

For a working-class environmental movement

**Selected articles from
Communist Voice Organization**

Contents

Say NO to fracking!.....	1
Hurricane Sandy and global warming.....	6
Class trends in the environmental movement: Not all that glitters is green.....	12
The sorry results of the Cancun global warming summit, the failure of climate capitalism, and the prospects of major change.....	19

Say NO to fracking!

Pete Brown, September 2012

Over 1,000 people marched in Albany, New York on August 27 in a demonstration against fracking. They were protesting New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's plan to open up parts of New York to fracking. Until now fracking has been banned in New York, but after he took office Cuomo ordered a study of the issue. After four years the study commissioners are about to issue their report, and when they do Cuomo has warned environmental groups he plans to OK fracking in some parts of the state. He'll probably allow it to begin along the Southern Tier, the border with Pennsylvania, where fracking has already begun.

The protesters targeted Cuomo with banners, signs and cardboard caricatures. They advised him to "just say no" and chanted, "Make fracking a crime!" The most common sign was "Ban fracking now!", but many demonstrators carried homemade signs with their individual sentiments like "Don't frack my farm!" and "Think your water is safe? Think again!" The march stopped in front of government office buildings in the state capital and finished with a rally at a nature preserve.

The protest was sponsored by an umbrella coalition of groups called "Don't Frack New York." These groups and others have joined together to sponsor a "Global Frackdown" coming September 22, which will feature teach-ins in many different localities. The oil and gas industry is finding itself facing a horde of local environmental groups as it tries to push fracking into localities and states not yet impacted by it. Meanwhile activists in New York continue to target Gov. Cuomo: a

group of them confronted Cuomo when he visited the New York state fair, and Cuomo was heckled by activists when he appeared at a recent panel on energy policy. Activists are dogging him for pretending to be anti-fracking when he ran for office and now reversing himself.

A crime against the environment

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is the latest technology used to extract natural gas from underground. It uses multidirectional drilling to tap sources of gas deep underground. Shale formations contain much natural gas locked up in the rocks; this is blasted out of the rock with water under high pressure. To make the water more slippery and thus less subject to friction, various poisonous chemicals are mixed with the water. As the gas is extracted from the well, much of this polluted water is then returned to the surface.

There are many dangers to this practice. Much of the polluted water is left underground, where it may leak into groundwater nearer the surface, water used for drinking, bathing, etc. We don't know exactly what chemicals are used, and federal laws protecting commercial secrecy make it impossible to find out, but it's generally recognized they include benzene and other highly carcinogenic chemicals. This "flowback" also contains minerals picked up from underground, some of which are radioactive. It also contains radioactive tracers gas companies use to track their drilling. Even when returned safely to the surface, there's a big question about what to do with the polluted water. It can't be returned to the regular water system, since the chemicals it's

infused with are highly toxic and difficult to separate from the water. This isn't just a problem for the future; already thousands of fracking wells have been drilled in Colorado, Pennsylvania, Texas and other states, so it's a pressing problem regardless of fracking's future.

The solution that's been taken up in some places is to inject the polluted water back underground into supposedly safe places deep underground and supposedly walled off from groundwater. But forcing water back underground in these injection wells also has problems; in Arkansas the result has been hundreds of small earthquakes. Even if these earthquakes don't cause much damage on the surface, there's the danger they may open up fissures that allow the polluted water to seep up to groundwater near the surface.

Another solution considered is to require gas companies to reuse the polluted water, to store it in large containers and then take it to other drilling sites. One problem with this is the sheer quantity: each well uses millions of gallons of water, so large containers would be necessary. Transporting those opens up the possibility of spills on the roadway or railway and poisoning workers assigned to do clean-up. This is complicated by the fact that gas companies will not reveal what chemicals are in the polluted water, and the bourgeois doctrine of commercial secrecy allows them to get away with this. Courts in Pennsylvania have ruled that people who have been sickened by fracking may be treated by doctors who have been informed by the gas companies what chemicals were used in the fracking; but the doctors are strictly forbidden from telling anyone else, including the

patients, what those chemicals are. This shows the insanity of capitalism, which not only allows, but insists on, people not being informed about chemicals that are poisoning them.

Plus, there's the issue of taking millions of gallons of fresh, drinkable water and infusing it with chemicals, making it impossible to use again without expensive chemical processes (which won't be done). This is criminal in a time of increasing droughts and the ever increasing cost of providing safe drinking water to people as the water table is depleted. One would think that the criminals involved would be jailed, but the oil and gas industry is specifically exempted from the federal Clean Water Act. Since the federal EPA cannot act, in Pennsylvania it's asked the state EPA to step in and test areas around fracking wells for radioactive minerals in the water. So the federal and state EPAs bounce the ball of responsibility back and forth. Meanwhile local water treatment plants usually can't test for radioactivity themselves, and even if they do, they don't have the means to separate radioactive minerals from the water.

Another problem is the seepage of natural gas. Fracking causes fissures in the rock and allows natural gas to seep up into groundwater. Gas companies say this can't happen because groundwater is only a few hundred feet down, while the wells are many thousands of feet deep and separated from groundwater by walls of rock. But experience tells otherwise. Various academic studies (by Cornell U., Duke U., Colorado School of Public Health) have shown a definite increase in natural gas around areas of fracking, both in the water and the air. There are many reports of animals and

humans being sickened in the area. But here again, gas companies' pollution of the air is completely legal because the oil and gas industry is exempted from the Clean Air Act. The federal EPA did a study of some of the health dangers from fracking in 2004, but the results of this study were censored when it was released, so the exact health dangers remain unknown⁽¹⁾.

Aside from the immediate danger of making people and animals sick, natural gas (mainly methane) is a serious addition to the problem of global warming. Methane is actually a much worse global-warming gas than carbon dioxide. Aside from seepage through the ground, there's a big loss of natural gas through the wellbore and through cracks in pipes. These are problems with any traditional gas wells and pipelines, but the problem is intensified with fracking. Fracking also damages the integrity of other pipelines in the area as it cracks the rock. Another problem is the possibility of a blowout, which actually happens quite often, and when it does gas, oil, polluted water, etc. are spewed across the surrounding area.

There are many other problems with the development of fracking. Many of them involve the economic development. The gas industry brags about bringing development to rural areas, and some property owners do profit financially. But it also brings a lot of headaches: hordes of gasfield workers move into an area that doesn't have facilities to take care of them. The workers end up living in motels, trailers, RVs, etc. for months at a time. Narrow country roads are now jammed with heavy machinery and tanker trucks that tear up the roads. These are problems that could be

dealt with, given a certain amount of economic planning and forcing the gas companies to pay for development. But that doesn't happen; local communities, and the people who live there, are forced to pay for everything.

Propaganda from the cancer-stick people

The bourgeoisie like to make a fuss about the need for "energy independence." This is one of their arguments for busting shale and extracting natural gas -- it's a domestic source of energy and so presumably helps reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil. But the only ones acquiring "independence" are the energy companies that sell their product around the world. Taxpayers and working people in the U.S. end up paying the bill for any problems while the oil and gas companies make billions in profits.

Energy companies have been running a national ad campaign to convince people to support gas drilling. One of the lies they promote is that there's nothing new to fracking, that gas drilling has been going on for decades. But actually there have been problems with gas wells for decades; these are just ignored by the ad campaign. And in fact the technology of fracking is new. Fracking involves very long, deep drilling, going in different directions and using pressurized, chemically-laden water to break apart shale. The technology for this "horizontal slickwater fracturing" has been developed only in the last 15 years. It's used not only for gas extraction but also for oil; it's made possible a new oil boom in North Dakota and Texas, and as oil is depleted from the North Slope in Alaska, there's talk of using it there too to extract harder to get oil. Oil and gas companies try to

say the new technology has less environmental impact than the old technology, because there's less surface disruption from drilling wells: since each well can be drilled in any direction for long distances, fewer wells need to be drilled. This is true, but the dangers from fracking also occur at long distances in any direction.

The industry ad campaign was designed by the PR company Hill and Knowlton. This is the same firm that used to promote smoking in the 1950s and 60s and denied that tobacco use had any links to cancer. The gas industry is using experienced liars to promote fracking. But its effect is limited; while many national and statewide politicians have been won over, many local environmental groups are drawing a line in the sand and saying, "Not here."

Bourgeois politicians promise tight regulations

To try and disarm opposition, the bourgeois politicians in support of fracking are promising tight regulation to ensure safe drinking water. Gov. Cuomo has promised that New York will have "the tightest regulation of any state in the country", and New York City mayor Bloomberg has called for a "tightly regulated" fracking industry. Bill Richardson, former Energy Secretary in the Clinton administration, has also come to Cuomo's support. At a panel on energy sponsored by the New York state Democratic Party, Richardson said he was all for "strong regulation" but insisted "Natural gas is the future. It is here."⁽²⁾

In the first place, Cuomo promises that the watershed for New York City will be protected and no fracking allowed there. But if it's important to protect the water of New York

City, why isn't it equally important to protect the water of Albany, Syracuse, Binghamton, etc.?

Further, environmental activists have plenty of experience with "tight regulation" and see its results. Look at the BP oil spill, for example. Look at the Enbridge oil pipeline spill in Michigan. Look at the hundreds of accidents and safety problems at nuclear power plants. Even Cuomo's investigation of fracking was a joke, like Obama's moratorium on new drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. Give it a little time, let the opposition die down, then go back to business as usual, the government in bed with the corporate polluters.

Regulatory capture is a phenomenon of capitalist government. Look at the Wall Street meltdown in 2007-08. There were numerous government agencies in charge of watching Wall Street, but they all "missed" the danger signs until it was all over. Why? They were too busy partying with the people and institutions they were supposed to watch. Similarly with coal companies and the OSHA regulators who are supposed to be watching out for coal miners' safety. The corporations bribe the regulators, and there's regular interchange of personnel as the government regulators quit their job and get hired by the corporations, and vice versa.

Even politicians not directly bribed by the corporations still buy into the general bourgeois philosophy of market fundamentalism. The main thing is to promote freedom for the corporations to make as much money as possible, especially the energy monopolies. The politicians shy away from environmental regulation as much as possible just as they shy away from economic

planning. Oil and gas companies are exempted from air and water regulation, and industrial practices are protected by commercial secrecy. Naked capitalist ideology is promoted especially by Republican Party politicians who stridently promote “Drill, baby, drill!” and oppose any government regulation. So they love to hate Obama because he wouldn’t approve the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada without first having an environmental impact study. But the Democrats’ approach isn’t that different: first they “study” and “investigate”, then they hold some hearings, and then it’s “Drill, baby, drill.”

Environmental activists who are seriously concerned about the dangers of fracking are sick of this charade. So the main slogan at the August 27 demonstration was “Ban fracking now.” They didn’t call for tighter regulation, but for a complete ban. This puts these activists on a collision course not only with the corporate polluters but with politicians, including Democrats like Cuomo, who act as corporate front-men.

The coming collision

The energy monopolies are not going to stop their push for fracking. Besides New York, they are pushing for gas extraction from the entire Delaware River basin, the border area of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The government commission in charge of the river basin has ordered a “review” and a “study” to see if this is feasible; no doubt they will follow the same path as Gov. Cuomo, at first feigning interest in scientific evidence and then capitulating to the rich corporations. Gas companies are also signing leases all over northeastern Ohio, and there’s significant activity in Colorado.

The energy monopolies’ push for fracking isn’t due to any concern for “American energy independence” or the needs of the masses, but because the energy companies are bent on maintaining their profits without bothering with a shift to alternative, renewable energy sources. Because of their powerful position within the bourgeoisie, they’re able to run roughshod over others, using whatever technology is easiest for them, and to hell with its impact on the environment. They’ve already paid for mineral rights in many areas, and they aren’t about to back off from fracking. Activists who are seriously concerned about clean water and air are thus going to be forced into a confrontation. In this confrontation activists should look to the working class for support.

The working class is the only force that can act as a consistent counterweight to the corporations and their government. Corporate capture of regulatory agencies can only be countered by mobilizing the working masses to demand more transparency and to get workers involved in the enforcement of regulation. This doesn’t mean just having a few trade union leaders sign off on things, to avoid rocking the boat and continue getting their fat paychecks. It means activists going directly to the masses, not through the sold-out politicians and union leaders, and mobilizing them for actions.

Up to now over 100 municipalities in New York, including the city of Binghamton, have passed resolutions against fracking, and recently Vermont became the first state to ban fracking. Local resolutions are the result of struggle by local activists who should be applauded for their work. On the other hand,

many of these resolutions are more like declarations of intent rather than outright prohibitions, and many are based on legalistic arguments about the rights of corporations, etc. Their actual legal status will be up in the air if the state of New York sanctions fracking, since state law overrules local ordinances. So local resolutions don't end the struggle; they intensify the need for activists to expand their outreach to workers and prepare militant actions.

Environmental groups that are serious about clean water and air will be forced into a clash with the energy monopolies. Serious activists

welcome this fight, because they're sick of being controlled by the sold-out politicians compromised by ties to corporate polluters. If they're able to gain the support of wide masses of the working people and to develop a program of standing up to the capitalists, activists have a chance of winning the battle against fracking and participating in the general movement of class struggle. <

Notes

⁽¹⁾Ian Urbina, "Pressure Limits Efforts to Police Drilling for Gas", *New York Times*, 3/3/2011, www.nytimes.com/2011/03/04/us/04gas.html?pagewanted=all

⁽²⁾*New York Post*, August 24

Hurricane Sandy and global warming

Presentation by Tim Hall at the *Detroit Workers' Voice* Discussion Group meeting of December 9, 2012

Today we want to give a working-class analysis of a recent major natural disaster; Hurricane Sandy and Global Warming. I will give a brief talk and then open the floor for discussion.

I will go into some details about Hurricane Sandy in a moment, but first a comment about its relation to global warming, to tell you why we linked the two topics. While the capitalist presidential candidates, Obama and Romney, had a tacit agreement not to talk about global warming in their debates in the election campaign, suddenly Hurricane Sandy loomed up right before the election and placed the question of natural disasters square in front of the country and stimulated a new wave of thinking about these disasters and their relationship to global warming. Suddenly the potential danger of global warming became real, devastatingly real. We will go into this later in my talk.

Hurricane Sandy began developing in the Caribbean in late October. It rushed through Jamaica, Cuba and Haiti, reaching wind speeds of 115 mph and killing 38 people, 26 of them in Haiti, which was already devastated by its 2010 earthquake and by imperialist exploitation by the U.S. Sandy was a serious hurricane from the first. As it moved northward parallel to the U.S. Coast it lost some speed but gathered size, and predictions said that it would gather more strength when it would merge with a Nor'easter bearing down from (where else?) the northeast. As Sandy approached New Jersey and New York, the storm turned left toward shore as it merged with the Nor'easter. Its wind speeds reached 90 mph and it gained such massiveness that cold air and high winds extended 820 miles wide (we felt them in Michigan) and Sandy acquired the nickname "Frankenstorm."

A gradual rise in sea levels due to global warming had already been challenging the

New York-New Jersey area. Sea levels were already being measured at about 8 inches above the long-term trend, with 2 to 5 more inches expected by 2020. This had already forced authorities to begin speculating on how to deal with the rising sea, and insurance capitalists had begun figuring it into their plans of how to rob the insured. The New York harbor was already considered vulnerable to rising levels, although typically a class bias permeated the discussions, as sea levels were usually compared to the elevation of southern Manhattan and not with the more vulnerable areas such as Far Rockaway, Breezy Point and Staten Island, where workers and the poor were the residents. Even a slight rise in sea levels means that a storm surge will reach much further inland than previously, because the rise allows more water to pass inland without friction from the shore underneath it.

Weather scientists predicted the immense strength of the approaching Sandy well ahead of time. Various mobilizations and evacuations were planned and held. But despite the predictions of apocalypse, little real preparation was made, a government failure reminiscent of Hurricane Katrina. The poor were not fully evacuated from the most dangerous areas and little preparation was made to house them after the storm was over and their housing was destroyed or rendered unlivable. As it became clear after the storm, insufficient supplies of gasoline and heating oil were acquired, nor were the transformers at Con Ed, the electrical utility, prepared.

Sandy roared ashore with 80 mph winds five miles south of Atlantic City, New Jersey, at 8 p.m. October 29. It hit New Jersey and New York city heavily. Sandy simply pulverized the

low-lying areas within its reach. Sandy's pure kinetic energy for storm surge and wave "destruction potential" reached a 5.8 on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 0 to 6 scale, the highest ever measured. Translated into life-and-death terms, 125 people died due to the hurricane in the U.S. (71 in the Caribbean). 72,000 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed in New Jersey alone (and up to 200, 000 homes in Cuba). And even when houses near the coast remained intact, electricity and heat were cut off and the population was subjected to great suffering. Sandy was almost as costly in money terms as the last great American disaster disgrace, Hurricane Katrina, and the poor have been treated with equal disdain by the government.

The worst affected by Sandy's destruction were the poor and working-class, often black and other minority, communities such as Far Rockaway, Staten Island, Red Hook and Coney Island. An immense fire broke out in flooded Breezy Point, Queens, and quickly consumed 80 to 100 homes in that area. Not only the deaths and injuries, but the complete destruction of housing or the rendering of houses unlivable, plus the lack of electricity and heating oil for houses that were still intact, created tremendous suffering and destroyed the finances of thousands of workers and poor people.

The rich capitalists often forced workers into storm danger, which cost at least one life. A Ghanaian immigrant was told by his "big boss" (his words) to watch the expensive cars in the basement of the Manhattan business; it was inundated with water and he did not return. In another incident, a group of transit

workers who had been ordered to work in a dangerous area of Coney Island by their bosses barely escaped with their lives.

Much of Manhattan, inhabited by Wall Street and many rich capitalist businesses and upper-middle class flunkies of the rich, was brought back to a functioning state fairly quickly. The subways were drained and power restored, mainly due to heroic efforts by unionized transit and electrical workers working 16-hour shifts. But still, lower Manhattan remains in trouble – in this case partly trouble for its rich owners. Apparently 15 to 18 million square feet of office space in the area is still unusable, due to lack of electrical and phone service. This is an area equal to all the office space in Dallas or Miami. Verizon, which provides phone service to the area, is having to entirely replace both its copper-wire and fiber-optic conduits, a job which may not be done for months.

Relief did not come quickly – or at all -- for the poor, for the working class.

For workers who live in Manhattan, like those of devastated outlying areas, conditions remained terrible. The Lower East Side and Chinatown, both immigrant areas, experienced very serious destruction. Lack of preparation by the authorities resulted in immediate widespread shortages of gasoline and heating oil. New York Mayor Bloomberg ordered city workers back to work within a few days of the storm, so thousands of city and other workers were threatened with loss of their jobs if they could not report for work, despite the obvious excuse of the storm and lack of gasoline, while at home they suffered from the fall cold. This was a big case of neglect of the workers and poor by the city, state and federal

governments. It is inexcusable that insufficient supplies were on hand; there had been plenty of warning. In addition, it turns out that Con Ed's transformers had not been maintained properly; in a dramatic explosion over darkened Manhattan one of them failed during the storm.

The rising waters also brought threats to nuclear plants. Five plants in the New York area reported problems, and one in New Jersey had to shut down.

Meanwhile, the outer communities near the ocean were devastated. Far Rockaway, Red Hook, Staten Island and others were nearly in ruins. Houses that remained standing were often filled with water. Some of these areas are without power even today! The treatment of the workers and poor during and after Sandy is a monstrous crime by the rich!

Despite the massive destruction of the homes of the poor and the workers, there was no big effort on the part of Obama and the federal government to plan for the re-housing of these people. A massive investment was needed, but at the time Obama preferred to have a photo opportunity with Governor Cristie of New Jersey, an opportunity to hug a Republican. In his tradition of giving nothing to the foreclosees in the housing crisis while handing trillions to the banks, Obama and the Democrats offered the Sandy victims honeyed words of "sympathy" and little massive help.

Now, over a month later, Obama is reportedly asking Congress for \$50 billion in aid, \$30 billion less than the governors of New Jersey and New York had asked for. And why must Obama ask the skinflint Congress for the money? In 2008 he gaily handed trillions directly to the banks! Clearly the big bankers

who reside in Connecticut's Gold Shore are way more important to this buddy of Wall Street than are the poor and minority workers of Far Rockaway or Breezy Point!

But this indifference was not shared by nearby workers and progressive activists, and residents themselves protested in various ways. Residents of the Red Hook community held a mass meeting in November 14 angrily demanding massive aid. Within days of the storm large numbers of volunteers rushed to help the critical areas and large amounts of material aid were donated. Thousands of people devoted long hours to aid the poor. This was a very moving effort. Occupy Wall Street leaped to help and wound up setting up the most efficient organization of aid, so recognized that the National Guard came to them for training. Occupy set up many relief collection centers throughout the New York area; today they maintain two in Brooklyn and one in Philadelphia and continue to supply the people, even though Mayor Bloomberg ordered the closing of Occupy Sandy's open-air distribution centers in Rockaway and elsewhere.

Now, over a month after the hurricane, poor workers in the devastated areas are still without housing and even power in many places. Occupy Wall Street reported Thursday: "A month after Hurricane Sandy first hit many residents, homeowners and tenants alike are still living without electricity, heat, and working appliances. Black mold is taking hold of walls and other surfaces, and absentee landlords refuse to fix their properties. Temporary housing is desperately needed." Many landlords are refusing to fix their properties as they wait in hopes that rich

capitalist developers, who have been eying these coastal properties for years, will buy them out.

I will end this section of my talk with a poem by a Facebook friend of mine in New York, Mark Naison:

Notorious Phd's Sandy Jam

*Bayonne, Red Hook, Lower East Side
Sandy crushed us while politicians lied
Millions flooded, Breezy's homes in flames
Casualties of Climate Change
Flooded, battered, frightened and cold
From Jersey to Connecticut whether young
and old
We found homes and stores and restaurants
gone
While fossil fuel giants still piled profits on
Beaten to our knees, we try to recover
We reach out in pain and find one another
Compassion and courage help us restore and
rebuild
But if we don't change how we live it could get
us all killed
Now Bloomberg wants to run his marathon
On Staten Island where homes are gone
Down Fourth Ave where people fight for gas
Half a mile from Red Hook where food goes
fast
It's up to us to make things right
First help one another then carry the fight
To the Big Money people who run this town
Who enrich themselves while poor folks
drown.*

Hurricane Sandy was an immense disaster for the workers and the poor of the NY-NJ area and an exposure of the failures of the Obama administration in protection and relief for the masses.

But Hurricane Sandy was also a clarion call to the masses to take seriously the question of global warming and to debate the methods of dealing with it. Over the past 3-5 years the U.S. has seen mounting natural disasters: wildfires in the west due to the dryness resulting from drought; massive and long-lasting drought throughout the southwest and elsewhere; unprecedentedly powerful tornadoes, and others. And all along, average temperatures have kept rising; north pole ice has kept melting, causing dark, open water and snowless land to absorb rather than reflect heat; and permafrost in the near-polar northern regions has been melting, releasing the very powerful greenhouse gas, methane. And sea levels and sea temperatures keep creeping up.

Then came the disaster of Sandy. It arrived right in the middle of the presidential election campaign, while Obama and Romney were avoiding mention of global warming in the presidential debates. They might as well have agreed not to mention the elephant in the room, because he was ignored until he roared through the East Coast in the shape of Hurricane Sandy, Sandy demonstrated how serious the stakes are in the global warming question. The accepted wisdom about global warming had recently been that it might be causing some disasters. Hurricane Sandy shifted that general viewpoint forward, to the view that while global warming cannot be proven to directly cause any individual disaster, it amplifies them and creates an environment in which greater and greater disasters are inevitable. A parallel might be that as a drought dries huge areas, you cannot say that the drought itself lit this or that fire directly, but with the drought the likelihood of fires and their intensity have both increased.

The result is more and more destructive fires. Warming conditions, in the case of Sandy, can be said to have "raised the baseline" for further weather turbulence.

For example, higher water temperatures provide more energy for hurricanes to feed on and intensify, and the temperatures in the ocean off New York in September were 2.3 degrees Fahrenheit above the long-term average. The higher sea levels, even of 8 inches, meant that the storm would be far more destructive. Its destructiveness was also increased by Sandy's merger with the Nor'easter, considered a North Atlantic typhoon; this storm was forced south by changes in the northern jet stream brought about by the melting of sea ice due to warming.

The result is that, while Sandy cannot be said to be caused, as a storm, by global warming, its size and destructiveness could only be caused by global warming. It was "Frankenstorm" because of global warming, nothing else.

In a recent op-ed in the *Washington Post*, James Hansen at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York clarified the relationship of warming to disasters. He blamed climate change for excessive drought, based on six decades of measurements, not computer models: "Our analysis shows that it is no longer enough to say that global warming will increase the likelihood of extreme weather and to repeat the caveat that no individual weather event can be directly linked to climate change. To the contrary, our analysis shows that, for the extreme hot weather of the recent past, there is virtually no explanation other than climate change." He

went on to write that the Russian heat wave of 2010 and catastrophic droughts in Texas and Oklahoma in 2011 could each be attributed to climate change, concluding that "the odds that natural variability created these extremes are minuscule, vanishingly small. To count on those odds would be like quitting your job and playing the lottery every morning to pay the bills."

So it is with natural disasters like hurricane Sandy. Warmer ocean waters, due to global warming, cause more intense hurricanes. Rising sea levels mean that they cause more damage to human life and property. And when you look around and see greater and greater droughts, more intense tornadoes, bigger wildfires and a whole list of amplified natural disasters, you cannot help but be influenced to see global warming as an underlying cause.

And the masses of working people in the U.S. are starting to see this; the attacks of the right-wing warming-deniers on pointy-headed professors' "fantasies" about warming are wearing thin. The handwriting is being seen on the wall further and further from the scientific community.

Hurricane Sandy raises two questions: how to defend the masses of workers and poor in the face of increased dangers and how to combat global warming.

And just this week a new, even more deadly natural disaster hit the world – Typhoon Bopha in the Philippines. ("Typhoon" is the name for Asian hurricanes.) With raging winds at 150 miles an hour, this savage storm has killed over 540 people, with 825 still missing, including 200 fishermen. This total exceeds that of last December's Typhoon Pablo, which killed over 400. The latest news is that

Typhoon Bopha has turned around and come back to the Philippines (fortunately as a weakened storm), this time to northern rather than southern Luzon, the biggest island in the archipelago. Add these typhoons to Hurricane Sandy and an even stronger case is made for global warming as an underlying cause of greatly intensified natural disasters.

Plus, the threat Sandy offered to nuke plants makes that case even stronger, as it reminds us of the precarious nature of the plants in the U.S., many of which antiquated and as dangerously constructed as the Fukushima plants, are near rising waters, in flood zones or are built upon earthquake faults. The ongoing crisis at the Fukushima plants in Japan underlines how serious this threat is.

The capitalists and their governments around the world do not take global warming seriously. The U.S. Government refused to sign the Kyoto agreement on global warming in 1997; today it and the Chinese fake-communist government, which ludicrously claims that China is just a poor developing country, are resisting most efforts against global warming, not because they are insufficient but in order to preserve capitalist profits. And the other capitalist governments through most of the world are following suit. The program of Kyoto, called "cap-and-trade," has been proven to be utterly ineffective. CO2 levels and temperatures have continued to rise and more rapidly than predicted. The reason cap-and-trade has failed is that it is a neoliberal market measure. That means that, instead of the governments regulating and enforcing major cuts in CO2 emissions, an artificial market in pollution permits was set up in the belief that price signals would

encourage the plutocrats to cut emissions efficiently simply as a result of their drive for profits. A ridiculously complex system was set up, but the capitalists were not to be lured away from their polluting and emissions continued to rise.

As cap and trade flounders, the next program in line for trial, the carbon tax, is also a market measure in that it, too, merely seeks to use price signals to encourage the capitalists to cut their emissions. This, too, will fail, while it will alienate the working people against environmentalism because the costs to the capitalists of the carbon tax will just be passed along like any other cost increase to them – onto the backs of the public, in other words, largely on the working class majority of the country.

The only method that will stop the growth of

CO2 emissions is straight-up governmental regulation, as was done (not very well) in 1978 when the chlorofluorocarbons threatened the ozone layer. But that was a much smaller problem than the CO2 emissions of today. It will take very vigorous government regulation of industry to cut today's emissions sufficiently to slow global warming. The working class must fight for serious environmental planning and strict regulation of the capitalist polluters, and for enforcement of this regulation. If any of this takes place before a socialist revolution, it will be through a constant struggle against the repeated attempts of the bourgeoisie to undermine and subvert environmental regulation and against its attempts to carry regulation out in a way that squeezes the masses; this may become one of the triggers for a working-class socialist revolution. <>

Class trends in the environmental movement: Not all that glitters is green

by Joseph Green, November 2010

Today it's become fashionable for politicians and corporations speak in the name of the environment. How infuriating it is to see the worst corporate polluters put out "green" ads! Even the infamous oil company BP takes part in this game, and likes to present itself as "Beyond Petroleum".

So it's important that some activists have put out a chart *Know Who You're Dealing with... (a Continuum of Types of Organizations Affecting Environmental Matters)*.⁽¹⁾ It pays particular attention to groups active in Pennsylvania, but also contains many examples of national and international groups. It sketches the range of groups focused directly on environmental matters: at one end,

there's the corporate polluters and their front groups, and at the other end are the "funded, but generally uncompromised" environmental groups and "largely unfunded, grassroots" group, on the other. (There are also totally unfunded groups based on the working class, such as ourselves, but the chart leaves these out, probably in order to avoid dealing directly with political issues.) This is a spectrum from corporate pirates and their public-relations people on one side, to dedicated activists on the other.

Not many people will be surprised that the oil companies and other corporate liars, no matter what they say in commercials, are ravaging the environment. So what's especially

important in this chart are the categories in the middle. It refers to "corporate controlled environmental groups" and "highly" or "moderately" compromised environmental groups. Many of these groups have big names and are touted by the establishment press as the real voices of environmentalism, and the chart characterizes them as either "corporate controlled", or "compromised" by their connections with the polluters. Groups such as the Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Defense Fund present themselves as fighters for the environment, but their leaderships march hand-in-hand with to the polluters. Take a look at the chart, and see how strongly connected the establishment groups are to the capitalists ravaging our planet. This is something which should be known more widely and taken into account.

Now, I am not knowledgeable about every group listed in this chart, and so can't endorse every single categorization. But from what I do know, it seems to me that this chart presents an accurate picture of the general nature of the environmental movement at this time.⁽²⁾ In particular, its bitter characterization of the big establishment environmental groups is on the mark.

This was shown by what's happened since the giant BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Many members and supporters of various mainstream environmental groups expressed outrage at the crimes of BP, only to find that their own groups had either taken money from BP and other oil companies or were involved in joint programs with them. This became an open scandal that even reached the pages of the *New York Times* and other establishment newspapers.

The seduction of the movement

So the time is long past when, no matter what solution one advocated, by simply talking about the need to be green one could make a contribution to saving the planet's biosphere. A large part of the bourgeoisie has learned to talk green. Just as cigarette companies learned to give money to "good causes" and advertise in every journal and at every sporting event, and they did this precisely because they knew their product was killing people, so the worst polluters learned years ago to give alms to a certain section of the environmental movement, and build links with it. Thus, for example, BP handed out money to the Nature Conservancy, while Chevron, known not only for its pollution but also for its savage exploitation of third world peoples, has coopted the World Wildlife Fund and seduced academics like Professor Jared Diamond, who sits on the WWF board, write books about the environment like *Collapse*, and yet praises Chevron.

But direct funding is only one of the ways in which the compromised environmental groups are bound to the polluters. Some of the compromised groups, such as the Environmental Defense Fund, won't take funds directly from the corporations. But the EDF seeks common ground with the environmental criminals as far as legislation and lobbying; this is supposedly the way to get things done. For example, the Partnership for Climate Action unites the EDF with major enemies of the environment like BP and Shell International, and promotes them to the public as "forward-thinking companies".⁽³⁾

The establishment environment groups think that this is realistic politics, but who's using

who? This search for common ground with the environmental criminals has been the flag of surrender, and it has meant giving them green credentials and watering down environmental proposals to what they will accept. It means searching for proposals that won't touch the profits or harm the image of the big corporations. And it has helped establish a revolving door between positions in establishment environmental groups and high-paying posts in major corporations.

The seduction of the movement has gone quite far: it is not restricted to groups of staid upper-class professionals and businesspeople, but has drawn in groups like Greenpeace as well. It may seem surprising that Greenpeace is listed in the chart as a compromised. After all, isn't it known for militant direct action in defense of the environment? And indeed, Greenpeace is not the worst of the compromised groups, and the chart does not list it as such, describing it as only "moderately compromised" rather than "highly-compromised". But I use Greenpeace as an example, not to denigrate the positive actions undertaken by Greenpeace, but to show how deeply corporate seduction has penetrated the movement.

A left-wing Australian academic described in 2002 how this led to Greenpeace taking part in the very type of "greenwashing" of corporations that it at other times has vigorously denounced. She wrote:

When Greenpeace emerged as an international organization in the 1970s, it embodied a spirit of courageous protest by activists who were willing to place their bodies on the line to call attention to environmental injustice. Its mission was to

'bear witness' to environmental abuses and take direct nonviolent action to prevent them.

In the 1990s, however, a new current of thought grew, both at the international level and at the level of national affiliates such as Greenpeace Australia. Greenpeace leaders and many members began to talk of going beyond negative criticism. The Greenpeace Australia web site proudly asserted this new philosophy: 'We work with industry and government to find solutions.' . . .

Greenpeace campaigners once criticised green marketing. 'Bung a dolphin on the label and we'll be right' was how Gilding referred to green marketing strategies. Yet this is just what Greenpeace did for the Sydney Olympics. Greenpeace helped sell the concept of the Green Olympics despite the toxic waste landfills on site, the waste plant emitting toxic emissions in its midst, and the use of ozone depletors in Olympic venues.

A June 1999 Greenpeace brochure stated that 'Sydney authorities were thorough in their efforts to remediate before construction began. Most of the waste remains on site, in state of the art landfills, covered with clay, vegetated to blend in with the Olympic site.' This raises several problems for Greenpeace credibility. For years it has campaigned against disposing of toxic waste by landfill because it is impossible to prevent toxic material from leaking into underlying groundwater. The major landfills on the Olympic site contain dioxins and organochlorines and heavy metals without

even linings underneath to mitigate the flow of leachate through the underlying soil.

.....

Nor was this shift in direction confined to the Australian branch. Greenpeace International wrote to Olympic sponsors, including BHP, Coca Cola, General Motors-Holden, McDonalds, and others, offering to help them earn the name of 'Green' in the same way as the Sydney Olympics has: 'As sponsors, you have the opportunity to play a key role in this success. One of the many benefits of being part of the Green Games is the chance to demonstrate your company's commitment to the environment and to future generations. The Sydney Olympics offer your staff the opportunity to take part in a long-term global initiative to protect the world's environment. . . Greenpeace would like to work with you to explore the areas in which you can make an environmental contribution during the Sydney 2000 Games.'

She went on to describe the revolving door that Greenpeace began to take part in:

To date Greenpeace policy does not allow the organisation to take money from industry or government so it is not the commercial opportunities which are converting Greenpeace into a greenwashing operation. It appears to be the career opportunities available to individuals, rather than the funds available to the organisation that is influencing Greenpeace decisions.

Greenpeace has become a site of the

ubiquitous revolving door between industry, government, and NGOs. Not only are people like Bode and Wilson, who come from industry and government and see nothing wrong with a 'reformist' solutions-oriented approach, coming into Greenpeace, but those who embrace such an approach such as Karla Bell (champion of the Green Olympics whilst at Greenpeace) and Paul Gilding are finding career opportunities as consultants to industry when they leave Greenpeace.

Others include Rick Humphries, who joined Gilding at Ecos Corporation and Blair Palese who left Greenpeace to work as Head of PR for the Body Shop International and then returned to work for Greenpeace four days a week and Ecos Corporation on the fifth day. Michael Bland left Greenpeace in 1989 to work for a Sydney-based marketing firm Environmental Marketing Services. Bland then started his own consultancy, Environment Matters, before returning to work for Greenpeace in 1993. In 1999 he left Greenpeace to work as a PR consultant for the Sydney Games authority.

She concluded: "Like many groups, Greenpeace is at a crossroads. Will it remain a principled green activist group confronting polluters and despoilers or will it become a deal-making, compromised collaborator with the powers that be?"⁽⁴⁾

Class differences in the environmental movement

Why has this taken place? Although the corporate polluters have a lot of money to throw around, it isn't simply a matter of direct

bribery or even the revolving door. No, while the corporate front groups may simply be paid spokespeople for the environmental criminals, the stand of the establishment environmental groups involves something more than this: it reflects a class viewpoint.

The establishment groups represent a bourgeois wing of the environmental movement. These groups base themselves on the bourgeoisie; and they believe in bourgeois measures. They believe in bourgeois economics, which would supposedly be compatible with environmental concerns provided goods were priced at their "true cost". They believe in neo-liberalism, and they would be horrified at the thought of the class struggle. All this being the case, it's not surprising that they advocate impotent market measures like carbon trading for dealing with greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental problems, and shy away from the regulation and economic planning needed to effectively deal with environmental issues.

There are also activist groups which are quite different from the stuffy bourgeois establishment organizations. But they face a good deal of pressure to keep them in line. Funding from the charitable foundations leaves organizations a longer leash than direct money from the corporations. But the foundations represent the humanitarian wing of the bourgeoisie, and their money and approval also sets limits on those who take it. Many NGOs are also active on various environmental issues, and employ many activists, but they are funded through bourgeois or even governmental sources. Meanwhile professors who wished to study the critical areas of the Gulf to deal with the

BP oil spill often found that they had to sign non-disclosure agreements with BP in order to get either access or funding for their work.

The result is a struggle between the push from a mass of activists for serious change in the economy, and the restraints of bourgeois environmentalism. The chart points out that there are some organizations which do receive some funding from foundations yet, for now, there are few strings attached. But, as the chart points out, it is "the largely unfunded, grassroots environmental groups" who "are capable of being more radical" in their agenda, because they don't have "conflicts of interest" resulting from where they get their funding or other organizational issues.

But aside from funding, some activist groups end up compromised because they are influenced by the general bourgeois standpoint. They may oppose neo-liberalism, but think that all it takes to overcome neo-liberalism is to have more government spending on certain programs. They may oppose cap and trade, but support the carbon tax, which is simply a different type of market measure. A certain section of the activist movement says directly it opposes market measures, but yet it does not see the carbon tax as a market measure, and it believes believe that "true cost pricing" is a radical departure from the market.⁽⁵⁾

Meanwhile the conservative atmosphere of the times has a tendency to wear down some people who might otherwise have preferred a more militant stand. The failure of the cap and trade mechanism used by the Kyoto Protocol, the failure of the US Congress to pass any environmental bill this year, and the horrible nature of the bills that were proposed, have led

to a crisis in the environmental movement. This could lead in one of two directions: to rejection of this new fiasco of bourgeois environmentalism, or to a search for some type of common denominator to form a basis of unity with the present neo-liberal awfulness.

Thus recently David Roberts, a staff writer for the environmental on-line journal *Grist*, expressed a certain mood in his article " 'Environmentalism' can never address climate change":

...the question is whether 'the environmental movement' can catalyze a big enough movement to be effective on this problem.

What needs to happen is for concern over earth's biophysical limitations to *transcend* the environmental movement -- and movement politics, as handed down from the '60s, generally. It needs to take its place alongside the economy and national security as a priority concern of American elites across ideological and organizational lines. It needs to become a shared concern of every American citizen regardless of ideological orientation or level of political engagement. That is the only way we can ever hope to bring about the urgent necessary changes.⁽⁶⁾

Here Roberts calls for jettisoning "movement politics", generally understood as embracing some kind of struggle, and looking towards making the environment "a priority concern of American elites", liberal or conservative. This seems to reflect a certain weariness with what seems a one-sided fight against the powerful the polluters: it is a dream of bringing them all into the fold, along with their concerns to

maintain their privileged position (their priority concern on the economy) and their imperialism (their priority concern on national security). Well, that may not be what Roberts sees as their concerns, but that's what the concerns of the elites actually are, and closing one's eyes to them won't change that. What is needed is not drawing closer to these elites: it is to link the environmental movement closer with the masses oppressed by these elites, in order to develop a class struggle that is far stronger and more consistent than that of the 60s.

Build a working class environmental movement

The only force that can provide a consistent counterweight to the corporations, and to the government run by the bourgeoisie, is the working class. But for this to be so, the working class has to provide not just numbers for the environmental movement, but also a working-class standpoint for the movement. The building of such a class-conscious environmental movement would fill out a new category in the chart -- groups with no connection to bourgeois philanthropy, but based on the class struggle.

A working-class environmental movement wouldn't be compromised by ties to the corporations and the bourgeoisie in general. It would be able to fight for serious measures to deal with greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental problems. It wouldn't be a stepping stone for getting cushy jobs in big business, but a part of a general movement of struggle of the working masses in their own interest.

A radical environmental movement shouldn't simply be more militant than the establishment

groups, but it should fight for a more effective environmental strategy. It shouldn't fight for the same market measures as the establishment groups, but avoiding their compromises. It shouldn't, say, fight for a cap and trade bill, albeit one unwatered down by the many compromises with the corporations which appeared in the last congressional bills. Instead it should put forward a better, truly effective, environmental strategy; it should oppose the futile cap and trade and carbon tax proposals; and it should put forward the need for comprehensive environmental regulation and planning.

Such a movement would see that the bourgeoisie acts not just through the corporations, but through the government as well. It would take seriously the lessons of the corporate capture of government regulatory agencies by the polluters, and would call for regulation to be carried out on a new basis, not only more transparent than before, but also involving the workers in enforcement. Naturally only a small part of this is possible under capitalism, but it is essential that something be accomplished along these lines if environmental regulations are to be enforced in every workplace, and if the government agencies are to have some independence from bourgeois industry.

A serious working class environmental movement doesn't mean one organized around the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy which leads the present-day American union movement, but around rank-and-file workers. It would be good, of course, if unions took a serious interest in environmental matters, but this would require an upsurge of rank-and-file pressure to transform the present situation in

the unions. Today's union bureaucracy, insofar as it considers environmental issues at all, is linked up with bourgeois environmentalism and trying to find common interests with business leaders.

Today there are militant activists that are looking for a real fight against environmental devastation. There are groups that are not compromised by ties to the large corporations. But these groups don't yet have a class viewpoint towards the differences in the movement. And, as can be seen by the example of Greenpeace, it isn't sufficient to have militant actions against the polluters in order to be free from corporate seduction. It is necessary to go further and see the class issues involved in the movement.

The chart *Know Who You're Dealing With* brings out that there are real differences in the movement. It shows that the establishment environmentalists are compromised by ties with the corporate polluters. In doing so, it makes important points that should be spread widely in the movement. A consciously working-class environmental movement can only be brought into existence by keeping such lessons in mind, and maintaining vigilance against the bourgeoisie, which not only runs the corporations, but also stands behind the government agencies and the establishment environmentalist groups. <>

Notes

^①It appears at the website of the Corporate Accountability Project at www.corporations.org/system/envirogroupstypes.pdf.

^② It doesn't deal with everything. It leaves out both government agencies and the different political groups, as well as the issue of the environmentally-related departments of universities.

^③See the glowing description of the Partnership for

Climate Action at The Environmental Defense Fund's website: www.edf.org/page.cfm?tagID=82.

⁽⁴⁾Sharon Beder, "Offering solutions or compromises?", www.herinst.org/sbeder/envpolitics/Greenpeace.html.

⁽⁵⁾For a discussion of environmental market measures in general, see "The coming of the environmental crisis, the failure of the free market, and the fear of a carbon dictatorship" (*Communist Voice* #39, August, 2007, www.comunistvoice.org/39cKyoto.html), which deals with the Kyoto Protocol, cap and trade, the carbon tax,

direct regulation, and democratic vs. capitalist planning. For a much more detailed discussion of the the carbon tax, see "[The carbon tax: another futile attempt at a free-market solution to global warming](#)" (*Communist Voice* #42, August 2008, www.comunistvoice.org/42cCarbonTax.html).

⁽⁶⁾"'Environmentalism' can never address climate change", August 9, 2010, "Grist: a beacon in the smog", www.grist.org/article/2010-08-09-environmentalism-can-never-address-climate-change/, emphasis as in the original

The sorry results of the Cancun global warming summit, the failure of climate capitalism, and the prospects of major change

The following article is based on a presentation at the *Detroit Workers' Voice* Discussion Group meeting of Jan. 2, 2011

Introduction (November 2011)

A few days ago, in early November 2011, it was announced that 2010 had seen a 6% jump in carbon emissions over the previous year, with about 564 million more metric tons of carbon than 2009. This was, in absolute terms, the largest annual increase in carbon emissions ever, and it was worse than the most pessimistic scenario put forward at the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit. It was a sign of the utter failure of the climate summits organized by capitalist governments to deal with global warming.

The market methods of dealing with carbon emissions, and the complete subservience of the capitalist governments to the energy corporations and other capitalist interests that make money off destroying the environment, have made a mockery of efforts at averting the looming climactic disaster. Climate capitalism, or neo-liberalism applied to environmental reform, has proved utterly bankrupt.

There is no reason to think that 2011 will turn out to be any better. The article below shows that the measures adopted by the Cancun

climate summit of December 2010 followed the same path to disaster as the previous climate summits.

The 2011 UN climate summit will be held Nov. 28 - Dec. 9 in Durban, South Africa. All signs are that it will follow the same neo-liberal path as its predecessors, and the environmental crisis will deepen. There will be debate on what is to replace the Kyoto Protocol, whose first "commitment period" is set to expire at the end of 2012, but no challenge to reliance on market methods. But serious progress on global warming will require abandoning market fundamentalism and implementing serious environmental and economic planning and regulation. Moreover, it will require the influence of the working class on this planning and regulation to ensure that it accomplishes environmental goals, that capitalists aren't able to evade it, and that it is integrated with social programs to protect the well-being of the working masses, rather than serving mainly as another way to funnel subsidies to the capitalists.

All this goes against the logic of capitalism, so

that it can only be accomplished in part while capitalism exists. Moreover, world capitalism is still insisting on market fundamentalism as the world sinks deeper and deeper into a world depression. So the struggle for relief from austerity and its deepening misery, and the struggle for measures to deal with the environmental crisis, both face the need to

fight the neo-liberalism of the bourgeoisie. The same bourgeoisie that is cruelly sending a whole generation of working people into destitution and desperation in order to save the banks, is also ruining the environment. If there is to be a chance for serious progress in protecting the environment, the class and environmental struggles must be linked.

This morning the Reuters new agency reported that record floods are swamping northeast Australia, Queensland state, forcing thousands of people from their homes. As rivers overflowed their banks, Gordon Banks, a senior forecaster in Australia's Bureau of Meteorology, was quoted as saying that "We have not seen water that high in recorded history here." Indeed, water may cover the town of Rockhampton 30 feet deep. Now, no one can say whether any individual catastrophe of this type is due to global warming. But what we do know is that we can expect many more events of this type in the coming years, because while this flood isn't necessarily due to global warming, many others will be.

We are already in the era where climate change is not just a danger, but a reality. The question is whether anything effective will be done to keep down the extent of this change, because it hasn't yet reached the level of total disaster. In this regard, people are looking toward the various climate summits organized each year by the UN. A year ago there was the 2009 climate summit at Copenhagen, which had the task of deciding what to do as the Kyoto Protocol ran out. And the failure of this summit was a major shock to concerned people around the world: it failed to agree on

any binding goals. We discussed this failure last year in *Communist Voice*.⁽¹⁾ And today we are discussing the Cancun climate summit of last month, which again failed to achieve anything definitive.

In a moment, we'll go into the major features of this summit. But it should be borne in mind that there is more to the story than just the details of the agreements, which are often complex. The summit reflects the views of the governing bourgeoisie about what is to be done. And what happened at Copenhagen a year ago, and Cancun last month, didn't particularly alarm the bourgeoisie. It happened because the bourgeoisie is presently in a complacent mood about the environment.

For now, the basic attitude of the bourgeoisie is that disasters come and go, and there's nothing special about global warming. "Adaptation" is its present slogan: it shrugs and says "we have to learn to live with global warming, as we have lived with other problems in the past. And especially we have to learn what business opportunities are presented by it."

Thus the real story of Cancun was written even before the first session opened on November 29. The influential British magazine *The Economist* reflects the views of

the market-fundamentalist bourgeoisie. Its issue of Nov. 25, 2010 carried an article entitled "Adapting to climate change/Facing the consequences/Global action is not going to stop climate change. The world needs to look harder at how to live with it."

In this way, *The Economist* shrugged its shoulders at the failure of the Kyoto Protocol to bring down carbon emissions enough to halt global warming. It doesn't ask why this has happened and how to change it. Instead it says: "adapt!"

It admits that it doesn't look like the Copenhagen summit achieved its goal of restricting future warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). Indeed, it says that it looks like what is happening is just the "business as usual" scenario -- that nothing much has been done. Indeed, it cites the International Energy Agency saying that world temperature will increase by 3.5C (6.3F) by the end of the century. But it shrugs this off. If business as usual is 2C, or 3C, or 4C, or whatever, well, just adapt to it. It doesn't use exactly these words, but the spirit is "don't be a nervous nelly we've heard predictions of disaster before -- it's never as bad as it is said to be."

Adaptation is the present codeword of the bourgeoisie for living with global warming. And it's true that we do have to prepare for the catastrophes, such as flooding in Australia, unusually cold winters in Europe (ironically, also expected as a result of global warming), and the flooding of entire small island nations that is expected. But *The Economist* isn't really worried about anything it considers major. Well, it says that perhaps "as much as two-thirds of the total [cost of the results of climate

change] cannot be offset through investment in adaptation", and it does mention that there will be some "misery". But still, it thinks it is mainly just a question of "higher prices" and "lower growth". It is thinking that minor measures will suffice to save the world, or at least the richer countries, from any major misery. After all, making money is supposedly the key to everything, and *The Economist* opines that "The best starting point for adaptation is to be rich."

So it talks about whether the dikes and barriers against flood water are high enough in various parts of the world, and says that "the Dutch can view the prospect of a rising sea level with a certain equanimity, at least for their own land", and it thinks that probably "the Thames Barrier", with some supplementary measures, will protect London. And New York could "in principle" protect itself, *The Economist* thinks, except that it's not likely to spend the necessary money. The poor countries are in more trouble, but there's always minor tinkering with finance to save them. Are poor countries going to face crop failures? Why, says *The Economist*, let's have crop insurance! It writes: "Here, as elsewhere, there is a role for insurance to transfer and spread the risks. Marshall Burke of the University of California, Berkeley, a specialist in climate impacts, argues that the best agricultural-insurance options for developing countries will pay out not when crops fail (which reduces incentives for the farmer) but when specific climatic events occur, such as rainfall of less than a set level." So the ever-so-clever financial wizards, who brought us one financial bubble after another, believe that tinkering with how insurance is paid out will be a great adaptation to global warming.

So it's just business as usual for *The Economist*. And that's how it was at Cancun. The major debates were haggling between the US, Japan, China and other countries over how to avoid agreeing to anything definite, and trying to calm down those countries who were more worried about the threat of future disaster.

It's not the bourgeoisie isn't doing anything, mind you. While part of the bourgeoisie still ridicules the idea of global warming, even pointing to this year's cold European and North American winter as an alleged refutation (and forgetting that weather extremes, and not just overall warming, were always predicted as part of global warming), and another part campaigns on global warming (a la Al Gore), they have in large part come to a sort of agreement, an agreement on climate capitalism. Certain measures will be taken, but they will all be market measures.

At the time when the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, in 1997, the bourgeoisie was a bit more worried. And it was also coming off of an apparent success in preventing the thinning of the global ozone layer due to emissions of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). It had turned this danger back, at least temporarily, through the adoption of an international agreement called the Montreal Protocol, which regulated total emissions of CFCs. This encouraged people to think that carbon emissions would be dealt with too.

But a fateful decision was made in the negotiations leading to the Kyoto Protocol, and Al Gore and Bill Clinton were central to it. This was that carbon emissions should be dealt with, not through overall regulation and planning, but through market measures.

Artificial markets should be set up in carbon emissions, and companies could buy and sell the right to burn carbon-based fuels. Instead of banning harmful production processes and mandating cleanup, companies should be allowed to decide for themselves what to do. If they wanted to clean up, fine. Otherwise, they could buy a permit to pollute, and that would be fine, too. Or they could, instead of cleaning up their production, pay for someone else to clean up production elsewhere. That was supposed to be just as good as cleaning up their own carbon emission. This was the so-called "Clean Development Mechanism" by which companies bought "carbon offsets". You could continue to pollute by "offsetting" your pollution by funding someone else to clean up. And to prove that you had funded such a project all you had to do was hire your own specialist to testify to it.

These market measures were trumpeted as far superior to regulation and planning. You may hear that the various UN climate summits argued over the reductions countries are supposed to make in carbon dioxide emissions, and that certainly sounds like regulation and planning. But the reality is different: these overall goals were to be achieved through market measures. And what happened is that these measures don't work; they don't give a sufficient reduction in carbon emissions; and sometimes they even give incentives to pollute. I won't go into the details of how this works here, as we have discussed it elsewhere and I want to get to the particular features of Cancun. But the point is that the market measures haven't worked; thus the Kyoto Protocol has not worked. And yet the whole point of the agreements at Copenhagen and Cancun is to continue them. Among the

bourgeoisie, there is no serious dissent from them, only haggling over which market measures. Even the dissenters at Cancun contrasted Copenhagen and Cancun to Kyoto, thus agreeing implicitly to the continuation of the reign of market measures.

So Cancun, just like Copenhagen, didn't reconsider the path of market measures. It instead debated how far to intensify or expand them. When you hear of so many billions of dollars pledged, so many ideas about how to allegedly save forests, it's all about using the same market measures that have failed in the past.

The basic issues that arose at Cancun were as follows:

- extending market measures with respect to forests, through the expansion of the so-called REDD+ program;
- money to poorer countries, allegedly to help them reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change, but really to bribe them to shut up;
- haggling among the more powerful countries over how small a reduction in carbon emissions they could make;
- and letting the World Bank and other neo-liberal financial institutions play a major role in all this.

Let's go into this one by one.

If you follow the UN climate summits, you'll hear a lot about REDD, which stands for "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation". That certainly sounds good. And geez, they went even further. By the time of Copenhagen, it had been rechristianed as "REDD plus", to make it even

better. The "plus" emphasizes that it is supposed to stand for "sustainable forest management", "conservation", and "increasing forest carbon stocks". In typical UN-speak, it sounds really good in generalities.

But in practice, it means allowing corporations or countries the right to offset their carbon emissions by funding REDD+ activities around the world. So on one hand, this means that whatever success is achieved in preserving forests, is offset by the continuation of carbon emissions elsewhere. Moreover, it doesn't look like much success will be achieved in preserving forests. For one thing, there is actually an incentive to clear-cut forests, so they can be replanted to get carbon offset credits through REDD+. As well, a living forest can be chopped down and replaced by a mono-culture tree plantation, where only one type of tree is planted. Such monoculture plantations are bad conservation practice; their proliferation helps destroy real forests; and they are designed for the convenience of logging companies. But that's OK, as far as REDD+: mono-culture plantations count as forests. Moreover, a complicated system of other incentives is set up, which is imposed on the local indigenous population and other working people in the forest, which puts everything in the hands of financiers and corporate CEOs.

Now, maybe some REDD+ projects may be successful to this or that extent, but on the whole the result is corporatization of the forests, the spread of fraud via carbon offsets, and the replacement of planning with haggling over who gets money. The theory of the carbon offset is doubtful to begin with: one can offset burning carbon fuels in one year, by

planting trees which will supposedly take up the same amount of carbon, but over a lifetime. Moreover, if these trees wither and die, or are logged, legally and illegally, then maybe another offset can be obtained to plant the trees again. It becomes hard to distinguish some of these offsets from a Bernie Madoff-type fraud. It might be argued that most of this fraud is an abuse of the carbon offset idea. And better regulation of offsets might help a bit. But first of all, such regulation would go against the whole idea of market measures to begin with, which is avoid having government regulation. And secondly, such regulation wouldn't solve the uncoordinated and anarchic feature of REDD+ projects, nor the fact that they put control of the forests into the hands of those whose only responsibility is to make a profit.

There has been a good deal of protest about REDD+ from some environmental activists, and especially from indigenous groups. But this is the forest project that Cancun determined to continue and intensify, and that its boosters boast about. It is solidly based on neo-liberal dogma in theory, and on protecting the profits of the corporations in practice.

This brings us to another feature of Cancun. It continues the promises of Copenhagen to provide funds to the developing countries to help with reducing carbon emissions or adapting to climate change. It promises up to \$100 billion a year by 2020. Again, this may sound good: money is to be provided to help various countries, and the amount is supposed to get larger and larger. And maybe the money will actually be provided, eventually. But like imperialist foreign aid in general, it's not so good in operation. In foreign aid, the more

powerful countries devastate the poor ones, impose one-sided treaties and trade agreements, and then give back some funds, with many strings attached. And that's the way Cancun will disperse environmental money; it's pretty much the same. The main reason why the bourgeoisie of the richer countries, so loath to agree to major reductions in carbon emissions, agrees to give money, is that it allows it to bribe the other countries into submission.

It's notable that there was a lot of protest at the Copenhagen summit, and leading up to it. Groups of countries disagreed with each other; poorer countries denounced the summit for wanting to go outside the UN framework into a more unilateral style of agreements; island nations denounced the summit for such a lax goal with respect to carbon emissions that some countries could expect to be flooded out of existence in several decades; many indigenous groups denounced REDD; NGOs, indigenous groups, and environmental activists took part in non-governmental actions; and up to 100,000 people were in the streets of Copenhagen on Dec. 12, 2008. The mass protest was one of the few good things to happen at Copenhagen. But what happened in Cancun? There were protests, but only of a few thousand activists.

In part, this was because governments were bought off. Only the Bolivian government refused to be part of the consensus agreement at the end. No doubt this is partly due to severe pressure on these countries. But it's hard not to believe that a role was played by various governments reaching for the money. This indeed had already begun at Copenhagen, with splits taking place among the dissenters

as various governments gave in to the lure of money. For that matter, the dissenting governments were themselves divided on goals. The views of the stronger members of the developing world, such as China, India and Brazil, already major capitalist powers in their own right, differ from those of the small island states and the poorer countries.

Meanwhile, there's no promise to help relocate the people of the countries which may be flooded out completely, such as the Maldives and various other island nations. And there's no promise to provide enough aid to, say, keep Bangladesh viable, although it's likely to have millions upon millions of flooded-out peasants. Moreover, the bourgeoisie of the richer countries will call the shots on these funds, managing them and directing them towards various corporate interests. Indeed, the richer countries will insist on dribbling the funds out, so that they constantly have to be coaxed and wheedled to give the money. No, all that these promised funds mean is the lure of cash, which is hard to believe isn't to help corrupt the bourgeois governments of the poorer countries. That's why the various governments which pooh-pooh climate change will, however, promise to contribute to the present proposals for a fund.

Cancun was also notable for the haggling among the richer and more powerful countries, such as the US, Europe, Japan, and China, to avoid ambitious targets for carbon emissions, or even to avoid compulsory targets at all. I won't go into the details here. But the fact of this haggling exposes the bourgeois mantra that wealth and capitalist development is supposed to be the key to everything good. Supposedly the bourgeoisie isn't for wealth for

its sake, not for greed, not to keep the privileged exploiters on top, oh no, but because money-making supposedly means progress in everything. If Teng Hsiao-ping famously told the Chinese that to get rich is glorious, then today the western bourgeoisie says that to get rich is to have all virtues, and *The Economist* implies that to be rich is to be able to adapt to climate change.

But when it's a matter of actually doing something for the environment, then the wealthier countries act truly impoverished. It's been several decades of market fundamentalism and supposed glorious growth. And yet, not a single one of these countries has enough money, it seems, to be able to do anything serious. They all allege that serious measures would harm their economies, and that the slightest bump to their economies would be devastating.

Indeed, the market mechanisms and supposed environmental funds give a major role to infamous neo-liberal financial institutions that are helping to devastate the world, such as the World Bank. The World Bank talks about environmentalism, while imposing austerity and environmental devastation around the world. One example is that last year it loaned the huge energy giant Eskom \$3.75 billion to build the world's fourth-largest coal-fired power plant at Medupi in South Africa. This plant would be a huge addition to South Africa's carbon emissions, and yet Eskom might apply for carbon credits for putting it into operation, on the pretext that its version of "clean coal" might produce somewhat less carbon dioxide than other coal plants. This is the type "environmentalism" which the World Bank, the IMF, and various neo-liberal

financial institutions are imposing on the world.

So that is what was going on at Cancun. It's pretty disturbing, because as the last few years tick off when there is a chance to avoid really catastrophic climate change, nothing serious is being done. But one has to look below the surface. It's often the case, just before an upheaval, that the forces of the old and outdated rally themselves for a last desperate effort to maintain themselves. They often appear most triumphant and in control in the days just before major changes are to take place.

Copenhagen and Cancun show that market fundamentalism can't solve the environmental problems, just as the ongoing world depression shows that it can only lead to misery and hunger for the masses. Problems are piling up. Soon a change will be forced, either by the need for serious measures to avoid environmental catastrophe, or by the need to deal with the human toll imposed by environmental catastrophes. This will force a switch to something more drastic. It won't be possible to deal with tens of millions of environmental refugees by setting up a market in refugee-trading. It won't be possible to deal with major devastation of the environment and local collapses of agriculture or major shortages of water by market measures -- not without the deaths of tens and tens of millions of people.

This will sooner or later give rise to something more drastic than the carbon markets and the fraud-ridden carbon offsets. Direct track will have to be taken of resources, and of the assignments of resources. Regulation and planning will be a necessity.

But such a switch won't, by itself alone, solve the problem. Regulation and planning can be used on behalf of the bourgeoisie just as privatization can be. Indeed, for a few decades after World War II, the bourgeoisie itself promoted a sort of "mixed economy", in which a certain amount of regulation, planning, and government enterprise served the needs of capitalist profits.

Thus there will be a struggle over how regulation is carried out, who benefits from it, and who has a say in the plans. It should be borne in mind that neo-liberalism isn't simply a lack of attention to necessary social projects; instead, market fundamentalism can involve the extension of privatization and market methods, and the provision of government subsidies to private companies, under the pretext of dealing with these projects, whether education, medical care, the environment, etc. Privatization and neo-liberalism don't necessarily mean the end of a government role in this or that sphere, but the provision of huge subsidies to business; they means converting government agencies into direct tools of this or that capitalist, just as the FDA, the agency regulating pharmaceutical companies, is now financed in part by fees for approving drugs, so that it has a vested interest in approving dangerous drugs; they mean breaking down worker protections of all types so that no one but businesspeople have any say in anything; they means corporatizing everything. Thus the news that the government has allocated billions of dollars to various environmental programs won't necessarily mean that the disastrous days of neo-liberalism are over in general, nor that market methods have been abandoned in the field of environmental policy.

Indeed, even after events force an end to direct market fundamentalism, neo-liberalism will leave a legacy in particularly oppressive ways of the government dealing with the masses, and particularly ineffective ways of dealing with environmental protection and major climate change. We can therefore expect struggles over how regulation is carried out; over whether ensuring mass livelihood is a part of regulation; and over whether regulations are done behind the back of the people or not. Capitalism with regulation is still capitalism; and it will be some time before the masses come to socialist conclusions, to say nothing of achieving the organization and level of struggle needed to overthrow the capitalist ruling classes. So we can expect a turbulent period where, if environmental regulations are to be of any serious value, workers will have to constantly fight to ensure that they are soundly based, and are not utterly corrupted by the influence of a myriad of capitalist interests.

In this regard, let's look at the protests at Cancun. As I mentioned, there wasn't very much, compared to what happened at Copenhagen, but what did take was important. And we should pay attention to what it stood for.

The major protests revolved around the Bolivian government, and around various groups with a similar standpoint. The preparation for this was the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in April last year at Cochabamba, Bolivia. This conference set forward a "people's agreement" which denounced the present do-nothing attitude of the Copenhagen Conference and the major

powers, and blamed this on capitalism. This was echoed by the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, in his "Letter to the indigenous peoples of the world" on November 16. The statement (and the letter) pointed to the disaster that global warming, even at the 2C level envisioned at Copenhagen, would give rise to. It denounced market mechanisms such as carbon trading; it denounced REDD; and the dictation by a group of leaders in the more powerful countries. And it demanded sharper carbon emission reductions; concern for biodiversity; the right of people to have their needs satisfied; that developed countries should be responsible to take care of the wave of environmental migrants to come; attention to the values of the indigenous peoples; more aid from the richer countries, etc.

But it's notable that it didn't put forward any way to achieve this. Yes, it denounced capitalism and market measures for the environmental problems, but it also demanded adherence to the Kyoto Protocol, which was a climate capitalist protocol which implemented market measures. It denounced capitalism, but it itself had no idea either of socialism or what would lead to it. And this is also seen in the actions of the Bolivian government itself, which denounces capitalism while implementing so-called "Andean capitalism".

Boiled down to its concrete measures, the program of the "people's agreement" amounted to demands on the developed and richer countries to provide more aid and in a more multilateral way. The denunciation of capitalism was an appeal to the masses who suffer from the capitalist interests, and it is indeed important to constantly expose the capitalist interests devastating the

environment. But the appeal regarded capitalism simply as bad policies, and put forward no picture of the basic economic and class changes needed to go beyond capitalism. It correctly linked demands for the people's welfare with environmental demands. But it had no idea concerning the need for comprehensive economic planning, nor about the struggle that will take place over the nature of regulation, nor about how capitalism will seek to continue after the downfall of neo-liberalism, nor about the needed class organization of the masses.

At present, there is a climate justice movement, of which the Cochabamba conference was part, that denounces certain of the market measures, or even "market measures" in general. But it doesn't yet have a class perspective. It doesn't even realize that the carbon tax, and not just carbon trading, is also a market measure. The development of the climate justice movement is important, but it is still only a step in the right direction.

We need to develop a working-class wing of the environmental movement. It must expose the climate capitalism, denounce the failure of the market measures, and expose corporatization at every turn. It must push for

effective measures, rather than bourgeois complacency. It must demand that guaranteeing the masses' livelihood must be an integral part of environmental planning. And it must bring out the class nature of the various governments, both of the rich and of the poor countries.

A working-class environment movement should seek to link up with those other serious environmentalists, in the climate justice movement, indigenous movement, and elsewhere, who are opposed to this or that extent to the market measures promoted by establishment environmentalism. But it should do so from a class perspective. This is important not only to fight for serious measures, but to continue, after serious environmental regulation begins, the fight over what type of measures are taken. The class struggle doesn't end at the door of the environmental movement; on the contrary, the class struggle must become a focus of the environmental movement, or else there will be no serious environmental reform. <>

Notes

⁽¹⁾ see "Lessons from the failure of the Copenhagen climate summit", www.comunistvoice.org/44cCopenhagen.html

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