheting up process” adopted in Paris in 2015, after which it was reported that there had been a collective effort to meet the $100 billion target set in Paris and that new pledges would be sought to make up the shortfall. There were also policy discussions on a wide range of important issues, including the following:

- *Renewable energy*. The conference agreed to triple renewable energy globally, double its energy efficiency by 2030, and accelerate emissions reductions from road transport. It was also agreed to cut methaneby at least 30 percent by 2030.
- *The internal combustion engine*. It was agreed that the internal combustion enginewould be phased out by 2030. Electric vehicles powered by renewable energy, it said, are the future, and we can’t achieve global decarbonisation of transport without them.
- *Low-carbon cities*. There was a report from the LocalClimate Action Summitregarding energy consumption in cities. It was noted that cities are responsible for more than three-quarters of global energy consumption and more than half of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Navigating this within a low-carbon and resilient framework can foster a more equitable and just future. Cities need to start building much more eco-friendly infrastructure at a much faster pace.

- *Public transport*. It was agreed that global public transport capacity should be doubledby 2030.
- *Food and agriculture*. The World Resources Institutereported that there were six major food and agriculture breakthroughs made in Dubai. Food and land, they say, drive one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, food systems around the world are vulnerable to droughts, flooding, extreme heat, and other impacts of climate change. The issue is particularly critical in many developing countries—for example, in Brazil, where food and land use drive 70% of emissionswhile over half the population remains food insecure.
- *Deforestation*. The Brazilian delegation successfully proposed a new global fundto pay countries to keep their tropical forests intact. The proposal called for the creation of a massive global scheme to help preserve rainforests in scores of countries, called the "Tropical Forests Forever" fund. The concept would pay residents and landowners who help preserve forested areas like the Amazon. Finance would initially be raised from sovereign wealth funds as well as from other investors, such as the oil industry.
- *The biodiversity crisis*. There was strong support for the landmark agreement for nature recovery that was signed last year at the UN COP51 conference on biodiversity, which included protecting 30% of nature by 2030.

Carbon taxes

There was a remarkable intervention by IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva (no less) on carbon pricing and carbon taxes. In

what was the first time the subject had been discussed at a COP conference, she made a two-part proposal on behalf of the IMF:

- First, the abolition of all subsidies for fossil fuel production
- Second, put an explicit charge (or tax) on CO_2emissions at the point of production. This, she said, would raise the trillions of dollars that are needed to tackle the climate crisis.

She claimed that because right-wing climate denial politicians and parties all over the world have targeted them, governments have delayed implementing such taxes. However, she said, “When you put a price on carbon, decarbonisation accelerates.” The IMF, World Bank, OECD, and World Trade Organisation, she said, have set up a taskforce to examine carbon pricing policies and their application around the world.

As someone who has been arguing for exactly this many years, I found this intervention staggering. It appears that a large section of the ruling elites have adopted one of the key elements of an exit policy from fossil energy. The IMF is not only a capitalist institution but one that was founded precisely in order to oversee the international market on behalf of global capitalism.

COP conferences have traditionally resisted discussing this kind of specific emissions reduction demand in favour of general principles. It is important that they are now discussing both.

The harsh reality

This positive outcome in Dubai reinforces what has long been clear: i.e., that at this stage of the climate crisis, with global temperatures rising at an ever faster rate and time running out, the only way to avoid catastrophic damage to the planet is by making the COP process work.

Any other proposition is leftist posturing. The science is irrefutable. The global temperature is rising at an ever-increasing rate. Dangerous tipping points are starting to trigger. Time is running out. The 1.5°C limit hangs by a thread, climate chaos could be irreversible within a decade, and in the end, nothing can be built on a dead planet.

At this stage, moreover, only governmental action—and action taken by governments prepared to go on a war footing—can make the changes necessary to stop climate change in the limited time we have left, and only the UN COP process has a chance of achieving it.

Not that it will be easy, of course. The implementation of COP policies has been a battle from the outset. Member states are quick to exploit any loopholes on offer, including, for example, carbon capture and storage and the notion of transitional fuels, both of which provide the opportunity to hang on to fossil fuels for a bit longer.

Others simply ignore their previous commitments—flagrantly, if necessary—if they cut across their domestic political interests. A prime current example is the UK Tory government, which has dumped a raft of previous ecological commitments in order to exploit a backlash from car drivers against measures to improve air quality in London, which it thinks it can use against Labour in the general election later this year.

These include delaying the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to 2035; delaying the ban on the sale of fossil-fuel heating boilers from 2035 to 2040; deprioritizing the transition to electric vehicles; issuing over a hundred new licences for oil and gas exploration; and a completely new oil field in the North Sea.

Such governments, however, have to be faced down if there is to be a solution, and that can best be done within the COP process.

The role of the left

Most of the left denounce the UN COP process at every opportunity, in the most vitriolic terms they can find, with no regard to factual or historical accuracy, while having no viable alternative to offer itself. This is a big problem, in my view.

George Monbiot, for example, whom I greatly respect and who should know better in my view, declared in the Guardian of December 9 that the whole COP process had broken down, had "achieved absolutely nothing since it started in 1992, and are now they are talking us into oblivion." "Let's face it," he goes on: "climate summits are broken. The delegates talk and talk, while Earth systems slide towards deadly tipping points". In other words, it is a roadblock to doing anything positive about climate change, and the sooner it gets out of the way, the better.

The Swedish writer and climate campaigner Andreas Malm, author of *How to Blow Up a Pipeline,* told the Guardian on April 21, 2023, that "climate diplomacy is hopeless" and that he does not have "a shred of hope that the elites are prepared to take the urgent action needed to avert catastrophic climate change.".

The COP conferences, he tells us, "have degenerated into kind of an annual theatre for pretending that we're doing something about global warming while, in fact, we're just letting fuel be poured on the fire. "If we let the dominant classes take care of this problem," he said, "they're going to drive at top speed into absolute inferno. Nothing suggests that they have any capacity to do anything else of their own accord because they are totally enmeshed with the process of capital accumulation.".

They reflect Gretta Thunberg's Glasgow "blah, blah, blah, blah" speech when, in fact, crucial debates were taking place

into which she should have been intervening.

George Monbiot says that he had considered proposing changes to the decision-making procedure at COP summits but had decided against it. Andreas Malm proposes that the climate movement should have some kind of military wing, which would get us nowhere when it comes to building the kind of broad global mass movement that is going to be necessary.

The revolutionary left

The revolutionary overthrow of global capitalism, which they imply is imminent, is the solution that the revolutionary left advocates, whether explicitly or implicitly. The fact that the far-right is growing dangerously across Europe, and Trump stands a very good chance of winning the US Presidency in November (for example), does nothing to deter them in this.

This kind of maximalism, however, has many consequences beyond wishful thinking. It implies that anything short of a global revolution is a reformist diversion and that victories are not victories but defeats if a reformist institution like the UN COP process is involved.

It implies that the collapse of the COP process, which is entirely possible as the crisis sharpens, would be good for the future of the plant, when in reality it would let global warming rip and leave us facing a catastrophe situation without a global project by which to confront it and with the right-wing waiting in the wings.

It also leads many on the radical left to oppose the placing of environmental demands on the COP process because, they say, it is a capitalist institution. This is not only wrong and ultra-left, but strange, since the left demands such institutions in other arenas of struggle all the time. We put demands on the employers, who are capitalists, and on governments that are also capitalist institutions. The fire service is a capitalist institution designed first and

foremost to protect private property, but we would not refuse its help if our house was burning down.

A transitional approach

The task we face today is not whether global capitalism can be overthrown by revolutionary means in the next few years, but whether it can be forced to take the measures necessary to save the planet from global warming today as a part of a longer-term struggle to eventually replace capitalism with an ecosocialist society. If we are unable to build a movement capable of forcing change under capitalism, how are we going to build a movement capable of its revolutionary overthrow?

It is not true—as many on the left insist—that capitalism cannot be forced to make structural changes that are contrary to the logic of its existence. In fact, it made concessions when it agreed under pressure to support a maximum global temperature increase of 1.5°C in Paris and when it agreed under similar pressure to transition away from fossil fuels in Dubai.

We need a transitional approach, built around a set of transitional demands, that, as well as addressing the immediate needs of the struggle today, also has a strategic logic towards a post-capitalist solution. Reforms are not necessarily reformist. The road to revolutionary change is forged in the struggle for reform. In fact, the struggle for reform is often the only real road to revolutionary change. Depending on the dynamics of struggle they generate, in fact, both the 1.5°C limit and the temperature increase and reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 are transitional demands.

The ruling elites, in any case, are deeply divided on the future of the planet. While its more enlightened wing recognises the approaching climate catastrophe and supports the COP process as the only way to save the planet—and within the capitalist order, of course—its dystopian, anti-woke,

climate-denying wing, such as Trump, Bolsonaro, and Orbán, are prepared to gamble on the future of the planet against their climate denial, fight it out on the streets, and impose an authoritarian regime if they get the chance.

These people are deeply hostile to the progressive agenda required to save the planet, i.e., humanitarianism, collectivism, environmentalism, and the defence of nature and the natural environment, that are involved in saving the planet on a sustainable basis.

The role of the left and progressive forces in the climate struggle must be to exploit this division on behalf of the future of the planet.

The role of the UN

I am not a natural defender of the UN—the "thieves kitchen," as Lenin called its predecessor, the League of Nations—or even of its environmental work.

It is important, however, to recognise the positive role that the UN has played in global warming over the last 35 years, decades before the socialist left showed any interest. In fact, it is difficult to play a useful role in the climate struggle today without an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of that contribution and what it represents as a focus for international campaigning and mobilisation.

The idea that the UN could have resolved the climate crisis many years ago if only it had been prepared to snap its fingers hard enough—which is implicit in the left critique—is nonsense. As is the notion that it has "achieved absolutely nothing since it was launched in 1992″ or that its conferences are "a kind of annual theatre for pretending that we're doing something about global warming." Such caricatures contribute nothing to the struggle.

The UN's engagement with the ecological crisis began in 1972

with the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a scientific body comprising 2,500 scientists from 130 countries, was launched in 1989. It's mandated to "prepare a comprehensive review and recommendations with respect to the state of knowledge of the science of climate change, the social and economic impact of climate change, and potential response strategies and elements for inclusion in a possible future international convention on climate."

It coincided with James Hansen's historic address to the US Senate on global warming and climate change.

The Framework Convention on Climate Change was launched in 1993 at the Earth Summit in Rio. Its mandate was to establish an international agreement in order to "stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere and prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate systems." What it did in practice was establish the COP process.

The Convention, in particular, was a frontal challenge to the petrochemical industry and what it produced, which had dominated planet Earth for almost a century and had shaped it in its image. Abolishing fossil fuels and replacing them with renewable energy was always going to mean uniting every country in the world in a monumental confrontation.

The fossil fuel industry responded with extreme hostility to all this and went on over the next 30 years to spend billions of dollars on the next opposing COP process, including the mobilisation of an army of climate deniers around the world to discredit the science, and they were initially very successful.

Legally binding votes

The most contentious issue in the COP process faced from the

outset was the issue of legally binding (or non-legally binding) votes at conferences. While the Framework Convention did not provide for binding votes, it had the authority to require them on carbon reduction pledges by way of a protocol to the Convention. Such a protocol, called the Kyoto Protocol, was agreed upon at COP3 in Kyoto in 1997. It was, however, highly contentious and difficult to implement.

This came to a head at COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, when 25 countries, including some of the world's biggest polluters—the USA, China, Canada, and Australia—refused to accept a legally binding vote over a proposal to restrict the global temperature increase to no more than 2°C above the preindustrial level. They all walked out, and the conference broke up in disarray.

The split effectively paralysed the COP process until COP15 in Paris in 2015, where legally binding votes on carbon reduction pledges were replaced by a consensus system, i.e., by unanimous, non-binding votes. Member states failing to meet their pledges would have to face the political and reputational consequences involved at the next COP, and under conditions where the crisis itself would inevitably be even worse.

This was correct, in my view. This has certainly been more effective, both in holding the whole thing together and in implementing decisions. Although getting 198 diverse and complete countries to act together to save the planet is always a formidable task, it is better than endless splits with no dialogue and no progress.

Meanwhile, the COP process, we should recognise, has been instrumental in defeating the climate deniers and winning the overwhelming majority of the scientific community over on the science of climate change—without which we get nowhere. Additionally, the COP process, without which the fight against climate change would be ineffective, has significantly

contributed to a seismic shift in the public's awareness of the climate crisis in recent years.

An exit strategy from fossil fuels

Any campaign against climate change, if it is to be successful, must have a viable existing strategy for fossil fuels based on a socially just transition to renewables, whether it is the UN or the left. While the exit strategy being pursued by the COP process until now has been net-zero emissions by 2050, it does not propose by what mechanism this should be achieved.

I have long argued that the most effective way to cut carbon emissions quickly and in a way compatible with social justice is by making fossil fuels far more expensive than renewables by means of carbon taxes, as argued (remarkably) by the IMF in Dubai. When properly managed and carried out as a part of the significant transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor, this can both provide a socially just transition for the most vulnerable members of society and shield it from right-wing forces like the far right in Britain or the yellow vests in France.

The best way of doing this, in my view, is through a fee-and-dividend project along the lines proposed by climate scientist James Hanson in his 2012 book Storms of My Grandchildren. He set out the main points as follows:

- Fossil-fuel companies would be charged an easily implemented carbon fee imposed at the well head, mine shaft, or point of entry.
- 100% of the revenue collected would be distributed monthly to the population on a per capita basis as dividends, with up to two-half shares for children per family.
- Dividends would be sent directly via electronic

transfers to bank accounts or debit cards.

- The carbon fee would be a single, uniform amount in the form of dollars per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted from the fuel.
- The carbon fee would then gradually and predictably be ramped up so as to achieve the necessary carbon reductions.
- At the same time, current subsidies to the fossil fuel industry would be eliminated.

When applied to the USA, he argued that 60% of the population would receive net economic benefits, i.e., the dividends they received back would exceed the increased prices paid. As the IMF speaker concluded in Dubai, as mentioned above, "when you put a price on carbon, decarbonisation accelerates.".

The best exposition of Hansen's proposal can be found in *The Case for a Carbon Tax* by Shi-Ling-Hsu, published by Island Press in 2011.

Cutting emissions from the demand side in this way is the only socially just way of doing it since it can be carried out within the framework of an overall taxation system that is heavily progressive and brings about a major transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor. Other alternatives, often advanced by the left, such as production cuts by government decision or the rationing of energy, not only do not work but can generate popular backlashes along the lines of the yellow vests, and rationing would create a black market.

It might be expected that the left would support such taxes since it supports taxing the rich, but this is not the case. Most on the radical left oppose carbon taxes, I presume, because they do not involve the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Mass movements

It is unlikely that the climate struggle will be resolved

without big confrontations and mass movements, for which ecosocialists have a responsibility to make preparations.

The best scenario, of course, is that a mass movement is built out of the existing global justice movement and includes everyone who is prepared to fight to save the planet on a progressive basis.

There is another scenario, however, which is that a mass movement or movements arise spontaneously following ecological or societal breakdown as a result of the failure of humanity to stop runaway global warming, resulting in catastrophic impacts on the planet, and with ultra-right and fascist forces waiting in the wings.

While any movement capable of saving the planet will initially be (hopefully) progressive rather than ecosocialist in character, it will be crucial that there are ecosocialists inside it able to fight not just for a sustainable energy transition but one based on social and economic justice and in an anti-capitalist direction.

It is the need to address these eventualities that makes the strategic discussions we have today around the climate and ecological struggle so important. The challenge for ecosocialists in such a situation is not just to be on the right side but to be able to make a contribution to the line of march and the principals involved.

Alan Thornett January 24th 2024

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2023 was hottest year on record, close to 1.5°C

Every day was over a degree above the pre-industrial level, *writes the Climate & Capitalism blog.*

The European Commission's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) says 2023 was the first year on with all days over 1°C warmer than the pre-industrial period.

Unprecedented global temperatures from June onwards led 2023 to become the warmest year on record – overtaking by a large margin 2016, the previous warmest year. The 2023 Global Climate Highlights report presents a general summary of 2023's most relevant climate extremes and the main drivers behind them.

C3S Director Carlo Buontempo comments:

"The extremes we have observed over the last few months provide a dramatic testimony of how far we now are from the climate in which our civilization developed. This has profound consequences for the Paris Agreement and all human endeavor's. If we want to successfully manage our climate risk portfolio, we need to urgently decarbonize our economy whilst using climate data and knowledge to prepare for the future."

Global surface air temperature highlights

- 2023 is confirmed as the warmest calendar year in global temperature data records going back to 1850.
- 2023 had a global average temperature of 14.98°C, 0.17°C higher than the previous highest annual value in 2016.
- 2023 was 0.60°C warmer than the 1991-2020 average and 1.48°C warmer than the 1850-1900 pre-industrial level.
- It is likely that a 12-month period ending in January or February 2024 will exceed 1.5°C above the pre-industrial

level.

- 2023 marks the first time on record that every day within a year has exceeded 1°C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial level. Close to 50% of days were more than 1.5°C warmer then the 1850-1900 level, and two days in November were, for the first time, more than 2°C warmer.
- Annual average air temperatures were the warmest on record, or close to the warmest, over sizeable parts of all ocean basins and all continents except Australia.
- Each month from June to December in 2023 was warmer than the corresponding month in any previous year.
- July and August 2023 were the warmest two months on record. Boreal summer (June-August) was also the warmest season on record.
- September 2023 was the month with a temperature deviation above the 1991–2020 average larger than any month in the ERA5 dataset.
- December 2023 was the warmest December on record globally, with an average temperature of 13.51°C, 0.85°C above the 1991-2020 average and 1.78°C above the 1850-1900 level for the month. You can access information specific for December 2023 in our monthly bulletin.

Ocean surface temperature highlights

- Global average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) remained persistently and unusually high, reaching record levels for the time of year from April through December.
- 2023 saw a transition to El Niño. In spring 2023, La Niña came to an end and El Niño conditions began to develop, with the WMO declaring the onset of El Niño in early July.
- High SSTs in most ocean basins, and in particular in the North Atlantic, played an important role in the record-breaking global SSTs.
- The unprecedented SSTs were associated with marine

heatwaves around the globe, including in parts of the Mediterranean, Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and North Pacific, and much of the North Atlantic.

European temperature highlights

- 2023 was the second-warmest year for Europe, at 1.02°C above the 1991-2020 average, 0.17°C cooler than 2020, the warmest year on record.
- Temperatures in Europe were above average for 11 months during 2023 and September was the warmest September on record.
- European winter (December 2022 – February 2023) was the second-warmest winter on record.
- The average temperature for the European summer (June-August) was 19.63°C; at 0.83°C above average, it was the fifth-warmest on record.
- European autumn (September-November) had an average temperature of 10.96°C, which is 1.43°C above average. This made autumn the second-warmest on record, just 0.03°C cooler than autumn 2020.

Other remarkable highlights

- 2023 was remarkable for Antarctic sea ice: it reached record low extents for the corresponding time of the year in 8 months. Both the daily and monthly extents reached all-time minima in February 2023.
- Arctic sea ice extent at its annual peak in March ranked amongst the four lowest for the time of the year in the satellite record. The annual minimum in September was the sixth-lowest.
- The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane continued to increase and reached record levels in 2023, reaching 419 ppm and 1902 ppb respectively. Carbon dioxide concentrations in 2023 were 2.4 ppm higher than in 2022 and methane concentrations increased by 11 ppb.

- A large number of extreme events were recorded across the globe, including heatwaves, floods, droughts and wildfires. Estimated global wildfire carbon emissions in 2023 increased by 30% with respect to 2022 driven largely by persistent wildfires in Canada, greenhouse gas concentrations, El Niño and other natural variations.

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The Hydrogen Economy – yet another mirage

Sean Thompson writes on Red Green Labour:

Over the past few years, much has been made (particularly by fossil fuel industry lobbyists) of the potential for the development of a 'hydrogen economy'. The great attraction of hydrogen to the proponents of the status quo, whether Tory or Labour, is that it feeds into their fantasies about 'green growth' – a lower carbon version of business as usual. Hydrogen, it is claimed, could replace fossil fuels as an energy source, not only for energy intensive heavy industries like steel and glass production but also for powering cars, public transport, aviation and home heating. However, as the estimable Ben Goldacre said of other sensational claims "I think you'll find it's more complicated than that."

Hydrogen comes in three colours:

- Grey: Hydrogen produced from a natural gas feedstock.

- Blue: Hydrogen produced from a natural gas feedstock with capture of the by-product CO2.
- Green: Hydrogen produced by splitting water molecules through electrolysis using renewable energy sources

According to the International Energy Agency, 95 million tonnes (Mt) of hydrogen is produced worldwide and 99% is 'grey'. In 2022, hydrogen production generated more than 900 Mt of CO2 emissions – more than the entire global aviation industry footprint of almost 800 Mt. At the same time, less than 0.1 per cent of the world's hydrogen production (less than 0.08 Mt) was green hydrogen.

In the run-up to COP28, its president, Al Jaber, Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology of the United Arab Emirates and head of theAbu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), repeatedly urged agreement by governments to almost double current global hydrogen production from 95 Mt to 180 Mt per year by 2030. Reaching that goal with green hydrogen would require a 2,068-fold production increase in seven years. This is, to say the least, a highly unlikely scenario, so the reality would be a massive boom in grey hydrogen and good news for ADNOC and the rest of the fossil fuel industry.

The idea that green hydrogen can replace the energy currently provided by fossil fuels for most transport and for domestic heating/cooling is fanciful in the extreme. Even more fanciful is the suggestion currently being promoted by aviation industry lobbyists that hydrogen might be used to power zero carbon flying, either by using it to manufacture yet to be discovered 'alternative' aviation fuels or via hydrogen fuel cells for electrically powered aircraft.

- A kilogram of hydrogen – the unit of measurement most often used – has an energy value of about 33.3 kWh.So a tonne of hydrogen delivers about 33 MWh and a million tonnes about 33 terawatt hours (TWh). To provide a sense of scale, the UK uses about 300 TWh of electricity a

year.

- Many estimates of the eventual demand for hydrogen are of at least 500 Mt. A world that requires 500 Mt of hydrogen will need to produce 22,000 TWh of green electricity a year just for this purpose. 22,000 TWh is roughly equivalent to 15% of total world primary energy demand, and today's global production from all wind and solar farms is a little more than 10% of this figure.
- A huge global increase in green energy generation capacity will thus be needed to produce 500Mt of hydrogen. As an example of the scale of of increase needed, for every gigawatt of capacity, a well-sited North Sea wind farm will provide about 4,400 GWh a year, or 4.4 TWh. At a future efficiency level of about 75%, this will produce around 100,000 tonnes of hydrogen. Therefore most of the UK's current North Sea wind output from 13 GW of wind would be needed to make just one million tonnes of H2.
- The amount of electrolysis capacity required to make 500 million tonnes of hydrogen a year depends on how many hours a year that the electrolysers work and how efficient they are. If we assume an average of about 60% of the time, at a prospective 75% efficiency level, then the world will need around 4,500 gigawatts of electrolysis capacity – about five hundred times what is currently in place.

While the creation of such a vast new industry is clearly possible over a period of time, particularly if such an huge initiative isn't left to the hidden hand of the market or the not so hidden hands of the fossil fuel industry, it is clearly not possible in the time left to us to avoid global catastrophe. Nonetheless, the use of hydrogen and the development of green hydrogen production capacity will be essential if we are to move to a zero carbon economy – but because the supply of truly clean hydrogen is going to be limited – certainly for the next two or three decades – it

should be prioritised for uses where there are no alternatives.

In an analysis for Bloomberg in 2020, Michael Liebreich pointed out that hydrogen has serious limitations in many applications:

"as an energy storage medium, it has only a 50% round-trip efficiency – far worse than batteries. As a source of work, fuel cells, turbines and engines are only 60% efficient – far worse than electric motors – and far more complex. As a source of heat, hydrogen costs four times as much as natural gas. As a way of transporting energy, hydrogen pipelines cost three times as much as power lines, and ships and trucks are even worse."…"What this means is that hydrogen's role in the final energy mix of a future net-zero emissions world will be to do things that cannot be done more simply, cheaply and efficiently by the direct use of clean electricity and batteries"

The [UK] Government's own Climate Change Committee (CCC) analysis in their 6th Carbon Budget Report, showed that hydrogen production is not the best use of renewable energy if it can be used in other ways, thus we should only use hydrogen where it is near-impossible to reduce demand or use electricity directly. As a leading analyst at CCC has put it: *"In our view, you should be looking to electrify wherever you can. Where that's prohibitively expensive , or where that's not feasible, that's the role that you're looking for hydrogen."*

The EU Energy Cities network has actually put together [a hierarchy of uses for hydrogen](#)(see graphic) which seems a good starting point. *A* is use by energy intensive heavy industrial processes needing high temperature heat like steel, chemicals or glass, *B* is grid-level storage – storing otherwise 'waste' energy produced by off shore wind during periods of low electricity demand, *C, D* and *E* for powering heavy transport – shipping, trains and buses/HGVs respectively. Way down at *F* and *G* are hydrogen fuel cells for cars and home heating. Speculative technologies like synthetic aviation fuel don't even figure on the list.

It's important that an incoming Labour [UK] government doesn't commit to high cost options involving blue – or even grey – hydrogen, which would suit the gas industry, but which would do little or nothing to reduce CO2 emissions. And it's equally important that governments realise that, whilst green hydrogen is vital, it will not be available in infinite quantities and isn't going to be a panacea for all the delivery challenges and investments that need to be made across buildings, transport and industry.

Despite this, both Tory and Labour politicians, along with a rag bag of lobbyists for various techno-fix solutions, from nuclear to carbon capture and sequestration and the wilder regions of geo-engineering, try to avoid the reality that there are no silver bullets that will somehow exempt capitalism from the laws of physics.

For example, in 2020, the Tory [UK] government launched its 'Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution', which included a commitment to investing up to £500m in new hydrogen

technologies. It claimed that the energy produced could be used *"to carry on living our lives, running our cars, buses, trucks and trains, ships and planes, and heating our homes while keeping bills low."* It announced that as part of a trial of hydrogen heating, two 'hydrogen villages' of around 1,000-2,000 homes, in Whitby, near Ellesmere Port and Redcar, Teeside, where the homes would be converted to hydrogen for heating instead of natural gas. In July this year, the plans for the Whitby pilot were abandoned in the face of local opposition and in December the proposed Redcar pilot was also scrapped. This leaves National Grid's £32m pilot project in Fife, where about 300 homes in Methil and neighbouring Buckhaven in Levenmouth were due to be converted from natural gas to hydrogen next year, as only remaining attempt in the UK by energy industry to show that hydrogen is a viable (and cost effective) alternative to natural gas for domestic heating. Unsurprisingly, the project is much delayed and the are doubts whether it will actually get going. Ofgem has warned that *"delay in the commencement of this project would materially impact the evidence base for an energy system transition to hydrogen as a means of decarbonising heat and industry".*

Capitalism, dependent as it is on the constant and infinite expansion of the production of commodities, is being forced by the inescapable reality of climate change to move from denial to a (partial) recognition of the terrible price that humanity and the planet as a whole is beginning to have to pay. However, its enthusiasm for the mirage of 'green growth' is making it grab more and more desperately at technological straws – some of which, like green hydrogen, have the potential to actually play a valuable, if limited, role in combatting global heating.

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COP 28- what is at stake?

Alan Thornett writes:
COP28 (along with planet Earth) is faced with "an absolutely gobsmackingly bananas increase in the global temperature"

COP28 – the annual UN global summit on global warming – is taking place from November 30th until December 12 – under the auspices of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that was launched in 1992 to protect the planet against "dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system", which now takes place annually. It is the 28th UN climate change summit since 1992, and will take place in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

COP28, along with other recent such summits faces a deadly, and indeed existential, contradiction between the relentless acceleration of global warming i.e. of the average global surface temperature of the planet – and the inability of the COP process to bring it under control, or even hold it to a maximum increase of 1.5°C in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement.

It became clear in August that 2023 would be of a different order of magnitude in terms of temperature when July turned out to be the world's hottest month ever recorded.

The UN Secretary General António Guterres – the most radicle the UN has had on climate change – responded rightly by declaring that this meant that "the era of global warming had ended, and the era of global boiling has arrived". It meant, he said, that: "Climate change is here, it is terrifying, and it is just the beginning. It is still possible to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C (above pre-industrial levels), and

avoid the very worst of climate change, he said, but only with dramatic, immediate climate action."

The September figure, however, was a whole lot worse. It was a staggering 0.5°C above the previous such record. The Guardian's environmental editor Damian Carrington quoted climate scientist Zeke Hausfather who had tweeted that: "This month was, in my professional opinion as a climate scientist – absolutely gobsmackingly bananas. It beat the prior monthly temperature record by over 0.5°C, and was around 1.8°C warmer than preindustrial levels." He noted that datasets from European and Japanese scientists confirmed the leap.

It's worth noting that the difference in the average global temperature between now and the depths of the last ice age when these islands were under a kilometre of ice is around 5.0°C.

In mid-November Guterres went further warning that. "Present trends are racing our planet down a dead-end 3C temperature rise. This is a failure of leadership, a betrayal of the vulnerable, and a massive missed opportunity. Renewables have never been cheaper or more accessible. We know it is still possible to make the 1.5 degree limit a reality. It requires tearing out the poisoned root of the climate crisis: fossil fuels."

He added: "Leaders must drastically up their game, now, with record ambition, record action, and record emissions reductions. No more greenwashing. No more foot-dragging."

The UK's sellout

One member state that has not upped their game – scandalously – is the UK under Sunak's Tory government – which has gone in exactly the opposite direction. In order to exploit a reactionary backlash from car drivers against Labour in a recent byelection Sunak has delayed the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to 2035 will deprioritise the

transition to electric vehicles. He has also announced that a ban on the sale of fossil-fuel boilers from 2035 would be watered down and extra exemptions introduced.

Most significantly he has issued a new generation of oil and gas licences for the North Sea and given the go-ahead for a new oil and gas field. It is a monumental stab in the back for the whole COP decarbonisation process.

Sunak insists (ludicrously) that none of this will affect the ability of Britain can still reach his 2050 net zero target. The UN has strongly protested.

The venue

The venue of this COP is a major problem of course. Few countries could be less suitable for such a summit than the UEA. It is not only the 7th biggest oil producer in the world at 3,250,000 barrels a day. It also holds the 7th largest proven reserves of natural gas in the world at over 215 trillion cubic feet. It is also yet another host nation, following Sharm El-Sheikh, with an appalling history of human rights abuses and an economy based on fossil fuel exports, and the president of the COP will be Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber who is the Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology of the UAE, and managing director and group CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

As a result of this, many campaigners will not travel to Dubai in person but will mount their protests at home or via the global day of action which has already been called for the last day of the summit which is Decembe12th. The problem has been compounded, however, by the astonishing revelation that the UEA has been using COP meetings to sell off oil and gas on the side. Guterres has denounced it as a serious breach of the standards of conduct expected of a COP president.

It would be a mistake, however, to allow the venue problem to

dominate our response. It is difficult for the UN to exclude a member state from the presidency when they are seeking to take their 193member states together towards net zero and when hosting a COP often has a positive effect of the host nation in terms of its own record.

The primary role of a COP summit in any case in pushing the member states to meet their commitment takes place between COP meeting rather than at them when the die has often been cast, also to plan actions and interventions for the following year. In the end the COP process has to be bigger than this since it is dealing with a global existential emergence with a short time line for it conclusion.

The COP conferences, however, urgently need democratising in order to give the climate movement a lot more space and to severely restrict corporate lobbying the access to it given to the petrochemical industry.

The aim of the climate movement should be to maximise mobilisations around every COP summit and where it is not possible at the venue it should be done at the international level. This is important both in order to mobilise the movement and also because it is the best opportunity we have to put demands on the global elites at an international level.

Meanwhile Al Jaber, COP president on behalf of the UAE, has told the Guardian in an exclusive interview on the eve of the conference that he thought that the world could agree a "robust roadmap" of cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 that would meet scientific advice.

We shall see.

Key challenges in Dubai

The principal responsibility of each COP is to conduct a global stocktake of the carbon reduction targets—or "Nationally Determined Contributions"— to which each member

state is pledged as a part of the so-called “ratcheting up process” adopted at COP21 in Paris in 2015. This requires each member state to set its own carbon reduction targets and then review and enhance them annually at implementation conferences such as COP27 and now COP28.

In this case every member state must meet the commitments it made at COP27 in in Sharm El-Sheikh and adopt new ones set at a stricter standard – which must be backed by a credible plan for implementation. The stocktake that took place last year at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh revealed a disastrous situation, and this could be even worse.

The loss and damage fund

The other massive issue that will rear it head again – and rightly so – is the matter of a so-called “loss and damage fund”.

This fund was agreed in principal in Sharm El-Sheikh after a long and heated debate. It would provide a mechanism by which the rich countries, that are most responsible for climate change, would be required to pay into a fund that could mitigate the impact of climate change on the poor countries, who are the least responsible for climate change, and help them with a just transition to renewable energy. There was no agreement, however, as to how much money should be paid into it, who should pay it, or on what basis. The UNs International Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) was , therefore, asked to prepare a recommendation, particularly on the size of the fund for the COP28 in Dubai.

The creation of such a fund had been blocked by the rich countries for over 30 years and was only forced onto the agenda this year after heavy pressure from the poor (or developing) countries themselves. Prior to COP27 Guterres had argued strongly for such an agreement, warning that unless there is what he called an “historic pact” between the rich

and poor countries on this issue, the planet could already be doomed. In other words without a serious loss and damage fund to provide a socially and economic transition the UN will eventually, and inevitably, fail.

This issue has been given a substantial boost on the eve of the summit when 70 international figures led by Gordon Brown, and including former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, have sent a letter to the COP calling for the massive revenues of oil-producing states to be subject to a $25bn levy to help pay for the impact of climate disasters on the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Brown told the Guardian: "The deadlock on climate finance has to be broken if Cop28 is to succeed. After more than a decade of broken promises, a $25bn oil and gas levy paid by the petrol states and proposed by the UAE as chair of Cop would kickstart finance for mitigation [reduction of greenhouse gas emissions] and adaptation in the global south".

Such a levy, he said, would shave off only a small fraction of the bonanza that oil-producing countries have made in recent years, but it would help to fill the "loss and damage" to poor countries afflicted by the impacts of the climate crisis.

The role of the UN

The state of the climate struggle today can be seen from the following harsh realities:

- the science remains irrefutable (though often understated by the scientific community)
- the time available to reach net zero is rapidly running out
- the limitations of the COP process become ever more apparent
- Anthropogenic global warming is accelerating at an unprecedented rate and dangerous tipping points are fast approaching – some have already arrived.

- The COP process has to be made to work because there is no alternative.

It is a pivotal moment for the UN since faced with such contradictions its entire carbon reduction project is falling apart leaving the global climate to spin out of control and cause more tipping points to trigger – which would be catastrophic for both the UN and the planet.

Many on the radical left argue that this failure was and is inevitable because the UN it is a capitalist institution, and as such is dedicated to the preservation of the fossil industry and prepared to use as much "greenwash" as necessary in order to do so and it is time for the left (however defined) to go it alone. There have been numerous proposals in recent years for the left to denounce the COP process as a road block and withdraw from it.

This would be a big mistake. The UN is, of course, a capitalist institution. It is comprised of 193 capitalist countries: how could it be otherwise. To its great credit, however, it recognised the danger of anthropogenic climate change as early as 1992 when the radical left still regarded the environment as a middle class diversion. Since then the COP process it established has been a battleground between the majority who recognise the problem and are prepared to decarbonise at least to some extent, and those who simply defend their own self-interest or who reject the concept of anthropogenic global warming on ideological grounds – i.e. the climate change deniers.

In the event the UN – along with its subdivisions such as the IPCC – were not only successful in defeating the climate deniers – despite the massive backing they received from the fossil fuel producers – but in winning the scientific community over to the climate struggle, without which we would be nowhere today. It has also been instrumental, along with the intensification of the climate crisis its self – in

transforming global awareness as to the dangers of climate change.

Today was are facing an existential climate emergency, which only the UN, or something with a comparable global reach and authority can successfully confront.

This is important since although the struggle against climate change must include individual responsibility, in the end it is only governmental action—and ultimately governments that are prepared to go on a war footing to do so—that can make the structural changes necessary to stop global warming in the few years that science is giving us to do it.

The role of the radical left

To the extent that the radical left in particular had or has a strategic approach by which to global warming and climate change it is the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, though how clearly this has been thought through is not always clear. To be relevant to global warming, however, it would have to happen within this decade since nothing can be built on a dead planet.

The actual task we are faced with today, therefore, is not whether global capitalism can be abolished within 10 years, but whether it can be forced to take action to halt global warming

as a part of a struggle for its eventual overturn and its replacement by an ecosocialism. If we are unable to build the kind of movement capable of forcing major change under capitalism, how are we going to build a movement capable of overturning it. It is what I would call a transitional approach.

It is not true – as some on the left imply – that capitalism cannot be forced to make major changes that are contrary to the logic of its existence. In fact it was already making

concessions to this when it agreed under extreme pressure to support a maximum global temperature increase of 1.5°C in Paris and when it agreed to end the use of fossil fuels in Glasgow.

Capitalism would also be prepared, in my view – given the existential implications – involved to carry though decarbonisation its self rather than see societal collapse, since to do so would meet with massive resistance. It would do so completely in its self-interest and with extreme brutality. We cannot assume, in any case, that global warming will be halted incrementally – or indeed peacefully – before runaway climate chaos along with societal and ecological break downs and if so ultra-right and fascist forces will be waiting in the wings.

Mass movements will emerge spontaneously under such conditions, problem however, will be which class interests do they represent. Whether they are led by progressive forces (including the left) ultra-right populists with a reactionary agenda, that are already flexing their muscles around environmental issues.

A major task of the radical left today – as well as being involved in every aspect of the struggle –implies conscious preparation for such an eventuality, which could already happen at any time.

Meanwhile, the most effective way to cut carbon emissions quickly and democratically is by making fossil fuels much more expensive than renewable energy, by means that are socially just, economically redistributive, and capable of commanding popular support – and in the two or three decades that remain to us.

The UN COP process remains a crucial forum in the struggle for such demands remains. It is the best forum through which the global climate movement can place demands on the global elites

and the forum around which we can build the kind of mass movement that can force them to take effective action.

Key carbon reduction issues

- The global average surface temperature to below a 5°C increase
- Demand net zero by 2030
- All new fossil fuel investment must be stopped
- The polluters must be made to pay
- Global biodiversity must be defended
- There must be a rapid transition to renewables: including solar, on-shore and off-shore wind, tidal and hydro carried out on a ‘war footing’. (In UK Labour must maintain its commitment to £28 billion a year on renewables)
- The 2030 deadline for selling fossil fuel cars must be maintained
- SUVs must be banned other than in specialised circumstances
- Adequate production facilities for EV batteries must be established
- There must be a major extension of public transport and fewer cars
- The national grid must be upgraded

There must be a massive programme of home (and building) insolation. All new homes must meet strict environmental standards

- LTNs and 15 minute cities must be introduced to cut carbon emission and clean up the air we breathe
- Decarbonise agriculture, ban deforestation, a big reduction in meat production and consumption. End the ploughing of fields.
- Stop the pollution of land and sea and rivers
- Protect wetlands
- Far better recycling and the detoxification of waste

disposal
- No to nuclear energy

29 November 2023

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Degrowth: a remarkable renaissance

There is continuing widespread interest in debate on Degrowth. ecosocialist.scot is keen to encourage this debate. We published Michael Lowy's Nine Theses on Ecosocialist Degrowth recently, and below we are republishing two more topical contributions. The first is an overview of the Degrowth debate from Alan Thornett's Ecosocialist Discussion site and the second is an introduction to degrowth concepts from the Scotonomics newsletter that was also published by Scottish daily newspaper 'The National'.

Degrowth: a remarkable renaissance

This article was written for the current edition of the Green Left's publication Watermelon in advance of the Green Party conference AT

There has been an upsurge of interest in degrowth –a long-discussed strategic alternative to climate chaos and not just from the radical left. It is experiencing a renaissance

at the moment, driven by the relentless rise in global temperatures and the resulting climate chaos.

It was the theme of a three-day conference in May entitled 'Beyond Growth 2023' which filled the main hall of the European Parliament with mostly young and enthusiastic people. It was organised by 20 left-leaning MEPs and it was opened by the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

According to the Economist report the young audience 'whooped and cheered' when it was proposed that some form of de-growth will be necessary to avoid societal collapse."

In July, Bill McKibben – the veteran environmental campaigner, founder of 350.org, and prolific author – had a major article in the New Yorker strongly advocating degrowth from an historical perspective.

Numerous books supporting degrowth – to varying degrees and stand points – have been also published recently from the left: The Case for Degrowth by Giorgos Kallis et al; Less is More how degrowth will save the world by Jason Hickel; Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism by Kohei Saito; and The Future is Degrowth by Matthias Schmelzer.

A recent book opposing degrowth is Climate Change as Class War, by Matt Huber – from, in my view, an ultra-left and voluntaristic position. He has reviewed himself in the current edition of Jacobin.

Growth is the driving force of the environmental crisis. Over the past 60 years the global economy has grown at an average rate of 3 per cent a year, which is completely unsustainable. John Bellamy Foster has pointed out that a 3% p.a. growth rate of would grow the world economy by a factor of 250 over the course of this century and the next. Over the same period the global human population has risen from 3.6 billion in 1970 to 8 billion in 2022.

Such growth rates are incompatible with the natural limits of the planet, and will ultimately defeat any attempts to resolve the environmental crisis that fail to deal with it.

An early attempt to analyse this issue was undertaken in 1970 by Donella Meadows and a team of radical young scientists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It was published in 1972 as the Limits to Growth Report

The Meadows Report, as it became known reached the monumental conclusion that: "if the present growth in world population, industrialisation, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continues unchanged", the limits to growth on the planet will be reached sometime around the middle of the 21st century. The most probable result "will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity."

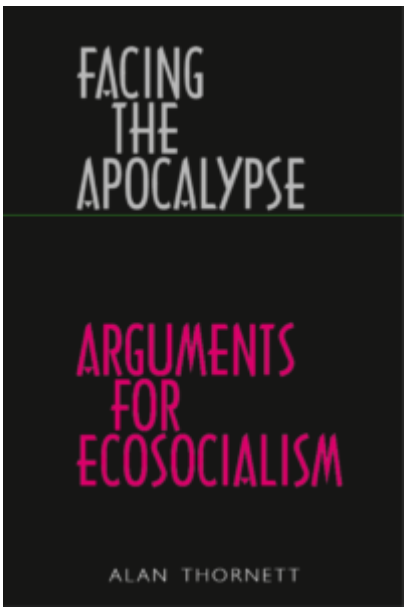
It sold 12 million copies world-wide, was translated into 37 languages. and remains the top-selling environmental title ever published. It also became the driving force behind the emergence of the ecology and green movement in the 1970s, and the degrowth movement itself.

It was remarkably accurate, as Bill McKibben notes, and it's conclusion puts us exactly where we are today, facing increasing frequent climate related societal breakdowns that may soon become generalised.

McKibben also notes that Ursula von der Leyen directly referenced to the Meadows Report at her opening speech in Brussels: "Our predecessors", she had said, "chose to stick to the old shores and not lose sight of them. They did not change their growth paradigm but relied on oil. And the following generations have paid the price."

The Report, however, was ignored by the socialist left, with a few exceptions. Tony Benn's Alternative Economic Strategy of the 1980s, for example, made ever-faster economic

growth its key demand. No wonder the trade unions and the Labour Party remain dominated by growth productivism today because they have never been challenged by the left.



William Morris – the outstanding environmentalist in the 19th century – had also gone unheeded when he raged against useless and unnecessary production. In his lecture 'How We Live and How We Might Live', delivered in December 1884 in Hammersmith [Image above]– he raised the issue of how to live dignified and fulfilling lives without the need for mass produced commodities and consumerism, and what kind of future society could best provide such an approach.

What degrowth offers is a planned reduction of economic activity, within a different economic paradigm, and first and foremost in the rich countries of the Global North. Giorgos Kallis puts it this way in The Case for Degrowth (page viii): "The goal of degrowth is to purposefully slow things down in order to minimise harm to human beings and earth systems".

Jason Hickel in Less in More (page 29) –– tells us that degrowth is: "a planned reduction of excess energy and resource use in order to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a safe and equitable way".

The adoption of such an approach will need a mass movement involving everyone who is prepared to fight to save the planet on a progressive basis, including environmental movements, indigenous movements, peasant movements, farmers movement as well as trade unions and progressive political parties. It must demand that the big polluters pay for the damage they have done. This means heavily taxing fossil fuels in order to both cut emissions and to ensure that the

polluters fund the transition to renewables as a part of an exit strategy from fossil fuel that redistributes wealth from the rich to the poor, and is capable of commanding popular support. Such an approach must be the cornerstone of ecosocialism and an ecosocialist strategy designed to save the planet from ecological destruction and create a post-capitalist, ecologically sustainable, society for the future.

Alan Thornett, ecosocialist writer and activist, was a leading British trade unionist and car worker in the 60s and 70s

Written by Alan Thornett September 2013. Republished from https://www.ecosocialistdiscussion.com/2023/09/16/degrowth-a-remarkable-renaissance/ Alan Thornett's 'Facing the Apocalypse – Arguments for Ecosocialism' is published by Resistance Books and available for £15 here.

An introduction to degrowth: What is it and how does it work?

This is the latest edition of the Scotonomics newsletter – click here to receive it free to your inbox every week.

As a global society, we must pursue policies to reduce material consumption and increase our wellbeing. This is the core of degrowth.It is exceptionalism that leads us to think that our economy, which grows by consuming natural resources, can grow forever. There must be a limit. That much is self-evident. However, even for those who agree that there is some future limit, many people think that we are a long way from that.

It is often a shock when you tell people that with an annual growth rate of only 3%, the economy doubles in only 24 years. By 2070, it would be four times bigger than it is today. Can we really look at our ecological problems and seriously picture an economy four times bigger?

2070 might seem too long a timeframe. So, let's look at 2050. There are approximately 9.7 billion people on the planet. If all of them were to live according to the living standards of a country like Scotland, assuming that 3% growth, our global resource use would be 15 times higher than it is today.

It is the bury-your-head-in-the-sand growth paradigm that is detached from reality.

Growth is not wellbeing

The mistake our society continues to make is to consider

growth the same thing as wellbeing. The growth of an economy can increase and reduce wellbeing. Degrowth makes this connection implicit; a degrowth economy is one in which well-being increases.

Ecological economist Herman Daly talked about "economic and uneconomic growth", and he suggested that it is likely that economies in the global north became "uneconomic" at some point in the 1980s. Herman's argument focused on the depletion of non-renewable resources, the ecological consequences of overfilling waste sinks and an understanding that not all expenditure is beneficial. Spending £10 billion to deal with an oil spill would increase GDP. But it is hard to argue that it improves wellbeing.
The idea that growth is always good has become what George Monbiot (above) calls a "root metaphor". So deeply rooted is the idea that growth equals well-being that it frames our understanding and choices without us even being aware. Growth is now more than a simple process; it has become a powerful idea.

According to degrowth scholar Giorgos Kallis: "Growth is not only a material process. It is also a cultural, political and social process. Growth is an idea, produced, imagined and instituted. An idea that growth is natural, necessary and desirable."

Degrowth challenges that growth is natural, necessary or desirable.

Degrowth is a broad transformative process. It is a decrease in ecological damage and an increase in well-being.

In a degrowth economy, our human society reacts in a co-evolutionary way to its surroundings, in a way familiar to humans for around 99% of the last 100,000 years. In other words, we act more in tune with our environment.

Degrowth is selective and will involve increases in some things and decreases in others, such as less private and more

public transport.

In a society guided by degrowth policies, we set limits on harmful activities and move our society to stay within specific and defined boundaries. Our life, not our economy, is placed within the planet's biophysical boundaries. Once we return to within our current constraints, these boundaries can be seen as fluid, advanced or reduced by managing technology and other factors to create a steady state or "Goldilocks" economy.

Degrowth policies, in general, are highly redistributive. It is degrowth for the global North to allow space for "economic" growth, as defined by Herman Daly, for the global south.

Within global north nations like Scotland, degrowth starts with the wealthiest in society. The actions and lifestyles of the wealthiest degrow before anyone else, and there is a clear rationale for this. In the UK, the top 1% emit 10 times as much carbon yearly as the poorest do in two decades. Where else could you possibly start if you wanted to be effective?

There are no "non-reformest reforms" in a degrowth paradigm. However, a degrowth economy would be familiar enough to today's economy that we can use today's economic terms to make sense of a degrowth economy.

The ecological economist Tim Jackson, who describes himself more as a "post-growth" economist, wrote in his book Prosperity Without Growth: "The economy of tomorrow calls on us to revisit and reframe the concepts of productivity, profitability, asset ownership and control over the distribution of social surplus."

"It calls for a renegotiation of the role of the progressive state." This would need to happen in a degrowth economy.

The end game for degrowth is a much more balanced society and

economy that prioritises planetary well-being. It is a post-capitalist world.

Common among those who support degrowth is the belief that degrowth is inevitable: We deal with the need to drastically reduce throughput by design or by disaster. Degrowth uses the agency we have to solve the problems we have created.

In next week's article, we will take a closer look at degrowth policies.

Join us at 2.30pm on September 27 to discuss all of the topics we have discussed this month.

Republished from The National. https://www.thenational.scot/politics/23800528.introduction-degrowth-work/

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Picture: 'How We Might Live' – from the cover of How We Might Live: At Home with Jane and William Morris by Suzanne Fagence Cooper

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Theses on Ecosocialist Degrowth

*Ecosocialist writer and Fourth International activist. Michael Löwy. presents **'Nine Theses on Ecosocialist Degrowth'** in an issue of the US magazine Monthly Review dedicated to a discussion on this important topic. If you can afford it*

please buy this issue (details below).

I. The ecological crisis is already the most important social and political question of the twenty-first century, and will become even more so in the coming months and years. The future of the planet, and thus of humanity, will be decided in the coming decades. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change explains, if the average global temperature exceeds the pre-industrial period by 1.5°C, there is a risk of setting off an irreversible and catastrophic climate change process. What would be the consequences of this? Just a few examples: the multiplication of megafires destroying most of the forests; the disappearance of rivers and the exhaustion of subterranean water reserves; increasing drought and desertification of land; the melting and dislocation of polar ice and rise in sea level, leading to the flooding of the major cities of human civilization—Hong Kong, Kolkata, Venice, Amsterdam, Shanghai, London, New York, Rio de Janeiro. Some of these events are already taking place: drought is threatening millions of people in Africa and Asia with hunger; increasing summer temperatures have reached unbearable levels in some areas of the planet; forests are burning everywhere over increasingly extended fire seasons; one could multiply the examples. In some sense, the catastrophe has already begun—but it will become much worse in the next few decades, well before 2100. How high can the temperature go? At what temperature will human life on this planet be threatened? No one has an answer to these questions. These are dramatic risks without precedent in human history. One would have to go back to the Pliocene Epoch, millions of years ago, to find climate conditions similar to what could become reality in the future due to climate change.

II. What is responsible for this situation? It is human action, answer the scientists. The answer is correct, but a bit short: human beings have lived on Earth since hundreds of thousands of years ago, but the concentration of carbon

dioxide in the atmosphere started to accumulate only after the Industrial Revolution and only began to become dangerous to life since 1945. As Marxists, our answer is that the culprit is the capitalist system. The absurd and irrational logic of infinite expansion and accumulation, productivism, and the obsession with the search for profit at any price are responsible for bringing humanity to the brink of the abyss.

The capitalist system's responsibility for the imminent catastrophe is widely recognized. Pope Francis, in his Encyclical Laudato Si, without uttering the word "capitalism," spoke out against a structurally perverse system of commercial and property relations based exclusively on the "principle of profit maximization" as responsible both for social injustice and destruction of our common home, nature. A slogan universally chanted the world over in ecological demonstrations is "System Change Not Climate Change!" The attitude shown by the main representatives of this system, advocates of business as usual—billionaires, bankers, so-called experts, oligarchs, and politicians—can be summed up by the phrase attributed to Louis XV: "After me, the deluge." The complete failure of the dozens of United Nations COP Conferences on Climate Change to take the minimal measures necessary to stop the process illustrate the impossibility of a solution to the crisis within the limits of the prevailing system.

III. Can "green capitalism" be a solution? Capitalist enterprises and governments may be interested in the (profitable) development of "sustainable energies," but the system has been dependent on fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) for the last three centuries, and shows no sign of willingness to give them up. Capitalism cannot exist without growth, expansion, accumulation of capital, commodities, and profits, and this growth cannot go on without an extended use of fossil fuels.

Green capitalist pseudo-solutions such as "carbon markets,"

“compensation mechanisms,” and other manipulations of the so-called “sustainable market economy” have proven perfectly useless. While “greening” goes on and on, carbon dioxide emissions are skyrocketing and catastrophe gets closer and closer. There is no solution to the ecological crisis within the framework of capitalism, a system entirely devoted to productivism, consumerism, and the ferocious struggle for market share. Its intrinsically perverse logic inevitably leads to the breakdown of the ecological equilibrium and the destruction of the ecosystems. As Greta Thunberg put it, “it is mathematically impossible to solve the ecological crisis in the framework of the present economic system.”

The Soviet experience, whatever its merits or shortcomings, was also based on the logic of growth, grounded on the same fossil resources as the West. Much of the left during the last century shared the ideology of growth in the name of “developing the productive forces.” A productivist socialism that ignores the ecological crisis is unable to answer the challenges of the twenty-first century.

IV. The degrowth reflection and movement that emerged in the last few decades has made a great contribution to a radical ecology by opposing the myth of an unlimited “growth” on a limited planet. But degrowth in itself is not an alternative economic and social perspective: it does not define what kind of society will replace the present system. Some proponents of degrowth would ignore the issue of capitalism, focusing only on productivism and consumerism, defining the culprit as “The West,” “Enlightenment,” or “Prometheanism.” Others, which represent the left of the antigrowth movement, clearly designate the capitalist system as responsible for the crisis, and acknowledge the impossibility of a “capitalist degrowth.”

In the last few years, there has been a growing coming together of ecosocialism and degrowth: each side has been appropriating the arguments of the other, and the proposal of an “ecosocialist degrowth” has begun to be adopted as a common

ground.

V. Ecosocialists have learned much from the degrowth movement. Ecosocialism is therefore increasingly adopting the need of degrowth in the process of transition to a new socialist ecological society. One obvious reason for this is that most renewable energies, such as wind and solar, (a) need raw materials that do not exist an on an unlimited scale and (b) are intermittent, depending on climate conditions (wind, sun). They cannot, therefore, entirely replace fossil energy. A substantial reduction of energy consumption is therefore inevitable. But the issue has a more general character: the production of most goods is based on the extraction of raw materials, many of which (a) are becomingly increasingly limited and/or (b) create serious ecological problems in the process of extraction. All these elements point to the need for degrowth.

Ecosocialist degrowth includes the need for substantial reductions in production and consumption, but does not limit itself to this negative dimension. It includes the positive program of a socialist society, based on democratic planning, self-management, production of use values instead of commodities, gratuity of basic services, and free time for the development of human desires and capacities—a society without exploitation, class domination, patriarchy, and all forms of social exclusion.

VI. Ecosocialist degrowth does not have a purely quantitative conception of degrowth as a reduction in production and consumption. It proposes *qualitative* distinctions. Some productions—for example, fossil energies, pesticides, nuclear submarines, and advertising—should not be merely reduced, but *suppressed*. Others, such as private cars, meat, and airplanes, should be *substantially reduced*. Still others, such as organic food, public means of transport, and carbon neutral housing, should be *developed*. The issue is not “excessive consumption” in the abstract, but the prevalent mode of

consumption, based as it is on conspicuous acquisition, massive waste, mercantile alienation, obsessive accumulation of goods, and the compulsive purchase of pseudo-novelties imposed by “fashion.” One must put an end to the monstrous waste of resources by capitalism based on the production, on a large scale, of useless and harmful products: the armaments industry is a good example, but a great part of the “goods” produced in capitalism, with their inbuilt obsolescence, have no other usefulness but to generate profit for large corporations. A new society would orient production toward the satisfaction of authentic needs, beginning with those which could be described as “biblical”—water, food, clothing, and housing—but including also the basic services: health care, education, transport, and culture.

How to distinguish the authentic from artificial, factitious, and makeshift needs? The last ones are induced by mental manipulation, that is, advertisement. While advertisement is an indispensable dimension of the capitalist market economy, it would have no place in a society transitioning to ecosocialism, where it would be replaced by information on goods and services provided by consumer associations. The criterion for distinguishing an authentic from an artificial need is its persistence after the suppression of advertisements (Coca-Cola!). Of course, old habits of consumption would persist for some time, and nobody has the right to tell the people what their needs are. The change in patterns of consumption is a historical process, as well as an educational challenge.

VII. The main effort in a process of planetary degrowth must be made by the countries of the industrialized North (North America, Europe, and Japan) responsible for the historical accumulation of carbon dioxide since the Industrial Revolution. They are also the areas of the world where the level of consumption, particularly among the privileged classes, is clearly unsustainable and wasteful. The

“underdeveloped” countries of the Global South (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) where basic needs are very far from being satisfied will need a process of “development,” including building railroads, water and sewage systems, public transport, and other infrastructures. But there is no reason why this cannot be accomplished through a productive system that is environmentally friendly and based on renewable energies. These countries will need to grow great amounts of food to nourish their hungry populations, but this can be much better achieved—as the peasant movements organized worldwide in the Vía Campesina network have been arguing for years—by a peasant biological agriculture based on family units, cooperatives, or collectivist farms. This would replace the destructive and antisocial methods of industrialized agribusiness, based on the intensive use of pesticides, chemicals, and genetically modified organisms. Presently, the capitalist economy of countries in the Global South is rooted in the production of goods for their privileged classes—cars, airplanes, and luxury goods—and commodities exported to the world market: soya beans, meat, and oil. A process of ecological transition in the South, as argued by ecosocialists, would reduce or suppress this kind of production, and aim instead at food sovereignty and the development of basic services such as health care and education, which need, above all, human labor, rather than more commodities.

VIII. Who could be the subject in the struggle for an ecosocialist degrowth? The workerist/industrialist dogmatism of the previous century is no longer current. The forces now at the forefront of the social-ecological confrontations are youth, women, Indigenous people, and peasants. The resistance of Indigenous communities in Canada, the United States, Latin America, Nigeria, and elsewhere to the capitalist oil fields, pipelines, and gold mines is well documented; it flows from their direct experience of the destructive dynamics of capitalist “progress,” as well as the contradiction between

their spirituality and culture and the “spirit of capitalism.”

Women are very present in the Indigenous resistance movement as well as in the formidable youth uprising launched by Thunberg’s call to action—one of the great sources of hope for the future. As the ecofeminists explain, this massive women’s participation in mobilizations comes from the fact that they are the first victims of the system’s damage to the environment.

Unions are beginning here and there to also get involved. This is important, because, in the final analysis, we cannot overcome the system without the active participation of urban and rural workers who make up the majority of the population. The first condition, in each movement, is associating ecological goals (closing coal mines, oil wells, coal-fired power stations, and so on) with guaranteed employment for the workers involved. Ecologically minded unionists have argued that there are millions of “green jobs” that would be created in a process of ecological transition.

IX. Ecosocialist degrowth is at once a project for the future and a strategy for the struggle here and now. There is no question of waiting for the conditions to be “ripe.” It is necessary to provoke a convergence between social and ecological struggles and to fight the most destructive initiatives by powers at the service of capitalist “growth.” Proposals such as the Green New Deal are part of this struggle in their more radical forms, which require effectively renouncing fossil energies—but not in those reforms limited to recycling the system.

Without any illusions on a “clean capitalism,” one must try to buy time, and to impose on the powers that be some elementary measures of degrowth, beginning with a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The efforts to stop the Keystone XL Pipeline, a polluting gold mine, and a coal-fired facility are part of the larger resistance movement, called Blockadia by

Naomi Klein. Equally significant are local experiences of organic agriculture, cooperative solar energy, and community management of resources.

Such struggles around concrete issues of degrowth are important, not only because partial victories are welcome in themselves, but also because they contribute to raising ecological and socialist consciousness while promoting activity and self-organization from below. These factors are decisive and necessary preconditions for a radical transformation of the world—that is, for a Great Transition to a new society and a new mode of life.

Michael Löwy is emeritus research director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research in Paris. He is the co-author, with Bengi Akbulut, Sabrina Fernandes, and Giorgos Kallis, of the call "For an Ecosocialist Degrowth" in the April 2022 issue of Monthly Review, and author of Ecosocialism: A Radical Alternative to Capitalist Catastrophe (Haymarket Books, 2015).

Republished from Monthly Review: https://monthlyreview.org/2023/07/01/nine-theses-on-ecosocialist-degrowth/

Full contents described here: https://monthlyreview.org/2023/07/01/mr-075-03-2023-07_0/

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Yes to Life, Yes to Yasuní!

On 20 August, at the same time they elect a new president and a new National Assembly, Ecuadoreans will be voting in one of the most important environmental referendums of modern times. They are being asked if the government should leave the oil beneath the Yasuní national park in the ground, indefinitely.

As Iain Bruce reports, this was one of the key themes of a recent visit by Leonidas Iza, Ecuador's main Indigenous leader, to Europe to launch the English edition of his book, *Uprising: the October Rebellion in Ecuador*.

Winning support

In a week of meetings and events in Madrid, Brussels, Paris, London, Oxford, Glasgow and Grangemouth, Leonidas Iza and his

co-authors, Andres Tapia and Andres Madrid, won support from MEPs, British MPs, trade unionists, peasants, climate justice activists, academics, migrants and many others, for a Yes vote in Ecuador's August referendum.

Leonidas Iza and fellow authors meet with Scottish trade unionists including STUC Deputy General Secretary Dave Moxham and Unison Scotland Depute Convenor Stephen Smellie in Glasgow during the recent tour to promote "Uprising: the October Rebellion in Ecuador".

Iza was a central figure in the Indigenous-led uprising of October 2019, triggered by the removal of fuel subsidies and therefore a sharp rise in the cost of living. He was then elected President of CONAIE, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, the most powerful movement of its kind in Latin America. In that role, he led the follow-up national stoppage, or *paro*, of June last year. That closed down the country for even longer, 17 days in all, and expanded the list of demands. Alongside opposition to a broader range of neo-liberal policies, mandated by the International Monetary Fund, the Indigenous movement and its allies put at the centre of their struggle the need to halt oil drilling and mining on protected, sensitive and Indigenous land. On both occasions, they forced the government to negotiate and won significant concessions, but not enough.

This August's referendum, which includes the question on stopping oil drilling in three oil fields known as Block 43, in the Yasuni, and another on limiting mining near the capital, Quito, is in effect a continuation of the 2019 and

2022 struggles. It brings together environmental campaigners with the Indigenous communities and other social movements that staged those insurrections, in a National Anti-mining Front. This combination is itself a significant, if tentative, achievement. The relationship of the Indigenous leaders and mass movement that led the insurrections, with the NGO left that has tended to dominate the environmental movement, has sometimes been difficult in recent years.

Biodiversity hotspot

As Iza and his colleagues repeated many times on their European tour, the campaign for Yasuní is not just about saving one of the most biodiverse spots on the planet. Of course, it is that too. The Yasuni National Park comprises 9,823 sq. kms of rainforest (almost half the size of Wales) in the Ecuadorean Amazon, just 200 kms from Quito and bordering the eastern range of the Andes. Perhaps because it was one of the few places that never froze over during the last ice age, it is one of the most biodiverse areas in the world, possibly *the* most biodiverse. Botanists have recorded 685 species of tree in one hectare of the Yasuni. That is more than in all of the United States and Canada. The same hectare also contains about 100,000 species of insects, again similar to the total number for North America. The Yasuni National Park is also home to Ecuador's two Indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation, the Tagaeri and the Taromenane. The pressure from oil companies operating on the edges of their territory has already resulted in three massacres, putting their survival in jeopardy.

> *Climate Justice activists at Climate Camp Scotland in Grangemouth send a message of solidarity "Yes to Life, Yes to Yasuni" July 2023*

https://www.ecosocialist.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Yes-to-Yasuni-at-Climate-Camp-Scotland.mp4

A novel initiative for mitigation

At the same time, the campaign for a Yes in the referendum has a broader international significance, because it revives one of the world's most original proposals for mitigating climate change. The Yasuni ITT Initiative was launched by the progressive government of Rafael Correa in 2007, during its early, more radical phase. It was based on proposals coming from Indigenous communities in Ecuadorean Amazonia and some environmental NGOs. It proposed leaving in the ground the 20 percent of Ecuador's oil reserves that had been identified in the Ishpingo, Tambococha and Tiputini oil fields, known as ITT or Block 43, most of which lay beneath the Yasuni National Park. In return, the rich countries would pay Ecuador for *not* exploiting those reserves. US$3.6 billion over 13 years was what the Correa government was asking for, in public and private sector contributions, when it took the Yasuni ITT initiative to the UN General Assembly in 2007, and to COP15 in Copenhagen two years later, where it formed a central plank of the proposals put forward by the ALBA alliance led by Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela. That amount was calculated as 50 percent of the money the country would make if it did exploit those reserves. This was emphatically not conceived as compensation or as any kind of offset, nor was the money to be obtained through any sort of carbon market, as Alberto Acosta, Correa's first energy minister and an architect of the Initiative, repeatedly insisted. The idea was not to leave the oil in the ground beneath the Yasuni National Park in exchange for some northern polluters being allowed to continue their business as usual; on the contrary, the rich countries should pay as part of their responsibility to cut global emissions.

Towards a global just transition

As the ecosocialist theorist, Michael Lowy, suggests in his foreword to the English edition of Iza's *Uprising*, the Yasuni

ITT Initiative could have been an unparalleled example to other countries – an inspiration for how the global south and the global north, both producers and consumers of fossil fuels, could have engaged together in a just transition away from the carbon economy, in a way that would be fair for communities across the planet.

In the end, President Rafael Correa abandoned the Yasuni Initiative. By 2013, the international pledges amounted to only US$336 million, of which less than 4 percent had actually been delivered. At the same time, the right-leaning and often pro-oil developmentalists in his Citizen Revolution movement had gained ground, bolstering Correa's own sympathies with the extractive industries – and his impatience with both the Indigenous and environmental movements, which he liked to refer to as "infantile". Alberto Acosta and others on the radical left in his government had either left or been marginalised. Blaming "the international community" for failing in its response (quite correctly of course), Correa declared the Yasuni Initiative dead, and ordered the state oil company, Petroecuador, to press ahead with drilling. In 2016, oil began to flow from the ITT fields, but in lesser quantities than expected, given the slump in world prices. Nonetheless, Correa's retreat from the Initiative sealed the already deep breach between his government and the bulk of the Indigenous and environmental movements.

The latter had argued that the oil should be left in the ground, with or without the international financial contribution. Already by 2014, a campaign called *Yasunidos*, launched by the environmental NGO *Accion Ecologica*, had collected enough signatures to trigger a referendum. But the electoral authorities refused to recognise hundreds of thousands of them, and for a number of years the Yasuni question all but disappeared from the political agenda.

The Yasuni returns

It was only in May this year that Ecuador's Constitutional Court ruled, somewhat unexpectedly, that the call for a referendum was valid. It set the vote to coincide with the snap presidential election on 20 August, called by Ecuador's right-wing president, Guillermo Lasso, to avoid his own impeachment. Since then, the Yasuni question has burst back into the centre of Ecuador's political life. In a context that has been changed fundamentally by the two Indigenous-led insurrections of 2019 and 2022, it has unleashed an unprecedented debate on what kind of social and economic development the Ecuadorean people want for their country. It is a debate that cuts through the middle of the electoral options on offer on the same day. It also reveals, once again, the profound contradictions that run through Latin America's diverse experiences with progressive governments, and their complicated relations with powerful social movements, like the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.

For the last decade or more, the left and progressive forces in Ecuador have been riven by a bitter, debilitating division. The supporters of former president Rafael Correa and his Citizen Revolution movement have been ranged against much of the Indigenous and women's movements (the country's two most important social movements) and most of the trade unions (much weakened from their high point of the 1980s), as well many environmental NGOs and a number of small far-left groups and currents.

Yasuni, elections and beyond

This split is playing out once again in the presidential election on 20 August. But whether as tragedy or as farce, it may be for the last time. On one side, the favourite to become Ecuador's next president, possibly in the first round but more likely in a second round in October, is Luisa Gonzalez, the

candidate of the Citizen Revolution movement. She has avoided taking a very explicit position on the Yasuni referendum, and her party has said its members will be free to vote as they choose. But like Correa himself, she has left little doubt about her opposition to leaving the oil in the ground. Both insist the country needs the money to build schools and hospitals. Most of the half a dozen candidates vying to represent a discredited right have maintained a similar ambiguity, and used the same arguments.

On the other side, Yaku Perez, who was the candidate of the Indigenous movement's party, Pachakutik, in the 2021 election and came third, is the only presidential candidate this time to support openly a Yes vote in the Yasuni referendum. He still has the support of the old, right-leaning leadership of Pachakutik and some environmental NGOs, as well as parts of the anti-Correa left and centre-left. But this bloc has lost much of its credibility. In particular, the Pachakutik leaders who engineered his candidacy last time and who led the large group of Pachakutik members in the now-dissolved National Assembly, revealed an extraordinary capacity for opportunism. Putting their virulent anti-Correa stance above loyalty to any particular ideology or policy, they struck a series of deals with Guillermo Lasso's right-wing government, in exchange for favours and positions. As a result, last April's national conference of Pachakutik voted them out and elected a new leadership aligned with the positions and priorities of CONAIE itself. They appealed against their removal, and since the National Electoral Council had still not ruled on the dispute, Pachakutik was not allowed to give formal endorsement to any candidates at a national level in this election.

7 August 2023

Uprising: the October Rebellion in Ecuador – Book launch Glasgow & Grangemouth Weds 12 July, online Monday 10 July

*ecosocialist.scot is pleased to be working with Resistance Books, Anti*Capitalist Resistance, and other organisations to bring the authors of*

Uprising: the October Rebellion in Ecuador

Leonidas Iza, Andres Tapia and Andres Madrid to Britain in July 2023.

PDF version of info below >>> here

Wednesday 12 July Grangemouth 8pm

The big public event will be at the opening session of **Climate Camp Scotland at Grangemouth on Wednesday 12 July at 8pm**. (This is approximately four miles from Falkirk, 25 miles from

Glasgow/Edinburgh, 50 miles from Dundee). In order to attend this you will need to **register** with Climate Camp Scotland – details are >>> here

Wednesday 12 July Glasgow STUC offices 3pm-4.30pm

A meeting will also be held **on Wednesday 12 July from 3pm-4.30pm** at the offices of Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), 8 Landressy Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow G40 1BP (Google Maps). Public Transport – nearest station: Bridgeton, 5 mins from Glasgow Central/Argyle Street; Bus 18, 46, 64, 263 (SPT Journey Planner).

This meeting is kindly hosted by STUC and will particularly focus on Trade Union Solidarity and Climate Justice issues.

Monday 10 July Online/London 7pm

The visit to Britain kicks off with a public meeting and book launch in London on **Monday 10 July** that will also be available to watch and participate online. In person details: Lumen Community Centre, 88 Tavistock Pl, London WC1H 9RS and on zoom https://bit.ly/ecuadorbkregister

Meeting sponsored by Resistance Books, War on Want, Global Justice Now, the Climate Justice Coalition as part of the We Make Tomorrow series, Plan C, and Anti*Capitalist Resistance

Buy the book >>> here

Organised by Resistance Books

About the book

UPRISING is a detailed description and analysis of the Indigenous-led uprising of October 2019 in Ecuador, written by three people deeply involved in the revolt. The lead author, Leonidas Iza, came to national prominence as one of the central leaders of the rebellion. On the final day of the paro, when the movement forced the government of Lenin Moreno to withdraw Decree 883 and accede to live televised talks with the leaders of CONAIE, the main Indigenous umbrella organisation, it was Leonidas Iza who tore apart the arguments of the finance minister in front of the nation, giving him a master class in the implications of neoliberal economics and the government's deal with the IMF.

About the authors

***Leonidas Iza** is President of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), and is the best-known of a new generation of Indigenous leaders in Ecuador. He emerged as one of the central leaders of the October uprising, when he was President of the Cotopaxi Indigenous and Campesino Movement.*
***Andrés Tapia** is Head of Communications at the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuadorean Amazonia.*
***Andrés Madrid** teaches at the Central University of Ecuador. He is the author of In search of the spark on the prairie. The revolutionary subject in the thought of the left intellectuality in Ecuador.*

Contents

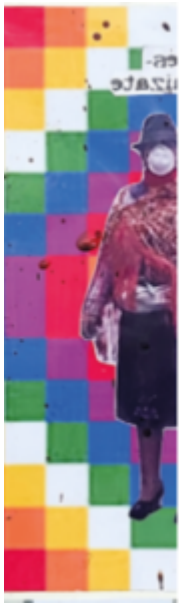
3. *Preface: Back to October, Hernán Ouviña*
4. *Introduction*
5. *Imminence: Background, accumulated experience and rupture*
6. *Awakening, determination, struggle and resistance*
7. *Impact: lessons, debates and perspectives*
8. *Epilogue: Our day-to-day October*
9. *Appendix: Platform for the 'Campaign of Escalating Struggle'*

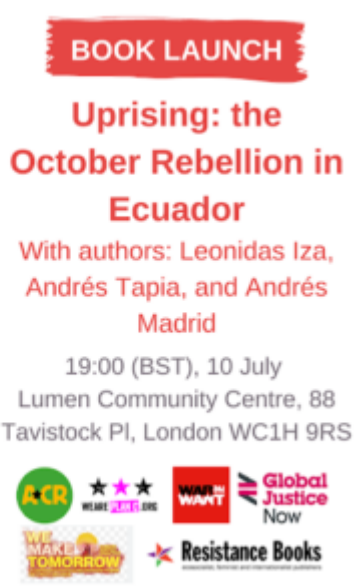
Recommendations

The October 2019 rising in Ecuador was a sign of things to come, as estallidos, or uprisings, erupted later in Chile and Colombia. They represented a "people in movement" – the construction of a new kind of power from below, the merging of new forms of popular resistance with historic expressions of indigenous rebellion, all reflected in the collective voice of rebellion which this remarkable book presents. In the course of those October days, as one speaker puts it, "the everyday became extraordinary", and a different future beckoned. ***Mike Gonzales,*** *Emeritus Professor of Latin American Studies, Glasgow University*

This book is an account of a semi-revolutionary confrontation, written by one of its key protagonists, Leonidas Iza, who is now arguably the most important Indigenous leader in Latin America, and two of his

comrades. It combines a detailed, first-hand account of what happened, with a profound, Marxist analysis of why and how, and what social movements and the ecosocialist left can learn from it. Unmissable! ***Iain Bruce,*** *journalist and writer, former head of news at teleSUR TV*





Hugo Blanco 15 Nov1934 - 25 June 2023

Derek Wall celebrates the life of his friend and comrade Hugo Blanco

Hugo Blanco, who died on Sunday 25th June, was an almost mythical Peruvian revolutionary leader. I had the pleasure of working with him and it is fair to say all of us who met him found not a cold legend but a warm and beautiful human being.

He led a peasant uprising in the 1960s, which while successful

in achieving land rights, saw him spend many years in prison, often in very difficult conditions and for much of the time on death row. He was at the time a leading member of the Fourth International and maintained warm contact with the FI up until his death. In recent decades, inspired by the Zapatistas and other indigenous movements, he published the newspaper Lucha Indigena ('Indigenous Fight').

There are three things, at least, which are important about Hugo Blanco. Firstly, he was a continuous active revolutionary militant from his student days right up until final illness. Secondly, he took an open comradely approach to this militancy, working with others and being flexible as to appropriate tactics. Thirdly, he was a pioneering ecosocialist, promoting an ecological approach to revolutionary activism before many of us were conscious of this element.

There is so much to say about his long life, it is difficult to know where to start perhaps. However, a key moment for Hugo was hearing about an indigenous person being physically branded with a hot iron. Though only a school student at the time, hearing of this started him on a lifelong path of working against oppression, particularly the oppression of indigenous peoples.

He became at Trotskyist as a student in Argentina in the 1950s. He, like many other Latin Americans was appalled by the coup led by the CIA in Guatemala in 1954. Attending a demonstration, he heard different speakers from different political currents, he was most impressed by the speaker who called for the masses in Guatemala to be armed. Learning that the speaker was a Trotskyist, Hugo decided he was a Trotskyist too.

He soon became a committed party member and worked at a various factories before moving back to Peru to organise the masses. He was held in a police cell overnight in Cusco for

organising workers. He shared his cell with three individuals from the La Convención region, bordering the Peruvian Amazon. They asked him to move to their region and help with their struggle for land rights, a struggle that accelerated with landowners murdering the peasants occupying land. In response, Hugo organised armed self-defence groups, with the conflict leading to both victory and imprisonment.

Released in 1970 by the new Peruvian military government, Hugo became active once again supporting trade union disputes and other struggles. He was exiled. Variously he spent time in Mexico, Argentina and Chile. He was in Chile during the coup against Allende's socialist government, narrowly escaping death as he was rescued by the Swedish Embassy. His beard was shaved off, he was put in a suit and spirited out under the name of Hans Bloom. His daughter Carmen went to school with daughter of the Swedish Ambassador; but for this he might well have been killed.

He lived for a time in Sweden, returned to Peru and was involved in many more struggles, indeed he was once a candidate for the Presidency and spent some time as a Senator. As Senator he was particularly engaged with environmental protection. Threatened with death by both the state security services and Shining Path, he was exiled, once again, this time back to Mexico.

He was least enthusiastic about his participation in electoral politics and in the last twenty years has been committed to grassroots militancy rather than traditional Leninism. There is, however, continuity in his approach, which has always focused on mass democratic struggles and decision making '"I have always respected the indigenous characteristic that it is the community that is responsible, not the individual. Even when we took up arms, it was the masses who decided to defend themselves". (Hugo Blanco, the Peruvian ecosocialist – International Viewpoint – online socialist magazine)

Equally his ecological struggles were rooted though in his life-long commitment to land rights. Lucha Indigena has supported many, many workers', indigenous and ecological struggles not just in Peru but across the world. Hugo has toured many countries in support of ecosocialists' campaigns, and in 2019 met Greta Thunberg in Stockholm. Hugo argued that environmental politics is rooted in the struggles of the oppressed, noting

There are in Peru a very large number of people who are environmentalists. Of course, if I tell such people, you are ecologists, they might reply, "ecologist your mother" or words to that effect. Let us see, however. Isn't the village of Bambamarca truly environmentalist, which has time and again fought valiantly against the pollution of its water from mining? Are not the town of Ilo and the surrounding villages which are being polluted by the Southern Peru Copper Corporation truly environmentalist? Is not the village of Tambo Grande in Piura environmentalist when it rises like a closed fist and is ready to die in order to prevent strip-mining in its valley?

It is impossible in a thousand words or even five thousand to properly honour and describe his various political campaigns or indeed his numerous often near miraculous escapes from death. However perhaps the best epitaph and summary comes from another Latin American revolutionary.

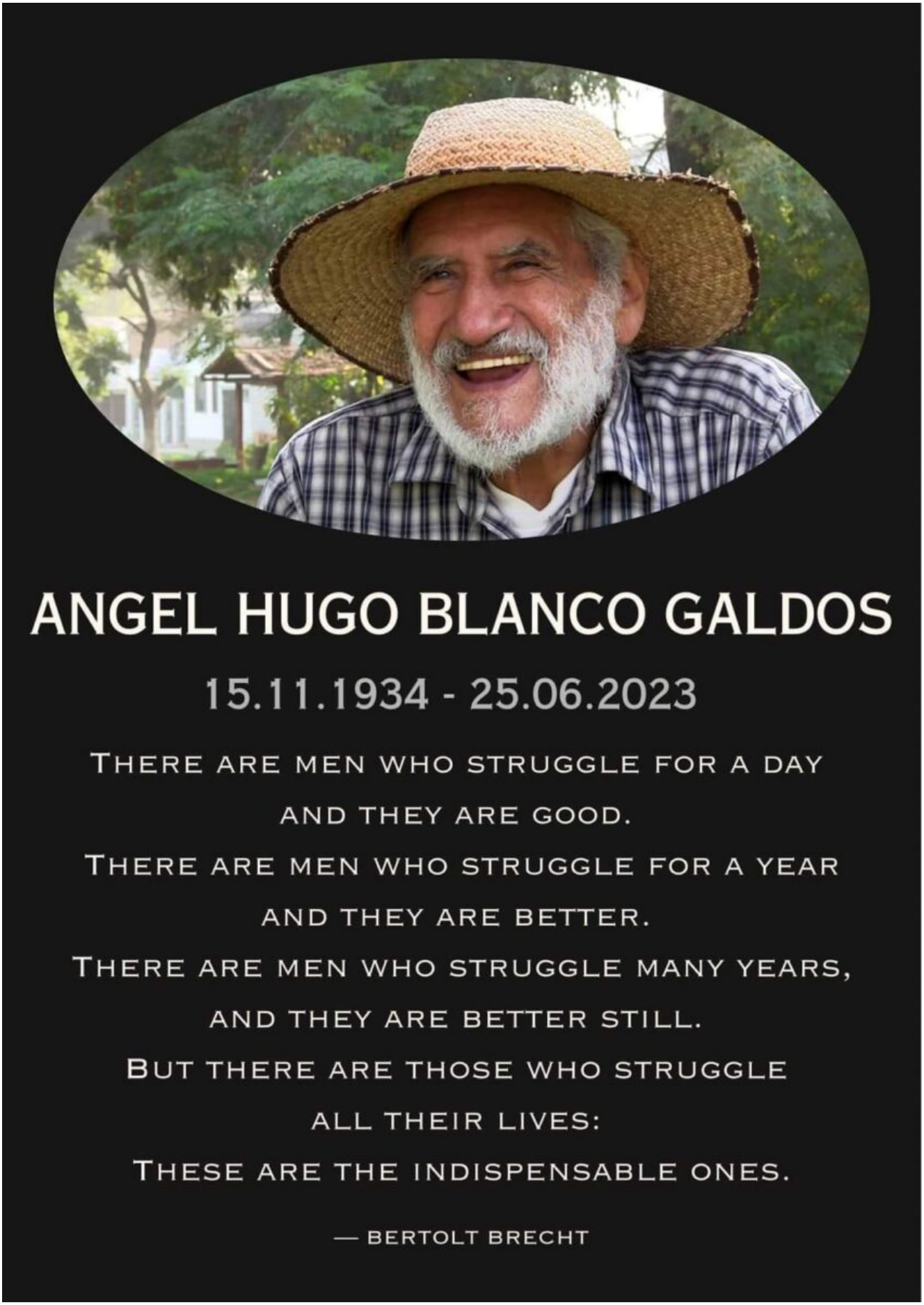
In Algiers in 1963 Che Guevara noted:

Hugo Blanco is the head of one of the guerrilla movements in Peru. He struggled stubbornly but the repression was strong. I don't know what his tactics of struggle were, but his fall does not signify the end of the movement. It is only a man that has fallen, but the movement continues. One time, when we were preparing to make our landing from the Granma, and when there was great risk that all of us would be killed, Fidel said: "What is more important than us is the example we set."

It’s the same thing. Hugo Blanco has set an example’

And Hugo kept setting the example for decades after, the best way to honour his life is to continue his legacy of indigenous solidarity, ecosocialism and practical, focused revolutionary commitment.

There is a film about Hugo released in 2020, Río Profundo, and many, many interviews from him that can be read. He was a huge inspiration to all of us who met him.



Derek Wall wrote *Hugo Blanco: A Revolutionary For Life* published by Merlin/Resistance books in 2018

Resistance Books and Merlin also published We the Indians:– The indigenous peoples of Peru and the struggle for land in the same year.

Republished from Red Green Labour – https://redgreenlabour.org/2023/06/28/hugo-blanco-15-11-1934%e2%80%9125-06-2023/

Ecosocialist Film Night: PickAxe – Tuesday 27 June, 6.30pm, Glasgow

To book tickets, click >>> HERE

Join us for a showing of PickAxe, a 1999 documentary about the victorious struggle of American eco-activists to stop the logging of a protected, old growth forest at Warner Creek in Oregon.

When Warner Creek suffered an arson attack which led to a wildfire in 1991, the forest service sold off the protected woods to the highest bidder to be salvage-logged. In order to stop that, activists occupied the logging road into Warner Creek with a fortified camp, tore up the tarmac with pickaxes, and settled in for a months-long battle against the park service, the timber companies, and the police.

A fascinating document of resistance by and for activists, PickAxe has much to teach a new generation of climate activists who are becoming ever more interested in direct action and protest militancy.

After the showing, there will be time for a discussion of the film and its message: What can we learn from the Warner Creek blockade? Can we take any of the politics and tactics from there and apply them to Scotland? What were the shortcomings of the Warner Creek activists?

Sales of tickets go towards fundraising for the costs of sending a delegation of Scottish activists to this years Socialist Youth Camp being put on by the 4th International over in France! Lend a hand to the comrades, watch a good film and have a good chat about eco-activism!

TIME: 6:30PM to 9PM

PLACE: Red Rosa’s event space, 195 London Rd, Glasgow, G40 1PA

TICKETS: You can either pay on the door or purchase a ticket online here.

£5 entry

Or if you wanna be a real gem: £8 solidarity price

(And for all stalwarts who would give yet more to the cause, the fundraising tin will be there too!)

EVENT – ECUADOR: Behind the indigenous mass uprisings and ecosocialist struggles

ecosocialist.scot is holding an educational and discussion meeting in Glasgow and online on Wednesday 22 February 2023 7pm-9pm (19.00-21.00 GMT). The leaflet for the meeting is

available in PDF form here and reproduced below. You don't need to book to attend the meeting in person, just turn up! But if you wish to join us online please use the Eventbrite link below to get the Zoom link. As this is an educational discussion you may find it useful to consult the reading list on the link below.

ECUADOR: Behind the indigenous mass uprisings and ecosocialist struggles

Come and discuss with a feminist and ecosocialist activist from Ecuador (In-person Glasgow, online via Zoom)

Wednesday 22 February 2023. 7pm-9pm (19.00-21.00 GMT)
icafe (upstairs meeting room), Ingram Street, Glasgow G1 1EX
(5 minutes walk from Glasgow Queen Street/Central stations Google Maps Link)

The Indigenous-led uprising in Ecuador in October 2019, and the similar national strike mobilisation in June 2022, have been two of the most dramatic, and successful, in a wave of big struggles and protest movements that swept the world in recent years – from Hong Kong, Iraq and Lebanon, to Chile, Colombia and now Peru and Iran. Thousands of indigenous people went onto the streets of Ecuador to demand reforms in agricultural payment, to tackle the cost-of-

living and poverty, to defend indigenous communities and to protect the natural environment from destruction, exploitation and profit-driven extractivism. The indigenous movement marched on the national capital, winning support from workers' organisations, from students and from the womens' movement.

They forced concessions from a neo-liberal government and vowed to continue the struggle.

In some parts of Latin America the semi-insurrections have gone alongside, and partly encouraged, the return of progressive governments in much of the region including recently in Colombia and even Brazil. But the struggles have often gone far beyond the limits of reform-minded governments and posed even bigger questions about the global order. In Ecuador, especially, they have shown something that is also vitally important now to activists in Scotland and other parts of Europe: how an immediate struggle to defend communities against rising prices and an attack on their basic living standards, can both develop a dynamic that is clearly anti-capitalist, and connect with the national and international environmental struggles to defend our planet, our Pachamama.

Maria Isabel Altamirano is a sociologist, community organiser and ecosocialist who has been active for a number of years in Ecuador in the feminist movement and working in Indigenous communities in both the Highlands and the Amazon region. She was in the midst of the uprisings, both in 2019 and last June. She is now in Glasgow and will give a short introduction on what happened and its context, and then open up a discussion on what we can learn from the struggle.

This meeting will be held in Glasgow in person but also available can be joined online, with full participation and discussion including questions. (Please note the meeting will be in English but the speaker will speak in Spanish with translation – we are unable to provide simultaneous translation during the discussion).

Online: book through eventbrite link https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/545187278827

If you wish to prepare with some reading, please consult our reading list at ecosocialist.scot (link) https://www.ecosocialist.scot/?page_id=1699