

The narrow limits of Al Gore's "24 hours of climate reality"

Sept. 14-15 saw Al Gore's 24 hours of internet presentations about the reality of climate warming. These presentations dramatized the effect climate change is having on countries and people around the world.

But when it comes to solutions, Gore is as stuck in the atmosphere of denial as the market-fanatic John Boehner and the other head-in-the-sand politicians referred to in the presentations. He still promotes the market-based measures that have helped lead to the present threat of global climate catastrophe. He still says that capitalist corporations will do the right thing for the environment out of the motivation to make higher profits. He's still silent about the many activists who are fighting militantly to protect the environment against those business interests that Al Gore praises. And Gore is silent on the urgent need for extensive environmental and economic planning and regulation.

The article below, which will appear in the coming issue of *Communist Voice*, discusses Gore's stands in the weeks leading up to the 24 hours of reality. It brings out those truths about global warming which Gore closes his eyes to. It is not Adam Smith and the drive for higher profits that will save the environment, but the development of a working-class environmentalism that breaks with pro-business environmentalism and instead takes part in the class struggle.

"24 hours of reality" about global warming, continuing fantasy about market-based measures **Al Gore and the Climate Reality Project**

Gore created a flurry of interest when he chided President Obama in *Rolling Stone* (June 2, 2011). This, it turns out, was a warmup for his new Climate Reality Project, which was announced on July 12. Gore speaks with passion about those who deny the ongoing environmental crisis, and he titled his article "Climate of denial: Can science and truth withstand the merchants of poison?". He says that climate change is not a matter of the future: no, it is here today. He even gently reproaches Obama for inaction.

But when it comes to what to do, he still clings to market methods, rather than regulation and planning. He makes a point of praising the supposed environmental concern of the vicious wage-cutting profiteer Walmart, but says nothing about the important role of militant activists for environmental justice. He demands action, but the action he demands is supporting big business, "reward(ing) those companies that are providing leadership", and providing more support to the very reprobate, Obama, who is sitting on his hands and letting the environment deteriorate.

Worse yet, Gore chides Obama only for inaction, not for advocating harmful policies like "cap and trade", which is a proven failure at cutting carbon emissions.. Gore hides the many ways the Obama administration has actively worked with big business in ravaging the environment, whether it is backing the fraud of "clean coal", encouraging the land-destroying practice of hydraulic "fracking" for natural gas, pooh-poohing the significance of the Fukushima nuclear disaster while letting American reactors evade safety standards, or helping BP minimize its liability for the Gulf oil spill.

Al Gore's Climate Reality Project is calling for 24 hours of reality on September 14-15. Its website declares: "***What can change in a day? Everything. On September 14, the world will focus its attention on the truth about the climate crisis. For 24 hours, we will all live in reality.***" This change is to be accomplished by "***a new multimedia presentation created by Al***

Gore and delivered once per hour for 24 hours, in every time zone around the globe." (<http://climateresalityproject.org/the-event/>) But how much reality can he put forward when he is still in a state of denial over the failed market measures which he advocates?

The environmental crisis is here

As usual, Gore is at his best in pointing out the dangers of climate change. He points to the disasters of the past 12 months: last year is tied with 2005 as the hottest year since scientific heat measurement was begun; huge floods displaced 20 million people in Pakistan, and submerged an area of Australia larger than Germany and France combined; a level of flood that is only supposed to come once every thousand years struck Gore's home town of Nashville, Tennessee; heat and drought was so hot in Russia that fires spread; ice continues to melt at an accelerated pace, threatening faster sea-level raises than previously predicted; etc.

Gore also denounces the way that a "climate of denial" has been created in the mass media to drown out the evidence of climate change and hide the scientific consensus on global warming being a reality. He admits that "the concerns of the wealthiest individuals and corporations routinely trump the concerns of average Americans and small business."

So his article has some useful material. It may be of use in waking up some people to the ongoing climate crisis. That's what the 24 hours of reality in September are supposed to do, and his presentation is likely to point to the real dangers that face us. But Gore's agitation that people should wake up and smell the coffee is accompanied by sweet lullabies to put people back to sleep. For Gore may travel around the world far from his native Tennessee, but he has never left the state of denial, and he works hand in hand with the very business elite which include the "merchants of poison". So, when it comes to solutions, Gore's article is an example of the type of blindness that is widespread in the establishment environmentalist organizations. And we can expect that his presentation on September 14 will be in the same vein,

Hand-in-hand with the merchants of poison

There is more than one type of climate denial. Gore admits the environmental crisis, but clings to the failed policies that have helped bring it on. It was Clinton and Gore, as president and vice-president, who insisted that the Kyoto Protocol be based on market measures. Instead of using the regulatory methods that had been used to fight a number of other environmental problems, Clinton and Gore championed market-fundamentalism, or neo-liberalism. They sought to develop artificial markets in pollution, and then hoped that Adam Smith's "invisible hand" would result in pollution being phased out. Today Gore may denounce the "merchants of poison", but Clinton and Gore insisted on the "cap and trade" schemes which created the poison markets in which these merchants operate. The idea was that the more societal regulation was replaced by the self-serving decisions of the "merchants of poison" the better: poison markets would supposedly result in environmental improvement, as a result of individual companies making decisions based on what was most profitable, and regulations on them would continue to be loosened or dropped.

This was the so-called "cap and trade" scheme. It hasn't worked. But Gore simply closes his eyes to this. Instead, he continues to advocate policies that would worsen the situation.

Gore's idea is that we all should walk hand-in-hand with big business, which he imagines would act responsibly and help reduce carbon emissions. He goes out of his way to praise business whenever he can. But what's happened? Most capitalists are pooh-poohing the problem, and Gore just hasn't noticed it. Oh yes, he says, *some* companies do engage in "green-washing". But for him, the fault lies just in ideologues and some of the richest companies (except for Walmart, of course, which he adores). All it takes, in his view, is for "individuals" to "demand change in the marketplace", and the business community will respond.

Gore's most radical step in his books and articles is to advocate that there should be *both* a "cap and trade" system *and* a carbon tax. (See his latest book, *Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis*, Ch 15, "The True Cost of Carbon".) The carbon tax is another market measure designed to replace environmental regulation. It is supposed to create financial incentives for businesses to reduce carbon emissions, just as cap and trade was supposed to have done. Actually, the weight of the carbon tax would fall on the people, while most of the business world, especially big business, would pass the tax on to consumers. Workers, independent truckers, small fishermen and others couldn't pass the tax on, but the big energy companies certainly could. So it would have the harshest effects on those with the least power to determine whether goods are produced in an environmentally-proper way, and the least effect on the big businesses with the most power. For example, workers might find that driving to work had become fabulously expensive, but the carbon tax would do nothing to provide them with any alternative to driving. Moreover, this tax would turn the slogan "make the polluters pay" into a denunciation of the mass of consumers, rather than of the corporate polluters. For this and other reasons, it's likely to be the biggest fiasco ever — making environmentalism hated among substantial sections of the masses, while failing to accomplish environmental goals. (See [\[communistvoice.org/42cCarbonTax.html\]\(http://www.comunistvoice.org/42cCarbonTax.html\) for a more thorough discussion of the carbon tax.\)](http://www.com</p></div><div data-bbox=)

True, in this article Gore doesn't say anything directly about the carbon "tax"; instead he talks about setting a price on carbon. But it's just different words to describe the same thing.

Gore at his worst

So as usual, Gore is at his worst when it comes to solutions. His basic idea is to keep doing the things that haven't worked — cap and trade; working hand-in-hand with the corporations and giving them subsidies; keeping government small and privatized; and hiding the extent of corporate crimes.

Gore is utterly committed to introducing market principles into everything. Indeed, Gore helped "reinvent government" under the Clinton administration: this meant privatizing government functions, removing regulations, providing incentives and subsidies for business, and letting the affected industries call the shots in the regulatory agencies. This plan, carried out by both Democrats and Republicans, has led to disaster. To be more precise, it has been disaster for the environment and the working class, but profitable to many businesspeople. It has meant marking time as far as global warming; ravaging the public schools through Bush's No Child Left Behind and Obama's Race to the Top; relying on private insurance in Obama's health plan, and so on. But energy companies, educational companies, insurance companies, and upper-level administrative personnel have made out like bandits.

Gore sums up his approach near the end of his article. It comes down to this: "above all, don't give up on the political system." By this, he means, don't give up on the Democrats and the Obama administration. So the alpha and omega of his proposals are to accept the pro-market politicians and search for big businesses to work with. If he chides Obama for inaction, he takes it back by suggesting that if we all get behind him and push, Obama will do the right thing.

From the Alliance for Climate Protection to the Climate Reality Project

So in his article Gore recommended that people join an organization, namely, the Alliance for Climate Protection (www.climateprotect.org), which he founded in 2006 and chairs, and whose name is now being changed to the Climate Reality Project. The ACP praises the European Union's version of cap and trade, the so-called Emission Trading Scheme, which is the heart of the Kyoto Protocol, which has failed badly. But why should Gore care that's he's advocating a policy that has failed? Indeed, it's notable that the ACP's website even praises some things, like the Copenhagen Climate Summit, that Gore himself calls a failure in his article in *Rolling Stone*. The extent of these failures can be seen in that, according to both the International Energy Agency and the top UN climate official, last year, 2010, saw, not a decrease, but *a record increase* in greenhouse gas emissions. (See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/may/31/emissions-rise-un-climate-chief>, and also <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/may/29/carbon-emissions-nuclearpower>.)

Indeed, the Alliance for Climate Protection hasn't even made

the mild criticisms of unnamed corporations and special interests that Gore makes in his article. Why, right and left, government and industry, everyone should just go hand-in-hand. The ACP promotes such fantasy as having the “WE Campaign” unite pro-business liberals and hard-right conservatives, minorities and racists, together in defense of the environment. The ACP website says: “Some of the most popular WE Campaign advertisements include the ‘Unlikely Alliances’ campaign, which paired together such seemingly polar opposites as Nancy Pelosi and Newt Gingrich and Revs. Pat Robertson and Al Sharpton.” (<http://www.climateprotect.org/our-work/>)

Gore has now decided to rechristen the ACP as the Climate Reality Project. But the website for the CRP has even less information than that of the Alliance for Climate Protection. Gore does denounce “fossil fuel interests”, and that’s about it.

In his article, Gore writes that “To make our elected leaders take action to solve the climate crisis, we must forcefully communicate the following message: ‘I care a lot about global warming; I am paying very careful attention to the way you vote and what you say about it; if you are on the wrong side, I am not only going to vote against you, I will work hard to defeat you — regardless of party. If you are on the right side, I will work hard to elect you.’” But the ACP and the CRP haven’t uttered a word about Obama’s record, nor that of any other politician. They fawn on the rich and powerful, and search out ways to praise them. How this is going to create pressure to do anything in favor of the environment, is Gore’s little secret.

Bring the class struggle into the environmental movement

Gore to the contrary, the establishment leaders, the corrupt politicians, and the profiteering corporations, are not “our leaders”. Workers should abandon Gore’s pro-business politics as usual, and so should anyone with a real concern for the environment. Of course, workers should abandon, not politics, but pro-capitalist politics. They should seek to rebuild a better politics, based on struggle against the big corporations, a politics of class struggle. They should get organized — at the workplace, in the community, and in solidarity with workers around the world — to fight the capitalist rulers of this world. They should fight against the current world austerity drive of the bourgeoisie, and they should fight about the environment too. With regard to

the environmental crisis, they should push for the things Gore is silent about:

- * comprehensive environmental regulation, which should enforce compulsory standards on big energy and, for that matter, big business as a whole;

- * that environmental planning should include concern for the mass livelihood: it’s a conservative trickle-down fraud to believe that “green jobs” will automatically provide prosperity; instead there must be programs directly guaranteeing people’s basic needs;

- * the need to bring the class struggle into the environmental movement, rather than searching for big corporations to praise;

- * comprehensive economic planning and regulation, which is needed both for the sake of the environment and to be able to surmount the economic crisis;

- * the need for planning be done in a new way; that the privatization of government functions should be reversed; that the industries being regulated should be pushed out of the government bodies regulating them; that regulations should be made transparent; and that workers should be brought, as far as possible, into the process of planning, and of enforcing the planning;

- * the need to look towards the working class, not the business world, as the bastion of environmental concern.

Gore is silent about these things, because he’s still a market-fundamentalist politician, albeit one that claims to be against market-fundamentalism. His recommendations show the narrow limits in which establishment environmentalism is caught, and the narrow limits of the left-right, community-big business cooperation on the environmental front which is so fashionably advocated in mainstream environmentalist circles today. Gore may preach against climate denial. And yes indeed, as far as climate change, the Republicans would have us go to our doom with our eyes shut, but Gore would have us go to our doom with our eyes half-open. To survive, one should instead open one’s eyes all the way, and see not just the looming disasters, but the policies needed to avoid them. □

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