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by Patrick Bond
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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-Alie 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 financial reform and development finance, from Seattle (1999) to Cancun (2003) to Geneva (2009) on trade and WTO reform, from one failed Bretton Woods Institution or UN General Assembly and Security Council reform to the next, from the UN Millennium Development Goals (2000) to whatever gimmicks will come next, from the G8 to the G20 (Canada 2010), from Davos to Davos to Davos, from the Washington Consensus and neoliberalism to neoconservatism to an alleged Post-Washington consensus after 2008. What a merry-go-round of grand rhetoric and stultifying inaction.

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 Pharmcorps 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 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 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, 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 Ecuadorean 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.
Climate Debt Owed to Africa: 
What to Demand and How to Collect?

Presented to the Economic Justice Network
Post Copenhagen Climate Justice Conference, 5 May 2010, Johannesburg

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.

'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

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

Introduction

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.’

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 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.

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5. 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
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 tonne 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.6

Van Schalkwyk has just as passionately promoted carbon trading, noting in 2006 that ‘The 17 CDM projects in the pipeline in Sub-Sahara 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 2010.7

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 isn’t 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

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7. Van Schalkwyk, M. (2007a), ‘Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism M van Schalkwyk spells out SA’s “Climate Roadmap” for 2007 and beyond,’ Pretoria, 14 March; Van Schalkwyk, M. (2007b), ‘Keynote Address’, International Emissions Trading Association Forum, Washington, DC, 26 September. It must be acknowledged that van Schalkwyk’s political skills are legendary, allowing him to overcome serious controversies: his role as apartheid spy in his youth, his leadership of the apartheid-era National Party (and then, to widespread derision, his dissolution of it into the ruling African National Congress party after the 2004 election in exchange for a junior ministry), his failure to make any statement against vastly expanded coal-fired power plants designed during his reign as environment/tourism minister, and his 2009 downgrading to merely tourism minister. Concerns about van Schalkwyk’s suitability extend to South Africa’s leading climate scientist, Richard Fuggle, who used his 2006 University of Cape Town retirement speech to describe van Schalkwyk as a ‘political lightweight’ who is ‘unable to press for environmental considerations to take precedence of “development”’. Fuggle, R. (2006), ‘We are still indifferent about the state of our environment’, Cape Times, 6 December.
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.\(^8\)

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.9

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.10 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’, especially the climate debt?

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.’ 11 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’.

9. 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 powers to regulate carbon pollution, plus the legislation’s subsidization of fossil fuels and offsets. See Annie Leonard’s 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.newint.org/features/2009/01/01/climate-justice-false-solutions/ 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’.
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, at the same time as an influential article by Canadian journalist/campaigner Naomi Klein in Rolling Stone magazine.

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, 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:

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.’

Leading ecofeminist Vandana Shiva 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. 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.’

The study included factors such as greenhouse gas emissions from South to North, which results in a total annual subsidy of $75 billion for the US. Leading ecofeminist Vandana Shiva 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.

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15. Ibid.
18. They include:
- 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 impatiens; and
- molluscicides from the Horn of Africa.
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 in its estimates of tangible wealth (in the 2006 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, but the result of a ‘genuine wealth’ accounting leaves vast negative adjustments to every African country. With the sole exceptions of Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles and Swaziland, all others have explicitly negative net year-on-year changes once environmental corrections to GDP are made (using 2000 as a sample year). In sum, 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 firms doing the extraction.

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:

> 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

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22. 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’ healthy 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.
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.

One impulse came in a statement by Lesotho, chair of the LDC group, at the Bonn negotiations in June 2009: ‘Failure to combat climate change will increase poverty and hardship in our nations, and increase the debts owed to us for excessive emissions by the developed countries.’ Within a few weeks, the same arguments were being very vocally articulated 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. 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 threatens to be another rape of our continent.’ 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’.

The most important African negotiator – and largest CO2 emitter (responsible for more than 40% of the continent’s CO2) – is South Africa. 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 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, 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.’

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 ($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 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.’

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.\textsuperscript{32} 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.’\textsuperscript{33}

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

\begin{quote}
\ldots 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.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

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 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, US 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.

\textsuperscript{34} Clinton, H.R. (2009), ‘Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’, US State Department, 17 December, Copenhagen.
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, which could 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, 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. 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 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, 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 Copenhagen in 2009 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 Zenawi.

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Even on its own terms, the Copenhagen Accord failed, as the first target date - January 31st 2010 for signing on and declaring cuts for carbon emissions - was missed by dozens of countries, leaving UN climate chief de Boer to concede that deadlines were ‘soft.’

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”’.

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.  

Maathei 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.

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.’

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


\[\text{43. Ibid.}\]

\[\text{44. Bond, P. and D. Brutus (2008), ‘Ecological debt and our centre’s survival’, ZCommentaries, 21 August, } \text{http://www.zcommunications.org/ zspace/ commentaries/ 3594.}\]
emissions. We call on these countries to pay this historical debt.’ 45 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.’ 46 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. 47

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

... 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 peoples.48

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:

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.49

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:

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

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; and

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.

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 therefore call on developed countries to acknowledge and repay the full measure of their climate debt to developing countries commencing in Copenhagen. 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.  

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 bilaterals. 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.51

South African critics such as groundWork and EarthlifeAfrica 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 EarthlifeAfrica 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, to widespread applause, 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.

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.

52. EarthlifeAfrica (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.’

These states, which stimulated the capitalist development model, are responsible for climate debt, but we shouldn’t 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.\textsuperscript{54}

The Working Group made suggestions for payment as follows:

- The re-absorption [of emissions] and cleaning the atmosphere by developed countries
- Payment in technology (eliminating patents) and in knowledge according to our worldview for both clean development and for adaptation to developing countries
- Financing
- Changes in immigration laws that allow us to offer a new home for all climate migrants
- 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

\textsuperscript{54} 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.
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.55

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 COP16, and be made operational at COP17.’ 56

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.

55. Working Group on Climate Finance (2009), ‘Document debated and approved in the working group on Climate Finance, during the World Conference of Peoples on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth’, April, Cochabamba.
56. Ibid.
Conclusion: Repaying the debt?

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. 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. 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 (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) critiques the model’s

57. Action Aid (2005), Real Aid: An Agenda for Making Aid Work, Johannesburg.
58. International Monetary Fund (2009), 'The implications of global financial crisis for low-income countries', Washington, DC.
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 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.

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

59. Lohmann, L. (2009), personal correspondence. pdf
step closer to trial when she rejected the corporations’ attempt to have it dismissed.  

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.

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’. 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.’ Hansen himself participate 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.\(^{65}\) 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 Acción 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).\(^{66}\)

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 Otjivero, Namibia is an exceptionally successful pilot for this form of income redistribution:

> 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

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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.

The concept is being discussed in many countries of the world. In Germany, it has gained the support of politicians across the political spectrum, including Dieter Althaus, the conservative governor of the eastern state of Thuringia, and businessmen like drugstore chain owner Götz Werner. More than 50,000 German citizens have signed a petition to the German parliament, the Bundestag.

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. 67

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.

Such a strategy would be just an emergency salve on a burning problem: 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, it is his responsibility to foot the clean-up bill.

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 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 (CJNISA) 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.
Carbon trading, new enclosures and eco-social contestation

Forthcoming in Antipode

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 an ongoing world financial crisis which has 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 percent during 2008 and zigzags following the Copenhagen summit. 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 a “double movement” in the Polanyian sense: if commodification of society and nature over-reaches, the reaction in civil society is to resist, deflecting devaluation of overaccumulation 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 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, that we learn broader-based lessons for global/local environmental politics and climate policy.

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 below 1.5 degrees centigrade this century, a level deemed necessary to avoid submersion of small islands and heavily inhabited coastland, and destruction of African agriculture. The radical tradition, as articulated most forcefully by David

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 financial markets and economic logic now claim public policy leadership in 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).

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):

- a global economic slowdown began during the late 1960s - in which world GDP/ per capita growth shrunk from 3.6 percent during the 1960s to 2.1 percent during the 1970s to 1.3 percent during the 1980s to 1.1 percent during the 1990s – but while capital enjoyed a momentary upturn in 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;

- 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;

- 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 and carbon in Europe;

- 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;

- the geographical overextension of financial capital during the 1990s-2000s included the diversification of investment portfolios into distant, risky areas and sectors under the rubric of (inadequate) global financial governance, leading to corruption in asset values ranging from sub-prime housing mortgages to illegitimate emissions credits;

- likewise, geopolitical tensions emerged over which sites would be most vulnerable to the 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 class politics of neoliberalism became so dominant that even Keynesian financial bail-out and public works strategies adopted in late 2008 were reversed in the US just over a year later and discouraged in the South, generating ever greater desperation for financial capital inflows (including emissions mitigation investments) as private portfolio capital and Overseas Development Aid suffered large-scale withdrawal; and

- the resulting rise of a “double movement” of civil society forces against excessive commodification included organisations and networks dedicated to addressing climate change not through market mechanisms but instead through a “Climate justice” philosophy, including 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.

The application of historical-materialist-geographical analysis to the world economy provides crucial contextual understandings for the climate policy debate, in this manner, and allows a more critical perspective to emerge about how space and time are mediated through financial markets when 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. First is 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 early 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);

- 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
  did could not muster the sixty votes that Senator John Kerry required to
  pass a law given even more fierce rightwing opposition; and

- at the end of 2009, the Copenhagen climate summit’s collapse spooked the
  markets, 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
  CDM projects and incompetent staff.

These were organic crises generated from above. From below, emissions markets
came under attack from environmentalists including climate scientist James
Hansen, Annie Leonard (who produced the 9-minute film “The Story of Cap and
Trade” which received 400,000 hits in its first two weeks on the web in December
2009) and Friends of the Earth. Protests by radicals in Rising Tide, Platform,
Climate SOS and Climate Pledge of Resistance began at carbon markets and
traders including in 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 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 World Bank chief economist Lawrence Summers (1991) 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.

To financial markets, carbon trading seemed to offer an attractive, fast-growing “green” investment, in a context of the crashes of overpriced property (2007), equity markets (dot.coms in particular, 2001), emerging markets (1997) and other exotic, speculative investment instruments. 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 (Bond 1999). 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. As environmental finance critic Michelle Chan (2009, 3) argues,

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 the deep-seated contradictions in industrial capitalism invariably bubble up into both financial and carbon markets. Hence, we will conclude, carbon trading represents at best a shifting of the deck chairs
on both the climate and economic Titanics, and at worst – and most probably - major new holes in the ships.

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 – with air pollution now treated as a property right traded mainly in London and Chicago financial markets - there is also a serious intellectual argument undergirding the carbon trade. John Dales (1968, 85) wrote “Pollution, Property, and Prices” to lessen 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 that sulphur dioxide could be capped and traded, so as to reduce emissions and hence acid rain damage. Critics of emissions trading insist that SO2 continues to do harm because of the lack of strong regulation. 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 stronger. 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 pre-1977 coal-fired plants that the coal industry initially succeeded in grandfathering in so as to avoid CAA regulation, were later brought into the cap and trade arrangement and hence 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 the modest target of a 5.2 percent reduction on 1990 emissions levels by 2012. This allowed the sale of the “hot air” – excess credits - that Eastern Europe enjoyed because their industrial economies were reduced by 40 percent
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 so that particular emissions-reducing projects could be financed: 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, if those projects require “additional” finance beyond what can be done on a profitable basis without the CDM subsidy. 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 credits have come from projects that reduce nitrogen and hydrofluorocarbons, which are much more extreme greenhouse gases than CO2 (Prototype Carbon Fund 2005). Landfill methane-to-electricity projects are most prevalent, but 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 credits, 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 percent of credits.

The intrinsic problem in setting an artificially-generated market price for carbon 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 credits (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.
Post-Copenhagen carbon market doldrums

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 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 percent 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 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.

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 was not strong enough to buck climate denialists and other critics. By the end of 2009, cap and trade was losing the support of a great many 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 means there's a good chance that carbon trading will simply die, as two Foreign Policy writers, Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger (2010), 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.

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). Meanwhile the CDM market shrunk by 28% from 2008-2009, to €17.5 billion, about 15% of the total; and 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 continues, for Europe'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, 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. Most are critics, especially of the 2009 plan for carbon credits in the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD)
program and the World Bank’s Forestry Carbon Partnership Facility. These emissions credits 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 in prior weeks, the Papuan 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.”

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. 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 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 fall into 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 ChloroFluoroCarbons 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).

The South also offers very serious leadership, such as 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. 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.

Climate Justice Now! 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.

No matter that the CJN! component movements are disparate, these are the kinds of 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 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, in early 2010, take this form of 'scale politics' for much of the CJ network:

- 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
  1) 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
  2) semi-industrialised economies (e.g. especially BASIC) to make cuts based upon reversing their growing fossil fuel addictions, and in some cases (e.g. South Africa) pay a climate debt to poorer neighbours, and reject 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; and

- 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.

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Maintaining momentum after Copenhagen’s collapse: ‘Seal the deal’ or “Seattle” the deal?

Forthcoming in 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

*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.”

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.

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

- Emissions cuts, which imply a catastrophic 3.5ºC 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 pittance,” 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

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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.77

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.\textsuperscript{78}

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.”\textsuperscript{79} 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.\textsuperscript{80} In the face of the ineffectual, pork-laden legislation, ecosocialists and other radical environmentalists may find more fruitful alternatives in the

\textsuperscript{80} 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.
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 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.\(^81\) 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\textsuperscript{82} and again in December when Europol discovered that up to 90 percent of trades in some E.U. countries were flagrant tax scams.\textsuperscript{83}

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?

**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.\textsuperscript{84} 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

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\textsuperscript{82} Danny Fortson and Georgia Warren, “Carbon-Trading Market Hit by UN Suspension of Clean-Energy Auditor,” Business Time, September 13, 2009, online at: \url{http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/natural_resources/article6832259.ece}


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 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.”

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.”85 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

85 Joan Martinez-Alier, “Marxism, Social Metabolism and Ecologically Unequal Exchange,”
paper presented at the Lund University Conference on World Systems Theory and the
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, 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.

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

86 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.
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
  o 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
  o 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.87

87 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
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;

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 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 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.”;

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 1°C 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 tech 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 sent 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, pressured 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 Giftfabrikken 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 Eskom’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. A lready 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:

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](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 immediately 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=CD9CFF07-18FE-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 chiselers 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.
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
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
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-stripped 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.


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 shack dwellers’ 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 shack dwellers welcomed the opportunity to have several dozen of their members pick rubbish and informally recycle it while on the dump. Scores more shack dwellers 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 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-rulled 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’.

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 declining 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-

88 Interview, September 25 2005.
90 Interview, July 30 2007.
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 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 year 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.

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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 2014.92

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.

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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 Maathéi 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.

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

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eThekwini 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.’

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 ClimateJustice 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 more so 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 ClimateAction 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 spindoc toring 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 protestor 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, wrecking 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

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’, Hanson 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 Arcellor-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/ cc). 

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;
• relocaising 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 seattling 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

ZNet, 6 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 Gaddafi, 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.

‘We’re 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 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 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;

- 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
scraped, especially because of the legislation’s destruction of Environmental Protection Agency powers to regulate carbon pollution.  

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 ‘import 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

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ecology’, or the proposals by the Swedish government in the early 1990s to calculate the country’s environmental debt. 101

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.’ 102

Leading ecofeminist Vandana Shiva103 and former South Centre director Yash Tandon104 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:

- 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;

102. Ibid.
103. Shiva, V. (2005), ‘Beyond the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong’, ZNet Commentary, 26 December.
• groundnuts from Malawi, Senegal, Mozambique, Sudan and Nigeria;
• Tanzanian impatiens; 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, 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;
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\(^{109}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Income per capita before adjustment ($)</th>
<th>Change in wealth per capita after adjustment ($)</th>
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<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>Cape Verde</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>
<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>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2837</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>8</td>
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and the Bank’s use of average – not marginal – cost resource rents also probably leads to underestimations of the depletion costs. 
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 2020.110

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.’111 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.112

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

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<tbody>
<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>

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.’

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’.

The most important African negotiator – and largest CO2 emitter (responsible for more than 40% of the continent’s CO2) – is South Africa. 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.’\(^{116}\)

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.’\(^{117}\)

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

\(^{116}\) Sapa (2009a), ‘SA not “compromising anything” at climate change negotiations – Sonjica,” 15 September.

\(^{117}\) Sapa (2009b), ‘SA on climate change: “No money, no deal”’, 5 August.
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. 118

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.’ 119

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.\textsuperscript{120}

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.\textsuperscript{121}

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.

\textsuperscript{120} Africa Peoples Movement on Climate Change (2009), ‘Confronting the Climate Crisis: Preparing for Copenhagen and Beyond’, Nairobi, 30 August.
\textsuperscript{121}  World Council of Churches Central Committee (2009), ‘Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt,’ Geneva, 2 September.
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 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. 122

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.’ 123 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?

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122. Ibid.
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. 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. 126

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. 127

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,

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

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.  

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’. 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.’ 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.\(^{132}\) 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 Acción 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.\(^{133}\)

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

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under conditions in which much greater socio-ecological and economic benefit is retained by the broader society.\textsuperscript{134}

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{134} Laxer, G. (2007), ‘Freezing in the dark?’, Presentation, Parkland Institute, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 7 November.