Climate Justice articles
by Patrick Bond & friends, 2009-10

From renewed climate hope to unrealizable market expectations
*Business Day*, December 2010

‘Climate capitalism’ won at Cancun - everyone else loses
*Links, ZNet, Counterpunch* and numerous other ezines, 12 December 2010

Anatomies of environmental knowledge and resistance

A climate conference, old and new oil curses, and ‘Good Samaritans’
*CounterPunch, Links, ZNet*, 22 November 2010

Community resistance to energy privatization in South Africa
with Trevor Ngwane, in Kolya Abramsky (Ed), *Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution: Social Struggles in the Transition to a Post-Petrol World*, Oakland, AK Press, September 2010

Emissions trading, new enclosures and eco-social contestation
*Antipode*, August 2010

Climate justice politics across space and scale
*Human Geography*, July 2010

Climate debt owed to Africa

Climate justice, climate debt, and anti-capitalism
*Upping the Antl*, May 2010

World Bank threat to South African politics and the world’s climate
*The Mercury*, 13 April 2010

Circumventing the climate cul-de-sac
*Social Text*, March 2010

Maintaining momentum after Copenhagen’s collapse
*Capitalism Nature Socialism*, March 2010

Climate justice opportunities after US carbon market and legislative crashes
with Desmond D’Sa, *ZNet*, 31 March 2010

What will Zoellick break next?
Counterpunch, 19 March 2010

Durban’s waste of energy
The Mercury, 3 February 2010

SA’s self-interested carbon pollution gels with ‘disappointing’ global climate governance
Sunday Independent, 24 January 2010

Eskom’s price hikes plus climate change contributions blow citizen fuses
with Alice Thomson, in The Mercury, 20 January 2010

The carbon market ship is sinking fast
ZNet, 19 January 2010

Why climate justice did not crumble at the summit
Counterpunch, 12 January 2010

Curing post-Copenhagen hangover
Znet, Climate and Capitalism, MRZine, Links and others, 23 December 2009

Countering critics of a cap-and-trade critique
ZNet, Counterpunch, 15 December 2009

Reproducing life as guide to climate politics
Women in Action, December 2009

‘False solutions’ to climate crisis amplify eco-injustices
with Khadija Sharife, in Women in Action, December 2009

Copenhagen friends and foes
Muslim Views, December 2009

From climate denialism to activist alliances in memory of Seattle
ZNet, 30 November 2009

Lessons for Copenhagen from Seattle via Addis Ababa
November 2009

When the climate change center cannot hold
ZNet, 24 October 2009

‘Seattle’ Copenhagen, as Africans demand reparations
ZNet, 6 September 2009

Repaying Africa for climate crisis

A climate-poverty challenge in South Durban
with Vanessa Black, Rehana Dada and Desmond D’Sa, The Mercury, 19 August 2009

From Nigeria to Durban, an oil change is needed
with Khadija Sharife, Muslim Views, May 2009

The state of the global carbon trade debate
The Commoner, Winter 2009

A timely death?
New Internationalist, January 2009
From renewed climate hope to unrealizable market expectations

Business Day, 31 December 2010

The Cancun Agreements’ fatal flaw is simple: faith in fickle markets. A year from now in Durban, the apparently unifying strategy of combining ever-broader emissions trading with a modicum of North-South aid to resolve contradictions between national blocs will again become a destructive wedge.

As world negotiators stared into the abyss of failure, markets became a lifeline. The World Bank was everywhere in Cancun, applying neoliberal economic theory where it’s rarely gone before: into new Chinese emissions markets, lurking within tropical forests, burrowing into the topsoils of agricultural land, and even tackling large ‘charismatic’ endangered species. All are sites for extended corporate investments and offsets against planet-threatening emissions.

The idea is lowering business costs of transitioning to a post-carbon world. After a cap is placed on total emissions, high-polluting corporations can buy ever more costly carbon permits from those which don’t need so many, or which are willing to part with them for a higher price than the profits they make in production or energy-generating or transport activities.

However, a global civil society network – the Durban Group for Climate Justice – formed in 2004 as a critical mass opposed to ‘the privatization of the air’. We worried that the main test case, the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme, not only failed to reduce net greenhouse gases there, but suffered extreme volatility (five major crashes from 2006-10), an inadequate price of €15/tonne (down from a high of €30/tonne 30 months ago and far less than is required for post-carbon transition investments), and worsening fraud scandals.

The market fix is also being tried in the Third World through Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects, whereby investment strategies to prevent ‘additional’ pollution also qualified for carbon credits, reaching around 6 percent of total trading at peak in 2008. But illustrating the pitfalls, Sasol argued that its Mozambique gas pipelines, far less damaging than burning Mpumalanga coal, were ‘additional’ because they wouldn’t have been built without CDM incentives. The specious claim was rejected by UN authorities after a 2009 complaint by Earthlife Africa.

With Europe as the base, world emissions trade grew to more than $130 billion in 2008 and while flat since then due to economic meltdown, corruption investigations and then Copenhagen-induced despondency, the market is projected to expand to $3 trillion/year by 2020 if the US signs on. Last month, a new estimate of up to $50 billion in North-South market-related transfers and offsets each year emerged from a United Nations financing commission which included SA planning minister Trevor Manuel. World climate managers evidently hope to skimp on grants and instead beg business to push vast monies into CDMs instead.
Durban is an important guinea pig, for at SA’s lead CDM pilot, the Bisasar Road landfill, methane from rotting rubbish is converted to electricity. After helping set it up, the World Bank refused to take part in marketing or purchasing Bisasar Road emissions credits. Local activists say the reason was growing awareness of Durban’s notorious environmental racism.

In early 2005, just as the Kyoto Protocol came into force, a Washington Post front-page story revealed how community organizer Sajida Khan suffered cancer from Bisasar Road’s toxic legacy. Back in 1980, the landfill – Africa’s largest – was plopped in the middle of Durban’s Clare Estate suburb, across the road from Khan’s house, thanks to apartheid insensitivity.

Instead of honoring African National Congress politicians’ promises to close the dump in 1994, the municipality kept it open when R100 million in emissions financing was dangled. After Khan died of cancer in mid-2007, civic pressure subsided and Durban began raising €14/tonne for the project from private investors.

Similar controversy surrounds the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) programme. In theory, REDD sells investors forest protection. But it’s seen as a boon to voracious commercial forestry and a danger to indigenous peoples, given that proper safeguards were not adopted in Cancun.

And everyone from EU climate commissioner Connie Hedegaard (a Danish conservative who hosted the summit last year) to Greenpeace warns that REDD could wreck fragile carbon markets, not only due to socio-ecological forest controversies but because a fresh glut of credits would again crash the price.

Financial gaming also remains rife in the EU, and on Wednesday, even the ordinarily pro-trading World Wild Fund for Nature and Öko-Institut attacked steel producers ThyssenKrupp and Salzgitter as fraudulent carbon profiteers, demanding that “the EU put a halt to the use of fake offsets.”

In short, last week’s market mania was a dangerous diversion from a daunting reality: the US, China, South Africa and most other big emitters came to Cancun to avoid making the binding commitments required to limit the planet’s 2000’s temperature rise, ideally below the 1.5°C that scientists insist upon. Naturally the (binding) Kyoto Protocol is a threat to the main emitting countries, which want to replace it with the voluntary, loophole-ridden Copenhagen Accord.

And naturally, the North’s failure to account for its vast ‘climate debt’ continued. Pakistan suffered $50 billion in climate-related flood damage alone this year, yet the total on offer from the North to the whole world is just $30 billion for 2010-12.

And even that’s funny money, according to Hedegaard. When last February she complained (according to WikiLeaks) that Tokyo and London were trying to pay
their share partly in the form of loan guarantees, not grants, US State Department
deputy climate negotiator Jonathan Pershing registered his approval: “Donors have
to balance the political need to provide real financing with the practical constraints
of tight budgets.”

The Copenhagen Accord, signed by Jacob Zuma, Barack Obama, Wen Jiabao, Lula
Ignacio de Silva and Manmohan Singh, is already compromised by bribery. The
Maldives and Ethiopia – once leaders in the G77 and Africa – soon dropped their
resistance to that shoddy deal in exchange for payola, WikiLeaks revealed.

After Hedegaard told Pershing that the Alliance of Small Island States ‘could be our
best allies’, given their need for financing,” he quickly provided a $50 million aid
package to the Maldives. The sinking island’s US ambassador, Abdul Ghafoor
Mohamed, told Pershing on February 23 that if ‘tangible assistance’ were given his
country, then other affected countries would realise “the advantages to be gained by
compliance” with Washington’s climate agenda.

Whether or not a comprehensive Durban deal replaces Kyoto, the ongoing climate
market failures and worsening corruption are distracting the world from the more
serious work required to go post-carbon: state ‘command and control’. To save the
ozone hole from growing, an outright ban was required against CFC emissions, and
after the Montreal Protocol did so starting in 1996, there’s our model for serious
mitigation action.

Given South Africa’s own extreme carbon addiction and the lamentable role Pretoria
climate negotiators play, self-interestedly slowing progress, Cancun’s desperate turn
to the market will backfire loudly next year. In Durban, an uncivil society starved for
a decent mix of climate change mitigation and the rerouting of cheap electricity from
guzzling metals smelters to the powerless masses will be especially noisy.
'Climate capitalism’ won at Cancun - everyone else loses
Links, ZNet, Counterpunch and numerous other ezines, 12 December 2010

CANCUN, MEXICO. The December 11 closure of the 16th Conference of the Parties – the global climate summit - in balmy Cancun was portrayed by most participants and mainstream journalists as a victory, a ‘step forward’. Bragged US State Department lead negotiator Todd Stern, ‘Ideas that were first of all, skeletal last year, and not approved, are now approved and elaborated.”

After elite despondency when the Copenhagen Accord was signed last December 18 by five countries behind the scenes, resulting in universal criticism, there is now a modicum of optimism for the next meeting of heads of state and ministers, in steamy Durban in the dogdays of a South African summer a year from now. But this hope relies upon a revival of market-based climate strategies which, in reality, are failing everywhere they have been tried.

The elites’ positive spin is based on reaching an international consensus (though Bolivia formally dissented) and establishing instruments to manage the climate crisis using capitalist techniques. Cancun’s defenders argue that the last hours’ agreements include acknowledgements that emissions cuts must keep world temperature increases below 2°C, with consideration to be given to lowering the target to 1.5°C.

Negotiators also endorsed greater transparency about emissions, a Green Climate Fund led by the World Bank, introduction of forest-related investments, transfers of technology for renewable energy, capacity-building and a strategy for reaching legally-binding protocols in future. According to UN climate official Christiana Figueres, formerly a leading carbon trader, “Cancun has done its job. Nations have shown they can work together under a common roof, to reach consensus on a common cause.”

**Status quo or step back?**

But look soberly at what was needed to reverse current warming and what was actually delivered. Negotiators in Cancun’s luxury Moon Palace hotel complex failed by any reasonable measure. As Bolivian President Evo Morales complained, “It’s easy for people in an air-conditioned room to continue with the policies of destruction of Mother Earth. We need instead to put ourselves in the shoes of families in Bolivia and worldwide that lack water and food and suffer misery and hunger. People here in Cancun have no idea what it is like to be a victim of climate change.”

For Bolivia’s UN ambassador Pablo Solon, Cancun “does not represent a step forward, it is a step backwards”, because the non-binding commitments made to reduce emissions by around 15 percent by 2020 simply cannot stabilize
temperature at the “level which is sustainable for human life and the life of the planet.”

Even greater anger was expressed in civil society, including by Meena Raman of Malaysia-based Third World Network: “The mitigation paradigm has changed from one which is legally binding – the Kyoto Protocol with an aggregate target which is system-based, science based – to one which is voluntary, a pledge-and-review system.” As El Salvadoran Friends of the Earth leader Ricardo Navarro lamented, “What is being discussed at the Moon does not reflect what happens on Earth. The outcome is a Cancunhagen that we reject.”

Most specialists agree that even if the unambitious Copenhagen and Cancun promises are kept (a big if), the result will be a cataclysmic 4-5°C rise in temperature over this century, and if they are not, 7°C is likely. Even with a rise of 2°C, scientists generally agree, small islands will sink, Andean and Himalayan glaciers will melt, coastal areas such as much of Bangladesh and many port cities will drown, and Africa will dry out – or in some places flood – so much that nine of ten peasants will not survive.

The politicians and officials have been warned of this often enough by climate scientists, but are beholden to powerful business interests which are lined up to either promote climate denialism, or to generate national-versus-national negotiating blocs destined to fail in their race to gain most emission rights. As a result, in spite of a bandaid set of agreements, the distance between negotiators and the masses of people and the planet grew larger not smaller over the last two weeks.

WikiLeaking climate bribery

To illustrate, smaller governments were “bullied, hustled around, lured with petty bribes, called names and coerced into accepting the games of the rich and emerging-rich nations,” says Soumya Dutta of the South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy. “Many debt-ridden small African nations are seeing the money that they might get through the scheming designs of Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD), and have capitulated under the attack of this REDD brigade. It’s a win-win situation, both for the rich nations, as well as for the rich of the poor nations. The real poor are a burden in any case, to be kept at arms length - if not further.”

Bribing those Third World governments which in 2009 were the most vocal critics of Northern climate posturing became common knowledge thanks to WikiLeaks disclosures of US State Department cables from February 2010. Last February 11, for example, EU climate action commissioner Connie Hedegaard told the US that the Alliance of Small Island States “could be our best allies’, given their need for financing.”
A few months earlier, the Maldives helped lead the campaign against low emissions targets such as those set in the Copenhagen Accord. But its leaders reversed course, apparently because of a $50 million aid package arranged by US deputy climate change envoy Jonathan Pershing. According to a February 23 cable, Pershing met the Maldives’ US ambassador, Abdul Ghafoor Mohamed, who told him that if ‘tangible assistance’ were given his country, then other affected countries would realise “the advantages to be gained by compliance” with Washington’s climate agenda.

The promised money is, however, in doubt. Hedegaard also noted with concern that some of the $30 billion in pledged North-South climate-related aid from 2010-2012 – e.g. from Tokyo and London, she said – would come in the form of loan guarantees, not grants. Pershing was not opposed to this practice, because “donors have to balance the political need to provide real financing with the practical constraints of tight budgets.”

Even while observing Washington’s tendency to break financial promises, Ethiopian prime minister Meles Zenawi, the leading African head of state on climate, was also unveiled by WikiLeaks as a convert to the Copenhagen Accord. This appeared to be the outcome of pressure applied by the US State Department, according to a February 2 cable, with Zenawi asking for more North-South resources in return.

**REDD as wedge**

Besides Bolivian leadership, the world’s best hope for contestation of these power relationships rests with civil society. Along with La Via Campesina network of peasant organizations, which attracted a Mexico-wide caravan and staged a militant march that nearly reached the airport access road on the morning of December 7 as heads of state flew into Cancun, the most visible poor peoples’ representatives were from the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN). On December 8, IEN spokesperson Tom Goldtooth was denied entry to the UN forum due to his high-profile role in non-violent protests.

According to Goldtooth, Cancun’s ‘betrayal’ is “the consequence of an ongoing US diplomatic offensive of backroom deals, arm-twisting and bribery that targeted nations in opposition to the Copenhagen Accord.” For Goldtooth, an ardent opponent of REDD, “Such strategies have already proved fruitless and have been shown to violate human and Indigenous rights. The agreements implicitly promote carbon markets, offsets, unproven technologies, and land grabs – anything but a commitment to real emissions reductions. Language ‘noting’ rights is exclusively in the context of market mechanisms, while failing to guarantee safeguards for the rights of peoples and communities, women and youth.”

The founder of watchdog NGO REDD-Monitor, Chris Lang, argues that attempts to reform the system failed because, first, “Protecting intact natural forest and restoring degraded natural forest is not a ‘core objective’ of the REDD deal agreed in
Cancun. We still don’t have a sensible definition of forests that would exclude industrial tree plantations, to give the most obvious example of how protecting intact natural forest isn’t in there – also ‘sustainable management of forests’ is in there, which translates as logging.”

Second, says Lang, “The rights and interests of indigenous peoples and forest communities are not protected in the Cancun REDD deal – they are demoted to an annex, with a note that ‘safeguards’ should be ‘promoted and supported’. That could mean anything governments want it to mean.”

During the Cancun negotiations, positioning on REDD came to signal whether climate activists were pro- or anti-capitalist, although a difficult in-between area was staked out by Greenpeace and the International Forum on Globalisation which both, confusingly, advocated a non-market REDD arrangement (as if the balance of forces would allow such). But they and their allies lost, and as Friends of the Earth chapters in Latin America and the Caribbean explained, “The new texts continue seeing forests as mere carbon reservoirs (sinks) and are geared towards emissions trading.”

In the same way, the Green Fund was promoted by World Bank president Robert Zoellick, whose highest-profile speech to a side conference promised to extend the REDD commodification principle to broader sectors of agriculture and even charismatic animals like tigers, in alliance with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. On December 8, protests demanded that the World Bank be evicted from climate financing, in part because under Zoellick the institution’s annual fossil fuel investments rose from $1.6 billion to $6.3 billion, and in part because the Bank promotes export-led growth, resource extraction, energy privatisation and carbon markets with unshaken neoliberal dogma.

According to Grace Garcia from Friends of the Earth Costa Rica, “Only a gang of lunatics would think it is a good idea to invite the World Bank to receive climate funds, with their long-standing track-record of financing the world’s dirtiest projects and imposition of death-sentencing conditionalities on our peoples.”

Unfortunately, however, some indigenous people’s groups and Third World NGOs do buy into REDD, and well-funded Northern allies such as the market-oriented Environmental Defense Fund have been using divide-and-conquer tactics to widen the gaps. The danger this presents is extreme, because the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) strategy set in place by Al Gore in 1997 – when he mistakenly (and self-interestedly) promised that the US would endorse the Kyoto Protocol if carbon trading was central to the deal – may well continue to fracture climate advocacy.

REDD is one of several blackmail tactics from the North, by which small sums are paid for projects such as tree-planting or forest conservation management. In some cases, as well as through CDMs such as methane-extraction from landfills, these
projects result in displacement of local residents or, in the case of Durban’s main CDM, the ongoing operation of a vast, environmentally-racist dump in the black neighbourhood of Bisasar Road, instead of its closure. Then the Northern corporations which buy the emissions credits can continue business-as-usual without making the major changes needed to solve the crisis.

**Climate debt and command-and-control**

Many critics of REDD and other CDMs, including Morales, put the idea of Climate Debt at the core of a replacement financing framework. They therefore demand that the carbon markets be decommissioned, because their fatal flaws include rising levels of corruption, periodic chaotic volatility, and extremely low prices inadequate to attract investment capital into renewable energy and more efficient transport. Such investments minimally would cost the equivalent of €50/tonne of carbon, but the European Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme fell from €30/tonne in 2008 to less than €10/tonne last year, and now hovers around €15/tonne. This makes it much cheaper for business to keep polluting than to restructure.

Having spent an afternoon at Cancun debating these points with the world’s leading carbon traders, I’m more convinced that the markets need closure so we can advance much more effective, efficient command-and-control systems. Rebutting, Henry Derwent, head of the International Emissions Trading Association (IETA), claimed that markets ended acid rain damage done by sulfur dioxide emissions. Yet in Europe during the early 1990s, state regulation was much more effective. Likewise, command-and-control worked well in the ozone hole emergency, when CFCs were banned by the Montreal Protocol starting in 1996.

The US Environmental Protection Agency now has command-and-control power over GreenHouseGas emissions, and its top administrator, Lisa Jackson, can alert around 10,000 major CO2 point sources that they must start cutting back immediately. But without more protest against the Agency, as pioneered by West Virginians demanding a halt to mountaintop coal removal, Jackson has said that she will only begin this process in 2013 (after Obama’s reelection campaign). On the bright side, IETA’s lead Washington official, David Hunter, confirmed to me that the US carbon markets were in the doldrums because of the Senate’s failure to pass cap-and-trade legislation this year. Thank goodness for Washington gridlock.

However, Washington’s Big Green groups have admitted that they pumped $300 million of foundation money into advocacy for congressional carbon trading, in spite of Climate Justice Now! members’ campaigning against this approach. Critique has included the film “The story of cap and trade” (www.storyofstuff.org), which over the past year had three quarters of a million views. The vast waste of money corresponded to a resource drought at the base.

In October, three well-resourced environmental groups – 350.org, Rainforest Action Network and Greenpeace – concluded that more direct action would be needed. It’s
happening already, of course. Two dozen US groups, including IEN, Grassroots Global Justice and Movement Generation, argued in an October 23 open letter that “Frontline communities, using grassroots, network-based, and actions-led strategies around the country have had considerable success fighting climate-polluting industries in recent years, with far less resources than the large environmental groups in Washington, D.C. These initiatives have prevented a massive amount of new industrial carbon from coming on board.”

**Climate justice instead of climate capitalism**

But by all accounts, one reason the climate capitalist fantasy moved ahead at Cancun so decisively was the fragmented nature of this kind of resistance. Crucial ideological and geographical divides were evident within Mexico’s progressive forces, a problem which must be avoided in the coming period as the healing of divisions over market-related strategies proceeds. Grassroots activists are unimpressed by Cancun’s last-gasp attempt at climate-capitalist revivalism.

Indeed, the limited prospects for elite environmental management of this crisis confirm how badly a coherent alternative is needed. Fortunately, the Peoples’ Agreement of Cochabamba emerged in April from a consultative meeting that drew 35 000 mainly civil society activists. The Cochabamba conference call includes:

- 50 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2017
- stabilising temperature rises to 1°C and 300 Parts Per Million
- acknowledging the climate debt owed by developed countries
- full respect for Human Rights and the inherent rights of indigenous people
- universal declaration of rights of Mother Earth to ensure harmony with nature
- establishment of an International Court of Climate Justice
- rejection of carbon markets and commodification of nature and forests through REDD
- promotion of measures that change the consumption patterns of developed countries
- end of intellectual property rights for technologies useful for mitigating climate change
- payment of 6 percent of developed countries’ GDP to addressing climate change

The analysis behind these demands has been worked out over the past few years. But now the challenge for climate justice movements across the world is to not only continue – and dramatically ratchet up – vibrant grassroots activism against major fossil fuel emissions and extraction sites, ranging from Alberta’s tar sands to the Ecuadoran Amazon to San Francisco refineries to the Niger Delta to West Virginia mountains to the Australian and South African coalfields. In addition, if Cancun revives financial markets for the purposes of Northern manipulation of the climate
debate, then Goldtooth’s warning is more urgent: “Industrialized nations, big business and unethical companies like Goldman Sachs will profit handsomely from the Cancun Agreements while our people die.”

Durban will offer the next big showdown between unworkable capitalist strategies on the one hand, and the interests of the masses of people and the planet’s environment. The latter have witnessed long histories of eco-social mobilization, such as the 2001 World Conference Against Racism which attracted a protest of 15,000 against Zionism and the UN’s failure to put reparations for slavey, colonialism and apartheid on the agenda.

It will be a challenge to maintain pressure against REDD and the carbon markets, but by next November it should be clear that neither will deliver the goods. Hence, as versed by Friends of the Earth International chair and Niger Delta activist Nnimmo Bassey, a winner of the Right Livelihood Award this year:

The outside will be the right side in Durban
What has been left undone
Will properly be done
Peoples’ sovereignty
Mass movement convergence
Something to look forward to!
Anatomies of environmental knowledge and resistance: Diverse climate justice movements and waning eco-neoliberalism

‘Climate Justice’ (CJ) is the name of the new movement that best fuses a variety of progressive political-economic and political-ecological currents in relation to the most serious threat humanity and most other species face in the 21st century. The time is opportune to dissect the process of knowledge production and resistance formation in relation to hegemonic climate policy making, in part because of the fracturing of elite power in an era of global state-failure and market-failure. The inability of global elite actors to solve major environmental, social and economic problems puts added emphasis on the need for a foundational CJ philosophy and ideology, principles, strategies and tactics. One challenge along that route is to establish the most appropriate CJ narratives (since a few are contraindicative to CJ broadly envisioned), what gaps exist in potential CJ constituencies, and which kinds of alliances are moving CJ forward, in what ways.

Birthing a Climate Justice movement

The first efforts to generate a climate advocacy movement in global civil society became the Climate Action Now (CAN) coalition of large environmental NGOs. From 1997, CAN arrived at what proved to be a false solution, namely that carbon trading was an inevitable part of greenhouse gas regulation, a myth broken in practice by the European Union’s Emission Trading Scheme failures (and also by the CAN breakaway by Friends of the Earth International in 2010). By the time of the Copenhagen Conference of Parties (COP), when the short film ‘Story of Cap and Trade’ (Leonard 2009) was launched (and in nine months subsequently recorded a million downloads), it was obvious that the main barrier to CJ within civil society had become CAN’s more civilized society. CJN! was able to make this case with sufficient force to gain half the space reserved for non-governmental delegations in Copenhagen’s Bella Centre in December 2009, an arrangement that will continue at the 2010 COP in Cancun, and presumably beyond.

The Copenhagen Summit crashed on 18-19 December when, at the last moment, a backroom deal was stitched together by Barack Obama (USA), Jacob Zuma (SA), Lula da Silva (Brazil), Manmohan Singh (India) and Wen Jiabao (China), designed to avoid needed emissions cuts (Müller 2010). Instead, the Copenhagen Accord delivered business-as-usual climate politics, biased towards fossil-fuel capital, heavy industry, the transport sector and overconsumers. As the leading US State Department climate negotiator, Todd Stern, explained when asked about the growing demand for recognition of Northern ‘climate debt’ liabilities, ‘The sense of guilt or culpability or reparations – I just categorically reject that’ (AP, 9 December 2009). In doing so, Stern rejected the foundational principle behind environmental economics: ‘polluter pays’.
CJ activists had entered this terrain with some demands that the global establishment simply would not meet: a 50 percent GHG emissions cut by 2020 and 90 percent commitment for 2050; payment of a rapidly rising ‘climate debt’ (in 2010, damages to Pakistan alone amounted to $50 billion) (Klein 2009, Bond 2010); and the decommissioning of the carbon markets so favoured by elites. As a result, the next stage of the CJ struggle was necessarily to retreat from the naively overambitious global reform agenda (politely asking Copenhagen and then Cancun delegates to save the planet) and instead to pick up direct action inspirations from several sites across the world – Nigerian and Ecuadorian oilfields, Australia’s main coal port, Britain’s coal-fired power stations and main airport, Canada’s tar sands, and US coalfields and corporate headquarters – where CJ was being seeded deep within the society. Some have called this the rise of the ‘poly-valent counter-hegemonic climate justice resistance movements’ (Dorsey 2010).

How did this transition from mere insider-lobbying to CJ politics occur? The CJ lineage includes 1990s environmental anti-racism (Dorsey, 2007); the late 1990s Jubilee movement against Northern financial domination of the South; the 2000s global justice movement (which came to the fore with the December 1999 Seattle World Trade Organisation protest); environmentalists and corporate critics who in 2004 started the Durban Group for Climate Justice (Lohmann 2006); the 2007 founding of the Climate Justice Now! (CJO) network; the 2009 rise of the European left’s Climate Justice Alliance in advance of the Copenhagen COP; the ongoing role of Third World Network in amplifying the critique by both South states and radical civil society in COP and related negotiations; the renewed direct-action initiatives that from 30 November 2009 generated the Mobilization for Climate Justice in the US and in 2010 drew in more mainstream groups like Greenpeace, Rainforest Action Network and 350.org; and, maybe most portentously, the Bolivian government-sponsored (but civil society-dominated) April 2010 ‘World Conference of Peoples on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth’ in Cochabamba. Shortly afterwards, the Detroit Social Forum began to consolidate a US movement led by people of colour. On October 12, 2010 (to counteract what in the US is known as ‘Columbus Day’ but represents European invasion of the hemisphere), the European-based Climate Justice Action network coordinated direct-action protests against climate-related targets in two dozen locales. In Cancun from 28 November-11 December 2010, an International Forum on Climate Justice was established to unite international forces.

Fused as CJ, these inter-related and often overlapping (although sometimes conflicting) traditions are mainly aimed at building (or serving) a mass-based popular movement bringing together ‘green’ and ‘red’ (or in the US, ‘blue’) politics. This entails articulating not only the urgency of reversing greenhouse gas emissions but also the need to transform our systems of materials extraction, transport and distribution, energy-generation, production of goods and services, consumption, disposal and financing. Some would go further with the CJ banner (e.g. those associated with the journals Capitalism Nature Socialism and Monthly Review), from a fossil-fuel-dependent capitalism to eco-socialism:
the realization of the ‘first-epoch’ socialisms of the twentieth century, in the context of the ecological crisis... a transformation of needs, and a profound shift toward the qualitative dimension and away from the quantitative... a withering away of the dependency upon fossil fuels integral to industrial capitalism. And this in turn can provide the material point of release of the lands subjugated by oil imperialism, while enabling the containment of global warming, along with other afflictions of the ecological crisis... The generalization of ecological production under socialist conditions can provide the ground for the overcoming of the present crises. A society of freely associated producers does not stop at its own democratization. It must, rather, insist on the freeing of all beings as its ground and goal (Kovel and Lowy, 2001: 3-5).

Before such a vision can be properly articulated, two critical missing elements must be accounted for: a stronger labour input, particularly given the potential for ‘Green Jobs’ to make up for existing shortfalls; and a connection between climate justice and anti-war movements, given that military activity is not only disproportionately concerned with supplies of oil and gas (Iraq and Afghanistan) but also uses vast amounts of CO2 in the prosecution of war (Smolker, 2010). But against eco-socialist orientations, not only are anarchists in the CJ movement suspicious of central planning.

**Climate controversies and wedge issues**

There are, as well, five ideological positions that have variously sought to claim CJ but that are not oriented (first and foremost) to movement-building:

- a Rawlsian ‘Greenhouse Development Rights’ technical calculation of per capita GHG emissions (by the NGO Ecoequity, with echoes in ‘Contraction & Convergence’ expansions/reductions and GHG ‘budget-sharing’) which aims to distribute the ‘right to pollute’ (and then let underpolluters sell their surplus rights via some form of carbon trading) (Athanasiou and Baer 2010);

- an emphasis on South-North justice primarily within interstate diplomatic negotiations over climate, as advanced especially by the South Centre and Third World Network, as well as the Bolivian government albeit with an awareness that the April 2010 Cochabamba meeting made demands on world elites far beyond their willingness to concede (Tandon 2009);

- an orientation to the semi-periphery’s right/need to industrialise, via the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) (Jomo K.S. 2010);
the use of CJ rhetoric by former UN Human Rights Commission director and Irish president Mary Robinson (2010), whose agenda for a new Dublin foundation appears solely situated within the ‘elite’ circuitry of global governance and international NGOs, in which ‘climate justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centered approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly’; and

• attempts to incorporate within CJ politics a commitment to carbon markets, especially through the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) projects (Spash 2010).

It may be premature to judge, but even setting aside repeated conflicts with the CJ movement’s own grassroots forces, it seems that these latter strands, drawing upon varying degrees of technicist-redistributionist, Third Worldist, Keynesian, or global-elitist experiences and aspirations, do not hold out much opportunity for success given the extremely adverse balance of forces at the world scale. Most of these latter five CJ projects’ ambitions play out at elite levels, primarily within UN negotiations. The problem for elite-level strategies is that the last time a sense of global-state coherence was achieved in addressing a world-scale problem was when the 1996 Montreal Protocol on chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) banned emissions outright, in order to prevent growth of the hole in the ozone layer. Since then, there was no progress on any other substantive top-down front, in part because of the decline of global social democrats (of the Willy Brandt type) and rise of neoliberals (1980s-90s) and then neoconservatives (2000s), and sometimes – as in the case of World Bank president Robert Zoellick, considered in detail below – a fusion. Hence we can label the current era as one of global-state failure, simultaneous with an historic failure of the financial markets that at one point eco-neoliberal technicists had relied upon, through carbon trading, to solve the climate crisis.

Nevertheless, for some eco-neoliberal specialists who carry out climate and development advocacy mainly within multilateral institutions or from international NGOs, especially in New York, Washington, London and Geneva, commitments to top-down approaches are held with an almost religious fervor. To recall an analogy once evoked by George and Sabelli (1994), supranational, non-democratic, elite institutions have ‘doctrine, a rigidly structured hierarchy preaching and imposing this doctrine and a quasi-religious mode of self-justification.’ Unsurprisingly, the aforementioned five approaches to CJ are at times advanced directly at odds with grassroots forces which tired of the futility of global-scale reform. In February 2010, for example, a controversy broke out in civil society regarding one civil society group whose initial desire for a negotiating stance in Geneva included a petition with several controversial positions: promotion of the Kyoto Protocol (due to its common but differentiated responsibilities position) notwithstanding the treaty’s very weak emissions cuts; a 2 degree (not 1 degree) centigrade temperature rise (considered unacceptable within the CJ movement); and an implicit endorsement of offsets and other private sector financing arrangements in spite of the failures of
private offset arrangements and the broader carbon market. The petition was changed after an uproar within the Climate Justice Now! network.

Later in 2010, further controversies emerged over the extent to which REDD would become a wedge issue within the CJ camp, given the vast resources being mobilized by major US environmentally-oriented foundations to resurrect market strategies. The seeds of the controversy were sown in late 2009 and in the aftermath of Copenhagen. Several American based, pro-REDD funders came together under the auspices of the US based Meridian Institute, a mediator-oriented think-tank that ‘regularly’ assembles ‘government officials, business leaders, scientists, foundation executives, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations’ to ‘facilitate internal consensus’. The private foundations Meridian brought together included ClimateWorks, David and Lucile Packard, Ford and Gordon and Betty Moore. These foundations committed to begin making grants in support of REDD projects under an umbrella group called the Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA) in early 2010. Meridian’s market-inspired, corporatist approach is not unprecedented. In late 2006 and early 2007 Meridian was the sole facilitating and mediating institution behind the creation of the US Climate Action Partnership. The Partnership assembled well over $200 million to support efforts by pro-market environmental organizations and major corporations to advocate for market-based solutions in recent US climate change legislation, which subsequently failed to pass the US Congress in 2010.

The CLUA sphere of influence is not confined to the US. By June 2010 CLUA members, heads of state, influential ministers and representatives from 55 countries convened in Norway for the Oslo Climate and Forest Conference. The conference aimed to endorse and launch the post-Kyoto REDD effort, dubbed the ‘Interim REDD+ Partnerships’. By the meeting’s end, with the largest contribution from the Norwegian government, some $4 billion was committed to support developing country involvement in REDD. Yet some argue that CLUA foundations and key actors that control the Interim REDD+ Partnerships process utilize a kind of divide-and-rule strategy. According to some sources, organizations that support and do not question any aspects of proto-REDD projects are lavished with funds; while those that have question REDD projects have been marginalized from even participating in many key of meetings on the matter. In a September 2010 letter, 34 non-governmental organizations from 20 countries issued a complaint to the co-chairs of the Interim REDD+ Partnership:

The modalities proposed so far by the Partnership do not satisfy the minimum requirements for effective participation and consultation, and therefore we urge that the workplan include a process to develop concrete and effective procedures to ensure proper participation and input to the Partnership initiatives. Simply using a mailing list that has been put together randomly, including organisations that are not working on REDD and excluding key actors, notably indigenous peoples organisations, is not an acceptable way to pretend that stakeholders are engaged in an effective and fair manner.
Tensions between the CJ approach and the group of NGOs comprising the Climate Action Network and 1 Sky continue, over whether legislative lobbying, social marketing and top-down coordination of consciousness-raising activities without further strategic substance (e.g. TckTckTck in 2009) are more appropriate advocacy methodologies than bottom-up linkage of organic climate activism. In a letter to 1 Sky in October 2010, a group self-described as ‘grassroots and allied organizations representing racial justice, indigenous rights, economic justice, immigrant rights, youth organizing and environmental justice communities’ listed some of the direct action and community organizing victories over prior months:

- **Stopping King Coal with Community Organizing:** The Navajo Nation, led by a Dine’ (Navajo) and Hopi grassroots youth movement, forced the cancellation of a Life of Mine permit on Black Mesa, AZ, for the world’s largest coal company – Peabody Energy. Elsewhere in the U.S. community-based groups in Appalachia galvanized the youth climate movement in their campaigns to stop mountain-top removal coal mining, and similar groups in the Powder River Basin have united farmers and ranchers against the expansion of some of the world’s largest coal deposits.

- **Derailing the Build-out of Coal Power:** Nearly two thirds of the 151 new coal power plant proposals from the Bush Energy Plan have been cancelled, abandoned or stalled since 2007 - largely due to community-led opposition. A recent example of this success is the grassroots campaign of Dine’ grassroots and local citizen groups in the Burnham area of eastern Navajo Nation, NM that have prevented the creation of the Desert Rock coal plant, which would have been the third such polluting monolith in this small, rural community. Community-based networks such as the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Energy Justice Network and the Western Mining Action Network have played a major role in supporting these efforts to keep the world’s most climate polluting industry at bay.

- **Preventing the Proliferation of Incinerators:** In the last 12 years, no new waste incinerators (which are more carbon-intensive than coal and one of the leading sources of cancer-causing dioxins) have been built in the US, and hundreds of proposals have been defeated by community organizing. In 2009 alone, members of the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives prevented dozens of municipal waste incinerators, toxic waste incinerators, tire incinerators and biomass incinerators from being built, and forced Massachusetts to adopt a moratorium on incineration.

- **Defeating Big Oil In Our Own Backyards:** A community-led coalition in Richmond, CA, has, stopped the permitting of Chevron’s refinery expansion in local courts. This expansion of the largest oil refinery on the west coast is part of a massive oil and gas sector expansion focused on importing heavy,
high-carbon intensive crude oil from places like the Canada’s Tar Sands. This victory demonstrates that with limited resources, community-led campaigns can prevail over multi-million dollar PR and lobby campaigns deployed by oil companies like Chevron, when these strategies are rooted in organizing resistance in our own backyards. REDOIL, (Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands) an Alaska Native grassroots network, has been effective at ensuring the Native community-based voice is in the forefront of protecting the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. Together with allies, REDOIL has also prevented Shell from leasing the Alaska outer continental shelf for offshore oil exploration and drilling. Advancing recognition of culture, subsistence and food sovereignty rights of Alaska Natives within a diverse and threatened aquatic ecosystem has been at the heart of their strategy.

- Stopping False Solutions like Mega Hydro: Indigenous communities along the Klamath River forced Pacificorp Power company to agree to ‘Undam the Klamath’ by the year 2020, in order to restore the river’s natural ecosystems, salmon runs and traditional land-use capacity. For decades, Indigenous communities have been calling out false solutions - pointing to the fact that energy technologies that compromise traditional land-use, public health and local economies cannot be considered climate solutions.

- Building Resilient Communities through Local Action: In communities all over the US, frontline communities are successfully winning campaigns linking climate justice to basic survival:
  - In San Antonio, Texas, the Southwest Workers Union led the fight to divert $20 billion dollars from nuclear energy into renewable energy and energy efficiency. In addition, they launched a free weatherization program for low-income families and a community run organic farm.
  - In Oakland, California, the Oakland Climate Action Coalition is leading the fight for an aggressive Climate Energy and Action Plan that both addresses climate disruption and local equity issues (Movement Generation et al, 2010:2).

The activists’ letter accused the mainstream of systemic, destructive failure:

A decade of advocacy work, however well intentioned, migrated towards false solutions that hurt communities and compromised on key issues such as carbon markets and giveaways to polluters. These compromises sold out poor communities in exchange for weak targets and more smokestacks that actually prevent us from getting anywhere close to what the science – and common sense – tells us is required (Movement Generation et al, 2010:2).

These struggles are not limited to seemingly rival grassroots social movements and mainstream organizations. Funders too, are also divided on which
constituencies to support and at what levels; and variously divide and gather those same constituencies. In contrast with the foundations that support the pro-market, corporatist CLUA effort described above, in a letter dated 10 September 2010 the ‘Climate equity working group chairs’ for the Funders Network on Trade and Globalization (FNTG), along with the FNTG Coordinator entered into the grassroots versus 1Sky debate. In a letter to the 1Sky leadership they point out:

Given our agreement on the need for increasing investments in fossil-fuel infrastructure resistance struggles and more broadly building the power of grassroots movements, we would like to work with you in developing a strategic dialogue between 1Sky and our key movement partners to meet these goals. They, and we, undoubtedly have much to learn from each other.

Contrast this with the revelation at the 2009 US Environmental Grantmakers Association meeting in Alaska, that less than 2% of all recorded funds from US private foundations went to address unfolding climate change in Africa — where many researchers concur that the adverse effects of climate change will be most severe.\(^1\) Accordingly the battle for justice based climate policy is as much a derivative of movement and organizational dynamics and struggles, as it is subject to passing whims, fads and frenzies of private foundation capital — which, at present, is, overwhelmingly American\(^2\).

These kinds of controversies are logical to expect insofar as huge pressures are mounting, North-South and environment-development tensions are often extreme, neoliberal financial forces continue to dominate the mainstream elite framework, and CJ movements across the world have not solidified a coherent set of tactics, much less strategy, principles, ideology and foundational philosophy. This is not the space to explore that shortcoming, but suffice to say that the wedge between most of the movement-oriented CJ activities and those from the five other CJ approaches noted above will continue to grow, in part because use of carbon markets is one of the defining differences between CJ and mainstream climate mitigation strategies.

**Failure of the elite model**

One reason for ongoing tension, as made clear by global climate negotiations experiences since Bali in 2007, is that investment of enormous NGO lobbying efforts into elite processes is one sign of variance from CJ grassroots energies, for a scan of global governance reform efforts reminds us of consistent failure. The World Bank

---

1 A staffer from the Consultative Group on Biological Diversity, the ‘premier professional association of foundation executives and trustees who make environmental grants’ revealed this in a discussion with funders during the course of the 2009 Environmental Grantmakers meeting.
2 Richard Branson’s War Room and nascent philanthropic efforts in India, are two of a growing number of exceptions.
and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Annual Meetings were exemplars of merely trivial reforms (for example, subimperial countries’ voting power rising a bit, with most of Africa’s and other poor countries’ voting shares actually falling, as witnessed at the G20 in October 2010). The reformers’ inability to budge the Bretton Woods ideological status quo was demonstrated when even a mild-mannered ‘Post-Washington Consensus’ gambit was introduced in early 1998, but within twenty months, its champion, Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, was fired. Similarly the UN Millennium Development Goals launched in 2000 proved illusory especially for Africa, in no small part because the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Bretton Woods Institutions were crucial intermediaries for MDG delivery. The WTO itself went into apparently terminal decline after the 1999 Seattle summit meltdown, the overhyped 2001 ‘Doha Agenda’ and the failed Cancun summit of 2003 – with no subsequent progress to report.

On the global currency and credit fronts, in addition to failed World Bank and IMF reform (Goldman 2005, 2007), none of the five main processes designed to shore up a cracking international financial architecture mustered the clout required to control footloose financiers: the Monterrey Financing for Development summit in 2002; various Basel Bank for International Settlements risk and capital re-ratings during the late 2000s; the G20 global financial reregulation talkshops of 2008-09; Stiglitz’s 2008-09 United Nations commission on reform; and French-German advocacy of an international financial transactions tax (George 2009, 2010, 2011). Such reregulation can only be built in a sturdy way based upon state power over finance in national settings, but the two leading national capitals for world banking – Washington and London – were run by the Democratic Party and Labour Party deregulators during the periods of greatest financial industry vulnerability, and hence there was only insubstantial regulation, as witnessed by the rapid return to superprofits and bonuses at Goldman Sachs and the other vast banks from 2009.

With climate change bound to generate more warring of the Darfur type, i.e., the kind where climate strained and stressed natural resource problems cyclically exacerbate conflict, it is especially disturbing that global governance is also failing on the security front, with renewed wars in Central Asia and the Middle East starting in October 2001 meant to last, as former US vice president Dick Cheney confessed, apparently forever. German, Japanese, Indian, Brazilian and African attempts to widen the UN Security Council failed decisively in 2005. Meanwhile North-South ‘global apartheid’ wealth gaps grew even more extreme, especially when G8 aid promises were broken; African countries hopes had been raised by the Gleneagles Summit of 2005, but then dashed when neither aid transfers nor debt relief were carried out with a genuine sense of shifting economic power.

Finally, the most decisive blow to the idea of global governance was the failure of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, as demonstrated by the 2009 Copenhagen Accord. The international carbon market was founded when, then US vice-president Al Gore in 1997 at Kyoto effectively misled other global climate managers into thinking Washington would sign the Protocol if US firms were given permission to keep
polluting at planet-threatening rates, through offsetting their emissions with trades and Clean Development Mechanism investments (Lohmann 2006, Spash 2010). Zoellick’s World Bank still strongly promotes carbon markets, even though they contain so much corruption, speculation and incompetence that the carbon price crashed from a high of €33/tonne in mid-2008 to €13 after the Copenhagen Summit, and on two European markets all the way down to €1.50 after yet more fraud scandals in March 2010 (Dorsey and Whittington 2010).

Continued volatility on various international financial fronts is especially worrisome for those championing carbon market approaches. Indeed, as shown by the recent financial meltdown’s ongoing contagion into the European Union, there is not only a global-state regulatory failure in financial markets but an extraordinary hubris still evident, insofar as Goldman Sachs and many other institutions harbour ambitions that a global carbon market can address climate change. In the early part of the 21st century, eco-neoliberals explained that the Emissions Trading Scheme’s repeated crashes, fraud and irrational features were because it was an ‘immature’ market. However, as carbon markets mature they are increasingly characterised by crime, corruption, institutional malfeasance and incompetence. These problems increasingly appear to be systemic. Since the conclusion of the first phase of the world’s largest formal carbon market (the EU-ETS) in 2007, carbon market crime has cost the market no less than €5 billion. Since the last quarter of 2009, analysis from the Climate Justice Research Project at Dartmouth College reveals that nearly 90% of publicly-known incidences of fraud took place during the ‘mature market’ stage after the end of phase one. Contrary to theoretical predictions and official proclamations, as the formal carbon market matures, without proper oversight, criminal activity, corruption and ethical malfeasance are on the rise (Chart 1) (Dorsey and Whittington, 2010).

Chart 1: Fraud and enforcement in carbon markets

Source: Dorsey and Whittington 2010.
These examples add up to a devastating conclusion: that the contemporary global elite cannot properly diagnose the extreme economic (trade/finance/migration), geopolitical, environmental and legitimacy crises that afflict the world, much less mobilize the political will and capital needed to fix the problems (Bond 2009). Efforts by the five teams of insider elite strategists, no matter their claim of CJ sensibilities or how talented they package the advocacy, will in this context inevitably bump up against a low ceiling, at least for the foreseeable future. At its most dangerous, elite jockeying in the realm of climate policy making runs the risk of marginalizing social movements, curtailing proverbial direct democracy and undermining social and political moves toward energy sovereignty. Increasingly the harms of broken carbon markets, off-set scheme frauds, *inter alia*, are socialized across and over tax-payers, while the benefits are privatized to a shrinking set of would-be climate-catastrophe profiteers.

So it is to the more direct ways in which CJ activism confronts its targets that we turn for inspiration. While the international CJ movement rose rapidly and has a lifespan only as long as its activists stay focused, nevertheless it combines a variety of political-economic and political-ecological theories, scale politics, and single-issue constituencies (Ziser and Sze 2007, Dawson 2009). The extreme challenge of mobilizing on an issue that in temporal and spatial terms is of great distance from the most implicated constituencies – the corporations, governments and citizens of Northern industrial countries – suggests the need for common targets, narratives, strategies, tactics and alliances. To this end, an example of a campaign that gained more from losing than it would have from winning is the effort in early 2010 to prevent the World Bank’s largest-ever project loan to the world’s fourth-largest coal-fired power plant, at Medupi. (Had the campaign against the World Bank won, the project would still have gone ahead with private financing.) The death of a campaign in South Africa in 2010 suggests potential areas for building CJ politics in years to come, especially against the single major financier of fossil fuel across the globe, the World Bank.

**Death of a South African CJ campaign**

We learn a great deal about the CJ terrain by examining a crucial campaign – unsuccessful in the short term – which entailed fighting the World Bank’s fast-growing coal portfolio. On April 8 2010, after nearly two months of strenuous lobbying against more fossil fuel credits, the Bank Board approved a $3.75 billion loan to the South African electricity utility Eskom. Its main purpose (for which $3.1 billion was allocated) is to build a power station that will pump 25-30 megatonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere annually, more than the output of 115 countries. Paying for Medupi will require a 127% real price increase from 2007-12 for South African household electricity consumers (to nearly $0.15/kiloWatt hour).

The loan was a last-minute request, as the 2008-09 global financial turmoil dried up Eskom’s potential private sector financing. As a result, it was only in December 2009
that South African civil society activated local and global networks against the loan, starting with a groundwork/Earthlife briefing document in December 2009. Within three months, more than 200 organisations across the world had endorsed a critique of the loan (http://www.earthlife.org.za/?p=858). South Durban activists launched the local public campaign on February 16 2010 with a spirited protest at Eskom’s main local branch. South Durban was an epicentre of protest against fossil fuels, given that it hosted the largest and least responsible petro-chemical firms south of the Niger Delta. With electricity prices soaring, many more residents in South Durban were being disconnected. They often reconnect illegally and as Eskom and the municipality clamped down, the result was more social strife, in a country with what is probably the world’s highest rate of community protest (http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?2,27,3,1858). To establish a campaign against an obscure World Bank loan so quickly, with the purpose of generating a profound crisis of confidence at the World Bank and in Pretoria, required clarity of message, an explicit demand (‘stop Medupi financing’) and a variety of issue-linkages to pull various constituencies into a coalition.

As always, the question is who wins and who loses? First, the source areas of the coal for Medupi are highly contaminated by mercury and acid-mine drainage, with air, land, vegetables, animals and people’s health at much greater risk. Forty new coal mines in impoverished areas of Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces will be opened to provide inputs to Medupi and its successor, Kusile. This will create a few coal sector jobs (hence receiving endorsement from the National Union of Mineworkers), but a great many jobs in agriculture and tourism will be lost as a result of the invasive mining activity and downstream degradation. Medupi itself will be built in a water-scarce area where communities are already confronting extreme mining pollution and, even though an air-cooled model (Africa’s first) was chosen, the cost of supplying an additional water-cooling supply amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars, given the long transport and pumping costs.

Once the coal is burned and electricity generated, the winners and losers become even more divergent. Medupi’s main beneficiaries will be the world’s largest metals and mining corporations, especially BHP Billiton (Melbourne based) and various Anglo American subsidiaries (most reporting to London), which already receive the world’s cheapest electricity thanks to multi-decade deals. Anger soon grew about the huge discounts made when secret, forty-year ‘Special Pricing Agreements’ were offered by Eskom during late apartheid, when the firm had a third too much excess capacity due to the long South African economic decline. These agreements were finally leaked in March 2010 and disclosed that BHP Billiton and Anglo were receiving the world’s cheapest electricity, at less than $0.02/kWh (whereas the overall corporate price was around $0.05/kWh, still the world’s cheapest, and the consumer price was around $0.10/kWh). In early April, just before the Bank decision, Eskom announced that a small modification was made to BHP Billiton’s contract price but it was reportedly to the firm’s ‘advantage’. Finally, however, the Australian based mining house was sufficiently intimidated by the glare of publicity that in October 2010 Deutsche Bank mining analysts predicted BHP would dispose
of Richards Bay assets. According to Business Day (2010) ‘The reason for selling the aluminium smelters would be the scrutiny under which BHP’s electricity contracts have come amid demands for resource companies to use less power.’

An additional problem with BHP and Anglo as beneficiaries is the outflow of profits to Melbourne and London, at a time South Africa’s current account deficit made it the world’s most risky middle-income country, according to The Economist (25 February 2009). Moreover, South Africa had an existing $75 billion foreign debt, which would escalated by five percent with the Bank loan. The 1994 foreign debt was just $25 billion, and First National Bank projected that the ratio of foreign debt to GDP would by 2011 rise to the same level as was reached in 1985, when a debt crisis compelled a default (on $13 billion), a signal that business and banking were finally breaking ranks with the apartheid regime.

Another controversial aspect of the loan was the Bank’s articulation of the privatization agenda. The confirmation that Eskom would offer private generating capacity to Independent Power Producers was established in loan documentation, in relation to the renewable component, advancing Eskom’s desire to privatize 30 percent of generating capacity (including a 49 percent private share in Kusile, although no private interest had been expressed for Medupi). This component attracted explicit opposition from trade unions – especially the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa - and consumers.

Corruption was another feature that generated critiques of the World Bank by South African opposition political parties (especially the centre-left Independent Democrats and liberal Democratic Alliance, which subsequently merged) and the influential liberal Business Day newspaper. These organizations opposed the loan because contrary to supposed Bank anti-corruption policies, it will directly fund African National Congress (ANC) ruling party coffers. Medupi will be built with Hitachi boilers that in turn kick back between $10 and $100 million (the amount is still unclear) thanks to an ANC investment in Hitachi. As the Eskom-Hitachi deal was signed, Eskom chairperson Valli Moosa was also a member of the ANC’s finance committee. A government investigation released in March 2010 found his conduct in this conflict of interest to be ‘improper’. The ANC promised to sell the investment stake, but this dragged on and in late 2010 was still not complete. Ironically, in February 2010, the Bank had issued a major statement alongside its annual African Development Indicators, entitled ‘Quiet Corruption’, in which it blamed African teachers and healthcare workers for moonlighting (a result of Bank structural adjustment policies).

Finally, the matter of historic racial injustice could not be ignored. The World Bank’s financing of apartheid began just three years after the 1948 election of the Afrikaners’ Nationalist Party, lasting through 1967, and included $100 million for Eskom. During that period, the Bank financed the supply of electricity to no black households (who only began receiving electricity in 1980), and instead empowered only white businesses and residences (Bond 2003).
Curiously, South African Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan argued, on April 1 2010, that ‘South Africa, in 16 years of democracy, never has had to take any loans from the World Bank… This is an opportunity for the World Bank to build a relationship with South Africa.’ Yet the Bank’s 1999 and 2008 ‘Country Assistance Strategy’ documents show conclusively that Medupi is the 15th credit since 1994. As for ‘building a relationship’, Gordhan also neglected that the Bank coauthored the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (homegrown structural adjustment) programme, whose orthodox strategies failed and which led South Africa to overtake Brazil as the world’s most unequal major country, as black incomes fell below 1994 levels and white incomes grew by 24% within fifteen years, according to official statistics.

Indeed the Bank itself regularly bragged about its ‘Knowledge Bank’ role in South Africa, and in 1999, for example, after Bank economist John Roome suggested to then water minister Kader Asmal that the government impose ‘a credible threat of cutting service’ to people who cannot afford water, the Bank’s Country Assistance Strategy reported that its ‘market-related pricing’ advice was ‘instrumental in facilitating a radical revision in SA’s approach’. As a result, the cholera epidemic the following year – catalysed by water disconnections near Richards Bay - killed hundreds. Predictions are easy to make, given the huge price increases faced by electricity customers, that parallel misery will follow the Bank’s Medupi loan. And it is here, in questioning the World Bank’s ability to reform away from its fossil fuel portfolio and extreme market-based orientation, that the CJ movement came to the conclusion in 2010 that the Bank should have no role in climate-related financing. One reason was the institution’s leadership, a model of climate injustice.

**Robert Zoellick as exemplar of elite failure and climate injustice**

Robert Zoellick, the 58-year old World Bank president, replaced Paul Wolfowitz, who in 2007 was forced to resign due to nepotism. US foreign policy analyst Tom Barry (2005) recalled how, ideologically, Zoellick stood hand in hand with Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Wolfowitz, John Bolton, John Negroponte and the other neoconservatives:

> Zoellick was perhaps the first Bush associate to introduce the concept of evil into the construct of Bush’s radical overhaul of US grand strategy. A year before Bush was inaugurated, Zoellick wrote: ‘A modern Republican foreign policy recognizes that there is still evil in the world - people who hate America and the ideas for which it stands.’

Zoellick is of interest to the CJ movement not only as a neocon (given the relationship of militarism to climate change), but because he represents a global trend of Empire in crisis since the Millennium, featuring at least three traits which he brings to climate negotiations. First is the ideological fusion of neoconservatism and neoliberalism that Zoellick shares with his predecessor Wolfowitz. Both strains
are bankrupt, by any reasonable accounting, given the failure of the Bush petro-militarist agenda of imposing ‘democracy’, and the 2008-present financial meltdown catalysed by neoliberal deregulation. Representing the former, Zoellick was at the outset a member of the Project for a New American Century, as early as January 1998 going on record in a letter coauthored with a score of other leading neocons to then president Bill Clinton that Iraq should be illegally overthrown. The petro-military complex is a major contributor to climate change via direct emissions, has a strong interest in the invasion (or imperial policing) of territories with fossil fuel resources, and has been the key source for financing climate denialism (Smolker 2010). It is therefore crucial for the CJ movement to reach out to a global anti-imperialist network that, notwithstanding failures to halt the US and allied invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, did manage the world’s largest-ever anti-war protest, on 15 February 2003, when more than fifteen million participated.

As for the latter ideology, the ‘Washington Consensus’, Zoellick had long advocated and practiced the core strategy of financial deregulation, no matter its devastating consequences. The extension of financial securitization into the climate, via carbon markets, was as prone to failure as the packaging of real estate loans and associated instruments. As a result, after the 2007-08 meltdown of securitized home mortgages in the US undermined neoliberalism’s ideological hegemony, Zoellick and IMF managing director Dominique Strauss-Kahn spent 2009 beating a hasty retreat from the austerity-oriented economics their institutions intrinsically favor, so as to maintain global effective demand with crony-Keynesianism during capitalist crisis. Yet by 2010 it was evident in sites as formerly wealthy as California, Greece, Ireland and Britain, that the Washington Consensus was only temporarily in retreat. Moreover, it was Zoellick’s embrace of eco-neoliberalism that would maintain Bank promotion of carbon markets, notwithstanding his attempts to disguise the financial agenda with triumphantist 2010 speeches about ‘Democratizing Development Economics’ and ‘The End of the Third World?’ (Zoellick 2010a, 2010b). A final feature of neoliberal economic policy is the desire to lock in financialization and the resulting strategy of austerity, and it was therefore not out of character for Zoellick (2010c) to promote ‘gold as an international reference point of market expectations about inflation, deflation and future currency values.... Although textbooks may view gold as the old money, markets are using gold as an alternative monetary asset today.’ This view, according to University of California economist Brad de Long (2010), a Clinton-era Treasury official, was Zoellick’s ‘play for the stupidest man alive crown’, because ‘The last thing that the world economy needs right now is another source of deflation in a financial crisis. And attaching the world economy’s price level to an anchor that central banks cannot augment at need is another source of deflation--we learned that in the fifteen years after World War I.’

The second trait of interest to CJ politics is Zoellick’s inability to arrange the global-scale deals required to either solve climate crises or gracefully manage the US Empire’s smooth dismantling. This was witnessed in the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO’s) demise, on his 2001-05 watch as the US Trade Representative. Zoellick’s inability to forge consensus for capital’s larger agenda was on display at the Cancun
ministerial summit in 2003, in disputes with the European Union over the US genetic engineering fetish, and in his insistence upon bilateral and regional alternatives to multilateralism, which generated durable anti-Washington economic sentiment across Latin America. Then, as one of the most senior Bush Administration officials in 2005-06, second-in-command at the State Department, Zoellick achieved practically no improvement to Washington’s wrecked image abroad. And as Bank president, appointed after Wolfowitz’s fall by Bush, Zoellick’s efforts during the 2008-09 G20 deliberations on the world economy and at the December 2009 UN Copenhagen climate summit were equally unsuccessful. If Zoellick continues clinging to the core financialization agenda of the US empire, the discarding of carbon markets in favour of genuine solutions to the climate crisis will take much longer.

The third trait, at a more profound level, was Zoellick’s tendency to deal with economic and ecological crises by ‘shifting’ and ‘stalling’ them, while ‘stealing’ from those least able to defend. As a theoretical aside, the shifting-stalling-stealing strategy (Bond 2010) is at the heart of the problem, and can be summed up in David Harvey’s (2003) phrase: ‘accumulation by dispossession’. This stage arrives when capital exhausts the options it usually has to address economic crises through traditional means: work speed-up (absolute surplus value), replacing workers with machines (relative surplus value), shifting the problems around geographically (the ‘spatial fix’), and building up vast debt and blowing speculative bubbles so as to stall crises until later (the ‘temporal fix’). At this stage, capital needs to also loot the non-capitalist spheres of society and nature through extra-economic, imperialist techniques, as described by Rosa Luxemburg (1913) a century ago in *The Accumulation of Capital* and more recently by Naomi Klein (2007) in *Shock Doctrine*. Carbon markets are a classic case of shifting-stalling-stealing, since they move the challenge of emissions cuts to the South (hence preventing industrialization), they permit a financialised futures-market approach – no matter how fanciful - to preventing planet-threatening climate change, and by ‘privatising the air’ (through carving up the atmosphere to sell as carbon credits) the maintenance of an exploitative relationship between capital and non-capitalist spheres is crucial to Zoellick’s agenda. To shift-stall-steal in his various positions since achieving international prominence in 2001, Zoellick’s neocon-neolib worldview provided cover, yet only up to a point, which we now appear to be reaching. That point comes sooner than later in part because the institutions needed to keep the game in play are cracking up.

To illustrate this problem of institutional incapacity, consider the fate of several major US financiers: Fannie Mae, Enron, Alliance Capital and Goldman Sachs. These were all crucial US imperial financial institutions, instrumental in generating the fictitious capital in real estate, energy and other sectors which proved so important to the Clinton-Bush era’s internal displacement and eventual amplification of crises.

First, Fannie Mae was led by Zoellick - its mid-1990s executive vice president – into dangerous real estate circuitry after his stint as a senior aide in James Baker’s Treasury, at one point Deputy Assistant Secretary for Financial Institutions Policy
just prior to the 1988-90 Savings&Loan (S&L) crisis, itself a function of the financial-deregulatory era that gave us mortgage-backed securities. Fannie Mae was soon so far in the red due to subprime lending through those securities, that a massive state bailout was needed in 2008. (And Baker also found Zoellick invaluable when he served as the Texan’s main assistant during the notorious December 2000 presidential vote recount in Florida, destructive of those last vestiges of US democracy, thanks to the open racism and right-wing bullying of Zoellick’s assistants.) Enron, the second of these financial firms, which cracked in 2002, boasted Zoellick as a senior political and economic advisor in 1999. Records are not available as to how implicated Zoellick was in Enron’s gambles, so painful to Californians (subject to extreme electricity price manipulations) and investors (who suffered Kenneth Lay’s illegal share price manipulation). However, as Board member of the third firm, Alliance Capital, Zoellick was party to late 1990s oversight of its investments in Enron which led to multiple fraud lawsuits and vast losses for Alliance’s clients, including the state of Florida, led by Jeb Bush.

The fourth bank, Goldman Sachs, which Zoellick served as a leading international official in 2006-07, did well only through morally-questionable and allegedly-illegal deals, followed by crony-suffused bailouts linking Bush/Obama administration officials Hank Paulson, Ben Bernanke, Tim Geithner and Larry Summers. For the CJ movement this is important, not only because ‘The world’s most powerful investment bank is a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money’, as Matt Taibbi (2009) put it:

The new carbon-credit market is a virtual repeat of the commodities-market casino that’s been kind to Goldman, except it has one delicious new wrinkle: If the plan goes forward as expected, the rise in prices will be government-mandated. Goldman won’t even have to rig the game. It will be rigged in advance... The bank owns a 10 percent stake in the Chicago Climate Exchange, where the carbon credits will be traded. Moreover, Goldman owns a minority stake in Blue Source LLC, a Utah-based firm that sells carbon credits of the type that will be in great demand if the bill passes... Goldman is ahead of the headlines again, just waiting for someone to make it rain in the right spot. Will this market be bigger than the energy-futures market? ‘Oh, it’ll dwarf it,’ says a former staffer on the House energy committee. Well, you might say, who cares? If cap-and-trade succeeds, won’t we all be saved from the catastrophe of global warming? Maybe -- but cap-and-trade, as envisioned by Goldman, is really just a carbon tax structured so that private interests collect the revenues. Instead of simply imposing a fixed government levy on carbon pollution and forcing unclean energy producers to pay for the mess they make, cap-and-trade will allow a small tribe of greedy-as-hell Wall Street swine to turn yet another commodities market into a private tax-collection scheme. This is worse than the bailout: It allows the bank to seize taxpayer money before it’s even collected... The moral is the same as for all the other bubbles that Goldman helped create, from 1929 to 2009. In almost
every case, the very same bank that behaved recklessly for years, weighing down the system with toxic loans and predatory debt, and accomplishing nothing but massive bonuses for a few bosses, has been rewarded with mountains of virtually free money and government guarantees -- while the actual victims in this mess, ordinary taxpayers, are the ones paying for it.

Under Zoellick, the World Bank remains the most important multilateral fixer of broken carbon markets, continuing to invest billions and spin-doctor the obvious flaws in the system. Simultaneously, internal Bank sources actively criticize and challenge the legitimacy of the Bank’s role in the carbon marketplace. A late 2010 report from the Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) poignantly reveals,

‘The World Bank’s Carbon Finance Unit (CFU) has led, through its extensive activities in Clean Development Mechanism markets, to expanding the role of, and the infrastructure for, carbon trading between developed and developing nations. However, there has been criticism of the environmental quality of many projects that the WBG [World Bank Group] has supported, including industrial gases, hydro-power, and fossil (gas and coal) power plants, which may well have been either profitable in themselves or were pursued primarily for the purpose of national energy diversification and security policies. In addition, although the CFU was promoted as a market maker that could act as a carbon offset buyer until the private market flourished, the WBG continued to build up its trading after that private market was fully established. Finally, as a vehicle for catalytic finance and technology transfer, the IEG finds the CFU’s record is at best mixed. The Panel suggests that the WBG has a public responsibility to ensure that its behavior advances the quality of international institutions that regulate carbon finance markets, rather than acting principally as a pure market player profiting from expanding market scale.’

Partly as a result, in November 2010, four global civil society organizations - Jubilee South, Friends of the Earth International, ActionAid and LDC Watch – along with dozens of regional and national organizations reacted to Zoellick’s management of the environment, including the loan to Medupi, with a full-fledged international campaign to ban the Bank from climate financing:

Many northern country governments and the World Bank itself have been actively pushing for the World Bank to be given the mandate to be ‘THE’ global climate institution, or for it to play a central role in setting up and eventually managing the governance and operations of a new global climate fund. At the June United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) inter-sessional negotiations in Bonn, Germany, the United States submitted a proposal naming the World Bank as the ‘Trustee’ for the formation of the Global Climate Fund. On June 25th, on the eve of the G20 meeting in Toronto, the WB appointed a World Bank Special Envoy for Climate Change. The World Bank also recently hired Daniel Kamman as their
clean energy czar. These are some of the latest of a series of moves since 2008 to secure this important mandate for the World Bank. Also included is the establishment of the WB-managed Climate Investment Funds, at the behest of the UK, US, and Japan. Regional development banks are also part of the governance and management system of these Climate Investment Funds (Jubilee South et al 2010).

In short, argue Jubilee South et al (2010), there should be no World Bank role in climate finance, for reasons that bring together several aspects of CJ politics:

Financing must be public in nature, obligatory, predictable, additional, and adequate, must not come with or be used to impose conditionalities, should not be in the form of loans or other debt-creating instruments. Instruments for raising finance should not cause harm to people and the environment. These should not promote or reinforce false solutions. These mechanisms and instruments should also have a transformational effect on the economy and environment. A new Global Climate Fund is an essential institutional channel for north to south climate finance flows and ensuring equitable, fair, and appropriate distribution among countries of the South. Such an institution should have democratic governance and management structures with majority representation from South countries, gender balance, and seats for civil society organizations.

Conclusion

Had the Kyoto Protocol and its arcane climate financing strategies succeeded over the past 13 years, and had centrist non-governmental organizations and environmentalists not themselves failed to offer visionary advocacy on what is the world’s most serious threat, there would not have been a need for the CJ movement to emerge and gel (Vlachou and Konstantinidis 2010). Had global governance firmly established itself in the 1990s-2000s, based on the Montreal Protocol’s example of decisive action in which global public goods were taken seriously, the kinds of subsequent elite gatherings that produced, at best, the likes of a Copenhagen Accord would instead have had more legitimacy and efficacy. Had South African elites paid attention to the variety of extreme contradictions unveiled by the Medupi power plant and World Bank financing, the campaign that generated a South African CJ movement – so crucial ahead of the COP 17 in South Africa in November-December 2011 – would not have been necessary.

Finally, Robert Zoellick’s background – his relationship to S&Ls, FannieMae, the Project for a New American Century (now formally defunct), Florida vote-counting, Enron, Alliance Capital, the WTO, Bush-era foreign/military policy (not to mention a million Iraqis and thousands of US soldiers), Goldman Sachs’ reputation, the World Bank, South African finances, and the climate – reveals his Zelig-like role in the interrelated failures of global states and markets. Instead of generating despair, what CJ observers need to understand is that Zoellick is little more than a key figure
in a demonstrably corrupt actor-network defined by the consistent geopolitical, economic, environmental and diplomatic self-destructiveness associated with recent elite managerialism. Zoellick is merely a personification of the way global governance, neoliberal-neoconservative ideological fusion, frenetic financialisation, the failing green-market project and the responsibility for financing a transition from climate chaos are not capable of working under present circumstances.

CJ marks a double effort to imagine other possible worlds and deliver them through struggle. Bolivian president Evo Morales (2009) offered his perspective on the movement’s momentum well before he convened the historic Cochabamba summit: ‘We can’t look back; we have to look forward. Looking forward means that we have to review everything that capitalism has done. These are things that cannot just be solved with money. We have to resolve problems of life and humanity. And that’s the problem that planet earth faces today. And this means ending capitalism.’ Accordingly, only the continuing rise of CJ activism from below – notwithstanding an occasional defeat, and indeed spurned on by the knowledge and anger thereby generated - will suffice to reverse the course of fossil fuel consumption and, more broadly, of a mode of production based on the utterly unsustainable accumulation of capital.

References


The stench of rotting blubber would hang for days over The Bluff in South Durban, thanks to Norwegian immigrants whose harpooning skills helped stock the town with cooking fat, margarine and soap, starting about a century ago. The fumes became unbearable, and a local uproar soon compelled the Norwegians to move the whale processing factory from within Africa’s largest port to a less-populated site a few kilometers southeast.

There, on The Bluff’s glorious Indian Ocean beachfront, the white working-class residents of Marine Drive (perhaps including those in the apartment where I now live) also complained bitterly about the odor from flensing, whereby blubber, meat and bone were separated at the world’s largest onshore whaling station.

Ever since, our neighborhood has been the armpit of South Africa. A bit further south and west, the country’s largest oil refinery was built in the 1950s, followed by the production and on-site disposal of nearly every toxic substance known to science.

The whalers gracefully retreated into comfortable retirement in the mid-1970s, their prey threatened by extinction. Conservationists had mobilized internationally, and thanks to the OPEC cartel, the cost of oil for ship transport soared in 1974, so the industry ceased operating in Durban. Even apartheid South Africa signed the global whaling ban in 1976.

What’s left is a small Bluff Whaling Museum – located within a chicken restaurant - where you sense the early Norwegians’ Vikingesque stance: brave, defiant, unforgiving to those they raped and pillaged, and utterly unconcerned about the sustainability of the environment they had conquered. The Bluff’s world-class surfing waves regularly toss ashore decayed fragments of sperm, blue, fin and humpback whales’ skeletons, numbering in the tens of thousands.

Déjà vu, earlier this month, when an invisible but persistent cloud suffused with a cat’s-piss ammonia stench floated from the South Durban petro-chemical complex – the continent’s largest – across the still racially-segregated belt of 300,000 residents. Once again the community’s salt-of-the-earth rabble-rouser, Des D’Sa of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), called a picket against an uncaring municipal bureaucracy.

The unbearable smell, apparently emanating from the powerful corporation FFS, lasted for days, reappearing Friday night. Further south, the rotten-egg sulfur odor from the petroleum refineries’ SO2 emissions is a permanent feature.

South Durban’s persistent pollution crises are a visceral reminder to follow the example of ye olde Norwegian whalers on The Bluff, gracefully retreating from
capitalism’s reckless dependence upon oil, coal and gas. It is a task that society cannot avoid much longer, as a devastating climate change tipping point looms sometime in the next decade, scientists confirm.

So nearly everyone was pleased, a fortnight ago, with the choice of Durban to host the 2011 Conference of the Parties (COP) 17, the world climate summit. Competition was tough. The conference centre in beautiful Cape Town was rejected, according to a guest post on former CT City Manager Andrew Boraine’s blog, because of “the high levels of security required... The CT International Conference Centre (ICC) falls way behind the ICC complex in Durban. You can lock it down completely and keep the over-the-top protesters well away from the high level attendees.”

Boraine, a Johannesburg NGO colleague of mine two decades ago when he helped Alexandra Township civic associations defend their over-the-top protests against apartheid, is now a public-private partnership facilitator. “Cape Town’s proposal,” he rebutted, “took into account the need to be able to lock down certain areas for government delegations and VIPs.”

Sorry, but I don’t accept the need for to safely insulate these rascals, for last December in Copenhagen I witnessed how badly the VIPs performed when tasked with making binding emissions cuts. Not only were none made but the 1997 Kyoto Protocol’s minor five percent cuts (measured from 1990-2012) were completely undermined.

SA and US presidents Jacob Zuma and Barack Obama joined Chinese, Indian and Brazilian leaders in wrecking the last vestiges of UN democracy and threatening their own societies (especially Zulu and Luo kinfolk who are on the climate frontline), on behalf of (mainly white-owned) fossil fuel industry and (mainly white) frequent fliers (like myself). Chief negotiator for the G77, Lumumba Di-Apeng, poignantly asked, “What is Obama going to tell his daughters? That their relatives’ lives are not worth anything?”

At the upcoming COP 16 climate summit, lasting through December 11 in Cancun, Mexico, these VIPs definitely need a strong wake-up slap - as activists there gave World Trade Organisation negotiators in 2003 - not a quiet meeting place where they’ll just back-slap.

Actually, the strategy many in civil society considered around this time last year, was what Boraine unintentionally advocated: ‘locking down’ (and in) the world leaders inside Copenhagen’s Bella Centre, so they would finally feel the pressure to sign a real deal, instead of the sleazy Obama-Zuma-Jiaboa-Singh-Lula Copenhagen Accord– and not allowing them out until they did so.

This would have involved blockades preventing delegates from departing, last December 19, the way activists did in September 2000 at Prague’s ancient palace, where SA finance minister Trevor Manuel chaired the World Bank’s annual meeting.
The VIPs barely scampered to safety from global-justice protesters, after again doing nothing to reform globalisation.

The plan to lock down the climate-negotiating VIPs in Copenhagen was considered and then abandoned when the Danish police turned semi-fascistic. It’s not even an option worth discussing in Durban with our proto-fascistic City Manager Mike Sutcliffe, who regularly denies permission to peacefully protest.

But come to think of it, on 31 August 2001, a march of 15 000 to the ICC led by the late great Fatima Meer and Dennis Brutus against a pathetic UN racism conference came close to barging in on the lethargic delegates. Recall the activists’ valid complaints then: no UN discussion of reparations for slavery, colonialism and apartheid, and no action against Israeli racial oppression and occupation of Palestine.

The reason why next year, the leading climate activists may decline the opportunity to appeal to the elites in the ICC – either asking politely, or amplified with a chorus of vuvuzelas – is simple: rapidly rising disgust with filthy leaders who cannot even clean up the world’s fouled financial nests, judging by the South Korean G20 meeting, much less planet-threatening emissions.

Cancun will again demonstrate that US and EU rulers can spend trillions of dollars to pacify the world’s richest speculators in financial markets, from Wall Street in 2008 to those holding state bonds in Athens, Dublin and Lisbon this month. But they’ll balk at a few hundred billion required annually to save the planet.

“If planet Earth was a bank, they’d have bailed it out long ago,” British climate campaigner Jonathan Neale remarked to laughter at the Norway Social Forum meeting’s opening session last Thursday. The money is certainly available in Oslo, thanks to a petroleum rainy-day fund worth $500 billion, the world’s second largest sovereign fund.

Norwegians in the campaigning group Attac with whom I spent the last few days are also intent on fighting what a workshop leader, Heidi Lundeberg, last Thursday termed Norway’s “Good Samaritan masking the face of our new oil imperialism”. Lundeberg’s edited 2008 collection for Attac, *Klima for ny Oljepolitikk*, demolishes Norway’s image as responsible global citizen.

University of Bergen eco-social scientist Terje Tvedt has also complained that Oslo’s spin-doctoring generates “an aura of moral-ideological irrefutability”. It’s especially irritating when accompanying a revitalized eco-Viking rape-and-pillage mentality, such as Oslo’s growing collaboration with the likes of the World Bank, led by one of the world’s most destructive men, Robert Zoellick.

The fake Samaritan tendency became noticeable when former prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland’s ran a 1983-87 world ‘sustainable development’ commission,
but is being taken to extremes by current prime minister Jens Stoltenberg and environment/development minister Erik Stolheim.

Workshop debate immediately ensued with the outraged director of the Oslo government’s Oil for Development fund, Petter Nore, who in 1979 coedited a great book, *Oil and Class Struggle*. “We are NOT the Samaritan face of imperialism!”, he clamoured, yet his own reports reveal the fund’s role in occupied Iraq and Afghanistan, donating millions to lubricate the US looting of petrol and gas, not to mention a slew of venal oil-rich African dictators.

Nore’s office also promotes carbon trading deals to mitigate the flaring of gas at oil wells. He thus rewards both Northern financiers and Big Oil polluters with ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ payola, buying ‘emissions reduction credits’ for the Norwegian state in order to reform an extraction system in which, at possibly the world’s worst site, the Niger Delta, flaring has been declared illegal in any case.

As do so many ex-leftist Scandinavian technocrats, Nore has capitulated to the worst global trends. He’s using Norway’s oil-infused cash-flush aid to reward corporations for what they should be doing free. Activists from Port Harcourt’s Environmental Rights Action movement, led by Nnimmo Bassey (co-winner of the Right Livelihood Award last month) know better, demanding that carbon trading must not legitimize illegal flaring.

The same problem can be found in another Norwegian Clean Development Mechanism strategy: planting alien invasive trees in plantations across several East African countries. This wrecks local ecology and pushes out indigenous people, as my colleague Blessing Karumbidza from the Durban NGO Timberwatch recently reported: “the Norwegian firm Green Resources has entrenched itself in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania where it looks to acquire at least 142 000 hectares of land... to plant exotic trees (varieties of eucalyptus and pine) for the purpose of selling an expected 400 000 tons of carbon credits to the Norwegian government.”

Along with Norway’s more serious environmentalists and development advocates, I find it heartbreaking that the government’s wonderful Soria Moria declaration is being trashed by Stoltenberg and Stolheim. The 2005 manifesto promised a U-turn, for example, through shifting funding from the World Bank to United Nations.

Even in the North’s most left-leaning government, it was all fibbery, as shown when Bank executive directors had a chance to turn down the notorious $3.75 billion Medupi coal loan last April, and the Norwegian representative only managed a limp abstention, not the no vote demanded by a South African-led global coalition of 200 concerned groups.

When Nore told the workshop that fifty governments had come to his agency for assistance in managing oil resources, including South Africa, I flashed back to South Durban’s grievances against the oil industry: our massive greenhouse gas and SO2
emissions, regular fires and explosions, devastating oil pipe leakage, the world’s highest recorded school asthma rates (Settlers Primary), a leukemia pandemic, extreme capital-intensity in petro-chem production and extreme unemployment in surrounding communities, a huge new pipeline to double the oil flow to Johannesburg, and an old airport earmarked for expansion of either the petrochem, auto or shipping industries. These contribute to SA’s emissions record: CO2 per unit of per person GDP around twenty times worse than even the US.

This makes South Durban one of the world’s most extreme sites of climate cause and effect: well-paid managers run leaky-bucket toxic factories by day and escape to western and northern suburbs by night, and gasping residents either slowly die from the exhaust or wake in fear when Engen erupts with noxious fumes late at night.

Yet thanks to one of the continent’s finest eco-social campaigning groups, SDCEA, the area can become an inspiring site for fighting petro-power and visioning alternatives.

Consistent with a global consensus that whales should be left in the ocean, the only solution to the climate crisis is one that some genuinely decent Norwegian community residents, fisherfolk, environmentalists and social activists are promoting in their own petrol-rich Lofoten region, for both conservation and climate change reasons.

The demand there is identical to that made by South Durban residents fed up with smells far more damaging than the decomposing blubber of yesteryear: “leave the oil in the soil!”
Community resistance to energy privatization in South Africa
with Trevor Ngwane, in Kolya Abramsky (Ed), Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution: Social Struggles in the Transition to a Post-Petrol World, Oakland, AK Press, September 2010

Introduction

In spite of South Africa’s alleged ‘economic boom’,¹ the harsh socio-economic realities of daily life actually worsened for most when racial apartheid was replaced by class apartheid in 1994. That process occurred in the context of a general shift to global neoliberal power, instead of prior Keynesian eras in which middle-income countries like South Africa were permitted to build an industrial base and balance their economies through inward oriented strategies.

Hence South Africa suffered enormously from neoliberal policies imposed by the governments of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, such as

- an immediate post-apartheid rise in income inequality, which saw the Gini coefficient soaring from below 0.6 in 1994 to 0.72 by 2006 (0.8 if welfare income is excluded);²
- the official unemployment rate doubled (from 16% in 1994 to around 32% by the early 2000s, falling to 26% by the late 2000s - but by counting those who gave up looking for work, the realistic rate is closer to 40%) as a result of increased imports in labor-intensive sectors and capital-intensive production techniques elsewhere; and
- ecological problems became far worse, according to the government’s 2006 ‘Environmental Outlook’ research report, which noted ‘a general decline in the state of the environment’.³

Social unrest and the rise of social movements reflect the discontent: there were 5813 protests in 2004-05, and subsequently, an average of 8,000 per annum.⁴ Until China overtook in early 2009, this was probably the highest per capita rate of social protest in the world during the late 2000s.

Matters will not improve, in part because of macroeconomic trends. The most severe problem is the vulnerability that South Africa faces in hostile global financial markets, given the 2008 current account deficit of 9% of GDP, one of the world’s

---

worst. It is also highly likely that investment and economic activity will be deterred by ongoing electricity shortages, given that it will take a generation for sufficient capacity to be added, and that the government confirmed its desire in early 2008 to continue offering a few large smelters and mines the cheapest electricity in the world, instead of redistributing to low-income people.

The electricity generation shortfalls of January-March 2008 which led to consistent surprise ‘load shedding’ – entire metropolitan areas taken off the electricity grid - were due partly to a lack of new capacity built by national power generator Eskom since the early 1990s (when excess capacity had risen to more than 30%), the running down of coal supplies, and rain damage to incoming coal. But the main reason was the increased electricity consumption of metals smelters due to the 2002-08 speculative uptick in commodity prices. Indeed, even earlier, the economy’s five-fold increase in $CO_2$ emissions since 1950, and 20 per cent increase during the 1990s, can largely be blamed upon supply of the world’s cheapest electricity by Eskom to mining houses and metals smelters.

Emitting twenty times the carbon tonnage per unit of economic output per person than even the United States, South African capital’s reliance upon fossil fuels for energy is scandalous. Not only are vast carbon-based profits fleeing to the mining houses’ offshore financial headquarters but, despite consuming huge amounts of electricity, the smelters create very few jobs. Instead of cutting back on these sorts of projects, and turning the subsidies to renewables, the government decided to augment coal-fired generation with dangerous, outmoded Pebble Bed technology (rejected by German nuclear producers some years ago). Renewable sources like wind, solar, wave, tidal and biomass are the suggested way forward for this century’s energy system, but still get only a tiny pittance of government support.

Behind this gluttonous and reckless consumption of electricity in South Africa is a long history of cheap energy for big capital that was made possible by the availability of large amounts of poor quality coal and an incentuous relationship between the coal mines and ESKOM the government-owned electricity company. A history of state intervention in securing the energy needs of the mines, agriculture and industry established the principle of keeping electricity as cheap as possible for the benefit of big capital. The ANC government has not changed this arrangement.

Grassroots organizations and civil society have challenged these policies through policy advocacy, public conscientisation, international alliance-building and the court system. These developments correspond to what Karl Polanyi termed a ‘double movement’ in which, initially during the 19th century in Europe, ‘the extension of the market organization in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction’ as people defended their land, labor and other resources from excessive

---

commodification. Most notably, the Treatment Action Campaign's early 2000s street pressure and legal strategy forced the South African government to provide locally-produced anti-retroviral drugs to HIV+ people free at public clinics, with 750,000 beneficiaries by 2009. Another example was the Campaign Against Water Privatisation, a coalition of urban community groups, whose protests resulted in a court victory against the installation of pre-payment water meters in Phiri, a poor community in Soweto, Johannesburg. The judge ordered the city council to provide 50 liters of free water per person per day. Suez, the French multi-national corporation that managed Johannesburg's water system and stood to benefit from the pre-payment meters, left the city in 2006 when their contract was not renewed. Protests and legal strategies that won these victories were based on the decommodification of crucial public services, and the deglobalization of capital.

Power to the people

How would these principles work in terms of struggles over electricity and energy more generally? The ordinary Sowetan working-class electricity consumer is a good case study, because of extraordinary political mobilisations that have occurred in the Johannesburg 'South Western Townships' (Soweto), including the student rising of 1976. In the same spirit, using the same rhetoric and songs, a new movement against extreme electricity price increases arose in 2000, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee.

Sowetans experienced high price increases due to a huge reduction in central-local state subsidies. As a result, an estimated ten million people were victims of electricity disconnections. According to the government 60% of the disconnections were not resolved within six weeks. This confirmed that the blame lay with genuine poverty, not the oft-alleged 'culture of non-payment' as a hangover of anti-apartheid activism. Likewise, of 13 million given access to a fixed telephone line for the first time, ten million were disconnected due to unaffordability. The bulk of suffering caused by the rescinding of vital state services was felt most by women, the elderly and children.

Ultimately these problems are the outcome of neoliberal capitalism. The state's post-apartheid urban policies tended to amplify rather than counteract the underlying dynamics of accumulation and class division despite electricity having been central in the anti-apartheid struggle. The first acts of sabotage by a then recently-banned ANC in the early 1960s were to bomb electricity pylons. The choice of target was symbolic given the economic importance of electricity and the fact that black working class areas were deliberately not electrified by the apartheid regime at the time. In the 1980s when townships like Soweto were granted electricity the residents launched a municipal services payment boycott that included electricity as part of their struggle against apartheid. This campaign was later adopted by the ANC and its aim was to underline the illegitimacy of apartheid (local) government authorities and to make South Africa "ungovernable".
The slogan “electricity for all!” resonated with and moved the masses during apartheid days, in part because black households were denied electricity until the early 1980s as a matter of public policy (World Bank loans to Eskom during the 1950s-60s accepted this as a matter of course, though surplus value raised from black SA workers repaid those very loans). Hence one of the most popular African National Congress military tactics was the limpet mining of electricity pylons. But the late apartheid regime and the capitalist class established their own agenda, and kickstarted the process of electricity commodification in a 1986 White Paper on Energy Policy which called for the 'highest measure of freedom for the operation of market forces', the involvement of the private sector, a shift to a market-oriented system with a minimum of state control and involvement, and deregulation of pricing, marketing and production. After apartheid was replaced in 1994, similar language was found in the Urban Development Strategy (1995), the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Framework (1997 and 2001), and the Energy White Paper (1998). The latter called for 'cost-reflective' electricity tariffs so as to limit any potential subsidy from industry to consumers.

Asked why cross-subsidization of electricity prices to benefit the poor was not being considered, the state’s leading infrastructure-services official explained, 'If we increase the price of electricity to users like Alusaf [a major aluminum exporter owned by BHP Billiton], their products will become uncompetitive and that will affect our balance of payments'. (Alusaf pays approximately one tenth the price that retail consumers do, without factoring in the ecological price of cheap power at the site of production and in the coal-gathering and burning process).

Rising electricity prices across South African townships had a negative impact during the late 1990s, evident in declining use of electricity despite an increase in the number of connections. According to Statistics South Africa, households using electricity for lighting increased from 63.5% in 1995 to 69.8% in 1999. However, households using electricity for cooking declined from 55.4% to 53.0%, and households using electricity for heating dropped from 53.8% in 1995 to just 48.0% in 1999. The state agency conceded a significant link between decreasing usage and the increasing price of electricity. Most poor South Africans still rely for a large part of their lighting, cooking and heating energy needs upon paraffin (with its burn-related health risks), coal (with high levels of domestic household and township-wide air pollution) and wood (with dire consequences for deforestation). The use of dirty sources of energy has negative consequences especially for women’s health leading to respiratory diseases and eye problems. This is because women, are traditionally responsible for managing the home; they are more affected by the high cost of electricity, and spend greater time and resources searching for alternative energy. Ecologically-sensitive energy sources, such as solar, wind and tidal, have barely begun

to be explored, notwithstanding the enormous damage done by South Africa’s addiction to fossil-fuel consumption.

The 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) mandated higher subsidies, but far stronger continuities from apartheid to post-apartheid emerged thanks to neoliberal pricing principles and the consequent policy of mass disconnections, preventing the widespread redistribution required to make Eskom’s mass electrification feasible. As protests began in earnest from 1997 and the African National Congress witnessed rising apathy before the 2000 municipal elections, the ruling party introduced a ‘Free Basic Services’ monthly package of 50 kWh of electricity per household, but it proved far too little, and if anything, disconnections actually increased.

Eskom continued to be a target of criticism, especially from environmentalists who complain that coal-burning plants lack sufficient sulfur scrubbing equipment and that alternative renewable energy investments have been negligible. Moreover, labor opposition mounted. Having fired more than 40,000 of its 85,000 employees during the early 1990s, thanks to mechanization and overcapacity, the utility tried to outsource and corporatize several key operations, resulting in periodic national anti-privatization strikes by the trade union federation.

But it was in Soweto that the resistance became world famous and internationally networked. In 2001, domestic consumers paid an average price to Eskom of US$0.03 cents per kWh, while the manufacturing and mining sectors paid only half that amount. Two years earlier, in 1999, Soweto residents had experienced three increases – amounting to 47% - in a short period as Eskom brought tariffs in line with other areas. This reflected the move towards ‘cost reflectivity’ and away from regulated price increases, in order to reduce and eventually eliminate subsidies, so as to achieve ‘market-related returns sufficient to attract new investors into the industry’, said Eskom.

When prices became unaffordable and payment arrears began to mount, Eskom’s first strategy was disconnection and repression. Eskom decided in 2001 to disconnect households whose arrears were more than $800, with payment more than 120 days overdue. An anticipated 131,000 households in Soweto were to be cut off due to non-payment, according to Eskom - even though the company had only 126,000 recorded consumers in the township. Johannesburg Metro authorities decided, in an act of solidarity, to cut off water and began evictions selling off residents’ houses in order to recoup the debts owed, in an attempt to pressure people to pay Eskom arrears. A survey of Soweto residents found that 61% of households had experienced electricity disconnections, of whom 45% had been cut off for more than one month. A random,  

A stratified national survey conducted by the Municipal Services Project and Human Sciences Research Council found that ten million people across South Africa had experienced electricity cutoffs.\textsuperscript{13}

The impact of disconnections can be fatal. One indication of the health implications of electricity denial and of supply cuts was the upsurge in TB rates, as respiratory illnesses are carried by particulates associated with smoke from wood, coal and paraffin. Because of climate and congestion, respiratory diseases are particularly common in Soweto. In a 1998 survey, two in five Sowetans reportedly suffered from respiratory problems.\textsuperscript{14}

Survey respondents reported many fires in the neighborhood, often caused by paraffin stoves, many of which were harmful to children. Eskom’s disconnection procedures often resulted in electricity cables lying loose in the streets.\textsuperscript{15} Residents were unhappy not only about the high reconnection fees charged but the fact that Eskom used outsourced companies that earn $10 per household disconnection. No notification was given that supply would be cut off, and residents were not given time to rectify payments problems. Eskom can disconnect entire blocks at a time by removing circuit breakers, penalizing those who do pay their bills along with those who don’t. All these grievances provided the raw material from which the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and its Operation Khanyisa emerged.

**Social resistance to commodified electricity**

The SECC was formed in June 2000, through a series of workshops on the energy crisis, followed by mass meetings in the township. Operation Khanyisa (‘light up’) allowed for mass reconnections by trained informal electricians. Within six months, over 3,000 households had been put back on the grid. The SECC turned what was a criminal deed from the point of view of Eskom into an act of defiance, and also went to city councilors’ houses to cut off their electricity, to give them a taste of their own medicine, and to the mayor’s office in Soweto. SECC were soon targeted for arrest, but five hundred Sowetans marched to Moroka Police Station to present themselves for mass arrest; the police were overwhelmed. By October 2001 Eskom retreated, announcing a moratorium on cut-offs. The SECC announced ‘a temporary victory over Eskom, but our other demands remain outstanding’:

- commitment to halting and reversing privatization and commercialization;
- the scrapping of arrears;

\textsuperscript{15} In a shack settlement outside Cato Manor in Durban, this problem caused the death of 11 children in 2001 (\textit{Mail & Guardian}, 16-22 March 2001).
• the implementation of free electricity promised to us in municipal elections a year ago;
• ending the skewed rates which do not sufficiently subsidize low-income black people;
• additional special provisions for vulnerable groups - disabled people, pensioners, people who are HIV-positive; and
• expansion of electrification to all, especially impoverished people in urban slums
and rural villages, the vast majority of whom do not have the power that we in Soweto celebrate (SECC 2001).

The Washington Post took up the story in a front-page article in November 2001:

SOWETO, South Africa -- When she could no longer bear the darkness or the cold that settles into her arthritic knees or the thought of sacrificing another piece of furniture for firewood, Agnes Mohapi cursed the powers that had cut off her electricity. Then she summoned a neighborhood service to illegally reconnect it.

Soon, bootleg technicians from the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) arrived in pairs at the intersection of Maseka and Moema streets. Asking for nothing in return, they used pliers, a penknife and a snip here and a splice there to return light to the dusty, treeless corner.

'We shouldn’t have to resort to this,' Mohapi, 58, said as she stood cross-armed and remorseless in front of her home as the repairmen hot-wired her electricity. Nothing, she said, could compare to life under apartheid, the system of racial separation that herded blacks into poor townships such as Soweto. But for all its wretchedness, apartheid never did this: It did not lay her off from her job, jack up her utility bill, then disconnect her service when she inevitably could not pay.

'Privatization did that,' she said, her cadence quickening in disgust. 'And all of this globalization garbage our new black government has forced upon us has done nothing but make things worse. . . . But we will unite and we will fight this government with the same fury that we fought the whites in their day.'

This is South Africa’s new revolution.16

A few weeks later, ANC Public Enterprises Minister Jeff Radebe visited Soweto to offer a partial amnesty on arrears, which the SECC declined as inadequate. The focus then moved to fighting prepayment meters. From the SECC and similar campaigns emerged an umbrella group, the Anti-Privatization Forum

How serious a threat was the SECC at this stage? The ruling party’s main intellectual journal, Umhlanga, carried a 2003 article by Tankiso Fafuli (later to become ANC councilor for Pimville), that gives a flavor of the challenge:

On the 24th September 2001 the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee [SECC] convened a rally at Tswelopele hall in Pimville zone 7. A wave of agitation permeated through the gathering, which influenced the attendants to march to councillor George Ndlovu’s house in ward 22. Councillor Ndlovu with his family was held at ransom and the electricity box of his house was ransacked... The incident prompted the branches of the ANC in both wards to convene a special joint forum in the evening wherein a vigorous debate ensued on the political challenges posed by SECC... [which] has successfully earned the respect from the community and thus the ANC could no longer tread willy-nilly in every territory. Particularly when such territory became his own not by residence alone but by virtue of influence...

In the initial stages of community mobilization, the key message from these forces was that the ANC in power has not only abandoned its historical constituency (i.e. the working class and poor), but has begun to unleash terror against it. This terror - they argue - is in the form of electricity and water cuts conducted against the weak and poor. Electricity cuts that intensified during the winter of 2002 were presented as naked savagery unleashed by a liberation movement against its people who are largely destitute... Essentially what is being precipitated is a rise of the working class against the ANC government to confront and alter its unpleasant material conditions. As a result, these struggles have resulted into an open confrontation like the shooting between employees of Eskom and residents of Dlamini in Soweto in the year 2001. Such readiness and agitation for extreme action is encapsulated in Duduzile Mphenyeke’s (SECC secretary) statement when proclaiming that ‘In every struggle there are casualties’. In explaining Operation Khanyisa the SECC has stated in some of its public forums that people must chase away Eskom ‘agents’ tasked to cut electricity cables with whatever means necessary and that ‘councillors must be made to taste their own medicines’...

The Pimville rally mandated the SECC to expand its scope of demands beyond electricity cuts and to begin to include a demand for houses, a stop to eviction/relocation, and access to free basic water among other issues. This is essentially a call to develop a broad united front that goes beyond SECC and the electricity issue... [The Anti-Privatization] Forum also creates the imperative link between the shop floor struggles against right-sizing (retrenchments), casualization of labour, and the struggles waged against water and electricity cuts in the townships. As a result, the APF synchronizes the struggles waged by SECC, Dobsonville Civic Association (DCA) against electricity and water cuts in Soweto with those fought by among others SAMWU [South African Municipal Workers’ Union] on the shop-floor against retrenchments, as a result of privatization. The APF has been able to show to its participants that they are all
fighting a common enemy namely privatization, the brainchild of GEAR\textsuperscript{17}. This explains the relationship between the SECC as a community organization and some fragments of trade unionists belonging to affiliates of COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions]. These trade unionists have played key roles in some of the APF campaigns and marches. It is this ability to link these cuts of services and electricity to privatization that creates a strong and broader appeal - not only to ordinary residents but trade unionists, intellectuals, and development activists - and the capacity to make inroads within the frontiers of the Tripartite Alliance\textsuperscript{18}.

This is an extraordinary admission by a representative of the SECC’s most powerful opponent, of the group’s community popularity as well as the sophisticated way the new movement expanded its organizing reach and agenda. Subsequent years were spent in issue linkage. The APF and SECC adopted socialism as their ‘official’ vision.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in August 2002 also helped raise the SECC’s profile. A memorable \textit{Mail & Guardian} front page on 16 August framed elderly SECC stalwart Florence Nkwashu in front of riot police with the headline ‘We’ll take Sandton!’ Two weeks later, the SECC was central to the memorable 30,000-strong march from Alexandra to Sandton, the largest post-1994 protest in South Africa aside from trade union mobilizations. The ‘Big March’ was roughly ten times larger than one aimed at supporting the WSSD (by the ANC, trade unions and churches) held along the same route later that day.

To the outside observer, that 2002 demonstration was the peak for many of the ‘New Social Movements’ which had emerged since the late 1990s. For the SECC, there were several years ahead in which attention shifted to water rights, culminating in the victories against prepayment meters and inadequate free supplies in 2008. In its journey it has faced many challenges including organizational crises due to internal political differences. It has set itself new challenges including running candidates in the 2006 local government elections where it won one seat in the Johannesburg City Council which it uses to amplify its campaigns to a broader audience. Recently it helped form an electoral front of community and left organizations to run candidates in the national elections on a red-green platform\textsuperscript{19}. This is related to a new chapter in its life where it is taking up environmental issues under the slogan: “We want electricity but not at the expense of the earth”.

\textbf{Climate privatization}

\textsuperscript{17} The Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme is the neoliberal macro-economic policy that was adopted by the ANC in 1996. It represents a shift to the right. SAMWU is an affiliate of COSATU. The latter is part of the ANC-SACP-COSATU Alliance. This alliance includes the South African Communist Party (SACP) AND is the hegemonic bloc in South Africa.


\textsuperscript{19} The Socialist Green Coalition’s platform is available at http://www.sgc.org.za/
Meanwhile, the SA government’s own stumbling attempts to address electricity shortages and the worsening climate crisis provided further opportunities for communities to link energy access and CO2 emissions campaigning. The government appeared so coopted by the Minerals Energy Complex, the phrase that captures the fusion of state, mining houses and heavy industry, especially in beneficiating metallic and mineral products through smelting. As Ben Fine and Zav Rustomjee showed, throughout the twentieth century, mining, petro-chemicals, metals and related activities which historically accounted for around a quarter of GDP typically consumed 40 per cent of all electricity, at the world’s cheapest rates. David McDonald updated and regionalizes the concept a decade onwards in his edited book *Electric Capitalism*, finding an ‘MEC-plus’:

*Mining is South Africa’s largest industry in the primary economic sector and the country has the world’s largest reserves of platinum-group metals (87.7% of world totals), manganese (80%), chromium (72.4%), gold (40.1%) and alumino-silicates (34.4%)... South Africa’s appetite for electricity has created something of a ‘scramble’ for the continent’s electricity resources, with the transmission lines of today comparable to the colonial railway lines of the late 1800s and early 1900s, physically and symbolically.*

Eskom fostered a debilitating dependence on the (declining) mining industry, causing a ‘Dutch disease’, in memory of the damage done to Holland’s economic balance by its cheap North Sea oil, which in South Africa’s case is cheap but very dirty coal. As one study found, South Africa

- is ‘the most vulnerable fossil fuel exporting country in the world’ if the Kyoto Protocol is fully extended, according to an International Energy Agency report (because of the need to make deep cuts);
- scores extremely poorly ‘on the indicators for carbon emissions per capita and energy intensity’;
- has a ‘heavy reliance’ on energy-intensive industries;
- suffers a ‘high dependence on coal for primary energy’;
- offers ‘low energy prices’ to large corporate consumers and high-income households, which in part is responsible for ‘poor energy efficiency of individual sectors’; and
- risks developing a ‘competitive disadvantage’ by virtue of ‘continued high energy intensity’ which in the event of energy price rises ‘can increase the cost of production’.  

20. Ibid.
22. “vulnerable” to losing earnings from selling coal, an environmentally harmful carbon-emitting fossil fuel
As a result, Eskom is amongst the worst emitters of CO₂ in the world when corrected for income and population size, putting South Africa’s emissions far higher than even the energy sector of the United States, by a factor of 20. To deal with this legacy, the government adopted a Long-Term Mitigation Scenario in mid-2008, to great fanfare, calling for cuts in CO₂, but only from 2050. Meantime, the rollout of at least a hundred billion dollars worth of new coal-fired plants ensued. Moreover, the 2004 National Climate Change Response Strategy endorsed carbon trading, specifically the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), declaring ‘up-front that CDM primarily presents a range of commercial opportunities, both big and small.’ The carbon trading gimmick allows Northern firms to buy World Bank Prototype Carbon Fund investment allowances in CDM projects so they can continue emitting at species-threatening rates, instead of cutting emissions.

The October 2004 ‘Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading’ rejected the claim that this strategy will halt the climate crisis, insisting that the crisis is caused by the mining of fossil fuels and the release of their carbon to the oceans, air, soil and living things, and must be stopped at source. By August 2005, inspiring citizen activism in Durban’s Clare Estate community forced the municipality to withdraw an application to the World Bank for carbon trading finance to include methane extraction from the vast Bisasar Road landfill, which community activists insisted should instead be closed. The leading advocate, long-time resident Sajida Khan, died two years later, but her struggle to halt the ‘privatisation of the air’, as carbon trading is known, lives on. The only way forward on genuine climate change mitigation is to leave fossil fuels in the earth.

Hence ‘keep the oil in the soil’ and ‘leave the coal in the hole’ are regular slogans of African energy activists ranging from the South Durban critics of deadly petrol refining in residential communities to the Niger Delta critics of deadly petrol extraction from residential communities. The hard work of winning more civil society organizations to this position, especially organized labour, continues. A Nigerian journalist explains:

Human rights activists from across the African continent that converged in Durban, South Africa recently for a conference which was convened by Oilwatch Africa and groundWork South Africa have warned that Africa is facing another round of colonisation that threatens livelihoods and ecology. The thrust of the conference was the renewed focus on Africa as one of the fastest growing sources of oil and gas for the global markets amidst tightening oil supplies, spike in oil prices, low sulphur content of the oil found in Africa and an equally growing appetite for fuel by emerging global economic powers like China, India and

25 The Durban Declaration on Carbon Trading was adopted by civil society organizations that met in Durban in October 2004, with the specific aim of halting the carbon trade as a ‘false solution’ to the climate crisis.
Korea... Nnimmo Bassey, executive director Environmental Rights Action and Friends of the Earth Nigeria included in his presentation entitled ‘The Future of Crude Oil is Already History’ profiled the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta in the last 50 years, stressing that fallouts of oil exploration include socio-economic displacement of the locals, pollution-induced sicknesses and violent conflicts in the region... Ivonne Yanez, co-ordinator of Oilwatch South America, explained that an initiative on keeping the oil underground was taking place in Yasuni Forest Reserve... in Ecuador... calling on Oilwatch Africa member countries to emulate the Yasuni struggle since the human and environmental costs of fossil fuel extraction far outweighs any gain that accrues from it. Activists from countries such as Ghana, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mauritius, among others also took time to share their ugly experiences. All were unanimous that oil extraction activities as shown in the cases of the Niger Delta or Angola, South America and several other places have been a curse rather than blessing to the indigenous people under whose soil oil is being tapped.26

In addition to campaigning against fossil fuel extraction, South African environmental activists insist on higher renewable energy subsidies, to kickstart the solar, tidal and other modes of harnessing the country’s vast potential resources. However, less than 10% of state R&D spending on energy went to renewables since 1994 (compared to 90% for nuclear). In late 2008, the National Electricity Regulator of South Africa offered new ‘feed-in tariffs’ to encourage private provision of electricity from smaller renewable generation units that could in turn feed their surpluses back to the grid. However, the World Wildlife Fund SA remarked, the incentive was ‘both pathetic and apathetic’ because the US$0.05kWh the state was prepared to pay would not attract the 10 000 GWh in renewable energy by 2013, established as a policy objective.

Conclusion

Reviewing this complex terrain of energy and social activism leaves us with several conclusions about the prospects for decommodifying electricity for poor people and shifting the generation to renewable production in a red-green synthesis:

• South Africa became more unequal during the late 1990s, as a million jobs were lost due largely to the stagnant economy, the flood of imports and capital/energy-intensive investment that displaced workers (especially in the strike-rich manufacturing sector)—and these trends had enormously negative implications for the ability of low-income citizens to afford electricity;
• billions of Rands in state subsidies are spent on capital-intensive energy-guzzling smelters, where profit and dividend outflows continue to adversely affect the currency;

• the price of electricity charged to mining and smelter operations is the lowest in
  the world;
• little is being spent on renewable energy research and development, especially
  compared to a dubious nuclear program;
• greenhouse gas emissions per person, corrected for income, are amongst the most
  damaging anywhere, and have grown worse since liberation;
• electricity coverage is uneven, and despite expansion of coverage, millions of
  people have had their electricity supplies cut due to commercialization and
  privatization.

All of these problems are being countered by critiques from civil society. However,
most challenging is the paucity of constructive collective work carried out between
the three major activist networks that have challenged government policy and
corporate practices: environmentalists, community groups and trade unions. This is
partly due to serious political setbacks suffered by progressive forces in South Africa
when the ANC capitulated to capitalist ideology. Overcoming this will require a highly
enhanced politics which must be able to reconcile differences of interest between the
various sectors of civil society. What unites is the certainty that if the capitalist
destruction of the environment is allowed to continue all are sunk. There is a need to
challenge the power of capital because while the rule of profit dominates the world all
solutions tend to fall flat. Humanity needs to stop digging out the coal and re-employ
coal miners in socially useful activities. The truth is that this will be next to impossible
to implement unless power shifts to the hands of ordinary people away from the
moneyed elite.

In South Africa the ANC’s pro-capitalist policy means that wasteful white elephant
projects continue: the Coega industrial complex; the expansion of the Lesotho
Highlands Water Project mega-dams; huge new soccer stadiums for the 2010 World
Soccer Cup; the corruption-ridden R43 billion arms deal; and the R20 billion+
Gautrain elite fast rail network. To these we can add the multi-billion rand nuclear
and coal power stations that Eskom plans to build.

In contrast, activists will have to intensify their work, to get any of the spending the
society requires redirected into providing a sufficient minimum free basic supply of
electricity, into rolling out the power grid to unserved rural areas as well as to
Southern African societies who have long contributed cheap labor to South African
mines, and to cutting back CO2 emissions via major state investments in
renewables. But if the apparent impossibility of acquiring AIDS medicines from
2000-03 or reversing water privatization in 2006-08 are useful examples, these are
the kinds of challenges that compel South African activists to rise up and shout,
“Amandla!” (Power!) – “Awethu!” (To the People!)
Emissions trading, new enclosures and eco-social contestation
August 2010, forthcoming in *Antipode*, 2011

ABSTRACT
The central operating strategy within the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and most of the advanced capitalist world’s environmental policy is to address climate change through the market mechanism known as emissions trading. Based upon government issuance and private trading of emissions reductions credits and offsets, this approach quickly rose to $135 billion in annual trading by 2008 and 2009, led by the most advanced pilot - the European Union’s Emission Trading Scheme – and was proposed in the United States Congress in 2009, and applied in the Third World through the Kyoto Protocol’s “Clean Development Mechanism”. But in the wake of the collapse of climate negotiations in Copenhagen and a world financial crisis which undermined market faith in derivative investments, carbon trading has an uncertain future. The market has suffered extreme price volatility, including the European carbon price crash of 70% during 2008 and zigzags following the Copenhagen summit. The US Senate’s failure to adopt emissions trading in 2010 was another major setback. No matter the short-term trends, linkages between deep-rooted financial market and emissions market problems are revealing in spatio-temporal terms, especially in the context of deeper overaccumulation crisis and investors’ desperate need for new speculative outlets. However, even before the recent market crashes, there emerged the second half of the Polanyian “double movement”: if commodification of society and nature over-reaches, the reaction in civil society is to resist, deflecting the burdens of devaluing capital, and in the process offering decommodifying alternatives. In that spirit, the Durban Group for Climate Justice was founded to oppose carbon trading in 2004, followed by the broader-based Climate Justice Now! movement in 2007 at the Bali climate negotiations, which together united with Climate Justice Action in Europe in December 2009, in addition to many other sites of direct action against fossil fuels extraction and power generation. It is in the nexus of the spatial and temporal aspects of carbon financing amidst resistance to “new enclosures” by adversely affected peoples, or what can be termed eco-social contestation, that broader-based lessons for global/local environmental politics and climate policy can be learned.

KEY WORDS: Carbon trading, financial crisis, externality, resource depletion, civil society
The political-economic branch of the geography discipline offers insights into the last decade’s policy reactions to climate change, particularly because of its unique critique of mainstream economic approaches to greenhouse gas emissions mitigation. Systematically cutting emissions is vital to avoiding climate chaos, thereby maintaining the world’s average temperature rise at the 1 degrees centigrade this century, a level deemed necessary to avoid submersion of small islands and heavily inhabited coastland, and destruction of most African agriculture (that figure was formerly estimated to be 2 degrees but has since been lowered in demands made by the climate justice movement and tabled in the United Nations by the government of Bolivia in mid-2010). The radical tradition, as articulated most forcefully by David Harvey (1985, 1989, 1996, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010), has tackled socio-economic phenomena including urbanisation, political ecology, postmodernism, liberatory epistemology, imperialism and neoliberal public policy. What does this tradition warn us when contemplating the use of a market “solution” – carbon trading – to address a market problem: greenhouse gas emissions as an externality?

Matters are complex because the market does not map readily onto natural phenomena that are only now being understood by the world’s leading climate scientists, e.g. sequestration of carbon in forests, oceans and grasslands. Thus Harvey (2006) warns that “the spatio-temporality required to represent energy flows through ecological systems accurately, for example, may not be compatible with that of financial flows through global markets. Understanding the spatio-temporal rhythms of capital accumulation requires a quite different framework to that required to understand global climate change.” The challenge presented by the increased commodification of nature is that the spatio-temporal rhythms of financial markets now drive global-scale public policy for addressing global climate change, even in the wake of neoliberalism’s crises, revisions, delegitimation and attempted relegitimation (Fine 2008, Foster and Magdoff 2009, Peck 2008).

As a result, the pages below attempt to elaborate, first, the context for the rise of emissions trading using historical-geographical materialism; second, the core theoretical propositions drawn from neoliberal ideology about carbon trading and the commodification of nature; third, the actual experiences with emissions trading including the carbon markets in the EU and Clean Development Mechanisms; fourth, political problems associated with US capital’s (and US senators’) failure to implement emissions trading; and fifth, eco-social resistance processes. The argument that follows is that spatio-temporal displacement capacities that emissions markets bring to the economic and ecological crises are attractive (to capital) in principle but difficult to implement in practice, largely because of ongoing disputes about how overaccumulation is displaced and ultimately devalued in uneven spatial and sectoral ways. That leaves a more hospitable terrain than previously considered for radical solutions that combine command and control with bottom-up climate activism, a much more effective mix than strategies on offer from elites.
Carbon trading and overaccumulation crisis

The rise of carbon trading over the last decade is most compellingly understood through Marxian political economy. The two primary ways Harvey (1982) adds to Marx’s crisis theory are through understanding space and time in part as displacement strategies during capitalist “overaccumulation crisis.” This perspective allows us to track several processes which overlapped, very dangerously, during the early 21st century (Bond 2009). Retracing to the late 1960s, a global economic slowdown began, as world GDP/per capita growth shrank from 3.6% during the 1960s to 2.1% during the 1970s to 1.3% during the 1980s to 1.1% during the 1990s. But while accumulation increased more rapidly during the late 2000s, it was only on the basis of untenable credit expansion, asset speculation and trade in (vastly overpriced) commodities, ultimately causing a major shock in 2007-09, followed by a potentially long-term world stagnation similar to Japan’s post-1990 crash. All of this occurred unevenly, as the spatial shift in industrial capital’s location, to East/South Asian and Latin American emerging markets, also shifted the source of greenhouse gas emissions dramatically (Harvey 2010).

Financial markets evolved over the past three decades, once the temporal fix began in earnest with liberalization and a shift to a higher-interest rate regime in the late 1970s. As productive sector profit rates declined and financial returns boomed, the financial explosion in various kinds of derivative investments permitted virtually any notional value to be marketed as a credit for packaging and onward sale, including emissions of SO2 in the US in the early 1990s and carbon in Europe by the late 1990s. The commodification of the environmental commons proceeded apace, with water privatization, biopiracy, genetic modification and other processes controlled by multinational corporations generating expectations for what became the world’s largest artificial market, i.e. carbon emissions. But the financial markets overextended geographically during the 1990s-2000s as investment portfolios diversified into distant, risky areas and sectors. Global and national financial governance proved inadequate, leading to bloated and then busted asset values ranging from sub-prime housing mortgages to illegitimate emissions credits.

Likewise, geopolitical tensions emerged over which sites would be most vulnerable to suffer devalorization of overaccumulated capital after 2008, i.e. which regions or countries would bear the brunt of the deep financial sector and real economic downturns. The global context in the 2000s was a sole military superpower oriented to neoconservative imperialism (especially in relation to US energy needs and corporate interests), but mitigated somewhat by a global class politics of neoliberalism. The neoliberal agenda was so dominant that notwithstanding the 2007-09 financial market crashes, the pseudo-Keynesian financial bail-out and public works strategies adopted in late 2008 were reversed in the US just over a year later, as the Obama Administration announced a budget freeze and state and municipal governments engaged in drastic spending cuts. In the South, where the IMF quickly reverted to austerity mode, numerous economic pressures - debt repayments, current account deficits, rapidly-slowing Foreign Direct Investment,
more erratic portfolio capital flows and stagnant Overseas Development Aid -
generated ever greater desperation for fresh financial capital inflows, including emissions mitigation investments.

Also by way of context, the resulting rise of civil society forces – the second half of the Polanyian "double movement" against excessive commodification - included organisations and networks dedicated to addressing climate change not through market mechanisms but instead through a “Climate Justice” approach. As discussed in more detail below, this entailed direct action against fossil fuel extraction and advocacy for national command-and-control emissions reduction strategies plus public works investments and regional/local utility and planning controls. Like global capitalism itself, this process developed extremely unevenly across space, with Northern movements of radical environmentalists only fusing with Southern economic justice advocates outside the 2007 Bali Conference of the Parties. The fusion of red and green influences was called the ‘Climate Justice Now!’ network, and after the elites' Copenhagen summit fiasco in December 2009, gained momentum in an April 2010 “World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth” in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Given this background, how should historical-materialist-geographical analysis be applied? If the above contextual understanding is accepted, it helps provide critical perspectives about how space and time are mediated through financial mechanisms applied to greenhouse gases. The early evidence suggests that the externalities of market-created climate damages are not readily internalized through market mechanisms, but are instead displaced. The spatial displacement of overaccumulation entails new investment arenas at long geographical distance and in new configurations of the built environment; while temporal displacement entails recourse to credit markets which permit payment later, for the sake of present consumption (Harvey 1982). The application of these concepts to carbon markets requires consideration of several features.

For example, consider the market’s triple troubles at the European, US and global scales. From mid-2008, the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme collapsed from levels around €30/tonne to below €9 before stabilizing in the €12-14 range in 2010, in the wake of December 2009 revelations that trading over the prior year and a half resulted in “losses of approximately €5 billion for several national tax revenues [with] ... in some countries, up to 90% of the whole market volume caused by fraudulent activities”, according to Europol (2009). Uncertainty over the potential development of emissions trading in the single largest market, the United States, is a major factor. From mid-2009, the US Senate came under pressure to pass legislation consistent with the House of Representatives, whose Waxman-Markey “cap and trade” bill (supported by President Barack Obama) entailed vast concessions to the financial markets and fossil fuel industries, yet which could not muster the sixty votes that Senator John Kerry required to pass a law given even more fierce rightwing opposition. At the end of 2009, the Copenhagen climate summit’s collapse spooked the markets (resulting in large volume trades and
another 10% loss in trades from December 17-21), following an embarrassment for
Third World emissions offsets in September when the United Nations disqualified
its main verification agency (SGS UK) due to systemic irregularities in the firm’s
vetting of Clean Development Mechanism projects and incompetent staff.

These were endogenous problems generated from above. From below, emissions
markets came under attack from climate scientist James Hansen, environmental
educationist Annie Leonard (whose 9-minute film “The Story of Cap and Trade”
received 400,000 hits in its first two weeks on the web in December 2009) and
Friends of the Earth. More radical activists in Rising Tide, Platform, Climate SOS and
Climate Pledge of Resistance increased protests at carbon markets and trading hubs
including London, New York and Chicago in 2009-2010. The opposition was
grounded in both practical experience and a sense that the world’s most important
ideological debates had suddenly moved into climate politics and environmental
economics.

The impeccable logic of pollution trading

This sentence, by Lawrence Summers (1991: 1) is amongst the most famous ever
uttered: “I believe the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste on the
lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.” When as World
Bank chief economist, Summers signed a memo prior to the Rio de Janeiro Earth
Summit endorsing the spatial displacement accomplished by markets to pollute, he
helped us identify features of “enclosure” associated with commodification and
primitive accumulation. Carbon trading fits the rubric of “accumulation by
dispossession” that Harvey (2003) utilizes as an explanation for the desperate
penetration of non-market spheres by capital under circumstances of both
overaccumulation crisis and imperialist power. Several processes reflect this
dispossession: a kind of ‘privatization of the air’ through the allocation of pollution
rights as property rights; other enclosures of forests and land (and even landfills)
that displace indigenous people and activities; the prevention of the South’s
potential development by buying up future emissions budgets; and the foregoing of
any alternative strategy for capping, commanding and controlling emissions.

The origins of this process of dispossession are found, as Rosa Luxemburg (1913)
puts it, in the uneven and combined way capital approaches the non-market terrain,
by drawing it into the commodification process yet still permitting retention of ‘non-
capitalist’ features, albeit in a now distorted, degenerative form: “Accumulation of
capital periodically bursts out in crises and spurs capital on to a continual extension
of the market. Capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist
organisations, nor ... can it tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself.
Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations
makes accumulation of capital possible.” If the atmosphere – specifically, a climate
viable for human life and capital accumulation – is considered to be a ‘non-capitalist
organisation’, then the commodification of the air itself (via the carbon markets) is a
way for capital to accumulate on the one hand, yet on the hand, at the same time, to
contribute to a liveable climate's continuous and progressive disintegration – since carbon markets are a 'false solution' to the climate crisis.

Not only to capitalism in general but to financial markets in particular, carbon trading seemed to offer an attractive, fast-growing "green" investment, in a context of the crashes of overpriced property (2007-09), equity markets (dot.coms in particular, 2000-01), emerging markets (1997-98) and other exotic, speculative investment outlets. The carbon traders’ hope was that the market could generate high returns once global and national public policies aimed at pricing carbon were implemented. The base expectation had been $3 trillion in trades anticipated by 2020 plus trillions more in the derivatives business.

However, environmental and social consequences invariably arise, alongside the devastating breakdowns that bedevil financial markets as stores of wealth in such turbulent periods. Indeed, financial markets which most acutely combine space and time actually amplify uneven development when they operate more flexibly in geographical and temporal terms, under conditions of overaccumulation crisis (Harvey 1982, Bond 1999). As George Soros once wrote (Financial Times, 31 December 1997), “The private sector is ill-suited to allocate international credit. It provides either too little or too much. It does not have the information with which to form a balanced judgment. Moreover, it is not concerned with maintaining macroeconomic balance in the borrowing countries. Its goals are to maximise profit and minimise risk. This makes it move in a herd-like fashion in both directions. The excess always begins with overexpansion, and the correction is always associated with pain.” Christian Suter (1992: 41) explained the amplification of North-South unevenness in part through international financial flows: “first, intense core capital exports and corresponding booms in credit raising activity of peripheries; second, the occurrence of debt service incapacity among peripheral countries; and third, the negotiation of debt settlement agreements between debtors and creditors.”

To some extent this is a consequence of excessive financial deregulation, especially applied to the “commodification of risk”, as Larry Lohmann (2009a, 2009b) puts it. The invention of derivatives for energy-related investments that bear little relation to underlying “real” values was witnessed in the Enron disaster, yet carbon trading incentives have permitted new waves of overinvestment in risky emissions reduction outlets, followed by crashes. Michelle Chan (2009, 3) shows how

The financial crisis was sparked by bad mortgages, and US carbon markets could pose similar problems through the creation of “bad carbon” or “subprime carbon.” Subprime carbon contracts — called “junk carbon” by traders — are contracts to deliver carbon that carry a relatively high risk of not being fulfilled and may collapse in value.

The point, ultimately, is that deep-seated contradictions in industrial capitalism invariably bubble up into both financial and carbon markets. Hence, it is argued below, carbon trading represents at best a shifting of the deck chairs on both the
climate and economic Titanics, and at worst – and most probably – will suffer from major new holes in the ships. Instead of displacing the crises by moving them around, the carbon markets have risen to attract hundreds of billions of dollars in trades, been corrupted as vehicles to genuinely solve economic and climate crises, and have sprung leaks that are so intimidating, even the US capitalist class has not found a way to patch up the idea of a market solution to a market problem.

The carbon market’s rise, corruption and fall

Although the point of this article is that dynamics of capital accumulation are creating a carbon space-economy based upon the enclosure (in 19th century terms) of non-polluted air, oceanic carbon-absorption capacity, land, forests, social commons and indigenous knowledge, there is also a serious intellectual argument undergirding the carbon trade. John Dales (1968, 85) wrote “Pollution, Property, and Prices” to as a way of reducing water pollution through waste quotas plus a market in “transferable property rights . . . for the disposal of wastes” interchangeable amongst firms.

However, it was only in 1990 that the US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) Clean Air Act (CAA) was amended by Congress so as to establish a market for sulphur dioxide. Critics of emissions trading insist that SO2 continues to do harm because of the lack of strong regulation, itself a function of power relations in the US government-industry nexus. Instead, had command and control strategies – such as the 1999 EPA’s New Source Review imposition of scrubbers on older plants (with a 95% SO2 removal record) – been applied, the results would have been far more impressive. To illustrate, command-and-control strategies in Europe had faster and more decisive results (87% reductions during the 1990s compared to 31% by the SO2 cap and trade), as they had as well in the US from 1977 (when the CAA was passed) to 1990. Moreover, by addressing only a part of the SO2 from high-emissions sources (about 43% emissions reduction from 1990-2007), there were ongoing adverse local impacts of co-pollutants (e.g. mercury, lead, dioxin, nitrous oxide), especially in geographical areas with high concentrations of people of color. The coal industry initially succeeded in grandfathering in plants built before 1977 so as to avoid CAA regulation, and these old plants were later brought into the cap and trade arrangement. Hence they were allowed to stay open longer by virtue of buying pollution allowances, from more efficient plants. Activists at the US Public Interest Research Group and Clear the Air showed how ongoing environmental health hazards from these beneficiaries of SO2 cap and trade have a class/race bias (Ehrman 2010).

Seven years later, the Kyoto Protocol allowed “Annex 1” countries – wealthier states accepting binding constraints – to buy emissions credits if their emissions were higher than their share of the modest target of a 5.2% reduction on 1990 emissions levels by 2012. This allowed the sale of the “hot air” – excess permits - that Eastern Europe enjoyed because their industrial economies were reduced by 40% after
1990, during the transition to capitalism, and in turn allowed the Protocol to come into effect in 2005 after it was ratified by Russia (Prototype Carbon Fund 2005: 45).

In addition to a general carbon trading framework which got its start in the European Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), two techniques were added to improve financing capacity for particular emissions-reducing projects: Joint Implementation between Annex 1 countries (with exceptions in the EU), and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for Annex 1 country investors to fund emissions reduction or sequestration projects in non-Annex 1 countries (assuming that those projects demonstrably require "additional" finance beyond what can be done on a profitable basis without the CDM subsidy, and that they can claim to result in lower emissions than business-as-usual). A Designated National Authority – sometimes a state agency and sometimes a trusted consultancy - in each participating non-Annex 1 country reviews and approves such projects (most CDM applications have come from companies in India, China and Brazil, with the African continent severely underrepresented). If successful there, a CDM project moves to approval by a private-sector Designated Operational Entity which again verifies and certifies reduction claims, at which point a CDM Executive Board decision is made on a rubber-stamp basis aside from problem cases. Amongst the major catalysts of the CDM market is the World Bank’s Prototype Carbon Fund. Most of the CDM certified emissions reduction permits have come from projects that reduce nitrogen and hydrofluorocarbons, which are much more potent greenhouse gases than CO2 (Prototype Carbon Fund 2005). Landfill methane-to-electricity projects are most prevalent within the CDM trade, but are also controversial since the dumps sourced for methane often have dangerous incineration systems as well as informal-sector wastepickers whose livelihoods are threatened in the process, as discussed below.

It is ironic, given the role of Al Gore in catalyzing the market, that the most important missing force in the market, to date, is a US government commitment to carbon trading. In 2009 this commitment finally advanced in the House of Representatives through the Waxman-Markey bill aiming to cap and trade emissions. The law includes a pollution rights give-away, as well as a change to the CAA (which critics argue will gut the important law by exempting carbon as a pollutant from EPA oversight and regulation) plus a generous allowance of offsets which would potentially delay actual US CO2 reductions by two more decades. Such legislation stems from a firm belief in the efficacy of markets. As a presidential candidate, Barack Obama promised,

We would put a cap and trade system in place that is as aggressive, if not more aggressive, than anybody else’s out there... So if somebody wants to build a coal-powered plant, they can; it’s just that it will bankrupt them because they’re going to be charged a huge sum for all that greenhouse gas that’s being emitted. That will also generate billions of dollars that we can invest in solar, wind, biodiesel and other alternative energy approaches (San Francisco Chronicle 2008).
In July 2008, the ETS price of carbon was €29.33/tonne, which probably gave Obama confidence in lucrative funding opportunities for renewables. But by election day in November that year, the price had crashed to less than €9/tonne (when, for example, €40-60/tonne was required to activate investments in carbon capture and storage - by which coal-fired stations could, theoretically, bury liquefied carbon emitted during power generation). Moreover, Obama dropped his promised “full auction” of emissions permits, meaning that polluters would have bid against each other for a bigger share of the emissions allowed under an agreed cap, which in turn they could trade to each other so as to improve economic efficiency. Whether market forces could discipline polluters in the manner envisaged soon became academic, as Waxman-Markey reduced the auction amount to just 15% of permits.

The intrinsic problem in setting a market price for such an elusive commodity - Green House Gas emissions - had already been revealed when the ETS crashed in 2006 thanks to the EU’s overallocation of pollution rights. The market regulators had miscalculated on how to set up the ETS from scratch, with electricity generation firms granted far too many permits (roughly €50 billion worth of pollution rights, if measured at €30 per tonne, were transferred to large European CO2 emitters annually through the ETS). In April 2006, the carbon spot market price lost over half its value in a single day, destroying many carbon offset projects earlier considered viable investments.

Even after a price recovery, by 2007 it was apparent that Europe’s carbon trading pilot was not working. As Peter Atherton (2007) of Citigroup conceded, “ETS has done nothing to curb emissions ... [and] is a highly regressive tax falling mostly on poor people.” Asking whether policy goals were achieved, he answered: “Prices up, emissions up, profits up . . . so, not really. Who wins and loses? ‘All generation-based utilities – winners. Coal and nuclear-based generators – biggest winners. Hedge funds and energy traders – even bigger winners. Losers . . . ahem . . . Consumers!’” A Wall Street Journal (2007) investigation in March 2007 confirmed that emissions trading “would make money for some very large corporations, but don’t believe for a minute that this charade would do much about global warming.” The paper termed the carbon trade “old-fashioned rent-seeking... making money by gaming the regulatory process.” Carl Mortished (2008) wrote in The Times of London, “The ETS is making a mockery of Europe’s stumbling attempts to lead the world in a market-based carbon strategy. It is causing irritation and frustration to the armies of advisers and investors who seek to cajole utilities into big investments in carbon reduction.” As The Guardian (2008) revealed, the ETS provided “hundreds of millions of pounds to some of Britain’s most polluting companies, with little or no benefit to the environment”. Added Jonathan Leake (2008) in the London Times, The incongruity of proposing that a brand new financial market might be able to save the world – when faith in every other kind of financial market is tumbling – needs no underlining. But there are plenty of other reasons for scepticism, too. Jim Hansen, director of the Nasa Goddard space centre and a renowned critic of global measures to combat climate change, believes
carbon trading is a “terrible” approach. “Carbon trading does not solve the emission problem at all,” he says. “In fact it gives industries a way to avoid reducing their emissions. The rules are too complex and it creates an entirely new class of lobbyists and fat cats.”

Specific carbon offsets and CDMs fared no better in these investigations. The Economist (2008) hosted a debate on carbon offsets in December 2008, in which Michael Wara of Stanford and Kevin Smith of Carbon Trade Watch argued the proposition that they “undermine the effort to tackle climate change” – and by a readers’ vote of 55-45, defeated Henry Derwent of the International Emissions Trading Association and carbon trader Mark Trexler. Not only were voluntary offsets increasingly dubious, but verified CDM projects in the Third World were also considered counterproductive. According to a Newsweek (Vencat 2007) magazine investigation in March 2007, the CDM concept “isn’t working... [and represents] a grossly inefficient way of cutting emissions in the developing world.” Notorious projects like the Bisasar Road toxic landfill in Durban and Plantar monocultural timber in Brazil were promised vast funds, with deleterious consequences for local communities and ecosystems. Newsweek (Vencat 2007) called CDMs “a shell game” which has already transferred $3 billion to some of the worst carbon polluters in the developing world.” In early 2009, the London Times (2009) uncovered problems in Mozambican tree planting investments supported by high-profile celebrities (e.g. Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones and actor Brad Pitt), including that “it is almost impossible to guarantee that the trees will survive the length of time needed to offset any significant carbon emissions.” As a TransNational Institute Carbon Trade Watch (2009) report remarked,

These failings are not caused by teething problems, but are symptomatic of the extreme difficulties of assessing the value of ‘carbon,’ which is a commodity that bears little relation to any single real world object. More generally, the scheme over-estimates the capacity of price to achieving structural change in energy production and industrial practice.

Markets work at the margins, and to solve the climate crisis, much more radical, transformative regulations and public investments are required to break through to new energy, extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal systems.

Post-Copenhagen carbon market doldrums and US capitalist ambivalence

At the Copenhagen summit in mid-December 2009, the global climate governance elites simply could not generate the consensus required for a renewed carbon market initiative, particularly in the wake of the US Senate’s failure to find sixty (out of 100) votes in favour of a scheme similar to Waxman-Markey. One reason the US became the major brake on the system’s global emergence was the difficulty in selling cap and trade legislation to the US public, as the main 2009 poll of popular support for carbon trading (by Hart Research Associates in August 2009) found only
27% of the 1000 people surveyed in support, half as much as a direct tax. As Energy and Environment Daily (2009) reported,

When both concepts are explained, voters of all political affiliations and backgrounds favor the tax proposal by a significant margin. Sixty-six% of Democrats prefer the carbon tax, as do 58% of independents and 46% of Republicans. Overall, 57% of those surveyed say they would favor a carbon tax, while 37% are opposed... The poll’s designers say support for the carbon tax proposal stems from a belief that it is far simpler than cap and trade, provides a revenue stream for tax refunds to offset consumer costs of the tax, offers a more direct incentive for businesses and consumers, and is less likely to be corrupted by loopholes for certain interests.

Financial Times climate finance reporter Kate Mackenzie (2010) explained,

Most people just don’t like the idea of carbon cap-and-trade schemes. Whether they object because it’s like a tax, or because it’s not like a tax, or because it only benefits those crooked financial types, or because it’s too bureaucratic and expensive, or because they hate offsets, or free allowance giveaways to polluters... there’s an objection for almost everyone. A pretty powerful constituency however does like cap-and-trade: (some) economists, financial industry types, policy wonks, and some big businesses.

And yet that constituency – those Harvey (1996) has described as ‘ecological modernizationists’ and especially the financial markets which depended upon their policy advocacy - was not strong enough to buck climate denialists, other critics and a skeptical public. A much bigger problem was thus revealed, for indeed on every occasion since the mid-1990s – in 1996 the Montreal Protocol capped and began eliminating ChloroFluoroCarbons in order to close the ozone hole – elite political will was insufficient to address world crises and to give multilateral institutions the power to solve problems, whether through state action or markets. The failure to take forward the Kyoto Protocol’s ambitions in subsequent Conferences of the Parties added to the overall malaise in global forums as well as more discrete gatherings such as the G8 and G20. The World Trade Organisation could not follow through with its Doha Agenda, the Bretton Woods Institutions and Monterrey Financing for Development process did not succeed in lubricating flows to the South or shoring up a volatile world banking system. The United Nations itself became irrelevant when it came to geopolitical tensions. All these problems of achieving global-scale coordination reflected the internecine struggle of capitals, especially the power of recalcitrant fractions within US capital, at the centre of world power.

By the end of 2009, cap and trade was losing the support of a great many US Senators and even the leading Senator in favor of carbon trading, John Kerry, admitted in Copenhagen that he might have to switch to a carbon tax (Politico, 2009). As the e-zine Politico summed up in early 2010,
Prospects for Senate passage of the legislation — already approved by the House last summer — have dimmed in recent months, with the bruising health care debate and looming midterm elections. Last month was particularly brutal, as environmental advocates fended off criticism of climate negotiations in Copenhagen that failed to produce a strong international agreement. Even some supporters now publicly doubt that the bill will get done this year. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) told The Associated Press last week that passage of the legislation was unlikely.

Gridlock meant there was a good chance that legislated carbon trading would simply die, as two Foreign Policy writers, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger (2010), anticipated:

Midterm elections [in November 2010] are likely to bring large Democratic losses in the House, and, fairly or not, a hard vote for failed cap-and-trade legislation will take a fair share of the blame. For House Democrats it will be déjà vu all over again. In 1994 they went out on a limb and voted for an energy tax (known as the Btu tax) pushed by then-Vice President Al Gore and President Bill Clinton’s White House only to see the Senate reject such a measure. Having been ‘BTUed’ by two Democratic administrations, twice-fooled Democrats are unlikely to sign up for more of the same in the next Congress. And cap and trade’s death in the Senate would likely signal its death everywhere - Australia, Japan, Canada, and eventually even Europe.

By January 2010, “moderate [Senate] lawmakers said the chances for enactment of any bill, regardless of its structure, were either nil or completely unpredictable in light of the election... of Sen. Scott Brown (R-Mass.) to replace the late Sen. Ted Kennedy” (Leber and Marshall, 2010). Ironically, Brown had originally been a supporter of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative in ten northeastern US states, which in 2009 was valued at $2.5 billion, about 2% of the world market, but with prices of just €2.35/tonne (compared with Europe’s €13/tonne). The mid-2010 death of the climate bill occurred within weeks of BP’s Gulf Oil spill, which left Kerry, Lieberman and others unable to stitch together both energy and climate concessions sufficiently generous for the coalition of capitals required to move legislation through the Senate. Again, at a larger level, this reflected internecine battles over spatio-temporal fixes, and whether parts of the US – both economically and geographically – would suffer devalorisation as the cost of climate crisis management began to be felt. The overall view of US capitalists seemed to be clear: continue to pass the costs to the environment and to those parts of the world that would be most adversely affected by climate change.

Meanwhile, in the South, the CDM market shrank by 28% from 2008-2009, to €17.5 billion, about 15% of the total, with most of the activity in China and India. The JI market fell 38% in volume over the same period, and 45% in value, to €399 million. Utility stockpiles and Eastern European hot air sales were anticipated to cause
further falls in 2010 (Sweet 2010). The other big factor is the extent to which economic decline continued in Europe, for the continent’s 2008-09 year-on-year GDP fall was 4.1%; industrial output was down 12%, and carbon-intensive construction was also adversely affected by the real estate bubble’s burst. Given these economic trends, the medium term is grim, with even Lord Adair Turner – chair of the UK Climate Change Committee – admitting, “the existing particular form of liberalised market structure has reached the end of its road... Prices [will] struggle to reach €20-30/tonne of CO2e by 2020.” Just a year earlier Turner’s committee had optimistically assumed a price of €50 by 2020, high enough to support many alternative energy projects (Ends, 2009).

Eco-social justice alternatives

Beyond the newspaper scandal investigations, it is interesting to consider just how far the critique of markets goes within the environmental and social justice communities. Perhaps the highest-profile environmentalist critic of carbon trading is Hansen (2009):

Cap-and-trade is the temple of doom. It would lock in disasters for our children and grandchildren. Why do people continue to worship a disastrous approach? Its fecklessness was proven by the Kyoto Protocol. It took a decade to implement the treaty, as countries extracted concessions that weakened even mild goals. Most countries that claim to have met their obligations actually increased their emissions. Others found that even modest reductions of emissions were inconvenient, and thus they simply ignored their goals.

Already a half-decade earlier, a first generation of carbon trade critics – affected communities (from Indonesia, Thailand, India, South Africa, Brazil and Ecuador), academics and researchers, and radical environmentalists – took the name Durban Group for Climate Justice and issued the “Durban Declaration” in October 2004 to sound the alarm about ethical and economic shortcomings. The analysis was foregrounded in the TransNational Institute’s Carbon Trade Watch (2003) report The Sky is Not the Limit, and was then produced as a seminal book, Carbon Trading, by Larry Lohmann (2006) for the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation. Campaigning in Durban itself was set back by the July 2007 death of meeting host Sajida Khan, who battled a CDM methane extraction proposal that kept open the Bisasar Road toxic dump next to her home and that caused the cancer that ultimately killed her. But by December 2007, the movement joined forces with broader global justice activism in the Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) network formed at Bali. As the CJN! (2007) manifesto put it, “Climate Justice Now! will work to expose the false solutions to the climate crisis promoted by these governments, alongside financial institutions and multinational corporations - such as trade liberalisation, privatisation, forest carbon markets, agrofuels and carbon offsetting.”
At a micro level, the roles of wastepickers, indigenous people, forest dwellers, dam-affected communities, critical environmentalists and others threatened by enclosure processes associated with the carbon trade are diverse and even contradictory at times (e.g. in South Africa’s main pilot project, the Bisasar Road methane-electricity landfill, which was supported by some wastepickers against other community critics who aimed to close the dump)(Bond, Dada and Erion, 2009). Most are critics, especially of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) programme and the World Bank’s Forestry Carbon Partnership Facility (earlier CDMs also financed forest and timber projects). These emissions permits were criticized in Copenhagen by the Durban Group for Climate Justice (2009):

Like CDM credits, they exacerbate climate change by giving industrialized countries and companies incentives to delay undertaking the sweeping structural change away from fossil fuel-dependent systems of production, consumption, transportation that the climate problem demands. They waste years of time that the world doesn’t have. Worse, conserving forests can never be climatically equivalent to keeping fossil fuels in the ground, since carbon dioxide emitted from burning fossil fuels adds to the overall burden of carbon perpetually circulating among the atmosphere, vegetation, soils and oceans, whereas carbon dioxide from deforestation does not. This inequivalence, among many other complexities, makes REDD carbon accounting impossible, allowing carbon traders to inflate the value of REDD carbon credits with impunity and further increasing the use of fossil fuels.

The anti-enclosure narrative offered by Tom Goldtooth, director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, is telling: “Most of the forests of the world are found in Indigenous Peoples’ land. REDD-type projects have already caused land grabs, killings, violent evictions and forced displacement, violations of human rights, threats to cultural survival, militarization and servitude.” Goldtooth noted that Papua New Guinea native leader Abilie Wape “was forced at gun point to surrender the carbon rights of his tribe’s forest.” Confirms the London-based NGO Survival International, REDD could leave Indigenous Peoples “with nothing” (Durban Group for Climate Justice, 2009).

In contrast, there are market-oriented environmental organisations which have endorsed carbon trading as a step forward. According to Sierra Club Canada director Elizabeth May, for example, “I would have preferred a carbon tax, but that is not the agreement we have. The reality is that Kyoto is the only legally binding agreement to reduce greenhouse gasses. When you’re drowning and someone throws you a lifeboat, you can’t wait for another one to come along” (Athanasiou 2005). There are also African countries whose own future industrial development prospects are limited by eventual capping of CO2 emissions, amongst which South Africa looms large given that as a measurement of carbon intensity, the energy sector’s CO2 emissions per unit of per capita GDP was twenty times that of the United States by the time of Kyoto (Bond 2002). One advocacy position that seeks to unite market environmentalists and Third World states is the demand for a notional per capita
pollution rights grant, which in turn can be traded (e.g. Greenhouse Development Rights, and Contraction and Convergence).

Would the kind of carbon tax Hansen advocates satisfy the activist critics? Many have expressed ambivalence about the potential for a tax on greenhouse gas emissions, because this market-related approach would take the production system as given and alter the demand structure, again falling victim to the problem of change merely at the margins. According to an assessment by the US Congressional Budget Office (2008),

A tax on emissions would be the most efficient incentive-based option for reducing emissions and could be relatively easy to implement. If it was coordinated among major emitting countries, it would help minimize the cost of achieving a global target for emissions by providing consistent incentives for reducing emissions around the world.

But aside from its failure to transform systems that generate emissions, major problems with taxation are tax avoidance capacities of influential industries, and incidence: who will pay the bill. There are certainly means of designing a tax system with a strongly redistributive outcome, and in the process incentivizing transformative economic strategies. However, a dramatic shift in political power is required for such an outcome. And if such a shift in power is achieved, there would quickly also arise more rapid alternatives to such market-based strategies. These typically include both state-oriented command and control, and fenceline/grassroots "direct action". Command-and-control strategies for emissions reductions include some important victories such as the banning of ChloroFluroCarbons in the 1996 Montreal Protocol in order to prevent ozone hole destruction, and many European emissions regulations. Moreover, a national state strategy known as "leave the oil in the soil" (and "leave the coal in the hole") entails both state prohibition of fossil fuel extraction and direct grassroots action against greenhouse gas emission points. Direct actions are increasing: environmentalists in dinghies harassing vast coal ships in Newcastle, Australia; blockaded British power plants; campaigns against the Alberta Tar Sands in Canada; and sit-ins against coal extraction in West Virginia and coal-based power generation in Washington, DC in 2009. This crucial step in Northern environmentalism followed Al Gore’s remark in August 2007: “I can’t understand why there aren’t rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants” (cited by Kristoff 2007). In March 2010, days after a direct action protest at the Environmental Protection Agency, the West Virginians won a commitment from its director, Lisa Jackson, that mountain top removal would end, via enforcement of the Clean Water Act in view of the destruction of myriad water courses in the mountains.

The South also offers very serious leadership in Polanyian ‘double-movement’ politics, such as from indigenous people and environmental and community activists in the Niger Delta and Ecuadoran Amazon. Accion Ecologica persuaded
Ecuadoran president Rafael Correa to consider an oil-in-the-soil plan to prevent drilling in the Yasuni National Park in 2007, which by June 2009 was rewarded with a $50 million/year commitment by the German government and in July 2010 by the establishment of a United Nations trust fund that activists believe can be kept free of the carbon markets. Most spectacularly, Niger Delta activists kept vast amounts of oil in the soil through both non-violent and armed struggle. In the former category, Environmental Rights Action in Port Harcourt insisted on an end to extraction and exploration. In the latter, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta continued to kidnap foreign oil workers, demanding they vacate the Delta for good. Thanks in part to organising by the Ogoni Solidarity Forum, Shell Oil was kicked out of Ogoniland in June 2008, 13 years after the company arranged for Ken Saro-Wiwa’s execution, an act for which they settled an Alien Tort Claims Act lawsuit out of court in June 2009 for $15.5 million. In South Africa, the Pietermaritzburg NGO groundwork linked OilWatch to several dozen anti-oil activists’ groups from across the continent at a September 2008 conference, and a month later, citing climate concerns, the South Durban Community and Environmental Alliance began a legal appeal to the national government, aiming to reverse a $2 billion Durban-Johannesburg pipeline investment which would double oil refining in the polluted community. These are examples of serious strategies in place to halt climate change at the supply side, and proponents believe that though they are still microscopic in nature, these strategies and tactics could be much more effective than carbon markets. Many have been inspired by Alaskan and Californian environmentalists’ ability to withstand US oil company pressure to drill in the tundra and off the coast.

To be successful beyond ‘Not In My Back Yard’ politics, such individual sites of environmental injustice, where markets penetrate and societies resist, require broader, deeper linkages of eco-social contestation. Climate Justice Now! (2007) emerged with these kinds of strategies in mind, in December 2007, issuing five demands: reduced consumption; huge financial transfers from North to South based on historical responsibility and ecological debt for adaptation and mitigation costs paid for by redirecting military budgets, innovative taxes and debt cancellation; leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in appropriate energy-efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy; rights based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous land rights and promotes peoples” sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water; and sustainable family farming, fishing and peoples’ food sovereignty.

These principles were further fleshed out in Cochabamba, where the April 2010 conference declared the emissions market had become “a lucrative business of commercializing our Mother Earth. Instead of tackling climate change, it is an act of looting and ravaging the land, water and even life itself.” As Naomi Klein (2010) summarised, that event generated four big ideas: that nature should be granted rights that protect ecosystems from annihilation (a Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights); that those who violate those rights and other international environmental agreements should
face legal consequences (a Climate Justice Tribunal); that poor countries should receive various forms of compensation for a crisis they are facing but had little role in creating (Climate Debt); and that there should be a mechanism for people around the world to express their views on these topics (World People’s Referendum on Climate Change).

No matter that the Climate Justice component movements are disparate, these are the kinds of narratives that link spatio-temporal resistances amongst diverse eco-social forces during a period of austerity, civil society weakness and repression. The agents of social and environmental change can take advantage of neoliberalism’s discredited ideological status, and demand from the next global and national negotiations a strategy not based upon commodifying carbon. But to do so they still need to generalize an innovative critique that has emerged over time, as the emissions trading strategy rose, peaked and then apparently fell during the frenzy of Kyoto-Copenhagen climate politics. From the common critique will come more confidence in the types of strategies, tactics and alliances that appear to be taking a distinct, multi-layered form of ‘scale politics’ for much of the CJ network. It is too soon to say whether these too become generalized but at least in mid-2010, they can be grouped into five coherent levels of action.

First, at global scale (the next COPs in Mexico and South Africa), the CJ movement and its components will continue to make demands – albeit unwinnable in the foreseeable future given the adverse balance of forces in the UN and G8/G20 - for huge emissions cuts (45% of industrial economy greenhouse gases by 2020), 2) Climate Debt payments (scaling up to $400 billion/year by 2020), and 3) carbon market decommissioning, along with the visionary global-governance arrangements proposed in Bolivia. Second, at national scale, movements will continue to make demands – also unwinnable in most settings, where due to adverse power balances, unacceptable legislation and/or gridlock are most likely - for industrial economies to make cuts of the same magnitude, Climate Debt payments and carbon market decommissioning, plus provide massive state investments in transformed, decentralized energy systems, transport and infrastructure. At national scale in semi-industrialised economies (e.g. especially BASICs), demands will be made for emissions cuts based upon reversing their growing fossil fuel addictions, and in some cases (e.g. South Africa) for payment of a climate debt to poorer neighbours, and for the rejection of CDMs and offsets.

Third, beyond making unwinnable demands, the CJ movements will pressure national states to create or strengthen national environmental regulatory agencies, and challenge these institutions to restrict greenhouse gas emissions as dangerous pollutants (for example, as in the US after lawsuits and direct action protests against the EPA). Fourth, at regional/provincial/state/municipal scales, the movements will engage public utility commissions and planning boards to block climate-destructive practices and projects. And fifth, at even more local scales, CJ movements will identify point sources of major greenhouse gas emissions, power consumption or
excessive transport, and raise consciousness and the cost of business-as-usual through direct action and other pressure techniques.

The point about these kinds of reform demands and concrete actions is that they replace what is now obviously a myopic reliance upon emissions markets – and the fractions of capital (in finance, energy and agriculture) and political forces promoting markets – with state command-and-control functions plus direct action. The successes noted so far with this set of bottom-up strategies, tactics and alliances are small, fragmented and potentially unsustainable (the outcome of the Yasuni Park financing struggle will be most revealing). But nevertheless these appear to be the bases upon which a serious climate justice political project will stand. The urgency of gaining traction for the sake of making substantial cuts in emissions is obvious enough, but the danger of moving too urgently with a climate politics that takes on board emissions markets simply because the Kyoto Protocol set them up is far more damaging. As shown in the pages above, the danger comes from the unworkability of emissions markets even though they appear attractive to elites (North and South) in part as a spatio-temporal displacement technique for overaccumulated capital. The evidence suggests, however, that the markets have had their chance, and for all manner of reasons have failed. The next step beyond realizing this is to gather a much broader coalition of forces working at the various scales above, and build a climate justice movement that can assure the survival of all life on the planet, not just those very few who, through success in the markets and other sites of accumulation, will retain some degree of insulation.

Correspondence: School of Development Studies and Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban 4001, South Africa, email: bondp@ukzn.ac.za

References


Climate justice politics across space and scale
*Human Geography*, July 2010

Abstract
After roughly two decades of growing activist interest in the climate problem, the deadlocked politics of formal climate change negotiations generated such divisions that a formal global network of radical proponents of ‘climate justice’ emerged. In December 2007, Climate Justice Now! was formed to transcend earlier technicist, market-oriented, insider strategies by environmental NGOs. South Africa is one place where climate justice politics reflected the top-down lack of political will and growing bottom-up anger. The spatial and scalar visions of climate justice activists at both global and local levels are worth considering in detail, given the importance of this work for planetary sustainability and the living conditions of future generations, as well as for transnational activism more generally. Using David Harvey’s insights on crisis and displacement, the article suggests routes of analysis, strategies, tactics and alliances that can be compared between global and local levels, with South Africa as a case study.

1. Introduction

This article draws together lessons from recent global and South African episodes in climate politics which reveal core insights into radical analyses and activism against climate change. Combating greenhouse gas emissions is a formidable challenge, and the first two decades of environmentalist awareness about the coming climate catastrophe obviously did not establish sound principles for social and state interventions. For critics, the scalar and spatial nature of the challenge is rarely strategized explicitly. However, the recent fusion of the ‘global justice movement’ with radical environmentalism may result in a decisive mix of ‘red’ and ‘green’ politics, stretching from local to global scales.

One reason for failure, to date, is the inadequate understanding among most environmentalists regarding capitalist climate imperatives. In turn, this stems in part from their overly generous assessments of global elite *bona fides*, a mistaken sense of the balance of forces in global-scale negotiations, a naïve belief that market mechanisms can work to solve (rather than exacerbate) the crisis, and a lack of sensitivity to North-South relations. In some cases too, the Big Green groups – especially National Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense, Conservation International, the Nature Conservancy, World Wide Fund for Nature and the Sierra Club – turned to corporate partners for financial support and, as a result, turned their backs on climate science. ‘I find the behavior of most environmental NGOs to be shocking,’ eminent climate scientist James Hansen recently stated. ‘I [do] not want to listen to their lame excuses for their abominable behavior’ (cited in Hari, 2010). Most prominently, the Climate Action Network, representing Big Green and similarly-minded smaller groups, has long supported emissions markets, to the point that extreme conflicts of interests emerged when Network leaders began earning side profits from the carbon trade (Bond 2009a).
As a result, a movement that became known as Climate Justice (‘CJ’) emerged during the 2000s. It drew inspiration from traditions such as US anti-racist politics associated with environmental justice organizing dating to the 1980s, the incipient radical environmentalism that regularly attempted to break out of stifling United Nations negotiations, and the Global Justice movement that symbolically began in Chiapas with the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and became global in orientation with the Seattle protests against the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) millennial summit. One marker of this new approach was the 2004 founding of the Durban Group for Climate Justice, a loose network largely aimed at building a critique of carbon trading. At the Bali Conference of the Parties in December 2007, the Climate Justice Now! network was launched, and two years later, joined Climate Justice Action (mainly European radicals) as the leading critics of the Copenhagen climate summit. In the wake of Copenhagen, a return of the same forces to Cancun will very likely see a repeat of the elite failure of December 2010, amidst militant protest outside. The same can be expected in South Africa when the Conference of the Parties reconvenes in late 2011.

Interesting new developments should inform CJ politics. The most important are the probable demise of overarching global (and US national) emissions markets as a serious vehicles for mainstream environmentalism, and the emergence of campaigns that relate to both the spatial and scalar challenges of global and local climate politics. The case studies in this article are drawn from South Africa, but similar processes elsewhere bear consideration.

As discussed in more detail below, this shifting-stalling-stealing strategy of powerful Northern actors (and supplicant Southern elite allies) recurs in capitalist crisis displacement (Section 2) in a manner that helps us understand climate negotiations (Section 3). A case study of South African national climate policy is reflective of how intermediate terrain has been won by the global elite, including the specific cases of a World Bank carbon trading project in Durban and a $3.75 billion loan to South Africa’s electricity parastatal Eskom (Section 4). This rounds off the argument that a serious ideology and strategy crossing space and scale will invariably embrace anti-imperialist, eco-socialist politics, and that the roots of this strategy have been planted in the movement now known as Climate Justice (Section 5).

2. Shifting, stalling and stealing through space, time and accumulation by dispossession

The context is crucial. Drawing on David Harvey’s insights into the laws of motion of capital, the climate debate fits well within what might be called a shifting-stalling-stealing strategy at the heart of contemporary capitalism. The three routes correspond to the ways capitalism dealt with its deep-rooted problem of overaccumulation, dating to the 1970s, using what Harvey terms the ‘spatial fix,’ the ‘temporal fix,’ and ‘accumulation by dispossession.’ In the field of political economy, these concepts refer, respectively, to:
- *globalization*’s ability to shift problems around spatially, without actually solving these problems;
- *financialization*’s capacity to stall problems temporally, by generating credit-based techniques – including securitization of toxic loans – that permit the purchase of products today at the expense of future arrears and defaults when the upside-down pyramid topples; and
- *imperialism*’s compulsion to steal from weaker territories via extra-economic extractive systems, variously termed ‘articulations of modes of production,’ ‘primitive accumulation,’ ‘uneven and combined development,’ the ‘Shock Doctrine,’ and ‘accumulation by dispossession’.

The mismanagement of capitalist crises, most spectacularly in 2008-09, included vast taxpayer bank bailouts when the financial bubbles burst. These, in turn, set the stage for another coming round of subprime disasters (next time, sovereign debt defaults combined with commercial real estate) as well as more rapid devaluation of the dollar. No matter how much the shifting, stalling, and stealing, more is required than US Treasury and the Fed have accomplished – but there are limits, now emerging into plain view.

It is a general problem, as we see by retracing several decades. Shifting-stalling-stealing moves are required when capital exhausts options to address periodic overaccumulation crises – such as 1973-75, 1980-82, 1989-92, 1997-2001 and 2007-09, with more to come – through traditional means. These would include classical strategies Marx identified as countervailing tendencies, such as raising the profit rate through work speed-up and intensity (absolute surplus value) or more efficient, capital-intensive production (relative surplus value). But the crises cannot be solved in these ways, because overaccumulation stems from excessive productive capacity and gluts of markets, commodity stocks, labor pools and financial assets unable to achieve deployment in a manner that generates acceptable levels of profit (Harvey 1982). As a result, the traditional strategies have to be augmented by shifting problems around geographically (Harvey’s term is the ‘spatial fix’ – or ‘shifting’); and building up vast debt and blowing speculative bubbles so as to stall crises until later (Harvey’s ‘temporal fix’ – or ‘stalling’). At this stage, capital often needs more routes to offset the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, including the appropriation of non-capitalist spheres of society and nature through extra-economic, imperialist techniques, in the manner Harvey (2003) termed ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (or, ‘stealing’). Rosa Luxemburg (1951) described this process in *The Accumulation of Capital* and Naomi Klein (2007) updated the argument in *Shock Doctrine*. The leading statement from Africa about capital’s tendency to ‘financialization’ as part of this process was restated recently by Ugandan political economist Dani Nabudere (2009) in his *Crash of International Finance Capital*.

Can the capitalist strategies of shifting, stalling and stealing also inform our understanding of the environmental dynamics associated with accumulation? Core
insights drawn from Harvey’s amendments to Marxist theory include the shifting of the geographical framework for climate (with the South and East bearing increased responsibility) as the crisis hits home in the North; the stalling of its resolution through recourse to financial markets – e.g. the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme – no matter how dysfunctional; and ‘stealing’ the right to emit pollutants from the more vulnerable countries of the South. After all, a crucial limit to capitalist political economy is political ecology. Larry Summers arranged Wall Street bailouts in 1995 (Mexico), 1997-98 (East Asia) and 2008-10 (across the world but mainly helping Wall Street) through extreme devaluations visited upon vulnerable countries and people. These hark back to December 1991. At that point, as World Bank chief economist, Summers (1991) wrote (or at least signed a memo written by Lant Pritchett) that ‘The economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste on the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that,’ and ‘African countries are vastly underpolluted’. The gist of Summers’ analysis and strategy is that the US and other First World ultra-polluters should:

- shift problems associated with environmental market externalities to the South;
- stall a genuine solution to the problems by instead opening up the field of pollution-trading for a future market solution, using financialization techniques and imaginary ‘offsets’ ostensibly aimed at building tomorrow’s sinks so as to mop up today’s dangerous forms of Northern pollution; and
- steal more of the world’s environmental carrying capacity – especially for greenhouse gas emissions – and perhaps pay a bit back through commodification of the air (resorting to mythical carbon markets and offsets) while denying climate debt responsibilities (as the US negotiating team did in Copenhagen, especially chief envoy Todd Stern: ‘The sense of guilt or culpability or reparations – I just categorically reject that’) (Bond 2009b).

This is the basic theoretical and interpretive standpoint that allows us to study power politics in climate negotiations beginning in 1997 and carrying through to 2010.

3. Kyoto-Copenhagen-Cancun

Three simple steps need to be taken to escape the greenhouse-gas governance gridlock among global elites, although United Nations officials, and nearly all the world’s climate negotiators, refuse to take them:

- make dramatic emissions cuts – 45% below 1990 levels in the advanced capitalist economies, within a decade, so as to reduce the temperature rise to less than 1 degree centigrade in line with scientific demands and the calls of climate change victims (World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, 2010);
• acknowledge the vast climate debt the wealthy North owes to the under-emitting South – estimated at $400 bn/year by 2020 (Klein 2009a, Lee 2009); and
• decommission the destructive carbon markets – which have proven incapable of fair, rational and non-corrupt trading (Lohmann 2009).

As noted, elites prefer other routes: shifting, stalling, and stealing, three moves we can use to characterize both contemporary economic crisis management and climate malgovernance. The carbon markets assist capitalism in generating all three moves, and it is remarkable that it took more than a decade before a critical mass of opponents emerged after the Kyoto Protocol was formulated. Instead, while Washington’s Big Green organizations initially opposed carbon trading, they were won over in Kyoto. They were joined by European elites, who set up the EU Emissions Trading Scheme along the lines Al Gore had requested in 1997. At that point, Gore falsely promised the US would sign on to Kyoto if it included carbon markets (and which has made him, personally, even more wealthy, as a pioneer carbon market participant). But the route from Kyoto to Copenhagen was one Washington declined to travel, as the Senate voted 95-0 against the Kyoto accords. The Bush regime showed up near the endgame, in Bali in 2007, with a vague commitment to join future post-Kyoto talks, if China and India were compelled to make deep cuts.

Then, in Copenhagen, Washington ‘broke the UN,’ as 350.org leader Bill McKibben put it, by invoking a WTO-style Green Room strategy of divide-and-conquer (Bond 2009b). In a microcosm of last-minute shifting-stalling-stealing, the Copenhagen Accord brought the US together with the Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC) bloc so that five leaders-of-color – Barack Obama, Lula da Silva, Jacob Zuma, Manmohan Singh and Wen Jiabao – could cement, for future decades, the untenable profits and lifestyles enjoyed overwhelmingly by white-owned capital and white over-consumers.¹ Process aside, the Accord’s content was nearly universally condemned, for four reasons:

• inadequate emissions cuts imply a catastrophic 3.5 degree centigrade increase in average temperatures by the end of the century, with options for vague ‘pledge and review’ commitments and offsets so that Northern polluters can outsource the cuts;
• no clear sources of financing and explicit commitments to pay the North’s ‘climate debt’ to the South, owed for taking too much environmental space and doing massive climate damage (such as the current 300,000 premature deaths annually, escalating much more quickly as climate chaos worsens

¹ Tellingly, amongst the first groups of rural Africans to be fatally affected by the extreme climate change that the Copenhagen Accord locks in, are the Luo people of Kenya and the Zulu of KwaZulu-Natal: Obama’s and Zuma’s closest kin. Nine of ten African peasants will not be able to produce if the 2 degrees centigrade mark is breached this century, according to UN experts (Pachauri, 2007).
beyond 1 degree centigrade)(United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2008);

- the deal’s departure from Kyoto Protocol and Bali Action Plan principles which set out far more ambitious targets for richer versus poorer countries; and
- no legally binding components or compliance mechanisms.

At Cancun, in November-December 2010, we can expect a re-occurrence of the crashed WTO ministerial summit held seven years earlier, in the form of protests outside and a walk-out and consensus-denial by insider elites. For also in Cancun in 2003, a brave African delegation opposed South Africa’s trade minister (Alec Erwin), and withdrew from the WTO summit (Bond 2006). In late 2010, Cancun critics will no doubt include delegates from small islands, a few African countries, and the Bolivarians of Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. They will be supported by tens of thousands of red-green activists outside the Cancun talks, a group far more militant than the 100,000 who marched December 12, 2009 in Denmark. We take up these movements’ strategic options, following a discussion of South African climate politics. This is more than a local case study, for the positions of state and capital on the one hand, and the Climate Justice Now! South Africa network on the other, will also shape global processes given South Africa’s 2011 hosting of the next Conference of Parties.

4. South African elite interests and climate injustice

In part because of South Africa’s vast CO2 emissions – the country’s carbon intensity per capita GDP output is amongst the world’s highest – the Pretoria government occupies an important position in global climate politics. As noted above, Brazil, South Africa, India and China – the BASIC countries – and the United States sponsored a climate deal at Copenhagen in December 2009, condemned by Klein (2009b) as ‘nothing more than a grubby pact between the world’s biggest emitters: I’ll pretend that you are doing something about climate change if you pretend that I am too. Deal? Deal.’ Returning from the meeting, South Africa’s environment minister Buyelwa Sonjica expressed ‘disappointment’ in the Copenhagen Accord that Obama persuaded SA President Jacob Zuma to sign at the last minute on December 18, 2009 (Bond 2010b). It failed on its own terms, as key deadlines slipped by. Moreover, Obama’s gambit meant that the WTO’s notorious divide-and-rule politics – controversially endorsed by South Africa (through Erwin) at the 1999 Seattle, 2001 Doha and 2003 Cancun summits but vetoed by the African delegation at the first and third – would become the norm for UN climate negotiations, to the obvious detriment of climate victims, especially in Africa (Bond, 2006). The cuts in South African emissions promised by Sonjica just before Copenhagen were labeled by Earthlife Africa as a ‘public relations stunt’ because of the ‘fantasy’ baseline projection (Bond 2009b). In reality, emissions cuts promised in Pretoria’s Long-Term Mitigation Scenario will not begin until after 2030.
The failure to prevent government from agreeing to the Copenhagen Accord can be blamed in part upon the weak state of civil society organizing and social consciousness. Amongst major countries surveyed in 2006, only China had a lower awareness of climate change than South Africa. The same problem had been evident when South Africa last hosted a major environmental conference, in Johannesburg in 2002, when the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development did not even consider climate change worthy of discussion.

Moreover, one of the most obvious strategic orientations of the South African government is carbon trading (Bond, Dada and Erion 2009). To illustrate the controversies, in April 2010 the Medupi power plant was proposed by Eskom officials as a potential Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project, in spite of the enormous eco-social resistance that arose to its financing by a World Bank loan (Newmarch 2010). In the same spirit, in 2009, an attempt by Sasol to claim that a gas pipeline investment was ‘additional’ to existing plans (hence deserving emissions reductions credits) was ridiculed by the Johannesburg activist group Earthlife (2009), and did not pass muster in the UN vetting process.

But the most controversial was South Africa’s single largest CDM project, a methane-electricity conversion at Bisasar Road landfill in Durban’s Clare Estate residential neighborhood, which processes 5000 tonnes of solid waste a day. As SA Energy Minister Dipuo Peters explained during a January 2010 visit and formal unveiling of the CDM, ‘As I understand it, the development of this project began as far back as 2002 when the Department of Cleansing and Solid Waste here in eThekwini municipality was approached by the World Bank encouraging the municipality to consider participating in CDM initiatives’ (Bond 2010c).

Durban bureaucrats believed the Bank and marketed Durban methane far and wide. But opposition arose from a local community activist, Sajida Khan, who lived next to the site until she died in 2007 of cancer, a disease she blamed white municipal officials for. The dump had been imposed on the Clare Estate community in 1980, in one of the world’s extreme cases of environmental racism. Many neighbors also succumbed to cancer. Because of Khan’s activism, profiled on the front page of the Washington Post the day the Kyoto Protocol became operational in February 2005, the Bank retreated from Bisasar (it did offer CDM status to two other small Durban landfills in August that year). During the 1990s, Khan organized thousands of her neighbors to call for the closure of the Bisasar Road site but apartheid bureaucrats refused, as did the post-apartheid city manager, Mike Sutcliffe, during the 2000s.2

2 In 2008, Sutcliffe was granted two major honors by the American Geographical Association, reflecting the extraordinary conceptual distance between Ohio State University – from where they were proposed (and from where Sutcliffe received his PhD) – and Durban. Critics of Sutcliffe point to his refusal to grant permissions for nonviolent protest marches, championing of a new World Cup stadium costing hundreds of millions of dollars (in spite of a perfectly functional stadium operating next door), dogmatic (and failed) bus privatization, attempted closure of a century-old Indian market to put up a shopping mall at Warwick Junction, unending subsidies given to pet projects at the harbor and the International Convention Centre, controversies over the rejection of the ‘Blue Flag’ beach
He ordered the dump to stay open, contradicting ANC campaign promises in 1994, because Bisasar is extremely well-located and the valley – once a nature reserve – could take many years' more worth of rubbish before filling up, hence more methane-electricity CDM monies.

For Khan, that meant the Clare Estate community would be forever stuck with waste, stink and toxins. Perfume rods along the fence sickened the air's smell, instead of cleaning it. Gaps in the thin cement wall separating the dump from Kennedy Road (and thousands of shackdwellers) illustrated how little maintenance support the city provides. The methane-electricity conversion requires burning and flaring, which meant putrid fumes from rotting waste have a much higher level of lethal chemicals and metals. Ideally, Khan argued, the dump should be shut, a municipal 'zero-waste' strategy adopted, and methane piped out of Bisasar to a site (for industrial usage) not so densely packed with housing and schools in the immediate vicinity. But that would have cost the city a bit more. Instead, the project went ahead, although due to the international uproar over Bisasar's explicit environmental racism (the subject of a front-page Washington Post report in 2005), the World Bank was compelled to drop out. Khan died in July 2007, of cancer which she believed was brought on by the extension of dumping.

Another South African climate justice campaign – also unsuccessful in the short term – entailed fighting the World Bank’s coal portfolio. On April 8 2010, the Bank Board approved a $3.75 billion loan to the South African electricity utility Eskom, to build the world’s fourth largest coal-fired power plant. The Medupi power station will pump 25-30 megatonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere annually, more than the program to assure safe sea water, promotion of the economically dubious Dube Trade Port, and adoption of an economic development strategy reliant upon sports tourism – including Olympic Games bids – in an age of climate change, stadium and airport white elephants, and fast-rising air travel taxes.

3 The adverse consequences of Durban waste strategies are not limited to Bisasar Road. In the Indian-African suburb of Chatsworth, the Bul Bul Landfill emits toxic fumes, and in October 2009, a particularly bad eruption left more than 100 nearby schoolchildren hospitalized. According to Lushendrie Naidu of the Dumpsite Action Committee, 'We are protesting, demanding the dump be closed. For the past five years, chemical waste has been stored at Bul-Bul, yet there is no disaster management plan.' Instead of a sensible disposal strategy, Durban’s bureaucrats are turning to waste incineration, using the energy/climate crisis as an excuse, and borrowing outmoded technology from Oslo. Yet as one official Norwegian document concedes, ‘Incineration and landfill are seen as the least desirable forms of waste management and represent the last resort within Oslo’s strategy.’ Because the super-carcinogenic chemical dioxin is produced in the process, the Norwegian group Aksjon Steng Gifffabrikken demanded that the two Oslo incinerators be closed. Yet Durban Mayor Obed Mlaba announced in the September 2009 city’s newsletter, ‘Residents of Oslo in particular, are generating electricity directly from solid waste. The way it’s done is that waste is simply fed into some transformer machine, where it is literally burned with the end product being electricity. Well, the good news for you and I is that we could soon have the same method right here on our doorstep. Once available, it would perfectly complement the methane-based power process,’ putting Durban ‘well on track to playing its part in curtailing global warming through the reduction of greenhouse gas emission into the atmosphere.’ The reality is much more dirty, dangerous and destructive (Bond, 2010c).
output of 115 countries. Paying for Medupi will require a 127% real price increase from 2007-12 for ordinary South Africans (to nearly $0.15/kiloWatt hour). Meanwhile the world’s biggest metals and mining houses – especially Anglo American Corporation and BHP Billiton (itself a beneficiary of twice as much as power as thirty million low-income black South Africans) – had signed ‘Special Pricing Agreements’ during apartheid. They still get the world’s cheapest electricity from Eskom, for less than $0.02/kWh, whereas the overall corporate price is around $0.05/kWh. In exchange for the cheap power, there are very few jobs and economic linkages because locally-sold steel and aluminum cost far more than the same products which are send abroad. Also sent abroad are their vast profits, contributing to the country’s severe payments deficit, which The Economist (2009) magazine found justified the ranking of South Africa as the world’s riskiest emerging market.

South Durban activists launched the campaign against the Bank loan on February 16 2010, with a spirited protest at Eskom’s main local branch. South Durban has been an epicenter of protest against fossil fuels, given that the neighborhood hosts the largest and most irresponsible petro-chemical firms south of the Niger Delta. With electricity prices soaring, many more residents in South Durban suffered electricity disconnections. They often reconnect illegally, and as Eskom and the municipality clamp down, the result is more social strife, in a country with what is probably the world’s highest rate of community protest (Bond 2010c).

There were a great many other objections to the loan. In Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, community and environmentalist anger at Eskom and the World Bank was due to the coal-fired generator’s eco-social threats, both in the vicinity of Medupi and near the dozens of new coal mines that will feed it. Local ecologies are adversely affected, especially the notoriously degraded water table, as well as the air, land, vegetables and animals due to mercury emissions from coal. Moreover, Eskom’s desire to privatize 30% of generating capacity was explicitly advanced in the loan, leading to opposition from trade unions – especially the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa – and consumers.

In spite of the Bank’s (2010) recent attack on ‘quiet corruption’, backhanders appear to characterize this project. The Bank loan will indirectly fund African National Congress (ANC) ruling party coffers, because the power plant will be built with Hitachi boilers that in turn kick back, at minimum, millions of dollars thanks to a convenient – and utterly dubious (everyone admits) – ANC investment in Hitachi. When the deal was done, Eskom chair (and former environment minister) Valli Moosa was also a member of the ANC’s finance committee. A government investigation released in March found his conduct in this blatant conflict of interest to be ‘improper’. Finally, the matter of historic racial injustice deserves mention. The World Bank’s financing of apartheid began just three years after the 1948 election of the Afrikaners’ Nationalist Party, and included $100 million for Eskom. During that period, the Bank’s money financed electricity to no black households, and instead empowered white businesses and residences (Centre for Civil Society, 2010).
As a result of these critiques, more than 200 organizations across the world, representing communities, environmentalists, labor, churches, NGOs, academics, endorsed a tough statement against the loan. The strong showing for climate justice contrasted with prior South African experiences in which ‘green’ and ‘red’ social forces were split, such as the Johannesburg WSSD in 2002 (Bond 2002). They point to a future of climate justice campaigning that takes advantage of critical international linkages, and that tackles the country’s, and world’s, largest institutions. The ability of South African state and capital to shift, stall and steal using climate-related finance – CDMs or World Bank loans – was not fundamentally altered by the social struggles described above. But the stage is set for future battles that will be even more strongly contested from below.

5. Conclusion: The logic of Charleston-Cochabamba-Caracas

In addition to protesting climate injustice in the case of the World Bank loan to Eskom and South Africa’s main CDM project, as well as at global-scale sites like Copenhagen and Cancun (and no doubt at its 2011 follow-up in South Africa, probably Cape Town), what, then, is the optimal route mapped by the CJ movement? Is anything to be learned from the South African experience in linking a variety of red and green issues within a single campaign?

We can answer in the affirmative if we recall the political-economic logic of CJ, in relation to the way capitalist crisis has unfolded so as to amplify climate injustice (Bond 2010d). To sum up, coming to grips with climate politics requires CJ organizers to:

- halt elite shifting of the problem, by expanding our own spatial and scalar political lenses from the local to the national and global (as was often accomplished in 2000s global justice organizing and activism);
- halt elite stalling by telescoping long-term climatic processes into the present, but without getting so carried away by urgency that we endorse dubious deals (this is one of our most serious challenges because the most adverse impacts are years away for many, and some of the most opportunistic of false solutions are being imposed through rush-job environmental assessments); and
- halt elite stealing – not only of an unfair share of the planet’s environmental space, but also of multilateral political processes – by asking tough questions about mitigation and adaptation, and about climate justice, stressing North-South and class/race/gender power relationships.

We have already explored the terribly adverse balance of forces associated with global governance processes from Kyoto to Copenhagen to Cancun. The last solution to a world-scale problem, after all, was the 1996 Montreal Protocol banning ozone-hole-endangering CFCs. As a result, the CJ movement must not only contest but also circumvent the elites in order to escape their climate cul-de-sac. Such a process
starts elsewhere, in unlikely places like Charleston, West Virginia, where the scale-challenge has taken groups like Coal River Mountain Watch and Climate Ground Zero from their localized mountaintop removal protests – including tree-sit microsites – to the state capital, where they locked down at the WV Department of Environmental Protection in June 2009. Their demand was a handover of responsibility from local bureaucrats captured by Big Coal, to the national Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

But simultaneously, the same agency became the subject of intense climate protest, especially in March 2010, because of the EPA’s slovenly attitude towards West Virginia mountaintop removal. Activists blockaded the Washington headquarters entrance, and within days, the EPA issued such a tough ruling – based on water law – that it appears West Virginia mountaintop coal removal may become a practice of the past. But the agency needs more direct action to reverse EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson’s February 2010 announcement that her agency would delay substantive implementation of its 2009 ‘endangerment finding’ on coal until 2013 (curiously timed to avoid the Obama reelection campaign).

Indeed it is in national state regulation (in the US and every other country) that climate accountability has been most obviously missing. Direct command-and-control regulation of emissions sources – far beyond current EPA plans for imposition of better coal-burning technology – must be higher on the agenda in 2010, since the Senate is unwilling to pass a genuine climate bill. Gridlock in the Senate is rather useful, in this context of adverse power relations. As climate scientist Hansen and activists at Climate SOS and Rising Tide pointed out, the cap-and-trade strategy adopted by Senators John Kerry and Joe Lieberman will do far more harm than good (Leonard 2009). As in Copenhagen, it is better to have no deal than to have a bad deal which locks in a ‘false-solution’ climate strategy, such as the May 2010 Kerry-Lieberman bill.

However, of greatest importance is that the tide turned against carbon trading in early 2010. The entire carbon trading apparatus – once projected to grow to $3 trillion worth of annual trades by 2020 – is now in question, having failed to cut emissions in the main pilot project, the European Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Due to overallocation of permits, the ETS will face further declines in price, and the failure of the Copenhagen Accord to confirm financing was a major blow to the market, which crashed by 10% from December 17-21 2009 as it appeared there would be a serious legitimacy deficit. The ETS was itself delegitimized in September 2009 when the UN’s main verification contractor was disqualified for repeated procedural violations, and in December 2009 when Europol discovered that up to 90% of trades in some EU countries were flagrant tax scams (The Telegraph 2009).

The problem lies not only with the particular project, an explicit example of environmental racism. More generally, to make such landfill methane-electricity
conversions highly profitable, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol needed to accomplish four things:

- impose a cap and reduce emissions so as to generate scarcity (the Protocol didn’t);
- thus continually raise the price of carbon (but it fell 60% from peak in mid-2008 to today’s 13 euros/tonne);
- thus rapidly escalate emission market trading volume (stagnant at $130 billion/year since 2008); via
- the establishment of markets across the rich world (but though Europe has an Emissions Trading Scheme, the US refused entry, Canada also dropped out, and Australia tried last November but gave up) along the way to a post-Kyoto Accord that would build a global market (but the Copenhagen breakdown terminated this vision).

Likewise in Europe, The Guardian reported in January 2010, ‘Banks are pulling out of the carbon-offsetting market after Copenhagen failed to reach agreement on emissions targets.’ As Anthony Hobley of the law firm Norton Rose put it, ‘We are seeing a freeze in banks’ recruitment plans for the carbon market. It’s not clear at what point this will turn into a cull or a rout’ (Webb 2010).

By March 2010, as the New York Times observed, ‘The concept is in wide disrepute. Obama dropped all mention of cap and trade from his current budget. And the sponsors of a Senate climate bill likely to be introduced in April, now that Congress is moving past health care, dare not speak its name... It was done in by the weak economy, the Wall Street meltdown, determined industry opposition and its own complexity.’ According to Senator Maria Cantwell (a Democrat from Washington State), cap and trade was ‘discredited by the Wall Street crisis, the Enron scandal and the rocky start to a carbon credits trading system in Europe that has been subject to dizzying price fluctuations and widespread fraud’ (Broder, 2010). An example of new fraud was the Hungarian government’s resale of carbon credits, which when exposed, drove the price of a ton from €12 down to €1 and crashed two emissions exchanges (Pointcarbon 2010). And reflecting the price volatility, futures on the European Climate Exchange crashed five times in the period 2006-2009 (Figure 1).
Somewhat less objectionable than Kerry et al’s efforts on behalf of the fossil fuel and financial industries, was a bill introduced by Senators Maria Cantwell and Sue Collins in late 2009, which some progressive US climate activists are now actively supporting. Yet this effort, the Carbon Limits and Energy for America’s Renewal Act (CLEAR), is also fatally flawed, because of inadequate emissions cuts (around 8% from 1990-2020), the lingering presence of carbon trading and offsets, the lack of revenues earmarked to pay the US’ fair share of the Climate Debt, its inadequate strengthening of the command/control regulatory mechanisms/mandates for EPA, utility boards and planning commissions, and its nonexistent mandate to assure economic transformation so as to generate new production, consumption, transport, energy and related systems. Also, if CLEAR passes the Senate, the likelihood is that the House will insist on many of the objectionable features of Waxman-Markey (offsets, carbon trading, oil/nuke/agro subsidies, EPA neutering, etc). While a last-gasp effort prior to Cancun may be made, by limiting a carbon market to electric utilities, most observers suggest climate legislation will not pass both houses of the US Congress in 2010. This realization should prevent distraction of activists into the national legislative quagmire, and instead allow more work on more immediate and fruitful strategies.

In contrast to the Capitol Hill quicksand, California provides more radical grassroots insights into jumping space and scale, with Chevron headquarters a special target of the vibrant Movement for Climate Justice-West (the most active group of CJ activists in the US), AmazonWatch, and Global Exchange. Californians and Alaskans who have previously fought to ‘leave the oil in the soil’ – halting offshore drilling and tundra destruction, respectively – will obviously need to remobilize against Obama. Amidst eco-catastrophe from Florida through Texas and beyond, British Petroleum’s April
2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill is one potential consciousness-raising opportunity for the CJ movement to address the utterly captive character of regulation.

Everywhere, organizers can find excellent local climate change targets to raise consciousness and effect emissions cuts, with direct action against major greenhouse gas sources or large-scale corporate fossil-fuel consumers. Two particularly good sites for climate activists are, first, the public utility commissions which control pricing and electricity generation techniques (and hence coal-fired and nuclear power plants); and second, the municipal or regional planning commissions which give the go-ahead to suburban sprawl and all manner of other climate-threatening projects.

This brings us to the global scale, where at a landmark conference in Cochabamba, Bolivia from April 19-22 2010 (Earth Day), more than 30,000 Bolivarians led by host Evo Morales and grassroots indigenous, community, feminist, and environmental movements were joined by genuinely solidaristic environmental, social, labor and NGO forces. This meeting set in motion a much more serious transnational CJ approach, based not upon the illusion that the UN will address the climate crisis anytime soon, but instead upon more serious, pragmatic strategies. These can come only from a much richer merging of social and ecological rights discourses (for what such narratives are worth), and choices of unifying targets (such as fossil fuel companies, carbon traders, and the World Bank).

Meanwhile, from Caracas, the ’Fifth International’ began slowly gathering steam, and could become the crucial meeting ground between red-green activists on the one hand, and on the other, the region’s petro-socialists (e.g. Hugo Chavez) and petro-Keynesians (e.g. Rafael Correa). At issue is whether the latter can face up to contradictions in their own political ecologies, because in one of the world’s most important sites of struggle, Ecuador’s Yasuni National Park in the Amazon, an official presidential threat has been made that oil drilling will commence in June 2010, unless countervailing pressure by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador and Accion Ecologica is successful.

The situation elsewhere in Africa is similar, since so many of the extractive industries are the sole beneficiaries of electricity grid expansion. Red-green campaigns aim to ’leave the oil in the soil’ and ‘the coal in the hole,’ exemplified in Nigeria where Delta activists have intimidated oil companies through both non-violent and armed struggle. In the former category, Environmental Rights Action in Port Harcourt insists on an end to extraction and exploration on grounds of the climate threat, and the descendants of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his Ogoni movement comrades won a precedent-setting out-of-court-settlement with Shell in June 2009 that may scare off other oil firms. In the latter category, even after an amnesty in 2009 had a divide-and-conquer effect, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (Mend) continued to kidnap foreign oil workers, demanding they vacate the Delta for good.
After a combined struggle of this type, Shell was evicted from Ogoniland in June 2008, 13 years after the company arranged for Saro-Wiwa’s execution, and a year later, Saro-Wiwa’s family (and those of eight others executed at the same time) won $15.5 million from Shell in an Alien Tort Claims Act case settled out of court, a large amount of which was recommitted to movement building. An estimated 1.5 million tonnes of oil have spilled since Delta drilling began in the late 1950s, the equivalent of an Exxon Valdez spill each year, costing more than $5 billion in annual environmental damage. In his closing statement at the trial prior to his execution, Saro-Wiwa demanded that Shell vacate the area: ‘The military dictatorship holds down oil-producing areas such as Ogoni by military decrees and the threat or actual use of physical violence so that Shell can wage its ecological war without hindrance.’ At the time, Shell executives met with the Nigerian High Commission in London, stating that if the ‘Ogoni virus’ spreads to other areas in the Delta it would be the end of the oil business. In court, the plaintiffs had alleged that Shell hired Nigerian police for internal security; that Shell purchased vehicles and arms for the military; that Shell requested military support to build a pipeline through Ogoni land; that Shell assisted and financed the Nigerian military to repress the resistance of the Ogoni people; and that the firm participated in the arrest of Saro-Wiwa and others on fake murder charges and bribed witnesses to produce false testimony (Bond and Sharife, 2009).

Most remarkably, rather than letting such destruction rest at the scale of the local, the Port Harcourt NGO Environmental Rights Action (ERA) led the climate justice movement in Nigeria, West Africa and globally at Copenhagen to a much deeper critique of ecological responsibility. In opposition to the shifting, stalling and stealing that characterizes economic and environmental commodification in their own region, and in relation to world financial and oil markets, ERA and its visionary leader Nimmo Bassey jumped scale to demand that the oil be left in the soil and under the Gulf of Guinea water, given the threat to the planet. It has been estimated that only 20 per cent of the Niger Delta’s oil is being extracted, thanks largely to the Mend insurgency.

Jumping to the global scale, the Climate Justice Now! network has shown a conceptual ability to confront world capitalism’s shifting, stalling and stealing with demands for Northern accountability for emissions, for decommissioned carbon markets so as to avoid the stalling of emission cuts, and for climate debt payments to reimburse the stealing associated with the North’s externalization of its emissions. Recall the five demands made in Bali, in December 2007:

- reduced consumption;
- huge financial transfers from North to South based on historical responsibility and ecological debt for adaptation and mitigation costs paid for by redirecting military budgets, innovative taxes and debt cancellation;
- leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in appropriate energy-efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy;
• rights-based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous land rights and promotes peoples’ sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water; and
• sustainable family farming, fishing and peoples’ food sovereignty.

No matter that the CJN!’s component movements are disparate; so too are the forces that moved from sophisticated critique of carbon trading in South Africa to a broad-based campaign against the World Bank’s largest project loan, that shook the energy establishment. These are the kinds of organizations and arguments that link spatio-temporal resistances amongst diverse eco-social forces during a period of austerity, civil society weakness, and repression. The agents of social and environmental change can take advantage of neoliberalism’s still-discredited ideological status and demand from the next global and national negotiations a strategy for justice, not one based upon commodifying carbon.

But to do so the CJ activists still need to generalize an innovative critique, one that emerged over time as the global emissions trading strategy rose from birth in 1997, peaked in 2008, and attempts a last-gasp resurrection after the economic crisis and climate negotiations breakdown. The frenzied failure of elite climate politics stretching narrowly, in 2009-10, from the UN to the US Senate and G20 in June 2010 should make bottom-up alternatives much easier to advocate, including globally-coordinated actions against destructive projects (such as the World Bank’s loan in South Africa). In addition to the Cancun version of an alternative climate summit, the Dakar World Social Forum in early 2011 is an additional sites in which to share the lessons and build wider alliances, aiming towards a much more decisive showdown in South Africa in December 2011.

From the wider, deeper, and increasingly common critique of the Kyoto-Copenhagen-Cancun cul-de-sac, will come more confidence in the types of analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances associated with CJ politics. The challenge is to aggregate experiences from the Charlestons of the world, so as to move into alignment with the Cochabamba conference, and in turn, to generate a formidable red-green force uniting radical governments and the popular movements that will keep them accountable within global-left initiatives such as represented by Caracas’s Fifth International. The case of South African national interactions in the global climate negotiations reinforces a sense of how the politics of scale and space can be distorted, so that policies patently against the interests of a country’s mass-popular constituencies are adopted. But likewise, South African CJ politics from below suggest ways forward that, while not yet sufficiently strong to declare victory, really do offer the only hope for the way forward.

References

____ (2010a), ‘The carbon market ship is sinking fast,’ ZNet, 19 January.
____ (2010d), ‘Maintaining momentum after Copenhagen’s collapse: “Seal the deal” or “Seattle” the deal?’, Capitalism Nature Socialism, March.


______ (2003), The New Imperialism, New York, Oxford University Press.


Climate debt owed to Africa:
What to demand and how to collect?

Abstract

The ‘climate debt’ that the industries and over-consumers of the Global North owe Africans and other victims of climate change not responsible for causing the problem has accrued by virtue of the North’s excessive dumping of greenhouse gas emissions into the collective environmental space. Damage is being accounted for, including the more constrained space the South has for emissions. This historical injustice – and ‘debt’ - is now nearly universally acknowledged (aside from Washington holdouts), and reparations plus adaptation finance are being widely demanded. In Copenhagen, the 2009 United Nations summit on climate change witnessed a great deal of theatre over conceptual problems, including, who should make emissions cuts and to what degree; should markets be the main mechanism; who owes a climate debt; how much is owed; and how the debt should be collected. The willingness of African heads of state to raise the matter publicly beginning in mid-2009 was notable, but their inability to ensure political solidarity led to the imposition of the Copenhagen Accord on December 18, in a manner that sets back the cause. Civil society will have to continue working with Latin American governments, especially Bolivia’s, to advance this struggle in coming months and years – even though it is in the self-interest of African rulers to join the campaign more forcefully and durably than they did in 2009. Without African government support for the concept, systems of climate debt payment won by civil society designed to bypass the African national state (such as Basic Income Programs) will be ever more attractive.

Introduction

“The largest share of historical and current global emissions of greenhouse gases has originated in developed countries... [and should be redressed] on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities.” -- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1992

“The sense of guilt or culpability or reparations - I just categorically reject that.” -- Chief US climate negotiator Todd Stern on being asked about climate debt, December 2009 (Spector, 2009).

“We are not assigning guilt, merely responsibility. As they say in the US, if you break it, you buy it”. -- Bolivian ambassador to the United Nations, Pablo Solon, December 2009 (Solon, 2009).

Climate damage to Africa will include much more rapid desertification, more floods and droughts, worse water shortages, increased starvation, floods of climate refugees jamming shanty-packed megalopolises, and the spread of malarial and
other diseases. The most probable outcome of climate change is, according to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change director R.K. Pachauri, “that there could be a possible reduction in yields in agriculture of: 50% by 2020 in some African countries... In Africa, crop net revenues could fall by as much as 90% by 2100, with small-scale farmers being the most affected” (Pachauri, 2008: 17).

The Climate Change Vulnerability Index, calculated in 2009 “from dozens of variables measuring the capacity of a country to cope with the consequences of global warming”, listed 22 African countries out of 28 across the world at ‘extreme risk’, whereas the United States is near the bottom of the world rankings of countries at risk even though it is the leading per capita contributor to climate change (Agence France Press, 2009).

There is no question that those most responsible should pay reparations, now that there is near-universal awareness of the damage being done by rising greenhouse gas emissions, and by the ongoing stubborn refusal by the rich to cut back. In 1997 at the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, the Global North offered to assist Africa financially through ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ (CDM) projects, in a context of declining overseas development aid associated with the end of the Cold War. Many African elites agreed, along with once reluctant environmental groups. Popular movements were unaware and uninvolved, and expert opinion was mixed about the efficacy and moral implications. The proponents of carbon trading argued that this would be the least painful – and least resisted – means of capping greenhouse gas emissions and allowing economies to adapt to new carbon constraints.\(^1\)

However, by 2010, prospects were not good for the broader carbon markets into which CDMs fit as a small sideline (worth roughly 6.5% of the $125 billion in 2008 trades, a ratio that probably grew slightly on flat trading volume in 2009). And the share of CDM financing to Africa continued to be disproportionately low, around 3% of all CDM projects (and mostly emanating from South Africa, with its huge emissions and large cadre of environmental technical specialists). Given the dubious prospects for carbon trading already evident in myriad European Union Emissions Trading Scheme credibility crises and price volatility problems – with the 2008-09 ‘value’ of a ton of CO2 falling from €30 at peak to less than €9 – the question emerged in Africa in 2009: how to get the North to pay its fair share of the costs of Africa’s adaptation bill?

The choice of carbon trading versus climate debt

Two answers emerged: stick with CDMs, or shift to climate debt demands (These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but do reflect a distinct divergence in analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances). The first answer has been most vociferously articulated by two high-profile Africans, former Kenyan deputy environment minister and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai, and former South African environment minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk. They assumed that the CDM and similar ‘market-based mechanisms’ for financing climate adaptation would continue
to underpin global climate policy in the post-Kyoto period. Maathai promoted this position through her own Greenbelt Movement in the expectation that CDMs and emerging proposals for ‘Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries’ would reward tree-planting (both her indigenous strategy as well as monocultural timber plantations). She was also the leading proponent of the document ‘Africa speaks up on Climate Change’, which fed into the ‘African Climate Appeal’, which insists upon more CDM finance with fewer strings attached, especially for afforestation, as discussed in more detail below.²

Van Schalkwyk has just as passionately promoted carbon trading, noting in 2006 that “The 17 CDM projects in the pipeline in Sub-Saharan Africa account for only 1.7 per cent of the total of 990 projects worldwide. To build faith in the carbon market and to ensure that everyone shares in its benefits, we must address the obstacles that African countries face.” A year later, at the International Emissions Trading Association Forum in Washington, he argued, “An all-encompassing global carbon market regime which includes all developed countries is the first and ultimate aim.” Van Schalkwyk was nominated by South Africa to be the replacement to Yvo de Boer as UNFCCC director in early 2010.³

Instead, a different answer was to depart from the CDM approach, to criticize market-based strategies as inadequate, and to demand direct compensation. In mid-2009, the Ethiopian leader of the African Union’s climate team, Meles Zenawi, began to pursue the latter strategy, insisting on at least $67 billion/year from the North to Africa to compensate for anticipated damages to Africa alone.

Critics of emissions trading argue that Zenawi was correct to seek a different route, for the carbon market is not working:

- the idea of inventing a property right to pollute is effectively the ‘privatization of the air’, a moral problem given the vast and growing differentials in wealth inequalities;

- greenhouse gases are complex and their rising production creates a non-linear impact which cannot be reduced to a commodity exchange relationship (a tonne of CO2 produced in one place accommodated by reducing a tonne in another, as is the premise of the emissions trade);

- the corporations most guilty of pollution and the World Bank – which is most responsible for fossil fuel financing – are the driving forces behind the market, and can be expected to engage in systemic corruption to attract money into the market even if this prevents genuine emissions reductions;

- many of the offsetting projects – such as monocultural timber plantations, forest ‘protection’ and landfill methane-electricity projects – have devastating impacts on local communities and ecologies, and have been hotly
contested in part because the carbon sequestered is far more temporary (since trees die) than the carbon emitted;

- the price of carbon determined in these markets is haywire, having crashed by half in a short period in April 2006 and by two-thirds in 2008, thus making mockery of the idea that there will be an effective market mechanism to make renewable energy a cost-effective investment;

- there is a serious potential for carbon markets to become an out-of-control, multi-trillion dollar speculative bubble, similar to exotic financial instruments associated with Enron’s 2002 collapse (indeed, many Enron employees populate the carbon markets);

- as a ‘false solution’ to climate change, carbon trading encourages merely small, incremental shifts, and thus distracts us from a wide range of radical changes we need to make in materials extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal; and

- the idea of market solutions to market failure (‘externalities’) is an ideology that rarely makes sense, and especially not following the world’s worst-ever financial market failure, and especially not when the very idea of derivatives – a financial asset whose underlying value is several degrees removed and also subject to extreme variability – was thrown into question.\(^4\)

The apparent demise of carbon trading in the 2009-10 legislative session of the US Senate made this strategy a losing proposition not only for Africa but also at the global scale. Even without the expected Washington gridlock (mainly as a result of sabotage by powerful fossil fuel interests), carbon trading had crashed on its own terms by March 2010. “The concept is in wide disrepute”, reported the New York Times (25 March 2010), with US Senator Maria Cantwell explaining that “cap and trade” (the US description) was “discredited by the Wall Street crisis, the Enron scandal and the rocky start to a carbon credits trading system in Europe that has been subject to dizzying price fluctuations and widespread fraud.”\(^5\)

To be sure, one wing of civil society still endorses carbon trading, in part perhaps because some major institutions and individuals suffer from substantial conflicts of interest as carbon-traders.\(^6\) But increasingly, carbon trading appears as a ‘false solution’, in contrast to the alternative financing source for climate damage: the North’s payment of its climate debt to the South for excess use of environmental space and for the problems caused in many ecosystems already, and in future when vast eco-social crises are anticipated especially in Africa. What, then, is the character of the ‘ecological debt’ more broadly, and the climate debt in particular?

**Demanding ecological and climate debt repayment**
According to the Quito group Accion Ecologica: “ecological debt is the debt accumulated by Northern, industrial countries toward Third World countries on account of resource plundering, environmental damages, and the free occupation of environmental space to deposit wastes, such as greenhouse gases, from the industrial countries” (Accion Ecologica, 2000: 1). The term came into professional use in 1992 at the Earth Summit of the United Nations in Rio de Janeiro of 1992, with NGOs promoting the concept through an ‘Alternative Treaty’.

An initial voice was the Institute of Political Ecology in Santiago, Chile, and contributed to world consciousness about ChloroFluoroCarbon damage to the ozone layer. A Colombian lawyer, José María Borrero, wrote a 1994 book on the topic, and further research and advocacy was provided by the Foundation for Research on the Protection of the Environment, and then Jubilee South. By 1999 Friends of the Earth International and Christian Aid agreed to campaign against Ecological Debt, especially in relation to climate damage. In Africa, amongst the main advocates of Ecological Debt repayment were churches, especially the Economic Justice Network of Southern Africa led by Malcolm Damon and Francis Ng’ambi. Other regional initiatives continued, moving to the global stage by 2009. The World Development Movement and Jubilee Debt Campaign (UK) produced a major campaign document in late 2009 (World Development Movement and Jubilee Debt Campaign, 2009), at the same time as an influential article by Canadian journalist/campaigner Naomi Klein in Rolling Stone magazine (Klein, 2009).

The leading scientist in the field, Autonomous University of Barcelona’s Joan Martinez-Alier (2003: 26), calculates ecological debt in many forms: “nutrients in exports including virtual water, the oil and minerals no longer available, the biodiversity destroyed, sulfur dioxide emitted by copper smelters, the mine tailings, the harms to health from flower exports, the pollution of water by mining, the commercial use of information and knowledge on genetic resources, when they have been appropriated gratis (‘biopiracy’), and agricultural genetic resources.” As for the North’s “lack of payment for environmental services or for the disproportionate use of Environmental Space,” Martinez-Alier criticizes “imports of solid or liquid toxic waste, and free disposal of gas residues (carbon dioxide, CFCs, etc)”. According to Martinez-Alier (2003: 25):

The notion of an Ecological Debt is not particularly radical. Think of the environmental liabilities incurred by firms (under the United States Superfund legislation), or of the engineering field called ‘restoration ecology’, or the proposals by the Swedish government in the early 1990s to calculate the country’s environmental debt.

The sums involved are potentially vast. As Martinez-Alier puts it, “tropical rainforests used for wood exports have an extraordinary past we will never know and ongoing biodiversity whose destruction we cannot begin to value”. However, “although it is not possible to make an exact accounting, it is necessary to establish the principal categories and certain orders of magnitude in order to stimulate
discussion... If we take the present human-made emissions of carbon, [this represents] a total annual subsidy of $75 billion is forthcoming from South to North” (Martinez-Alier, 2003: 28). Leading ecofeminist Vandana Shiva (Shiva, 2005), and former South Centre director Yash Tandon estimate that wild seed varieties alone account for $66 billion in annual biopiracy benefits to the US. There are dozens of examples of biopiracy in Africa, according to a 2005 study commissioned by the Edmonds Institute and African Centre for Biosafety. A partial ecological debt accounting was published by environmental scientists in early 2008, and counted $1.8 trillion in concrete damages over several decades (Srinivasan et al., 2008). According to co-author Richard Norgaard, ecological economist at the University of California, Berkeley, generated a crucial finding: “At least to some extent, the rich nations have developed at the expense of the poor, and, in effect, there is a debt to the poor” (Guardian, 21 January 2008). The study included factors such as greenhouse gas emissions, ozone layer depletion, agriculture, deforestation, overfishing, and the conversion of mangrove swamps into shrimp farms, but did not (so far) succeed in calculating other damages, e.g. excessive freshwater withdrawals, destruction of coral reefs, bio-diversity loss, invasive species, and war.

In this context of systemized looting of resources (as even acknowledged by the World Bank), Bolivia at least began the process of making climate debt a concept more broadly understood within the international discourse. That country’s submission to the UNFCCC in 2009 made the demand explicitly (Republic of Bolivia, 2009):

The climate debt of developed countries must be repaid, and this payment must begin with the outcomes to be agreed in Copenhagen. Developing countries are not seeking economic handouts to solve a problem we did not cause. What we call for is full payment of the debt owed to us by developed countries for threatening the integrity of the Earth’s climate system, for over-
consuming a shared resource that belongs fairly and equally to all people, and for maintaining lifestyles that continue to threaten the lives and livelihoods of the poor majority of the planet’s population… Any solution that does not ensure an equitable distribution of the Earth’s limited capacity to absorb greenhouse gases, as well as the costs of mitigating and adapting to climate change, is destined to fail.

In addition to Bolivia, the Cumana Declaration was signed by Cuba, Dominica, Honduras (prior to the coup), Nicaragua and Venezuela, and included the argument that developed countries are in an environmental debt to the world because they are responsible for 70% of historical carbon emissions into the atmosphere since 1750. Developed countries should pay off their debt to humankind and the planet; they should provide significant resources to a fund so that developing countries can embark upon a growth model which does not repeat the serious impacts of the capitalist industrialization.

Africa united then divided on climate debt

How did African governments react to the new narrative around ecological debt? In general, with a few exceptions, the post-colonial leadership of African states has cooperated with those institutions doing the resource extraction and over-utilizing Africa’s ecological space, in spite of persistent complaints by exploited communities, by workers subject to safety/health violations and exploitation, by environmentalists and by patriotic nationalists. However, finally in mid-2009, the African Union’s leadership on climate issues became a force to be reckoned with.

Lesotho had raised the issue of climate debt in UN negotiations, but the highest profile discussion was initiated by Zenawi, who also chaired the New Partnership for Africa’s Development and thus was invited to G20 gatherings along with the South African government. Zenawi’s record of service to US security interests, ideological zigzagging, contradictory signaling and repression of local civil society activists suggested that it might ultimately be counterproductive for Zenawi to lead the climate debt campaign (McLure, 2009). Still, someone from Africa was compelled to express the extreme costs to the continent of the debt, so prior to December 2009, Zenawi played that role.

The African elites could marshal an implied threat: repeating their performance in Seattle in 1999 and Cancun in 2003, when denial of consent in World Trade Organisation negotiations were the proximate cause of the summits’ collapse on both occasions. On September 3, 2009, Zenawi issued a strong threat from Addis Ababa about the upcoming Copenhagen conference: “If need be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that threaten to be another rape of our continent” (Ashine, 2009). To gather sufficient power, Zenawi established the Conference of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change: chairpersons of the AU and the AU Commission, representatives of Ethiopia, Algeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Chairpersons of
the African Ministerial Conference on Environment and Technical Negotiators on climate change from all member states. They met at the AU Summit in Sirte, Libya in July 2009, agreeing that Africa would have a sole delegation to Copenhagen with a united front and demands for compensation. According to AU official Abebe Hailegabriel, “Trillions of dollars might not be enough in compensation. Thus there must be an assessment of the impact before the figure.” Added AU head Jean Ping, “Africa’s development aspirations are at stake unless urgent steps are taken to address the problems of climate change. Climate change will fundamentally affect productivity, increase the prevalence of disease and poverty... and trigger conflict and war” (Bond, 2009b: 13).

The most important African negotiator – and largest CO2 emitter (responsible for more than 40% of the continent’s CO2) – is South Africa (Bond et al., 2009). Aside from ostensibly preventing climate change that could have an especially devastating impact in South Africa, Pretoria’s climate negotiators have two conflicting agendas: increasing Northern payments to Africa (a longstanding objective of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, which unsuccessfully requested $64 billion per annum in aid and investment concessions during the early 2000s); and increasing South Africa’s own rates of CO2 outputs through around 2030-35, when the Long-Term Mitigation Scenario – South Africa’s official (albeit non-binding) climate strategy – would come into effect. Only then are absolute emissions declines offered as a scenario. In the meantime, Pretoria has earmarked more than $100 billion for emissions-intensive coal and nuclear fired electricity generation plants due to be constructed during 2010-15, which would amplify Africa’s climate crisis, requiring more resources from the North for adaptation.

Thus far, South Africa does not, officially, see itself as a climate creditor, in spite of strong climate debt advocacy by the new Climate Justice Now! South Africa movement, especially in February-April 2010 when the World Bank considered and then granted a $3.75 billion loan to Eskom primarily for the construction of the world’s fourth-largest coal-fired power plant. As explained by environment minister Buyelwa Sonjica in September 2009: “We expect money. We need money to be made available... we need money as of yesterday for adaptation and mitigation” (South African Press Association, 2009a). South African negotiators also led the G77, and are on record from August 2009 demanding that “at least 1% of global GDP should be set aside by rich nations” so as, according to one report, to help developing countries conduct research, improve flood control, protect their coastlines, create seed banks and take other steps to cope with the severe storms and droughts linked to climate change. The money also could help poor countries obtain technology to reduce their carbon emissions. Alf Wills, a top South African environmental official, summed up the position going into Copenhagen: “No money, no deal” (South African Press Association, 2009b).

The effect of this rhetoric appeared to entail some immediate concessions. In September 2009, the European Union announced it would begin paying its climate debt, but only up to $22 billion annually to fund adaptation, roughly 1/7th of what
EU environment commissioner Stavros Dimas observed would be required by 2020 ($145b). Some of that would be subtracted from existing aid. The EU damage estimates were considered far too conservative, as China’s mitigation and adaptation costs alone would be $438 billion annually by 2030, according to Beijing. According to one report, the EU view is that emissions trading should be the basis of ‘much of the shortfall’: “The international carbon market, if designed properly, will create an increasing financial flow to developing countries and could potentially deliver as much as €38bn per year in 2020” (Chaffin and Crooks, 2009: 24).

Because this offer was widely judged as inadequate, Zenawi carried out a trial run of his walk-out threat just prior to Copenhagen, in November 2009 at a Barcelona UNFCCC meeting. Sufficient concessions were not on the table, so his technical negotiators registered a protest. But at the crucial moment in Copenhagen, during the final week when heads of state would arrive to negotiate a new protocol, Zenawi diverted his own flight from Addis Ababa via Paris, where he met French premier Nicolas Sarkozy. Shortly thereafter, he announced the halving of Africa’s climate debt demands (Vidal, 2009). According to Mithika Mwenda of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, this act had the effect of “undermining the bold positions of our negotiators and ministers represented here, and threatening the very future of Africa... Meles wants to sell out the lives and hopes of Africans for a pittance. Every other African country has committed to policy based on the science” (Reddy, 2009: 1).

Then on 17 December, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton offered what appeared to be a major concession (Clinton, 2009: 1):

... in the context of a strong accord in which all major economies stand behind meaningful mitigation actions and provide full transparency as to their implementation, the United States is prepared to work with other countries toward a goal of jointly mobilizing $100 billion a year by 2020 to address the climate change needs of developing countries. We expect this funding will come from a wide variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including alternative sources of finance.

Yet there was no firm line-item in the US budget to this end, just a promise (the US had regularly broken similar aid promises in the past, and at the same time the US President Barack Obama was cutting back AIDS medicines funding to Africa). The private sources of finances alone could easily exceed $100 billion, with CDMs at the time in excess of 6% of the $125 billion emissions markets. If, as predicted, the size of the 2020 carbon market reached $3 trillion, it would take just 3.3% dedicated to CDMs to reach the $100 billion target. So given the private sourcing and likelihoods of loans not grants, Clinton’s offer could readily be rejected as meaningless.

The following day, President Barack Obama arrived and at the end of a long negotiating period, persuaded leaders of the BASIC countries—Brazil, South Africa, India and China—to sign the Copenhagen Accord at literally the climate summit’s
last minute. The December 18 deal followed extremely harsh police repression against nonviolent protesters outside the Bella Center. Inside, Denmark’s conservative ruling party leaders set up a ‘Green Room’ process where 26 countries were cherry-picked to represent the world. When even that small group deadlocked—allegedly due to Chinese intransigence and the overall weak parameters set by the US, the five leaders—Obama, Lula da Silva, Zuma, Manmohan Singh, and Wen Jiabao, attempted a face-saving last gasp. Instead of 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon in the atmosphere as ‘required by science’ (as the popular advocacy phrase goes), the Copenhagen Accord signatories promised 15 per cent emissions cuts from 1990 levels by 2020, which could translate into a 10 per cent increase once carbon trading and offset loopholes are factored in. The result would be 770 ppm by century’s end, at least a 3.5 C increase, which scientists say will certainly destroy the planet. Moreover, there were no clear sources of financing nor explicit commitments to pay the North’s climate debt, which by then was being estimated at $400 billion per year by 2020 (World Development Movement, 2009). Moreover, the Accord departed from Kyoto Protocol and Bali Action Plan principles, which set out much more ambitious targets for richer countries than poorer countries. And the Accord contains no legally binding components or compliance mechanisms.

Most significant was Obama’s refusal to lead the North to make 45 per cent emissions cuts and offer payment of the climate debt, and instead engage in a process of leadership so flawed that 350.org leader Bill McKibben charged that “he blew up the United Nations” (McKibben, 2009). Economist Jeffrey Sachs also accused Obama of abandoning “the UN framework, because it was proving nettlesome to U.S. power and domestic politics. Obama’s decision to declare a phony negotiating victory undermines the UN process by signaling that rich countries will do what they want and must no longer listen to the ‘pesky’ concerns of many smaller and poorer countries.” The idea that the UN is too unwieldy for climate talks surfaced repeatedly in subsequent weeks. The Accord is “insincere, inconsistent, and unconvincing,” Sachs continued, “unlikely to accomplish anything real. It is non-binding and will probably strengthen the forces of opposition to emissions reductions.” Moreover, Clinton’s “announcements about money a decade from now are mostly empty words. They do not bind the rich countries at al” (Sachs, 2009: 1). As Naomi Klein summed up, the Accord is “nothing more than a grubby pact between the world’s biggest emitters: I’ll pretend that you are doing something about climate change if you pretend that I am too. Deal? Deal” (Klein, 2009: 1). George Monbiot compared Copenhagen in 2009 to the 1884-85 Berlin negotiations known as the “Scramble for Africa,” which divided and conquered the continent (Monbiot, 2009). The African Union was twisted and u-turned to support Zuma’s capitulation by Zenawi. Even on its own terms, the Copenhagen Accord failed, missing its first deadline, on January 31st 2010, for signing on and declaring cuts for carbon emissions, leaving UN climate chief de Boer to concede that deadlines were ‘soft’.11
Several countries had insisted on climate debt as a negotiating framework even before Copenhagen, including Venezuela, Paraguay, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. But in Africa, only Sudan stood out, partly because its UN Ambassador, Lumumba di-Aping, had such a visible role as G77 chief negotiator. At one point, when briefing civil society a week before the fatal Copenhagen Accord deal, he “sat silently, tears rolling down his face,” according to a report, and then said, simply, “We have been asked to sign a suicide pact.” For much of the continent, said Di-Aping, 2 degrees C globally meant 3.5 degrees C: “certain death for Africa”, a type of “climate fascism” imposed on Africa by polluters, in exchange for which the Third World would get a measly $10 billion per year in ‘fast track’ funding, although “$10 billion is not enough to buy us coffins”. Agreeing with leading US climate scientist James Hansen, the Copenhagen deal on offer was “worse than no deal”, said Di-Aping, concluding, “I would rather die with my dignity than sign a deal that will channel my people into a furnace.” As for the main negotiator, he had this prophesy: “What is Obama going to tell his daughters? That their [Kenyan] relatives’ lives are not worth anything? It is unfortunate that after 500 years-plus of interaction with the West we [Africans] are still considered ‘disposables’” (Welz, 2009).

Civil society ups the ante

Against malevolent states and industries addicted to fossil fuels, there usually arises opposition from civil society. But between a relatively small number of environmental NGOs and other organizations, there are important strategic divisions on how to tackle climate change, whether to address climate debt and what to do about carbon trading. For example, the network headed by Wangari Maathai (based in Nairobi and Addis Ababa) offered a supportive statement on reform of CDMs and did not mention climate debt in a mid-2009 document:

African governments should ensure that there is equity in geographical distribution of CDM projects and that this is entrenched in the international policy process. They should negotiate for the requirement of up front funding of CDM projects to be waived for many African countries who cannot afford it. The appeal calls upon African countries to embark on the development of CDM capacities and projects including capacity building and development of centers of incubation for CDM projects. African governments should explore possibilities of accessing grants to provide upfront funding for CDM projects and also project development and financing through bilateral arrangements (Matthai, 2009: 4).

Maathai criticized three existing funds – the Special Climate Change Fund, the Least Developed Countries Fund and the Bali Adaptation Fund – because these funds have not been able to address concerns of African countries on adaptation, namely: access, adequacy and equitable geographical distribution. The funds are largely inadequate and inappropriately structured; currently relying on a 2% levy on CDM projects. Access to the funds has been made difficult, among others, by bureaucratic bottlenecks of the Global Environmental Fund and the World Bank. This problem has been diagnosed but the position of African governments on their preferred way
forward remains vague. Lastly, the funds are structured in a way that replicates many structural problems manifest in the CDM resulting in eschewed access in favour of stronger economies from developing countries (Matthai, 2009).

Instead of requesting more CDM carbon trading funds, many more civil society groups instead insisted on raising climate debt as the optimal financing route. In August 2008, Africa chapters of Jubilee South converged in Nairobi to debunk limited ‘debt relief’ by Northern powers and to plan the next stage of financial campaigning. Nairobi-based Africa Jubilee South co-coordinator Njoki Njehu concluded, “Africa and the rest of the Global South are owed a huge historical and ecological debt for slavery, colonialism, and centuries of exploitation” (Bond and Brutus, 2008: 1).

In subsequent months, across the world, increasing numbers of social movements led by indigenous peoples explicitly demanded climate debt repayment. The Anchorage Declaration by indigenous people from the Arctic, North America, Asia, Pacific, Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean and Russia issued a statement calling “on the UNFCCC to recognize the historical and ecological debt of the Annex 1 countries in contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. We call on these countries to pay this historical debt” (Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change, 2009). A major Trade Union Conference of the Americas (albeit without participation from the US and Canada) insisted that ‘Climate justice will only be reached when the Rich States of the North recognize this environmental debt, which also entails a drastic and urgent reduction of their contaminating emissions, the provision of funds for poor countries for climate change mitigation and adaptation processes, and the transfer of ‘clean’ technologies to the global south for the development of environmentally sustainable productive processes’.

And in Kenya, the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance of 63 NGOs argued:

for their disproportionate contribution to the causes of climate change - denying developing countries their fair share of atmospheric space - the developed countries have run up an ‘emissions debt’. These excessive emissions, in turn, are the principal cause of the current adverse effects experienced by developing countries, particularly in Africa. For their disproportionate contribution to the effects of climate change - causing rising costs and damage in our countries that must now adapt to climate change - the developed countries have run up an ‘adaptation debt’. Together the sum of these debts - emissions debt and adaptation debt - constitutes the climate debt. Proposals by developed countries in the climate negotiations, on both mitigation and adaptation, are inadequate. They seek to pass on the costs of adaptation and mitigation, avoiding their responsibility to finance climate change response efforts in Africa. They also seek to write-off rather than reduce their emissions and continue their high per-capita emissions. This would deepen their debt and deny atmospheric space to the developing countries like ours, which would be asked to crowd into a small and shrinking remainder. We therefore call on developed countries to fully,
effectively and immediately repay the climate debt they owe to African countries.\textsuperscript{13}

Also in Nairobi at the same time, the Africa Peoples Movement on Climate Change pronounced (2009: 1):

\textit{... The people of Africa, as well as other developing nations are creditors of a massive ecological debt; This ecological debt continues to accrue today through the continued plunder and exploitation of Africa’s resources, its people, labor, and economies;... We reject the principle and application of Carbon Trading, which is a false solution based on inventing a perverse property right to pollute. A property right to air; ... We support the call by African leaders for reparations on Climate Change and support the initiative of the upcoming AU ministers of environment meeting and call for African governments to embrace more people centered alternatives for the African people.}

Another node of ecological debt organizing was the World Council of Churches (WCC), whose Central Committee was lobbied for years by a senior staffer (and former Tanzanian Council of Churches secretary) Rogate Mshana, and finally adopted a formal statement in September 2009 on the North’s “deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice by addressing our debts to peoples most affected by ecological destruction and to the earth itself.” It is useful to consider the WCC’s analysis because it does not stop at the debt, but attacks the mode of production itself (World Council of Churches, 2009: 1):

\textit{We call for the recognition, repayment and restitution of ecological debt in various ways, including non-market ways of compensation and reparation that go beyond the market’s limited ability to measure and distribute... This warrants a re-ordering of economic paradigms from consumerist, exploitive models to models that are respectful of localized economies, indigenous cultures and spiritualities, the earth’s reproductive limits, as well as the right of other life forms to blossom. And this begins with the recognition of ecological debt.}

The most extensive statement from civil society had more than 230 supporters, and was circulated by Action Aid, Africa Action and the Third World Network during 2009. Excerpts included these demands:

(i) For their disproportionate contribution to the causes and consequences of climate change, developed countries owe a two-fold climate debt to the poor majority;

(ii) For their excessive historical and current per person emissions – denying developing countries their fair share of atmospheric space – they have run up an ‘emissions debt’ to developing countries;
(iii) For their disproportionate contribution to the effects of climate change – requiring developing countries to adapt to rising climate impacts and damage – they have run up an ‘adaptation debt’ to developing countries; and

(iv) Together the sum of these debts – emissions debt and adaptation debt – constitutes their climate debt, which is part of a larger ecological, social and economic debt owed by the rich industrialized world to the poor majority.

Honoring these obligations is not only right; it is the basis of a fair and effective solution to climate change. Those who benefited most in the course of causing climate change must compensate those who contributed least but bear its adverse effects. They must compensate developing countries for the two-fold barrier to their development – mitigating and adapting to climate change – which were not present for developed countries during the course of their development but which they have caused... As the basis of a fair and effective climate outcome, we demand they:

- Repay their adaptation debt to developing countries by committing to full financing and compensation for the adverse effects of climate change on all affected countries, groups and people;

- Repay their emissions debt to developing countries through the deepest possible domestic reductions, and by committing to assigned amounts of emissions that reflect the full measure of their historical and continued excessive contributions to climate change; and

- Make available to developing countries the financing and technology required to cover the additional costs of mitigating and adapting to climate change, in accordance with the Climate Convention.$^{14}$

These demands were largely ignored (or explicitly rejected) by state officials, of course, as epitomized by Todd Stern’s reaction (see above). Hence the Copenhagen Summit’s delegitimised Accord was, from many of the civil society groups’ perspective, not actually a disastrous outcome, since they arrived with no viable expectations of progress on either emissions cuts, decommissioning the carbon markets or achieving climate debt repayments. Instead, it represented a chance to firm up demands for future negotiations, including bilateral ones. The process of civil society consolidation also entailed making a distinct break from the emerging market economies whose own fossil-fuel expansion strategies would challenge the physical limits of carbon sinks.

As a result, the BASIC climate signatories soon faced opposition from within. For example in India, Centre for Science and Environment director Sunita Narain argues that her government’s negotiators are the same people who would stymie any real action on environmental improvement in the country:
They will oppose fuel efficiency standards, tax on big cars, or tough penalties for polluters. But they will still talk glibly about low-carbon economies. They will of course, dismiss out of hand, any discussion on the need for ‘radical’ and out-of-the-box solutions for equity and sustainability. These, they will tell you, are mere evangelical thoughts of some fringe activists. The men think and act differently. These are the promoters of the Accord in India. And I believe they do so, because for them, firstly, the Accord provides the perfect solution—talk big about change, but do little at home. The U.S. has provided a perfect formula—it promises us the right to pollute, because it wants to legitimize its own pollution. Secondly, it promises that we can get a place on the high table of polluters. And as powerful conspirators this will mean that we need to do little ourselves, but instead push the price of change on the less favored—the poor of India or the poor anywhere else in the world. It’s an open offer to protect, not our right to development as we have been demanding—the rich countries pay for our transition to low-carbon economies. But a simpler proposition: we give you the right to pollute (at least for now). The other proposition is equally seductive. To the countries, which are not yet polluters (from Ethiopia to Maldives), the Copenhagen Accord says we will give money to keep you pliant and agreeable. This is why the Accord promises some fictional money to poor vulnerable countries. It’s a perfect formula, designed to please all. There is only one hitch: we will all have to forget the climate change crisis and the hazards and impacts that will grow (Narain, 2010: 1)

South African critics such as groundWork and Earthlife Africa made similar statements about Pretoria’s delegation. The crucial conflict was over South Africa’s vaguely-promised 34% emissions cut below anticipated 2020 levels, even though the Long-Term Mitigation Scenario (LTMS) acknowledged that absolute decline would only begin after 2030. Tristen Taylor of Earthlife Africa requested details and after two weeks of delays, learned that the 34% cut promise was from a ‘Growth Without Constraint’ (GWC) scenario within the LTMS. According to Taylor, “GWC is fantasy, essentially an academic exercise to see how much carbon South Africa would produce given unlimited resources and cheap energy prices.” Officials who authored the LTMS had already conceded that GWC was “neither robust nor plausible” eighteen months earlier. This led Taylor to conclude, “The SA government has pulled a public relations stunt.”

In contrast to the BASIC countries and the erratic African Union, civil society groups committed to climate debt found they had an extremely enthusiastic ally in the Bolivian government. Evo Morales insisted that two additional factors be added to the existing three components of climate debt calculations (the costs of emissions, of foregone development and of adaptation to climate damage): the notions of a ‘migration debt’ and a debt to nature. This, as Nicola Bullard recounts, would be compensated by dropping restrictive migration practices and treating all humans with dignity, and finally, the debt to Mother Earth. Ultimately, the only way that the debt can be repaid is by ensuring that the historic relations of inequality are broken
once and for all and that no ‘new’ debt will accumulate. This requires system change, both in the North and in the South. That’s why climate debt is such a subversive idea (Bullard, 2010).

The Bolivians’ main proposals were a ‘Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights’ (with a binding ‘Climate Justice Tribunal’ to punish violators), a formal compensation mechanism for climate debt, and a ‘World People’s Referendum on Climate Change’ to short-circuit the multilateral fora which were clearly dysfunctional. Some of the details subsequently worked out in conjunction with civil society in late April 2010 drove the debate forward in significant ways. The Working Group on Climate Debt argued as follows: Climate debt is an obligation of compensation that is generated because of the damage done to Mother Earth by the irrational emissions of greenhouse gases. The primary responsible for these irrational emissions are the so-called ‘developed countries’, inhabited by only 20% of the world population, and which emitted 75% of historical emissions of greenhouse gases.

These states, which stimulated the capitalist development model, are responsible for climate debt, but we should not forget that within these states, there live poor and indigenous peoples which are also affected by this debt. The responsibility for the climate debt of each developed country is established in relation to the level of emissions, taking into account the historically emitted amount of tons of carbon per capita (Working Group on Climate Debt, 2009).

The Working Group made suggestions for payment as follows: (i) The re-absorption [of emissions] and cleaning the atmosphere by developed countries; (ii) Payment in technology (eliminating patents) and in knowledge according to our worldview for both clean development and for adaptation to developing countries; (iii) Financing; (iv) Changes in immigration laws that allow us to offer a new home for all climate migrants; and (v) The adoption of the Declaration on the Mother Earth’s Rights.

An additional Working Group on Climate Finance provided a document with further details and even more audacious demands:

The scale of existing financial resources currently allocated to developing countries parties for addressing climate change plus the Copenhagen Accord proposal to mobilize (US$10 billion per year between 2010 and 2012, and up to US$100 billion by 2020 annually – which represents only 0.8% to 8% of developed countries’ national defense budgets, respectively) is grossly inadequate.

Developed country parties must commit at least 6% of their annual GDP for climate finance in developing countries. The viability of mobilizing this amount of finance is evident – developed countries spend an equivalent amount each year on national defense. In addition, developed countries have mobilized trillions of dollars (equivalent to 5 times the 6% GDP proposed) to bail out failed
banks and speculators. This is a question of political will, and the priority given to effectively combating climate change and protecting Mother Earth.

The finance required must be provided from public sources, and must be new and additional to ODA, to bilateral assistance, and to funds flowing outside the UNFCCC. Any funding provided outside the UNFCCC will not be regarded as meeting the commitments of developed country parties under the Convention.

The carbon market shall be eliminated as source of financing, because its capitalist logic promotes the paradox that those actors who will benefit most, are the same actors who have most harmed the environment. In addition, market mechanisms allow developed countries to evade their commitments to reduce emissions, while at the same time benefitting economically from the climate crisis. Moreover, this model impedes the equitable distribution of resources, can not guarantee a predictability flow of resources at scale, nor the timely availability or direct access to financing for those most affected.

Financing for climate change must be delivered as grants, understood as a part of the reparations for climate debt between parties. Loans cannot be considered as fulfillment of financial commitments. In the same way climate financing does not signify a donor/recipient relationship between developed and developing countries. All Annex 1 funding allocated to military purposes and subsidies for fossil fuel producers shall be redirected to climate change (Working Group on Climate Finance, 2009).

The Working Group also called for funding to be routed through the UNFCCC, “replacing the Global Environment Facility and its intermediaries such as the World Bank and the Regional Development Banks.” A further suggestion was that “The financial mechanism must respect the sovereign control of each country to determine the definition, design, implementation of policy and programmatic approaches to climate change.” As for timing, “The financial mechanism shall be defined and approved at COP 16, and be made operational at COP 17” (Working Group on Climate Finance, 2009: 2).

These documents were based upon visionary, radical civil society demands that had emerged over the prior months and years. Some earlier, very ambitious demands - such as the end of apartheid or access to AIDS medicines - were only won after years of struggle, after initially appearing equally audacious and unrealistic. The short term, however, did not offer any genuine potential for the North paying its climate debt. Moreover, because of the influence of big capital and pro-market ideology on Northern governments in the Kyoto process to date, not only will emissions continue rising, carbon trading will not be dropped as a central EU and US strategy. As a result, critique of establishment strategies will become more common, and in turn will force serious advocates of environmental justice to raise important strategic issues about how to get the North to repay the climate debt.
How should the debt be repaid?

Assuming it was possible to wring a commitment from wealthier states, existing North-South redistributive processes have proven to be ineffectual. Northern foreign aid to the South goes only a small way towards ecological debt repayment. It is a far lower sum (and falling) than military spending (which is rising), and in any case 60% is ‘phantom aid’, according to the Johannesburg-based agency Action Aid (Action Aid, 2005). Aid is also a tool of imperialism. Other North-South payments to Africa are yet more dubious, including the debt relief promised in 2005. In spite of enormous hype at the Gleneagles G8 meeting, the International Monetary Fund calculates that while lowest-income African countries’ debt stock fell in recent years, their actual debt repayments remained stable from 2006-08 and then increased 50% in 2009 as a percentage of export earnings (International Monetary Fund, 2009). So although there was a bit of debt cancellation, it was on debt that could be considered unrepayable. Meanwhile, debilitating debt servicing charges for low-income African countries still prevented both local capital accumulation and provision of social services, much less financing for climate change adaptation.

There are important debates about who should pay what share. But in general, it is important to note that ecological debt results from the unsustainable production and consumption systems adopted by elites in the Northern countries, which are to some extent generalized across the Northern populations. Hence even poor and working-class people in the North, often through no fault of their own, are tied into systems of auto-centric transport or conspicuous consumption, which mean that they consume far more of the Earth’s resources than do working-class people of the South.

As a result, some climate campaigners, including the Heinrich Boell Stiftung of Germany’s Green Party, have called for ‘Greenhouse Development Rights’ (GDRs) as a solution, including a per capita ‘right to pollute’ (and to trade pollution rights). The bigger questions which GDRs pose are whether environmental justice can be measured merely in terms of formal ‘equality’; whether environmental justice is instead historical, political-economic, and grounded in social struggles of those adversely affected; and in turn, whether environmental justice should not aim higher, for a broader, deeper eco-social transformation? The GDR approach may foreclose these questions by reducing the challenge to incremental reformism. When it comes specifically to GDRs as a methodology for calculating debt liabilities and beneficiaries, Larry Lohmann of The Cornerhouse (a British development institute) criticizes the model’s tacit endorsement of a long-discredited concept of “development” that condescendingly sees “resilience” as “far beyond the grasp of the billions of people that are still mired in poverty”, and that singles out for special climate blame “subsistence farming, fuel wood harvesting, grazing, and timber extraction” by “poor communities” awaiting Northern tutelage in capital flows, social networking, carbon trading and methods for holding policymakers accountable.16
Is a rights-based approach to environmental services preferable, as a strategy for demanding and properly redistributing ecological debt payments from North to South? South Africa’s promises of ‘Free Basic Services’ (including water and electricity) were not delivered, contributing to the country’s standing as having amongst the highest per capita social unrest in the world. Attempts to gain justice for Soweto residents deprived of water, via taking water pricing through the court system (as high as the Constitutional Court in September 2009) proved extremely frustrating (Bond, 2010).

Juridical approaches to ecological debt may not be optimal, although interesting precedents have emerged. In November 2008 a San Francisco court began considering an ecological debt and reparations lawsuit – under the Alien Tort Claims Act - filed by Larry Bowoto and the Ilaje people of the Niger Delta against Chevron for involvement in 1998 murders reminiscent of those that took the life of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders on November 10, 1995. The first judgments went against Bowoto et al. but appeals are in process. In June 2009, Shell Oil agreed in a similar lawsuit to an out-of-court settlement with reparations payments of $15.5 million. Although representing just four hours’ worth of Shell profits, it was considered a crucial step in establishing liability and disincentivising corporate exploitation of people and nature. In late 2009, further reparations lawsuits were expected in the New York Second District Court by victims of apartheid who initially requested $400 billion in damages from US corporations which profited from South African operations during the same period. Supreme Court justices had so many investments in these companies that in 2008 they bounced the case back to a lower New York court to decide, effectively throwing out an earlier judgment against the plaintiffs: the Jubilee anti-debt movement, the Khulumani Support Group for apartheid victims, and 17,000 other black South Africans. When Judge Clara Scheindlin replaced the late John Sprizzo, the case suddenly was taken seriously and in March 2009 was moved a step closer to trial when she rejected the corporations’ attempt to have it dismissed (Bond and Sharife, 2009).

Beyond these kinds of tort actions, will courts start declaring climate-related ecological debt a valid concept? Environmental rights to protection from climate change were explored in a court case filed by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the cities of Boulder, Colorado, Arcata, Santa Monica and Oakland in California, against the US Export-Import Bank and Overseas Private Investment Corporation, which had invested, loaned or insured $32 billion in fossil fuel projects from 1990–2003 without regard to the US National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). At present, only US cities have formal standing to sue for damages from climate change under NEPA, in the wake of a 2005 federal ruling. The out-of-court-settlement in February 2009 meant that the defendants will in future incorporate CO2 emissions into planning, but there are prospects for further suits that extend into identification and payment of damages (Friends of the Earth, 2009).

There are quite obvious limits to prospects for court relief under the Alien Tort Claims Act or NEPA, the two most advanced areas. Hence it would be consistent for
climate justice activists to also proceed with more immediate strategies and tactics. As Al Gore expressed it in 2007, “I can’t understand why there aren’t rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants” (Kristoff, 2007: 23). Arguing that “Protest and direct action could be the only way to tackle soaring carbon emissions,” the US National Aeronautic and Space Administration’s leading climate scientist, James Hansen, “The democratic process is supposed to be one person one vote, but it turns out that money is talking louder than the votes. So, I’m not surprised that people are getting frustrated. I think that peaceful demonstration is not out of order, because we’re running out of time” (Adam, 2009). Hansen himself participated in direct action in 2009, demonstrating at coal-fired power plants in Coventry, England and West Virginia (where at the latter site he was arrested), as well as at a pro-coal and pro-carbon trading environmental NGO in late 2009.

But the most effective examples of direct action come from the Global South, especially the Niger Delta. In January 2007, at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, many other groups became aware of this movement thanks to eloquent activists from the Delta, including the Port Harcourt NGO Environmental Rights Action (ERA). In separate disruptions of production (including armed interventions), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta prevented roughly 80% of the country’s oil from being extracted, although a cease-fire was called in mid-2009 (Mistilis, 2009). The strategy is consistent with the grassroots, coalface and fenceline demands of civil society activists in the Oilwatch network (headquartered at ERA) to leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, the tar sand in the land. Activists from Accion Ecologica popularized this approach in their struggle to halt exploitation of the oil beneath the Yasuni park in the Ecuadoran Amazon. The German state development agency GTZ conceded to a $50m/year grant (although Yasuni may become a pilot carbon trading case unless Ecuadoran environmental and indigenous rights activists can resist) (Gallagher, 2009).

Finally, there arises a question of how, if such direct action pressure permits climate debt to become part of Northern elite climate concessions, the debt repayments might be best distributed. It became clear to many civil society groups in recent decades that post-colonial African governments were too easily corrupted, just as were United Nations and aid (and even International NGO) bureaucracies.

One solution to the payment distribution problem appeared in 2009: the idea of simply passing along a monthly grant – universal in amount and access, with no means-testing or other qualifications – to each African citizen via an individual ‘Basic Income Program’ payment. According to Der Spiegel correspondent Dialika Krahe, the village of Otiivero, Namibia is an exceptionally successful pilot for this form of income redistribution (Krahe, 2009: 3-5):

It sounds like a communist utopia, but a basic income program pioneered by German aid workers has helped alleviate poverty in a Namibian village. Crime is down and children can finally attend school. Only the local white farmers are
unhappy... 'This country is a time bomb,' says Dirk Haarmann, reaching for his black laptop. 'There is no time to lose,' he says, opening documents that contain numbers he hopes will support his case. Haarmann and his wife Claudia, both of them economists and theologians from Mettmann in western Germany, were the ones who calculated the basic income for Namibia. And both are convinced that 'this is the only way out of poverty.' ... 'The basic income scheme,' says Haarmann, 'doesn't work like charity, but like a constitutional right.' Under the plan, every citizen, rich or poor, would be entitled to it starting at birth. There would be no poverty test, no conditions and, therefore, no social bureaucracy. And no one would be told what he or she is permitted to do with the money.

In a country like Namibia, says Haarmann, "a basic income would achieve what conventional development aid could never do: provide a broad basis for human development, both personal and economic" (Krahe, 2009: 5).

First priority would be to supply a Basic Income Program to Africans who live in areas most adversely affected by droughts, floods or other extreme weather events. Logistically, the use of Post Office Savings Banks or rapidly-introduced Automated Teller Machines would be sensible, although currency distortions, security and other such challenges would differ from place to place. The Namibian case has much to recommend it, in part because it amongst the driest sites in Africa.

**Conclusion**

The climate debt strategy ultimately chosen by African elites and civil society campaigners alike, would ideally address the burning problem of how to ensure that the greenhouse gas 'polluters pay' in a manner that first, compensates their climate change victims; that second, permits transformation of African energy, transport, extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal systems; and that third, in the process assures the 'right to development' for Africa in a future world economy constrained by emissions caps. Extremely radical changes will be required in all these activities in order not only to ensure the safety of the species and planet, but also that Africans are at the front of the queue for long-overdue ecological and economic compensation, given the North's direct role in Africa's environmental damage. The contemporary argument for climate debt to be paid is simply the first step in a long process, akin to decolonization, in which the master – the polluting Global North (South Africa included) - must know that not only is it time to halt the reliance on fossil fuels, but having 'broken' the climate (as Pablo Salon puts it), it is their responsibility to foot the clean-up bill.

**Notes**

1 Market mechanisms – especially carbon trading and offsets – allow corporations and governments generating greenhouse gases to seemingly reduce their net emissions. They can do this, thanks to the Kyoto Protocol, by trading for others’ ‘certified emissions reductions’ (e.g. CDM projects in the Third World) or emissions
rights (e.g. Eastern Europe's 'hot air' that followed the 1990s economic collapse). The pro-trading rationale is that once property rights are granted to polluters for these emissions, even if given not auctioned (hence granting a generous giveaway), a 'cap' can be put on a country's or the world's total emissions. It will then be progressively lowered, if there is political will. So as to minimize adverse economic impact, corporations can stay within the cap even by emitting way above it, by buying others' rights to pollute. But this would lead to a more efficient adaptation of economies to pressures associated with a carbon tax.

2 Maathai’s main institutional ally and funder were the Forum for Environment, Ethiopia and the Heinrich Boell Foundation (Ethiopia).


4 The analysis generated by Larry Lohmann is probably the most sophisticated, e.g., see Lohmann (2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, and 2010). In addition, I have written about the choice between carbon markets and climate debt in Bond (2009).

5 But neither was Cantwell’s own alternative ‘cap and dividend’ legislation sufficiently strong on making cuts or committing to pay carbon debt for it to gain genuine traction amongst environmental advocates. Most scientists insist that at least an 80% drop in emissions will be necessary within four decades, with the major cuts before 2020. To achieve this, carbon markets won’t work, as the leading US climate scientist, James Hansen, concluded in leading the intellectual opposition to US president Barack Obama’s cap and trade scheme. Obama’s legislation – the Waxman-Markey bill that passed the US House of Representatives in June 2009 (with similar Senate legislation on hold in 2010) – was so profoundly flawed that the more ambitious wing of environmental civil society argued it should be scrapped, not only because of its orientation to carbon markets, but simultaneously its destruction of Environmental Protection Agency’s powers to regulate carbon pollution, plus the legislation’s subsidization of fossil fuels and offsets. See the film ‘Story of Cap and Trade’ at http://www.storyofstuff.org and analyses by, e.g, the groups Center for Biological Diversity, Climate SOS and the Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, at http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/action/toolbox/ACESA/sign-on_letter.html, http://www.climatesos.org and http://www.seen.org.

6 See Bond, P. (2009a). According to Michael Dorsey, Professor of Political Ecology at the US's Dartmouth College, “After more than a decade of failed politicking [on behalf of carbon trading], many NGO types... are only partially jumping off the sinking ship – so as to work for industries driving the problem. Unfortunately, many continue to influence NGO policy from their current positions, while failing to admit to or even understand obvious conflicts of interest”.

They include: (i) three dozen cases of African resources – worth billions of dollars - captured by firms for resale without adequate 'Access and Benefit Sharing' agreements between producers and the people who first used the natural products; (ii) diabetes drug produced by a Kenyan microbe and Libyan/Ethiopian treatment; (iii) antibiotics from Gambian termite hill and giant West African land snails; (iv) antifungal from Namibian giraffe and nematocidal fungi from Burkina Faso; (v) infection-fighting amoeba from Mauritius; (vi) Congo (Brazzaville) treatment for impotence; (vii) vaccines from Egyptian microbes; (viii) South African and Namibian indigenous appetite suppressant Hoodia; (ix) drug addiction treatments, multipurpose kombo butter from Central, W. Africa; (x) beauty, healing treatment from Okoumé resin in Central Africa; (xi) skin and hair care from the argan tree in Morocco, Egyptian ‘Pharaoh’s Wheat’, bambara groundnut and ‘resurrection plant’; (xii) endophytes and improved fescues from Algeria and Morocco; (xiii) groundnuts from Malawi, Senegal, Mozambique, Sudan and Nigeria; (xiv) Tanzanian impatiens; and (xv) molluscicides from the Horn of Africa.

The Bank’s estimates are conservative for at least three reasons: a minimalist definition based upon international pricing in 2000 (not potential future values when scarcity becomes a more crucial factor, especially in the oil industry); the partial calculation of damages to the local environment, to workers’ health/safety, and especially to women in communities around mines; and the Bank’s use of average – not marginal – cost resource rents also probably leads to underestimations of the depletion costs.


As New York Times reporters remarked, “Just a month after world leaders fashioned a tentative and nonbinding agreement at the climate change summit meeting in Copenhagen, the deal already appears at risk of coming undone” (see Broder and Rosenthal, 2010).

Trade Union Conference of the Americas (2009), ‘Statement’.


See: http://www.climate-justice-now.org/category/reports_and_publications/climate-debt/

Earthlife Africa (2009), ‘Press Release: South Africa’s Emissions Offer’, Johannesburg, 10 December. Other agencies were more circumspect, maintaining good relations. For example, in early December a leading official of the World Wildlife Fund called Sonjica’s Copenhagen strategy ‘very progressive’ and Greenpeace – so effective with direct action protests involving pranks and aesthetically gripping imagery (instead of grassroots organizing) – actually termed
SA the ‘star’ of Copenhagen, prior to the Copenhagen Accord. Even a month after the Accord was signed, according to Themba Linden of Greenpeace Africa, “The BASIC countries have to lead the world in light of no leadership from developed world.”

16 Lohmann, L. (2009), personal correspondence.

References


Action Aid (2005), Real Aid: An Agenda for Making Aid Work, Johannesburg: Action Aid.


Africa Peoples Movement on Climate Change (2009), ‘Confronting the Climate Crisis: Preparing for Copenhagen and Beyond’, Nairobi, 30 August, Available at: http://www.iboninternational.org


International Monetary Fund (2009), The implications of global financial crisis for low-income countries, Washington, DC.: IMF.


McLure, J. (2009), 'Ethiopian leader chosen to represent Africa at climate summit,’ in Addis Ababa, 1 September.


Narain, S. (2010), 'Move over boys and girls, the men are here: The future of climate negotiations and why India wants the Accord,’ in India Environment Portal blog,
12 January, Available at:  


Republic of Bolivia (2009), ‘Submission to the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,’  
La Paz, April.

Sachs, J. (2009), ‘Obama as Climate Change Villain,’ 21 December, Available at:  
http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/sachs161


Shiva, V. (2005), ‘Beyond the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong’, in ZNet Commentary,  
26 December.


http://www.pnas.org/content/105/5/1768.

Van Schalkwyk, M. (2007a), ‘Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism M van Schalkwyk spells out SA’s “Climate Roadmap” for 2007 and beyond,’ in Pretoria,  
14 March.


Working Group on Climate Debt (2009), ‘We demand the enforcement of the payment of climate debt’, World Conference of Peoples on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, April, Cochabamba.

Working Group on Climate Finance (2009), ‘Document debated and approved in the working group on Climate Finance’, World Conference of Peoples on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, April, Cochabamba.


Patrick Bond is a political economist and activist living in Durban, South Africa, where he teaches political economy and eco-social policy at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Before the African National Congress came to power in 1994, he was active in the international anti-Apartheid movement as well as the US student movements and community movements in the 1980s. He continues to be active in labour, ecology, and anti-racist struggles in South Africa and internationally, and has written prolifically on neoliberalism, imperialism, ecology, the politics of global justice movements, structures of racism in global political economy, and on various aspects of South African and Zimbabwean politics. Bond’s books include: Climate Change, Carbon Trading and Civil Society: Negative Returns on South Africa’s Investments (co-edited with Rehana Dada and Graham Erion for Rozenberg Publishers and UKZN Press, 2008, 2007); The Accumulation of Capital in Southern Africa: Rosa Luxemburg’s Contemporary Relevance (co-edited with Horman Chitonge and Arndt Hopfmann for CCS and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2007); Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation (Zed Books and UKZN Press, 2006); and Trouble in the Air: Global Warming and the Privatized Atmosphere (edited with Rehana Dada for CCS and TransNational Institute, 2005). Chandra Kumar interviewed him in February 2010.

**CK: Why have you been critical of what’s been called the ‘cap and trade’ approach to dealing with carbon emissions and climate change – a strategy that has even been endorsed by people on the left such as Robin Hahnel?**

PB: For the tiny group of left environmentalists who genuinely support carbon trading – and Canada has its share – there are two problems: first, believing your own progressive politics will fail against the neoliberal enemy and hence adopting mainstream logic, which is the main reason for most of the controversies with pro-market greens (such as Robin); and believing the claims of neoliberal hucksters that a carbon market can work.

Those claims have been systematically debunked since October 2004, when the Durban Group for Climate Justice gathered activists and intellectual critics from around the world and began networking and expanding our critique. Serious climate activists have made opposition to carbon trading a fairly central plank, such as in the global critique of Kyoto’s market provisions and various national legislative debates, as well as at the Third World coalface in Clean Development Mechanism projects and forest campaigning, led there by indigenous peoples. Carbon market conferences are now regular scenes of protest.
This stance contrasts with most of the Big Green groups – though not Friends of the Earth – whose leadership think carbon trading is the last best hope for legislation in North America, for stronger implementation in Europe, and for the buy-in of big Asian and Latin American polluters on the basis of complex market incentives.

But it turns out that due mainly to right-wing opposition, the cap and trade legislation supposedly ready for passage in the US and Australia in 2009 was defeated. So there’s really no hope for a coherent global market, with carbon priced sufficiently high to fund renewable energy (at $50+/tonne), which is what these light-green advocates had expected would be in place by now. It turns out that the pragmatists hoping to cut a deal with more enlightened fractions of capital – such as allegedly far-sighted financiers - overestimated the level of support for pricing carbon. They also assumed that widespread fraud would be eliminated instead of spreading, as we saw with the Hungarian government’s resale of carbon credits that wrecked European prices in March.

As a result, with the gridlock at Copenhagen and on Washington’s Capitol Hill, as well as in Ottawa and Canberra, the carbon market is dead. Of course, we’ve argued that it was already dead as an ecological project, for the purpose of financing renewable energy. After all, from mid-2008 to early 2009, the price fell from more than €30/tonne to less than €9/tonne. And this was the third such carbon market crash.

Market chaos is helpful, though, because genuine climate activists – even some who still work, however uncomfortably, within Canada’s Climate Action Network – are now able to more readily jettison vain hopes of climate policy alliances with liberals, bankers and corporations. That leaves us better able to seek direct caps on polluters through regulation, as well as direct-action strategies and tactics to keep the oil in the soil, coal in the hole and tar sand in the land. Plenty of excellent Canadian and US activists are leading these battles, such as indigenous people in Alberta, networks of anarchists, radical greens and eco-socialists.

**CK: Climate talks broke down at Copenhagen. The G77, representing 130 countries, suspended talks because they felt the countries of the North – with the US and Canada being the most glaring culprits – were unwilling to accept responsibility for their emissions. We heard the phrases ‘climate debt’ and ‘climate justice’ coming from representatives of the South. What do these concepts refer to and how do you think activists in countries such as Canada should take them up?**

**PB:** ‘Climate Justice’ is the phrase that was popularized as a movement slogan at the December 2007 launch of the network Climate Justice Now! in Bali. The idea of climate justice brings together radical environmentalism with global justice currents such as those forged by Zapatismo, and by the protests in Seattle, Quebec City, Soweto, Bhopal, the Narmada Valley and several other cases of recent
indigenous activism and anti-capitalism. The indigenous, small island, African and Andean leadership we’ve seen is vital, given this movement’s need to take direction from those most adversely affected, and it has been aided by political-strategic inputs from inspiring organisations like Focus on the Global South, whose best-known intellectuals, Walden Bello and Nicola Bullard, are influential critics of neo-liberal, Northern-dominated ‘multilateralism’.

Another great boost came from the research and eloquent reportage of Naomi Klein, who in late 2009 assisted many in the North to realise how much they owe the South in damages for taking up too much environmental space: ‘climate debt’. The phrase is most closely associated with Quito-based Accion Ecologica and its advisor Joan Martinez-Alier of Barcelona, but Jubilee South chapters from Manila to Buenos Aires have also made this a campaigning issue.

Last April, in an inspiring statement to the UN General Assembly, the Bolivian government played a leading role in putting climate debt on the UN’s agenda. In September the World Council of Churches endorsed the idea, in spite of some Northern member opposition. And then we figured the big breakthrough in the last half of 2009 was the willingness of the Ethiopian tyrant, Meles Zenawi, to demand a Copenhagen commitment of up to $100 billion/year by 2020 for Africa, without which the Africans would walk out. They even did a November dress rehearsal at a preparatory meeting in Barcelona.

Hearing this, our Durban guru Dennis Brutus replied, ‘Then we should “Seattle Copenhagen”, with the left outside protesting and African elites inside denying consensus, so as to delegitimize the process and outcome, just as we did in 1999.’ That was a logical trajectory for climate politics, especially when even the establishment scientist James Hansen cogently argued in the New York Times in December that because of carbon trading, no deal at Copenhagen would be better than a bad deal. No one I met in the CJ movement in Copenhagen had any illusions that an agreement worth endorsing would emerge.

Exactly a week before Brutus died, on December 19, the Copenhagen circus imploded because, as Bill McKibben of 350.org put it, ‘Obama blew up the UN.’ This news pleased Dennis immensely, given the contours of a bad US-driven deal: insufficient CO₂ cuts, unwillingness to pay the climate debt, and inability to break from the centrality of a carbon market.

After signing on, the South African president Jacob Zuma looked like a hapless mugging victim staggering drunkenly home from a pub. He really didn’t know what hit him in the negotiating room on December 18, and along with everyone else, his environment minister shook her head the following week and said, ‘I’m disappointed’ – because the SA ruling class, like Canada’s, needs legitimacy for ongoing mineral-based plunder, and they didn’t get it. Three of the last words Dennis said to me were, ‘Serves them right!’
As for the climate debt demand, some of us (myself included) were naive to believe Zenawi, who detoured to Paris on his way to Copenhagen, and with the enthusiastic support of Nikolas Sarkozy, promptly cut his demands in half by accepting lower financial transfers and removing the walk-out threat. But now that the climate debt genie is out of the bottle, US officials – in denial of course, refusing to acknowledge the concept – and Europe will continue to be badgered to pay by Climate Justice activists. So will South Africa, which owes the continent a vast amount, given that we emit 42% of Africa’s greenhouse gases but have less than 8% of the population.

One of the nuanced debates is whether the debt should take the form of individualized and potentially commodifiable ‘Greenhouse Development Rights’ or whether instead we can move towards more transformative and collective strategies for claiming debt. Another is what form the climate debt would be paid in, since no sensible climate debt activist trusts the kinds of strategies that the likes of Hillary Clinton offer: ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ expansion via carbon trading, or traditional corrupt, corporate-dominated and geopolitically-influenced aid, of the sort CIDA is infamous for. We’re unsure of the reliability of even the G77 climate financing demands, which include public payments but also market mechanisms.

**CK: You were a student of David Harvey. In The New Imperialism (2003), he provides an updated Marxian analysis of US imperialism in the context of a neoliberal order bent on ‘accumulation by dispossession.’ What do you make of the fact that despite his critical analysis, he ends the book by calling not for building socialist movements to actually overthrow the prevailing economic order, but for a return to something like Keynesian social democracy?**

PB: Yeah, I love that book, except those last pages. In 2003, having recently moved to New York and possibly envisaging a President Howard Dean – who was then making a good run in the early going and sounding globo-Keynesian in the wake of the world’s 1997-2001 financial chaos – David had every reason to hope that a rational US elite would replace the madman Bush. In retrospect, proclaiming such an early death for neoliberalism, was overly optimistic. After all, even the 2008-09 chaos left the IMF’s most enlightened minds advocating Keynesianism for the North but increasing austerity nearly everywhere else – even in South Africa in late 2008, where we were running budget surpluses yet had vast unmet social needs.

Still, the times have been ripe for that sort of idealism, and there’s probably no harm in making a Keynesian argument now and again, even if just to help provoke Stiglitz, Sachs, Krugman and Soros leftwards. However, my problem with a call for global Keynesianism or global governance is that it distracts us from the harsh reality of power imbalances at the global scale. Since the 1996 Montreal Protocol ending CFCs, and perhaps some subsequent minor advances in the Convention on Biodiversity, it’s abundantly clear that the world rulers cannot get their act together. Hoping for meaningful change from these global summits has become an exercise in frustration: from Kyoto (1997) to Copenhagen on climate, from Monterrey (2002) to Gleneagles (2005) to Washington (2008) to London and New York (2009) on global

These guys are desperate for a global solution for even one single global problem, and they are not getting anywhere close. All they really have to offer is stale analyses and then inaction. And that’s mainly because their own national capitalist classes are up against the wall. They go into negotiations with a mindset that exacerbates the problems, as was evident in Copenhagen.

Given this adverse balance of forces, which will continue into the foreseeable future, any talk of global governance is a dangerous distraction, whether of the Keynesian or Giddensian Third Way or neoliberal sort. Instead, I believe our offensives should be planned mainly where the left can generate a genuine change in power relations, such as at the national level and perhaps in regional combinations, as the Bolivarian bloc has sometimes been capable of doing.

Of course, we’re nowhere close to the left taking power elsewhere, and so we’ve come to realize, these past couple of decades, that it’s really at the local spheres where movement building can shake the global elites, something Harvey acknowledges by putting ‘accumulation by dispossession’ at the centre of his recent analysis. Like Rosa Luxemburg’s theory of imperialism in *The Accumulation of Capital* in 1913, or Naomi Klein’s privileging of extra-economic coercion in *The Shock Doctrine*, or our own race-class debates in South Africa regarding the ‘articulation of modes of production,’ or Trotskyist (and post-Trotskyist) references to combined and uneven development, the crucial insight concerns the extreme stretch of market power into the non-market sphere during periods of long-term capitalist downturn and amplified financial crisis.

As Polanyi’s idea of the ‘double-movement’ suggests, very serious political resistance can be found in the consequent pushback. Our best case is probably the Treatment Action Campaign’s successful demand for access to AIDS medicines, in which local activism joined by ferocious international solidarity beat the Clinton-Gore administration in 1999, the Big Pharmacorps in 2001, and Thabo Mbeki’s regime here from 2003-08 – resulting in 800,000 South Africans with AIDS getting free AntiRetroViral (ARV) drugs today. The cost of this war was high, for in the process, 330,000 lives were unnecessarily lost because Mbeki took so long to surrender.

Still, thanks to this precedent, millions are getting access elsewhere in Africa, consuming pills made as generics in African factories, and not paying for patents in
New Jersey or Zurich. A decade ago these treatments would have cost $15,000/year each, and so decommodification and deglobalisation of capital through the globalisation of people’s struggles represents the formula needed to defeat accumulation by dispossession in one of the most critical areas: intellectual property rights.

Local resistances to water and electricity privatization offer another set of excellent struggles. Harvey writes encouragingly of the precedents set in Soweto’s water wars, which helped kick Suez, the French water company, back to Paris in 2006. These struggles take us through decommodifying ‘socio-economic rights’ discourses, right up to their limits (in South Africa it turns out to be 25 litres of water/day per person for free but no more), and now – after a Constitutional Court defeat for activists last October – beyond rights-talk into ‘commons’ narratives, such as mutual aid in the liberation of water from the despised prepayment meters thanks to crafty neighbourhood re-plumbing teams. In Canada, Maude Barlow’s Council of Canadians, David McDonald at Queens University, and Tony Clarke’s Polaris Institute have come along on this journey with us.

Our challenge remains stitching together these sorts of victories across the expanse of the New Imperialism, and linking them up into a coherent political strategy. We’d hoped the World Social Forum would do so, and when David and I strolled through Porto Alegre in late January discussing this, it was with sadness that we realized there is still too much WSF ‘open space’ and not enough connecting-the-dots. Maybe the Fifth International project launched by the Bolivarians will help, but let’s see.

**CK:** In terms of climate politics and climate justice, how should we orient ourselves to the emergence of more social democratic language since the financial meltdown of 2009 in the US and the election of Barack Obama?

**PB:** Simply listen and look at the evidence soberly. It wasn’t surprising to me that after a kind of bailout-based financial crony capitalism for Obama’s Wall Street friends, Larry Summers would arrange a budget freeze. This merely amplifies the damage being done by what’s called ‘the fifty Herbert Hoovers’ (i.e., all the austerity programs at the state level).

With this sort of evidence, I think you’ll end up reacting to Obama’s occasional populist bank bashing by replying, ‘Talk Left, Walk Right’, as we do here in South Africa, and also maybe ‘Obummer!’ Or even ‘You Lie!’ as do his rightwing critics.

Then the illusions in US Democratic Party politics will lift, and it will be back to the hard but rewarding task of grassroots and labour organizing.

I spent 2003-04 at York University in Toronto with the single most talented group of English-speaking political economists, and they are really tackling this matter of Washington’s excessive power and residual neoliberalism. While I have occasional
differences with Leo Panitch and his comrades about interpreting capitalist crises, they know the US state as well as any analysts out there.

As for climate politics, having spent a month in San Francisco after Copenhagen, I was very inspired by the willingness of Climate Justice Movement-West cadre there to tackle Chevron, with dozens of arrests. They also protested at the Danish Embassy, at Senator Barbara Boxer’s office and at City Hall, and on Tax Day (April 15) will disrupt an emissions market conference. Carbon traders have also become targets in Chicago and New York. I’m also impressed that activists and lawyers have beaten back applications for nearly all the proposed new coal plants in North America. Most impressively in the US, West Virginia critics of mountaintop removal are doing brilliant activism, including a March sit-in at the Environmental Protection Agency which forced their director, Lisa Jackson, to move towards a ban on coal blasting that destroys those Appalachian streams and reivers.

And most important of all, halting Tar Sands exploitation in Alberta is crucial. Shannon Walsh, our Montreal-based comrade made a film – H2Oil – that teaches us so much, and helps make linkages from Alberta to the community I live in, South Durban, which is Africa’s major oil refining site south of Nigeria.

CK: You have written about what you and others call ‘global apartheid’, signifying a racist global economic order that shares certain characteristics of the apartheid system. How do you relate issues of race to questions of climate change and ecology generally?

PB: The most obvious is waste disposal, including greenhouse gases, with the most adverse impacts occurring in residential areas predominantly populated by people of colour.

Remember the famous December 1991 World Bank memo by its then chief economist Summers - actually plagiarised from his friend Lant Pritchett - saying that ‘Africa is vastly underpolluted’, since ‘the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste on the lowest-wage country is impeccable, and we should face up to that.’ Once you look at where Obama plans to build his new nuclear plants, you’ll see ongoing evidence of environmental racism.

The same goes for Africa. Here in Durban, the largest landfill in Africa is Bisasar Road, situated just south of the famous Kennedy Road and its 4000 black ‘African’ shackdwellers who until last September included leadership of the group Abahlali baseMjondolo, amidst working-class and lower-middle-class ‘Indian’ and ‘coloured’ communities. This case of extreme environmental racism began under apartheid in 1980 when the dump was forced onto unwilling residents, who fought it hard and who believed African National Congress promises of closure in 1994. In part because Summers’ toxic logic spawned carbon trading, the World Bank and neoliberal municipal bureaucrats came with their own crazy promises, of jobs and university scholarships for the communities, if only the dump could be kept open longer and methane gas from rotting rubbish be turned into electricity, albeit with a
massive increase in flaring, with all manner of hot super-toxins released in the process. And from 2009, carbon credits began flowing into Durban municipal coffers at $14/tonne, so that Northern polluters can keep warming the climate. No, none of the Abahlali members got jobs or bursaries; that was a World Bank and municipality hoax.

Bisasar is South Africa’s most famous and largest ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ (CDM), and the leader in the continent. Thanks to Sajida Khan, who hosted the inaugural Durban Group for Climate Justice meeting in 2004 and in 2007 died of cancer - which she got twice breathing in Bisasar fumes every day - we know more about how CDMs are closely correlated to this kind of global-apartheid climate-racism, and how they cement in local racism borne of state power and capital accumulation.

Still, what we learned from the five stooges who co-signed the Copenhagen Accord last December is a shocking confirmation of global climate apartheid. Quite simply, these five men of colour – Obama, Zuma, Manmohan Singh of India, Wen Jiabao of China and Lula da Silva of Brazil – represented the interests of mainly white-owned industrial capital and mainly white over-consumers, against the masses of climate victims who are predominantly people of colour.

Some of the very worst-off rural victims of the coming climate disaster will be the Luo of Kenya and the Zulu of South Africa. The sacrifice by Obama and Zuma of their relatives on behalf of big capital and consumer hedonists is especially poignant, reminiscent of the way Fanon described the pitfalls of African leaders’ ‘national consciousness’ in The Wretched of the Earth.

CK: In the face of a global capitalism dominated by the most ecologically destructive states, mainly in the global North, how would you suggest that activists in places like Canada and the US form productive alliances with movements in the South that not only challenge ecological destruction but also the rule of capital more generally?

PB: South Africa has an exceptionally vibrant climate justice movement, and we need one because of the extreme contributions that global capital makes to South Africa’s climate footprint. Measured by the CO2 emissions in the energy sector per person per unit of output, we’re 20 times worse than the US here. And that’s so BHP Billiton, Arcelor Mittal, Anglo American Corporation and others can enjoy the world’s cheapest electricity – between US$0.01 and $0.02/kiloWatt hour, cross-subsidised by low-income consumers who are paying as much as $0.10/kWh through prepayment meters. The first figure will stay the same thanks to apartheid-era deals locking in cheap power for decades, while poor and working people are facing price hikes of 300% over the last couple and next three years.

So there’s a proliferation of community protests, many over ‘service delivery’ – e.g. excessively expensive electricity or simple lack of access in places like Kennedy
Road, hence repeated shack fires and internal respiratory health problems. We’ve not been successful in connecting the red and green dots, though, and linking these protests, especially to trade union struggles against electricity privatization. I feel that such linkages will occur in coming years. Eskom and the World Bank will be useful targets in the next weeks, given the latter’s US$3.75 billion loan to the former. We have a couple of hundred groups lined up to protest, stretching across the world.

The South offers very serious climate justice leadership, such as indigenous people and environmental and community activists in the Niger Delta and Ecuadorian Amazon. Accion Ecologica persuaded Ecuadoran president Rafael Correa to consider an oil-in-the-soil plan to prevent drilling in the Yasuni National Park in 2007, which by June 2009 was rewarded with a $50 million/year commitment by the German government, though it appears to be in trouble now.

Most spectacularly, Niger Delta activists keep vast amounts of oil in the soil through both non-violent and armed struggle. In the former category, Environmental Rights Action in Port Harcourt insisted on an end to extraction and exploration. In the latter, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta continues to kidnap foreign oil workers, demanding they vacate the Delta for good. Thanks in part to organising by the Ogoni Solidarity Forum, Shell Oil was kicked out of Ogoniland in June 2008, 13 years after the company arranged for Ken Saro-Wiwa’s execution, an act for which they settled an Alien Tort Claims Act lawsuit out of court in June 2009 for $15.5 million.

Here in Durban, the radical NGO groundWork linked Oilwatch to several dozen anti-oil activist groups from across the continent at a September 2008 conference, and a month later, citing climate concerns, the South Durban Community and Environmental Alliance began a legal appeal to the national government, aiming to reverse a $2 billion Durban-Johannesburg pipeline investment which would double oil refining in the polluted community.

These are examples of serious strategies in place to halt climate change at the supply side. Proponents believe that though they are still microscopic in nature, these strategies and tactics could be much more effective than carbon markets in stopping emissions. Many have been inspired by Alaskan and Californian environmentalists’ ability to withstand US oil company pressure to drill in the tundra and off the coast. The struggles against Chevron in the Bay Area are really good models, including actions at the company’s racist Richmond refinery.

CK: How can labour be radicalized on the question of climate change? What about all those workers whose livelihood depends on carbon-emitting industries? With regards to the union movement is the problem with the leadership or is it just something to do with the relatively higher standards of living enjoyed by unionized workers in the global North?
PB: It’s a tough question. The leading union on these issues here is the National Union of Metalworkers, and their leaders know it makes sense to make a ‘Just Transition’ from these untenable jobs in aluminium smelting to equally skilled and remunerated work doing the construction, installation and maintenance of passive-solar hot water heaters. These are needed atop every home across this country and continent. Lacking is the $1200 per unit subsidy required, so that’s a point of contestation with a government these unions helped to put into power, to replace the neoliberal Mbeki regime in 2008.

It turns out, though, that the Zuma regime is just as bad in most areas, but a communist minister of trade and industry, Rob Davies, is now making the right noises about green jobs. The metalworkers have to keep their eyes on a fast-changing industrial policy, on macroeconomics – where they lead the country in criticising monetarism – and on maintaining leftward momentum in union and Communist Party politics. It’s a hell of a hard job.

One of the great inspirations for them is the writing and speeches of Sam Gindin at York University. And they have learned lots about the failings of corporatist strategy from the US United Auto Workers and the more recent foibles of Canadian auto workers.

These problems are partly leadership failure and partly, as you say, a function of the old ‘labour aristocracy’ defence of living standards. We all need a bigger dose of critical education – such as The Story of Stuff and other attempts to address rampant consumerism – so as to organize for more free time and a better quality of life, instead of two McJobs, overpriced real estate, nonstop television advertisements and underpriced consumer goods which do environmental and social harm.

**CK: Do you think that the anti-globalization movement has evolved into the global climate justice movement? Do some of the same problems within the global justice movement haunt the climate justice movement?**

PB: Climate justice politics are picking up the best lessons from the last fifteen years or so of global justice activism. We saw that with the Climate Justice Action mobilizations in Copenhagen. Climate is an issue that encompasses so many others, like trade did for those Seattle activists in 1999. It will only get stronger, and hence a great deal of time is being spent negotiating good process, such as how to make the Cochabamba meeting called by Evo Morales in late April as effective as possible notwithstanding financing and language challenges. Every so often, a huckster will pop up trying to claim the traditions of climate justice, such as we saw with the tcktcktck campaign, so vigilance about what qualifies as justice is critical, now that the Climate Action Network membership is in disarray with their carbon trading strategies and tactics so discredited.

In addition, we still need every component of the global justice movement to toughen up. There are roughly three dozen fields of action where transnational
movements of radical civil society forces have generated formal networks and sites of solidarity, often under severe difficulties, but the difficulty of working out of the silos remains.

**CK: What is the significance of the experiments with “Bolivarian Socialism” in Venezuela and Bolivia for the global climate justice movement?**

PB: Of course, the Bolivian indigenous and radical social movements’ transition from opposition to state power is inspiring, and we’ve followed the complexities through the principled stance of the Cochabamba water movement, partly because their April 2000 coming out party and the South African independent left’s emergence were so similar (Cochabamba’s autonomist Oscar Olivera discussed this so eloquently with Soweto’s socialist Trevor Ngwane over coffee in a DuPont Circle bookshop during the World Bank protest mobilization, to mutual benefit).

We’re very inspired to hear that Ecuador is moving back to a saner macroeconomic policy with its 2009 default on the foreign debt, ejection of World Bank staff, and its work with the Bank of the South. We’re even more inspired to know that indigenous people in the Ecuadorian Amazon and Accion Ecologica are fighting so hard against the petro-Keynesianism of Rafael Correa, who looks increasingly repressive.

Can Hugo Chavez move to a post-petrosocialist vision more motivated by decentralised power and resources? Following dispatches from Marta Harnecker, Edgardo Lander, Michael Liebowitz, Fred Fuentes and Kiraz Janicke in Caracas, and Michael Albert’s persistent efforts to inject participatory ideas into the Fifth International, sure, Venezuela has its ups and downs on this path beyond capitalism.

We’re desperately hoping Chavez becomes as serious a climate justice leader as we heard him hint at becoming in Copenhagen. As evidence to the contrary, in September 2008, he sold the idea of a new oil refinery in South Africa to import his junk dirty-shale, and outgoing president Mbeki bought it just before being tossed out of power. So we may be stuck with a white-elephant $8 billion refinery for the state company PetroSA.

When, a month later in Caracas, Dennis Brutus and I asked Chavez and his environmentalists, could they please keep their oil in the soil, ‘si’ was not the answer we were given. For now, though, the critique we share of global capitalism is the basis for much more collaboration and debate. And from there to unifying action is inevitable, as we try to keep the coal in the hole in South Africa, requiring a great deal more pressure from the Bolivarians against our ruling party, a process that has already begun when in Copenhagen, Chavez and Morales chastised Zuma for his sub-imperialist climate posture. But as Marx said, each proletariat has to deal with its own bourgeoisie first, and that’s still the most critical thing for us to bear in mind before we are sucked into unrealistic alliances aimed at global deal-making.
World Bank threat to South African politics and the world’s climate

The Mercury, 13 April 2010

How dangerous is the World Bank and its neoconservative president, Robert Zoellick?

Notwithstanding SA’s existing $75 billion foreign debt, last Thursday the Bank added a $3.75 billion loan to Eskom for the primary purpose of building the world’s fourth-largest coal-fired powerplant, at Medupi, which will spew 25 million tonnes of the climate pollutant CO2 each year.

As taxpayers, Eskom customers, municipal ratepayers and world citizens, how worried should we be?

Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan repeatedly said that this is the Bank’s ‘first’ post-apartheid loan, yet its 1999 and 2008 ‘Country Assistance Strategy’ documents show conclusively that Medupi is the 15th credit since 1994.

Gordhan also claimed the loan will now help South Africa ‘build a relationship’ with the Bank. He forgets, the Bank coauthored the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme, which led us to overtake Brazil as the world’s most unequal major country, as black incomes fell below 1994 levels and white incomes grew by 24%, according to official statistics.

Gordhan neglects that the Bank itself regularly brags about its ‘Knowledge Bank’ role here. In 1999, for example, after Bank economist John Roome suggested to then water minister Kader Asmal that the government impose ‘a credible threat of cutting service’ to people who cannot afford water, the Bank’s Country Assistance Strategy reported that its ‘market-related pricing’ advice was ‘instrumental in facilitating a radical revision in SA’s approach’.

As a result, the cholera epidemic the following year – catalysed by water disconnections near Richards Bay - killed hundreds.

Similar misery will follow the Eskom loan. Medupi will be built in a water-scarce area where communities are already confronting extreme mining pollution. Forty new Limpopo and Mpumalanga coal mines will be opened to provide inputs to Medupi and its successor, Kusile.

More worrying, power-plant construction plans include a payoff of R1 billion profit for the African National Congress, whose investment arm owns a quarter of Hitachi, which received a R38 billion Eskom contract. So blatant is the conflict of interest that the government’s Public Protector last month judged Valli Moosa – then chair of Eskom and an ANC finance committee member – to have acted ‘improperly.’ Official embarrassment is acute, especially since the Bank issued a major report, ‘Quiet Corruption,’ just weeks ago. This is a prime case.
The announced sale of the ANC’s share in Hitachi within the next six weeks doesn’t really mitigate matters, given Medupi’s huge cost escalations (from R40 billion to R120 billion) and the increased value of Hitachi’s shares thanks to the improper, corrupt contract.

Five dozen civic, environmental, church, academic and labour organisations began a campaign against the World Bank loan in February. They are concerned not only that catastrophic climate change will be hastened, along with privatization of electricity generation, but worse, Medupi’s main beneficiary will be the world’s largest metals and mining corporations, which already receive the world’s cheapest electricity thanks to multi-decade deals.

In early April, a small modification was made to one apartheid-era sweetheart ‘Special Pricing Agreement’ - but it was to BHP Billiton’s ‘advantage’, the Melbourne-based company reported.

Medupi’s vast costs will mainly be passed on to people who cannot afford to pay the loan, through a 127% electricity price increase over four years. Dissent against service delivery deficits make South Africa amongst the world’s most protest-rich countries and the Congress of SA Trade Unions is threatening a national strike against Eskom that may well last into the World Cup.

South African civic groups and their 140 international allies now say they will start financial punishment of the institution, harking back to the World Bank Bonds Boycott launched by the late poet-activist Dennis Brutus exactly a decade ago.

In response to Brutus’s call, the city of San Francisco and other municipalities pledged not to buy Bank bonds. Scores of major financial institutions and endowment funds followed suit, including the world’s largest pension fund, TIAA-CREF, whose annual meetings Brutus visited on three occasions.

With the focus now broadening to include climate, San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi reacted angrily to the Eskom financing: ‘The loan provides sobering proof that the World Bank’s recent talk about its commitment to climate finance was nothing but a bunch of hot air. We will renew our commitment to keep our clean money from being tarnished by investment in the Bank’s coal-dirtied bonds.’

To understand why the Bank took this huge risk – with major shareholders like the US and European countries abstaining from voting – requires insights into its leader, Zoellick.

A major player in the ‘war on terror,’ Zoellick served as number two at George W. Bush’s State Department and then in 2007 replaced Bank president Paul Wolfowitz, who was fired by the Bank board for arranging a plush State Department job for his girlfriend.
Like Wolfowitz, Zoellick was at the outset a proud member of the neoconservative thinktank, the ‘Project for a New American Century’, and as early as January 1998 went on record arguing that Iraq should be illegally overthrown. In the same period, Zoellick also worked for Fannie Mae, Enron and Alliance Capital, all of which effectively went bankrupt. From 2001-05, Zoellick was the US trade minister, and his bumbling at the 2003 Cancun ministerial summit confirmed the World Trade Organisation’s subsequent demise.

And just prior to becoming World Bank president, Zoellick was a top executive at Goldman Sachs, widely blamed for amplifying the 2008-09 global financial crisis. Zoellick’s efforts promoting the Bank as lead climate financier at the December 2009 UN Copenhagen climate summit were equally unsuccessful, and the Bank’s backing of carbon markets is now widely decried as a lost cause.

Zoellick has broken many things in his career, and having now granted Eskom the R29 billion loan, he can add to his belt some new notches: the budgets of poor and working South Africans who will suffer unaffordable price increases, Limpopo ecologies, South African democracy and the climate.
Circumventing the climate cul-de-sac:
Charleston-Cochabamba-Caracas versus Kyoto-Copenhagen-Cancun

Social Text, March 2010

The simple three steps required to escape the greenhouse-gas governance gridlock between global and especially US elites are easy to see, though United Nations officials and nearly all the world’s climate negotiators refuse to take them:

- Make dramatic emissions cuts - 45% below 1990 levels in the advanced capitalist economies within a decade, so as to reduce the temperature rise to less than 1 degree centigrade in line with scientific demands and the calls of climate change victims.
- Acknowledge the vast climate debt the wealthy North owes the under-emitting South - estimated at $400 bn/year by 2020.
- Decommission the destructive carbon markets - which have proven incapable of fair, rational and non-corrupt trading.

The elites prefer other routes: shifting, stalling, and stealing. These represent three moves we can use to characterize both contemporary economic crisis management and climate malgovernance. The routes correspond to the ways capitalism dealt with its deep-rooted problem of overaccumulation, dating to the 1970s, using what David Harvey terms the “spatial fix,” the “temporal fix,” and “accumulation by dispossession.” In the field of political economy, these concepts refer, respectively, to

- Globalisation’s ability to shift problems around spatially, without actually solving them.
- Financialization’s capacity to stall problems temporally, by generating credit-based techniques - including securitization of toxic loans - that permit the purchase of products today at the expense of future arrears and defaults when the upside-down pyramid topples.
- Imperialism’s compulsion to steal from weaker territories via extra-economic extractive systems, variously termed “articulations of modes of production,” “primitive accumulation,” “uneven and combined development,” the “Shock Doctrine,” and accumulation by dispossession.

The mismanagement of capitalist crisis, most spectacularly in 2008-09, included vast taxpayer bank bailouts during bursting financial bubbles, which in turn set the stage for another coming round of subprime disasters (next time, sovereign debt defaults combined with commercial real estate) as well as more rapid devaluation of the dollar. No matter how much shifting, stalling, and stealing has been accomplished, more is required than US Treasury and the Fed have accomplished - but there are limits now emerging into plain view.
One crucial limit to capitalist political economy is political ecology. Shifting, stalling, and stealing on behalf of world capitalism, by the likes of Larry Summers - when he arranged Wall Street bailouts in 1995 (Mexico), 1997-98 (East Asia) and 2008-10 through extreme devaluations visited upon vulnerable countries and people - hark back to a similar insight in December 1991. At that point, as World Bank chief economist, Summers wrote (or at minimum signed a memo Lant Pritchett wrote) that “The economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste on the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that,” and “African countries are vastly underpolluted”.

By this, I think Summers meant that the US and other ultra-polluters should:

- Shift problems associated with environmental market externalities to the Third World.
- Stall a genuine solution to the problems by instead opening up the field of pollution-trading for some future market solution, using financialization techniques and imaginary “offsets” that are ostensibly aimed at building tomorrow’s sinks so as to mop up today’s dangerous forms of Northern pollution.
- Steal more of the world’s environmental carrying capacity - especially for greenhouse gas emissions - and perhaps pay a bit back through commodification of the air (resorting to mythical carbon markets and offsets) while denying climate debt responsibilities (as the US negotiating team did in Copenhagen, especially chief envoy Todd Stern: “The sense of guilt or culpability or reparations - I just categorically reject that”).

Joined by Washington’s Big Green lobby, European elites were initially encouraging, setting up the EU Emissions Trading Scheme along the lines Al Gore requested in 1997 when he falsely promised the US would sign on to Kyoto if it included carbon markets (and which has made him, personally, even more wealthy, as a pioneer salesman). But the route from Kyoto to Copenhagen was one Washington declined to travel, as the Senate voted 95-0 against Kyoto and the Bush regime only showed up near the endgame, in Bali in 2007, with a vague commitment to join future post-Kyoto talks, but only if China and India were compelled to make deep cuts.

Then in Copenhagen, Washington “broke the UN,” as 350.org leader Bill McKibben put it on December 18, by invoking a WTO-style Green Room strategy of divide-and-conquer. In a microcosm of last-minute shifting-stalling-stealing, the Copenhagen Accord brought together the US with the Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC) bloc so that five leaders-of-color - Barack Obama, Lula da Silva, Jacob Zuma, Manmohan Singh and Wen Jiabao - could cement, for future decades, the untenable profits and lifestyles enjoyed overwhelmingly by white-owned capital and white overconsumers.
(Tellingly, amongst the first groups of rural Africans to be fatally affected by the extreme climate change that the Copenhagen Accord locks in, are the Luo of Kenya and the Zulu of KwaZulu-Natal: Obama’s and Zuma’s closest kin. Nine of ten African peasants will not be able to produce if the 2 degrees centigrade mark is breached this century, according to UN experts, and the Copenhagen Accord is expected to achieve no better than a warming limitation to 3.5 degrees.)

In Cancun in November-December 2010, we can expect what happened in the same place exactly seven years earlier, at the crashed WTO ministerial summit. The configuration could well entail protests outside and a walk-out and consensus-denial by insider elites representing desperate victims. In 2003 it was a brave African delegation, but in 2010 will probably mix small islands, a few Africans, and the feisty Bolivarians. They will be cheered on by a mass protest of tens of thousands of red-green activists outside the Cancun talks, far more militant than were the 100,000 in Danish civilized society who marched last December 12.

Aside from protesting climate injustice at these sites (as well as the 2011 follow-up here in South Africa), what, then, is the optimal route mapped by the red-green Climate Justice (CJ) movement? The CJ movement has been growing especially from roots in the US environmental justice and Latin American climate movements (led by Accion Ecologica), and a Durban Group for Climate Justice formed in 2004 to specifically contest the “privatization of the air” associated with carbon trading. By 2007 at the Bali climate negotiations, leading radical environmentalists united with the global justice movement to form Climate Justice Now! and in 2009, Climate Justice Action fused similar currents in Europe to generate protest at Copenhagen.

To come to grips with climate politics requires CJ organizers to:

- Halt elite shifting of the problem, by expanding our own spatial and scalar political lenses from the local to the national and global (as was often accomplished in 2000s global justice organizing and activism).
- Halt elite stalling by telescoping long-term climatic processes into the present, but without getting so carried away by urgency that we endorse dubious deals (this is one of our most serious challenges because the most adverse impacts are years away for many, and some of the most opportunistic of false solutions are being imposed through rush-job environmental assessments).
- Halt elite stealing - not only of an unfair share of the planet’s environmental space, but also of multilateral political processes - by asking tough questions not only about mitigation and adaptation, but also about climate justice.

Given the terribly adverse balance of forces associated with global governance processes from Kyoto to Copenhagen to Cancun (the last solution to a world-scale problem, after all, was the 1996 Montreal Protocol banning ozone-hole endangering CFCs), the CJ movement must not only contest but also circumvent the elites in
order to escape their climate cul-de-sac. Such a process starts elsewhere, in unlikely places like Charleston, West Virginia, where the scale-challenge has taken groups like Coal River Mountain Watch and Climate Ground Zero from their localized mountaintop removal protests - including tree-sit microsites - to the state capital, where they locked down at the WV Department of Environmental Protection last June. Their demand was a handover of responsibility from local bureaucrats captured by Big Coal, to the national Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

But at the same time, the EPA is becoming the subject of intense climate protest, due not only to its slovenly attitude towards WV mountaintop removal, as occurred in late March when activists blockaded a Washington headquarters entrance. In addition, the EPA needs more direct action to punish EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson’s February announcement that her agency would delay substantive implementation of its 2009 “endangerment finding” on coal until 2013 (curiously timed to avoid the Obama reelection campaign).

It is in national state regulation (in every country) that climate accountability has been most obviously missing. Direct command-and-control regulation of emissions sources - far beyond current EPA plans for imposition of better coal-burning technology - must be higher on the agenda in 2010, since the Senate is unwilling to pass a genuine climate bill.

Gridlock in the Senate is thus rather useful. As climate scientist James Hansen and activists at Climate SOS and Rising Tide point out, the cap-and-trade strategy adopted by Senators Kerry, Boxer, Lieberman and Graham will do far more harm than good (see http://www.storyofcapandtrade.org). As in Copenhagen, better to have no deal than to have a bad deal which locks in a false-solution climate strategy.

Somewhat less objectionable than Kerry et al’s efforts on behalf of the fossil fuel and financial industries, is a bill introduced by Senators Maria Cantwell and Sue Collins last year, which some progressive US climate activists are now actively supporting. Yet this effort, the Carbon Limits and Energy for America’s Renewal (CLEAR) Act, is also fatally flawed, because of inadequate emissions cuts (around 5% from 1990-2020), the lingering presence of carbon trading and offsets, the lack of revenues earmarked to pay the US’ fair share of the Climate Debt, its inadequate strengthening of the command/control regulatory mechanisms/mandates for EPA, utility boards and planning commissions, and its inadequate mandate to assure economic transformation so as to generate new production, consumption, transport, energy and related systems. Also, if it passes the Senate, the likelihood is that the House will insist on many of the objectionable features of Waxman-Markey (offsets, carbon trading, oil/nuke/agro subsidies, EPA neutering, etc). (Upon invitation, I put these critiques to one of the bill’s technical managers, Amit Ronan of Cantwell’s office, and got no rebuttal.)

In contrast to the Capitol Hill quicksand, California provides more radical grassroots insights into jumping space and scale, with Chevron headquarters a special target of
the vibrant Movement for Climate Justice-West (the most active group of CJ activists in the US), AmazonWatch, and Global Exchange. Californians and Alaskans who have previously fought to “leave the oil in the soil” - halting offshore drilling and tundra destruction, respectively - will obviously need to remobilize against Obama. But everywhere, organizers can find excellent local climate change targets to raise consciousness and effect emissions cuts, with direct action against major greenhouse gas sources or large-scale corporate fossil-fuel consumers. Two particularly good sites for climate activists are, first, the public utility commissions which control pricing and electricity generation techniques (and hence coal-fired and nuclear power plants); and second, the municipal or regional planning commissions which give the go-ahead to suburban sprawl and all manner of other climate-threatening projects.

Which brings us to the global scale, where in Cochabamba, Bolivia from April 19-22 (Earth Day), Bolivarians led by host Evo Morales and grassroots indigenous, community, feminist, and environmental movements will be joined by genuinely solidaristic labor and NGO forces. This could set in motion a much more serious transnational CJ strategy, based not upon the illusion that the UN will address the climate crisis anytime soon, but instead upon more serious, pragmatic strategies. These can come only from a much richer merging of social and ecological rights discourses (for what such narratives are worth), and choices of unifying targets (such as fossil fuel companies, carbon traders, and the World Bank). Also in April, in Caracas, the new “Fifth International” will meet, and if red-green activists are there in force, the region’s petro-socialists (e.g. Hugo Chavez) and petro-Keynesians (e.g. Rafael Correa) may face up to contradictions in their own political ecologies. This is crucial, because in one of the world’s most important sites of struggle, Ecuador’s Yasuni National Park in the Amazon, an official presidential threat has been made that oil drilling commences on June 1, unless countervailing pressure by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador and Accion Ecologica is successful.

There are indeed, sometimes, deep-seated contradictions between red and green. In Africa, one of our objectives is universal supply of free basic electricity. South African activists in the Energy Caucus demand the equivalent of 100 kWh/person/month (so as to eliminate dirty energy inside the house for health/safety and gender equity purposes) to be supplied partially by universal passive-solar hot water heaters and partially through a connection to a progressively decarbonized national grid. But the only way to do so is to reverse a surreal apartheid inheritance: what is currently the world’s cheapest electricity (less than $0.02/kWh) goes to the world’s largest metals and mining firms (which export profits to London, Luxembourg, Zurich, and Melbourne), while a typical black township household will suffer a 127% price rise from 2008-12. The rationale for the higher higher rates is the construction of two huge new coal-fired powerplants - required so as to maintain cheap power to the smelters. A World Bank loan is critical to the process, and against it, a red-green alliance is forming - initiated by Climate Justice Now!SA (CJN!SA) members (especially groundWork, the South
Durban Community Environmental Alliance, and Earthlife Africa) and joined by major international environmental groups which aim to halt the Bank’s coal-oriented energy strategy. Given that a few thousand jobs in smelters, mines and the auto industry are at risk, environmentalists, communities and unions are seeking ways to work together, so that fossil fuel-dependent jobs can be compensated for through equally well-paid Green Jobs, especially the construction and installation of solar water heaters (in a Just Transition approach that the left of the British labor movement is also strategizing with red-green forces).

The situation elsewhere in Africa is similar, since so many of the extractive industries are the sole beneficiaries of electricity grid expansion. Red-green campaigns aim to “leave the oil in the soil” and “the coal in the hole,” exemplified in Nigeria where Delta activists have intimidated oil companies through both non-violent and armed struggle. In the former category, Environmental Rights Action in Port Harcourt insists on an end to extraction and exploration on grounds of the climate threat, and the descendants of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his Ogoni movement comrades won a precedent-setting out-of-court-settlement with Shell last June that may scare off other oil firms. In the latter category, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta continued to kidnap foreign oil workers, demanding they vacate the Delta for good. Thanks in part to organizing by the Ogoni Solidarity Forum, Shell was evicted from Ogoniland in June 2008, 13 years after the company arranged for Saro-Wiwa’s execution.

In contrast to the compromise-oriented lobby group, Climate Action Network, led by large NGOs which support carbon trading, the radical red-green activists formed Climate Justice Now! in December 2007. They issued five demands:

- Reduced consumption.
- Huge financial transfers from North to South based on historical responsibility and ecological debt for adaptation and mitigation costs paid for by redirecting military budgets, innovative taxes and debt cancellation.
- Leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in appropriate energy-efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy.
- Rights-based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous land rights and promotes peoples’ sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water.
- Sustainable family farming, fishing and peoples’ food sovereignty.

No matter that the CJN! component-movements are disparate. These are the kinds of organizations and arguments that link spatio-temporal resistances amongst diverse eco-social forces during a period of austerity, civil society weakness, and repression. The agents of social and environmental change can take advantage of neoliberalism’s still-discredited ideological status and demand from the next global and national negotiations a strategy for justice, not one based upon commodifying carbon.
But to do so the CJ activists still need to generalize an innovative critique, one that emerged over time as the global emissions trading strategy rose from birth in 1997, peaked in 2008, and attempts a last-gasp resurrection after the economic crisis and climate negotiations breakdown. The frenzied failure of elite climate politics stretching narrowly, in 2009-10, from the UN to the US Senate and G20 in June should make bottom-up alternatives much easier to advocate, including globally-coordinated actions against destructive projects (such as the World Bank’s loan in South Africa).

From the wider, deeper, and increasingly common critique of the Kyoto-Copenhagen-Cancun cul-de-sac, will come more confidence in the types of analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances associated with CJ politics. The challenge is to aggregate experiences from the Charlestons of the world, so as to move into alignment with the Cochabamba conference, and in turn, to generate a formidable red-green force uniting radical governments and the popular movements that will keep them accountable in Caracas and beyond.
Maintaining momentum after Copenhagen’s collapse: ‘Seal the deal’ or “Seattle” the deal?  
*Capitalism Nature Socialism,* March 2010

The Copenhagen Accord that U.S. President Barack Obama persuaded leaders of the BASIC countries—Brazil, South Africa, India and China—to sign at literally the climate summit’s last minute on December 18 is a telling reflection of the limits to top-down “global governance” and instead suggests the potential for bottom-up transformation. The deal followed extremely harsh police repression against nonviolent protesters outside the Bella Center. Inside, Denmark’s conservative ruling party leaders set up a “Green Room” process where 26 countries were cherry-picked to represent the world. When even that small group deadlocked—allegedly due to Chinese intransigence and the overall weak parameters set by the U.S., the five leaders—Obama, Lula da Silva, Jacob Zuma, Manmohan Singh, and Wen Jiabao, attempted a face-saving last gasp at planetary hygiene.

Even this weak Accord failed on its own terms, missing its first deadline, on January 31st, for signing on and declaring cuts for carbon emissions, leaving UN climate chief Yvo de Boer to concede that deadlines were “soft.” Moreover, Obama’s strategy meant the World Trade Organization’s divide-and-conquer political style would become the norm for UN climate negotiations—if indeed the UN remains a site of negotiation. More likely, the G20 will take over this process, starting with the expected G8 decommissioning near Toronto in June 2010, a development that would be to the obvious detriment of climate victims, especially in Africa and on small islands.

Instead of 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon in the atmosphere as “required by science” (as the popular advocacy phrase goes), the Copenhagen Accord signatories’ promised 15 percent emissions cuts from 1990 levels by 2020 could in reality translate into a 10 percent increase once carbon trading and offset loopholes are factored in. The result would be 770 ppm by century’s end, which scientists say will cook the planet. Nine of ten African peasants will not be able to produce food if the 2ºC mark is breached, according to UN experts. Hence the repeated accusation that Obama and Zuma “sold out” their rural Luo and Zulu relatives on behalf of their economies’ fossil fuel industries.

---

*This paper draws from participant insights taken from presentations to seminars and workshops in December 2009-January 2010 at Leeds University’s “Democratization in Africa” conference, the Roskilde University Centre for International Studies in Citizenship, Democratic Participation, and Civil Society, the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society in Durban (supported by the SA National Energy Research Institute), the San Francisco-based Movement for Climate Justice-West, the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and the Gyeongsang University Institute for Social Studies (supported by Korea Research Foundation Grant KRF-2007-411-J04601). Special thanks to the late poet-activist Dennis Brutus, whose idea it was in mid-2009 that Copenhagen be “seattled.”

Process aside, the Accord’s content was nearly universally condemned, for four reasons:

- Emissions cuts, which imply a catastrophic 3.5°C increase by the end of the century, are completely inadequate. They also include options for vague “pledge and review” commitments and, even worse, offsets so that Northern polluters can outsource the cuts.

- There are no clear sources of financing nor explicit commitments to pay the North’s “climate debt” to the South, estimated at $400 billion per year by 2020. The debt is owed for taking too much environmental space and doing massive climate damage, which is already resulting in 300,000 premature deaths annually and expected to escalate much more quickly as climate chaos worsens.

- The Accord departed from Kyoto Protocol and Bali Action Plan principles, which set out much more ambitious targets for richer countries than poorer countries.

- The Accord contains no legally binding components or compliance mechanisms.

Most significant was Obama’s refusal to lead the North to make 45 percent emissions cuts and offer payment of the climate debt, and instead engage in a process of leadership so flawed that 350.org leader Bill McKibben charged that “he blew up the United Nations.” Economist Jeffrey Sachs also accused Obama of abandoning “the UN framework, because it was proving nettlesome to U.S. power and domestic politics. Obama’s decision to declare a phony negotiating victory undermines the UN process by signaling that rich countries will do what they want and must no longer listen to the ‘pesky’ concerns of many smaller and poorer countries.” The idea that the UN is too unwieldy for climate talks surfaced repeatedly in subsequent weeks. The Accord is “insincere, inconsistent, and unconvincing,” Sachs continued, “unlikely to accomplish anything real. It is non-binding and will probably strengthen the forces of opposition to emissions reductions.” Moreover, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s “announcements about money a decade from now are mostly empty words. They do not bind the rich countries at all.” As Naomi Klein summed up, the Accord is “nothing more than a grubby pact between the world’s biggest emitters: I’ll pretend that you are doing

---


something about climate change if you pretend that I am too. Deal? Deal.” George
Monbiot compared the deal to the 1884-85 Berlin negotiations known as the
“Scramble for Africa,” which divided and conquered the continent.

The African Union was twisted and u-turned to support Zuma’s capitulation by the
man appointed its climate leader, Meles Zenawi. In September, the Ethiopian
dictator claimed, “If need be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that
threatens to be another rape of our continent.” But he didn’t walk out. He walked
off his plane in Paris on the way to Copenhagen, into the arms of Nicolas Sarkozy.
The fateful side deal, according to Mithika Mwenda of the Pan African Climate
Justice Alliance, is “undermining the bold positions of our negotiators and ministers
represented here, and threatening the very future of Africa.” Not only did Zuma and
Zenawi surrender on emissions cuts, but also on demanding full payment of the
North’s climate debt to the South. “Meles wants to sell out the lives and hopes of
Africans for a pitittance,” said Mwenda. “Every other African country has committed
to policy based on the science.” Climate damage to Africa will include much more
rapid desertification, more floods and droughts, worse water shortages, increased
starvation, floods of climate refugees jamming shanty-packed megalopolises, and
the spread of malarial and other diseases. Ironically, Obama’s and Zuma’s own Luo
and Zulu relatives in rural Kenya and KwaZulu-Natal will be amongst the first
victims of the Accord.

The BASIC climate “compradors” did, however, begin to face opposition from within.
For example in India, Centre for Science and Environment director Sunita Narain
argues that her government’s negotiators

are the same people who would stymie any real action on environmental
improvement in the country. They will oppose fuel efficiency standards, tax
on big cars, or tough penalties for polluters. But they will still talk glibly
about low-carbon economies. They will of course, dismiss out of hand, any
discussion on the need for “radical” and out-of-the-box solutions for equity
and sustainability. These, they will tell you, are mere evangelical thoughts of
some fringe activists. The men think and act differently. These are the
promoters of the Accord in India. And I believe they do so, because for them,
firstly, the Accord provides the perfect solution—talk big about change, but
do little at home. The U.S. has provided a perfect formula—it promises us the
right to pollute, because it wants to legitimate its own pollution. Secondly, it
promises that we can get a place on the high table of polluters. And as
powerful conspirators this will mean that we need to do little ourselves, but

7 A. Ashine, “Africa Threatens Withdrawal from Climate Talks,” The Nation (Nairobi), September 3,
2009.
8 John Vidal, “Copenhagen: Head of African Bloc Calls on Poorer Nations to Compromise over Climate
instead push the price of change on the less favored—the poor of India or the poor anywhere else in the world. It’s an open offer to protect, not our right to development as we have been demanding—the rich countries pay for our transition to low-carbon economies. But a simpler proposition: we give you the right to pollute (at least for now). The other proposition is equally seductive. To the countries, which are not yet polluters (from Ethiopia to Maldives), the Copenhagen Accord says we will give money to keep you pliant and agreeable. This is why the Accord promises some fictional money to poor vulnerable countries. It’s a perfect formula, designed to please all. There is only one hitch: we will all have to forget the climate change crisis and the hazards and impacts that will grow.10

Judged not only by Copenhagen’s crash but by the rise of the G20 (economics) and BASIC (climate) groupings, the global-scale climate governance ship appears to be sinking. So, too, is the climate’s supposed private sector lifeboat, carbon trading.

Legislative gridlock and the sinking carbon trading ship

Recall Obama’s January 2008 promise:

We would put a cap-and-trade system in place that is as aggressive, if not more aggressive, than anybody else’s out there... So if somebody wants to build a coal-powered plant, they can; it’s just that it will bankrupt them because they’re going to be charged a huge sum for all that greenhouse gas that’s being emitted. That will also generate billions of dollars that we can invest in solar, wind, biodiesel and other alternative energy approaches.11

Nothing of the sort was attempted. The main legislation pushed by Congressmen Henry Waxman and Edward Markey and Senators John Kerry, Barbara Boxer, Joe Lieberman, and Lindsay Graham during 2009 did not auction but instead gifted the right to pollute to those firms with historically high emissions records, foregoing the billions Obama pledged would flow to alternatives. As Virginia Congressman Rich Boucher explained, new subsidies to the coal industry plus massive offsets, which reduce pressure to cut emissions at the source, together meant that the Waxman-Markey bill that passed in the House of Representatives in June 2009, “strengthens the case for utilities to continue to use coal.”12 Remarkably, the bill also strips the


U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of its authority to regulate greenhouse gases. As a result, the U.S.’ emergent climate justice movement opposed the legislation, and only the major environmental groups put resources into pressuring the Senate to adopt similar legislation.

Having thus spent his first year in office moving around some deckchairs with Congress’ assistance, Obama, the captain of this Titanic, began 2010 by heading directly towards the closest iceberg: the USS Senate. The shock election of Republican Scott Brown to fill Edward Kennedy’s Massachusetts seat in late January—ending the filibuster-proof Democratic majority—was telling and perhaps decisive, because the climate debacle was center stage. Brown campaigned partly on the basis that he will reject cap-and-trade legislation currently pending in the Senate. His election confirms the most likely outcome from Capitol Hill: gridlock. Given Congressional power relations and the destructive nature of legislation on the table, this outcome is, frankly, welcomed by many U.S. grassroots environmentalists, as well as by leading climate scientist James Hansen.\(^\text{13}\) In the face of the ineffectual, pork-laden legislation, ecosocialists and other radical environmentalists may find more fruitful alternatives in the EPA’s ever-stronger regulatory potential and opportunities to intervene against climate-destroying projects at utility regulatory boards and local planning commissions. In December, the EPA issued an “endangerment” finding against carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas pollutants using the Clean Air Act.

The major bills are being pushed by Kerry, the senior Massachusetts senator who failed in a 2004 presidential campaign bid against George W. Bush. Kerry felt the need to ally with the conservative Democrat-turned-Independent (but pro-Republican) Lieberman, his 2004 running mate, and the very conservative Republican Graham. To lure deserters from the Senate’s substantial climate-denialist or climate do-nothing camps, the bill they are pushing in 2010 is full of subsidies to the coal, oil, gas, and nuclear industries. It also remains based on a carbon trading strategy which rewards polluters for historic emissions and allows an inadequate domestic emissions cap to be “offset” with purchases from other countries. This ill-gotten windfall was intended to partly fund U.S. promises in Copenhagen to begin giving $100 billion a year for climate change mitigation by 2020, an offer that many in the South rejected, since it is part of a market process rather than genuine climate debt payments.

The entire carbon trading apparatus—worth nearly $140 billion in volume last year and, had Copenhagen succeeded, projected to grow to $3 trillion in annual trades by 2020—is now in question. Experience with the main pilot project, the European

\(^{13}\) James Hansen, “Sack Goldman Sachs Cap-and-Trade,” December 7, 2009, online at: http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/mailings/2009/20091207_SackGoldmanSachs.pdf. Even the less harmful Senate bill offered by Maria Cantwell and Susan Collins includes trading, and offset provisions (albeit limited) aim for emissions cuts that are as weak—4 percent from 1990 levels by 2020, when science requires 45 percent cuts—as the other bills, and hence have no climate justice movement support, nor even major mainstream environmentalists’ sign-on.
Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), gives no confidence that carbon trading will result in reduced emissions. After five years of operation, the ETS has not cut emissions, though it has sent vast profits from consumers to utilities, fossil fuel firms, and financial intermediaries. Although there are contending viewpoints, with Point Carbon projecting a price rise in 2010 to €18/tonne, it is just as likely that the price of ETS-traded pollution allowances will decline further in 2010, because of investor uncertainty about the UN process, because too many allowances were given out, deflating their value, and because ‘hot air’ credits from Eastern Europe (due to deindustrialization since 1990) may be dumped onto the market since there is a question whether after Kyoto expiries in 2012 they will have any value. The failure of the Copenhagen Accord to confirm financing was a major blow to the market, which crashed by 10 percent between December 17-21, when it appeared there would be no legitimacy granted to a global carbon trading regime. By early 2010, a metric ton of carbon traded at €13, a 60 percent discount from mid-2008 highs of around €30. The ETS was itself delegitimized in September 2009 when the UN’s main verification contractor was disqualified for repeated procedural violations and again in December when Europol discovered that up to 90 percent of trades in some E.U. countries were flagrant tax scams.

Yet in spite of its proven failure, carbon trading was still central to Copenhagen’s aims and promised “adaptation finance” (in place of the U.S. refusal to acknowledge “climate debt”). If the Kyoto Protocol Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) ratio remained at its current level of about 6 percent of the carbon market, by 2020 the anticipated $3 trillion market would yield $180 billion in annual “financing” from North to South, incidentally, far more than Clinton’s promised $100 billion. The proposal to use “market mechanisms”—at a discounted rate—to finance adaptation was harshly criticized not only by activists but by the more enlightened negotiators from vulnerable states: the Association of Small Island States, Africa, and Latin America’s Bolivarian leaders. In the end, only the latter prevailed with tough politics, as financial blackmail seduced many others to agree on December 19 to “note” the U.S.-BASIC Accord (although only 20 countries had formally signed on as partners by mid-January 2010). Surprisingly, the Mauritian and Ethiopian heads of state who were once so tough in their rhetoric ultimately folded and joined Obama’s side. Where, then, does that leave oppositional grassroots politics?

15 Danny Fortson and Georgia Warren, “Carbon-Trading Market Hit by UN Suspension of Clean-Energy Auditor,” Business Times, September 13, 2009, online at: http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/natural_resources/article6832259.ece
Radical environmental politics

One theory, offered in *Counterpunch* ezine by anarchist activists Tim Simons and Ali Tonak is that Copenhagen is a site of defeat for radical climate politics, because, they claim, “the attempted resurrection of this movement, known by some as the Global Justice Movement, under the banner of Climate Justice” failed the tests of critical analysis and militant practice.17 Indeed, critical analysis and militant practice are important for any current and future fusion of red and green internationalism. Zapatismo in 1994 may be the first sighting of the solidarity that came to characterize the Global Justice movement’s inspiration and horizontal capacities. Likewise, Climate Justice might date its origins to Accion Ecologica’s pathbreaking work in Ecuador at roughly the same time. These two political projects were conjoined in Bali, Indonesia when Climate Justice Now! emerged outside another failed UN Conference of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. That crucial moment stitched together global justice and radical environmental activists. Since then, the growth of climate justice politics has been not merely the rebranding of existing radical networks but instead has witnessed a new red-green movement across borders that by most accounts will necessarily be anti-capitalist if it addresses the problem with the seriousness required.

Simons and Tonak dispute that the climate justice movement can address the climate crisis at its roots, because, they argue, its insistence on climate debt payments promotes “the financialization of nature and the indirect reliance on markets and monetary solutions as catalysts for structural change.” Yet Climate Justice Now! and the main Copenhagen activist network, Climate Justice Action (and before them the Durban Group for Climate Justice, which began in October 2004), are explicitly against commodification of the atmosphere, strenuously opposing carbon trading and offsets.

Indeed on climate debt, the best of the older Jubilee South debt/reparations language merged with Accion Ecologica’s “Ecological Debt” demands, culminating in the insistence of $400 billion per annum by 2020, a figure that has been rising dramatically as we learn more about the damage ahead. If articulated fully, climate debt should cover not only the damages done by climate change but also finance the South’s transcendence of extreme uneven development associated with the world economy’s export-oriented operation. Payment of climate debt damages and “adaptation” financing—if done properly—would ideally permit (and compel) the Global South to delink from all manner of relations with the world economy that damage both the exporting economy and the climate: fossil fuel extraction, agricultural plantations and associated deforestation, export-processing zones, vast

shipping operations, and foreign debt that forces further attempts to raise hard currency, which in turn reinforce the exploitative relationships that keep these countries in such poverty. Climate debt is not, therefore, a “simple claim,” as Simons and Tonak allege; it’s potentially a complex challenge to capitalism’s internal logic of commodification and neoliberal policy expansion.

Simons and Tonak charge that climate justice “demands for reparations justified by the notion of climate debt open a dangerous door to increased green capitalist investment in the Global South.” Yet the door has been wide open since 1997, when mainstream greens adopted the Kyoto Protocol’s CDM strategy as a North-South financing vehicle. Climate debt analysis does the exact opposite: it delinks reparations obligations from market mechanisms. In short, to promote climate debt does not require the climate justice movement to promote CDMs or other existing financing strategies that tie the South more deeply into Northern-controlled circuits of capital. On the contrary, the climate debt demand is why climate justice activists legitimately argue the South could and should halt export-oriented agriculture, extraction of minerals and petroleum, cheap manufacturing platforms and metals smelting, mass-produced consumer imports, further debt, further migrant labor supplies, further Foreign Direct Investment, further aid dependency, etc.

Moreover, climate debt is about reparations to people who are suffering damages by the actions of Northern overconsumption of environmental space—damages that can be proven even in courts, as the Alien Tort Claims Act has proven useful in the U.S. for some of the Niger Delta plaintiffs against Shell recently and for apartheid victims. This does not mean, as Simons and Tonak further claim, that “Climate debt’ perpetuates a system that assigns economic and financial value to the biosphere, ecosystems and in this case a molecule of CO$_2$,” and that “Everyone from Vestas to the Sudanese government to large NGOs agree on this fundamental principle: that the destruction of nature and its consequences for humans can be remedied through financial markets and trade deals and that monetary value can be assigned to ecosystems.”

Yet even if Simons and Tonak's political conclusion is wrong, their resistance to quantification of nature is understandable and commendable. Yet it is also irrelevant here, particularly given the climate justice movement’s hostility to—and track record fighting—carbon markets. Under capitalism, after all, everything gets commodified, and the optimal climate debt narrative involves recognizing this problem to insist on explicit compensation for damages done by climate chaos to the South (especially islands, Africa, Bangladesh, and other vulnerable sites), and then to make a rough estimate of this damage. The point is both financing compensation (for “adaptation”—i.e., survival) and disincentivizing further climate damage by penalizing the polluters.

Climate debt analyst Joan Martinez-Alier responds to this kind of critique by acknowledging that “although it is not possible to make an exact accounting, it is necessary to establish the principal categories and certain orders of magnitude in
order to stimulate discussion."\(^{18}\) Once discussion is generated about the damages done to climate victims in the global South (including their inability to use the environmental space that is occupied by the North), next comes the logical demand for reparations. To refuse on principle to make any kind of quantification, as do Simons and Tonak, is to refuse to acknowledge that damage is being done—and then to refuse to halt it. That is Washington’s viewpoint, as was stated repeatedly by Obama Administration officials in Copenhagen,\(^ {19}\) although the president’s Kenyan Luo relatives are amongst the first serious victims.

Simons and Tonak also claim the movement “obfuscates internal class antagonisms within states of the Global South in favor of simplistic North-South dichotomies.” This is a danger, of course, and always has been in internationalist politics. But against that danger, dynamic climate justice movements are emerging to challenge national elites (and the transnational corporations they front for) in Brazil, India, South Africa, and most other major global South sites. Simons and Tonak worry about “the pacification of militant action resulting from an alliance forged with transnational NGOs and reformist environmental groups who have been given minimal access to the halls of power in exchange for their successful policing of the movement.” But against the danger of demobilization, Climate Justice Now! arose specifically because the existing Climate Action Network on environmental NGOs was inadequate, compromised, and ideologically confused. Moreover, in Copenhagen, some of the most militant South-based transnational movements—e.g., Via Campesina and Oilwatch affiliates—showed they are able to negotiate the inside-outside space with power and grace. So, too, did the climate justice movement’s major formal NGO network, Friends of the Earth, which worked to undermine elite legitimacy within the Bella Centre and as a result were evicted. Simons and Tonak allege that the climate justice movement’s “solidarity with the Global South” was conflated with “a handful of NGO bureaucrats and allied government leaders.” There are certainly some in the climate justice movement who would put the North-South contradiction ahead of internal class conflict as a priority for struggle, a tension that is openly recognized and has been the source of frank debating as this broad global movement is organized quickly, without secretariats and enforced norms, values, and processes.

---


\(^{19}\) On the question of climate debt, chief U.S. negotiator Todd Stern said: “the sense of guilt or culpability or reparations—I just categorically reject that.” Bolivian ambassador to the United Nations Pablo Solon replied, “Admitting responsibility for the climate crisis without taking necessary actions to address it is like someone burning your house and then refusing to pay for it. We are not assigning guilt, merely responsibility. As they say in the U.S., if you break it, you buy it.” Stern’s aversion to “culpability” translates into rejection of his own government’s straightforward “polluter pays” principle as well as the foundational concepts of the Superfund, which was created to clean up toxic waste dumps across the U.S. See Government of Bolivia Ministry of International Relations, “Press Release: Bolivia responds to U.S. on climate debt,” Copenhagen, December 11, 2009.
This is, after all, a movement in its early stages. If the long tradition of protests for democracy and social justice in Mexico are any guide, and if Cancun in 2003 and the 2006 Mexico City march of 10,000 against the World Water Forum (just as illegitimate a body as those deciding the climate future) are precedents for internationalism, then it will be worthwhile to again descend on another climate summit, in Cancun in November 2010 and again at a follow-up in South Africa a year later, to battle so that climate justice issues will be raised forcefully—including big emissions cuts, big climate debt repayment, and the decommissioning of carbon markets. And when the governing elites refuse the demands of science, environment, and, most of all, radical Southern social movements, which will be there in much greater numbers than in Copenhagen, then the momentum will have decisively shifted away from the centrist NGOs and mainstream environmentalists who do, certainly, aim to band-aid rather than transform the system.

Simons and Tonak would have preferred climate justice activists to confront “the hyper-green capitalism of Hopenhagen, the massive effort of companies such as Siemens, Coca-Cola, Toyota, and Vattenfall to greenwash their image and the other representations of this market ideology within the city center.” But the world’s climate justice movements are indeed targeting both the corporates directly (especially at the oil/coalface in the Niger Delta, Ecuador, Australia, Europe, Alberta, West Virginia and San Francisco) and the national and multilateral executive committees of the bourgeoisie who go to COPS. There are, of course, major environmental organizations—WorldWide Fund for Nature, Environmental Defense Fund, National Resource Defense Council, and even the Sierra Club and Greenpeace—which have strong corporate connections. These were most pernicious in the case of the TckTckTck marketing campaign, which asked Copenhagen leaders to “seal the deal.” The climate justice movement, in contrast, aimed to “seattle the deal,” and generated the political principles, analysis, strategies, tactics, and alliances to do so.

Hence it is indeed logical for climate justice activists to declare victory at Copenhagen and make plans for future-scale politics that move progressively closer to the home base, whether in the North or South:

- At global scale, continue to make demands—albeit unwinnable in the foreseeable future given the adverse balance of forces in the UN and G8/G20—for
  - 1) huge emissions cuts (45% of industrial economy greenhouse gases by 2020),
  - 2) Climate Debt payments (scaling up to $400 billion/year by 2020), and
  - 3) carbon market decommissioning.
At national scale, continue to make demands—also unwinnable in most settings, where due to adverse power balances, unacceptable legislation and/or gridlock are most likely—for

- industrial economies to make the same cuts, Climate Debt payments and carbon market decommissioning, plus massive state investments in transformed, decentralized energy systems, transport and infrastructure, and
- semi-industrialised economies (e.g. especially BASIC) to make cuts based upon reversing their growing fossil fuel addictions as well as making public investments in appropriate energy, transport and infrastructure, and in some cases (e.g. South Africa) pay a climate debt to poorer neighbours, while rejecting CDMs and offsets.

At national scale where national environmental regulatory agencies exist, challenge the institutions to restrict greenhouse gas emissions as dangerous pollutants (for example, as in the US after lawsuits and direct action protests against the EPA).

At regional/provincial/state/municipal scales, engage public utility commissions and planning boards to block climate-destructive practices and projects.

At local scales, find point sources of major greenhouse gas emissions, power consumption or excessive transport, and raise consciousness and the cost of business-as-usual through direct action and other pressure techniques.

Organizing and consciousness-raising are critical, perpetual steps, just as hotly contested as the right to protest in Copenhagen. To illustrate, an intense struggle over interpreting carbon trading in the U.S. played out partly through a nine-minute popular educational film, The Story of Cap and Trade, launched a week before the summit. In its first two weeks on YouTube and Vimeo, the film recorded 400,000 hits, in the process attracting strong opposition from mainstream environmentalists wedded to the promotion of cap and trade.

There were three repellent reactions: climate denialists who endorsed the film’s critique of cap and trade (which they incorrectly view as a big government tax); the mainstream environmental movement’s policy specialists who had worked for a dozen years to build support for cap and trade; and the carbon traders themselves (see cites and a rebuttal at Patrick Bond, “Green Market Punks,” Counterpunch, December 17, 2009, online at: http://www.counterpunch.org/bond12172009.html). Another reaction was imitation: the Environmental Defense Fund—a large, corporate-financed Washington NGO—issued a film, Facts about Cap and Trade: http://ga3.org/campaign/cew_facts/forward (which originally carried the same title as Leonard’s). But aside from borrowing the style, copying some of the graphics and citing some of the same studies, Nat Keohane’s film did not acknowledge the widely-known problems of the cap and trade legislation (offsets, giveaways not auctions, nuclear/coal/gas subsidies, derivatives and speculation, and the terribly inadequate emissions cuts, not to mention the evisceration of EPA regulatory

20 http://www.storyofcapandtrade.org made by Annie Leonard’s organization The Story of Stuff and Free Range studies with partners Climate Justice Now! and the Durban Group for Climate Justice. There were three repellent reactions: climate denialists who endorsed the film’s critique of cap and trade (which they incorrectly view as a big government tax); the mainstream environmental movement’s policy specialists who had worked for a dozen years to build support for cap and trade; and the carbon traders themselves (see cites and a rebuttal at Patrick Bond, “Green Market Punks,” Counterpunch, December 17, 2009, online at: http://www.counterpunch.org/bond12172009.html ). Another reaction was imitation: the Environmental Defense Fund—a large, corporate-financed Washington NGO—issued a film, Facts about Cap and Trade: http://ga3.org/campaign/cew_facts/forward (which originally carried the same title as Leonard’s). But aside from borrowing the style, copying some of the graphics and citing some of the same studies, Nat Keohane’s film did not acknowledge the widely-known problems of the cap and trade legislation (offsets, giveaways not auctions, nuclear/coal/gas subsidies, derivatives and speculation, and the terribly inadequate emissions cuts, not to mention the evisceration of EPA regulatory
Finally, to confirm that activism would be the main antidote to polluters and carbon traders, the most effective response to the post-Copenhagen hangover came from radicals stretching from Australia to Africa to the Andes to the Amazon to Appalachia to Alberta.

- On December 20, on a bridge leading to the world’s largest coal port, in Newcastle, Australia’s Rising Tide activists blocked a train for seven-and-a-half hours, with 23 arrests.

- In South Africa, groundWork, Earthlife, and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance demanded that the state electricity utility, Eskom, “keep the coal in the hole” by protesting at Durban and Johannesburg tariff hearings in January.

- Up the Atlantic Coast, Niger Delta oil was kept in the soil by the Port Harcourt-based NGO, Environmental Rights Action, which explicitly links local destruction to global climate chaos, and through sabotage of oil extraction by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, which ended a two-month ceasefire by attacking a Shell and Chevron pipeline six hours after the Copenhagen Accord was signed.

- In the Andes, Bolivian President Evo Morales announced he will host a major strategy conference of the world’s eco-social climate justice movements from April 20-22.

- In the Amazon, Quito-based Accion Ecologica’s work with indigenous people to protect the Yasuni National Park required renewed solidarity in January when Ecuador’s President Rafael Correa threatened to authorize drilling in June (Correa also tried to put Yasuni into the carbon markets). Environmental and indigenous people have instead demanded that more countries join Germany, which has pledged $50 million per year, in paying their climate debt so that Ecuador’s leaders can justify leaving the oil in the soil;

- In Appalachia, the Climate Ground Zero activists of West Virginia have, according to a December 19 report by Vicki Smith, “chained themselves to giant dump trucks, scaled 80-foot trees to stop blasting and paddled boots online into a 9 million-gallon sludge pond. They’ve blocked roads, hung banners and staged sit-ins. Virginia-based Massey Energy claims a single three-and-a-half hour occupation cost the company $300,000.”;

---

authority). It was released at just the point in late January when political pragmatism suggested that Capitol Hill was a no-go zone for climate legislation, the day after the Massachusetts Senate upset. This effort seemed to prove the Story of Cap and Trade’s main point, i.e., that the Washington-insider political strategy served mainly as a distraction to those genuinely interested in tackling climate change.
• In Canada on December 20, anti-tarsands environmentalist Ingmar Lee climbed a flagpole at the British Columbia parliament to protest carbon crimes by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, provincial Premier Gordon Campbell, and their ally Tzeporah Berman from the corrupted NGO ForestEthics, following an action in London at the Canadian High Commission, where Camp for Climate Action activists offered solidarity to Alberta’s indigenous Canadian tarsands victims by cutting down the maple-leaf flag, drowning it in crude oil, and then locking down on an upstairs balcony.

Opportunities abounded for climate justice activism following Copenhagen, as leading U.S. forces in San Francisco carried out various protests—at Senator Boxer’s office, Chevron headquarters, City Hall, and the Danish consulate—as well as teach-ins in December-January. In New York on January 13, a carbon trade conference was subject to a protest by scores of Climate Camp activists.

So if only two useful things were accomplished in Copenhagen, they were the unveiling of Pretoria, Delhi, Beijing, and Brasilia as willing criminal accomplices to the Washington/Brussels/Tokyo/Melbourne/Ottawa axis, and the rise of Climate Justice Action, Climate Justice Now!, 350.org, and parallel movements whose hundreds of thousands of protesters swarmed streets of the world’s cities. The next question is whether, before the next fiasco in Cancun in November-December 2010, the latter can cancel the former. We all depend upon an affirmative answer.
Climate justice opportunities after US carbon market and legislative crashes
with Desmond D'Sa, ZNet, 31 March 2010

Fierce debating about United States climate justice (CJ) strategies and tactics on ZNet over the past couple of months leave us ready to continue exploring comradely but sharp differences.

In ZNet Commentaries on these pages, Robin Hahnel and Ted Glick firmly dispute, respectively, two views we hold from a long way away in Durban, South Africa:

- first, to fight global warming, carbon markets are a destructive distraction, and should be decommissioned; and

- second, national legislative campaigning is futile given the prevailing balance of forces (and weak bills) on offer in the US.

Instead, CJ activists everywhere are better off directly confronting the largest emitters, their financiers and their regulators.

We'll briefly restate these positions, and then provide an alternative CJ opportunity that both us have come to the US to campaign on behalf of during the next two weeks: halting World Bank coal financing.

First, the Kyoto Protocol’s carbon market strategy – called ‘cap and trade’ in the US - is now dead in the water. Hahnel’s thousands of words extolling potential carbon market efficiencies in four ZNet articles since late December are obviously well meaning, yet a waste of time.

Why? ‘The concept is in wide disrepute’, according to the New York Times (ordinarily a booster) last week: ‘Obama dropped all mention of cap and trade from his current budget. And the sponsors of a Senate climate bill likely to be introduced in April, now that Congress is moving past health care, dare not speak its name.’

Don’t blame us. In spite of trying hard to spike this market (e.g. http://www.durbanclimatejustice.org and http://www.storyofcapandtrade.org), we green-left critics of carbon trading cannot claim to have succeeded, if the Times is correct: ‘Why did cap and trade die? The short answer is that it was done in by the weak economy, the Wall Street meltdown, determined industry opposition and its own complexity.’

According to Senator Maria Cantwell (a Democrat from Washington State), cap and trade was ‘discredited by the Wall Street crisis, the Enron scandal and the rocky start to a carbon credits trading system in Europe that has been subject to dizzying price fluctuations and widespread fraud.’
Hahnel assumed such problems could be solved as the market matured. But just one example of brand new fraud was the Hungarian government’s resale of carbon credits, which when exposed recently, drove the price of a tonne from €12 down to €1 and crashed two emissions exchanges. According to a BusinessGreen.com reporter on March 18, ‘Europe’s carbon market descended into chaos yesterday as fears over “recycled” carbon credits sparked a collapse in the price of Certified Emission Reductions.’

A week earlier, the Global Forest Coalition accused the European Union of promoting ‘highly volatile carbon markets that jeopardize forest-dependent peoples’ livelihoods’.

Four days before that, on March 3, Reuters reported: ‘Investors are becoming less convinced that a global carbon market, estimated to be worth about $2 trillion by the end of the decade, can be established as uncertainty over global climate policy persists.’

The report went on, ‘Participants at a carbon conference in Amsterdam were equally downbeat, as carbon prices in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme are weak and range-bound and expectations are low for a climate pact being agreed this year at the talks in the Mexican city of Cancun.’

This is pleasing news, given how bad such a deal would be, and given that the emissions market serves as a profound distraction from serious climate politics, sucking Big Green groups in Washington into corporate quicksand.

Second, then, should organizing be directed at lobbying for a non-market climate law on Capitol Hill? Not yet, not even the legislation that Glick fervently supports, proposed by Cantwell and Maine Republican Senator Sue Collins: the ‘Carbon Limits and Energy for America’s Renewal Act’ (CLEAR).

CLEAR puts a cap at the original source of greenhouse gas emissions, auctions the right to pollute, and gives back a ‘consumer rebate’ from carbon revenues. It’s much preferable to the Waxman-Markey carbon trading bill that passed the House of Representatives last June, to be sure.

However, Maggie Zhou of Secure Green Future in Massachusetts notes that CLEAR’s mandated emissions reductions will be just 8% below 1990 levels by 2020, even though 45% cuts are needed to avoid breaching 2 degrees Centigrade. But Zhou reminds us, ‘It is becoming increasingly clear that even 1oC is unacceptable warming that could trigger many dangerous and potentially irreversible feedback processes.’

CLEAR’s low targets are an unacceptable insult to the rest of the world, and so too is CLEAR’s failure to mention repaying victims of climate change the ‘climate debt’ owed them by the US. Zhou also criticizes ‘offset-like projects’ in CLEAR, its
promotion of unproven or dangerous techie fixes (carbon capture and storage, and oil or gas reinjection), and a too-narrow carbon pricing band range (http://securegreenfuture.org/blogs/clear).

(We would add that a genuine climate bill should also strengthen command-and-control regulatory mechanisms and mandates for the Environmental Protection Agency, utility boards and planning commissions. A serious climate/energy bill, yet to be authored, would mandate a profound economic transformation, so as to generate new production, consumption, transport, energy and disposal systems.)

Worse, if CLEAR passes the Senate in coming months, House conference negotiators will no doubt insist on fusing in many of the objectionable features of Waxman-Markey (private offsets, carbon trading, oil/nuke/agro subsidies, EPA neutering, etc).

Glick rebuts that the CJ movement cannot win everything we want at once: ‘Immanuel Wallerstein has written about the need for “movements to internalize the sense that the social transformation they are seeking will not occur in a single apocalyptic moment, but as a continuous process, one continually hard-fought.”’

True, but the critical problem is whether CLEAR drives us towards climate transformation, or puts us in neutral or reverse. Let’s distinguish between serious, structural, ‘non-reformist reforms’ on the one hand, and on the other hand, ‘reformist reforms’ that offer far too little change (just 8% below 1990); give the system a bit of legitimacy (Obama would go to Cancun beaming); amplify the system’s internal logic (auctioning the right to pollute); suffer from system-wide decay (e.g. volatile carbon prices); and weaken our team’s momentum.

We asked Wallerstein, who agrees, ‘The problem is always to decide about a particular project - in which category it falls.’ We’ve made the case that CLEAR is a reformist reform, to be avoided, and so it’s over to Glick.

Until legislation emerges and power relations change so we’re not dumped back within the toxic swamp of US congressional parameters, can’t leading CJ activists like Glick once again step up movement-building that cuts more quickly to the chase?

A good example was the March 18 Washington protest against EPA slobs who are not doing their jobs in West Virginia. For hours, Kate Finneran and Adrian Wilson blocked the EPA headquarters entrance atop stilts and two 20 feet mock blue mountains, demanding a halt to mountaintop removal by coal companies.

Joshua Kahn Russell of Rainforest Action Network explained, ‘Despite the Obama administration’s big announcement last year that it was going to take “unprecedented steps” to reduce the environmental damage from mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia, the EPA has been slow moving.’ Activists
demand that EPA ‘block every single mining permit application that seeks to remove America’s oldest mountaintops and dump the waste into waterways,’ he said. And next, go after power companies.

Two more examples of CJ opportunities will be Fossil Fool’s Day, when on April 1, Rising Tide North America will ‘pull some pranks that pack a punch’ (http://www.fossilfoolsdayofaction.org/2010/15-actions-to-topple-the-fossil-fuel-empire/); and the Rainforest Action Network’s Tax Day (April 15) protests against coal financier Chase Bank.

Another campaign closer to our home entails fighting the World Bank’s coal portfolio (http://www.groundwork.org.za/). On April 8 the Bank Board is expected to approve a $3.75 billion loan to the South African electricity utility Eskom, to build the world’s fourth largest coal-fired power plant, Medupi. The US Treasury could veto, and thus ‘keep the coal in the hole’, but more pressure is needed.

If activists lose, paying for Medupi will require a 127% real price increase from 2007-12 for ordinary South Africans (to nearly $0.15/kiloWatt hour). Meanwhile the world’s biggest metals and mining houses - Anglo American Corporation, BHP Billiton, Arceleor Mittal and other multinationals - still get the world’s cheapest electricity from Eskom (less than $0.02/kWh).

These companies benefit from apartheid-era ‘Special Pricing Agreements’ that Eskom keeps secret, yet there are very few jobs and economic linkages because locally-sold steel and aluminum cost far more than the same products which are send abroad. Also sent abroad are their vast profits, contributing to the country’s severe payments deficit.

More than 200 organisations across the world have endorsed a critique of the loan (http://www.earthlife.org.za/?p=858). South Durban activists launched the campaign on February 16 with a spirited protest at Eskom’s main local branch.

South Durban has been an epicenter of protest against fossil fuels, given that our neighbours include the largest and least responsible petro-chemical firms south of the Niger Delta. With electricity prices soaring, many more residents in South Durban are being disconnected. They often reconnect illegally, and as Eskom and the municipality clamp down, the result is more social strife, in a country with what is probably the world’s highest rate of community protest (http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?2,27,3,1858).

In Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, anger at Eskom and the World Bank comes from eco-social threats in the vicinity of Medupi and the dozens of new coal mines that will feed it. Local ecologies are adversely affected, especially the notoriously degraded water table, as well as the air, land, vegetables and animals due to mercury emissions from coal.
If these reasons are not enough, Eskom’s desire to privatize 30% of generating capacity is explicitly advanced in the loan, leading to opposition from trade unions – especially the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa - and consumers.

Corruption is rife, too. Contrary to supposed anti-corruption policies, the Bank loan will directly fund African National Congress (ANC) ruling party coffers, because the power plant will be built with Hitachi boilers that in turn kick back an estimated $700 million thanks to a convenient – and utterly dubious (everyone admits) – ANC investment in Hitachi. When the deal was done, Eskom chair Valli Moosa was also a member of the ANC’s finance committee. A government investigation released last Thursday found his conduct in this blatant conflict of interest to be ‘improper’.

Finally, there’s historic racial injustice. The World Bank’s financing of apartheid began just three years after the 1948 election of the Afrikaners’ Nationalist Party, and included $100 million for Eskom. During that period, the World Bank’s money financed electricity to exactly zero black households and instead empowered white businesses and residences.

If the Bank makes the loan on April 8, South Africans will call for the revival of the World Bank Bonds Boycott, to encourage divestment by institutional investors similar to anti-apartheid tactics, and will also lobby for rejection of the Bank’s forthcoming recapitalization.

Scores of organizations across Africa are already on board this campaign, and the next step beyond the World Bank will be to demand that South Africa confront its own climate debt to the continent.

These opportunities for activism against the world’s largest producers, financiers, regulators and consumers of fossil fuels reflect the need for solidaristic global-local linkages. Seeking these out is one benefit behind building internationalist CJ politics as quickly as possible.
What will Zoellick break next?
Firms and financial institutions, countries and the climate?

Counterpunch, 19 March 2010

There are two theories about Robert Zoellick, and they’ll be tested next month by a World Bank vote on a massive South African coal-fired generator loan.

The 57-year old Bank president is a nerdy man who served as number two at the Bush State Department and then in 2007 replaced the disgraced, nepotistic Paul Wolfowitz. One theory is that Zoellick is brilliant and effective. The other – which I’ll defend - is that nearly everything he touches, he breaks.

In one corner, writing in Counterpunch in 2005, is US foreign policy analyst Tom Barry: “At first glance, Zoellick could be mistaken for an ideologue, as an evangelist for free trade and a member of the neoconservative vanguard. But when his political trajectory is more closely observed, Zoellick is better understood as a can-do member of the Republican foreign policy elite - a diplomat who always keeps his eye on the prize, namely the interests of Corporate America and U.S. global hegemony.”

Ideologically, the man stood hand in hand with Cheney, Rumsfeld, Perle, Wolfowitz, Bolton, Negroponte and the other maniacs, admits Barry: “Zoellick was perhaps the first Bush associate to introduce the concept of evil into the construct of Bush’s radical overhaul of US grand strategy. A year before Bush was inaugurated, Zoellick wrote: ‘A modern Republican foreign policy recognizes that there is still evil in the world - people who hate America and the ideas for which it stands.’”

This, the argument continues, is merely banal Washington rhetoric. It should not distract us from Zoellick’s deeper capacity to reproduce and restructure imperial power. As Central American activist Toni Solo put it in Counterpunch in 2003, “Zoellick is neither blind nor crazy. He simply has no interest in the massive human cost, whether in the United States or abroad, of his lucrative global evangelical mission on behalf of corporate monopoly capitalism.”

The other theory is more skeptical of Zoellick’s efficacy, concluding that he’s not particularly good at what he does. Indeed, Zoellick is mainly of interest because he represents a global trend of Empire in crisis since the Millennium, featuring at least three self-immolating traits which he brings to next month’s climate showdown at the Bank.

First is the ideological fusion of neoconservatism and neoliberalism that Zoellick shares with his predecessor Wolfowitz. Both strains are bankrupt, by any reasonable accounting. Representing the former, Zoellick was at the outset a proud member of the Project for a New American Century, and as early as January 1998 he went on record that Iraq should be illegally overthrown.
As for the latter ideology, 'Washington Consensus’ dogma, Zoellick and IMF managing director Dominique Strauss-Kahn had to spend 2009 beating a hasty retreat from the austerity-oriented economics their institutions intrinsically favor, so as to maintain global effective demand with crony-Keynesianism during capitalist crisis.

Second is Zoellick’s inability to cut global-scale deals required to manage the US Empire’s smooth dismantling. This we already witnessed in the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO’s) demise, on his 2001-05 watch as the US Trade Representative. Zoellick’s bumbling was on display at the Cancun ministerial summit in 2003, in disputes with the European Union over the US genetic engineering fetish, and in his insistence upon bilateral and regional alternatives to multilateralism, which has generated durable anti-Washington economic sentiment across Latin America.

Next, as one of the most senior Bush Administration officials in 2005-06, Zoellick achieved practically nothing, aside from further wreckage of the US image abroad. And as Bank president, appointed after Wolfowitz’s fall by Bush (in what is likely the last unilateral imposition of a US petro-militarist in this role), Zoellick’s efforts during the 2008-09 G20 deliberations on the world economy and at the December 2009 UN Copenhagen climate summit were equally unsuccessful.

Actually, dating to the 1996 Montreal Protocol banning chlorofluorocarbons, there have been approximately zero global-scale deals that affirmatively solve major world problems. Thanks to Zoellick and his brothers, US Empire-in-decline is just not conceding the resources and power required to fix trade, finance, climate, migration, military, public health, multilateral governance, and similar global-scale crises.

An example is the international carbon market, founded by then US vice-president Al Gore in 1997 at Kyoto through tricking the world into thinking Washington would sign the Protocol if US firms were given permission to keep polluting at planet-threatening rates, through offsetting their emissions with trades and ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ (CDM) investments.

Zoellick’s World Bank strongly promotes carbon markets, even though they contain so much corruption, speculation and stupidity that the carbon price crashed from a high of €33/tonne in mid-2008 to €13 after Copenhagen, and on two European markets all the way down to €1.50 after yet more fraud scandals last week.

Third, at a more profound level, is Zoellick’s tendency to deal with economic and ecological crises by shifting and stalling them, while stealing from those least able to defend.

(As a theoretical aside for political-economy fundis, what I call the shifting-stalling-stealing strategy is at the heart of the problem, and can be summed up in David
Harvey’s phrase: ‘accumulation by dispossession’. This stage arrives when capital exhausts the options it usually has to address crises - such as 1973-75, 1980-82, 1989-92, 1997-2001 and 2007-09, with more to come - through traditional means: work speed-up [absolute surplus value], replacing workers with machines [relative surplus value], shifting the problems around geographically [the ‘spatial fix’], and building up vast debt and blowing speculative bubbles so as to stall crises until later [the ‘temporal fix’]. At this stage, capital needs to also loot the non-capitalist spheres of society and nature through extra-economic, imperialist techniques, the way Rosa Luxemburg described stealing so well a century ago in *The Accumulation of Capital* and Naomi Klein has updated in *Shock Doctrine*.

To shift-stall-steal in a three-piece suit, Zoellick’s neocon-neolib worldview gives excellent cover, yet only up to a point, which we now appear to be reaching. That point comes sooner than later in part because the institutions needed to keep the game in play are cracking up.

To illustrate, Fannie Mae, Enron, Alliance Capital and Goldman Sachs were all crucial US imperial banksters, instrumental in generating the fictitious capital in real estate, energy and other sectors which proved so important to the Clinton-Bush era’s internal displacement and eventual amplification of crises. Goldman continues in this role today.

The first suffered Zoellick as its mid-1990s executive vice president, following his several-years stint as a senior aide in James Baker’s Treasury (at one point Deputy Assistant Secretary for Financial Institutions Policy), just prior to the 1988-90 Savings&Loan crisis, itself a function of the financial-deregulatory era that gave us mortgage-backed securities. By the middle of the last decade, Fannie Mae was so far in the red due to subprime lending through those securities, that a massive state bailout was needed.

(And speaking of Baker, Zoellick served as his main assistant in the notorious December 2000 presidential vote recount in Florida, so destructive of those last vestiges of US democracy, thanks to the open racism and right-wing bullying of Zoellick’s thugs.)

The second firm, which cracked in 2002, boasted Zoellick as a senior political and economic advisor in 1999. Records are not available as to how implicated Zoellick was in Enron’s electricity gambles, so painful to Californians and investors. However, as Board member of the third firm, Alliance, Zoellick was party to late 1990s oversight of Alliance Capital’s investments in Enron which led to multiple fraud lawsuits and vast losses for Alliance’s clients, including the state of Florida.

The fourth bank, Goldman Sachs, which Zoellick served as a leading international official in 2006-07, has done well only through illegal, immoral deals and crony-capitalist bailouts linking Bush and Obama econocrats. In the process, Goldman
Sachs has come to enjoy an unprecedented amount of popular brand awareness in the US and Europe, albeit not particularly favorable.

What gives any observer hope from Zoellick’s c.v. is its pure, consistent, world-class geopolitical, economic, environmental and diplomatic self-destructiveness. He is so bad, he has zero credibility among sensible people.

Moreover, if the World Bank joins FannieMae, Enron, Alliance Capital, Goldman’s reputation, the WTO, Bushite foreign/military policy (not to mention a million Iraqis and thousands of US soldiers), and other notches on Zoellick’s belt, future generations may be spared the implications simply because he will utterly foul his own nest.

This process will become glaringly evident as early as April 8, when Zoellick attempts to sell his Board’s Executive Directors an incompetent, corrupt, underdevelopmental, eco-disastrous loan to a corrupt regime, the African National Congress (ANC). It will add 5% to the foreign debt, which has soared since 2006 due to outflow of capital and amongst the world’s highest current account deficits.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the ex-wife of our first post-apartheid president, Nelson Mandela, last week revealed to an Italian journalist (whether on or off record is in dispute) how the ANC leadership sold out to white business elites.

The current South African president, Jacob Zuma, pressuring the country’s national prosecutor to drop scores of corruption charges against him just days before last year’s election. (That must have really impressed Zoellick, whose institution issued a new Africa Development Indicators report last week, ironically entitled ‘Silent and lethal: How quiet corruption undermines Africa’s development efforts.’ The new coal loan should be Case Study #1, but instead the Bank mainly blames teachers and doctors for slacking off.)

Such context clarifies why the ANC continued the apartheid-era gift of the world’s cheapest electricity to the world’s biggest mining/metals companies, such as Anglo American Corporation (formerly based in Johannesburg, now London) and BHP Billiton (also ex-SA, now Melbourne). This multibillion dollar gift is anticipated to continue in coming years when Zoellick’s proposed $3.75 billion World Bank loan helps the Pretoria government build the world’s fourth largest coal-fired power plant, leaving the apartheid deals intact.

Corruption is rife, with a reported $700 million scheduled to flow into ANC coffers from Hitachi, for its successful tender on a multi-billion dollar contract to build boilers for the $18 billion Medupi plant (boilermaking is not a typical ANC staffer’s speciality but everyone can learn new trades).

The borrower, a parastatal corporation called Eskom, began raising prices to retail consumers by more than triple the inflation rate in 2008. From 2007 to 2012, the
price of a month’s normal electricity use in an ‘average township household’ is
anticipated to rise 127% in real terms, according to Eskom. These price increases
will have an extreme adverse impact, leading to massive disconnections (and illegal
reconnections, hence electrocutions) of poor households.

Ironically, World Bank staff insist that the proposed Eskom loan will have a
‘developmental’ impact. An international coalition of more than 200 groups led by
65 red-green organizations in South Africa, vigorously object, and protests are
mounting. Many recall the Bank’s last loans to Eskom, from 1951-67, when zero
black South Africans received electricity, which was reserved for white business and
households.

The World Bank is in an untenable position. Zoellick is soon to issue a new Bank
energy policy and he is also campaigning to take on additional responsibilities for
channeling finance related to climate change. The proposed Eskom loan should
disqualify the World Bank from any further role in climate-related activities.

In advance of the Bank’s $180 billion recapitalization bid at the April 24-25 Spring
Meetings, critics are ready to take even more vigorous action against the bank itself.
This could include revival of the ‘World Bank Boycott’ which cost the institution
support from many major bondholders over the past decade (including the world’s
largest pension fund, the cities of San Francisco and Cambridge, the Calvert Group
and many university, labor and church endowment funds).

Back to our opening question: is Zoellick clever or a pompous self-saboteur? From
this angle he appears anxious, as ever, to defend the shortest-term of Empire’s
interests, and once again, in the process break a great deal more.
Durban’s waste of energy
The Mercury, 3 February 2010

What we do with waste tells us a lot about how our society and economy have been organized – and it’s not pretty.

Mercury and E.coli in our fish and seawater. Industrial and agrobusiness effluents leaking everywhere. Periodic fires and explosions fires in South Durban’s unregulated petrochemical complex. Unrecycled solid waste in our rubbish bins (with insufficient orange bags). Carbon dioxide and other pollutants spewing into the air. All are poisoning nature, our own bodies, and the future of our species.

Governments appear oblivious, as witnessed when Pretoria joined the hijacking of December’s UN climate summit by Washington, New Dehlhi, Brasilia and Beijing. No matter SA’s world-leading CO2 emissions, Pretoria is pushing Eskom to build at least two more vast coal-fired power plants, paid for with a $3.5 billion World Bank loan in turn repaid with a 200% increase in electricity prices for households and vulnerable small businesses. Meanwhile, the world’s largest mining and metals houses continue getting the world’s cheapest electricity thanks to apartheid-era multi-decade deals.

In Durban, the same mentality was on display when Energy Minister Dipuo Peters visited the Bisasar Road landfill last Thursday. This is Africa’s biggest dump, processing 5000 tonnes of solid waste a day. It’s the new centerpiece of a ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ (CDM) project which generates electricity by burning a dangerous greenhouse gas, methane (from rotting rubbish), which would otherwise escape into the air, causing climate change at a rate 20 times higher than CO2.

At first glance the Bisasar Road CDM looks good, but consider two glaring reasons this project should have been vetoed by City Manager Mike Sutcliffe and environmental officer Debra Roberts:

- the fragile, declining global emissions market that supplies the CDM’s main income; and
- serious environmental hazards from flaring the methane.

First, backtrack a bit, as did Peters at the stinking dumpsite: “As I understand it, the development of this project began as far back as 2002 when the Department of Cleansing and Solid Waste here in eThekwini municipality was approached by the World Bank encouraging the municipality to consider participating in CDM initiatives.”

The Bank promised that a new emissions market would emerge in which Northern corporations bought CDM offset permits so as to continue emitting greenhouse
gases of their own. To make the landfill methane-electricity conversions highly profitable, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol would need to accomplish four things:

- impose a cap and reduce emissions so as to generate scarcity (the Protocol didn’t),
- thus continually raise the price of carbon (but it fell 60% from peak in mid-2008 to today’s 13 euros/tonne),
- thus rapidly escalate emission market trading volume (now stagnant at $130 billion/year since 2008), via
- the establishment of markets across the rich world (but though Europe has an Emissions Trading Scheme, the US refused to play ball, Canada also dropped out, and Australia tried last November but gave up) along the way to a post-Kyoto Accord that would build a global market (but Copenhagen terminated this fantasy).

Naively believing the hype, Durban bureaucrats took the bait, and the loan shark moved in for the kill. The World Bank marketed Durban methane far and wide.

But then they ran into Sajida Khan, who lived next to the site – at the corner of Clair and Kennedy Roads – until she died in 2007 of cancer, a disease she blamed white municipal officials for. The dump had been plopped onto the Clare Estate community in 1980, in one of the world’s extreme cases of environmental racism. Many neighbours also succumbed to cancer.

Because of Khan’s activism, profiled on the front page of the Washington Post the day the Kyoto Protocol became operational in February 2005, the Bank retreated from Bisasar, but did offer CDM status to two other small Durban landfills in August that year.

During the 1990s, Khan organised thousands of her neighbours to call for the closure of the Bisasar Road site – like dumps at Umhlanga and Umlazi – but apartheid bureaucrats were as rude to her then as was Sutcliffe during the 2000s.

Sutcliffe ordered the dump to stay open, contradicting ANC campaign promises in 1994, because Bisasar is extremely well-located and the valley – once a nature reserve – could take many years’ more worth of rubbish before filling up, hence more methane-electricity CDM monies.

But for Khan, that meant the Clare Estate community would be forever stuck with waste, stink and toxins. Perfume rods along the fence sicken the air instead of cleaning it. Ever-widening gaps in the thin cement wall separating the dump from Kennedy Road (and thousands of shackdwellers) illustrate how little maintenance support the city provides.
The methane-electricity conversion requires burning and flaring, which mean the putrid fumes from rotting waste have a much higher level of lethal chemicals and metals. Ideally, Khan argued, the dump should be shut, a municipal ‘zero-waste’ strategy adopted, and methane piped out of Bisasar to a site (for industrial usage) not so densely packed with housing and schools in the immediate vicinity. But that would have cost the city a bit more.

Sutcliffe might argue that the Bisasar CDM gamble will yet pay off, and if so, I’d like to spend an evening playing poker with him given this unbroken losing streak: bus privatization, a supposed Warwick Junction shopping mall by June 2010, unending subsidies needed at the Point and ICC, last week’s Blue Flag beach bust-up in Council (a unanimous KO), the delusional Dube Trade Port, and an economic development strategy reliant upon sports tourism in an age of climate change, overly-expensive stadium and airport white elephants, and fast-rising air travel taxes.

It’s safe to bet against Sutcliffe’s expectation of rising emissions market income to pay for Bisasar Road. Carbon trading is now in terminal decay, in part because Obama will fail to get climate change legislation out of his corporate-funded Congress, everyone acknowledges.

It’s the same story in Europe, The Guardian reported last week: “Banks are pulling out of the carbon-offsetting market after Copenhagen failed to reach agreement on emissions targets.” As Anthony Hobley of the law firm Norton Rose put it, “We are seeing a freeze in banks’ recruitment plans for the carbon market. It’s not clear at what point this will turn into a cull or a rout.”

Meanwhile, the awful consequences of Durban waste continue. In Chatsworth, the Bul Bul Landfill emits toxic fumes, and last October, a particularly bad eruption left more than 100 nearby schoolchildren hospitalised. According to Lushendrie Naidu of the Dumpsite Action Committee, “We are protesting, demanding the dump be closed. For the past five years, chemical waste has been stored at Bul-Bul, yet there is no disaster management plan.”

Instead of a sensible disposal strategy, Durban’s pyromaniac bureaucrats are turning to waste incineration, using the energy/climate crisis as an excuse, and borrowing outmoded technology from Oslo. Yet as one official Norwegian document concedes, “Incineration and landfill are seen as the least desirable forms of waste management and represent the last resort within Oslo’s strategy.”

Because the super-carcinogenic chemical dioxin is produced in the process, the Norwegian group Aksjon Steng Gifffabrikken demands that the two Oslo incinerators be closed.

Yet Mayor Obed Mlaba cheerily announced in last September’s city’s newsletter, “Residents of Oslo in particular, are generating electricity directly from solid waste. The way it’s done is that waste is simply fed into some transformer machine, where
it is literally burned with the end product being electricity. Well, the good news for you and I is that we could soon have the same method right here on our doorstep. Once available, it would perfectly complement the methane-based power process,“ putting Durban “well on track to playing its part in curtailing global warming through the reduction of greenhouse gas emission into the atmosphere.”

The reality is much more dirty, dangerous and destructive, and if Mlaba, Sutcliffe, Peters and the World Bank are doing this deed purely for the dollars, they’ll be as deeply disappointed as residents whose cancer they are causing by burning toxins and keeping landfills open in Durban’s vulnerable neighbourhoods, not to mention wagering our lives on a climate strategy – emissions trading - that won’t work, either for them or our descendants.
**SA’s self-interested carbon pollution gels with ‘disappointing’ global climate governance**

*Sunday Independent, 24 January 2010*

Today’s meeting of the Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC) environment ministers in New Delhi comes at a time the Copenhagen climate deal is dead in the water. No one disputes that an entirely new strategy is needed if the same fate is to be avoided at the next negotiating venues: Mexico later this year and South Africa next.

But is this the optimal team to defeat the climate threat? When SA’s environment minister Buyelwa Sonjica returned from Copenhagen, she expressed ‘disappointment’ in the Copenhagen Accord that US President Barack Obama persuaded the BASIC leaders – including President Jacob Zuma – to sign at the last minute on December 18.

The sleazy deal followed extremely harsh police repression against nonviolent protest outside the Bella Centre, and inside, a ‘Green Room’ process in which the Danish hosts – conservative ruling party leaders - cherry-picked 26 countries to represent the world. When even that small group deadlocked, allegedly due to Chinese intransigence and the overall weak parameters set by the US, the five leaders – Obama, Zuma, Wen Jiabao, Lula da Silva and Manmohan Singh - attempted a face-saving last gasp at planetary hygiene.

Not only did it fail on its own terms, for the first key deadline is about to slip past, but Obama’s gambit meant that the World Trade Organisation’s notorious divide-and-conquer politics – controversially endorsed by SA’s then Trade Minister Alec Erwin at the 1999 Seattle, 2001 Doha and 2003 Cancun summits but vetoed by the African delegation at the first and third – would become the norm for UN climate negotiations, to the obvious detriment of climate victims, especially in Africa.

Nine of ten African peasants will not be able to produce if the 2 degrees mark is breached this century, according to UN experts. Hence the repeated accusation by African delegates that Zuma and Obama ‘sold out’ their rural Zulu and Luo relatives on behalf of their economies’ fossil fuel industries.

Process aside, the Accord’s content was nearly universally condemned, for four reasons:

- inadequate emissions cuts imply a catastrophic 3.5 degree centigrade increase by the end of the century, with options for vague ‘pledge and review’ commitments and, even worse, offsets so that Northern polluters can outsource the cuts;
• no clear sources of financing and explicit commitments to pay the North’s ‘climate debt’ to the South (estimated by even the World Bank at $400 billion/year by 2020), owed for taking too much environmental space and doing massive climate damage (such as the current 300 000 premature deaths annually, escalating much more quickly as climate chaos worsens);

• the deal’s departure from Kyoto Protocol and Bali Action Plan principles which set out much more ambitious targets for richer versus poorer countries; and

• no legally binding components or compliance mechanisms.

No one disputes, now, that the climate governance ship is sinking, as is the climate’s supposed private sector lifeboat, carbon trading. With just 20 out of 192 countries having signed on this week, UN climate official Yvo de Boer admitted the Accord deadline of January 31 was actually ‘soft’, because ‘Countries are not being asked if they want to adhere... but to indicate if they want to be associated.’

And the captain of this Titanic, Obama, is heading directly towards the closest US iceberg: the US Senate. Last week’s shock election of Scott Brown to fill Edward Kennedy’s Massachusetts seat is telling and perhaps decisive, because the climate debacle was centre stage. Brown campaigned partly on the basis that the US should avoid ‘cap and trade’ legislation currently pending in the Senate. His election confirms the most likely outcome from Capitol Hill: gridlock.

Given the power relations in Congress, this outcome is, frankly, welcomed by many US grassroots environmentalists. They contrast the ineffectual ‘pork-laden’ legislation with the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) ever-stronger regulatory potential plus grassroots ‘keep the coal in the hole and oil in the soil’ direct actions at sites like West Virginia mountaintops and Chevron’s San Francisco headquarters.

In December, the EPA issued an ‘endangerment’ finding against carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas pollutants using the Clean Air Act – a move that Pietermaritzburg NGO groundWork now insists Sonjica try with the SA Air Quality Act. Activists demand strong enforcement, but legislation that last June passed the US House of Representatives actually strips the EPA of enforcement powers. Hence halting the legislation in the Senate is a goal of both climate-denialist fossil fuel firms and progressive ecologists, for completely opposite reasoning.

The major bills are now being pushed by John Kerry, the senior Massachusetts senator who failed in a 2004 presidential campaign bid against George W. Bush. Kerry felt the need to ally with the conservative Joseph Lieberman (his 2004 running mate) and the very conservative Lindsay Graham, and in order to overcome
the climate denialist lobby, the bill they are now promoting is full of subsidies to the coal, oil/gas and nuclear industries.

It is also based on ‘cap and trade’ in which polluters are rewarded for historic emissions, and in which an inadequate cap on US emissions can be ‘offset’ with purchases from other countries, including South Africa. (This was partly the source of US promises in Copenhagen of $100 billion – and hence was rejected by many since it is part of a market process, not genuine climate debt payments.)

The most substantial Third World offsets through the UN’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) are being paid to companies which reduce emissions in China, India and Brazil. Meanwhile, South Africa’s own attempts to establish CDM offset projects have faltered.

In 2005, community opposition foiled a World Bank investment in the largest project, a methane-electricity conversion at Bisasar Road landfill in Durban’s Clare Estate residential neighbourhood. Last year, an attempt by Sasol to claim that a gas pipeline investment was ‘additional’ to existing plans (hence deserving emissions reductions credits) was ridiculed by the Johannesburg activist group Earthlife, and did not pass muster in the UN vetting process.

The entire carbon trading apparatus – worth nearly $140 billion in volume last year and once projected to grow to $3 trillion annual trades by 2020 - is now in question, having failed to cut emissions in the main pilot project, the European Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Due to overallocation of permits, the ETS will face further declines in price, and the failure of the Copenhagen Accord to confirm financing was a major blow to the market, which crashed by 10% from December 17-21 as it appeared there would be a serious legitimacy deficit.

The ETS was itself delegitimised last September when the UN’s main verification contractor was disqualified for repeated procedural violations, and in December when Europol discovered that up to 90% of trades in some EU countries were flagrant tax scams.

The general problem of relying upon these actors to save the planet was obvious last week when Ėskom’s contracts with an African National Congress investment firm, Chancellor House, were revealed. The boiler deals give the ruling party a multi-billion rand stake in further coal-fired power plant construction.

If Zuma aims, therefore, to persuade the world that he and similarly compromised BASIC leaders are not corrupted by this process, major cuts in emissions would be the only way. The SA cuts promised by Sonjica just before Copenhagen were labeled by Earthlife Africa as a ‘public relations stunt’ because of the ‘fantasy’ baseline projection. In reality, cuts promised in the Long-Term Mitigation Scenario – itself based upon the extreme case of rising Sasol coal-to-liquid emissions – will not start to decline until after 2030.
As the Eskom tariff hearings organised by the national regulator this week showed, Eskom is intent on a 35% annual increase the next three years so as to keep building coal-fired plants. Yet the purpose of the new build programme is not to increase affordable energy, because the tiny rise in Free Basic Electricity anticipated (from 50 to 70 kWh per household per month) does not mitigate the rise in a typical township household budget spent on energy: from R360/month last year to R1000/month in 2012, according to Eskom.

Meanwhile the multi-decade contracts signed during the closing years of apartheid – by men like Eskom treasurer Mick Davis, now head of Exstrata and beneficiary of more than R100 million in salary and share benefits last year – are being jealously guarded by Eskom, which won’t even reveal the extent of the giveaways to BHP Billiton, Arcelor Mittal and other smelter and mining operators. These firms, in turn, export profits and dividends to headquarters in Melbourne and London, worsening SA’s vast balance of payments deficit.

Does the public have any faith in the energy fraternity given these power relations, electricity disconnections and climate criminality? Last year the deputy leader of the Communist Party, Jeremy Cronin, called for the phasing out of the aluminium industry give the adverse cost-benefit ratio, and two years ago Standard Bank chairman Derek Cooper asked Eskom to shut off power to Richards Bay smelters so as to end the load-shedding crisis.

Last week there were protests at Durban and Midrand tariff hearings, including arrests of three Earthlife and Anti-Privatisation Forum activists.

The difference between those activists and the more established lobby groups like WWF and Greenpeace is becoming stark. WWF called Sonjica’s Copenhagen strategy ‘very progressive’ and Greenpeace – so effective with direct action protests involving pranks and aesthetically gripping imagery (instead of grassroots organizing) – termed SA the ‘star’ of Copenhagen. Now, according to Themba Linden of Greenpeace Africa, ‘The BASIC countries have to lead the world in light of no leadership from developed world.’

But the new Greenpeace head is Kumi Naidoo, who understands global positioning, and his staff’s empowerment of such obviously inappropriate climate dealmakers is hopefully a thing of the past. Instead, leadership should be vested in the unions demanding Green Jobs for a just transition out of the minerals energy complex, communities facing a huge increase in electricity disconnections (hence making theft attractive and with it a rise in electrocutions), and environmentalists genuinely upset by the disaster unfolding before our eyes.
Eskom’s price hikes plus climate change contributions blow citizen fuses
with Alice Thomson, in The Mercury, 20 January 2010

Yesterday morning, anger against the rudderless parastatal Eskom was palpable in a large community protest outside the Luthuli International Convention Centre, and inside too, where the apparently useless National Energy Regulator of SA (Nersa) was holding court.

People should be very angry indeed, for even Eskom admits that the monthly bill a 'typical township household' paid a year ago - R360 – will rise to R1000 by 2012, and for a typical suburbanite, from R750 to R2400 (the free basic electricity supply will rise from 50 to 70 kWh/month, still a trivial amount).

We’re mainly paying for ecologically-destructive new coal-fired power plants, the first of which – Medupi near the increasingly water-stressed Waterberg in Limpopo – has been hit with a 40% cost escalation, to R120 billion. Dangerous nuclear plants could follow. And unless opposed by labour and consumers, partial privatisation will put even more pressure on Eskom to raise tariffs to return profits to its new partners.

But community consciousness is also rising, as leaders of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) spent most evenings last week mobilizing in neighbourhood civic halls, and along with the new Climate Justice Now! South Africa (CJN!SA) KZN chapter, reported back from the Copenhagen climate summit on Friday at UKZN.

As the Eskom protest demonstrated, SDCEA and CJN!SA practice a grassroots politics linking local and global so as to comprehensively criticize SA’s energy resource abuse, from coal extraction through pollution-intensive generation to hedonistic consumption. They view our state and corporate officials as amongst the world’s least environmentally and socially responsible.

Proof was evident in Copenhagen last month, and will be again on Sunday in New Delhi when the next generation of world-leading carbon tsotsis - Brazil, SA, India and China (using the acronym BASIC) - meet to update their do-nothing emissions strategy. Recall that on December 18, to cries of ‘Shame!’ across the world, Jacob Zuma and other BASIC leaders signed Barack Obama’s non-binding, unambitious and unfair Copenhagen Accord.

While nonviolent protesters were beaten up by Danish police outside, the US and BASIC were also beating the UN’s consultative process to a pulp, doing a deal in a secretive cabal meeting while leaving nearly 200 other countries to guess what these five major carbon emitters were up to. With the planet’s future at stake, CJN!SA activist Siziwe Khanyile expressed anger in Copenhagen that the Pretoria delegation helped destroy what was once strong African unity, in order to promote self-interest: no emissions cutbacks until the 2030s.
But SA’s self-interest looks disturbingly like the self-interest of multinational metals and mining corporations based in London and Melbourne, which consume a vast share of South Africa’s electricity.

Remarked Khanyile, “The Southern powers who say they must have the ‘carbon space’ to ‘catch up’ with the North are less concerned with eradicating poverty than with their power in the international system. This is not a trivial matter. But, in choosing the means of carbon development, the major Southern powers choose to reproduce the economy of plunder.”

Plunder was extreme during the last years of apartheid, when Eskom treasurer Mick Davis – now head of the Swiss-based Xstrata coal mining house, whose hostile takeover bid for Anglo American recently failed, yet who personally ‘earned’ R100 million in share sales last year - signed 40-year special pricing agreements with the likes of BHP Billiton (the firm Davis moved to after leaving Eskom in 1993). The world’s largest metals and mining firms got the cheapest power in the world, ever cheaper as minerals prices fall.

Since then, Eskom management has failed to address the contracts’ extreme socio-economic inequity, climate change implications, or financial volatility created within Eskom’s ‘embedded derivatives’ gambles. The discredited former leadership of Bobby Godsell and Jacob Maroga oversaw Eskom’s R9.7 billion loss in 2009, due mainly to these derivatives, as aluminium prices and the currency went haywire during the world economic crisis.

What often goes unmentioned is that when big corporations receive ultra-cheap electricity – just 11 cents per kiloWatt hour to BHP Billiton, compared to 44 cents/hour for Eskom’s household customers – their profits are exported to London, Melbourne and Zurich. In turn, this amplifies SA’s perennial balance of payments deficit – a problem which last year led The Economist magazine to rank SA as the riskiest of all emerging markets.

This ridiculous situation appears acceptable to Nersa’s Thembani Bukula, who last July defended BHP Billiton’s special deals, although a month later both Godsell and Maroga made an apparently half-hearted effort to renegotiate them.

Especially infuriating for environmentalists is that because Eskom ran out of cash, major renewable solar and wind energy projects are delayed, while tidal power is being seriously attempted. The company’s promise to roll out a million solar hot water heaters in three years is being broken, with only around a thousand supplied in its first year, even though 30,000 geysers are replaced annually and though this is an ideal ‘green job’ opportunity so as to rehire thousands of workers laid off last year in the metals and auto sectors.
Another broken Pretoria promise is a meaningful carbon tax that would force excessive consumers of energy to become more energy efficient. As finance minister, Trevor Manuel imposed only a tiny tax, with a bias against ordinary people not big corporations, and his successor Pravin Gordhan has dropped the baton.

If a higher price on carbon doesn’t persuade large corporates to change behaviour, then direct regulation must, including the 2004 Air Quality Act. But as Eskom’s last annual report confessed, the state-owned agency has since 2007 been regularly violating this law: “As a result of this decline in performance, we have applied for over 170 exemptions and had 22 legal contraventions as a result of not meeting limits set out in the power station emission permits.”

Since the Green Scorpions are apparently asleep on the job, Eskom is passing the costs of its world-leading emissions onto society and nature. People living near coal-fired power stations pay with their health, taxpayers will pay for their health costs, and there will be increased losses for agriculture.

Worse, Eskom’s proposed R385bn capital expansion – much for coal-fired electricity generation - will dramatically increase carbon emissions, since Eskom wants to double electricity supply by the 2030s. Already climate change is responsible for Africa’s increased droughts and floods, rising sea levels, decreasing water supply, malaria and other diseases, and extreme weather events.

The World Bank is the latest villain in the tale, provisionally offering Eskom $3.75 billion in December, but at an ever-higher interest rate as the rand declines in value, given that the loan must be repaid in hard currency.

NGOs are already mobilizing to halt the loan when the Bank’s board meets in March, for it is yet another travesty from the world’s largest fossil fuel financier. This is the institution that, ironically, is also bidding to manage both the new climate-debt fund promised in Copenhagen (which could amount to $100 billion/year by 2020) and the futile strategy of carbon trading in which ‘Clean Development Mechanisms’ (CDMs) are said to offset northern industrial pollution.

Instead of playing dangerous games with the World Bank – as does Ethekwini municipality with its dubious landfill gas extraction CDM - SA should peak greenhouse gas emissions no later than 2015 and cancel the coal-fired generators. How? First, by following advice given by Standard Bank chairman Derek Cooper two years ago during Eskom’s load-shedding crisis: cut off supply to the big aluminium smelters which use so much power, create so few jobs and export so many profits.

That way, as CJN/SA puts it, we can finally start to ‘leave the coal in the hole’ and invest instead in solar, wind and tidal. At the same time, SDCEA insists, we can avoid new electricity price hikes caused by massive new coal-fired power plants. Together, the future of our species’ and our low-income neighbours’ economic survival require nothing less.
The carbon market ship is sinking fast
ZNet, 19 January

Robin Hahnel, ordinarily so persuasive when criticizing markets and constructing notional post-capitalist economic relations, makes serious strategic errors in his article ‘Has the Left Missed the Boat on Climate Change?’ (www.zmag.org/zspace/robinhahnel). In half the space he used, I’d like to offer two concerns:

- Robin’s argumentative technique assumes there’s no space in between full-fledged eco-socialism (our shared long-term ideal) and cooption into (allegedly reformable) carbon markets, and thus he takes serious political missteps justified through strange allegations about the Climate Justice (CJ) movement.

- Robin’s political vision is constrained by the backward state of US congressional power relations, which indeed makes his proposed reforms far less likely than the combination of grassroots direct actions (not a legislative utopia) against polluters, national/local air quality and planning regulation, and substantial public investments that together the CJ movement is advocating.

In short, Robin’s ‘pragmatic’ market-reformist approach to an urgent challenge is in reality more idealistic – impossible, really - than CJ anti/post-market politics. Having had exchanges of this sort in person and on email with Robin for fifteen months already, I have no illusion that his mind will be changed in the following pages. Still, at the risk of sounding ill-tempered, here’s a reply (at Z’s request) to Robin’s attacks on those of us who have, as he puts it, ‘missed’ his sinking cap-and-trade ship.

At the least it allows a review of CJ perspectives on how to contest markets, grounded in activist initiatives – some of which were pioneered here in South Africa – that cut against the grain of, instead of surrendering to, capitalist logic. For it is only by transcending ‘price’ (as ‘value’) that we can escape the fate of commodification of the atmosphere and all that it implies.

Escaping that fate is crucial, and follows the bottom-up, anti-market politics I’ve learned from activists here, which I think withstands Robin’s curious, self-proclaimed ‘left’ critique and top-down technicism. You the reader may decide on the merits of ideological labeling and self-labeling, as to what’s ‘left’. (For the sake of comparison, last week I rebutted a different but equally misguided crit of CJ climate finance politics by two San Francisco anarchists: www.counterpunch.org/bond01122010.html. And for a reply to pro-market ‘green’ critics of our short CJ movie http://www.storyofcapandtrade.org last month, see http://www.zmag.org/zspace/commentaries/4078.)
Although we all seek discussions between comrades with the utmost respect, and while respect will endure in other areas, it is distressing to the point of annoyance that Robin strays so very far from CJ carbon market wisdom gathered up over the past decade. Instead of drawing on that wisdom, especially environmentalist and indigenous people’s open hostility to Clean Development Mechanism (and now forest financing) versions of carbon trading, Robin prefers the mind-altering policy-wonk milieu that characterizes so much allegedly realist environmental debate in the United States (see, e.g., http://www.grist.org).

That means his analysis is grounded in the bankrupt logic of the economics profession, not the radical market-critical ideology we all know Robin is capable of through Parecon and his other contributions, not least of which are the many protestations that he’s still a true ‘socialist’. So dear reader, pardon the long trek through this muck, but rehearsing arguments about why markets – and pro-market reforms - are no solution to climate crisis is never entirely a waste of time.

The Copenhagen victory against elites and carbon trading

Robin’s initial error is lamenting the outcome of the December 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, in which he disregards both realpolitik and CJ strategy:

- from the standpoint of realpolitik, given the adverse balance of forces, as even establishment scientist James Hansen argued in the New York Times in early December, any deal struck at Copenhagen (or the US Senate) would be bound up in carbon trading, hence no deal was better than a bad deal – and for all effective purposes we got no deal;

- from the standpoint of political strategy, the Copenhagen circus dramatically lowered the credibility of the global climate governance elite, and added coherence, mutual trust and visibility to the emerging grassroots CJ movement.

The summit meltdown, witnessed in the universally-condemned Accord that Barack Obama stitched together at the last moment on December 18, should, in fact, be celebrated. Copenhagen was semi-seattled, unveiled as an undemocratic, crony-capitalist, band-aiding response to a genuine crisis, sullied by openly imperialist processes within the UN’s Bella Centre bubble, which in turn was protected by brazen police brutality.

Just as happened in Seattle a decade earlier with the activist lock-down outside and African elites denying consensus inside, the CJ movement in the Copenhagen streets and Bolivarian governments in the negotiations together questioned the process and the content, denying Obama’s deal the status of an official UN outcome.
A month later, no one claims the Copenhagen Accord was more than a face-saving gesture aimed at coopting Chinese, Indian, Brazilian and South African politicians into taking responsibility for their economies’ emissions (to the extent of surrendering potential pollution allotment ‘rights’), albeit without any meaningful way to do so, and without questioning their fossil-fuel addicted, export-oriented accumulation strategies, which will continue unabated because the Accord has no binding targets. So thankfully, there’s no legitimacy there, and no joy in the carbon markets, which from December 17-21 reacted by crashing from already flaccid levels.

And thankfully, too, Copenhagen’s failure leaves serious activists with much clearer strategic insights about ultimately solving this crisis. Because of global climate governance failure, we’re all going to be working much harder on:

- deepening educational and motivational work in local settings;
- targeting local fossil fuel production and consumption with direct action and boycotts;
- critiquing carbon markets and traders; and
- demanding that national air quality control regulation be enforced for greenhouse gases, and that local/regional planning boards and utility regulators start moving rapidly into the post-carbon future by prohibiting fossil-fuel-dependent project now in the application pipeline.

With the distraction of Copenhagen now past, and with no hope for a genuine climate-saving treaty in Mexico 2010 or South Africa 2011 (except in the opportunistic minds of professional conference-hoppers), the CJ movement is much stronger and can now plot more decisive interventions, for example in Bolivia at the April 20-22 meeting of indigenous, radical environmental and social/labour movements called by Evo Morales.

Moreover, as Jess Worth predicts in New Internationalist, ‘If governments won’t phase out fossil fuels, then we’ll have to do it for them, by shutting down their coal mines and oilfields. If they won’t protect the world’s forests - or worse, if they try to sell them off for private profit - then we’ll unite with the people of those lands and defend them ourselves.’

For instance, here in Durban this morning, hundreds of protesters came to the International Convention Centre fighting the national electricity company’s new coal-fired plants. To pay for these, Eskom has asked regulatory permission to jack up retail prices for poor people by 35% per annum the next three years, and is also near completion with negotiating a World Bank loan of $3.7 billion (but that may attract a serious backlash and revival of the World Bank Boycott which the late
South African activist Dennis Brutus helped initiate eight years ago). Red and green politics come together very well under these circumstances.

Grassroots movement organizing is the first step forward for the CJ agenda, which in turn requires us to avoid carbon trading distractions and the elite deals that Robin seeks for a mythical global emissions market. Luckily, gridlock at both global and US national levels is not a setback, but instead an excellent outcome of the 2009 debates, given the prevailing balance of forces, especially the danger – in both the Kyoto Protocol’s extension and US congressional bills - of giving further momentum to the deepening of carbon markets.

These markets are currently worth around $130 billion/year, but had Copenhagen and congressional initiatives succeeded, they were expected to soar to $3 trillion in annual turnover by 2020 not counting derivatives. Gridlock means there’s a good chance that carbon trading will simply die, as two Foreign Policy (13 January 2010) writers, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, anticipate:

Midterm elections [in November 2010] are likely to bring large Democratic losses in the House, and, fairly or not, a hard vote for failed cap-and-trade legislation will take a fair share of the blame. For House Democrats it will be déjà vu all over again. In 1994 they went out on a limb and voted for an energy tax (known as the Btu tax) pushed by then-Vice President Al Gore and President Bill Clinton’s White House only to see the Senate reject such a measure. Having been ‘BTUed’ by two Democratic administrations, twice-fooled Democrats are unlikely to sign up for more of the same in the next Congress. And cap and trade’s death in the Senate would likely signal its death everywhere - Australia, Japan, Canada, and eventually even Europe.

All in all, Robin is wrong to call Copenhagen ‘a train wreck that no spin doctor can put a good face on.’ The carbon market’s immediate crash was just one indication of a worthwhile outcome, but the round of popular critique of the global climate governance ‘leaders’ was even better.

Robin is also wrong about an even bigger problem: how to generate a serious, pragmatic radical climate politics while staring fossil-fuel capitalism in the face. Unfortunately he opts instead for an unserious, idealistic, reformist capitulation, namely fixing cap and trade.

**Leftists need not be capital’s battered spouse**

Though he may argue there’s a substantial left faction in his corner, Robin appears virtually alone in places like ZCommunications fretting about the CJ critique of carbon markets. A few other progressive economists have also publicly identified themselves in favor of carbon trading, including Frank Ackerman of Tufts. Having known them for years, I celebrate their work when it provides ecological-economic critique.
But when Robin and Frank turn their minds to constructive policy-making in this rancid political environment, weighing in with insights drawn from within their battered profession, their theoretical approach misses the benefits of CJ movement-building commitment and experience. That experience comes from fighting back against the real damages done in carbon markets, especially Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects which are supported by Robin but opposed by environmentalists and indigenous and poor/working peoples (especially women – e.g. our first South African CDM educator, the late Sajida Khan, who died on the job: http://www.zcommunications.org/zspace/commentaries/3171).

That leaves Robin like a battered spouse – married to US corporate capitalist power relations - who has not learned the merits of divorce. His article shows no awareness of precedent for rejecting market-based reforms, and thus achieving much greater victories.

Such victories – for example, access to AIDS medicines and the pushback against water privatization (our two main South African social movement wins in the past decade, repeated in many other Third World sites) - came through fighting against the logic of capital, instead of going with the flow. In going with the capitalist flow, Robin’s natural allies in this battle are mainstream environmentalists from the large corporate-oriented agencies (especially EDF, NRDC, WRI and WWF) and carbon traders themselves.

So Robin’s views do not genuinely represent one half of, as he claims, a ‘divide between some on the Left who support putting a price on carbon emissions through a cap and trade treaty, and others on the Left who deny that putting a price on carbon is a necessary and important step forward, and denounce carbon markets as a “pretend solution” that diverts attention from “real solutions”’. This is a false dichotomy, as I show in more detail below, as many critics of carbon trading favor a carbon tax, for example.

To gain added stature, Robin’s team of ‘some on the left’ includes Frank, in a televised debate on December 15 with the leading intellectual critic of carbon trading, Larry Lohmann. According to Robin, ‘When the Left needn’t agree on everything, when we contradict one another to the extent that Amy Goodman can’t figure out what message to bring home from Copenhagen for her Democracy Now audience, the Left also has a problem.’

Sorry, but Robin simply wasn’t paying attention, because in that debate, an opening excerpt of Annie Leonard’s nine-minute film The Story of Cap and Trade provided various examples of emissions market failure, leading Frank to immediately concede, ‘I’m not exactly for [carbon trading]… a price on carbon can be done either through a tax or through cap and trade… Any time a price incentive like this has worked, it has needed many, many other things to be working with it. The image of a level playing field that economists sometimes suggest is exactly wrong.’
And yet notwithstanding the critiques Frank had to acknowledge (see the transcript – http://www.democracynow.org/2009/12/15/cap_trade_a_critical_look_at), he was ultimately compelled to defend carbon trading, but in the way a battered spouse might fantasize about repairing a broken marriage because he/she sees no alternative:

The problem is not describing how to reduce American carbon emissions; the problem is creating incentives that will make people feel like they have been allowed to do it in a free market way (sic)... I think some of the big companies that are advocating a carbon tax are probably conscious of that and doing it with dishonest intent in the attempt to destroy the entire idea of climate legislation. From that, I deduce that, sadly enough, we’ll have to figure out how to patch up the holes in cap and trade, of which there are many.

The South African political equivalent of this sort of defeatism that we remember well was the option chosen in 1983 by a very few superficially anti-apartheid activists: cooption into the PW Botha regime’s reform program, which opened up second-class citizenship for Indian and ‘coloured’ (as against third-class African) people. It was central to apartheid’s divide-and-conquer strategy against black people in general, but it failed. Internationally the equivalent move was a few wealthy liberals’ endorsement of Rev Leon Sullivan’s Principles as an alternative to divestment. These gambits were termed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu ‘polishing the chains of apartheid’ instead of breaking them, and no one took them seriously as we struggled for the minimal demand, one person-one vote in a unitary state.

‘Patching the holes’ in emissions markets is just as objectionable a way of polishing the chains of climate apartheid, given how awful cap and trade is as policy and practice, how little success market watchdogs have had to date, and what a miniscule group of reformers Robin and Frank can turn to.

Worse, this logic isn’t even limited to dumbing climate policy down to humor the alleged backwardness of the ‘American people’, which for whatever bizarre reason is Frank’s main political criterion, as expressed on Democracy Now. In any case, holding the rest of the world hostage to the whims of the ‘American people’ – who, recall, suddenly swung in majority support for the Republican presidential candidate in August 2008 immediatley after John McCain chose Sarah Palin as running mate – is as unethical as the Obama Administration’s attempts in Copenhagen to deny that the US owes a climate debt.

Frank’s dumb-it-down, make-it-palatable argument is also refuted by the most recent US poll of popular support for carbon trading versus a carbon tax (by Hart Research Associates in August 2009). As summarized by Energy and Environment Daily, only 27 percent of the 1000 people surveyed support cap-and-trade, half as much as a direct tax:
When both concepts are explained, voters of all political affiliations and backgrounds favor the tax proposal by a significant margin. Sixty-six percent of Democrats prefer the carbon tax, as do 58 percent of independents and 46 percent of Republicans. Overall, 57 percent of those surveyed say they would favor a carbon tax, while 37 percent are opposed... The poll's designers say support for the carbon tax proposal stems from a belief that it is far simpler than cap and trade, provides a revenue stream for tax refunds to offset consumer costs of the tax, offers a more direct incentive for businesses and consumers, and is less likely to be corrupted by loopholes for certain interests (http://www.eenews.net/public/eenewspm/2009/12/01/2).

By the end of last month, cap and trade was losing the support of a great many Senators, as well; even Kerry admitted in Copenhagen that he might have to switch to a carbon tax (http://dyn.politico.com/printstory.cfm?uuid=CD9FF07-18FE-70B2-A8A448F9F6703C97). As the website Politico remarked on Saturday:

Prospects for Senate passage of the legislation — already approved by the House last summer — have dimmed in recent months, with the bruising health care debate and looming midterm elections. Last month was particularly brutal, as environmental advocates fended off criticism of climate negotiations in Copenhagen that failed to produce a strong international agreement. Even some supporters now publicly doubt that the bill will get done this year. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) told The Associated Press last week that passage of the legislation was unlikely (http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/31416.html#ixzz0coOZlEiy).

And as last Thursday’s Financial Times blog on climate finance by Kate Mackenzie explained,

Most people just don’t like the idea of carbon cap-and-trade schemes. Whether they object because it’s like a tax, or because it’s not like a tax, or because it only benefits those crooked financial types, or because it’s too bureaucratic and expensive, or because they hate offsets, or free allowance giveaways to polluters... there’s an objection for almost everyone. A pretty powerful constituency however does like cap-and-trade: (some) economists, financial industry types, policy wonks, and some big businesses (http://blogs.ft.com/energy-source/2010/01/14/carbon-emissions-reduction-without-cap-and-trade/).

In short, Frank and Robin are wrong to assume that cap and trade simply needs a bit of hole-patch fixing (not nixing) because it’s the only politically viable strategy: it just ain’t, all the evidence shows. That useless, abusive spouse should be tossed out of the house, pronto, because cap and trade may please some big corporations and their paid-for Washington ‘greens’, but is not even good for catching Senators and Senate constituent votes nowadays, if it ever was.
Divorcing the capitalist albatross of climate commodification

Yet more extreme, Robin argues that ‘as long as the albatross of global capitalism remains around our necks’ we should support global carbon trading and ‘fix’ its problems. Adopting this premise would be disastrous for the left in any field, so thank goodness South African activists divorced the climate albatross when it was time to consider life-and-death strategies in the health and water sectors.

First, a decade ago when we observed that AIDS medicines were too expensive at $15,000/person/year, the reformist logic of Robin’s position would have prevented the victory achieved by the Treatment Action Campaign and AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: decommodification of medicines (they are now free for millions) and deglobalisation of their production (they are now made in SA, Zimbabwe, Uganda, etc), which were only possible by removing them from solely market determinations (http://www.zmag.org/zspace/commentaries/1875 and http://www.zmag.org/zspace/commentaries/1792).

Second, likewise for water activists, Robin’s premise would have led to fruitless efforts to reform Suez’s Johannesburg operations so as to optimize the price mechanism, instead of the intense social resistance in Soweto which not only rejected orthodox water pricing but sought (and won) free water, in part because ‘Destroy the Meter, Enjoy the Water!’ was the slogan and practice. This militancy was in large part responsible for Suez departing after a disastrous 2001-06 spell, and for the increased Free Basic Water allotment Johannesburg coughed up in 2008 (http://www.zmag.org/zspace/commentaries/1683, http://www.zmag.org/zspace/commentaries/2505 and http://www.zmag.org/zspace/commentaries/3473).

Perhaps because Robin’s view of the transition to socialism relies more upon blueprinting the future than actually struggling for it by fighting unfair market determinations wherever they arise, he fails to recognize that waging decommodification battles in order to ‘common’ goods and services is the only sure route to dislodging the capitalist albatross, short of revolution. In contrast to Robin’s strategy, radical policy strategists such as the late Andre Gorz, Vicente Navarro, Gosta Esping-Andersen, Boris Kagarlitsky and John Saul have shown how ‘nonreformist reforms’ even within the capitalist mode of production can indeed undermine markets and strengthen the masses (and environment). Instead, Robin’s ‘reformist reforms’ explicitly amplify the power of the status quo and legitimize markets.

Opposition to commodified medicine and water may be the most advanced of South African nonreformist-reform strategies, yet quite early on, around 2002, a similar demand emerged from Durban for the decommodification of the air itself. This led to the rejection of carbon trading by leading environmental groups such as groundWork, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and
TimberWatch, and hence the Durban Group for Climate Justice was formed in 2004 by an international team in a quite hospitable location, followed by the launch of a Climate Justice Now! South Africa chapter in Durban five years later. These South African CJ activists don’t accept Robin’s premise that until we get rid of the capitalist albatross we must just lobby for somewhat less corrupt but still thoroughly capitalist climate policies.

The CJ view of carbon trading is, simply, that in order to turn the clean air and cooler climate which we need to survive into a commons, we must avoid commodification of the air. Commodification entails

- carving up the air into property rights to pollute;
- commodifying the atmosphere via a carbon market in which emitting a tonne of carbon dioxide pollution today sells for just 13 euros;
- risking speculative hoarding (as energy traders are wont to do);
- promoting the growth of derivatives markets which allow gambling on the future value of the right to pollute; and
- selling it all to the highest bidder, with obvious implications for social equity.

**Getting the prices really right**

Rather than confront these obvious evils, Robin claims that critics of carbon trading ‘denounce those who work to increase the price of carbon emissions from its present price of zero to as close to its true social cost as is politically possible.’ Most CJ activists would, in fact, applaud a price associated with carbon emissions that incorporates ‘its true social costs’ (so long as it can include cross-subsidies that provide ‘lifeline’ support for ordinary people’s basic energy/transport needs). But we’re convinced by experience (and theory too) that carbon markets cannot determine these costs, much less achieve them in a sustained way so as to meet public policy purposes.

Such a price would have to be imposed as part of command-and-control regulation and carbon taxation (with punitive costs aimed at hedonistic carbon users so as to pay for basic consumption access for everyone). And it would have to be quite a dramatic price increase to achieve not only desired behavioral changes by those who need to radically change (such as me, vicariously flying around to climate protests last month), but also requires accompanying state investments in vast new alternative public infrastructure, something cap and trade simply isn’t designed for in practice, given its revenue-avoidance systems and offsets.
Working within markets to find appropriate prices is just damn hard, no matter what economists are hard-wired to believe. Amongst the many reasons that progressive environmentalists and political economists have consistently rejected carbon trading as a valid strategy, there are, in particular, two central problems that Robin doesn’t even try grappling with in his carbon trading analysis:

- markets generate and amplify adverse power relations in society (favouring the institutions which caused the problems), and

- financial markets generate speculative activity that amplify capitalism’s intrinsic crisis tendencies.

Instead, Hahnel’s critique of capitalism is based on five market imperfections, for which carbon trading can be repaired so as to provide internal market corrections: the inability to factor in externalities like pollution; failure to supply ‘public goods’ including environmental protection; excessively rapid extraction of natural resources; excess personal consumption; and inadequate information.

But to reiterate, the two that we highlighted most in our film The Story of Cap and Trade – corruption by self-interested, powerful corporations and speculation by financiers – can be fixed only by banning all carbon market activity (even the Cantwell-Collins Senate bill cannot fully insulate its trading proposal from Wall Street machinations). That’s why, when we drafted the October 2004 Durban Declaration, the authors were most concerned by the ways that markets ‘commodify... the earth’s carbon-cycling capacity into property to be bought and sold in a global market.’

In sum, most of us in the CJ movement denounce carbon markets because to genuinely get the prices right – i.e., so as to transform economies from fossil fuel addictions – we need much more than markets. Aside from distracting attention from genuine solutions, carbon markets reward those who are already rich from financial speculation and those in the fossil fuel industries who have the political clout to gain free carbon allowances.

As Robin well knows, markets typically change behavior in only a gradual manner, because what economists call ‘price elasticity’ – the change in consumption associated with a change in price – isn’t high enough for fossil-fuel costs within a typical household budget to generate life-style changes such as public transport commuting, or within a corporate budget given that firms typically pass energy costs straight to consumers.

Of course we need price increases (while protecting ordinary people from energy/transport poverty) but we need much more: direct grassroots action against emitters/extractors plus a major shift towards command-and-control regulatory
functions, as Europe had adopted (prior to the Kyoto Protocol) to end sulfur dioxide acid rain much more quickly than did US SO2 markets.

Hence it is insulting of Robin to claim that CJ critics simply ‘sit on the sidelines while giant corporations seize valuable property rights to store carbon in the upper atmosphere in the greatest wealth give-away in history.’ The sidelines? Just last week Climate SOS joined by Hansen protested outside the main carbon trading conference in New York, in the wake of similar demonstrations in Chicago, London, Amsterdam and Paris prior to Copenhagen. It seems Robin’s not paying attention, especially to the film http://www.storyofcapandtrade.org, which has probably done more to raise debate about the free emissions giveaways in US congressional carbon trading legislation and the EU ETS than anything else he might point to.

But in the spirit of a battered spouse continuing to reside with the perpetrator, Robin suffers from acute self-blame: ‘we socialists need to look to ourselves. Had we done our work well the human species would have abandoned capitalism.’ Even though his main partners, the fossil-fuel corporation and Wall Street trader, continue to abuse him, Robin meekly appeals: ‘we socialists failed to replace capitalism with socialism in the twentieth century, which means that decisions about how to use the environment are actually made, and will continue to be made for some time, by market forces where a key price, the price of carbon emission, is completely out of whack.’

No, that’s a bad attitude! As explained above, South African activists have been successful at replacing the corporate calculus with decommodified essential medicines, water and to some extent electricity – and billions more people have won similar struggles in past decades over basic needs goods/services ranging from healthcare and education to fire protection and municipal libraries. Markets are not gravity, and as Karl Polanyi argued in The Great Transformation, when commodification and social movements resistance together represent a ‘double movement’, the reach of capitalism into all aspects of our lives can be repelled.

In any case, rather than getting the prices right, capitalism continues to get prices out of whack on nearly everything, even financial assets that should respond most efficiently to market signals (recall that from September 2008-March 2009, half the paper value in the world’s stock exchanges went up in flames). Reforming capitalism to get the carbon prices right is futile given the presence of speculative and corrupt elements which have made a farce out of the EU’s emissions markets.

**There’s only time for false solutions?**

In response, Robin claims we don’t have the luxury of time to decommodify: ‘when dealing with climate change it is irresponsible not to be realistic about time frames.’ (Likewise, a battered spouse might sometimes use the excuse of kids nearly out of high school to delay a needed divorce.)
But really, how long will it take to set up a functional carbon market? A dozen years after the Kyoto Protocol generated UN-sanctioned emissions trading, surely long enough for reformers to make the system work, the UN found its main CDM verification agency to be utterly incompetent last September. We’ve also had five years of EU emissions trading zaniness, with huge price crashes in April 2006, October 2008 and December 2009, and in December, Europol found that 90% of trades in some EU countries were corrupt. Finally, the gridlocked pathways through Copenhagen and the US Senate suggest that we’ll need dozens more years before the balance of forces is appropriate for a global cap and regulatory framework, even an inadequate one.

Robin replies that ‘being realistic about time frames does mean recognizing that the global economy will continue for some time to be dominated by giant corporations guided by the profit criterion and market forces.’ (I.e., ‘My spouse is too powerful and I’m just too weak to leave him/her.’) In reality, those corporations – especially the supposedly omnipotent Goldman Sachs - that most desperately want carbon trading haven’t dominated the US political system sufficiently to get it, and they probably won’t.

Finally, Robin laments the lack of ‘well-tested institutions and procedures at our disposal for making efficient and equitable choices about where and how to reduce carbon emissions, and how to distribute the costs of reductions fairly between and within countries without resort to commodification. But the last time I checked, participatory eco-socialism had yet to replace global capitalism, and pretending it has does not yield effective policy responses in the world we live in.’

But if we were having this debate in 1996, when chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) emissions threatened the ozone hole, adopting Robin’s logic would have deterred the green left from demanding an outright ban. Yet such a ban was achieved, in the Montreal Protocol.

**But it’s not yet too late to swim back to a solid political shoreline**

Finally, Robin worries that time’s a wastin’, CJers are on a ‘Road To Nowhere’, and the movement’s desire to seattle Copenhagen (and Mexico and South Africa summits next) is silly because ‘it is nationalistic, right wing American Firsters, not Leftists, who call for trashing the UN.’ Factually that’s not true. Here in Durban in 2001, 10,000 leading anti-racism activists demonstrated against the UN’s refusal to include Zionism and reparations for slavery/colonialism/apartheid on the agenda of the World Conference Against Racism. The following year in Johannesburg, 30,000 demonstrated against the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development because it amplified the commodification of nature and retained neoliberal development policies within ‘public private partnerships,’ including emissions trading markets.

Robin thinks that ‘Leftists have traditionally supported the UN,’ but when the UNDP mimics the World Bank, when UN Millennium Development Goals justify water
privatization, and when the UN General Assembly votes in favor of US occupation of Iraq, as just three examples, then Tariq Ali’s suggestion to ‘let the UN go the way of the League of Nations’ is a more accurate reflection of our disgust at the executive committee of the world bourgeoisie.

Robin claims that ‘the UN sponsored Kyoto Protocol establishes a constructive framework for addressing climate change in an equitable way’, but in reality the Kyoto deal is a good example of the body’s bias towards Washington’s interests (it was Al Gore who introduced carbon trading based on the fib that in that case, the US would endorse it), towards big capital, and towards the privatization of environmental policy. Kyoto’s target for emissions reductions - roughly 5% cuts mandated from 1990 levels by 2012 – and lack of enforcement against chisellers provide all you need to know about how serious the negotiators were in 1997, and again in 2009 in Copenhagen.

Of course the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities’ in Kyoto and other UN processes is useful, rhetorically, but the overarching context remains that the US and other rich countries have next to no responsibilities or capacities for solving major global problems. So it is not surprising that the last useful thing the UN can be credited with at the world scale goes back to that 1996 ban on CFCs.

And in the meantime, the weakening of environmentalist politics became so acute that Robin reverts to insult: ‘To be taken seriously Leftists must stop mindless trashing of carbon trading and belittling the importance of reducing the social costs of averting climate change.’ For Robin, that means fixing carbon trading by advocating ‘changes in the Kyoto Protocol that would make it effective, fair, and well worth fighting for as we continue to work to convince more and more people to throw off the capitalist albatross that regrettably still hangs around our necks.’

In reality, there are no reforms of Kyoto carbon trading rules underway along the lines Robin hopes for (many Copenhagen proposals would have made it far worse, by including more scam offsets and false geo-engineering solutions, and commodifying forests). And if legislation does eventually emerge from the US Congress (very unlikely), the kinds of loopholes in Waxman-Markey and a likely Senate bill (such as removing Environmental Protection Agency greenhouse gas oversight) will make our ‘mindless trashing’ that much easier.

Given the Washington political temperature, such legislation would merely represent rearranged deckchairs on the climate Titanic. Luckily, it appears nearly certain that carbon trading will die before getting congressional approval, and failure in the US spells the death knell for global emissions markets. At that point, when his ship is under water, comrade Robin will be very welcome back on dry land, encountering the pragmatic CJ movement reality now being crafted by activists and also by a few visionary state leaders in Latin America.
In that time and place, the distractions of cap and trade or other false solutions posed within financial markets to the vast problems caused by markets will be ancient history, as we will have ratcheted up the struggle not only to cut emissions, pay ecological debt, and build a new energy/transport infrastructure for society, but in the process to throw off that capitalist albatross.
**Why climate justice did not crumble at the summit**  
*Counterpunch*, 12 January

Writing in *CounterPunch*, Tim Simons and Ali Tonak (hereafter S&T) have gone overboard in their critique of radical climate politics, offering an always-welcome warning against ineffectual reformism, but making enemies inappropriately due to their inadequate exposure to the Climate Justice (CJ) movement’s political analysis and to their misreading of Copenhagen alliances, strategies and tactics.

For S&T, ’the antiglobalization movement has been brought out of its slumber’ because ‘anniversaries and nostalgia often trump the here and now’. Yet ’what is troublesome,’ they worry, is ’the attempted resurrection of this movement, known by some as the Global Justice Movement, under the banner of Climate Justice.’

Others may differ, but I think it’s terribly important to generate political linkages to the earlier tradition, dating not to the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protest but to Zapatismo in 1994 (as CJ might date its origins to Accion Ecologica’s pathbreaking work in Ecuador at roughly the same time). Seattle+10 wasn’t actually the leading CJ’s movement’s founding moment; that occurred in Bali, Indonesia two years earlier when Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) emerged outside another failed Conference of Parties (COP).

That crucial moment stitched together global justice and radical environmental activists. Since then, the growth of CJ politics has been not merely the rebranding of existing radical networks – but instead has witnessed a new red-green movement across borders that is necessarily going to be anti-capitalist if it addresses the problem with the seriousness required.

**A litany of anti-CJ claims**

S&T repeatedly insist that the CJ movement promotes ‘the financialization of nature and the indirect reliance on markets and monetary solutions as catalysts for structural change’. As is well known, CJN! and the main Copenhagen activist network, Climate Justice Action (and before them the Durban Group for Climate Justice starting in October 2004), are explicitly against commodification of the atmosphere, strenuously opposing carbon trading and offsets.

S&T also claim the movement ‘obfuscates internal class antagonisms within states of the Global South in favor of simplistic North-South dichotomies.’ This is a danger, of course, and always has been in internationalist politics. But against that danger, dynamic CJ movements are emerging to challenge national elites (and the transnational corporations they front for) in Brazil, India and South Africa (three of the four sell-out countries whose leaders joined Barack Obama for the December 18 Copenhagen Accord) and in most other major Global South sites.
S&T worry about ‘the pacification of militant action resulting from an alliance forged with transnational NGOs and reformist environmental groups who have been given minimal access to the halls of power in exchange for their successful policing of the movement’. Yes, there’s a danger of demobilization, but CJN! arose specifically because the existing Climate Action Network was so incompetent, compromised and ideologically corrupted. Moreover, in Copenhagen, some of the most militant South-based transnational movements – e.g. Via Campesina and Oilwatch affiliates – showed they are able to negotiate the inside-outside space with power and grace. So too did the CJ’s movement’s major formal NGO network which worked to undermine elite legitimacy within the Bella Centre, Friends of the Earth (as a result, they were booted).

S&T repeatedly allege that senior movement strategists (only Naomi Klein is named – though out of context, prior to the December 16-18 degeneration) ordered ‘those who came to protest to be one with a summit of world nations and accredited NGOs, instead of presenting a radical critique and alternative force.’ But in this instance, it’s not either/or but both/and: establishing a durable alliance with the Bolivian government delegation was perfectly consistent with presenting a radical critique and posing alternatives.

It may be tedious, but since S&T make so many unjustified allegations, consider some of the finer details.

**Should climate damage be paid?**

Regarding climate commodification, S&T begin by unfavourably comparing CJ politics to a decade past when, for example, ‘debt incurred through loans taken out from the IMF and World Bank [informed] the antiglobalization movement’s analysis and demand to “Drop the Debt.”’ Sure, but Jubilee South soon went much further and by 2001 also insisted on ‘Reparations for Slavery, Colonialism, Apartheid’ from the UN World Conference Against Racism (here in Durban). Because WCAR conference leaders Thabo Mbeki and Mary Robinson dogmatically refused to even table reparations for discussion (and also refused to recognize Zionism as racism), a march of 10,000 protesters set the stage for future anti-UN actions.

The best of the older Jubilee South debt/reparations language and ‘Ecological Debt’ demands that have been made ever more forcefully, culminating in the insistence on $400 billion/annum by 2020 (a figure that has been rising dramatically as we learn more about the damage ahead). CJ ecodebt demands were originally associated with Accion Ecologica and have overlapped closely with the broader global justice movement via Jubilee South, dating to the late 1990s. Hence it may embarrass S&T to recall that ‘Drop the Debt’ language was actually the least challenging component of this critique of world finance and economy.

The most obvious component of Ecological Debt is Climate Debt, and since S&T do not recognize the latter, they miss the crucial difference between Northern elites
owing vulnerable ‘countries’ (as S&T say), when actually they owe people and ecosystems. This is important because if the North provides climate monies to Ethiopian tyrant Meles Zenawi (a close ally of George W. Bush when invading Somalia in January 2007 and of Nicolas Sarkozy when halving Africa’s Climate Debt demands just prior to arriving in Copenhagen) plus most other African elites, these recipients would likely abuse the funds. We need Climate Debt paid, but directly to the victims of climate chaos, and mechanisms need to be established to do so. (Similar debates have characterized the apartheid reparations movement’s strategies for non-state funding mechanisms.)

Hence we don’t need to waste time with S&T’s misguided critique of Climate Debt – instead, we need to restate this relationship as one between the primary victims of climate chaos and the beneficiaries of greenhouse gas emissions, including Southern elites such as most white South Africans and corporations such as SA’s Anglo American, Eskom and Sasol. Thus if articulated fully, Climate Debt should cover not only the damages done by climate change but also finance for the South’s transcendence of extreme uneven development associated with the world economy’s export-oriented operation. Payment of Climate Debt damages and of ‘adaptation’ financing – if done properly – would ideally permit (and compel) the Global South to delink from all manner of relations with the world economy that damage both the exporting economy and the climate: fossil fuel extraction, agricultural plantations and associated deforestation, export-processing zones, vast shipping operations and foreign debt that forces further attempts to raise hard currency.

Climate Debt is not, therefore, a ‘simple claim’, as S&T allege, it’s potentially a complex challenge to capitalism’s internal logic of commodification and neoliberal policy expansion. This is critical because S&T claim that the earlier ‘Drop the Debt’ language aimed to ‘not only stop privatization (or at least its primary enabling mechanism) but also open up political space for local social movements to take advantage of. Yet something serious is overlooked in this rhetorical transfer of the concept of debt from the era of globalization to that of climate change.’

Not true. Only by understanding Climate Debt simplistically do you fall into this trap. Likewise ‘Drop the Debt’ could be read in a simplistic way – as did the 2005 Make Poverty History campaign run mainly by Oxfam, the Gleneagles G8 ‘mobilizations’ (characterized by Bono and Geldof’s untenable victory claims), and the Global Call for Action Against Poverty’s white bands and Millennium Development Goals, which all stupidly encouraged debt relief alongside tighter subsequent relations with world financial, industrial, commodity and commercial circuitries.

**Does counting climate chaos lead to climate commodification?**

Most inaccurately, S&T claim that our CJ ‘demands for reparations justified by the notion of climate debt open a dangerous door to increased green capitalist investment in the Global South’. Yet the door has been wide open since 1997, when
the mainstream greens adopted the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) as a North-South financing strategy. Climate Debt analysis does the exact opposite: delink reparations obligations from market mechanisms. This is so obvious a strategy that even African elites adopted it in their own negotiations rhetoric in late 2009.

In short, to promote Climate Debt does not require us to promote CDMs or other existing financing strategies that tie the South more deeply into Northern-controlled circuits of capital. On the contrary, the Climate Debt demand is why we can legitimately argue the South should halt export-oriented agriculture, extraction of minerals and petroleum, cheap manufacturing platforms and metals smelting, mass-produced consumer imports, further debt, further migrant labor supplies, further Foreign Direct Investment, further aid dependency, etc etc).

Moreover, S&T fail to recognize that Climate Debt is about reparations to people who are suffering damages by the actions of Northern overconsumption of environmental space – damages that can be proven even in courts (the way the Alien Tort Claims Act has proven useful in the US for some of the Niger Delta plaintiffs against Shell recently and for apartheid victims).

S&T further suggest that “Climate Debt” perpetuates a system that assigns economic and financial value to the biosphere, ecosystems and in this case a molecule of CO2’, and that ‘Everyone from Vestas to the Sudanese government to large NGOs agree on this fundamental principle: that the destruction of nature and its consequences for humans can be remedied through financial markets and trade deals and that monetary value can be assigned to ecosystems.’

Even if S&T’s political conclusion is wrong, their resistance to quantification of nature is understandable and commendable. Yet it’s passé, particularly given the CJ movement’s hostility to – and track record fighting – carbon markets. Under capitalism, after all, everything gets commodified, and it seems to me that the optimal Climate Debt narrative involves recognizing this problem, to insist on explicitly compensation for damages done by climate chaos to the South (especially islands, Africa, Bangladesh and other vulnerable sites), and then, yes, to make a rough estimate of this damage. The point is both financing compensation (for ‘adaptation’ – i.e. survival) and disincentivizing further climate damage by penalizing the polluters.

Climate Debt analyst Joan Martinez-Alier responds to this kind of critique by acknowledging, ‘although it is not possible to make an exact accounting, it is necessary to establish the principal categories and certain orders of magnitude in order to stimulate discussion.’ Once we have generated discussion about the damages done to South climate victims (including their inability to use the environmental space that is occupied by the North), next comes the logical demand for reparations. To refuse on principle to make any kind of quantification, as do S&T, is to refuse to acknowledge that damage is being done – and then to refuse to halt it.
That’s Washington’s revolting viewpoint, of course, as was stated repeatedly by Obama Administration officials in Copenhagen: ‘Don’t owe, won’t pay’ – while the president’s Kenyan relatives are amongst the first serious victims.

Alliances with enemies?

S&T then condemn Copenhagen CJ activists for insufficient militancy, which they trace to the inside-outside strategy. S&T’s mistake is understating the possibility for a large-scale walk-out from the Bella Centre, which appeared the most likely scenario until December 17th, when the African Union (AU) delegation lost spine. Prior to that point, it really did appear that Copenhagen might be ‘seattled’ by virtue of a denial of consensus by the AU, small islands and Bolivarian countries, similar to the outcome of the 1999 Seattle and 2003 Cancun World Trade Organization ministerial summits. What happened to the first two core groups between the 16th and 18th of December is unclear, but by Friday the AU and small islands had nearly all been pounded into submission, i.e., allowing the UN to ‘note’ the Accord.

Optimally, the AU delegates would have walked out, as was threatened as early as August, and as was dress-rehearsed the month before in a Barcelona meeting. But the elites running the AU – especially Zenawi of Ethiopia and Jacob Zuma of South Africa – took the AU in the usual direction, to work against the interests of the African masses and environment. One lesson we must draw is that the CJ activists did not sufficiently weaken the Northern negotiators and provide enough support to these Southern elites. Another is that the AU elites cannot be trusted, full stop (and I for one was mistaken by the extent of Zenawi’s militant rhetoric – we call this ‘talk left, walk right’ – from August-November).

But on December 14 we didn’t know the extent of the coming sell-out, so at that stage, CJ activists expressed the sense that the South elites might indeed repeat the Seattle/Cancun walk-outs – albeit as Naomi Klein put it, this would be ‘nothing like Seattle’ insofar as back in 1999 there was virtually no connection between the African elites who walked out and the street militants (only a couple of NGOs, Third World Network and Seatini, had feet in both camps). Indeed the final lesson of Copenhagen is that the only really reliable government to support CJ principles is Bolivia’s, perhaps adding Cuba and Venezuela (though petro-socialism is a contradiction in terms).

Looking ahead, only those sleeping through Copenhagen will have any expectation that in November the bulk of state delegations, the multilaterals and the mainstream green movement (WWF, IUCN, EDF, NRDC, etc) will do anything useful at Mexico’s COP 16. Given that reality, only a very few outliers in the CJ movement, such as Greenpeace, will be asking ‘our political leaders’ – as TckTckTck chair Kumi Naidoo described them in a widely circulated AP article on December 24 – to do better next time.
Instead, like James Hansen, the CJ movement has (or should have) wised up to the need for further Copenhagen-style global elite gridlock (e.g. in the US Senate where failure to generate a climate bill will be welcome in coming months since no legislation is on the table that will improve matters), and hence direct actions of a much more serious nature at local and national scales, e.g. keep the oil in the soil and coal in the hole, and protest at environmental regulatory agencies and planning commissions that are not doing their job properly.

**Militants demobilized?**

S&T claim that ‘the bureaucratization of the antiglobalization movement (or its remnants), with the increased involvement from NGOs and governments, has been a process that manifested itself in World Social Forums and Make Poverty History rallies’, a fair point. Though still brimming with potential, the WSF was always mainly a talk shop. MPH was, from the start, opposed to what S&T call ‘antiglobalization’, and its core force, Oxfam, called itself ‘globophile’ as against our movement’s ‘globophobes’. Sure, some global justice components are bureaucratized, but others – like CJ – show a very healthy radical orientation.

S&T claim that CJ activists were ‘asked by these newly empowered managers of popular resistance to focus solely on supporting actors within the UN framework’, but there are no names or organizations identified to go back for an accountability check, aside from Greenpeace. Indeed, Greenpeace embodies some extreme contradictions. In South Africa, we’ve criticized their applause of the Zuma government at the outset of Copenhagen for being a ‘star’ (thanks to Pretoria’s lies about potential emissions cuts), i.e., classical Greenpeace malpractice of parachuting into a place they don’t know and doing great damage by stumbling around, mismessaging and hogging the airwaves with their brand and ability to carry out effective publicity stunts (in SA, Greenpeace asked Zuma to attend Copenhagen by placing a high profile sign with this request around the neck of the main statue of Nelson Mandela, and Zuma not only did so in order to defend SA’s lamentable emissions and new coal-fired power plants, but on December 18 was one of five core leaders to sign Obama’s public relations gimmick). I hope the new Greenpeace director, Kumi Naidoo (from Durban), can turn that around, though his statement on December 24 wasn’t encouraging: ‘One thing our political leaders have learned is that they have to up their game’.

S&T allege that ‘solidarity with the Global South’ was conflated with ‘a handful of NGO bureaucrats and allied government leaders’. As one who applauded Zenawi’s walk-out threat as early as last August – mindful of his tyrannical role, to be sure – I’ll plead guilty to misreading the potential for fully settling Copenhagen, and likewise I recognize that the new CJ movement in South Africa was not as effective in undoing the enormous damage of SA government officials as it could have been. But that just means much tougher analysis and better organizing is needed in future.
There are certainly some in the CJ movement who would put the North-South contradiction ahead of internal class conflict as a priority for struggle, and while I’m not one of those, that tension is openly recognized and has been the source of frank debating as this broad global movement is organized quickly, without secretariats and enforced norms/values/processes. It’s not easy, and requires constructive criticism, not a writing-off of the nascent CJ movement.

Romanticizing the 1999 WTO shutdown – ‘Ten years ago, resistance to transnational capital went hand in hand with resistance to corrupt governments North and South that were enabling the process of neoliberal globalization’ – S&T forget that in Seattle and Cancun four years later, there was plenty of celebrating in the streets when the African elites denied consensus and broke up the WTO ministerials.

S&T claim that ‘Those who came to pose a radical alternative to the COP15 in the streets found their energy hijacked by a logic that prioritized attempts to influence the failing summit, leaving street actions uninspired, muffled and constantly waiting for the promised breakthroughs inside the Bella Center that never materialized.’ As I understand it, though, the only real breakthrough that CJ movement people had hoped for, until around December 17th, was a walkout by the AU, AOSIS and ALBA.

**Did Copenhagen wreck CJ’s future?**

But the final outcome wasn’t bad: no legitimacy, a carbon market crash in subsequent days, and CJ movement building. Yet S&T believe that ‘the display of inside outside unity that the main action on the 16th attempted to manifest was a complete failure and never materialized,’ way too negative a conclusion. The December 16th protest action was a partial success, and certainly the beatings that many suffered trying to get out from the Bella Centre unveiled the UN process as profoundly flawed, if even those basic rights of expression were denied.

S&T therefore assume that ‘An important opportunity to launch a militant movement with the potential to challenge the very foundations of global ecological collapse was successfully undermined leaving many demoralized and confused.’ But only people who had the mistaken impression that Copenhagen would generate elite consciousness and action about climate were despondent. I don’t think that category includes any CJ militant realists.

S&T are simply wrong to conclude that in the process, the CJ movement ‘discarded the most promising elements of the antiglobalization struggles: the total rejection of all market and commodity-based solutions, the focus on building grassroots resistance to the capitalist elites of all nation-states, and an understanding that diversity of tactics is a strength of our movements that needs to be encouraged.’ The first two are obviously false claims, while the third is a matter of conjunctural analysis. I’m willing to hear a scenario in which more militant activities outside would have genuinely changed the process, but it strikes me that it could have degenerated into adventurism without doing anything more durable for movement.
building, mass concientization on the issues, and delegitimation of the elites. Copenhagen was actually a successful moment if we take those as three objectives.

This is, after all, a movement in its early stages, and if the long tradition of protests for democracy and social justice in Mexico are any guide, and if Cancun in 2003 and the 2006 Mexico City march of 10,000 against the World Water Forum (just as illegitimate a body as those deciding our climate future) are precedents for internationalism, then it will be worthwhile to again descend on the November 2010 Cancun COP and battle to get the issues raised properly – including big emissions cuts, big Climate Debt repayment and the decommissioning of carbon markets – and when the elites refuse the demands of science, environment and most of all radical Southern social movements, who will be there in much greater numbers than in Copenhagen, then the momentum will have decisively shifted away from the centrist NGOs and mainstream environmentalists who do, certainly, aim to band-aid not transform the system.

S&T would have preferred CJ activists to confront ‘the hyper-green capitalism of Hopenhagen, the massive effort of companies such as Siemens, Coca-Cola, Toyota and Vattenfall to greenwash their image and the other representations of this market ideology within the city center.’ But the world’s CJ movements are, it seems to me, targeting both the corporates directly (especially at coalface in the Niger Delta, Ecuador, Australia, Europe, West Virginia and S&T’s own San Francisco), and the national and multilateral executive committees of the bourgeoisie who go to COPS. As they should.

S&T wrap by appropriately asking whether ‘the NGO non-profit industrial complex has become a hindrance’, but this question has long applied to the big corporate green groups, not the bulk of the CJ movement. Their first task, I think, might be to add specific and more constructive critiques, and in the process to build a more radical movement that can demand accountability. This is the way it has always been, and always will be. S&T have made a start, but too sloppily to be of much use as it is.
Curing post-Copenhagen hangover
Znet, Climate and Capitalism, MRZine, Links and others, 23 December 2009

In Copenhagen, the world’s richest leaders continued their fiery fossil fuel party last Friday night, ignoring requests of global village neighbors to please chill out.

Instead of halting the hedonism, Barack Obama and the Euro elites cracked open the mansion door to add a few nouveau riche guests: South Africa’s Jacob Zuma, China’s Jiabao Wen (reportedly the most obnoxious of the lot), Brazil’s Lula Inacio da Silva and India’s Manmohan Singh. By Saturday morning, still punch-drunk with power over the planet, these wild and crazy party animals had stumbled back onto their jets and headed home.

The rest of us now have a killer hangover, because on behalf mainly of white capitalists (who are having the most fun of all), the world’s rulers stuck the poor and future generations with vast clean-up charges – and worse: certain death for millions.

The 770 parts per million of carbon in the atmosphere envisaged in the Copenhagen Accord signatories’ promised 15% emissions cuts from 1990 levels to 2020 – which in reality could be a 10% increase once carbon trading and offset loopholes are factored in - will cook the planet, say scientists, with nine out of ten African peasants losing their livelihood.

The most reckless man at the party, of course, was the normally urbane, Ivy League-educated lawyer who, a year ago, we hoped might behave with the dignity and compassion behooving the son of a leading Kenyan intellectual. But in Obama’s refusal to lead the North to make 45% emissions cuts and offer payment of the $400 billion annual climate debt owed to Third World victims by 2020, Obama trashed not only Africa but also the host institution, according to 350.org leader Bill McKibben: ‘he blew up the United Nations.’

Economist Jeffrey Sachs charged Obama with abandoning ‘the UN framework, because it was proving nettlesome to US power and domestic politics. Obama’s decision to declare a phony negotiating victory undermines the UN process by signaling that rich countries will do what they want and must no longer listen to the “pesky” concerns of many smaller and poorer countries.’

The Accord is ‘insincere, inconsistent, and unconvincing’, Sachs continued, ‘unlikely to accomplish anything real. It is non-binding and will probably strengthen the forces of opposition to emissions reductions.’ Moreover, US secretary of state Hillary Clinton’s ‘announcements about money a decade from now are mostly empty words. They do not bind the rich countries at all.’
As Naomi Klein summed up, the Accord is ‘nothing more than a grubby pact between the world’s biggest emitters: I’ll pretend that you are doing something about climate change if you pretend that I am too. Deal? Deal.’

A handful of technocrats must also shoulder blame, including two key South African officials. A week earlier, before the politicians arrived, Pretoria bureaucrats Joanne Yawitch and Alf Wills were already criticized by leading Third World negotiator Lumumba Di-Aping for dividing the South’s main negotiating group, the G77. Yawitch then forced a humiliating apology from Di-Aping for his frank talk (to an African civil society caucus) about her treachery. On Friday night, Zuma did exactly what she had denied was underway: destroyed the unity of Africa and the G77.

The Pretoria team went to Copenhagen empowered by endorsements from the World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace – alongside gullible climate journalists – who took at face value a vaguely-promised 34% emissions cut below anticipated 2020 levels, even though absolute decline would only begin after 2030. Tristen Taylor of Earthlife Africa begged Pretoria for details and after two weeks of delays, learned Yawitch’s estimates were from a ‘Growth Without Constraint’ (GWC) scenario.

According to Taylor, ‘GWC is fantasy, essentially an academic exercise to see how much carbon South Africa would produce given unlimited resources and cheap energy prices.’ Officials had already conceded GWC was ‘neither robust nor plausible’ eighteen months ago, leading Taylor to conclude, ‘The SA government has pulled a public relations stunt.’ WWF and Greenpeace owe an explanation for their incompetence.

Then came Friday, which George Monbiot compared to the 1884-85 Berlin negotiations known as the ‘Scramble for Africa’, which divided-and-conquered the continent. The African Union was twisted and U-turned to support Zuma’s capitulation by the man appointed its climate leader, Meles Zenawi. In September, the Ethiopian dictator claimed, ‘If need be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that threatens to be another rape of our continent.’

But he didn’t walk out, he walked off his plane in Paris on the way to Copenhagen, into the arms of Nicolas Sarkozy. The fateful side deal, according to Mithika Mwenda of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), is ‘undermining the bold positions of our negotiators and ministers represented here, and threatening the very future of Africa.’

Not only did Zuma and Zenawi surrender on emissions cuts, but also on demanding full payment of the North’s climate debt to the South. ‘Meles wants to sell out the lives and hopes of Africans for a pittance,’ said Mwenda. ‘Every other African country has committed to policy based on the science.’

Clinton and the US team refused to acknowledge the North’s vast climate debt, owed not only for climate damage but for excessive use of environmental space. Huffed
Washington’s chief climate negotiator, Todd Stern, ‘the sense of guilt or culpability or reparations - I just categorically reject that.’

Bolivian ambassador to the United Nations Pablo Solon replied, ‘Admitting responsibility for the climate crisis without taking necessary actions to address it is like someone burning your house and then refusing to pay for it. We are not assigning guilt, merely responsibility. As they say in the US, if you break it, you buy it.’

Stern’s aversion to ‘culpability’ translates into rejection of his own government’s straightforward ‘polluter pays’ principle as well as the foundational concepts of the Superfund, responsible for cleaning toxic waste dumps across the US.

Worse, if the Copenhagen Accord is widely endorsed by February 1, much of the promised funding would flow via notoriously corrupt Clean Development Mechanism projects which often do great damage in local settings. According to the Accord, ‘We decide to pursue opportunities to use markets to enhance the cost-effectiveness of and to promote mitigations actions.’

But carbon markets continue failing, as long predicted by the Durban Group for Climate Justice and more recently by http://www.storyofcapandtrade.org. Last Thursday, the European Union’s Emissions Trading Scheme anticipated the feeble Copenhagen outcome – including a defunct forest offsets deal - by dropping 5%. The benchmark price is just 13.66 euros, less than half the peak of mid-2008, far lower than required to attract renewable energy investments.

According to European Climate Exchange director Patrick Birley, ‘We were hoping that a deal in Copenhagen would open up new opportunities for emissions trading. That expectation has now faded’.

This leaves South Africa and the others as accomplices to an historic climate crime that cannot be covered up. The claim that post-apartheid Pretoria only looks after itself has often been made elsewhere on the continent. For example, former president Thabo Mbeki’s nickname at the World Economic Forum’s mid-2003 meeting in Mozambique was ‘the George Bush of Africa’, as the Sunday Times reported.

Climate damage to Africa will include much more rapid desertification, more floods and droughts, worse water shortages, increased starvation, floods of climate refugees jamming shanty-packed megalopolises, and the spread of malarial and other diseases. Ironically, Obama’s and Zuma’s own rural relatives in Kenya and KwaZulu-Natal will be amongst the first victims of the Accord.

Did Zuma know what he was doing, acting in Copenhagen on behalf of major mining/metals corporations, which keep SA’s ruling party lubricated with cash, ‘black economic empowerment’ deals and jobs for cronies, and which need higher
SA carbon emissions so as to continue receiving the world’s cheapest electricity, and which then export their profits to London and Melbourne?

Perhaps, but on the other hand, two other explanations – ignorance and cowardice – were, eight years ago, Zuma’s plausible defenses for promoting AIDS denialism in 2000. He helped Mbeki during the period in which 330,000 South Africans died due to Pretoria’s refusal to supply anti-retroviral medicines (as a Harvard Public Health School study showed). To his credit, Zuma reversed course by 2003, as public pressure arose from the Treatment Action Campaign and its international allies. That’s exactly what the main local activist network, Climate Justice Now! South Africa, must repeat, or otherwise permit Zuma to remain a signatory to a far worse genocide.

In the US, given that Obama’s counterproductive cap-and-trade legislation is grid-locked in the Senate, the logical response – if he cares a whit about the climate – is to compel the Environmental Protection Agency to start shrinking greenhouse gas emissions by the worst polluters through its recent ‘endangerment’ finding, to locate serious resources (e.g. through Third World debt cancellation) to pay carbon debt damages that can finance adaptation for climate victims, and to formally decommission the nascent US carbon markets, which delay the needed structural change towards a post-carbon economy. None of these strategies need congressional authorization.

In South Africa, Zuma should do exactly the same. Neither will, of course.

So uncivil society will have to take up the slack and apply direct pressure, starting with the slogan ‘leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole and the tarsand in the land!’ Indeed the most effective antidote to the post-Copenhagen hangover came from environmentalists – most visibly, Greenpeace - stretching from Australia to Africa to Appalachia to Alberta.

On December 20, on a bridge leading to the world’s largest coal port, in Newcastle, Australia’s Rising Tide activists blocked a train for 7.5 hours, with 23 arrests.

In South Africa, groundWork, Earthlife and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance are amongst the country’s serious environmentalists trying to keep coal in the hole, by protesting the recently-announced $3.75 billion World Bank loan to Eskom (which helps fund the vast Medupi coal-fired plant), increased coal exports from Richards Bay, ultra-cheap electricity for aluminium smelters and mines, filthy operations of Sasol oil-to-coal, a new dirty oil refinery near Port Elizabeth, and a proposed Durban-Johannesburg pipeline which will double fuel flow to Africa’s least sustainable city.

Up the Atlantic Coast, the climate’s and the people’s main ally is the militancy which keeps Niger Delta oil in the soil. The Port Harcourt-based NGO Environmental Rights Action, led by visionary Nnimmo Bassey, links local destruction to global climate
chaos. Sabotage of oil extraction is the consistent tactic of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, which ended a two month ceasefire by attacking a Shell and Chevron pipeline six hours after the Copenhagen Accord was signed.

In Appalachia, West Virginia’s Climate Ground Zero activists have, according to a December 19 report by Vicki Smith, ‘chained themselves to giant dump trucks, scaled 80-foot trees to stop blasting and paddled boots online into a 9 million-gallon sludge pond. They’ve blocked roads, hung banners and staged sit-ins. Virginia-based Massey Energy claims a single 3 1/2-hour occupation cost the company $300,000.’

And in Canada on December 20, anti-tarsands environmentalist Ingmar Lee climbed a flagpole at the British Columbia parliament to protest carbon crimes by prime minister Stephen Harper, provincial premier Gordon Campbell and their ally Tzeporah Berman from the corrupted NGO ForestEthics. At the Canadian High Commission on London’s Pall Mall last week, Camp for Climate Action activists offered solidarity to Alberta’s indigenous Canadian tarsands victims by cutting down the maple-leaf flag, drowning it in crude oil, and then locking down on an upstairs balcony.

So if only two things were accomplished in Copenhagen, they were the unveiling of Pretoria, Delhi, Beijing and Brasilia as willing criminal accomplices to the Washington/Brussel/Tokyo/Melbourne/Ottawa axis, and the rise of Climate Justice Action, Climate Justice Now!, 350.org and parallel movements whose hundreds of thousands of protesters swarmed streets of the world’s cities.

The next question is whether in 2010, before the next fiasco in Mexico, the latter can cancel the former. We all depend upon an affirmative answer.
Countering critics of a cap-and-trade critique
ZNet, Counterpunch, 15 December 2009

Eight million people viewed Annie Leonard’s The Story of Stuff video since December 2007, and her new nine-minute Story of Cap and Trade (http://www.zmag.org/zvideo/3310) received 400,000 hits in the two weeks after its December 1 launch.

The film, produced by Free Range Studios, was developed in collaboration with the Durban Group for Climate Justice and Climate Justice Now! networks, which joined Climate Justice Action and other networks to put tens of thousands of activists on the streets of Copenhagen, London and dozens of other cities in recent days, demanding large emissions cuts, the payment of ecological debt to climate victims, and the decommissioning of carbon markets.

But critics abound, so what trends can we discern from the sometimes venomous feedback to Story of Cap and Trade, and what do these tell us about US and global climate politics? Consider three categories:

• libertarian climate change denialists;
• Big Green groups and other carbon trading supporters; and
• self-interested green capitalists.

To start, rightwing extremists are easiest to dismiss because they deny that climate change is a product of human/economic activity – but there’s a schizophrenic double agenda. For although they’re pro-business, libertarians like Fox tv’s Glenn Beck oppose market-based cap-and-trade schemes.

The most dangerous, Oklahoma Senator Jim Inhofe, denies ‘that we’re going to pass a cap-and-trade or we’re going to do something on emissions reduction,’ as he told the rightwing NewsMax agency on Sunday.

Australian climate denialists now control the official opposition party, having overthrown its leader last month due to his cap-and-trade endorsement, in the process halting the state’s proposed emissions trading scheme (http://agmates.ning.com/forum/topics/canberra-protest-rally-live?commentId=3535428%3AComment%3A9579).

Those of us fighting carbon markets certainly *don’t* want alliances with cretins like Inhofe or intrepid videoblogger Lee Doran. After a clumsy rebuttal to The Story of Stuff, Doran offered another zany video-attack (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWjGZNDEH-A), in which he first agrees with the demolition of cap-and-trade, but then replies to Annie’s charge that rich-world overconsumption victimizes those least responsible for global warming:
Annie: ‘Did you know that in the next century, because of the changing climate, whole island nations could end up underwater?’

Lee: ‘Yes, and islands will emerge from the water too, it’s part of the natural cycle of the planet.’ (minute 6)

Enough said about flat-earth libertarian ideologues.

In the second group we find both pro-market ‘green’ ideologues - i.e., ‘always find a market solution for a market problem!’ – and well-meaning environmental advocates operating under conditions not of their own choosing within Washington’s adverse balance of forces.

From at least 1997, when Al Gore shoved cap-and-trade into the Kyoto Protocol with the soon-to-be-broken promise that Washington would then endorse the climate treaty, many greens who earlier criticized market solutions concluded that the market was the only game in town, due to prevailing power relations.

But instead of trying to change those power relations, most of Washington’s Big Green groups held their noses and went to work expanding carbon trading from London to the Chicago Climate Exchange, joined by like-minded academics and green policy wonks.

Along the way some turned eco-egotistical about their chosen trade. Eric de Place of Sightline Institute takes the policy critique personally: ‘All these years that tens of thousands (sic) of folks like me have worked long hours at low pay (or no pay) to hash out a workable and effective climate policy and it turns out that our purported allies like Leonard would rather paint us as duplicitous bankers in pin-striped suits.’

Notwithstanding the long underpaid hours hustling cap-and-trade - wasted, if judged by the subsequent evidence of carbon market failures – de Place’s injured tone is misplaced. As Annie did in fact acknowledge, ‘Some of my friends who really care about our future support cap and trade. A lot of environmental groups that I respect do too. They know it’s not a perfect solution and don’t love the idea of turning our planet’s future over to these guys, but they think that it is an important first step and that it's better than nothing.’

However, as the film demonstrates, carbon trading is not better than nothing, it’s far worse than nothing. As the US’s top climate scientist, James Hansen, insisted in the New York Times last week, a Senate bill or Copenhagen deal based on cap-and-trade are indeed worse than no bill, no deal: carbon trading ‘actually perpetuates the pollution it is supposed to eliminate’ (www.nytimes.com/2009/12/07/opinion/07hansen.html).

Ideologically, the market environmentalists risk sliding down a dangerous slope. For instance, amongst conservationists in both Southern Africa (where I live) and
Seattle (where de Place lives) this question has been posed: should markets be relied upon to preserve threatened wildlife, even endangered species?

In our case, the challenge involves rhinos and elephants whose ivory tusks attract murderous poachers seeking riches in the East Asian aphrodisiac markets. Poachers have reduced the big animals’ populations dramatically in recent decades. In the Pacific Northwest, instead of aphrodisiacs, macho trophy hunters seek coastal grizzly bears for their fireplace mantels.

Market-environmentalists react with a simple formula, which – to quote Robert Mugabe – reduces life to a commodity: ‘They must pay to stay’ (http://baraza.wildlifedirect.org/2008/03/10/illegal-wildlife-trade-is-fueling-wars-in-africa/). Mugabe and his allies seduce hunters to visit Zimbabwe in order to maintain a ‘sustainable’ herd for the killing pleasure of rich tourists (not ordinary Zimbabweans’ viewing pleasure).

De Place, too, defends the trophy industry: ‘I’m not sure that hunting is bad for the species being hunted’ (http://www.grist.org/article/to-save-a-species-shoot-here - and for a rebuttal by the Raincoast Conservation Foundation, see http://www.grist.org/article/raincoast-responds-to-eric-de-place ).

David Roberts of Grist (http://www.grist.org/article/2009-12-01-annie-leonard-misses-the-mark-her-new-video-story-cap-and-trade/) also suffers pro-trading panic, calling the film ‘the perfect representation of all the confusion and misplaced focus that plagues the green left right now.’ In contrast, he confesses, ‘I’m generally viewed among greens as a defender of cap-and-trade—or, in the less charitable version, a defender of the “party line,” a shill for the administration, a sell-out “insider,” whatever.’

Quite. Roberts cannot defend the US and EU cap-and-trade systems’ free pollution allowances and billions of tons of offsets, rebutting that we should criticize not carbon markets, simply prevailing legislation. But the dreadful Waxman-Markey and Kerry-Boxer carbon-trading bills were complemented in mid-December by Senator Joe Lieberman - ‘This is the market-based system for punishing polluters previously known as “cap and trade” – to now include offshore drilling for oil and natural gas, nuclear energy and ‘clean coal’ scamming.

Another new bill offered by Senators Maria Cantwell and Sue Collins last week was endorsed by de Place and his colleague Alan Durning even though it has only a 4% emissions reduction target for 2020 from 1990 levels. Go figure, the author of the great 1992 anti-consumption book How Much is Enough?, Durning, now calls this irresponsibly low target ‘solid’ (http://www.grist.org/article/2009-12-11-cantwells-cap-and-trade-bill-almost-genius/).

Ideally Kerry, Lieberman et al will be punished by Washington’s grid-lock, as the bills suffocate in Capitol Hill’s corporate pollution – a good thing, since their death
would at least preserve the existing Clean Air Act, which all the main legislators except Cantwell-Collins threaten to gut.

Roberts grows yet more defensive on matters of principle: ‘I don’t know why the green left has decided that markets are bad, in and of themselves, but it seems both politically unwise and substantively thin.’ He *doesn’t know why*? Only a year after the world’s worst market failure in recorded history, with global trade and financial indicators far lower after eighteen months than a similar period in 1929-31?!

Aside from concern about the self-destructive tendency of financial markets which host carbon trading (witness the EU Emissions Trading Scheme collapses in April 2006 and October 2008), the green left offers many substantively thick arguments why business environmentalism is flawed, and why commodifying natural resources - like the air, in carbon trading - generates systemic market failures.

For example, Africa’s greatest political economist, Samir Amin, has just penned a damning attack on environmental markets (http://seminario10anosdepois.wordpress.com/2009/12/01/the-battlefields-chosen-by-contemporary-imperialism/#more-37), as has University of Oregon professor John Bellamy Foster (http://sociology.uoregon.edu/faculty/foster.php): The Ecological Revolution: Making Peace with the Planet (http://www.monthlyreview.org/books/ecologicalrevolution.php). Either can assist Roberts to plug the gaping holes in his pro-market consciousness.

Roberts doesn’t seem to understand the severe dangers associated with an anticipated $3 trillion in carbon trades by 2020, which will become the basis for further trade in financial derivatives, for he derides the film’s warning about Wall Street speculation: ‘Leonard et al. seem instead to have decided that “market Goldman Sachs derivatives bugga bugga!” suffices.’

But Roberts, de Place and NRDC policy director David Doniger (http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/ddoniger/the_rest_of_the_story_of_cap_a.html) dare not trash the film’s proposed solutions, such as stronger EPA regulatory enforcement and citizen activism (e.g. West Virginia mountaintop defense). There is greater potential to push the EPA into action – in spite of misgivings by NewEnergyNews’ Herman Trabish (http://newenergynews.blogspot.com/2009/12/oversimple-story-of-cap-and-facts.html) – than to win legislation regulating carbon within ill-functioning, untransparent financial markets, in which ‘too big to fail’ deregulatory freedom was amplified by Bush-Obama’s 2008-09 bailouts.

The third critical group includes green technocrats with financial self-interest. That may explain why at least one of them – Adam Stein from TerraPass – is so very cross, absurdly entitling his attack on the film, ‘Why does Annie Leonard hate the environment?’ (http://www.terrapass.com/blog/posts/why-does-annie-leonard-

Stein claims, ‘cap and trade and carbon taxes are functionally equivalent policies’ – but they’re not. As Hansen points out, carbon fees would easily withstand the scamming and price volatility so notorious in the carbon markets.

Ultimately, for Stein, ‘one criterion clearly stands above all others: which policy actually stands a chance of passage in the US Congress?’ Unmentioned, for obvious reasons (the Congress being a wholly-owned subsidiary of big business) is that a carbon trading policy only enjoys the ’strong support’ of a meager 2% of the US voting population, who ‘favor a carbon tax over cap-and-trade by nearly two-to-one,’ according to a Hart Research survey (http://www.sustainablebusiness.com/index.cfm/go/news.display/id/19351).

But given Washington’s adverse power relations, a genuine climate policy must avoid the corporate-ruled Congress for now, and instead focus on command/control by the EPA. (To be sure, a stronger EPA would also rule many of TerraPass’s own projects – especially those methane-electricity landfill conversions that undermine zero-waste strategies – as unworthy of green investment.)

Of all the film’s supposed errors, says Stein, ‘my favorite for sheer chutzpah, if not for actual importance, is when Leonard dings Kyoto because “energy costs jumped for consumers.”’

But Stein may want to look at what European consumers now see: no net emissions reductions on the one hand, and on the other, massive criminality in the EU’s carbon trading scheme (Europol estimates five billion euros have been stolen in tax fraud, as just one example), alongside regressive energy price increases (the poorest suffer a much higher burden of expenses than the wealthy, and are least able to make the transition to the post-carbon economy).

So when the film refers to higher EU energy costs, this is not chutzpah, it’s critical realism. No one more than Annie is committed to raising consumption costs appropriately so as to deter waste; Story of Stuff’s viewers learned of unaccounted-for eco-social externalities that should be internalized in her $4.99 radio, for instance.

Actually, the most telling contribution to the critiques of our cap-and-trade critique comes from an unlikely source: Charles Krauthammer (http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/10/AR2009121003163.html). The despicable neocon columnist fused all three hostile narratives when he wrote, last Friday, against the EPA: ‘Congress should not just resist this executive overreaching, but trump it: Amend clean-air laws and restore their original intent by excluding CO2 from EPA control and reserving that power for Congress and future legislation. Do it
now. Do it soon. Because Big Brother isn’t lurking in CIA cloak. He’s knocking on your door, smiling under an EPA cap.’

Sorry, the big brother who so frightens Krauthammer is far bigger than a beleaguered Washington environmental agency and far more dangerous to corporate profits than pro-market ‘green’ critics of The Story of Cap and Trade actually comprehend: simply, a new global movement known as Climate Justice.
Reproducing Life as Guide to Climate Politics
Women in Action, December 2009

“The climate crisis shows us the impossibility of infinite growth on a finite planet. We cannot continue business as usual, but we must radically re-calibrate how we consume and commodify nature, given the limits to our capacity to sustain and reproduce life.”

This is what Nicola Bullard of Focus on the Global South pointed out at a recent conference in Johannesburg, where the audience was reminded of the same approach that feminists brought to Southern African political economy many years ago. This approach suddenly made sense, when writ large, moving from our region to the planetary scale.

During the 1960s to 1970s, a series of South African male intellectuals argued that the apartheid system or the systematic discrimination against black people, was rooted in the corporations’ need for migrant labour, fusing race-class oppression. Behind the typical black male worker who laboured in the mines throughout the first century of gold mining, prior to Nelson Mandela’s election in 1994, was a woman. She provided three hidden and un-costed subsidies, as feminists quickly taught us, using the idea of the ‘care economy’.

First, in rural Bantustans - the ecologically-degraded apartheid “homelands” - women raised the migrant worker through childhood, as the state was non-existent or merely a religious mission station. Household reproduction was never subsidised, unlike urban residents who had access to state childcare and school systems. Second, rural women were compelled to look after sick workers who were tossed back home until they recovered, due to the lack of health insurance, as offered by states and companies in the West after workers battled long and hard. Finally, when the male worker was too old to work and returned to the Bantustans without adequate pension support, the women again took on the responsibility for care-giving.

Of course, it’s not just a matter of apartheid capitalism. The reproduction of global labour power has been universally subsidised by women’s unpaid work. But these days matters look more like the extreme South African system, with state and capital lowering the “social wage” and dismantling social policy gains that have been achieved through decades of struggle. This process extends as well into reproductive health and rights that feminist movements have consistently advocated.

Neoliberal policies and corporate power have resulted in labour outsourcing, casualisation and informalization. With life more precarious as a result, women are the safety net for household reproduction, in addition to being the most vulnerable and disposable of all labour sectors.
But they have also been the driving force in resisting this process here, overcoming micropatriarchy within communities and leading most of our grassroots campaigns on issues such as water decommodification, access to AIDS medicines and other successful strategies to enlarge or defend the commons and sustain life.

As the world recession spreads, global capitalism is becoming much more like apartheid: predatory against women and the environment. Drawing on evidence from Southern Africa, Rosa Luxemburg demonstrated this tendency in her own analysis of imperialism back in 1913: “Accumulation of capital periodically bursts out in crises and spurs capital on to a continual extension of the market. Capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organisations.”

Increasingly, such non-capitalist life arrangements rely upon women and the communities that they guide. And yet on the other hand, Luxemburg continued, capitalism cannot “tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself. Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible.”

Luxemburg would not have been surprised at how the destructive force of capital drives men into migrancy, spreads HIV/AIDS and causes rising domestic violence. Such disintegration is always contested by women’s personal strengths and mutual aid systems as well as other anti-/non-capitalist reactions, plus campaigns – successful in South Africa (unique on the continent) – to guarantee reproductive healthcare, including the right to a safe abortion.

Teresa Brennan made the link from the household scale to climate change, the biggest crisis women will face in the coming decades. She argued that, like the need to end Bantustan migrant labour systems, rearranging spatial and re/production arrangements is crucial to ending the unfair role of women in subsidising capitalism’s destructive irrationality.

In her 2003 book, Globalisation and Its Terrors: Daily Life in the West, Brennan wrote, “The closer to home one’s energy and raw material sources are, the more one’s reproduction costs stay in line: paid and domestic labour will be less exploited, the environment less depleted.” The need now to limit the “distance over which natural resources can be obtained” is obvious given how shipping, trucking and air transport contribute to carbon emissions.

That is why Bullard’s arguments are critical if one believes (as a few neoliberals insist) that globalisation of industry has helped break up feudal-patriarchal relations, drawing women out of oppression into Mexican maquiladore or Bangkok sweatshops. Such export-led growth is now an increasingly untenable “development” strategy, and in any case always generated extreme uneven development, drawing on the women’s care economy for its hidden subsidies.
Bullard likened the climate negotiations to those of the World Trade Organisation (WTO): “By and large, countries are defending their narrow economic interests and the rich countries in particular are trying to grab the last slice of the atmospheric pie.”

Although the Kyoto Protocol is deeply flawed, especially the low targets and reliance on market mechanisms, Bullard asserted that attempts by the US to get rid of Kyoto are dangerous. “It is critical to retain the rich countries’ legally binding commitment in any future agreement and any alternative that could emerge at this stage would be much worse.”

She broke down the narrative at Copenhagen into three discourses: business as usual, catastrophism, and climate justice. The first comes from business and most Northern governments while the second is advanced by some smaller and vulnerable countries as well as many NGOs. Catastrophism also “leads to dangerous last-gasp strategies such as geo-engineering, nuclear and carbon markets.”

Third, climate justice is supported by a widespread civil society movement launched in 2007 at the Bali negotiations. It now includes the Latin American governments of Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador and Venezuela.

Bullard explained, “If you look at what’s on the table and the balance of forces, whatever comes out of Copenhagen will be bad. On the other hand, with Copenhagen’s failure, there are a lot of possibilities for shifting the discourse.” She reminded us of the demands of Climate Justice Now! for restoring planetary sanity:

- The North must repay its ‘ecological debt’ to the South
- There is a need to subordinate climate strategies to human rights agreements, especially those that protect women and indigenous people
- A moratorium on fossil fuel
- A just transition for workers
- Unconditioned public finance under control of the “creditors”
- Open-source global commons on sharing climate-friendly technology and innovations

Feminists working on climate change are connecting the dots between these various oppressions, to warn how, in times of crisis, their opponents are emboldened. In a major new report, “Looking Both Ways”, the group Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice document Hurricane Katrina’s deeper political damage: “Following a disaster, women of colour – particularly African American women, low-income women and immigrant women - are routinely targeted as burdens of the state and the cause of over population, environmental degradation, poverty, crime and economic instability.”
It has never been more important to draw together eco-feminist and eco-socialist insights to link issues, analyses, challenges and alliance-building efforts. There is no more crucial period than the aftermath of a failed elite process in Copenhagen.

Bullard teased the NGO-driven “Tck tck tck” campaign because it asks plaintively for an ambitious, fair and binding deal in Copenhagen – without asking what that deal really means. "If you believe in the ticking of the clock, you’ll do anything. So stop listening to the ticking of the clock and start listening to the voices of the people, especially women!"

Sources:


‘False solutions’ to climate crisis amplify eco-injustices
with Khadija Sharife, in Women in Action, December 2009

The idea that carbon trading will save the world from global warming is not only foolish but also deadly, as Durban activists inspired by a feminist environmentalist learned.

The struggle of Sajida Khan (1952-2007), a self-taught ecologist based in Durban, South Africa, is instructive for any of us worried about the climate. Attempting to shut the dump that ultimately killed her, Khan dedicated half her life to a contest with international corporations, the World Bank and heartless municipal bureaucrats. She did so in a courageous manner that helped us localize ecofeminist theory and international feminist anti-capitalism, while remaining acutely aware of race, class and gender conflicts within oppressed communities.

Africa’s biggest formal landfill, the Bisasar Road dump, can be found in the Clare Estate community of Durban, South Africa’s second largest city. Khan was raised in what was the traditionally Indian neighbourhood within Clare Estate, astride a nature reserve that spanned a small valley. In 1980, when she was 28, her surroundings were suddenly destroyed by apartheid officials. The peaceful reserve became an unending, stinking heap of rubbish, which until the late 1990s also included a medical waste incinerator. Khan believed that the neighborhood’s involuntary receipt of overwhelmingly wealthy white Durbanites’ droppings was the root cause of her two cancer cases, the latter of which was fatal.

The reason that Bisasar Road dump was not closed in the early 2000s notwithstanding a very substantial pressure campaign by Khan and 6000 residents, was a commitment by the World Bank to invest a potential $14.4 million grant in a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project to convert landfill methane emissions into electricity. With at least another 15 years of life left in the dump before it reached its maximum possible height, Durban officials (white men) celebrated the Bank’s interest at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development by ignoring the clamour (mainly by black women) to close it.

The officials aimed to draw out the methane, burn and flare it (with associated incineration hazards) so as to power turbines and link the resulting electricity back into the municipal grid. The ‘win-win’ strategy to capture the dump’s escaping methane – a greenhouse gas at least twenty times more potent than CO2 – would require the CDM subsidy so as to compete with South Africa’s cheap coal-fired national electricity grid.

Conflict and contradiction

Community opposition to the Bank’s CDM and demands for Bisasar Road’s closure were not universal. Apartheid segregated South Africa’s four main race groups into different areas. In addition to people of Indian origin like Khan, Clare Estate also
hosts thousands of poor ‘African’ and working-class ‘coloured’ residents. The Khan family built their middle-class house in the 1950s on Clare Road. Some members of the family still reside in the house overlooking (to the west) the dump, directly in the path of prevailing winds which continually coat the area with light landfill dust and disease-carrying flies.

As logical as the closure demand is, given the history of environmental racism, there are nevertheless conflicting opinions about how to handle this menacing neighbor. Starting in early 2005, the Abahlali baseMjondolo shackdwellers’ movement of Kennedy Road – also directly adjoining the landfill, to the north – did an extraordinary job struggling against adverse conditions and police repression (until in September 2009 many of the leaders were driven away by a vigilante thug attack apparently carried out by the ruling African National Congress so as to secure votes from the area). But throughout the 2000s, the Kennedy Road shackdwellers welcomed the opportunity to have several dozen of their members pick rubbish and informally recycle it while on the dump. Scores more shackdwellers once informally picked materials from the dump, until the municipality’s Durban Solid Waste limited access due to safety and health dangers.

There was not unity in this community, for Kennedy Road leaders accused Khan of threatening livelihoods and sabotaging the city’s offer of a handful of jobs and bursaries (in Uganda) in the event the CDM project got off the ground. Khan had used the word ‘informals’ to describe the shack settlement residents and once advocated that they be compensated and moved to areas nearby (as she herself desired for her family), sufficiently far from the dump (she recommended a buffer for all residents of 800 meters) to be safe from the windswept dust. At the nearby clinic, health workers confirmed that Kennedy Road residents suffer severely from asthma, sinusitis, pneumonia and even tuberculosis. The toxic body load is unknown, but the Cancer Society of South Africa deemed the area a ‘cancer hotspot’ because of the heavy metals and other dangerous substances that penetrate the water, air and shifting soils.

Khan had a profound empathy for people in the same proximity as cancer-causing and respiratory disease particulates, as she noted in an interview: ‘Recently a woman was buried alive. She died on the site [picking rubbish, killed by a dump truck offloading]. I could have saved her life.’

Ecofeminist anti-capitalism or Not-In-My-Back-Yard self-interest?

The term ‘ecofeminism’ was first used in Francois d’Eaubonne’s 1974 book Le Feminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death). Khan epitomized the lifelong commitment so many extraordinary women leaders show in their eco-justice struggles. She fell into a coma on 12 July 2007 and died three days later. An ordinary

21 Interview, September 25 2005.
middle-class victim of apartheid racism and patriarchy who equipped herself with
detailed knowledge of chemistry, public health and landfill economics, Khan
organised a landfill-closure petition campaign as well as a mass march during the
mid-1990s. After the popular mobilising ended because the African National
Congress-ruled Council enjoyed large voting majorities, Khan turned to the courts to
harass the city. As a Muslim woman, she waged her campaign at a time, as Durban
sociologist Ashwin Desai puts it, ‘when religious gate-keepers were reasserting
authority over the family. This involved the assertion of male dominance’. 23

She resisted, Desai testifies: ‘Sajida Khan was breaking another mould of politics.
During apartheid, opposition in her community was channeled through the male-
dominated Natal Indian Congress and Durban Housing Action Committee. But these
were bureaucratised struggles with the leaders at some distance from the rough-
and-tumble of local politics. She eschewed that. Her politics were immediately on
her doorstep. It was a politics that, gradually at first, made the links between the
local and the global. It was a kind of trailblazing politics that later was manifested in
what have become known as the “new social movements”. In contrast, her political
peers in the Congress tradition have built an impressive electoral machine but
ended up merely with votes for party candidates rather than a movement to
confront global apartheid and its local manifestations.’

Sometimes accused of waging her battle because of a selfish interest, her family’s
decoming property value, Khan rebutted, ‘No, no. It’s to do with pollution, and it
transcends race and colour’. Yet there were certainly class and, to some extent, race
and gender power relations at play – all of which were shaped by capital
accumulation at municipal, national and global scales. For example, as Khan
struggled for life, the toxic economy of Bisasar Road was being rebuilt by the
Durban municipality with the global capitalist master’s CDM tool. The campaign to
close apartheid’s dump may ultimately fail as a result of the various post-apartheid
forces whose interaction now generates overlapping, interlocking, ecosocial and
personal tragedies.

Still, if inhaling status quo pollution meant paying dearly with her health for so
many years, still, Khan died knowing she had been partially successful: at least
temporarily preventing a major World Bank investment and raising local/global
consciousness. Most importantly, she left us with a drive to transcend the inherited
conditions and mindsets into which apartheid categories have cemented
infrastructures and people.

But pessimistically, and realistically, without Khan’s energy and talent, it was
infeasible for Clare Estate residents from different and sometimes opposed
race/class backgrounds to forge more effective alliances against the municipality, at
least not in the short-term. It was only a matter of time before global capitalist

23 Interview, July 30 2007.
processes rolled over citizen opposition to Bisasar Road, facilitated by the money-hungry, neoliberal municipality, joined by Pretoria and Paris.

**Bisasar brings in the bucks**

For John Parkin, deputy head of the engineering at Durban Solid Waste, ‘What makes (the Bisasar Road CDM project) worthwhile is the revenue that can be earned from carbon credits’, estimated at 3.1 million certified emissions reduction credits, worth about $15 million, along with some 6-8 megaWatts of electricity over a 20 year lifespan. In late 2006, the French Development Agency pledged long-term loans of $8 million to Durban’s landfill gas projects (Bisasar is by far the largest of three), alongside the $1.3 million extended by South Africa’s Department of Trade and Industry. According to Durban city manager Mike Sutcliffe, ‘Landfill gas offers a viable renewable energy source only when linked to Carbon Finance or CDM.’

The World Bank had backed off in 2005 when Khan’s fame was at her height – e.g. the lead paragraph in the Washington Post’s analysis of the Kyoto Protocol when it came into effect that year24 was about Khan’s battle against CDMs – but still billed itself as a potential financer for the project. The Bank needed such offsets because of its portfolio of obscene climate-destroying credits, such as 130 fossil-fuel projects during the mid-2000s, 82% of which were designed to supply cheapened energy to the North. By way of counterweight, fewer than 5% of the Bank’s CDM projects constituted renewable energy projects.

In 2008, the Bank was replaced by an investment company, Tradings Emissions, which acquired the right to purchase one million emissions reduction credits. The firm’s investment advisor Simon Shaw termed Bisasar and the other two landfills ‘an important project, it is operational, it has a long term future and we anticipate registration shortly. These credits will be a useful addition to our portfolio.’ By March 2009, the municipality registered it on the United Nations’ list of CDM projects, as active through at least 2014.25

The four million cubic meters of potential Bisasar Road rubbish that is today’s remaining capacity – on top of 19 million cubic meters in the dump that are already exuding methane – will allow extraction of methane and damaging on-site conversion of electricity for many years to come. Khan believed that the gas should indeed be removed, but through nearby gas pipes, not burned and flared on site. Khan’s goal of Bisasar Road’s immediate closure with conversion of the gas for industrial use a long way from residential areas could have been achieved were there better financing systems available than the unstable carbon market (which flitted from $40/tonne at peak eighteen months ago to $18/tonne today).

---


But Khan required something bigger than we find in Durban and South African politics at present: a united red and green civil society front that can defeat the local-global capitalist-patriarchal rubbish industry, using a ‘zero waste’ philosophy that would create dozens - perhaps hundreds - of reliable jobs in recycling for Kennedy Road shackdwellers who, where needed, could (at their own volition) be suitably resettled with security of tenure, on stable land in the immediate vicinity. With such a political front in place and the municipality in post-neoliberal hands, the simultaneous termination and rehabilitation of the Bisasar Road dump could then proceed, as Khan had demanded, potentially with stable soil cover, vegetation and a new public space for the oppressed neighbours. The end of Thabo Mbeki’s neoliberal reign over South Africa from 1999-2008 offered a hope that such a front might emerge, but sadly it did not.

**Back to a eco-feminist future?**

Why have we not found the red/green combination? Perhaps because long-standing principles of eco-feminism still elude Durban civil society. Ecofeminist theory sheds light on struggles that unite Khan’s with the anonymous shackdweller’s who died on the dumpsite scratching out a living.

In the words of Kathleen Manion, ‘Certain ecologically damaging issues have more of a detrimental effect on women than on men, particularly as women tend to be more involved in family provisions and household management. Such problems include sustainable food development, deforestation, desertification, access to safe water, flooding, climate change, access to fertile land, pollution, toxic waste disposal, responsible environmental management with in companies and factories, land management issues, non-renewable energy resources, irresponsible mining and tree felling practices, loss of biodiversity (fuel, medicines, food). As household managers, women are the first to suffer when access to sustainable livelihoods is unbalanced. When the water becomes unpotable, the food stores dry up, the trees disappear, the land becomes untenable and the climate changes, women are often the ones who need to walk further and work harder to ensure their families survival.’

For a middle-class woman like Sajida Khan, just as for the impoverished woman killed on the dump, the struggle for reproduction was more costly than any of us can contemplate. High-profile heroines have led such struggles: for example Wangari Maathai fighting for Kenyan greenbelts; Erin Brockovich campaigning for clean water in Hinkley, California; Medha Patkar opposing big dams in India or Lois Gibbs advocating against toxins at Love Canal, New York. Others have written eloquently of Chipko tree huggers (Vandana Shiva) and the Nigerian Niger Delta’s women activists (Terisa Turner). In all these cases, including Bisasar Road, women’s defence

---

of immediate family and community is a compelling handle for a larger analysis of patriarchal power relations and anthropomorphism.

But though Khan did not find a way to work with all her neighbours as a result of huge political, class and race divides, her campaign against carbon trading using the Bisasar Road dump has at least brought this pilot project to the world’s attention, as an example of how ‘low-hanging fruit rots first’, to borrow the metaphor of Canadian CDM critic Graham Erion.27

Still, the attention she has gained for this cause only goes so far, as Desai observes: ‘Sajida’s main strategic flaw was the belief that by meticulous scientific presentation of the facts based upon thorough research, she could persuade the ruling class. Facts became the main weapon of struggle. But without an ongoing critical mass of people, once the World Bank was convinced she was right and dropped out - apparently the case by 2006, just as happened with the Narmada dams in India - then the domestic government stepped in to take up the slack. So eThekweni Municipality is now taking over from the World Bank and looking for investors because the bigger cadreship isn’t there to stop it. Facing down the World Bank was impressive and deserved the claim to a victory. But its one thing to tell truth to power, and Sajida was absolutely brilliant in defeating the system’s experts. I hosted one debate for the Mail & Guardian [South African weekly newspaper] in 2005, and she got a first round knockout. However, the corollary is that you must not just talk technically but also expose and defeat the power. And you need a much bigger mass movement to do that.’

Quoting Audrey Lourde, the great Australian ecofeminist-socialist Ariel Salleh might also find in Khan’s story an inspiring if as yet uncertain fight against capitalist patriarchy: ‘As an old feminist adage goes: “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”. For socialists, the capitalist class, its government cronies and lifestyle hangers on are the master and his house is the global public sphere. For ecofeminists, this is also true, but there is another master embodied in the private power relations that govern everyday life for women at home, at work and in scholarship. This is why we use the double construct capitalist patriarchal societies – where capitalism denotes the very latest historical form of economic and social domination by men over women. This double term integrates the two dimensions of power by recognising patriarchal energetics as a priori to capitalism. As reflexive ecosocialists know: the psychology of masculinity is actively rewarded by the capitalist system, thereby keeping that economy intact.’28

Carbon trading is the new rage of the world’s most maniacal financial capitalists, and it is no surprise that in their haste for fast profits, the bodies of women like

Khan are violated so terribly. And it is no wonder that those who knew Khan – such as members of the Durban Group for Climate Justice which she hosted at her house for its launch in October 2004 – are that much more inspired to fight back, knowing how hard Sajida did.
Copenhagen friends and foes
Muslim Views, December 2009

As MV went to press, two critical developments emerged in Copenhagen that ensure a disastrous climate deal will result on December 18, and that clarify why country blocs whose leaders include Presidents Barack Obama in Washington and Jacob Zuma in Pretoria are mainly to blame.

First, Obama announced he will arrive on the 18th, which signifies a deal has been secretly cooked up by Danish hosts, to the chagrin of African delegates and civil society activists who on December 8 engaged in vigorous protest, including the threat of an African walk-out. As revealed in a leaked draft text, that deal will let Obama off the hook, so he and his main congressional ally, Senator John Kerry, can avoid cutting US emissions using the technique known as ‘carbon trading’ (or in the US, ‘cap-and-trade’).

As the new 10-minute internet film – http://www.storyofcapandtrade.org – shows, the carbon trading strategy is full of the kind of scams and market failures you’d expect from the likes of Goldman Sachs and Enron.

Carbon trading allows financial markets to ‘privatize the air’ and manipulate pollution credits, permitting those buying the permits to continue polluting, business as usual. Under former environment minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk and with the support of big business, Pretoria wholeheartedly endorsed this strategy, whose projects are locally known as Clean Development Mechanisms.

Much more is needed from Obama. But to avoid making the required emissions cuts – small island states demand 45% CO2 cuts by 2020 and 85% by 2050 – Obama’s negotiators claim that he first needs Senate legislation (sponsored by Kerry).

This is not true. On December 8, the Center for Biological Diversity in San Francisco issued a report, “Yes, He Can”, with this conclusion: “The US Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the President has legal authority to bind the country internationally, by way of an ‘executive agreement,’ without submitting a treaty to the Senate for supermajority approval. In fact, Congress already has given the President specific authority to negotiate international agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

So if on December 18, Obama says he cannot make major emissions commitments in international negotiations, this is a fib. Moreover, according to the Center, “The President also could make an international commitment grounded in his power—and indeed, his duty—to enforce existing U.S. environmental laws” such as the Clean Air Act, which was recently interpreted to include CO2 as a dangerous pollutant.

But in service to the world’s worst polluters, Kerry’s legislation guts the Clean Air Act. As the Center puts it, “These laws could be implemented more quickly, and with
far greater scientific credibility, than any compromise cap-and-trade system that Congress might (or might not) someday enact. All President Obama has to do is promise the international community that he will use his power as the Chief Executive to enforce existing laws in a manner that effectively reduces the country’s greenhouse gas emissions.”

The second development in Copenhagen is a split between the high-polluting and low-polluting countries of the Third World. In addition to the planet-destroying role of the US government plus EU, Canada and Japan, quite a few other major polluters – including South Africa – are putting the self-interest of corporations ahead of planet and people. The main victims are small island states which are already submerging, and the bulk of the African continent.

The latter want a legally binding deal that is far stronger than the Kyoto Protocol. According to Ian Fry, chief negotiator for the island nation of Tuvalu, “Our future rests on the outcome of this meeting.” He and African delegates insist that CO2 be reduced to 350 parts per million, not the 450 ppm that Washington and Pretoria are happy to accept, notwithstanding that this might well lead to runaway climate change, with global temperature increases exceeding 2 degrees this century.

In one Copenhagen session, the lead G77 negotiator, Lumumba Di-Aping of Sudan, “sat silently, tears rolling down his face,” according to a report. Di-Aping said, simply, “We have been asked to sign a suicide pact,” explaining that in his home region, it was “better to stand and cry than to walk away.” For much of the continent, said Di-Aping, 2 degrees C globally meant 3.5 degrees C: “certain death for Africa”, a type of “climate fascism” imposed on Africa by polluters, in exchange for which the Third World would get a measly $10 billion per year in ‘fast track’ funding, but “$10 billion is not enough to buy us coffins”.

Agreeing with leading US climate scientist James Hansen, the Copenhagen deal on offer is “worse than no deal”, said Di-Aping, concluding, “I would rather die with my dignity than sign a deal that will channel my people into a furnace.”

The African position was amplified on December 8 by protesters from the Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance, chanting in the main Bella Centre auditorium, “Two degrees is suicide! One Africa! One Degree!”

This is where Pretoria’s venal self-interest – for the sake of the world’s biggest mining and metal companies, which still receive the world’s cheapest electricity from Eskom – come in. In addition to Washington, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, China, and India, the Pretoria official delegation is taking the lead in opposing stronger cuts, arguing – as did environment minister Buyelwa Sonjica in her main speech - that it would hinder South Africa’s ‘development’.

‘Development’? We should look in the mirror and be frank: we’re one of the world’s ugliest, meanest carbon tsotsis. It’s not only because of our extreme social inequality
which limits adequate, affordable electricity access to the wealthiest, but even moreso due to the metals and mining houses which use an inordinate share of SA electricity. Eskom’s CO2 emissions are many times worse per unit of per capita economic output than even the United States, that great climate satan.

Why? Shady decades-long deals done during apartheid are still in place, providing Anglo, Arcelor Mittal, BHP Billiton and their ilk with massive profits, which they export to London and Melbourne – in the process worsening SA’s extreme balance of payments deficit and driving the electricity price for the rest of us sky high.

As a result, deputy transport minister Jeremy Cronin last month suggested “phasing out aluminium smelters” in order to lower both emissions and Eskom tariff hikes. In early 2008 Standard Bank chairman Derek Cooper advocated cutting the smelters’ power source to avoid brownouts.

But on this very point, a crucial split has emerged in civil society, between the new Climate Justice Now! alliance of popular movements and progressive NGOs on the one hand, and the Climate Action Network of market-oriented environmentalists on the other. In the latter camp, a few ‘green’ agencies are making common cause with polluters and governments, and have not only endorsed Pretoria’s negotiating strategy in Copenhagen, but also carbon trading in spite of the fact that the European Union’s pilot Emissions Trading Scheme has conclusively failed.

The new social movement, Climate Justice Now (CJN), also calls for immediate reductions and a policy of keeping fossil fuels like oil in the soil, and coal in the hole. And CJN’s members in Earthlife Africa were instrumental in defeating Sasol’s carbon trading strategy earlier in 2009, and in making Sasol a leading candidate for the mock prize of most obnoxious polluter to be found lobbying here in Copenhagen (the ‘Angry Mermaid’ award, named after the famous harbour statue).

In contrast, the most visible and well-resourced NGO, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), is tightly allied with Pretoria’s obscure ‘Long Term Mitigation Scenario’, which its staff helped draft during van Schalkwyk’s reign. His successor, Sonjica, has apparently rejected Cronin’s wise counsel in order to maintain van Schalkwyk’s destructive trajectory: SA’s emissions will rise until 2025 thanks mainly to two huge new coal-fired powerplants, ‘plateau for a decade and then decline from 2035’, as she confirmed in a speech last month.

A very small change in wording was announced by Zuma, just before Copenhagen, so that the emissions cuts might start as early as 2030. (Actually, 2009 emissions were substantially lower across the world than in 2008 because of the economic crisis which especially drove down demand for coal, aluminium, steel and auto, leaving vast excess capacity in SA’s most pollution-intensive industries.)

Added Sonjica, ‘Without financial and technology support, it will not be possible to do more than what we are already doing.’ This is nonsense, of course (as Cronin
shows in an Umsebenzi article), and reflects mainly the agenda of the big vested interests which donate funds to the ruling party and its BEE buddies.

More optimistically, recall that eighteen months ago, Sonjica – then mining minister – initially backed the Australian titanium grab in the Wild Coast’s Xolobeni dunes, but community resistance forced her to U-turn, suggesting there may be flexibility under pressure.

Tragically, however, former environmental activist Peter Lukey – now Sonjica’s main climate spokesperson – defended Pretoria’s irresponsible Copenhagen stance on eTV’s ‘Big Debate’ climate show. The WWF terms Sonjica’s head-in-the-sand posture ‘very progressive’. Likewise, another SA civil society group in which WWF is dominant, ‘Climate Action Network’, endorsed another six years of rising emissions.

The WWF is playing a role reminiscent of the 1990s scandal in which oil behemoth Chevron trashed Papua New Guinea’s fragile Lake Kutubu. When local residents opposed the oil company’s ecological and cultural destruction, WWF took a $3 million Chevron contract for an ‘Integrated Conservation and Development Project’.

In exchange, Chevron viewed WWF as indispensable for spindoctoring efforts to ‘control media and interest groups’, specifically Greenpeace. In the event of an oil spill, wrote a Chevron official, ‘WWF will act as a buffer for the joint venture against environmentally damaging activities in the region, and against international environmental criticism.’

By buffering SA’s polluters and greenwashing Pretoria, the WWF may cajole more corporate funding contributions and access to policy drafting exercises. But there is a price for this behaviour.

For example, last month, eighty environmental and indigenous peoples’ organisations attacked WWF-certified palm oil projects for ‘dislocation of local populations’ livelihoods, destruction of rainforests and peat lands, pollution of soils and water, and contribution to global warming.’

And in Geneva in early December, dozens more activists from across the globe demonstrated at the group’s international headquarters. According to protester Michelle Pressend of the church-based Economic Justice Network in Cape Town, they demanded ‘an end to WWF’s promotion of genetically modified soya, to its Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil - a contradiction in terms - and to counterproductive Latin American carbon trading and other market-based climate strategies.’

In contrast to the dangerous strategies of Washington, Pretoria and allied NGOs like WWF, the phrase ‘climate justice’ is being used to signify alliances between serious popular movements and genuine environmentalists, with the main victims of climate change in the small islands and the African continent. Social justice
internationalism in civil society – mistakenly called 'the anti-globalisation movement' - that increased in earnest at the Seattle protest against free trade exactly ten years ago is being reborn through climate advocacy.

As in the case of AIDS treatment activism, civil society again shows that thinking globally and acting locally are much more than a bumper-sticker slogan. Without that combination, we will lose this vital battle over our planet's future to the polluters, their paid politicians, and a few greenwashing NGOs.
From climate denialism to activist alliances in memory of Seattle
ZNet, 30 November 2009

Preparations for the December 7-18 Copenhagen climate summit are going as expected, including a rare sighting of African elites’ stiffened spines. That’s a great development (maybe decisive), more about which below.

While activists help raise the temperature on the streets outside the Bella Centre on December 12, 13 and 16, inside we will see Northern elites defensively armed with pathetic non-binding emissions cuts (Obama at merely 4% below 1990 levels), with carbon trading, and without the money to repay their ecological debt to the South.

The first and third are lamentable enough, but the second is the most serious diversion from the crucial work of cutting emissions. A nine-minute film launched on the internet on Tuesday, December 1 - ‘The Story of Cap and Trade’ (www.storyofstuff.org/capandtrade) – gives all the ammunition you need to understand and critique emissions trading, and to seek genuine solutions.

Another important diversion emerged on November 20, when hackers published embarrassing emails from the University of East Anglia’s (UEA’s) Climate Research Unit. What I’ve understood from http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/georgemonbiot/2009/nov/25/monbiot-climate-leak-crisis-response and http://enviroknow.com/2009/11/25/climategate-the-swifthack-scandal-what-you-need-to-know is roughly as follows:

- the UEA researchers were silly egocentric ultracompetitive academics who were at times sloppy – an occupational hazard true of most of us, only in this case there is a huge amount at stake so their silliness is massively amplified,

- but a few academics who are silly about their work ethos do not reverse the universal understanding that scientists have regarding climate change, and

- people who want to distract the world from getting to the root of the climate crisis may well be empowered and have a field day with the UEA emails scandal, which should in turn compel the rest of us to redouble our efforts.

The unapologetic UEA researcher Phil Jones seems to think that because climate denialists have been a pain in the ass (since 2001), it was ok to hide scientific data (paid for by taxpayers), and to avoid wasting valuable time addressing the loonies’ arguments: “Initially at the beginning I did try to respond to them in the hope I might convince them but I soon realised it was a forlorn hope and broke off communication.”
Look, where I live, in Durban, we’ve had dreadful experiences with two kinds of life-threatening denialisms: apartheid and AIDS:

- dating back many decades, apartheid-denialists insisted that black South Africans had it better than anywhere else in Africa, that anti-apartheid sanctions would only hurt blacks and not foster change, and that if blacks took over the government it would be the ruination of SA, with whites having all their wealth expropriated; and

- from around 1999-2003, AIDS denialists very vocally insisted that HIV and AIDS were not related, that AIDS medicines were toxic and would do no good, and that the activists’ lobby for the medicines was merely a front for the CIA and Big Pharma (denialist-in-chief Thabo Mbeki is now being widely cited for genocide involving 350,000 unnecessary deaths due to his presidency’s withholding of AIDS medicines).

In both cases, as with the climate, the denialists’ role was to entrench the status quo forces of state and capital. They were, simply, hucksters for vested interests. In both cases they were defeated, thanks to vigorous social activism:

- fighting against apartheid-denialism, during the 1980s, the United Democratic Front, African National Congress and other liberation forces found that the denialists’ main damage was opposing sanctions/disinvestment pressure. So we intensified our efforts and by August 1985 won the necessary breakthrough when NY banks withdrew lines of credit to Pretoria, thus forcing a split between Afrikaner state rulers and white English-speaking capitalists. Within a few days, the latter traveled to Lusaka to meet the exiled ANC leadership, and then over the next eight years helped shake loose Afrikaner nationalism’s hold on the state, and indeed today in SA you will search long and hard to find a white person who admits they ever defended apartheid;

- as for AIDS, the Treatment Action Campaign found that a mix of local and internationalist activism was sufficiently strong to pry open Big Pharma’s monopoly on intellectual property rights and also overthrow opposition by the US and South African governments, a story worth revisiting in more detail in below. In short, by 2003, the coterie of AIDS denialists surrounding Mbeki lost to street heat, ridicule and legal critique, so today nearly 800,000 South Africans and millions more elsewhere have access to the medicines.

I hope we’ll look back at the climate denialists and judge them as merely a momentary quirk in human rationality, ultimately not in the least influential. The real danger comes from fossil fuel firms which, like Big Tobacco decades ago, know full well the lethal potential of their product. Their objective is to place a grain of doubt in our minds, and climate denialists are rather useful.
The fossil fuel firms – especially BP, Shell, Chevron and ExxonMobil - not only fund denialist thinktanks and astroturf advocacy (such as the Global Climate Coalition). They support members of the US Congress – such as Rick Boucher from Virginia - who energetically sabotage legislation aimed at capping emissions (Congress’ offsets, carbon trading and other distraction gimmicks mean there will be no net US cuts after all until the late 2030s). They also work with mainstream ‘green’ groups – WWF comes to mind - to halt environmental progress.

These corporations are far more insidious than the email hackers. I hope we aren’t further distracted by the UEA affair and that this is a quickly-forgotten little episode of dirty academic laundry meant for the dustbin of our sloppy movement where it belongs, so we can make the movement stronger, more transparent, more rigorous, more democratic and much more militant in trying to defeat the fossil fuel industry.

One way to do so is to flash back to Seattle exactly a decade ago, when the World Trade Organisation (WTO) fiasco on November 30, 1999 taught civil society activists and African leaders two powerful lessons. Turning 85 years old on Saturday, our comrade Dennis Brutus reminded us of two lessons from one of the most eventful weeks in his amazing life.

First, working together, African leaders and activists have the power to disrupt a system of global governance that meets the Global North's short-term interests against both the Global South and the longer-term interests of the world’s people and the planet. Second, in the very act of disrupting global malgovernance, major concessions can be won.

Spectacular protest against the WTO summit’s opening ceremony is what most recall about Seattle: activists ‘locking down’ to prevent entrance to the conference centre, a barrage of tear gas and pepper spray, a sea of broken windows and a municipal police force later prosecuted for violating US citizens’ most basic civil liberties. (See David and Rebecca Solnit’s excellent new book The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle - www.akpress.org/2008/items/battleofseattleakpress - for the spin on the spin)

That was outside. Inside the convention centre, negotiations belatedly got underway, and African leaders quickly grew worried that further trade liberalization would damage their tiny industrial sectors.

The damage was well recognized, as even establishment research revealed Africa would be the continent to suffer the worst net losses from corporate-dominated free trade. The US trade representative, Charlene Barchefsky, repeatedly insulted African elites who raised this point.

With the exception of South African trade minister Alec Erwin, who enjoyed an insider ‘Green Room’ role to promote SA’s self-interest, delegations from the
Organisation of African Unity (OAU, since renamed the African Union) were soon furious.

As OAU deputy director general V.J. McKeen recalled: “They went out to a dinner in a bus, and then were left out in the cold to walk back. To tell you to the extent that when we went into the room for our African group meeting, I mean, there was no interpretation provided... so one had to improvise. And then even the microphone facilities were switched off.”

Tetteh Hormeku, from the African Trade Network of progressive civil society groups, picks up the story: “By the second day of the formal negotiations, the African and other developing-country delegates had found themselves totally marginalised... [and threatened] to withdraw the consensus required to reach a conclusion of the conference. By this time, even the Americans and their supporters in the WTO secretariat must have woken up to the futility of their ‘rough tactics’.”

By walking out, the Africans’ strong willpower earned major concessions in the next WTO summit, in Doha, in November 2001. At the same time as the global justice movement began widening into an anti-imperialist movement in the wake of the USA’s post-9/11 remilitarization, African activists delved deeper into extreme local challenges, such as combating AIDS. In Doha, African elites joined forces with activists again.

On this occasion, the positive catalyst was a South African government law – the 1997 Medicines Act – which permitted the state’s compulsory licensing of patented drugs. In 1998, the Treatment Action Campaign (http://www.tac.org.za) was launched to lobby for AIDS drugs, which a decade ago were prohibitively expensive - $15,000 per person per year - for nearly all South Africa’s HIV-positive people (roughly 10% of the population).

That campaign was immediately confronted by the US State Department’s attack on the SA Medicines Act, a “full court press”, as bureaucrats testified to the US Congress. The US elites’ aim was to protect intellectual property rights and halt the emergence of a parallel inexpensive supply of AIDS medicines that would undermine lucrative Western markets.

US vice president Al Gore directly intervened with SA government leaders in 1998-99, aiming to revoke the Medicines Act. Then in mid-1999, Gore launched his presidential election bid, a campaign generously funded by big pharmaceutical corporations, which that year provided $2.3 million to the Democratic Party.

In solidarity with the South Africans, the US AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power began protesting at Gore’s campaign events, in New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Tennessee. The demos soon threatened to cost Gore far more in adverse publicity than he was raising in Big Pharma contributions, so he changed sides.
As pressure built, even during the reign of president George W. Bush and his repressive trade representative Robert Zoellick (now World Bank president), the WTO’s Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights system was amended at Doha in late 2001 to permit generic drugs to be used in medical emergencies.

This was a huge victory for Africa, removing any rationale to continue to deny life-saving medicines to the world’s poorest people.

In 2003, with another dreadful WTO deal on the table in Cancun and 30,000 protesters outside, once again the African leadership withdrew consensus, wreacking the plans of the US and Europe for further liberalization. The WTO has still not recovered.

These are the precedents required to overcome the three huge challenges the North faces in Copenhagen: 2020 emissions cuts of at least 45% (from 1990 levels) through a binding international agreement; the decommissioning of carbon markets and offset gimmicks; and payment on the vast ecological debt owed to victims of climate change.

Realistically, the adverse balance of forces currently prevailing will not permit victories on even one, much less all three. What response is logical?

In Barcelona, in early November, African negotiators boycotted the pre-Copenhagen talks, making good on AU leader Meles Zenawi’s September threat, given that the North put so little on the negotiating table.

Indeed, that is the main lesson from Seattle: by walking out - alongside civil society protesters – and halting a bad deal in Copenhagen on December 18, we can together pave the way for subsequent progress.

Two years after Seattle’s failure, progress was won through African access to life-saving medicines. We must ensure it doesn’t take two years after Copenhagen’s failure for Africa to get access to life-saving emissions cuts and to climate debt repayment, alongside the demise of carbon trading – but those are surely the battles just ahead.
Lessons for Copenhagen from Seattle via Addis Ababa
ZCommentaries, November 2009

The decade since the Seattle World Trade Organisation (WTO) fiasco taught civil society activists and African leaders two powerful lessons. First, working together, they have the power to disrupt a system of global governance that meets the Global North’s short-term interests against both the Global South and the longer-term interests of the world’s people and the planet.

Second, in the very act of disrupting global malgovernance, major concessions can be won.

The spectacular November 30 1999 street protest against the WTO summit’s opening ceremony is what most of us recall about Seattle: activists ‘locking down’ to prevent entrance to the conference centre, a barrage of tear gas and pepper spray, a sea of broken windows and a municipal police force later prosecuted for violating US citizens’ most basic civil liberties.

That was outside. Inside the convention centre, negotiations belatedly got underway, and African leaders quickly grew worried that further trade liberalisation would damage their tiny industrial sectors.

The damage was well recognized – an OECD study found Africa to be the continent that would suffer the worst net losses from corporate-dominated free trade. The US trade representative, Charlene Barchefsky, repeatedly insulted African elites who raised this point.

With the exception of South Africa’s Alec Erwin, who enjoyed Green Room status hence an insider role to promote self-interest, the delegations from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, since renamed the African Union) were furious.

As OAU deputy director general V.J.McKeen told journalists: “They went out to a dinner in a bus, and then were left out in the cold to walk back. To tell you to the extent that when we went into the room for our African group meeting, I mean, there was no interpretation provided. And we are - you know, at least the English and French interpretation should have been there, so one had to improvise. And then even the facilities, the microphone facilities were switched off.”

Tetteh Hormeku, from the African Trade Network of progressive civil society groups, picks up the story: “By the second day of the formal negotiations, the African and other developing-country delegates had found themselves totally marginalised. This arose mainly from the non-transparent and, some would say, unlawful practices adopted by the powerful countries, supported by the host country and the WTO secretariat.”
According to a statement by civil society, “African countries were not getting their positions and issues on the table for the simple reason that the table had been shifted away from the place where the negotiations were supposed to be taking place - the working groups - into exclusive Green Room discussions where they had no equal access.”

Hormeku recalls that African Trade Network members “began to demand that their Northern NGO counterparts help focus attention on the outrageous practices of their various governments. The first concrete result was a joint press conference by the African Trade Network, Friends of the Earth, South Centre, Oxfam, the World Development Movement, Focus, Consumers International and New Economics Foundation. Here developing-country negotiators like Sir Sonny Ramphal (former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth) joined hands with NGO representatives to denounce the big-power manipulation of the WTO process. Many more African civil society organisations and governments spoke out.”

At that point, says Hormeku, “African countries thus joined the other developing-country groups in threatening to withdraw the consensus required to reach a conclusion of the conference. By this time, even the Americans and their supporters in the WTO secretariat must have woken up to the futility of their ‘rough tactics’."

This strong will by Africans at least earned major concessions in the next WTO summit, in Doha, in November 2001. At the same time as the global justice movement began widening into an anti-imperialist movement in the wake of the USA’s post-9/11 remilitarization, African activists were delving deeper into extreme local challenges, such as combating AIDS. In Doha, African elites joined forces with activists again.

On this occasion, the positive catalyst was a South African government law – the 1997 Medicines Act promoted by then health minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma – which permitted the state’s compulsory licensing of patented drugs. In 1998, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) was launched to lobby for AIDS drugs, which a decade ago were prohibitively expensive - $15,000 per person per year - for nearly all South Africa’s HIV-positive people (roughly 10% of the 50 million current population).

That campaign was immediately confronted by the US State Department’s attack on the SA Medicines Act - a “full court press”, as bureaucrats testified to the US Congress. Their aim was to protect intellectual property rights and halt the emergence of a parallel inexpensive supply of AIDS medicines that would undermine lucrative Western markets. US Vice President Al Gore directly intervened with SA government leaders in 1998-99, aiming to revoke the law.

Then in mid-1999, Gore launched his 2000 presidential election bid, a campaign generously funded by big pharmaceutical corporations (which in that election cycle provided $2.3 million to the Democratic Party). As an explicit counterweight, TAC’s
allies in the US AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power began to protest at Gore’s campaign events.

The protests ultimately threatened to cost Gore far more in adverse publicity than he was raising in Big Pharma contributions, so he changed sides.

By 2001, even during the reign of president George W. Bush and his vicious trade representative, Robert Zoellick (now World Bank president), the WTO’s Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights system (TRIPS) was amended to permit generic drugs to be used in medical emergencies, such as AIDS. This was a huge victory for Africa, removing any rationale to continue to deny life-saving medicines to the world’s poorest people.

Then in 2003, with another dreadful WTO deal on the table in Cancun, and 30,000 protesters outside, once again the African leadership withdrew consensus, wrecking the plans of the US and Europe for further liberalization.

These are the precedents required to cut through the three huge challenges we face in Copenhagen – and forever after in climate negotiations:

- northern countries should cut emissions by 2020 by at least 45% through an international agreement;
- they should not rely on carbon markets or offset gambits when making these cuts; and
- they should pay the ecological debt they owe to victims of climate change.

Tragically, the adverse balance of forces currently prevailing will not permit victories on even one, much less all three.

Recall that Africa is the worst-affected continent. According to UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change director R.K. Pachauri, “crop net revenues could fall by as much as 90% by 2100.” The ecological debt the North owes Africa alone is estimated at $67 billion/year (minimum) by 2020.

What response is logical if the North fails to address these three basic challenges? In early September 2009, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi issued this threat about Copenhagen from Addis Ababa: “If need be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that threatens to be another rape of our continent.”

Indeed, that is the main lesson from Seattle: by walking out - alongside civil society protesters - halting a bad deal in Copenhagen now paves the way for subsequent progress, once our forces reassemble.
When the climate change center cannot hold
ZNet, 24 October 2009

On a day that 350.org and thousands of allies are valiantly trying to raise global consciousness about impending catastrophe, we can ask some tough questions about what to do after people depart and the props are packed up. No matter today’s activism, global climate governance is grid-locked and it seems clear that no meaningful deal can be sealed in Copenhagen on December 18.

The recent Bangkok negotiations of Kyoto Protocol Conference of Parties functionaries confirmed that Northern states and their corporations won’t make an honest effort to get to 350 CO2 parts per million. On the right, Barack Obama’s negotiators seem to feel that the 1997 Kyoto Protocol is excessively binding to the North, and leaves out several major polluters of the South, including China, India, Brazil and South Africa.

Kyoto’s promised 5% emissions cuts (by 2012, from 1990 levels) are impossible now. Obama’s people hope the world will accept 2005 as a new starting date; a 20% reduction by 2020 then only brings the target back to around 5% below 1990 levels. Such pathetically low ambitions, surely Obama knows, guarantee a runaway climate catastrophe – he should shoot for 45%, say the small island nations.

The other reason Kyoto is ridiculed by serious environmentalists is its provision for carbon trading rackets which allow fake claims of net emissions cuts. Since the advent of the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme, the Chicago exchange, Clean Development Mechanism projects and offsets, vast evidence has accumulated of systemic market failure, scamming and inability to regulate carbon trading (see a website launched today www.350reasons.org).

A final reason we need to rapidly transcend Kyoto’s weak, market-oriented approach is that devastation caused by climate change will hit the world’s poorest, most vulnerable people far harder than those in the North. Reparations for the North’s climate debt to the South are in order. The European Union offered a pittance in September, while African leaders are stiffening their spines for a fight in Copenhagen reminiscent of Seattle a decade ago.

Since discussing this threat six weeks ago in a ZNet column, subsequent Bangkok negotiations and web traffic offered me a sobering reminder of Northern stubbornness, on two fronts – those whose interests are mainly in short-term capital accumulation, but also the mainstream environmentalists who are only beginning to grasp the huge strategic error they made in Kyoto.

In the first camp, Obama’s people are hoping non-binding national-level plans will be acceptable at Copenhagen. But their case is weaker because at home, the two main proposed bills - Waxman-Markey which passed in the US House of
Representatives and Kerry-Boxer which is under Senate consideration – will do far more harm than good.

Don’t take it from me; the best source is Congressman Rich Boucher, from a coal-dominated Southwestern Virginia district. Boucher supported Waxman-Markey, he told a reporter last month, precisely because it would not adversely affect his corporate constituencies. The two billion tons of offset allowances in the legislation mean that ‘an electric utility burning coal will not have to reduce the emissions at the plant site,’ chortled Boucher. ‘It can just keep burning coal.’

Boucher was one of the congressional rednecks who wrecked Obama’s promise to sell – not give away – the carbon credits, and then bragged to his district’s main newspaper, the Times News, that ‘this helps to keep electricity prices affordable and strengthens the case for utilities to continue to use coal.’

Boucher and co are also working hard to disempower the Environmental Protection Agency from regulating CO2. This was accomplished in Waxman-Markey, and upon introducing his legislation, Senator John Kerry gave the game away by noting EPA regulatory authority is not gutted in his bill now, only so that it can be gutted later, so as to provide ‘some negotiating room as we proceed forward.’

The Senate bill has all manner of other objectionable components, which hard-working activists from Climate SOS, Rising Tide North America, Friends of the Earth, the Center for Biological Diversity, Biofuelwatch and Greenwash Guerrillas have been hammering at.

Hence in the US, the balance of forces is fluid. On the far-right, the fossil fuels industries are intent on making Obama’s climate legislation farcical – and have so far succeeded. In the centre, the main establishment ‘green’ agencies – such as the Environmental Defense Fund and Natural Resources Defence Council – are plowing ahead with carbon trading strategies, hoping to salvage some legitimacy for Obama, because these bills are a ‘first step’ to more serious emissions reduction, they claim.

Yet US negotiators will go to Copenhagen (as they did in Bangkok and will next month in Barcelona) with the aim of smashing any residual benefit of the Kyoto Protocol – such as potential binding cuts with accountability mechanisms - and then allow these US dynamics to play out in a manner that locks in climate disaster.

So just as in 1997, when Al Gore introduced carbon trading into the initial deal – and subsequently broke an implicit promise by failing to get the US (under both Clinton and Bush) to ratify the Protocol - there is every likelihood that if an agreement in Copenhagen were reached, it would be as worthless as Kyoto.

Which brings us to quandaries faced by two other forces: the ordinary environmentalist in the US – perhaps a typical fan of useful www.grist.org blogs –
and activists based in the so-called Third World who have to deal with the most adverse impacts of climate chaos in coming decades.

Grist’s Jonathan Hiskes recently reacted to the first dilemma by characterizing Goddard Institute for Space Studies director James Hansen – the most celebrated US climate scientist – as ‘especially troublesome.’ Hansen not only put his body on the line this year in a high-profile arrest at a West Virginia coal generator, and testified repeatedly against carbon trading, but also endorsed Climate SOS, to Hiskes’ dismay.

Why rail against Hansen? Hiskes claims that when describing Obama’s bills as ‘worse than nothing’, Hansen and other ‘no-compromise types’ ignore ‘the historical precedent of legislation that is deeply flawed at first evolving into something effective and durable. The original Clean Air Act did not address the acid rain crisis, an omission not corrected until 1990. The original Social Security Act did not include domestic or agricultural workers, effectively excluding many Hispanic, black, and immigrant workers.’

The obvious difference is that those two laws empowered environmentalists and workers against enemies. They had universalizing potential and could be incrementally expanded. In contrast, Obama’s climate legislation is so far off on the wrong track – by commodifying the air as the core climate strategy and empowering the fossil fuel industries – that the train cannot be steered away from its over-the-cliff route. Just let it crash.

(Oh bummer, the same seems to be true of 2009 legislation and fiscal programs for the economy and healthcare, which empower banksters, derivative financiers, energy firms, insurers and others who caused the problems in the first place.)

The second force caught in the quandary of climate politics is Penang-based Third World Network (TWN) and its many admirers, who insisted at Bangkok that the Kyoto Protocol be retained because, first, at least it offers the possibility of a binding framework, and second, countries not presently liable under Kyoto should still have the right to increase emissions so as to ‘develop.’

I’ll grant the first point, for if US negotiators block Kyoto’s extension, then national-level agreements could indeed be much weaker. On the other hand, if the EPA actually used its powers to reduce the top 7500 or so largest point-sources of US carbon pollution, that would be far stronger than carbon trading legislation which lets polluters off the hook.

The main problem with TWN’s ‘development’ argument is that a great deal of CO2-emitting economic activity and resource extraction in the Third World are better considered ‘maldevelopment’ – and for environmental, socio-economic and moral reasons should halt.
Here in South Africa, a long-term (apartheid-era) state relationship to the so-called ‘minerals-energy complex’ generated a political bloc so powerful that it is now in the process of building $100 billion in new coal-fired and nuclear plants. Their strategy is to keep offering the cheapest electricity in the world to UK/Australian (formerly SA) mining/metals firms, including Anglo, BHP Billiton, Lonplats and Arcelor-Mittal.

By way of background, state supplier Eskom lost $1.3 billion last year gambling on aluminum futures. Forty percent of SA’s CO2 emissions can be traced to a handful of the largest firms, including the dangerous oil-from-coal/gas operator Sasol. And cheap electricity for the mining/metals firms contrasts with wickedly-high price hikes (a 250% projection from 2008-11) for ordinary people, which in turn contributes to the intense demonstrations now destabilizing dozens of municipalities (the Centre for Civil Society documents these daily in our Social Protest Observatory, at http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs).

Moreover, as corporations export profits and dividends to London/Melbourne headquarters, our vast balance of payments deficit gives The Economist magazine cause to rate South Africa the world’s riskiest emerging market. In sum, it is impossible to argue that SA’s world-leading per capita CO2 emissions represents ‘development’.

One way to address this maldevelopment - especially from exports of CO2-intensive minerals and cash crops, as well as manufactured goods transported by air and ship - is import/export taxation.

French president Nicolas Sarkozy proposed a small import tariff (the equivalent of 4 cents per litre of petrol) last month: ‘Most importantly, a carbon tax at the borders is vital for our industries and our jobs’. In the US, the energy secretary and organized labor are also making noises along these lines.

Sarkozy’s small incremental tax will not change consumption patterns. Explains Soumya Dutta from the People’s Science Movement, ‘In India, a far less affluent society, whenever gasoline or diesel prices are raised by even 6-10 %, there is an initial hue and cry. Within a month, things settle down and the consumption keeps growing – invariably.’

The South Centre’s Martin Khor condemns Sarkozy’s move as ‘climate protectionism’, remarking, ‘It would be sad if the progressive movement were to support and join in the attempts by those who want to block off products from developing countries in the name of climate change.’ He is correct to label such taxes ‘self-interested and selfish bullying acts’.

More generally, says Khor, ‘We shouldn’t give the powerful countries an excuse and legitimacy to use climate or labour or social issues to block our exports and get away with it through a nice sounding excuse.’
Of course, the details of the French strategy, and indeed its protectionist orientation, must be criticized. But the most crucial factor when imposing any kind of sanctions - whether a carbon tax or trade sanctions against Burmese regime or Zimbabwe's main ruling party - is the consent of those affected who are themselves struggling for change, a point Sarkozy hasn’t factored in.

How might one? Turning a carbon tax into a positive funding flow for the Third World is a suggestion by Daphne Wysham of the Institute for Policy Studies. Proceeds should go directly to the countries whose products are being taxed, for the purposes of explicit greenhouse gas reduction.

These nuances in national-level strategic debates should be tackled by Northern activists bearing in mind the Global South's genuine development aspirations.

Regardless, core principles of the progressive movement are non-negotiable. In advance of Copenhagen Bella Center protests, here are demands articulated by Climate Justice Action:

- leaving fossil fuels in the ground;
- reasserting peoples’ and community control over production;
- relocalising food production;
- massively reducing overconsumption, particularly in the North;
- respecting indigenous and forest peoples’ rights; and
- recognising the ecological and climate debt owed to the peoples of the South and making reparations.

If the center is not holding, that’s fine: the wave of courageous direct-action protests against climate criminals in recent weeks – and the prospect of seatlling Copenhagen on December 16 - is an inspiring reflection of left pressure that will soon counteract that from the right. It’s our only hope, isn’t it.
‘Seattle’ Copenhagen, as Africans demand reparations
*ZCommentaries*, September 2009

Here’s a fairly simple choice: the Global North would pay hard-hit Global South sites to deal with climate crisis either through complicated, corrupt, controversial ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ (CDM) projects with plenty of damaging side effects to communities, or instead pay through other mechanisms that must provide financing quickly, transparently and decisively, to achieve genuine income compensation plus renewable energy to the masses.

The Copenhagen climate summit in December is all about the former choice, because the power bloc in Europe and the US have put carbon trading at the core of their emissions reduction strategy, while the two largest emitters of carbon in the Third World, China and India, are the main beneficiaries of CDM financing.

What that means is that problems caused when Al Gore’s US delegation brought pro-corporate compromises to Kyoto in 1997 - promising US sign-on to Kyoto (hah, what a lie) in exchange for carbon trading - are going to now amplify, and haunt us for a very long time, unless serious reforms are achieved in Copenhagen.

They won’t be, and nor will any substantive agreement emerge, hinted the new UN Development Programme director, New Zealand’s neoliberal former prime minister Helen Clark, this week: ‘The success of the Copenhagen summit on climate change in December will not depend on a final international deal being sealed there.’

In other words, prepare for a stalemate by a coalition of selfish, fossil-fuel addicted powers. Terribly weak targets may get a mention (or even no mention, as last time at Bali), but market mechanisms will be invoked as the ‘solution’ so as to appease polluting capitalists and the governments under their thumb, especially Barack Obama’s.

In contrast, there are attractive, simple mechanisms for financing Africa’s survival, including the militant ‘ecological debt’ (or ‘climate reparations’) demands now being made by environmental leaders of the African Union (AU), as well as Jubilee Africa’s request to just remove the damn boot from Africa’s financial neck by canceling ongoing debt repayments.

On that score, in 2009 the lowest-income African countries are suffering a 50% increase in debt repayments (as a percentage of export earnings), according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As noted four years ago in this space, that means the ‘Make Poverty History’ NGO-rockstar campaign was a farce. The only debt written off wasn’t possible to repay anyhow, so for low-income Africa, ‘debt relief’ was just an accounting gimmick and the G8’s real Gleneagles debt strategy was to squeeze Africa even tighter, as the IMF data now show.
But, you may well ask, should anyone take anything said by the AU leadership seriously, since that would be a mistake when it comes to malevolent leaders of the G8, G20, etc? The AU typically serves, as Zimbabwe’s new finance minister Tendai Biti once put it, as the continent’s ‘trade union of dictators.’

Heading the AU climate team is Ethiopian strongman Meles Zenawi, who also chairs South Africa’s subimperialist New Partnership for Africa’s Development and thus gets invited to G20 gatherings along with Pretoria (better him than AU chair Moammar Gaddafy, reckon the others).

Sometimes seen merely as a US puppet - thanks to the disastrous, Washington-sponsored 2007 invasion of neighboring Somalia - Zenawi is rather more complex. He was once a self-described Marxist but is now a brutal tyrant whose troops killed scores of students and other democrats, and who has just imposed a ban on international funding of local civil society aimed to intimidate critics.

Quite ridiculous, isn’t it, for Zenawi to lead the charge, reportedly demanding a minimum of $65 billion - and up to $200 billion - annually from the North by 2020?

Well, no, not considering how much Africa will be devastated. Even Zenawi’s voice, and role in Copenhagen are potentially crucial in the struggle ahead.

What a struggle it is. The most shocking probable outcome of climate change is that 90% of the African peasantry will be out of business by 2100 due to drought, floods, extreme weather events, disease and political instability, according to UN experts.

The Climate Change Vulnerability Index, calculated in 2009 ‘from dozens of variables measuring the capacity of a country to cope with the consequences of global warming’, listed 22 African countries out of 28 across the world at ‘extreme risk’, whereas the United States is near the bottom of the world rankings of countries at risk even though it is the leading per capita contributor to climate change.

There is no question that those most responsible should pay reparations, now that we are aware of the damage being done by rising greenhouse gas emissions, and by the ongoing stubborn refusal by the rich - especially Obama and his people - to cut back.

The amounts can be debated, for of course $65 billion/year for Africa is way too low, given how many incalculably valuable species will be lost, how much devastation to individuals and communities is already underway, how many economies will falter, how much ecology is threatened.

But in addition to AU leaders, the world is awakening. After several years of hard work by World Council of Churches members and staff, on September 2, the
Council’s Central Committee adopted a formal statement on the North’s ‘deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice by addressing our debts to peoples most affected by ecological destruction and to the earth itself.’

The Council slams ‘the agro-industrial-economic complex and the culture of the North, characterized by the consumerist lifestyle and the view of development as commensurate with exploitation of the earth’s so-called natural resources,’ and cites the eco-debt definition pioneered by Accion Ecologica of Quito: ‘historical and current resource-plundering, environmental degradation and the dumping of greenhouse gases and toxic wastes.’

Like the USA’s ‘Superfund’ legislation or any other damages paid by corporations for messes made - such as Thor Chemicals’ notorious mercury spillage a few dozen kilometers from my Durban home, now leaking into the city’s bulk water supply at the Inanda Dam - the point is to get a general estimate of clean-up costs and a rough estimate of damages done.

As compensation, flows of grant funding are required - hopefully via an accountable, fair, transparent system such as a Basic Income Grant for all residents of Africa (a Namibian pilot is showing excellent results) - instead of the kinds of corrupting carbon trade financing that dictators or big corporations currently grab hold of and redirect to adverse ends.

What is a carbon market regime and why is it counterproductive? This is the heart of the debate about the merits of a Copenhagen deal.

Carbon trading allows corporations and governments generating greenhouse gases to seemingly reduce their net emissions. They can do this, thanks to the Kyoto Protocol, by trading for others’ reductions (e.g. CDM projects in the Third World) or emissions rights (e.g. Eastern Europe’s ‘hot air’ that followed the 1990s economic collapse).

Why do they do it? The pro-trading rationale is that once property rights are granted to polluters for their emissions, a ‘cap’ can be put on a country’s or the world’s total emissions (and then progressively lowered if there is political will). So as to minimize adverse economic impact, corporations can stay within the cap even by emitting way above it, by buying others’ rights to pollute.

But the carbon market isn’t working, for several reasons:

- the idea of inventing a property right to pollute is effectively the privatization of the air;
- the corporations most responsible for pollution and the World Bank - which is most responsible for fossil fuel financing - are behind the market, and can
be expected to engage in systemic corruption to attract money into the market even if this prevents genuine emissions reductions;

- many of the offsetting projects - such as monocultural timber plantations, forest ‘protection’ and landfill methane-electricity projects - have devastating impacts on local communities and ecologies;
- the price is haywire, having crashed by half in a short period in April 2006 and by two-thirds in 2008;
- there is a serious potential for carbon markets to become an out-of-control, multi-trillion dollar speculative bubble, similar to exotic financial instruments associated with Enron’s 2002 collapse (indeed, many Enron employees populate the carbon markets);
- as a ‘false solution’ to climate change, carbon trading encourages merely small, incremental shifts, and thus distracts us from a wide range of radical changes we need to make in materials extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal; and
- the idea of market solutions to market failure is an ideology that rarely makes sense, and especially not following the world’s worst-ever financial market failure.

Recall that scientists insist an 80% drop in emissions will be necessary within four decades at most, with the major cuts before 2020. To achieve this, carbon markets won’t work, as the leading US climate scientist, James Hansen, remarked in opposition to Barack Obama’s cap and trade scheme.

Obama’s legislation - the Waxman-Markey bill that passed the house in June - is so profoundly flawed it should be scrapped. Some excellent movements have sprung up to try to prevent US carbon trading and the destruction of Environmental Protection Agency powers to regulate carbon pollution, on which Waxman-Markey is especially wicked (please help by joining scores of groups disgusted with Obama’s legislation, at http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/action/toolbox/ACESA/sign-on_letter.html and http://www.climatesos.org - and do give a miss to pro-Hopenhagen campaigners like Avaaz, the World Wildlife Federation, the ‘Climate Action Network’ and other deal-doers who either haven’t thought through the issues properly or who wallow in conflicts of interest as carbon-traders themselves).

In sum, the emissions trade is a bogus, ‘false solution’. Very different forms of climate finance are required at the Copenhagen Summit in December, including the North’s payment of ecological debt. But Zenawi and others from Africa - especially civil society - will have to work much harder to put climate compensation on the agenda (and to ensure that governments corrupted by the fossil fuel industry and other TNCs, as well as local elites, do not become the vehicle for distributing the compensation).

While carbon trading is at the heart of Copenhagen negotiations, any deal done will be a step backwards. The Durban Group for Climate Justice - founded in 2004 in
South Africa - is the main civil society network explicitly fighting carbon trading; a superb analysis by Larry Lohmann is available from the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation:

One of our other gurus, University of KwaZulu-Natal honorary professor Dennis Brutus, puts the challenge ahead quite frankly: 'My own view is that a corrupt deal is being concocted in Copenhagen with the active collaboration of NGOs who have been bought off by the corporations, especially oil and transport. They may even be well-intentioned but they are barking up the wrong tree.'

Instead of a bad deal, Brutus recommends that we all 'seattle Copenhagen', i.e. the AU insiders work with civil society outsiders to prevent the North from doing a deal in their interests, against Africa's. A decade ago, that formula stopped the World Trade Organisation’s Millennial Round from succeeding in Seattle, and in 2003 the feat was repeated in Cancun.

'Vere outta here' Zenawi may well say in Copenhagen, for on September 3, he issued a strong threat from Addis Ababa: 'If need be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that threatens to be another rape of our continent.'

To seattle Copenhagen would entail civil society protesting outside and African governments working for Africans’ interest inside, to halt a dirty deal that makes matters worse. Even with less than 100 days to go, Brutus insists it's feasible, and would then allow us to move on to the real emissions reduction and alternative energy and production systems the world desperately needs.
Repaying Africa for climate crisis: ‘Ecological debt’ as a development finance alternative to emissions trading

The ‘ecological debt’ that the Global North owes the Global South for excessive use of the environmental space plus damages done to Third World ecology became a global concern in 2009 as it entered the Copenhagen Conference of Parties (COP) negotiations. The willingness of African rulers to raise this in preliminary meetings – and the European Union’s acknowledgement of compensation payments but at grossly inadequate levels - reflected how much damage was already done. It also suggested that a configuration similar to the Seattle World Trade Organisation summit might emerge (if not at Copenhagen then in subsequent negotiations), with discontented elites inside and angry protesters outside. Other faith-based and advocacy groups in civil society took up the demand as well, suggesting the potential for a global movement which would generate the resources thus far missing from Africa’s plans to finance development aspirations – and also to change those aspirations into strategies that can transcend the Western model of capitalist industrialism and mass consumption.

Introduction

Carbon trading is under attack, but is there an alternative strategy to transfer resources to the Global South to support a different model of development? Is it reasonable to make calls for ‘ecological debt’ or ‘climate compensation’ in the form of a fund that would justifiably exceed $100 billion/year within a decade, without tendentious reliance upon emissions trading brokers, offset salesmen, futures and options, ‘additionality’ requirements, corruption, and the ‘commodification of the air’ associated with the Kyoto Protocol and its likely successor regime?

There is a fairly simple financial choice facing those advocating global climate governance: the Global North would pay hard-hit Global South sites to deal with climate crisis either through ‘Clean Development Mechanism’ (CDM) projects and declining overseas development aid – both entailing plenty of damaging side effects - or instead, pay through other mechanisms that must provide financing quickly, transparently and decisively, to achieve genuine income compensation plus renewable energy to the masses. The Kyoto Protocol – and its potential Copenhagen COP successor - is all about the former choice, because the power bloc in Europe and the US put carbon trading at the core of their emissions reduction strategy, while the two largest emitters of carbon in the Third World, China and India, are the main beneficiaries of CDM financing. What that means is that problems caused when Al Gore’s US delegation brought pro-corporate compromises to Kyoto in 1997 – deceitfully promising US sign-on to Kyoto in exchange for carbon trading – will now amplify and haunt this debate for a long time to come. For what we have witnessed since Kyoto came into effect in February 2005 is a climate-reduction stalemate by a coalition of selfish, fossil-fuel addicted powers. Terribly weak targets may get a
mention (or even no mention, as at the Bali 2007 Conference of Parties), but market mechanisms will be invoked as the ‘solution’ so as to appease polluting capital and associated governments, especially Washington. Some of the less principled environmental NGOs and opportunistic Third World elites will sign up, as has become a habit in such global governance gambits.

Market mechanisms – especially carbon trading and offsets – allow corporations and governments generating greenhouse gases to seemingly reduce their net emissions. They can do this, thanks to the Kyoto Protocol, by trading for others’ ‘certified emissions reductions’ (e.g. CDM projects in the Third World) or emissions rights (e.g. Eastern Europe’s ‘hot air’ that followed the 1990s economic collapse). The pro-trading rationale is that once property rights are granted to polluters for these emissions, even if given not auctioned (hence granting a generous giveaway), a ‘cap’ can be put on a country’s or the world’s total emissions. It will then be progressively lowered, if there is political will. So as to minimize adverse economic impact, corporations can stay within the cap even by emitting way above it, by buying others’ rights to pollute.

But critics\(^1\) argue that the carbon market isn’t working, for several reasons:

- the idea of inventing a property right to pollute is effectively the ‘privatization of the air’;
- greenhouse gases are complex and their rising production creates a non-linear impact which cannot be reduced to a commodity exchange relationship (a tonne of CO\(_2\) produced in one place accommodated by reducing a tonne in another, as is the premise of the emissions trade);
- the corporations most guilty of pollution and the World Bank – which is most responsible for fossil fuel financing – are the driving forces behind the market, and can be expected to engage in systemic corruption to attract money into the market even if this prevents genuine emissions reductions;
- many of the offsetting projects – such as monocultural timber plantations, forest ‘protection’ and landfill methane-electricity projects – have devastating impacts on local communities and ecologies, and have been hotly contested;

• the price of carbon determined in these markets is haywire, having crashed by half in a short period in April 2006 and by two-thirds in 2008, thus making mockery of the idea that there will be a sufficient market mechanism to turn the society towards renewable energy;
• there is a serious potential for carbon markets to become an out-of-control, multi-trillion dollar speculative bubble, similar to exotic financial instruments associated with Enron’s 2002 collapse (indeed, many Enron employees populate the carbon markets);
• as a ‘false solution’ to climate change, carbon trading encourages merely small, incremental shifts, and thus distracts us from a wide range of radical changes we need to make in materials extraction, production, distribution, consumption and disposal; and
• the idea of market solutions to market failure (‘externalities’) is an ideology that rarely makes sense, and especially not following the world’s worst-ever financial market failure, and especially not when the very idea of derivatives – a financial asset whose underlying value is several degrees removed and also subject to extreme variability – was thrown into question..

Most scientists insist that at least an 80% drop in emissions will be necessary within four decades, with the major cuts before 2020. To achieve this, carbon markets won’t work, as the leading US climate scientist, James Hansen, concluded in leading the intellectual opposition to Barack Obama’s cap and trade scheme. Obama’s legislation – the Waxman-Markey bill that passed the US House of Representatives in June 2009 (with similar Senate legislation bogged down at the time of writing in September 2009) – was so profoundly flawed that the more ambitious wing of environmental civil society argued it should be scrapped, especially because of the legislation’s destruction of Environmental Protection Agency powers to regulate carbon pollution. 2

Even the financial speculator George Soros criticizes cap and trade:

The cap and trade system of emissions trading is very difficult to control and its effects are diluted. It is pretty much breaking down because there is no penalty for developing countries not to add to their pollution. You count the saving but you don’t count the added pollution going on. As a world, I don’t think we are getting our act together on climate change at the moment... [CDMs] are not effective: you buy credits in third world countries that don’t have a cap on emissions and you can get carbon credits whether you can sell

---

them or not... It is precisely because I am a market practitioner that I know the flaws in the system.  

To be sure, one wing of civil society – e.g., campaigners Avaaz, the World Wildlife Federation and the Climate Action Network – endorsed a Copenhagen deal no matter such flaws, which can be partially explained by the fact that some in the latter group have substantial conflicts of interest as carbon-traders themselves. According to Michael Dorsey, professor of political ecology at the US’s Dartmouth College, these include CAN board member Jennifer Morgan of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, who took leave for two years to direct work on Climate and Energy Security at carbon trading firm E3G, Kate Hampton, formerly of Friends of the Earth, who joined Climate Change Capital as head of policy while simultaneously advising the EU on energy and the environment, working for the California Environmental Protection Agency, and acting as president of International Carbon Investors and Services, and several others.

Dorsey concludes: ‘After more than a decade of failed politicking, many NGO types... are only partially jumping off the sinking ship – so as to work for industries driving the problem. Unfortunately, many continue to influence NGO policy from their current positions, while failing to admit to or even understand obvious conflicts of interest’.

Critics condemn carbon trading for these and many other reasons, and term the emissions trade a ‘false solution’. In contrast, central to a genuine solution to climate crisis is the task of raising the world’s standards of living in a manner not characterized by the fossil fuel addiction of industrial society. Climate-related finance will be required, and this might logically begin with the North’s payment of ecological debt to the South for excess use of environmental space and for the damage done to many ecosystems already, and in future when vast damages are anticipated especially in Africa.

Ecological debt defined

According to the Quito group Accion Ecologica: ‘ecological debt is the debt accumulated by Northern, industrial countries toward Third World countries on account of resource plundering, environmental damages, and the free occupation of environmental space to deposit wastes, such as greenhouse gases, from the industrial countries’. The term came into professional use in 1992 at the Earth Summit of the United Nations in Rio de Janeiro of 1992, with NGOs promoting the concept through an ‘Alternative Treaty’. An initial voice was the Institute of Political

---

Ecology in Santiago, Chile, and contributed to world consciousness about ChloroFluoroCarbon damage to the ozone layer. A Colombian lawyer, José María Borrero, wrote a 1994 book on the topic, and further research and advocacy was provided by the Foundation for Research on the Protection of the Environment. By 1999 Friends of the Earth International and Christian Aid agreed to campaign against Ecological Debt, especially in relation to climate damage.

The leading scientist in the field, Autonomous University of Barcelona’s Joan Martinez-Alier, calculates ecological debt in many forms: ‘nutrients in exports including virtual water, the oil and minerals no longer available, the biodiversity destroyed, sulphur dioxide emitted by copper smelters, the mine tailings, the harms to health from flower exports, the pollution of water by mining, the commercial use of information and knowledge on genetic resources, when they have been appropriated gratis (‘biopiracy’), and agricultural genetic resources.’ As for the North’s ‘lack of payment for environmental services or for the disproportionate use of Environmental Space,’ Martinez-Alier criticizes ‘imports of solid or liquid toxic waste, and free disposal of gas residues (carbon dioxide, CFCs, etc).’ According to Martinez-Alier:

The notion of an Ecological Debt is not particularly radical. Think of the environmental liabilities incurred by firms (under the United States Superfund legislation), or of the engineering field called ‘restoration ecology’, or the proposals by the Swedish government in the early 1990s to calculate the country’s environmental debt. 6

The sums involved are potentially vast. As Martinez-Alier puts it, ‘tropical rainforests used for wood exports have an extraordinary past we will never know and ongoing biodiversity whose destruction we cannot begin to value.’ However, ‘although it is not possible to make an exact accounting, it is necessary to establish the principal categories and certain orders of magnitude in order to stimulate discussion... If we take the present human-made emissions of carbon, [this represents] a total annual subsidy of $75 billion is forthcoming from South to North.’ 7

Leading ecofeminist Vandana Shiva8 and former South Centre director Yash Tandon9 estimate that wild seed varieties alone account for $66 billion in annual biopiracy benefits to the US. Examples of biopiracy in Africa, according to a 2005 study commissioned by Edmonds Institute, African Centre for Biosafety, include:

7. Ibid.
- three dozen cases of African resources – worth $billions - captured by firms for resale without adequate ‘Access and Benefit Sharing’ agreements between producers and the people who first used the natural products;
- diabetes drug produced by a Kenyan microbe and Libyan/Ethiopian treatment;
- antibiotics from Gambian termite hill and giant West African land snails;
- antifungal from Namibian giraffe and nematocidal fungi from Burkina Faso;
- infection-fighting amoeba from Mauritius;
- Congo (Brazzaville) treatment for impotence;
- vaccines from Egyptian microbes;
- South African and Namibian indigenous appetite suppressant Hoodia;
- drug addiction treatments, multipurpose kombo butter from Central, W.Africa;
- beauty, healing treatment from Okoumé resin in Central Africa;
- skin and hair care from the argan tree in Morocco, Egyptian ‘Pharaoh’s Wheat’, bambara groundnut and ‘resurrection plant’;
- endophytes and improved fescues from Algeria and Morocco;
- groundnuts from Malawi, Senegal, Mozambique, Sudan and Nigeria;
- Tanzanian impatients; and
- molluscicides from the Horn of Africa.

A partial ecological debt accounting was published by environmental scientists in early 2008, and counted $1.8 trillion in concrete damages over several decades. According to co-author Richard Norgaard, ecological economist at the University of California, Berkeley, generated a crucial finding: ‘At least to some extent, the rich nations have developed at the expense of the poor, and, in effect, there is a debt to the poor. That, perhaps, is one reason that they are poor. You don’t see it until you do the kind of accounting that we do here’. The study included factors such as greenhouse gas emissions, ozone layer depletion, agriculture, deforestation, overfishing, and the conversion of mangrove swamps into shrimp farms, but did not (so far) succeed in calculating other damages, e.g. excessive freshwater withdrawals, destruction of coral reefs, bio-diversity loss, invasive species, and war.

Another route into the intellectual challenge of calculating ecological debt was taken by the World Bank (2006) in its estimates of tangible wealth (in the book Where is the Wealth of Nations?). In addition to resource depletion and rent outflows, there are also other subsoil assets, timber resources, nontimber forest resources,

protected areas, cropland and pastureland to account for. The 'produced capital' normally captured in GDP accounting is added to the tangible wealth. In the case of Ghana, to consider one example, that amounted to $2,022 per person in 2000. The same year, the Gross National Saving of Ghana was $40 and education spending was $7. These figures require downward adjustment to account for the consumption of fixed capital ($19), as well as the depletion of wealth in the form of stored energy ($0), minerals ($4) and net forest assets ($8). In Ghana, the adjusted net saving was $16 per person in 2000. But given population growth of 1.7%, the country’s wealth actually shrunk by $18 per person in 2000. Notwithstanding the World Bank's conservative counting bias, Africa shows evidence of net per capita wealth reduction, largely traceable to the extraction of nonrenewable resources that is not counterbalanced by capital investment from those firms doing the extraction (Table 1).

Table 1: African countries' adjusted national wealth, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Income per capita before adjustment ($)</th>
<th>Change in wealth per capita after adjustment ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2925</td>
<td>814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>-152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CapeVerde</td>
<td>1195</td>
<td>-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comoros</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rep of Congo</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>-727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>3370</td>
<td>-2241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>-147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. The Bank’s estimates are conservative for at least three reasons: a minimalist definition based upon international pricing in 2000 (not potential future values when scarcity becomes a more crucial factor, especially in the oil industry); the partial calculation of damages to the local environment, to workers’ health/safety, and especially to women in communities around mines; and the Bank’s use of average – not marginal – cost resource rents also probably leads to underestimations of the depletion costs.
### Table: 2010 GDP and GDP per Capita (US$) for Select African Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP</th>
<th>GDP per Capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>3697</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>-210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>7089</td>
<td>904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2837</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### African leaders united?

How is Africa reacting? Generally the leadership of African countries has cooperated with those doing the resource extraction and utilizing Africa’s ecological space, with only complaints by exploited communities, by workers subject to safety/health violations and exploitation, and by environmentalists. However, finally in mid-2009, the African Union’s leadership on climate issues became a force to be reckoned with, thanks to Ethiopian prime minister Meles Zenawi, who also chaired the New Partnership for Africa’s Development and thus was invited to G20 gatherings along with the South African government. Sometimes seen merely as a US proxy power in the Horn of Africa – thanks to the disastrous, Washington-sponsored 2007 invasion of neighboring Somalia – Zenawi is rather more complex. He was once a self-described Marxist but became a tyrant whose troops killed scores of students and other democrats. It is ironic, thus, for Zenawi to lead the ecological debt charge, reportedly demanding a minimum of $67 billion – and up to $200 billion – annually from the North by 2020.¹⁵

Ironic or tragic, nevertheless this voice must be heard, considering how much Africa will be devastated by the climate crisis. The most shocking probable outcome of climate change is, according to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change director R.K. Pachauri, ‘that there could be a possible reduction in yields in agriculture of: 50% by 2020 in some African countries... In Africa, crop net revenues could fall by as much as 90% by 2100, with small-scale farmers being the most affected.’¹⁶ The Climate Change Vulnerability Index, calculated in 2009 ‘from dozens of variables measuring the capacity of a country to cope with the consequences of global warming’, listed 22 African countries out of 28 across the world at ‘extreme

---


risk’, whereas the United States is near the bottom of the world rankings of countries at risk even though it is the leading per capita contributor to climate change.\(^\text{17}\)

There is no question that those most responsible should pay reparations, now that there is near-universal awareness of the damage being done by rising greenhouse gas emissions, and by the ongoing stubborn refusal by the rich to cut back. The amounts can be debated, for of course $67 billion/year for Africa is way too low, given how many incalculably valuable species will be lost, how much devastation to individuals and communities is already underway, how many economies will falter, how much ecology is threatened.

The question is not mainly a technical one, but related to power. Behind African elites’ considerations are the threat to repeat their performance in Seattle in 1999 and Cancun in 2003, when denial of consent in World Trade Organisation negotiations were the proximate cause of the summits’ collapse on both occasions. On September 3, 2009, Zenawi issued a strong threat from Addis Ababa about the upcoming Copenhagen conference: ‘If need be we are prepared to walk out of any negotiations that threatens to be another rape of our continent.’\(^\text{18}\)

To gather that power, Zenawi established the Conference of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change: chairpersons of the AU and the AU Commission, representatives of Ethiopia, Algeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda, Chairpersons of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment and Technical Negotiators on climate change from all member states. They met at the AU Summit in Sirte, Libya in July 2009, agreeing that Africa would have a sole delegation to Copenhagen with a united front and demands for compensation. According to AU official Abebe Hailegabriel, ‘Trillions of dollars might not be enough in compensation. Thus there must be an assessment of the impact before the figure.’ Added AU head Jean Ping, ‘Africa’s development aspirations are at stake unless urgent steps are taken to address the problems of climate change. Climate change will fundamentally affect productivity, increase the prevalence of disease and poverty... and trigger conflict and war’.\(^\text{19}\)

The most important African negotiator – and largest CO2 emitter (responsible for more than 40% of the continent’s CO2) – is South Africa.\(^\text{20}\) Long seen as a vehicle for Western interests in Africa, Pretoria’s negotiators have two conflicting agendas: increasing Northern payments to Africa (a longstanding objective of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, which requested $64 billion per annum in aid

and investment concessions during the early 2000s); and increasing CO2 outputs through around 2050, when the Long-Term Mitigation Scenario – South Africa’s official climate cap - would come into effect and emissions declines are offered as a scenario. In the meantime, Pretoria has earmarked more than $100 billion for emissions-intensive coal and nuclear fired electricity generation plants due to be constructed during 2010-15, which would amplify Africa’s climate crisis, requiring more resources from the North for adaptation. South Africa does not, officially, see itself as an ecological creditor; As the environment minister, Buyelwa Sonjica put it in September 2009: ‘We expect money. We need money to be made available... we need money as of yesterday for adaptation and mitigation.’

South African negotiators also lead the G77, and are on record from August 2009 demanding that ‘at least 1% of global GDP should be set aside by rich nations’ so as, according to one report,

help developing countries conduct research, improve flood control, protect their coastlines, create seed banks and take other steps to cope with the severe storms and droughts linked to climate change. The money also could help poor countries obtain technology to reduce their carbon emissions. Alf Wills, a top South African environmental official, summed up the position going into Copenhagen: ‘No money, no deal.’

There are other allies, especially Bolivia, whose submission to the UNFCCC in 2009 made the ecological debt demand explicitly:

The climate debt of developed countries must be repaid, and this payment must begin with the outcomes to be agreed in Copenhagen. Developing countries are not seeking economic handouts to solve a problem we did not cause. What we call for is full payment of the debt owed to us by developed countries for threatening the integrity of the Earth’s climate system, for over-consuming a shared resource that belongs fairly and equally to all people, and for maintaining lifestyles that continue to threaten the lives and livelihoods of the poor majority of the planet’s population. This debt must be repaid by freeing up environmental space for developing countries and particular the poorest communities. There is no viable solution to climate change that is effective without being equitable. Deep emission reductions by developed countries are a necessary condition for stabilising the Earth’s climate. So too are profoundly larger transfers of technologies and financial resources than so far considered, if emissions are to be curbed in developing countries and they are also to realise their right to development and achieve their overriding priorities of poverty eradication and economic and social development. Any solution that does not ensure an equitable distribution of

the Earth’s limited capacity to absorb greenhouse gases, as well as the costs of mitigating and adapting to climate change, is destined to fail.  

Bolivia’s government is generally driven by left-leaning popular forces in the rural and urban social movements. Other countries that have expressed similar sentiments include Venezuela, Paraguay, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. In Africa, where most countries do not have such strong movements, what is the state of play around civil society’s ecological debt demands?

**Civil society reactions**

The threat of a walkout at Copenhagen was contemplated with interest by civil society groups, both in Africa and across the world. The former became increasingly active in August 2008 when Africa chapters of Jubilee South converged in Nairobi to debunk limited ‘debt relief’ by Northern powers and to plan the next stage of financial campaigning. Nairobi-based Africa Jubilee South co-coordinator Njoki Njehu concluded, ‘Africa and the rest of the Global South are owed a huge historical and ecological debt for slavery, colonialism, and centuries of exploitation.’ Njehu says Jubilee’s challenge as it rebuilds is to link issues as diverse as food sovereignty, climate change, trade and EU Economic Partnership Agreements and continuing debt bondage. ‘From the initial 13 countries that participated in the Jubilee South founding conference in Johannesburg in 1999, the Africa Jubilee South network has grown to organizations and movements from 29 countries.’

A year later in Nairobi, the Africa Peoples Movement on Climate Change, pronounced:

- We reject the principle and application of Carbon Trading, which is a false solution based on inventing a perverse property right to pollute, a property right to air;
- We demand that human rights and values be placed at the centre of all global, national and regional solutions to the problem of climate change;
- We call on colleagues in the social and economic justice movement globally to rigorously campaign against the undemocratic corporate led agendas which will dominate the deliberations and processes at COP 15;
- We emphasize that ecological, small holder, agro-biodiversity based food production can ensure food and seed sovereignty and address climate change in Africa;
- We support the call by African leaders for reparations on Climate Change and support the initiative of the upcoming AU ministers of environment meeting

---

and call for African governments to embrace more people centered alternatives for the African peoples;

- We urge African governments to engage civil society groups positively and collaborate with them to build common national and international responses on the problems of climate change.  

Another node of ecological debt organizing is the World Council of Churches (WCC), whose Central Committee adopted a formal statement in September 2009 on the North’s ‘deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice by addressing our debts to peoples most affected by ecological destruction and to the earth itself. ’ It is useful to consider the WCC’s analysis because it does not stop at the debt, but attacks the mode of production itself:

We call for the recognition, repayment and restitution of ecological debt in various ways, including non-market ways of compensation and reparation, that go beyond the market’s limited ability to measure and distribute... This warrants a re-ordering of economic paradigms from consumerist, exploitive models to models that are respectful of localized economies, indigenous cultures and spiritualities, the earth’s reproductive limits, as well as the right of other life forms to blossom. And this begins with the recognition of ecological debt.  

The WCC Central Committee made several requests, including:

- Urges Northern governments, institutions and corporations to take initiatives to drastically reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within and beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which stipulates the principles of historical responsibility and ‘common, but differentiated responsibilities’ (CDR), according to the fixed timelines set out by the UNFCCC report of 2007.

- Urges WCC member churches to call their governments to adopt a fair and binding deal, in order to bring the CO2 levels down to less than 350 parts per million (ppm), at the Conference of Parties (COP 15) of the UNFCCC in Copenhagen in December 2009, based on climate justice principles, which include effective support to vulnerable communities to adapt to the consequences of climate change through adaptation funds and technology transfer.

- Calls upon the international community to ensure the transfer of financial resources to countries of the South to keep petroleum in the ground in fragile environments and preserve other natural resources as well as to pay for the

---

25. Africa Peoples Movement on Climate Change (2009), 'Confronting the Climate Crisis: Preparing for Copenhagen and Beyond', Nairobi, 30 August.

costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation based on tools such as the Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR) Framework.

- Demands the cancellation of the illegitimate financial debts of Southern countries, most urgently for the poorest nations, as part of social and ecological compensations, not as official development assistance. 27

It is evident at this writing (September 2009) that the COP15 – or its immediate successors - will not make the urgent progress required on cutting emissions to the levels at which climate disaster can be averted; or on providing restitution and reparations to Third World peoples, or even canceling their illegitimate debts. To be sure, in September 2009, a desire by the European Union to begin paying its ecological debt was recorded, but only up to $22 billion annually to fund adaptation, roughly 1/7th of what EU environment commissioner Stavros Dimas observed would be required by 2020 ($145 bn). Some of that would be subtracted from existing aid. The EU damage estimates were considered far too conservative, as China’s mitigation and adaptation costs alone would be $438 bn annually by 2030, according to Beijing. According to one report, the EU view is that emissions trading should be the basis of ‘much of the shortfall’: ‘The international carbon market, if designed properly, will create an increasing financial flow to developing countries and could potentially deliver as much as €38bn per year in 2020.’ 28 As noted above, however, this strategy is replete with fatal flaws.

Because of the influence of big capital and pro-market ideology on Northern governments in the Kyoto process to date, not only will emissions continue rising and the ecological debt not be properly paid, carbon trading will not be dropped as a central EU and US strategy. As a result, critical narratives will become more common, and in turn will force serious advocates of environmental justice to raise very important strategic issues about how to get the North to repay the ecological debt.

**Conclusion: Repaying the debt?**

Existing North-South redistributive processes are not effective. Northern foreign aid to the South goes only a small way towards ecological debt repayment. It is a far lower sum (and falling) than military spending (which is rising), and in any case 60% is ‘phantom aid’, according to the Johannesburg-based agency Action Aid. 29 Aid is also a tool of imperialism. Other North-South payments to Africa are yet more dubious, including the debt relief promised in 2005. In spite of enormous hype at the Gleneagles G8 meeting, the International Monetary Fund calculates that notwithstanding a lower debt stock, the actual debt repayments of the lowest-income African countries stayed stable from 2006-08 and then increased 50% in

2009 as a percentage of export earnings. So although there was debt cancellation, it was on unrepayable debt, with debilitating debt servicing charges for low-income African countries still preventing local accumulation and provision of social services, much less financing preparations for climate change adaptation.

There are important debates about who should pay what share. But in general, it is important to note that ecological debt results from the unsustainable production and consumption systems adopted by elites in the Northern countries, which are to some extent generalized across the Northern populations. Hence even poor and working-class people in the North, often through no fault of their own, are tied into systems of auto-centric transport or conspicuous consumption, which mean that they consume far more of the Earth’s resources than do working-class people of the South.

Hence, recalling the WCC position in favour of a ‘Greenhouse Development Rights’ framework, it is worth considering that a per capita ‘right to pollute’ – and to trade pollution rights – will have some of the same dubious outcomes. The bigger questions which GDRs pose are whether environmental justice can be measured merely in terms of formal ‘equality’; whether environmental justice is instead historical, political-economic, and grounded in social struggles of those adversely affected; and in turn, whether environmental justice should not aim higher, for a broader, deeper eco-social transformation? The WCC hints at such a perspective, but the GDR approach may foreclose it by reducing the challenge to incremental reformism. When it comes specifically to GDRs as a methodology for calculating debt liabilities and beneficiaries, Larry Lohmann of The Cornerhouse (a British development institute) critiques the model’s tacit endorsement of a long-discredited concept of ‘development’ that condescendingly sees ‘resilience’ as ‘far beyond the grasp of the billions of people that are still mired in poverty’, and that singles out for special climate blame ‘subsistence farming, fuel wood harvesting, grazing, and timber extraction’ by ‘poor communities’ awaiting Northern tutelage in capital flows, social networking, carbon trading and methods for holding policymakers accountable.

Is a rights-based approach to environmental services preferable, as a strategy for demanding and properly redistributing ecological debt payments from North to South? South Africa’s ‘Free Basic Services’ provide insights into the possibilities and limitations of rights discourses for redistributing wealth from North to South. In 2000 (just after Nelson Mandela left the presidency), the ruling party’s municipal campaign platform highlighted this promise: ‘African National Congress-led local government will provide all residents with a free basic amount of water, electricity

---

and other municipal services, so as to help the poor. Those who use more than the basic amounts will pay for the extra they use. But as can be shown in excruciating detail, it was the failure to move beyond individualized nuclear-family household units and tokenistic amounts of free basic water (6 kl/household/month) and electricity (50kWh/household/month) that led to many ‘service delivery protests’ during subsequent years, contributing to South Africa’s standing as the country with the most per capita social unrest. Attempts to gain justice in these cases through the court system - even the Constitutional Court in September 2009 – proved extremely frustrating.32

Juridical approaches to ecological debt may not be optimal, although interesting precedents have emerged. In November 2008 a San Francisco court began considering an ecological debt and reparations lawsuit – under the Alien Tort Claims Act - filed by Larry Bowoto and the Ilaje people of the Niger Delta against Chevron for involvement in 1998 murders reminiscent of those that took the life of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders on November 10, 1995. The first judgments went against Bowoto et al but appeals are in process. In June 2009, Shell Oil agreed in a similar lawsuit to an out-of-court settlement with reparations payments of $15.5 million. Although representing just four hours’ worth of Shell profits, it was considered a crucial step in establishing liability and disincentivising corporate exploitation of people and nature. In late 2009, further reparations lawsuits were expected in the New York Second District Court by victims of apartheid who initially requested $400 billion in damages from US corporations which profited from South African operations during the same period. Supreme Court justices had so many investments in these companies that in 2008 they bounced the case back to a lower New York court to decide, effectively throwing out an earlier judgment against the plaintiffs: the Jubilee anti-debt movement, the Khulumani Support Group for apartheid victims, and 17 000 other black South Africans. When Judge Clara Scheindlin replaced the late John Sprizzo, the case suddenly was taken seriously and in March 2009 moved a step closer to trial when she rejected the corporations’ attempt to have it dismissed.33

Beyond these kinds of tort actions, will courts start declaring climate-related ecological debt a valid concept? Environmental rights to protection from climate change were explored in a court case filed by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the cities of Boulder, Colorado, Arcata, Santa Monica and Oakland in California, against the US Export- Import Bank and Overseas Private Investment Corporation, which had invested, loaned or insured $32 billion in fossil fuel projects from 1990–2003 without regard to the US National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). At present, only US cities have formal standing to sue for damages from climate change

under NEPA, in the wake of a 2005 federal ruling. The out-of-court-settlement in February 2009 meant that the defendants will in future incorporate CO2 emissions into planning, but there are prospects for further suits that extend into identification and payment of damages.34

There are quite obvious limits to prospects for court relief under the Alien Tort Claims Act or NEPA, the two most advanced areas. Hence it would be consistent to also proceed with more immediate strategies, as well as direct action tactics. As Al Gore expressed it in 2007, ‘I can’t understand why there aren’t rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants’.35 Arguing that ‘Protest and direct action could be the only way to tackle soaring carbon emissions,’ the US National Aeronautic and Space Administration’s leading climate scientist, James Hansen, ‘The democratic process is supposed to be one person one vote, but it turns out that money is talking louder than the votes. So, I’m not surprised that people are getting frustrated. I think that peaceful demonstration is not out of order, because we’re running out of time.’36 Hansen himself moved to direct action in 2009, demonstrating at coal-fired power plants in Coventry, England and West Virginia (where at the latter site he was arrested).

But the most effective examples of direct action come from the Global South, especially the Niger Delta. In January 2007, at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, many other groups became aware of this movement thanks to eloquent activists from the Delta, including the Port Harcourt NGO Environmental Rights Action (ERA). In separate disruptions of production (including armed interventions), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta prevented roughly 80% of the country’s oil from being extracted, although a cease-fire was called in mid-2009.37 The strategy is consistent with the grassroots, coalface and fenceline demands of civil society activists in the Oilwatch network (headquartered at ERA) to leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, the tar sand in the land. Activists from Accion Ecologica popularized this approach in their struggle to halt exploitation of the oil beneath the Yasuni park in the Ecuadoran Amazon. The German state development agency GTZ conceded to a $50 mn/year grant, although Yasuni may become a pilot carbon trading case unless Ecuadoran environmental and indigenous rights activists can resist.38

The legacy of keeping oil in the soil includes Alaskan and Californian environmentalists who halted drilling and even exploration. In Norway, the global justice group, ATTAC, took up the same concerns in an October 2007 conference and

began the hard work of persuading wealthy Norwegian Oil Fund managers that they should use the vast proceeds of their North Sea inheritance to repay Ecuadorans some of the ecological debt owed via a Yasuni grant. In Australia, regular blockades of Newcastle coal transport (by rail and sea) by the activist group, Rising Tide, correspond to Gore’s injunction. 

Canada is another Northern site where activists are hard at work to leave the oil in the soil. In a November 2007 conference in Edmonton, the University of Alberta Parkland Institute addressed the need to halt development of tar sand deposits (which require a liter of oil to be burned for every three extracted and devastate local water, fisheries, and air quality). Institute director Gordon Laxer laid out careful arguments for strict limits on the use of water and greenhouse gas emissions in tar sand extraction; realistic land reclamation plans (including a financial deposit large enough to cover full-cost reclamation up-front); no further subsidies for the production of dirty energy; provisions for energy security for Canadians (since so much of the tar sand extract is exported to the U.S.); and much higher economic rents on dirty energy to fund a clean energy industry (currently Alberta has a very low royalty rate). These kinds of provisions would strictly limit the extraction of fossil fuels and permit oil to leave the soil only under conditions in which much greater socio-ecological and economic benefit is retained by the broader society.\textsuperscript{39}

There are many other examples where courageous communities and environmentalists have lobbied successfully to keep nonrenewable resources (not just fossil fuels) in the ground for the sake of the environment, community stability, disincentivizing political corruption, and workforce health and safety. For many victims, the extraction of these resources is incredibly costly in terms of local land use, water extraction, energy consumption, and political corruption, and requires constant surveillance and community solidarity. The adverse balance of forces noted at the outset should be restated: the climate negotiators and corporations of the Global North will consistently fail to make sustained emissions cuts; to depart from the ineffectual, dangerous carbon trading modus operandi; and to offer adequate reparations for the ecological debt. This will, in turn, require national states to take stronger actions, such as Zenawi has threatened, or as Ecuador’s Rafael Correa did in defaulting on odious foreign debt in early 2009. But most of all, it will require people of conscience across the world to become involved, and to offer solidarity and activism aimed at leaving fossil fuels in the ground.

\textsuperscript{39} Laxer, G. (2007), ‘Freezing in the dark?’, Presentation, Parkland Institute, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 7 November.
A climate-poverty challenge in South Durban
with Vanessa Black, Rehana Dada and Desmond D'Sa, The Mercury, 19 August 2009

Let’s be frank: the most important trend to affect our lives over the coming decades – climate change – is being ignored by our own people, by our municipal representatives, and by the companies doing business in our neighbourhoods.

In South Durban, the Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) views climate change with the utmost concern and last year we issued a pamphlet to help residents understand the implications for our weather, our vulnerabilities to natural disaster and the ways we should begin adapting.

But we also think that mitigation of the problem is a responsibility of our organisation. After all, our neighbourhoods are full of climate tsotsis, especially in the petro-chemical, transport and pulp/paper industries.

The impact of climate change will especially be felt in several of our community’s vulnerable areas:

- Low-lying sites include areas where shacks have been built in flood plains and other places with inadequate storm-water drainage – and poor people especially are located in environmentally-vulnerable zones.
- Many wetland areas of South Durban have been destroyed over the past few decades.
- The ability of the beachfront to withstand bruising waves and torrential storms has limits, as the March 2007 semi-tsunami proved by ripping up infrastructure and even roads at Ansteys, Brighton, Cuttings and ’Toti beaches.
- Our landscape has been covered with asphalt and cement, leading to worse flash floods, as we saw in July 2008.
- Fishing has also already been adversely affected by rising seawater temperatures, as the failed 2009 sardine run demonstrated.
- The small-scale agricultural sector near the airport could be devastated, as the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change anticipates a 90% reduction this century in African farmer production due to droughts and floods; while many other farmers from rural KwaZulu-Natal will immigrate to Durban as their livelihoods decline.
- Street and market traders will be adversely affected if they do not get access to local food and fish products for resale.
- Jobs in the air transport, shipping/trucking and auto sectors will be radically changed by the imposition of carbon taxes, so the employment base of South Durban will need to adjust, and that usually happens at the expense of ordinary people.
- The proposed Transnet pipeline to double petroleum flows to Johannesburg is being rerouted through South Durban for what we believe are
environmentally-racist reasons – and without adequate consideration to
dangerous implications of (and for) climate change.

Already, our community is known as the armpit of South Africa, because sulphur
pollution – that rotten egg smell – is notorious. Lethal fires break out regularly at
badly-maintained facilities in the petro-chemical complex, especially the Engen
refinery. But in addition, greenhouse gases such as CO2 and methane are being
emitted by major industries at a rate that makes South Durban one of our country’s
worst climate hotspots.

These companies are going to have to completely transform their production
systems so as to be less destructive. We believe many should vacate our community
because of the persistent damage they have caused residents and the environment.

Unfortunately, when it comes to climate change, it is not only the corporations that
are now the enemies of our current residents and our descendants.

Service delivery failure also characterises the Durban municipality’s climate policy.
Officials have failed to incorporate climate change in economic development
planning, leaving all our citizens far more vulnerable than we should be:

- Gambling that our city’s future will be based on tourism, major sports events
  and transport is absurd given what we now know about the need for national
  and global carbon taxes.
- The municipality’s attempt to profit from climate change through ‘Clean
  Development Mechanism’ carbon trading gimmicks at several landfill sites is
  not only unworkable, it is also immoral because it allows Northern countries
  and companies to maintain greenhouse gas emissions while neglecting green
  alternatives to waste disposal at home.
- The city’s failure to fund green jobs and the just transition away from fossil
  fuel addiction is another example of short-sightedness.
- City manager Michael Sutcliffe has already littered Durban with failed
  gambles and public subsidies at the Point and ICC, formerly Blue Flag
  Beaches, the Early Morning Market, bus privatisation, services
  disconnections and a growing housing crisis, evictions of fisher-folk from the
  port, non-consultative street renaming, and vast cost-overruns at the
  Mabhida Stadium. He has let loose police on all our communities when we
  attempt to stage non-violent marches. He treats shackdwellers, market
  traders, organised labour, and residents’ organisations with contempt.

Supported by Oxfam, today SDCEA holds a day-long hearing at the Clairwood Tamil
Institute Hall, focusing on ways that climate change and poverty are mutually
destructive, and how we can fight back, for the good of our present and the survival
of our society and environment long into the future.
When the United Nations Kyoto Protocol Conference is updated in Copenhagen, Denmark in December, we will provide testimonies from South Durban to inform the deliberations. Last week, the main UN official responsible for climate change, Yvo de Boer, warned that efforts at reaching an emissions reduction deal “will not make it at this rate”.

At the rate the elites in both Copenhagen and Durban are going, it is only through grassroots pressure that they will change their ways. It is up to all of us to save our species from self-destruction, by reversing the corporate and state policies and practices that are so certain to wreck the planet.
From Nigeria to Durban, an oil change is needed
with Khadija Sharife, *Muslim Views*, May 2009

“We sometimes feed conflict by the way we award contracts, gain access to land, and deal with community representatives,” Shell Nigeria admitted in 2003.

It was a modest confession from a corporate giant that has long collaborated with the state to loot Nigeria’s oil and gas resources, systematically destroying the indigenous ecology through spills, deforestation, flaring and dumped waste, in the process fueling climate change that threatens our collective future on the planet.

In 2006, the Niger Delta Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Project declared the region “one of the 10 most important wetlands and marine ecosystems in the world.” Although 20 million people directly depend on shared natural Delta resources such as fisheries, fertile land and water sources, Shell is responsible for 2900 oil spills.

Many have stood up to say “enough!”, but perhaps it was the Ogoniland civic leader and writer/poet Ken Saro-Wiwa who is best known for courageous socio-environmental struggle against Shell, especially after mobilizing 300 000 non-violent protesters in early 1993.

Our UKZN colleague Dennis Brutus recalls his last meeting with the 54 year-old Saro-Wiwa, at the University of Pittsburgh: “Ken was displaying his new novel Soja Boy, his 28th book. He seemed very gloomy - even pessimistic: as if he had a foreboding that he would be executed on his return to Nigeria.”

Brutus traveled to Johannesburg soon thereafter: “After a Wits conference in 1995, the US poet Amiri Baraka and I brought a letter to Mandela’s office appealing for a stronger role in preventing his execution. But the functionary who took the letter was not encouraging.”

Brutus reminds us, “Saro-Wiwa was executed in a bungled operation, with three attempts. The evidence has emerged that the Nigerian regime of Sani Abacha acted on instructions of Shell Oil.”

Saro-Wiwa’s son and brother are now taking Shell to court in the US under the Alien Tort Claims Act, a law Brutus himself helped to publicise as part of a suit demanding apartheid reparations from multinational corporations that profited from apartheid by colluding with the white South African military prior to 1994.

Families of Saro-Wiwa and other victims claim that from 1990-1995, Shell requested and financed Nigerian soldiers to repress a peaceful
environmental justice movement with deadly force. On November 10, 1995, the “Ogoni Nine” were executed after being framed for murder and tried by the military.

In addition to Saro-Wiwa, those killed were youth leader John Kpuinen, Dr. Barinem Kiobel, Saturday Doobee, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbokoo, Paul Levera, Felix Nuate and Baribor Bera.

On May 26, after twelve years of preliminary arguments, the Ogoni finally get their day in the New York courts, supported by Brutus’ anti-apartheid ally Paul Hoffman, the Center for Constitutional Rights, EarthRights International and Justice in Nigeria Now.

Solidarity protests will be held around the world, including The Bluff’s Solomon Mahlangu (Edwin Swales) Shell petrol station.

Nearby, Shell’s refining operation at Sapref is partly responsible for the extreme leukemia and asthma rates suffered by Merebank and Wentworth residents. Shell won the groundWork/CCS “Corpse Awards” in 2005, for contributions to mortality/morbidity in the South Durban basin: “13 thousand tones of sulphur dioxide and 1.2 million tones of carbon dioxide as well as the usual heady mix of volatile organic compounds.”

A few years earlier, in 2001, according to Desmond D’Sa of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, “Sapref’s ageing pipelines ruptured and leaked between one and two million litres of fuel into the ground beneath local people’s houses, and 26 tons of tetra-ethyl-lead leaked out of a holding tank adjacent to community houses. Shell then set up a ‘Community Liaison Forum’ to divide the community.”

The damage pales in comparison to the Niger Delta, where it is estimated that 1.5 million tonnes of oil have spilled since drilling began 51 years ago, the equivalent of an Exxon Valdez spill each year, costing more than $5 billion in annual environmental damage. Last year, Nigerian president Umaru Musa Yar’Adua finally conceded the obvious: “There is a total loss of confidence between Shell and the Ogoni people. So, another operator acceptable to the Ogonis will take over.”

But Yar’Adua’s regime, like others before it, is rife with corruption and collaboration, and Shell has hung on in a country responsible for 10% of its profits. The bulk of Nigeria’s wealth is held offshore by corrupt officials, and is estimated at over $100 billion.

It is not only Nigerian money that flows out. In Cape Town, Pastor Barry Saro Wuganaale assists Ogoni exiles who still face exile “because of founded fears of persecutions by the government against those who believe in the
liberation of their motherland.”

Nigeria, considered to be the US’s new oil cushion, is the seventh largest producer in the world pumping out a minimum of 900,000 barrels of crude each day. Even greater amounts would flow were it not for militant activists of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, who kidnap foreign oil workers both for ransom and to halt the destruction.

As MEND spokesperson Jomo Gbomo put it a year ago after an attack on a Shell facility, “Our candid advice to the oil majors is that they should not waste their time repairing any lines as we will continue to sabotage them.”

Despite Nigeria raking in over $400 billion during the past three decades, the population living under $1 per day has increased from 59% (1990) to 71% (2008) while the percentage of people with access to clean water has decreased by 3% (50% - 1990 to 47% 2008).

Says Brutus, “The reparations case against Shell strongly relates to our South African anti-apartheid case.” In the same court, six weeks ago, Judge Shira Scheindlin found that Daimler Chrysler, Ford, General Motors, IBM, Fujitsu and Rheinmetall must answer charges in September.

Six years ago, US secretary of state Colin Powell arm-twisted Thabo Mbeki and justice minister Penuell Maduna to write a letter opposing the apartheid reparations case on grounds it interfered with SA’s own reconciliation process and hence would harm US foreign policy. Will Jacob Zuma and Jeff Radebe follow suit with this blasphemy, given how they have pledged to foreign investors there will be no change in economic policy?

Economist Joseph Stiglitz and Archbishop Desmond Tutu testified against Pretoria’s alliance with the corporations. Last month Scheindlin confirmed that there was “absolutely nothing in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, its goals or the pursuit of the overriding goal of reconciliation, linked with truth, that would be impeded by this litigation. To the contrary, such litigation is entirely consistent with these policies and the findings of the TRC.”

As Brutus’ co-plaintiffs in the Khulumani Support Group observed, “That ruling has certainly breathed new life into a class of human-rights litigation seeking to establish that corporations have obligations under international law to not be complicit in human rights violations.”

Some of Saro-Wiwa’s last words are the most inspiring, and can ring true with some assistance from the US courts: “I have no doubt at all about the ultimate success of my cause, no matter the trials and tribulations which I
and those who believe with me may encounter on our journey. Nor imprisonment nor death can stop our ultimate victory.”
The state of the global carbon trade debate

The Commoner, Winter 2009

Introduction

“I can’t understand why there aren’t rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants.” - Al Gore speaking privately, August 2007

What is the state of the strategic debate over climate change? What kinds of reforms are being contested? Are we in danger of seeing the air itself – one of our last commons – become commodified, reflecting not only the core elite strategy to mitigate global warming, but market-environmentalist acquiescence?

As climate change generates destruction and misery, the people and corporations responsible for these problems – especially in the US/EU-centred petro-mineral-military complex and associated financial agencies like the World Bank – are renewing their grip on power, but likewise reasserting their rights to property and to inaction on climate change. And a good many activists once strongly opposed to the corporate elites have bought in, seduced by the idea that we have to tackle the climate crisis one step at a time, with reforms that the establishment can live with, that in turn can be used to leverage substantial cuts in emissions through clever market incentives.

Here, we grapple with four sets of strategies to combat climate change: emissions cap-and-trade options, carbon taxation, command and control of emissions, and alternative grassroots climate change mitigation strategies. The latter two are what we insist will be necessary to save the planet, yet it is the former two strategies that are still ascendant.

A scientific consensus now appears unshakable: by 2050, the world requires 80% reductions in CO2 emissions to prevent tipping of the world environment into an unmanageable process and potentially a species-threatening crisis. Yet the options being contemplated in global and national public policy debates to take us to 80% reductions were nowhere near what is required, for several reasons.

The first is that the global balance of forces appears adverse to the kinds of radical changes required. As a mid-2008 report from Bonn put it,

---

2. Earlier reports on the struggle over commodification of the air as a climate change mitigation strategy include the co-edited books with Rehana Dada (2005) Trouble in the Air (Durban, Centre for Civil Society and Amsterdam, Transnational Institute) and with Dada and Graham Erion (2007, 2008), Climate Change, Carbon Trading and Civil Society (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press and Amsterdam, Rozenberg Publishers).
Another round of talks on the road towards a new global deal on climate change was wrapping up in Germany on Friday, battered by criticism that progress had been negligible. The 12-day haggle under the 192-nation United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was the second since the accord in Bali, Indonesia, last December that set down a “road map” towards a new planetary treaty... India representative Chandrashekar Dasgupta deplored “the lack of any real progress” in Bonn and “a deafening silence” among industrialised countries, save the European Union.3

In this context, the current state of debate, in mid-2008, divides those who would want the world economy to slowly and painlessly adapt to CO2 abatement strategies, and those who would advocate dramatic emissions cuts in a manner that is both redistributive (from rich to poor and North to South, and in the process male to female), and sufficiently shocking to economic structures and markets that major transformations in production and consumption are compelled.

Harnessing the market to fix a market imperfection

There are some who argue that market-based instruments – either a “cap-and-trade” system or carbon tax (or some hybrid) – will have the capacity to rope in the major CO2 emitters and compel them to reduce greenhouse gases as an economic strategy, a means of using the market to fix a market imperfection. A debate has emerged about how to make mitigation more efficient. As the US Congressional Budget Office explains:

The most efficient approaches to reducing emissions of CO2 involve giving businesses and households an economic incentive for such reductions. Such an incentive could be provided in various ways, including a tax on emissions, a cap on the total annual level of emissions combined with a system of tradable emission allowances, or a modified cap-and-trade program that includes features to constrain the cost of emission reductions that would be undertaken in an effort to meet the cap.4

The “cap” means that each major point source of emissions - usually in the form of a country and a firm within a country - would be granted an emissions permit for each tonne of CO2 released into the atmosphere. The cap would gradually reduce to the point that by 2050, the 80% target is met. The crucial point is that through the “trade”, flexibility can be attained so as to achieve more efficient greenhouse gas reduction. Those with the opportunity to make bigger cuts should do so and sell their “hot air” - the emissions saved above and beyond what is required at any given point in time - to those who have a harder time making the required cuts. Such a

trading strategy would keep the high-emissions businesses alive until they have time to adapt. Auctioning the permits would give governments a dependable revenue stream which could be used to invest in renewable energy and other innovations. In the US, $300 billion per year is anticipated as feasible income (at $10-15 per metric tone of CO2) by reducing emissions 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.

Another version of a market-based climate change mitigation system – which either enforces underlying economic dynamics or changes them - is a **tax on greenhouse gas emissions**. Such a tax would take the production system as given and alter the demand structure. According to an assessment by the US Congressional Budget Office,

> A tax on emissions would be the most efficient incentive-based option for reducing emissions and could be relatively easy to implement. If it was coordinated among major emitting countries, it would help minimize the cost of achieving a global target for emissions by providing consistent incentives for reducing emissions around the world. If other major nations used cap-and-trade programs rather than taxes on emissions, a U.S. tax could still provide roughly comparable incentives for emission reductions if the tax rate each year was set to equal the expected price of allowances under those programs.  

The major problems with taxation are tax avoidance capacities of influential industries, and incidence: who will pay the bill. As noted below, there are ways to design a tax system with a strongly redistributive outcome, and in the process to incentivize transformative economic strategies. However, a dramatic shift in political power is required for such an outcome.

A more equitable version of emissions trading advocacy comes from those who recommend a **per capita strategy** oriented to social justice along North-South lines, combined with trading. The **per capita right-to-emit** has been advocated through “contraction and convergence” and “Greenhouse Development Rights” strategies.

The alternatives to such market-based strategies typically fall into state-oriented **command-and-control**, and activist “direct action”. The rationale here is, typically, that the application of market incentives - and in the process, the granting of pollution rights – cannot generate the cuts needed to save the species from severe damage due to climate change. Instead, a variety of strategies and tactics that would explicitly cut greenhouse gas emissions is preferable. Some of the strategies – a switch to renewable energy, changed consumption patterns, new production and consumption incentives through punitive taxation, and “keep the oil in the soil and the coal in the hole” campaigns – are already being adopted by some activists.

---

The state of the debate

In mid-2008, the most important single site of debate was the US Congress, where a cap-and-trade law proposed by Senators Joe Lieberman and John Warner was narrowly defeated. Although there are two committed US Presidential candidates in the November 2008 election who have aggressive positions on climate change – Ralph Nader (Independent) and Cynthia McKinney (Greens) – their chances of winning are negligible. The two who will set the climate agenda from 2009 onwards are Barack Obama and John McCain, and both support the cap-and-trade concept. The primary difference is that Obama supports and auction while McCain would give out emissions permits to large CO2 polluters for free, at least initially.

The Environmental Defense Fund argues that core support for cap-and-trade in the US Congress represents an opportunity in 2009 for a major legislative initiative. However, opposition to Lieberman-Warner by environmentalists and other progressive organisations – including Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, MoveOn.org, CREDO Mobile and Public Citizen - was a result of its inclusion of support for nuclear energy, its inadequate emissions cap, the adverse impact on low-income people, and other problems inherent in carbon trading. Increasingly, there are many environmental justice organisations which lobby not for cap-and-trade, but for a robust and fair carbon tax instead.

The other main site of debate is Europe, whose Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) has been hotly contested. Due to the large reliance upon controversial offsets as well as the ETS price crash in April 2006 once a flood of emissions permits were released to companies on a gift (non-auctioned) basis, there is doubt about the ability of the ETS authority to tackle the challenge of regulating emissions. Moreover, roughly 50 billion euros worth of pollution rights (measured at 30 euros per tonne) are being transferred to large European CO2 emitters annually through the ETS (Table 1).

Table 1: Transfers of wealth to polluters by EU countries
According to Jutta Kill, there are five lessons to be learned from the ETS experience:

1. Over-allocation of permits due to intensive industry lobbying during the allocation process led to price collapse of ETS permit prices in April 2006 and few permit trades for compliance purposes. Similar price collapse due to over-allocation has been reported for the New South Wales emissions trading scheme. Lack of a stringent cap has undermined the emissions trading scheme. Slight tightening of the cap for the second phase of the ETS from 2008-2012 in the wake of the failure and price collapse during phase 1 has been offset by increasing the hole in the cap: across the board, companies are allowed to use significantly more offset credits from CDM and JI projects during phase 2 compared to phase 1 of the ETS. Several reports have shown that the shortfall of permits resulting from the tightening of the cap in phase 2 will be filled to 88%-100% by increased volume of offset credit influx into the ETS.

2. Free allocation of emission permits has led to record windfall profits to energy utilities and some of the highest emitting industry sectors in the EU. 100% auctioning in the third phase of the ETS increasingly considered as the only remedy to salvage the ETS. Capping emissions without 100% auctioning
selects against immediate investment in long-term structural change. Short-term and uncertain price signals discourage structural change, cost-spreading discourages innovation.

3. Any influx of offset credits into the emissions trading scheme will undermine effectiveness due to risk of development of a ‘lemons market’ as a result of unverifiable quality of offset credits. This is of concern particularly given the increasing evidence that up to one third of CDM projects either already registered or in the process of CDM registration are considered ‘non-additional’ by CDM experts.

4. There is increasing acknowledgement, including from the private sector, that emissions trading will not provide the incentives and price signals required to trigger significant investments and R&D into zero-carbon and low-carbon technologies which is required to be able to achieve the emissions cuts required to avert climate chaos.

5. Increasing signs that more effective approaches to switch to zero-carbon economies are held back for fear of jeopardizing the EU’s flagship Emissions Trading Scheme. A leaked UK government internal note for example reveals a deep concern that achieving the 20 per cent renewable energy target itself could present a “major risk” to the EU’s emission trading scheme, for which London has become a major centre of exchange. Combined with the EU’s drive to greater energy efficiency, increasing the share of renewable energy could cause a carbon price collapse and make the ETS “redundant”, the note says.

A crucial determinant of the impact of market mechanisms, whether carbon trades or taxes, is the problem of our unreliable understanding of carbon price elasticity: i.e., what happens to demand for carbon-related products when their price changes, either in small increments or dramatically. Latest data, and their implications for environmental justice, are reviewed below. In addition, a series of less publicised alternatives are in continual evolution, including the Contraction-and-Convergence and Greenhouse Development Rights strategies for per capita emissions rights, which also involve trading.

In contrast to market-related approaches, command-and-control strategies for emissions reductions have an important history. However, for public policy to evolve in a just and effective way on climate emissions, a much stronger set of measures will be required. These will mix the set of command-and-control strategies associated with prior emissions controls (e.g. ChloroFluoroCarbons in the

1996 Montreal Protocol and many European regulations of emissions) and the national state strategy known as “leave the oil in the soil” (and “leave the coal in the hole”), with direct grassroots action against greenhouse gas emission points (such as coal facilities), as advocated by Al Gore in 2007.

Reformist and non-reformist reforms

There are intrinsic, deep-level problems in the new emissions markets, both on their own terms and with respect to the climate and peoples most vulnerable. What is required is agreement on the strategic orientation and the kinds of alliances that can move the debate forward. To this end, applied to the debate over market solutions to the climate crisis, consider the late French sociologist Andre Gorz’s distinction (in his books Strategy for Labour and Socialism and Revolution)7 between “reformist reforms” and “non-reformist reforms”:

1) Reformist reforms undergird, strengthen and relegitimise the main institutions and dynamics in the system that cause the climate change problem, and thus weaken and demobilise environmental and social justice advocacy communities through co-option;

2) Non-reformist reforms undermine, weaken and delegitimise the climate change system’s main institutions and dynamics, and consequently strengthen its critics, giving them momentum and further reason to mobilize.

The prior pages allow us to distinguish four market-based emissions mitigation initiatives along this spectrum:

1) carbon trades without auctions, where pollution permits are grandfathered in, as in the European Trading Scheme, are now so widely delegitimised, that only US Republican Party candidate John McCain supports them;

2) carbon trades with auctions will increasingly dominate discussions, especially in the US if Barack Obama is elected President in November, in part because they have the support of many mainstream commentators and large environmental organizations;

3) carbon taxes, either aimed to be revenue-neutral, or to raise funds for renewables and socio-economic transformation, will continue to be seen as the main progressive alternative to carbon trading, even though such taxes do not address more fundamental power relations or achieve systematic change required to avert climate disaster; and

4) **Greenhouse Development Rights, Contraction-and-Convergence** and other *per capita* “right to pollute” strategies with a North-South redistributive orientation are also advocated by eloquent environmentalists and some Third World leaders, and entail a trading component and the property right to emit.

Each strategy has major disadvantages by virtue of being located within market-based systems, especially during a period of extreme financial volatility during which energy-related securities (including emissions credits) have been amongst the most unreliable measures of value. As a result, we can conclude that the first two are reformist reforms, and the latter two have non-reformist possibilities. There are two further non-reformist alternatives – command-and-control emissions prohibitions and local supply-side strategies (a kind of command-and-control *from below*) – that bear consideration once the market-based strategies are briefly reviewed.

A central problem is that reformist reforms can be *counterproductive* to mitigating climate change. In short, it is possible that an exploitative system becomes even stronger in the wake of an eco-social change campaign. If campaigners unwittingly adopt the same logic of the system, and turn for change implementation to the kinds of institutions responsible for exploitative damage, and moreover also restore those institutions’ credibility, the reforms may do more harm than good.

To illustrate, if mainstream environmentalists endorse World Bank strategies to commodify forests through the “Reducing Emissions From Deforestation and Degradation” (REDD) programme, their co-optation inevitably strengthens the Bank – responsible for vast climate damage as a major fossil fuel investor – and weakens the work of indigenous people and environmental activists. The reformist-reform logic appears in the case of a Brazilian meat packing plant in the Amazon that coincides with the Bank’s investments in forest protection. There are, in such cases, persuasive advocates of reform, such as Dr Daniel Nepstad of Woods Hole Research Institute, who accept the basic parameters of the system’s logic, namely the ongoing exploitation of the Amazon, and who seek to tame that process using World Bank resources:

The irony is that at the same time the World Bank was launching the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, the International Finance Corporation [a World Bank agency] was making a loan to the Bertin meat-packing plant in the Brazilian Amazon. The loan aims to set up a sustainable supply of beef for an ecological meat-packing facility in Marab in the state of Para. What upset the protestors was the idea that the same institution would be accelerating deforestation by expanding the capacity to process meat in the Amazon region as it creates this mechanism for compensating nations for reducing their emissions.

Our own feeling on this is that there comes a point where we have to acknowledge that the region is undergoing an economic transformation and
if we can find a powerful lever for commodifying how this transformation takes place - putting a premium on legal land-use practices, legal deforestation, the gradual elimination of the use of fire - we should take it. For me that trumps the negative consequences of setting up increased capacity in the region. In other words, I really do believe that there are many responsible cattle ranchers and soy farmers in the Amazon who are waiting for some sort of recognition through positive incentives.

The incentive could be a very small mark up - literally a few cents per pound of beef sold - but it would send a signal to these ranchers that if they want to participate in the new beef economy, they better have their legal forest reserve in order or have compensated for it, maintain or be in the process of restoring their riparian zone forests, control erosion, and get their cows out of the streams and into artificial watering tanks. There is a whole range of positive things that can happen once cattle ranchers see that if they do things right they are rewarded. This means that as Brazil moves forward as the world’s leading exporter of beef - with tremendous potential to expand - we have a way to shape that expansion as it takes place to reduce the negative ecological impacts.8

Such logic is also evident in efforts to reform carbon trading by advocating the auctioning of emissions permits. In opposition to reformist reforms, a coalition of 32 Indigenous Peoples (and environmental allies) lobbied against the REDD programme:

Given the threat to Indigenous Peoples’ Rights that REDD represents, we call on the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to recommend strongly to the UNFCCC, the UN Forum of Forests, concerned UN agencies such as UNEP, the World Bank, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples and nation states that REDD not be considered as a strategy to combat Climate Change but, in fact, is in violation of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, we also urge the Permanent Forum to recommend strongly to the Convention on Biological Diversity that the implementation of the programme of work on Forests and biodiversity prohibit REDD. We also further urge that Paragraph 5 be amended to remove “clean development mechanism, the Clean Energy Investment Framework, and the Global Environment Facility”. These initiatives do not demonstrate good examples of partnership with indigenous peoples. There are many CDM projects that have human rights violations, lack of transparency and have failed to recognize the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent.9

In contrast to reformist reform initiatives such as REDD, non-reformist reforms are generated by campaigns that explicitly reject the underlying logic of climate change, i.e., fossil fuel exploitation. Such reforms legitimate the opponents of the system, not the system itself, and lead to further mobilisation rather than to the movement’s cooptation. An example is the partially-successful struggle to “keep the oil in the soil” in the Yasuní National Park waged for several years by the Quito NGO Accion Ecologia and its Oil Watch allies. The campaign advanced rapidly in 2007, when Ecuadoran president Rafael Correa declared his intent to leave $12 billion worth of oil reserves untouched in perpetuity, in exchange for anticipated payments from international sources - not as a carbon offset, but instead to be considered part of the North’s repayment of its “ecological debt” to the South.

The aim of the proposal is to provide a creative solution for the threat posed by the extraction of crude oil in the Ishpingo-Tiputini-Tambococha (ITT) oil fields, which are located in the highly vulnerable area of Yasuní National Park. The proposal would contribute to preserving biodiversity, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and their way of life.

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa has stated that the country’s first option is to maintain the crude oil in the subsoil. The national and international communities would be called on to help the Ecuadorian government implement this costly decision for the country. The government hopes to recover 50% of the revenues it would obtain by extracting the oil. The procedure involves the issuing of government bonds for the crude oil that will remain “in situ”, with the double commitment of never extracting this oil and of protecting Yasuní National Park. It is important to keep in mind that if Ecuador succeeds in receiving the hoped for amount – estimated at 350 million dollars annually – it would only be for a period of ten years beginning after the sixth year, since production and potential revenues would progressively decline at the end of that period.

A more promising alternative would be a strategy to provide the government with the 50% of resources in such a way as to provide a consistent income for an indefinite period of time. This resources would be channelled towards activities that help to free the country from its dependency on exports and imports and to consolidate food sovereignty. The proposal is framed within the national and international contexts based on the following considerations:

1. halt climate change
2. stop destruction of biodiversity
3. protect the huaorani people
4. economic transformation of the country.

The very notion of an “ecological debt” is also a non-reformist reform, because although it asserts the calculation of the monetary value of nature, payment on such an obligation would revise such a range of power relationships that massive structural change would inevitably follow. Such linkages between environmental stewardship and social justice provide the only sure way to generate political principles that can inform lasting climate mitigation. Prior to concluding with these movements’ most recent call to action, we must quickly review the proposals “in between”, and ask, will principles of non-reformist reformism be adopted by those advocating carbon taxes and per capita emissions rights?

Two crucial questions emerge which will help determine whether the reforms proposed by carbon tax and per capita emissions rights advocates do more harm than good. The first is whether the kinds of reforms proposed – which entail putting a price on carbon and exposing that price (and all manner of related negotiations) to corporate-dominated national and global-scale “governance” initiatives – can be assured of both genuinely addressing the climate crisis and also redistributing energy and economic resources from rich to poor. The “devil is in the details” in relation to both a carbon tax and per capita emissions rights, yet as noted, the presumptions entailed in taxation (which often has a maldistributive impact, as shown in the British Columbia gas tax) and allocations of property rights will make a constructive outcome unlikely.

Might non-reformist reform opportunities emerge so that a carbon tax redistributes resources to both renewable energy investments and to low-income people who, through no fault of their own, are most vulnerable to higher energy prices? Could a per capita rights mechanism be designed and adopted that move forward the agenda of the environmental and social justice movements without falling victim to market distortions? *These are not impossible outcomes, but given prevailing power relations are quite unlikely.*

**Strategic problems for the environmental justice movement**

The next question is whether pursuing these sorts of reforms will contribute to the expansion and empowerment of the environmental justice movement. At the December 2007 Bali Conference of Parties, a movement emerged to unite “green” and “red” demands:

- reduced consumption;
- huge financial transfers from North to South based on historical responsibility and ecological debt for adaptation and mitigation costs paid
for by redirecting military budgets, innovative taxes and debt cancellation;

- leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in appropriate energy-efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy;
- rights based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous land rights and promotes peoples’ sovereignty over energy, forests, land and water; and
- sustainable family farming and peoples’ food sovereignty.

The alternative strategies proposed above do not rely entirely upon command-and-control, for that in turn requires national and ultimately global state power, which is not likely to be exercised by environmentally-responsible political parties for many years if not decades, notwithstanding encouraging signs from Ecuador. Instead, a new approach to command-and-control-from-below is being adopted which takes forward community, labour and environmental strategies to maintain resources in the ground, especially fossil fuels and especially in cases where “resource curse” economic power relations prevail. It is in such cases where activists have an unprecedented opportunity.

Because of the failure of elites to properly recognise and address climate change, and because their strategy of commodifying the commons through the Clean Development Mechanism was already a serious threat to numerous local communities across the Third World, the Durban Group for Climate Justice produced a Declaration on Carbon Trading in 2004, which rejected the claim that this strategy could halt the climate crisis. It insisted that the crisis has been caused more than anything else by the mining of fossil fuels and the release of their carbon to the oceans, air, soil and living things.

The Durban Declaration suggested that people need to be made more aware of carbon trading threat, and to actively intervene against it. By August 2005, inspiring citizen activism in Durban’s Clare Estate community forced the municipality to withdraw an application to the World Bank for carbon trading finance to include methane extraction from the vast Bisasar Road landfill (instead, the application was for two relatively tiny suburban dumps). But the heroic battle against Bisasar’s CDM status was merely defensive, and the loss of Sajida Khan to cancer in July 2007 was a great blow to the struggle there. Community residents have a proactive agenda, to urgently ensure the safe and environmentally sound extraction of methane from the Bisasar Road landfill, even if that means slightly higher rubbish removal bills for those in Durban who are thoughtlessly filling its landfills, without recycling their waste.10

At the time the Durban Declaration was drafted in October 2004, only cutting-edge environmental activists and experts understood the dangers of carbon trading. Others – including many well-meaning climate activists – argued that the dangers are not intrinsic in trading, just in the rotting ‘low hanging fruits’ that represent the

first and easiest projects to fund, at the cheapest carbon price. Since then, however, numerous voices have been raised against carbon colonialism. These voices oppose the notion that, through carbon trading, Northern polluters can continue their fossil fuel addiction, drawing down the global atmospheric commons in the process. Rather than foisting destructive schemes like the toxic Bisasar Road dump on the South, the North owes a vast ecological debt.

**Conclusion: Direct action to protect the climate commons**

It is here, finally, where the most crucial lesson of the climate debate lies: in confirming the grassroots, coalface and fenceline demand by civil society activists to *leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, the resources in the ground*. This demand emanated in a systemic way at the Kyoto Protocol negotiations in 1997 from the group OilWatch when it was based in Quito, Ecuador, as heroic activists from Accion Ecologia took on struggles such as halting exploitation of the Yasuni oil.

Within a decade, in January 2007, at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, many other groups became aware of this movement thanks to eloquent activists from the Niger Delta, including the Port Harcourt NGO Environmental Rights Action. (ERA visited Durban in March 2007 to expand the network with excellent allies such as the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and the Pietermaritzburg NGO groundWork, and in turn these groups committed in July 2008 to campaign against the proposed pipeline from Durban to Johannesburg which would double petrol product flow).

But the legacy of resisting fossil fuel abuse goes back much further, and includes Alaskan and Californian environmentalists who halted drilling and even exploration. In Norway, the global justice group ATTAC took up the same concerns in an October 2007 conference, and began the hard work of persuading wealthy Norwegian Oil Fund managers that they should use the vast proceeds of their North Sea inheritance to repay Ecuadorans some of the ecological debt owed. In Australia, regular blockades of Newcastle coal transport (by rail and sea) by the activist group Rising Tide correspond to Al Gore’s injunction, noted at the outset. As Gore showed in his August 2008 endorsement of Obama at the Denver Democratic Convention, the establishment’s desire for offsets will require even more intensive activism of this sort.

Canada is another Northern site where activists are hard at work to leave the oil in the soil. In a November 2007 conference in Edmonton, the Parkland Institute of the University of Alberta also addressed the need for no further development of tar sand deposits (which require a litre of oil to be burned for every three to be extracted, and which devastate local water, fisheries and air quality). Institute director Gordon Laxer laid out careful arguments for strict limits on the use of water and greenhouse gas emissions in tar sand extraction; realistic land reclamation plans (including a financial deposit large enough to cover full-cost reclamation up-front); no further subsidies for the production of dirty energy; provisions for energy
security for Canadians (since so much of the tar sand extract is exported to the US); and much higher economic rents on dirty energy to fund a clean energy industry (currently Alberta has a very low royalty rate). These kinds of provisions would strictly limit the extraction of fossil fuels and permit oil to leave the soil only under conditions in which much greater socio-ecological and economic benefit is retained by the broader society.  

There are many other examples where courageous communities and environmentalists have lobbied successfully to keep nonrenewable resources (not just fossil fuels) in the ground, for the sake of the environment, community stability, disincetivising political corruption and workforce health and safety. The highest-stake cases in South Africa at present may well be the Limpopo Province platinum fields and Wild Coast titanium finds, where communities are resisting foreign companies. The extraction of these resources is incredibly costly in terms of local land use, water extraction, energy consumption and political corruption, and requires constant surveillance and community solidarity.

Finally, one of the most eloquent climate analysts is George Monbiot, so it was revealing that in December 2007, instead of going to Bali, he stayed home in Britain and caused some trouble, reporting back in his Guardian column:

Ladies and gentlemen, I have the answer! Incredible as it might seem, I have stumbled across the single technology which will save us from runaway climate change! From the goodness of my heart I offer it to you for free. No patents, no small print, no hidden clauses. Already this technology, a radical new kind of carbon capture and storage, is causing a stir among scientists. It is cheap, it is efficient and it can be deployed straight away. It is called ... leaving fossil fuels in the ground.

On a filthy day last week, as governments gathered in Bali to prevaricate about climate change, a group of us tried to put this policy into effect. We swarmed into the opencast coal mine being dug at Ffos-y-fran in South Wales and occupied the excavators, shutting down the works for the day. We were motivated by a fact which the wise heads in Bali have somehow missed: if fossil fuels are extracted, they will be used... The coal extracted from Ffos-y-fran alone will produce 29.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide: equivalent, according to the latest figures from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to the sustainable emissions of 55 million people for one year...

11. I raised this issue in many sites in 2006-08, enthusiastically commenting on the moral, political, economic and ecological merits of leaving the oil in the soil. Unfortunately, in addition to confessing profound humility about the excessive fossil fuel burned by airplanes which have taken me on this quest, I must report on the only site where the message dropped like a lead balloon: Venezuela. At a July 2007 environmental seminar at the vibrant Centro Internacionale Miranda in Caracas, joined by the brilliant Mexican ecological economist David Barkin, our attempts failed to generate debate on whether petro-socialism might become a contradiction in terms.
Before oil peaks, demand is likely to outstrip supply and the price will soar. The result is that the oil firms will have an even greater incentive to extract the stuff.

Already, encouraged by recent prices, the pollutocrats are pouring billions into unconventional oil. Last week BP announced a massive investment in Canadian tar sands. Oil produced from tar sands creates even more carbon emissions than the extraction of petroleum. There’s enough tar and kerogen in North America to cook the planet several times over.

If that runs out they switch to coal, of which there is hundreds of years’ supply. Sasol, the South African company founded during the apartheid period (when supplies of oil were blocked) to turn coal into liquid transport fuel, is conducting feasibility studies for new plants in India, China and the US. Neither geology nor market forces is going to save us from climate change.

When you review the plans for fossil fuel extraction, the horrible truth dawns that every carbon-cutting programme on earth is a con. Without supply-side policies, runaway climate change is inevitable, however hard we try to cut demand.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{12} Monbiot, G (2007), “The Real Answer to Climate Change is to Leave Fossil Fuels in the Ground”, \textit{The Guardian}, 11 December.
\end{flushright}
Carbon trading is a charade that will do nothing to reduce global warming. Could it be doomed by the financial meltdown, or will Barack Obama help sustain it?

In the year leading to the Copenhagen Summit, preventing climate change may now finally get a proper global hearing – but not necessarily with useful outcomes. What could be a last ditch attempt to rely on markets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions looks likely to come from carbon trading enthusiast, US President-elect Barack Obama.

His market-friendly approach to tackling climate change is not surprising. Wall Street financiers donated substantially more campaign cash to Obama than McCain. In January 2008 Obama announced: ‘We would put a cap-and-trade system [a carbon trading mechanism] in place that is as aggressive, if not more aggressive, than anybody else’s out there… So if somebody wants to build a coal-powered plant, they can; it’s just that it will bankrupt them because they’re going to be charged a huge sum for all that greenhouse gas that’s being emitted. That will also generate billions of dollars that we can invest in solar, wind, biodiesel and other alternative energy approaches.’

The idea is that polluters would bid against each other for a share of the emissions allowed under an agreed cap, which in turn they can trade with each other so as to improve economic efficiency.

It may sound like a neat plan. But it won’t work: in part, ironically, because the financial crisis that helped sweep Obama to power has also caused the price of carbon to collapse.

**Carbon crash**

The crisis crashed so many financial institutions and froze credit markets so quickly that carbon values in the emissions-trading markets plummeted by a quarter during the first weeks of October 2008, from around 30 dollars per tonne to less than 22. The price had been 37 dollars per tonne in July – showing just how quickly an incentive scheme meant to provide stability and security to clean energy investors can do the opposite.

Opponents of emissions trading still need to persuade centrist greens and the broader swathes of society that the carbon market is crazy.

A low carbon price is no good for stimulating the kind of investment in alternatives needed: for example, an estimated 50-75 dollars per tonne is required to activate private sector investments in ‘carbon capture and storage’, the as-yet-non-existent
technology by which coal-fired power stations could, theoretically, bury liquefied carbon emitted during power generation.

This extreme volatility makes it abundantly clear that market forces cannot be expected to discipline polluters.

Carbon trading, like most climate policies currently under consideration by élites, is what the French sociologist André Gorz would have called a ‘reformist reform’. It is addressing a market-caused problem – greenhouse gases released during most capitalist transactions – with a capitalist ‘solution’. That solution allows the North to continue emitting, through the granting and trading of brand new property rights to pollute. The only real winners are speculators, financiers and energy sector hucksters who have made billions already. As the air itself is privatized and commodified, poor communities across the world suffer and resources and energy are diverted away from real solutions.

But opponents of emissions trading still need to persuade centrist greens and the broader swathes of society that the carbon market is crazy, because conventional wisdom begins with the opposite premise. As Obama himself says: ‘This market mechanism has worked before and will give all American consumers and businesses the incentives to use their ingenuity to develop economically effective solutions to climate change.’

Will it really?

**A brief history of failure**

Canadian economist John Dales first justified trading in emissions rights by applying market logic to water pollution in a 1968 essay. Then, after the 1980s Reagan/Bush administrations neutered the US Government’s ability to prohibit destructive activities, the Clean Air Act of 1990 was the first to legalize trade in sulphur dioxide to tackle acid rain. This approach was far less successful than parallel European ‘command-and-control’ environmental policies.

Nonetheless, in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated to include carbon trading as a core strategy to reduce global emissions. This was because the then US Vice-President Al Gore threatened that his Congress would only sign up if corporations gained the ability to continue emitting above set limits by paying to buy someone else’s right to pollute. After co-opting critics in Kyoto, the Clinton-Gore Administration and Congress did not keep their word and, later, George W Bush pulled out of Kyoto. But the idea of carbon trading stuck and in Europe the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) was launched in January 2005.

Ever since, tales of scandals and market mishaps have emerged from dismayed financiers and business journalists. The intrinsic problem in setting an artificially generated market price for carbon was revealed in April 2006 when the ETS
crashed, thanks to the over-allocation of pollution rights. The EU had miscalculated on how to set up the market and granted electricity generation firms far too many credits. Carbon lost over half its value in a single day, destroying many carbon offset projects earlier considered viable.

By 2007, the European Commissioner for Energy had admitted the ETS was: ‘A failure’. Peter Atherton of Citigroup conceded: ‘ETS has done nothing to curb emissions...[and] is a highly regressive tax, falling mostly on poor people.’ Had it achieved its aims? ‘Prices up, emissions up, profits up... so, not really.’ Who wins, who loses? ‘All generation-based utilities – winners. Coal and nuclear-based generators – biggest winners. Hedge funds and energy traders – even bigger winners. Losers...ahem...consumers!’

Even the Wall Street Journal confirmed in March 2007 that emissions trading ‘would make money for some very large corporations, but don’t believe for a minute that this charade would do much about global warming’.

The Kyoto Protocol also promotes carbon trading in the Majority World via the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). This aims to finance emissions reductions project by project: for example, by turning landfill methane into electricity, or by planting trees. But, according to a Newsweek investigation in March 2007, ‘it isn’t working... [and represents] a grossly inefficient way of cutting emissions in the developing world.’

Notorious projects like the Plantar timber monoculture in Brazil secured vast funds, with dreadful consequences for local communities and ecosystems. Newsweek called the trade ‘a shell game’ which has already transferred $3 billion to some of the worst carbon polluters in the developing world.

In October 2008, with the market crashing, Carl Mortished wrote in The Times of London: ‘The ETS is making a mockery of Europe’s stumbling attempts to lead the world in a market-based carbon strategy. It is causing irritation and frustration to the armies of advisers and investors who seek to cajole utilities into big investments in carbon reduction.’

With friends like these...

All this mainstream criticism should spell the end for what is clearly a bad idea. But many still doggedly endorse the carbon market, including major green groups in the influential Climate Action Network (CAN), which has lobbied most visibly on the Kyoto Protocol. Why? Some would say, pragmatism: it’s the only game in town, according to Sierra Club Canada director Elizabeth May: ‘I would have preferred a carbon tax, but that is not the agreement we have. The reality is that Kyoto is the only legally binding agreement to reduce greenhouse gases. When you’re drowning and someone throws you a lifeboat, you can’t wait for another one to come along.’
But according to Michael Dorsey, professor of political ecology at the US’s Dartmouth College, there is another reason for CAN’s support: some of its leaders have personal involvement in the industry. He lists many prominent greens closely connected to carbon trading firms. Take, for example, CAN board member Jennifer Morgan of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, who took leave for two years to direct work on Climate and Energy Security at carbon trading firm E3G. Or Kate Hampton, formerly of Friends of the Earth, who joined Climate Change Capital as head of policy while simultaneously advising the EU on energy and the environment, working for the California Environmental Protection Agency, and acting as president of International Carbon Investors and Services.

Dorsey concludes: ‘After more than a decade of failed politicking, many NGO types... are only partially jumping off the sinking ship – so as to work for industries driving the problem. Unfortunately, many continue to influence NGO policy from their current positions, while failing to admit to or even understand obvious conflicts of interest.’

Tellingly, in November 2008, Friends of the Earth International formally withdrew from CAN membership.

**Serious strategies**

The financial crisis has proved categorically that carbon trading is not a seaworthy lifeboat. As temperatures (and sea-levels) rise we are discovering the numerous leaks, opening up space for a crucial debate about how to change the world’s economy into something that does not threaten our descendants’ future. Luckily, countering the more sluggish, corporate-sponsored elements of the environmental movement are grassroots organizations, coming together to oppose market strategies wholesale and advocate direct and equitable measures that reverse addiction to fossil fuels.

Critics from Indonesia, Thailand, India, South Africa, Brazil and Ecuador, together with Northern academics, researchers and radical environmentalists first issued the ‘Durban Declaration’ in October 2004. This sounded the alarm about the ethical and economic shortcomings in carbon trading.

A tragic setback came in July 2007 with the death of Durban Declaration host Sajida Khan. She had battled against a Clean Development Mechanism proposal for methane extraction that had kept open the Bisasar Road toxic dump next to her home – which caused the cancer that ultimately killed her. But in December 2007, the movement joined forces with broader global justice activism at the Bali climate talks and formed the Climate Justice Now! network.

Climate Justice Now! is committed to exposing the false solutions promoted by governments, financial institutions and multinational corporations – such as forest carbon markets, agro-fuels and carbon offsetting. Instead, its members are
campaigning to leave fossil fuels in the ground and invest in clean, efficient, community-led renewable energy. These are the only serious strategies in place: to halt climate change at the supply side. They will go much further than market gimmicks towards saving the planet.