Dealing with Distractions

Confronting Green Capitalism in Copenhagen and Beyond

Various Authors

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post-political context of climate change this will be very difficult to achieve. An analysis of post-political processes has severe implications for anti-capitalist interventions. If the formal political sphere is no longer a viable space for intervention, then what implications does this have for activists and social movements? Indeed, the truly antagonistic intervention against global climate governance may well be expressed in anti-austerity campaigns as the effects of food, water and energy precarity come to be felt throughout the social sphere. It is likely that these campaigns and events will be led by people not explicitly identifying with climate change politics as they are currently expressed. Whether we are "successful" or not in re-politicising climate change, we must begin to recognise ways in which we can support these autonomous uprisings rooted in our everyday experiences of capital.

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is impossible to be accommodated within the existing political sphere.

Despite this, we must act. Radical movements must remain relevant if they wish to be successful, and climate change has become a central motif for the organisation of contemporary global society. However, a principled intervention must embody a rejection of the current organisation of capitalism and the false solutions being supported by the COP-15 and many liberals and environmentalists who wish to "make Kyoto Stronger", all of whom are in fact pushing for a more austere form of capitalism.

Faced with these choices, the only principled position for an anti-capitalist intervention is that of negation. Our politics must reject both the current form of capitalism and its emerging successor, "Green Capitalism". This is not based on political idealism but rather on an objective analysis. The real idealists appear to be those that believe that capitalism can be reformed and can function sustainably within the objective barriers of the bio-physical world. Even if climate change is averted, the spectres of food, water and soil crises loom on the horizon. Those restricted by the activist ideology of immediate action are merely ensuring they will have an ample supply of causes and campaigns post-climate change.

In terms of environmental politics, a true anti-capitalist politics is nowhere. Climate change has become post-political. The only debates that remain at the COP-15 are over the finer points of the carbon market which will be implemented: a market which will produce new forms of structural violence. In an incredible demonstration of the adaptability of capital, many NGOs and environmentalists are supporting this process. Although it would be tempting to remain in our local communities, the impacts of climate change and its mitigation are so large that we cannot afford to retreat to localism.

The question of how to manifest a rejection of capitalist solutions remains, in my opinion, yet to be answered. Given the

sis of continued capital accumulation; that is, the initial source of discontent.

This is tying the world into a disastrous course of action. Climate change must be defined as an issue of capital, not carbon. Contrary to the claims of proponents of the emerging "green" economy, there is no equitable technological solution to climate change. A de-carbonised global economy (as many wish to see) will still be a capitalist economy with all the social and environmental damage this entails. A greener form of capitalism will be a more austere form of capitalism in which increasing unrest will require discipline through increasingly authoritarian forms of state power. At best, capitalist climate "solutions" will be a pyrrhic victory in which catastrophic climate change is averted at the expense of the global majority.

The COP-15 process can be seen as one part of this emerging 'green new deal' in which converging ecological and financial crises can be recuperated into circuits of capital accumulation. The burgeoning carbon market will primarily benefit private interests in the North, who will profit from the synergy between possessing surplus capital and the need to offset their emissions via "development" projects in the global South which look likely to only benefit small sections of local elites. Even changes within energy production systems away from coal (a target of many radical movements) towards renewable production appear likely to entail the enclosure of the commons, the displacement of communities and the reconsolidation of global energy corporations. Real political antagonism has been trumped by a process whose destructive and deeply political nature has been obscured behind a scientific and apparently universal mandate for action.

That the media and the entire political spectrum appear in support of this process makes a truly anti-capitalist intervention even more problematic. By demanding the end of capitalist social relationships and refusing to accept existing forms of bio-political governance we are articulating a demand that

The apocalypse looms like a dark tempest on the horizon. Things are serious now. If we are to get through this Crisis we have to forget all old grudges and past wrongs, leave behind all dissent and rebellious activity, and gather in support of our leaders. "Come," they smile at us in the green-shimmering full-page advertisements from a future where new technology and new markets have saved the planet, "only together can we solve this".

But wait a minute... Their proposal for how we are to be saved from ruin seems sickeningly familiar. Haven't we heard all this before? What is it they are hiding? What is it they are trying to distract us from?

As the faith in the proposed future crumbles, an increasingly clear line is becoming visible between those that believe that a solution is possible within the capitalist system, and those that don't. While the world is shaken by crises, a growing number of people on the earth can be found on the side of those doubting the current structures of power and capital. When this zine goes to press, preparations are in full swing on both sides for the next big event in this drama: The 15th Conference Of the Parties of the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change, better known as the COP15.

The crowd preparing to oppose the summit is a diverse bunch. The Climate Crisis seems to have opened the possibility of uniting a broad range of struggles against capitalism: from indigenous peoples to workers unions, from the landless to the european autonomous, from climate campers to youth from the suburbs of the metropolis, from anti-industrialists to anarcho-syndicalists. Just as big is the scope of the strategies, tactics and dreams.

The radical class struggle movements have just recently started to join in. In spite of the division between them and the environmental oriented movements, it´s getting more and more clear that whoever wants to have any influence on the

upcoming development of the future needs to start addressing the topic.

By putting together this zine, we wanted to look for the connections: What common interests can we find faced with the "Climate Crisis"? How can it be understood in the context of the Capitalist system? How will the changes to the climate and the proposals at the COP15 influence our fighting and living conditions in the future? And the inevitable question: How can the devastation be stopped?

Some of these articles were written specifically for this zine, while others have been printed elsewhere. Some authors are well known, others wish to remain nameless. We hope that you find the following texts thought-provoking and inspiring. See you in the streets!

Love, The COP 15 zine crew. October, 2009
Cop15zine@riseup.net

act this very instant in any way possible to avert this catastrophic build up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Climate change therefore becomes framed as a universal problem requiring an immediate, united global response.

Faced with the prospect of apocalypse, old left-right antagonisms begin to look outdated and those standing outside this "carbon consensus" are marginalised as extremists or as relics of a previous time. The climate change banner is a (carbon neutral) rainbow leading towards a decarbonised society regardless of the mode of production which operates within it. The threat of apocalypse and the resultant emphasis on haste fail to recognise the daily crisis many already experience due to the processes of capital.

This discourse is also reproduced within radical environmental movements where the "necessities" of action are placed before "abstract" and "divisive" political debates. What is needed within radical movements, we are told, are "more people", "more awareness" and "more action". Climate change discourse has therefore become a post-political space devoid of antagonism that is focused on implementing policy based on science, technology and markets. This appeal to universal action has helped to short circuit real political debate over possible future socio-ecological relationships. Within this depoliticised space David Milliband's call for "millions on the streets", in a "Make Poverty History" style mobilisation to give Gordon Brown a mandate at the COP-15, sits comfortably with environmental activists calling for a pragmatic engagement with the process. Much like the Gleneagles G8 summit, COP-15 appears to be recuperating antagonism in order to re-articulate global patterns of capital.

The post-political condition actively forecloses the creation of political — that is, antagonistic — moments in which the social relations upon which all reality is grounded come into question. The energy generated via social movements is funnelled into systems of governance in order to reproduce the ba-

mitigation has for environmental movements in particular, and within global society more generally. A recognition of the unique characteristics of contemporary global governance is vital for those seeking to move beyond its limitations rather than operate within them.

The post-politics of climate change

The formal political space of the COP-15, and climate change mitigation in general, can be defined by its emphasis on consensus. The articulation of antagonistic positions has been subsumed within a new political space grounded upon science and technocratic administration, where the only legitimate debates that remain concern the finer points of the governance mechanisms to be implemented.

Climate change has become depoliticised and debate is now framed within the scientific and apolitical frame of carbon parts per million in the atmosphere. However, despite appearing as a non-political issue, it is the exact opposite. Carbon emissions stem from concrete forms of production that are themselves the result of political contestation. By focusing on carbon and not the flows of capital responsible for their emission, policymakers are confusing the effects with the system that produces them. This focus on carbon helps to insulate capitalist production from criticism by externalising the problem and divorcing it from its social context.

While climate change has been defined and depoliticised in terms of carbon rather than capital, any policy needs political support to be implemented. The political willpower to act on climate change has been galvanised through an apocalyptic and millenarian narrative. The argument for averting climate change is clear and unequivocal: if climate change is not averted we will face global disaster which will most affect the majority world. Therefore, the argument continues, we must

Before the Big Change *by Peter Gelderloos*

It is a testament to the horror, the boundless horror of capitalism, that after decades of its triumph, of changelessness, of the end of history, of a famine of other possible futures even in the minds of children, that those of us alive today who will see this world change forever cannot count ourselves lucky. We stand at the brink, and all the petty squabbles, all political programs and narrow affinities fall into insignificance. The estimate vary as to exactly when we reach the point of no return, it could be 2015, it could be 2020, but climate scientists have reached a consensus that since the Industrial Revolution humans (I would be more direct and say capitalists) have caused global surface temperatures to raise 0.7 degrees Celsius, and that at a certain point not so far off, additional global warming will trigger a number of feedback loops that will cause the global temperatures to rise even more.

Tested climate models[1] suggest that within ten years, we will have released enough greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to cause 20℃ of warming. At that point, the melting of the polar ice caps (which currently reflect large amounts of solar radiation), the release of methane currently stored beneath the Siberian permafrost (methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than CO2), the increase in atmospheric water vapor (which also acts to trap heat from the sun), and the additional release of CO2 currently stored in the oceans as their absorption rate decreases with warming, will have a cumulative effect to raise global temperatures by five to six degrees by the end of the cen-

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[1] www.realclimate.org

tury. Few species alive today have survived such a hot world in the past, and we will all have to adapt or go extinct, as the oceans acidify, desert regions expand, and coastal areas flood.

There are a number of possibilities: the very best is that within the next ten years, waves of revolt overthrow the State, which is the chief defender and administrator of the structures of fossil fuel-based capitalism; all coal power plants are shut down; all cars are taken off the road excepting perhaps a small number that can run on vegetable oil; airline travel is abolished; electricity is abandoned or produced locally with small scale renewables; agriculture transitions from the current industrial petroleum-driven variety to traditional methods or permaculture, meaning a huge portion of the human population will have to concern themselves once again with growing their community's food; and a massive amount of carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere through the reforestation of abandoned highways, commercial areas, golf courses, and other spaces, and through the rewilding of the planet's extensive commercial tree plantations (the greatest amount of carbon stored by a forest is in the layer of leaves and other organic debris on the ground, which is part and parcel with a biodiversity that does not exist in tree plantations). This is also what needs to happen if we pass the point of no return, but in that case it will be much less pleasant for all of us.

We are not faced with a collapse, but with a deepening of the misery beyond what any of us can imagine. The climate crisis will not destroy capitalism. As blind and insanely idiotic as the powerful are, they are also looking towards the future. At the recent NATO summit in Strasbourg, the world government discussed its solution to the impending disaster: militarized borders and stricter internal security measures like biometric IDs and surveillance. I don't see these as naively unrealistic non sequiters so much as codewords for the full realization of the New World Order. The powerful are well informed that a sharp

Are We Anywhere?: The (post)politics of climate change *by Ben Lear*

> "Everything is rational in capitalism, except capital or capitalism itself ...the system is demented, yet it works very well at the same time." Felix Guattarri, 1995

> "We mean business when we talk about climate change." Jose Manuel Barroso, European commission president, 2009

The COP-15 summit appears likely to be the biggest political spectacle of the past few years. Inside the summit delegates from 170 countries, corporate lobbyists and NGO representatives will come together under the banner of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to broker a deal to "defeat climate change". The COP-15 will be a core global governance mechanism through which climate change mitigation will be implemented and the deal that will emerge has the potential to affect the entire socio-ecological field. Outside the conference both environmental activists and environmental ministers are calling for a mass mobilisation to save humanity from climate change. The COP-15 summit is a unique spatial and temporal condensation of the climate mitigation debate and as such provides a clear lens through which to view broader process of capitalist governance.

This article hopes to tease out some of the implications that a radical analysis of the (post)politics of climate change

18. As an emerging global climate justice movement, we must fight two enemies: on one hand climate change and the fossilistic capitalism that causes it, and on the other, an emergent green capitalism that won't stop it, but will limit our ability to do so

19. Of course, climate change and free trade aren't the same thing, but: the Copenhagen-protocol will be a central regulatory instance of green capitalism just as the WTO was central to neoliberal capitalism. So how to relate to it? The Danish group KlimaX argues: A good deal is better than no deal — but no deal is way better than a bad one

20. The chance that governments will come up with a 'good deal' in Copenhagen is slim to none. Our aim must therefore be to demand agreement on real solutions. Failing that: to forget Kyoto, and shut down Copenhagen! (whatever the tactic)

decrease in agricultural productivity caused by global warming will coincide with a projected peaking of the human population at nine billion, resulting in mass starvation that is predicted to claim between three and six billion lives. Already 300,000 people die every year, nearly all of them in the Global South, due to the results of climate change: desertification, droughts, more violent storms, greater spread of tropical diseases, and crop failure. Human populations are already beginning to migrate on an enormous scale in search of survival.

The NATO solution is to close the border, to seal the door of the gas chamber that now encompasses the greater part of three continents. This is the new jewel in their crown — they are planning the greatest mass murder in human history. There are already confirmed reports of killings in the desert between the US and Mexico and eerie rumours of naval boats sinking rafts full of Africans in the Mediterranean when the press isn't there to take some humanitarian photos of dramatic rescues at sea — in fact, just the reported deaths on the borders of Fortress Europe between 1988 and 2006 total 14,000. This will become policy. This will become open war. Of course, the border will not be hermetically sealed. NATO will probably maintain military colonies in key fuel- and food-producing regions, especially in areas of low population density like Saudi Arabia where control will be easier.

Domestically too their answer is already becoming visible: totalitarianism. Unintegrated immigrant populations and youth who have not yet consented to the murder of our futures present a constant internal threat to this order that has manifested in numerous revolts and insurrections, as well as countless quieter negations and the creation and diffusion of new social models — I mean our protests, our social centers, our permaculture farms, hacklabs, counterinformation groups, DIY health collectives, bicycle workshops, and other self-organized projects. When coupled with a will to destroy the existing system and an attempt to overcome the separations

imposed by government and media to create real solidarity, these movements evidence a superhuman optimism that may be the only hope for the future.

And it is apparent that the State feels threatened. Under the rubric of anti-terrorism, the constellation of leading governments have begun instituting systems of total control. Infiltration and provocation in anarchist groups and Muslim communities throughout the US, as well as the curtailing of gun rights and the imprisonment for up to 22 years of activists trying conscientiously to save the planet; biometric IDs across Europe; in France mandatory DNA sampling as a consequence for over a hundred criminal offenses including graffiti and illegal protest, and psychological tracking and databasing of delinquent, potentially criminal characteristics of all children from as young as three; in the UK, thousands of surveillance cameras with facial recognition and automatic license plate-scanning technology deployed across the whole of public space as well as most bars; in Germany, the criminalization of self-defense from surveillance by wearing masks in demonstrations, and the government prerogative to declare any radical political group a criminal organization and imprison anyone said to be associated with it; in Spain, the extension of the torture and high security isolation prisons long used against the Basques to anarchists and squatters; in the Netherlands, the installation of a new system requiring one to use a personal ID/bank card to get on or off the bus, rendering one's movements through the city trackable; and everywhere, the use of cellphones to listen to people's conversations and log people's movements.

The world governments may also try to mitigate the disaster by proliferating nuclear power plants and deploying particles in the atmosphere or orbital shields to reflect some of the sun's energy, with unknown consequences for the future, as usual.

Capital and the white supremacist states are preparing to manage the apocalypse they have brought down on all of us. We need to develop our ability to survive, undermine, and de-

12. In green capitalism, there is a danger that established, mainstream environmental groups will come to play the role that trade unions played in the Fordist era: acting as safety valves to make sure that demands for social change, that our collective rage remain within the boundaries set by the needs of capital and governments

13. Albert Einstein defined 'insanity' as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." In the past decade, in spite of Kyoto, not only has the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere increased — so, too, has the rate of increase. Do we simply want more of the same? Wouldn't that be insane?

14. International climate agreements promote false solutions that are often more about energy security than climate change. Far from solving the crisis, emissions trading, CMD, joint implementation, offsets and so on, all provide a political shield for the continued production of greenhouse gases with impunity

15. For many communities in the global South, these false solutions (agrofuels, 'green deserts', CDM-projects) are by now often a greater threat than climate change itself

16. Real solutions to the climate crisis won't be dreamt up by governments or corporations. They can only emerge from below, from globally networked social movements for climate justice

17. Such solutions include: no to free trade, no to privatisation, no to flexible mechanisms. Yes to food sovereignty, yes to degrowth, yes to radical democracy and to leaving the resources in the ground

'Green New Deal' discussed by Obama, green parties all around the world, and even some multinationals is more about welfare for corporations than for people

7. Green Capitalism won't challenge the power of those who actually produce most greenhouse gases: the energy companies, airlines and carmakers, industrial agriculture, but will simply shower them with more money to help maintain their profit rates by making small ecological changes that will be too little, too late

8. Because globally, working people have lost their power to bargain and demand rights and decent wages, in a green capitalist setup, wages will probably stagnate or even decline to offset the rising costs of 'ecological modernisation'

9. The 'green capitalist state' will be an authoritarian one. Justified by the threat of ecological crisis it will 'manage' the social unrest that will necessarily grow from the impoverishment that lies in the wake of rising cost of living (food, energy, etc.) and falling wages

10. In green capitalism, the poor will have to be excluded from consumption, pushed to the margins, while the wealthy will get to 'offset' their continued environmentally destructive behaviour, shopping and saving the planet at the same time

11. An authoritarian state, massive class inequalities, welfare given to corporations: from the point of view of social and ecological emancipation, green capitalism will be a disaster that we can never recover from. Today, we have a chance to get beyond the suicidal madness of constant growth. Tomorrow, by the time we've all gotten used to the new green regime, that chance may be gone

stroy them. We cannot do this alone; in fact, we must overcome the isolation they impose on those who resist. Non-integrated immigrant communities and anti-authoritarians who have been privileged with citizenship must increase communication and build networks of solidarity that overcome racism, national boundaries, and otherification, and all active people must engage in a Herculean campaign of communication with everyone outside the movement to challenge the legitimacy of the State. There is a need to remind people that the politicians and capitalists created this problem. For years, they worked hard to silence it, and they have been repressing those of us trying to do something about it. The problems of the future will be much easier if everyone feels as we do — that as the lifeboat starts to sink, those responsible should be the first to go overboard. A vital task is to intervene publicly in the discourse on terrorism, to show that we are the people being persecuted as terrorists and the war on terror is actually a war of social control, and that the state is crying wolf and none of its security measures make us feel safe. People need to be comfortable with resistance, not with surveillance. If we can achieve this, we will have deprived the State of a tool it desperately needs to survive the coming storm.

The end result of this communication must be a consciousness that the State and capitalism are suicidally insane and a complementary desire to organize our own lives free of their management; an acknowledgement of the central role racism and colonialism and their attendant genocides have long played in this insanity; and an understanding that the earth is not a mechanical, dead agglomeration of materials and processes that exist for us to exploit but rather a living, sacred thing that gives us life and meaning, of which we are a small and dependent part. No future with the mentality of control and exploitation is possible: this mentality is responsible for enslavement, genocide, and the destruction of the planet.

No peace with the State and capitalism is desirable: we are reclaiming our power to create the world we want to live in.

This is the change we face: total revolution or a new totalitarianism installed to preside over mass extinction, the murder of billions of people, and the deepening enslavement of those who by citizenship or skin color are marked for survival.

(financialisation, deregulation, privatisation...) is thus no longer an option: new spaces of accumulation and types of political regulation will need to be found by governments and corporations to keep capitalism going

2. Alongside the economic and political as well as energy crises, there is another crisis rocking the world: the biocrisis, the result of a suicidal mismatch between the ecological life support system that guarantees our collective human survival and capital's need for constant growth

3. This biocrisis is an immense danger to our collective survival, but like all crises it also presents us, social movements, with a historic opportunity: to really go for capitalism's exposed jugular, its need for unceasing, destructive, insane growth

4. Of the proposals that have emerged from global elites, the only one that promises to address all these crises is the 'Green New Deal'. This is not the cuddly green capitalism 1.0 of organic agriculture and D.I.Y. windmills, but a proposal for a new 'green' phase of capitalism that seeks to generate profits from the piecemeal ecological modernisation of certain key areas of production (cars, energy, etc.)

5. Green capitalism 2.0 cannot solve the biocrisis (climate change and other ecological problems such as the dangerous reduction of biodiversity), but rather tries to profit from it. It therefore does not fundamentally alter the collision course on which any market-driven economy sets humanity with the biosphere.

6. This isn't the 1930s. Then, under the pressure of powerful social movements, the old 'New Deal' redistributed power and wealth downwards. The 'New New' and

biodiversity; lack of access to water; loss of arable land through erosion and desertification; overfishing; destruction of forests, and so on.

This biocrisis, while a threat to us as human beings, is actually quite interesting for capital: it might just be possible to use public concern about this crisis to channel massive investment flows into so-called 'green technologies', get governments to subsidise the construction of 'green cars', or maybe get a new 'green' construction boom going. This would mean kick-starting economic growth again, and — from the perspective of capital — all would be well again. Because that is all that capital can and must care about: economic growth. Whether or not the biocrisis is solved by such 'green growth' is not in fact the question — it cannot be. But what if solutions to the climate and biocrisis require actions that would reduce growth rates below zero? Are the — largely — well-meaning advocates of a Green New Deal prepared to go this far? Nothing in their proposals so far seems to suggest that this is the case…

This is the context for our 20 theses against green capitalism. We believe that the biocrisis is fundamentally caused by economic growth in a fossilistic capitalist system. For example, 250 years of industrial capitalism have equalled 250 years of explosive rises in carbon emissions. Only if we manage to use the political space opened by the current crisis to really tackle the mad, destructive need for growth that is at the heart of both capitalism and the biocrisis can we hope to solve the latter — not through some social-democratic tinkering around capitalism's destructive edges. A Green New Deal sounds nice, but falls short of this. In the current climate, it is possible to challenge the fundamentals of capitalism. So we should have the courage to do so. Let's be realistic and demand the possible: shut down global capitalism — fossilistic or greenwashed!

1. The current world economic crisis marks the end of the neoliberal phase of capitalism. 'Business as usual'

Migraton, borders and climate change: a 'no borders' perspective

Every year we are seeing thousands of people fleeing their countries of origin in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia, hoping for a better life. Whilst the majority will move to nearby countries, a few will attempt the long and dangerous journey to Europe. It is impossible to determine exactly how many people are forced to migrate directly by climate change. However, what is clear is that the position of wealth and privilege in the global north is, to a large extent, the result of the exploitation of land, people and resources of two-thirds of the world, the very same processes that have driven industrial capitalism and caused climate change.

The world's poor did not cause climate change, but they are more vulnerable to its effects because of both where and how they live. Whether it's in agricultural areas or city slums in the global south, they have fewer options available to them for adapting when things go wrong. Africa and South East Asia, for example, are some of the most geographically vulnerable places on the planet in terms of droughts, rising sea levels and extreme weather events like hurricanes and floods. But this is not exclusive to the global south: when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans it was the poor, black neighbourhoods that were hit hardest and have been excluded from where they used to live ever since.

Political systems, willing to place one group of people above another, are already responding to the potential impact of climate change. With the "war on terror," security politics and nationalism flourished globally; climate change is being used to give further legitimacy to the concepts of "national preservation" and "homeland security." So the Indian state is currently building a perimeter fence around its entire border with Bangladesh, a country more at risk than almost any other from the devastating consequences of rising sea levels. The fence has been explicitly talked about as a barrier to migration. If sea levels rise and Bangladeshi people are driven from their homes, they will now find themselves trapped inside this ring.

The extreme-right British National Party in the UK gives very serious attention to questions of environmental damage, peak oil, famine and food supply. For fascists like them, climate change provides the perfect opportunity to try and argue their view of the world that humanity consists of races and nations in constant conflict and competition.

What these people might advocate in the face of the effects of climate change does not bear thinking about.

This year, in April 2009, the NATO war alliance celebrated their 60th anniversary with a summit to discuss NATO's new strategic direction. A strategy paper published in April 2007 stressed the need for a more "proactive approach," in which the pre-emption and prevention of threats are central. To the NATO strategists an array of threats exist in today's uncertain world, from terrorism and transnational crime to unrest following food crises, extensive migration to the countries of the NATO alliance and social conflicts as a result of climate change. The paper maintains that proper "defense" requires the concept of "homeland security", which entails a "comprehensive approach" of the military, police, politicians, researchers, academics and civil society and the continued blurring of internal and external security to build up a "global security architecture." We can already speak of a global market boom in

20 Theses against green capitalism

Global capitalism really isn't doing so well these days: from mortgages to banks, from the banks to the car industry, from the US to Western Europe, from Western to Eastern Europe… Nobody seems to know where the crisis will strike next.

All that is clear is that it will continue to strike, and strike, and strike. This is not a 'normal' economic crisis, i.e. one that is caused by the normal ups and downs of an economic cycle. This crisis goes deep: it is the result of decades of neoliberal assaults on wages and welfare benefits, leading to an excess of supply of goods and services over demand. Or in other words: there's too much stuff that wants to be bought out there, and not enough people with enough money to buy it. Profit rates are low, productivity growth is depressed, and this time, unlike the last few times a crisis seemed to threaten the wobbly edifice of neoliberalism, there is no new bubble in sight to soak up all the excess capital sloshing around the world. So to sum up: global capitalism really isn't doing so well these days, and that's not even mentioning the energy crisis, the crumbling of US-hegemony, etc., etc…

And then there's what we call the 'biocrisis': the multiple socio-ecological crisis tendencies that arise as a result of the antagonism between collective human survival in relatively stable eco-social systems, and the requirements of economic growth. The most prominent of these is no doubt the climate crisis, but further crisis tendencies, all of which stand in a reasonably direct relationship to capitalist production, are: loss of

- Robert U. Ayres: Toxic heavy metals: Materials cycle optimization www.pnas.org (1991)

- Bob Black: On Organisation (Chapter 4 in *Anarchy After Leftism*, C.A.L. Press, 1997).

See also p. 14–5 in Murray Bookchin: To Remember Spain www.spunk.org (AK Press, 1994) and "Centralization and planning" in Daniel Guerin's "Anarchism — From theory to Practice" www.infoshop.org .

databases, biometric readers, data mining programs and other new technologies of control, with multinational corporations poised to make huge profits.

In Autumn 2009, under the Swedish presidency, interior ministers met in Stockholm to decide the next five year framework on internal security in the EU. "The Stockholm Program" will foster more surveillance of the internet, common access to European police databases and more cross-border police collaboration to fight "illegal migration". It will force countries outside the EU to take back their citizens who enter the EU without a visa and it will push the use of biometrics and radio-frequency identification (RfiD) and enlargement of the police agency Europol and the EU border watchdog Frontex.

Freedom of movement is a contested common right. Understood as a form of grassroots globalization, migration is contained, managed and restricted by a top-down process of transnationalization. And with an increase in mobility and migration, irregular migration is being perceived as a threat to the world-order and to the integrity of the nation state. "Project Nation State" is challenged by an unregulated globalism. Borders are an attempt to limit and privatise freedom of movement as a common right. Wherever physical migration occurs, new borders are erected where one is "processed," "profiled," "sorted," "filtered," "contained," or "rejected". The border is a site of unequal power relations where a selection is made between the useful and unwanted in relation to market demands. The border is a site of conflict that is costing yearly the lives of many who try are trying to cross borders in spite of the latest technological advances in security, surveillance and control. These people are suffocating in containers, drowning in rivers and seas, exploding on mine fields, or being shot by border guards.

'No Borders' is a clear antiauthoritarian position that fights for the freedom of movement for all and the abolition of borders, while recognizing the massive injustice which exploits

people and resources around the world for the benefit of few. The immigration system of Fortress Europe is designed to preserve this division. And while the EU is working towards One Europe, "Project Nation State" continues far outside the EU borders. New borders are created and existing borders are transformed to also exclude from Europe the growing group of climate refugees.

A crucial part of the No Border fight is supporting and building a radical climate change movement which challenges the idea of using threats of climate chaos as an excuse for even more draconian migration controls. The radical climate action movement critiques responses to climate chaos offered by governments and corporations, such as carbon rationing that would de-facto lead us blindfold into a police state, agrofuels that would take land and food from the global South to feed cars and airplanes in the North, and carbon trading which applies market logic to solve a market problem. No Borders has at its core this same resistance to intrusion on our liberties and sees that government systems of control which are often tested on migrants will affect us all. Those who have promoted and profited from our carbon dioxide intensive lifestyles are not only responsible for the current concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, but they are also the ones who are aiming to maintain their positions of wealth and privilege by getting ahead in the new ecotechnologies and green capitalism, whilst always fortifying the walls around them.

duction and infrastructure. We need to put wind energy, solar energy and other alternative industrial solutions on the list of false solutions along with agrofuels, nuclear energy, and clean coal technology. As soon as possible, we need to start doing the only thing that can halt the destruction of our life supporting systems: reducing our industrial production and consumption to the absolute minimum.

Further reading:

- Sharon Astyk: A New Deal or a War Footing? Thinking Through Our Response to Climate Change sharonastyk.com (Casaubon's Book, 11.11.2008)

- Jeff Vail: The Renewables Hump www.jeffvail.net (2009) and Renewable Transition www.theoildrum.com (The Oil Drum, 2009)

- Stew Cowans: Rare earth supply crimp could derail expansion in alternative energy industry treo.typepad.com (RareMetalMedia, 27.8.2009)

- Steve Gorman: As hybrid cars gobble rare metals, shortage looms www.reuters.com (Reuters, 31.8.2009)

- Damian Kahya: Bolivia holds key to electric car future news.bbc.co.uk (BBC News, 9.11.2008)

- Bradley Berman: Shortage of Rare Metals for Hybrids Is Overblown www.hybridcars.com (Hybridcars.com, 4.9.2009)

- I.Wernick and N.J. Themelis: Recycling Metals for the Environment www.seas.columbia.edu (1998)

- Robert U. Ayres, Leslie W. Ayres and Ingrid Råde: The Life Cycle of Copper, its Co-Products and By-Products www.iied.org (2002)

has yet to be proven if we even have the raw materials available to make enough wind turbines and solar panels to keep up current levels of energy consumption or any significant level of industrial production at all.

3. The new surge in green manufacturing puts a lot of pressure to open new mines and to build new processing plants. These new mines and other methods of resource extraction will inevitably destroy and poison local communities around the source of extraction. Even Jana Hartline, Toyota's environmental communication manager admits: "Mining in any way, shape or form is never an environmentally friendly process. That's the nature of the beast."

4. If industrial production were to be ecologically sustainable, it would have to be a closed loop when it comes to non-renewable materials. In other words 100 % recycling. With current technology, this is impossible.

5. A question that shouldn't be underestimated for anti authoritarians is whether or not it is possible to sustain the large scale co-operation and deep specialization necessary for running any type of industrial production, without falling into hierarchical ways of organization. This should not be taken lightly: the organization of CNT, the anarchist labor union which controlled much of industrial production in some areas of Spain during the civil war, had at least six levels of hierarchy.

6. It takes time to build new infrastructure, time that we don't have. There are diverging opinions whether any kind of alternative green infrastructure could be built quickly enough to be any kind of replacement.

What all this means is that if we want to halt global warming, we need to start questioning our dependence on industrial pro-

Class, Labour and Climate Change

Climate change is not a question of carbon emissions. The depletion of water, soil and mineral resources and the decimation of biodiversity and ecosystems now being experienced across the planet — primarily in marginalised and poorer areas — are the result of an utter bankruptcy in the relationship between human economic activity and the rest of life on earth. It is now clear that if this relationship is not drastically altered in the coming years the consequences will be disastrous.

What is this borne of? The very language we use and metaphors we draw upon to describe the ecological crisis — that of exhaustion, degradation and exploitation, are all familiar to us as trade unionists and working class activists. The world over, workers are subject to overwork and exploitation to the point of physical and mental collapse. The reality we face now is that exploitation has increased in so many different ways that the planet itself faces such a collapse. The force that drives the stripping of rainforests and the poisoning of the atmosphere is the same force that drives the exploitation of one human being by another: the logic that profit should be the basic imperative of human activity, the logic of capitalism. We should draw no distinctions between its willingness to wreck human life or its willingness to wreck the lives of any other living thing.

We are creative and dynamic enough to be able to build societies that do not put themselves in a state of perpetual warfare with the other beings and living things that we share a planet

with. We can see evidence of this in local and indigenous communities across the world which do not respond to the logic of profit. But right now we are not the ones in control of our own creativity or dynamism; our capacity to produce. The basic question of who decides what people's work and efforts are applied towards is the key to understanding environmental damage. Wresting back the control of our own work from the class of bosses who have squandered and wasted generation upon generation of both people and resources must be fought for with a fire and passion that reflects the knowledge of the fact that in this struggle, everything is at stake. Revolutionary change and the adoption of a new set of imperatives for our labours is needed to create any sort of genuine sustainability.

The movement against environmental racism, which started with people of colour in the U.S. struggling against environmental injustices, confronted the racial discrimination in environmental decision-making. Later on, it started to be identified as not only a race struggle but also as a class struggle, since regulations and laws (international treaties in this case) were being enforced with a deliberate impact on marginalized communities in terms of toxic waste disposal, implementation of heavily polluting industries, or mega projects that produce 'clean' energy for someone else.

So what? It is easy enough to say that you won't ever get a sustainable capitalist society. We cannot be part of a movement that is happy to say 'we'll sort out the environment after the revolution,' nor 'forget the revolution; we need to save the planet.' Any analysis of both the already happening and likely future impacts of climate change makes it clear that more and more, it will start to have massive implications for the daily lives of huge sections of the world's population — and of course, the first and worst hit will be the poorest sections of every society.

Examples of how this might begin to play out are everywhere. Last year there were riots in Mexico, Morocco and the

Six Arguments against Alternative Industrialism *by Mikko Virtanen*

Almost everyone from capitalists to mainstream environmentalists and anarchists are proposing a massive construction project of alternative industrial infrastructure, replacing the current high emitting infrastructure, to solve the problem of global warming. These people say we need more wind energy, solar energy and ocean energy, a new electrical grid, electric cars, and even energy efficient household appliances. If critique of capitalism is uncommon these days, then critique of alternative industrialism is even less common. Here are some arguments often left out of the debate.

1. To build a new green infrastructure of such a massive scale would require a lot of energy and materials, which can only be provided through the use of already existing fossil fuel based infrastructure. Inevitably this would lead to a lot of net greenhouse gas emissions, in a situation when we need to start reducing them quickly.

2. The production of this new infrastructure will require a vast amount of raw materials, much of which are not renewable themselves, and are environmentally destructive to obtain. Alternative industrial technologies, such as wind turbines, solar panels and electric cars require a lot of rare earth metals that are already in short supply from the current alternative industrialism boom. It

The fourth problem is that the endpoint of the logic behind simple living as a political act is suicide. If every act within an industrial economy is destructive, and if we want to stop this destruction, and if we are unwilling (or unable) to question (much less destroy) the intellectual, moral, economic, and physical infrastructures that cause every act within an industrial economy to be destructive, then we can easily come to believe that we will cause the least destruction possible if we are dead.

The good news is that there are other options. We can follow the examples of brave activists who lived through the difficult times I mentioned — Nazi Germany, Tsarist Russia, antebellum United States — who did far more than manifest a form of moral purity; they actively opposed the injustices that surrounded them. We can follow the example of those who remembered that the role of an activist is not to navigate systems of oppressive power with as much integrity as possible, but rather to confront and take down those systems.

Philippines over a jump in food prices caused almost entirely by increased global use of biofuels. The great hidden factor behind recent conflicts in Somalia and Darfur has been the vast reduction in the areas of arable land as a result of water shortage and desertification. When we think of both the forces that have generated this disaster (and more to the point) the people who will pay the consequences of it, the class divisions are openly exposed. It will not be those with the money and technology to move from the worst affected areas or pay for measures to adapt. The worst affected will be those who now bear the least responsibility: those without economic or social power.

It is clear that ecological destruction and the results of it are and will increasingly become a central point of real class struggle. There is no better example of the complete bankruptcy of capitalism as a way of organising our society for its long term survival and benefit than the fact that it now threatens the very ability of the planet's ecosystems to support complex life such as ourselves.

The basic principle of Workers Climate Action is that in all instances you make solidarity with the oppressed; in the case of an environmentally damaging industry there is therefore a contradiction to be grappled with. While the short term economic need of the workers is for the expansion and continuation of that industry, the wider interest of the working class and of the world is that their skills are applied to another role. The only principle that can break through this problem is that of solidarity: solidarity with people and planet regardless of any distinction.

Workers of the world unite! Save it!

"Overpopulation": letting capitalism off the hook

The text below was written collectively by Manchester No Borders for Shift Magazine. *It is a result of discussions in the group, and of the debates at the 2008 Camp for Climate Action, where we hosted a workshop on the topic. We have received lots of support/interest when we started engaging with the 'over-population' argument and would welcome further discussion of it within the No Borders network and beyond.*

From when we started being active as a No Borders group in Manchester, we have been frustrated with a lack of radical analyses and critiques (anti-state, anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, anti-discrimination etc.) of climate change, particularly as we became aware of a 'greening of immigration controls'. There appears to be an increasing tendency for green politics to lean towards repressive measures as solutions to the environmental crisis.

More specifically, in discussions with other (environmental) activists, we have recently found ourselves in disagreement over the issue of 'overpopulation'. A common green orthodoxy today is that there are too many people on this planet, and that we need to do something about it. (Although as we gave a well-attended workshop at the Climate Camp on this topic, we were positively surprised how many of the participants were critical of this stance.)

In this article, we want to spell out the dangers of the 'the planet is full' argument and argue that 'overpopulation' is not the root cause of climate change. People are not the problem,

and the fact that those in power might try to kill us if we seriously impede their ability to exploit the world — none of which alters the fact that it's a better option than a dead planet. Any option is a better option than a dead planet.

Besides being ineffective at causing the sorts of changes necessary to stop this culture from killing the planet, there are at least four other problems with perceiving simple living as a political act (as opposed to living simply because that's what you want to do). The first is that it's predicated on the flawed notion that humans inevitably harm their landbase. Simple living as a political act consists solely of harm reduction, ignoring the fact that humans can help the Earth as well as harm it. We can rehabilitate streams, we can get rid of noxious invasives, we can remove dams, we can disrupt a political system tilted toward the rich as well as an extractive economic system, we can destroy the industrial economy that is destroying the real, physical world.

The second problem — and this is another big one — is that it incorrectly assigns blame to the individual (and most especially to individuals who are particularly powerless) instead of to those who actually wield power in this system and to the system itself. Kirkpatrick Sale again: "The whole individualist what-you-can-do-to-save-the-earth guilt trip is a myth. We, as individuals, are not creating the crises, and we can't solve them."

The third problem is that it accepts capitalism's redefinition of us from citizens to consumers. By accepting this redefinition, we reduce our potential forms of resistance to consuming and not consuming. Citizens have a much wider range of available resistance tactics, including voting, not voting, running for office, pamphleting, boycotting, organizing, lobbying, protesting, and, when a government becomes destructive of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we have the right to alter or abolish it.

waste accounts for only 3 percent of total waste production in the United States.

I want to be clear. I'm not saying we shouldn't live simply. I live reasonably simply myself, but I don't pretend that not buying much (or not driving much, or not having kids) is a powerful political act, or that it's deeply revolutionary. It's not. Personal change doesn't equal social change.

So how, then, and especially with all the world at stake, have we come to accept these utterly insufficient responses? I think part of it is that we're in a double bind. A double bind is where you're given multiple options, but no matter what option you choose, you lose, and withdrawal is not an option. At this point, it should be pretty easy to recognize that every action involving the industrial economy is destructive (and we shouldn't pretend that solar photovoltaics, for example, exempt us from this: they still require mining and transportation infrastructures at every point in the production processes; the same can be said for every other so-called green technology). So if we choose option one — if we avidly participate in the industrial economy — we may in the short term think we win because we may accumulate wealth, the marker of "success" in this culture. But we lose, because in doing so we give up our empathy, our animal humanity. And we really lose because industrial civilization is killing the planet, which means everyone loses.

If we choose the "alternative" option of living more simply, thus causing less harm, but still not stopping the industrial economy from killing the planet, we may in the short term think we win because we get to feel pure, and we didn't even have to give up all of our empathy (just enough to justify not stopping the horrors), but once again we really lose because industrial civilization is still killing the planet, which means everyone still loses. The third option, acting decisively to stop the industrial economy, is very scary for a number of reasons, including but not restricted to the fact that we'd lose some of the luxuries (like electricity) to which we've grown accustomed,

but society. Human beings per se are not the problem, but the way our social life is organized: capitalism.

There are two levels to our criticism of the 'overpopulation' argument. One, the argument quite simply plays into the hands of governments, nationalists and anti-feminists who are quite happy to step up demographic controls, people management and anti-immigration policies. Two, interpreting population growth as the root cause of the climate crisis completely disregards the systemic nature of the problem and thus lets capitalism off the hook.

The overpopulation argument

So where is the problem? The UN projects that world population figures will rise from today's 6.8 billion to 9.2 billion by 2050. For the prophets of demographic doom, Britain, in particular, is under threat. Government projections are that the UK population is to rise from 60.6 million (mid-2006) to 77 million in 2050. Obviously, demographic modeling contains lots of cultural and political assumptions, and its observations should be treated as politically informed rather than neutral. Human population behaviour is very random and unpredictable, not something that can be forecasted as unproblematically as tomorrow's weather, say (and you know how inaccurate that is!).

Whatever the assumption, an increasing amount of global players (from government agencies to international organizations, think tanks, and celebrities) conclude that the planet is full. They argue that any such densely populated area as Britain would be unsustainable in terms of food production, housing and energy needs.

Also, within the green movement this is not a marginal position, and it is no longer limited to 'deep ecologists'. The green-nationalist think tank 'Optimum Population Trust', for example, estimates that the UK can only sustain less than half its

current population level. And they demand a national population policy that first stabilizes the number of people in the UK and then gradually brings it down to 30 million.

The fact is, however, that the UK population is growing primarily because of immigration. The argument thus is threefold. First, immigration puts pressure on national resources such as water, energy, food and land. Second, new migrants tend to have more children than the national population, thereby accelerating the problem. Third, migration to 'first world' countries turns previously low-impact consumers into high-impact consumers, thereby increasing their ecological footprints. It comes as no surprise to us, then, that the BNP calls itself the 'real Green Party'.

The government's chief green advisor, Jonathan Porritt, has also time and again argued this point. But what to do? Porritt's suggestion is straightforward: zero net immigration! David Cameron also agrees that rapid population increase will put pressure on our natural resources. And again, his solution is to lower net immigration: "my focus today is on population, and here we should note that only around thirty per cent of the projected increase in our population by 2031 is due to higher birth rates and longer lifespans… the evidence shows that roughly seventy per cent — more than two thirds — of the increase in our population each year is attributable to net migration. Of that increase, forty-seven per cent comes directly from people to moving to Britain, and the rest from higher birth rates amongst immigrant populations."

The feminist dimension

It becomes clear that in a sexist, imperialist, capitalist world, it is impossible to separate discussion of population control from hierarchies of oppression. Which population is going to be "controlled" and how will this control come about?

consensus is that emissions must be reduced by at least 75 percent worldwide.

Or let's talk water. We so often hear that the world is running out of water. People are dying from lack of water. Rivers are dewatered from lack of water. Because of this we need to take shorter showers. See the disconnect? Because I take showers, I'm responsible for drawing down aquifers? Well, no. More than 90 percent of the water used by humans is used by agriculture and industry. The remaining 10 percent is split between municipalities and actual living breathing individual humans. Collectively, municipal golf courses use as much water as municipal human beings. People (both human people and fish people) aren't dying because the world is running out of water. They're dying because the water is being stolen.

Or let's talk energy. Kirkpatrick Sale summarized it well: "For the past 15 years the story has been the same every year: individual consumption — residential, by private car, and so on — is never more than about a quarter of all consumption; the vast majority is commercial, industrial, corporate, by agribusiness and government" (he forgot military). So, even if we all took up cycling and wood stoves it would have a negligible impact on energy use, global warming and atmospheric pollution."

Or let's talk waste. In 2005, per-capita municipal waste production (basically everything that's put out at the curb) in the U.S. was about 1,660 pounds (753 kg). Let's say you're a die-hard simple-living activist, and you reduce this to zero. You recycle everything. You bring cloth bags shopping. You fix your toaster. Your toes poke out of old tennis shoes. You're not done yet, though. Since municipal waste includes not just residential waste, but also waste from government offices and businesses, you march to those offices, waste reduction pamphlets in hand, and convince them to cut down on their waste enough to eliminate your share of it. Uh, I've got some bad news. Municipal

Forget Shorter Showers: Why personal change does not equal political change *by Derrick Jensen*

Would any sane person think dumpster diving would have stopped Hitler, or that composting would have ended slavery or brought about the eight-hour workday, or that chopping wood and carrying water would have gotten people out of Tsarist prisons, or that dancing naked around a fire would have helped put in place the Voting Rights Act of 1957 or the Civil Rights Act of 1964? Then why now, with all the world at stake, do so many people retreat into these entirely personal "solutions"?

Part of the problem is that we've been victims of a campaign of systematic misdirection. Consumer culture and the capitalist mindset have taught us to substitute acts of personal consumption (or enlightenment) for organized political resistance. An Inconvenient Truth helped raise consciousness about global warming. But did you notice that all of the solutions presented had to do with personal consumption — changing light bulbs, inflating tires, driving half as much — and had nothing to do with shifting power away from corporations, or stopping the growth economy that is destroying the planet? Even if every person in the United States did everything the movie suggested, U.S. carbon emissions would fall by only 22 percent. Scientific

Any form of population control risks seriously impinging upon women's right to bodily autonomy. State-enforced population control programs, such as China's 'one-child policy', are usually enacted upon women's bodies; it is women who are forced to have abortions, to undergo sterilisation, or to take long-term birth control products (often with serious health repercussions). Rarely are men forced to undergo vasectomies, despite the relative easiness of this procedure when compared to tubal ligation.

However, not all women will be affected equally; those from the Global South, ethnic minorities, those perceived as disabled, and the working class have historically borne the brunt of population control policies. Eugenicists in Victorian England were very clear about which segments of the population needed controlling: the poor and the disabled.

More recently, black British feminists in the 1970s and 1980s wrote about the need to campaign for abortion rights while at the same time also fighting for their right not to have abortions and not to be pressured into sterilisation. At the same time, dangerous forms of birth control, like early experimental forms of Depo-Provera, were being tested upon women in the Global South (and in predominantly African-American areas of the US) before being allowed for sale in the Western world. Today, women in the Global South are often 'encouraged' by NGOs to use long-term forms of birth control, like implants, that require a medical attention to stop (as opposed to something like the pill, which can be stopped at any time by the woman taking it). This history cannot be ignored today when discussing population control in the UK. As single working-class mothers, immigrants and ethnic minorities (particularly Muslims) find themselves being increasingly demonised; any population control policies will target women from these groups.

Malthus

Throughout its history, the overpopulation argument has been used to present people and children as the source of inherently social problems, thus letting capitalism off the hook. The argument always goes like this: there are too many of us and the planet can't hack it. Whether it's the poor, the Jews, women, or migrants, all have been used strategically as scapegoats for an irrational and unproductive use of space and resources within a capitalist economy.

One of the most prominent writers on overpopulation was Thomas Malthus, a 19th century cleric of the Church of England. His treatise on overpopulation "A summary view of the principle of population" was printed in 1830, but is still read widely today. Malthus stated that whilst population increased at a geometric rate (1, 2, 4, 8, 16...), doubling every 25 years, food production increases at an arithmetic rate (1, 2, 3, 4, 5...). Malthus believed this disparity between food production and population growth was the root cause of "checks to (human) growth" such as war, famine and disease.

The strong strand of prejudice within Malthus' work, however, often goes unacknowledged by neo-Malthusians. He saw poverty as deserved rather than produced and blamed the poor for their "lack of moral restraint", thus making them the primary focus of population policy. The inherent conservatism and class prejudice hidden behind a veneer of scientific objectivity has made Malthus a popular source of intellectual legitimacy for various conservative and authoritarian positions.

In the late 19th century, Eugenicists began utilising and expanding on Malthus's critique of the rapid population growth of the poor. Eugenicists argued that this lack of restraint was genetically inherited and posed a threat to the future of the nation (one prominent Eugenicist was Winston Churchill). Many discriminatory laws were passed to attempt to influence the outcome of breeding. Once again, systemic problems were nat-

this "all" be in the future, that is to be equally distributed? In our opinion the radical left in Germany has to search for a political reorientation, if she doesn't want to loose the connection to the global left critical of the system pretty soon.

In the next years climate change will have drastic ecological, social and political effects — and this not only in the global south but also here in Europe. All parts of the radical left should confront themselves with these effects, if they want to have any influence in the upcoming conflicts of society. For example: What will happen, when the border regime we face today collapses under the mass of refugees and then gets replaced by the military? And what will happen by the time petrol gets so expensive that the average citizens cannot afford to fly to Mallorca for holidays anymore or drive to work with their cars? For the radical left this offers the chance to scandalize the social failure of capitalism, and to dismantle it ideologically and practically. Right now the effects of climate change are shifted on to the poor people of the world without restraint and in open public — and only little dissent is to be heard from the rich metropolis…

Climate change does not only pose a threat, it is also a chance. By the time adjustments to climate change have been made, it will have lead to drastic economic and social instability, and the question will no longer be if there will be radical political changes, but which changes these will be.

(excerpts from a text originally written in German)

uralised and projected upon the very people most negatively affected by them.

Neo-Malthusianism

Many anti-migration authors have also propagated Malthusian ideas. These arguments have relied upon an analysis of national resources as closed and finite systems and exaggerating rates of migration. Proposals for the closing of borders are contrasted with images of swarms of migrants exhausting national resources like locusts. One example of this nationalist position, which supports the competitive nature of states, is this quote from the journal Population and environment:

"Countries that are in the lead in reducing their populations should not give in to advocates of growth by allowing massive immigration. This rewards those who multiply irresponsibly."

As environments change due to climate change, the monster of 'overpopulation' is being resurrected as a security issue. As we are seeing with climate change, environmental issues provide a space for the legitimisation of conservative and authoritarian policies.

Perhaps one of the most influential of these authors was Garrett Hardin, whose 1968 essay "The Tragedy of the Commons" masked a pro-private property stance beneath a veneer of scientific objectivity. Hardin believed that without private ownership of natural resources, unchecked population growth would lead to their exhaustion.

The same arguments were used to support the 20th century 'green revolution', and are appearing again with the G8 leaders in Japan agreeing to extend research into GM crops to deal with 'overpopulation'. 'Overpopulation' is used as a convenient argument to support the agendas of specific political and economic actors.

But let's not attack a straw man here. None of the green progressives here in the UK argue for more stringent migration controls (in contrast to parts of the green conservationist movement in the US). Nonetheless, we have witnessed population graphs being used in climate change presentations, which could have lead to knee-jerk reactions and dangerous political conclusions when taken out of their left-wing context.

Earth First?

The climate action movement of course recognises the repression faced by migrants and the fact that the groups of people who are hit hardest by climate change are in the Global South. However, even with the best intentions of warding off ecological destruction and creating better lives for people in the face of climate chaos, the 'overpopulation' argument still ignores the systemic logic behind climate change: capitalism.

The central flaw to Malthusian thought is its a-systemic nature. Regardless of the economic system or social organisation, it views the root cause of most human suffering as population growth, and in particular the threat of the poor becoming richer (and thus consuming more). Poverty however, is produced not bred, and by projecting systemic flaws onto those it most affects, neo-Malthusianism both helps to protect the status quo from criticism and construct vulnerable social groups as legitimate targets of control.

As relatively rich Western countries consume the most energy, it is often argued that it is their populations, in particular, that should be curbed, whether by authoritarian state control or by individuals in the West simply realizing it is their moral responsibility not to reproduce. But to imply that the Earth should come before a child can lead down a dangerous path. It may lead to a resentment of those social groups that migrate or reproduce more often than others. Besides, social, economic,

and cultural pressures to have or not to have children cannot be tackled through individual lifestyle choices and guilt trips.

An emancipatory response to climate change requires a political and social solution. We should be attacking capitalism, not children and families. In a world where children are killed over oil and exploited at the hands of multi-national corporations, it isn't surprising that children will eventually be blamed for capitalism's fuck-ups. Capitalism doesn't make sense and neither do capitalist solutions. The 'overpopulation' argument ignores the contradictions inherent in capitalism that mediate the relationship between human beings and the environment and already limit our freedom and desires on a real everyday level.

Instead of acknowledging the unprecedented global disasters that seem to spiral as capitalism grows and spreads its destructive wings, the 'overpopulation' argument asks not for a new form of social organisation (that might see land and resources accessed and shared more evenly, contributing to less poverty, more sustainable lifestyles and fewer wars), but takes the shameful and hopeless route of asking people to have fewer children. In a world where we are repeatedly screwed over, we are now being asked not to screw!