

## Savage Capitalism - the Ecosocialist Alternative

**This is an edited version of the main document being discussed at next month's AGM of Socialist Resistance. The document explains why Socialist Resistance is changing its political programme, perspectives and public profile towards being an anti-capitalist, ecosocialist organisation. This is to make explicit a change in our perspectives that has been underway for at least a year and now needs to be signaled publicly. At the core of this change is our contention that free-market, privatising neoliberalism has over 20 years arrived at a new and deadly phase – what we call 'savage capitalism'. The document explains why now only a socialist response that centrally addresses the environmental crisis is adequate to the current period.**

### 1. Introduction: Savage capitalism – wrecking lives, wrecking the planet

Hardly anyone now doubts that humanity is facing an enormous environmental crisis. The recent report by the International Panel on Climate Change, although watered down to meet the objections of the worst polluters, spells out what this means in graphic detail. Billions will face disaster from flooding, desertification, water shortage and other environmental consequences of global warming - unless there is a radical reversal of humanity's production and consumption consequences.

The events of this year's 'Typhoon Summer' in which there have been massive floods in the China, India, Australia, the UK and many other European countries – combined with soaring heatwaves of 40°-plus in southern Europe – can only be explained by climate change, around which there is now a massive scientific consensus. Climate change may be a result of the industrialisation in general, but has been given a massive boost capitalist productivism, which has greatly intensified during the last 25 years of neoliberalism. To see how this has happened, it is worth looking at the old debate about the 'collapse' of work that was supposed to happen as computer technology became generalised.

In 1979 ASTMS General Secretary Clive Jenkins published a book with the union's chief researcher, Barrie Sherman (now a Labour MP), entitled "The Collapse of Work". The basic idea was that with the application of computerisation, productivity would grow massively, leading to a rapid decline in the need for human labour. The question would be – how will we use all that leisure time? How are we going to ensure that the limited amount of work is spread around, and that everyone gets paid? These problems, it was argued, could be easily overcome with a little bit of social engineering.

A quarter of a century on, nothing like this has happened. Computerisation has not led to the collapse of work; on the contrary there are more workers on a world scale than ever before – as Paul Mason puts it in his recent book *Live Working or Die Fighting* (1), the working class has 'gone global'. Even in countries with high levels of employment like Britain, *people are working longer and harder*. Average hours worked have *gone up* since 1979. The paradise of short working hours combined with affluence never happened. How can we explain this paradox?

Jenkins' and Sherman's idea would only have worked if labour is mainly about social reproduction and satisfying human needs. But under capitalism it isn't. The authors missed the crucial point – *capitalism is about generating ever larger amounts of profits, which requires*

*ever larger numbers of commodities and ever larger inputs of labour to exploit.* So, 28 years down the line we live in a society with 42 brands of washing powder available at most supermarkets, 93 different personal bank account options, 72 family saloon car models available, 17 celebrity magazines, 56 brands of mp3 player in the shops (not counting the internet) and 541 different types of telephone you can install for your landline.

Cheap airlines go to 423 destinations from Britain, but domestic rail transport is unaffordable by most people! In return for all this, people work longer and harder, have less secure pensions and a more difficult old age, bad public services and health care, and the poorer sections of society have a much worse quality of life overall. The gap between what is possible under the Sherman/Jenkins scenario and the realities of daily life today is immense.

It is this massive intensification of the production of (often useless and environmentally damaging) commodities that has given an extra twist to the environmental crisis.

All this has happened not only because of the general priorities of any form of capitalism, but because of the present phase of 'savage capitalism', stalking the earth with all sense of social responsibility abandoned, increasing amounts of surveillance, violence, war and torture, and aimed at short term profits squeezed from the labour of the poor, rather than the development of social solidarity, peace and the possibility for most people to live a happy life.

It is now obvious that this morbid phase of capitalism has brought upon humanity the biggest ever threat to its existence – the threat of environmental catastrophe.

The overall threat to humanity and the planet we sum up here under four headings – environmental catastrophe, imperialist war and the crushing of the third world, savage capitalism in everyday life and the surveillance- security lockdown state. They are all linked; they all are part of a single system of power and exploitation. 'Neoliberalism', with the added ingredient of US-style neoconservatism, has degenerated into a new and more barbarous phase – 'savage capitalism'.

This new phase of capitalism forces an inevitable conclusion – *only by a total transformation in politics and production, in other words a transformation of our social relations, can a sustainable future for humanity be established.* We are facing the biggest crisis of human civilisation ever. No previous crisis has ever posed the existence human civilisation so directly. Revolutionary answers are needed, qualitative answers which go way beyond the standard 'no to' slogans of daily campaigns, and point the way to an eco-socialist alternative.

For Socialist Resistance this means a turn in our political stance, our campaigning priorities, our forms of organisation and our self-definition.

## **2. Ecological materialism and revolutionary ecology**

Contemporary Marxism has been late in relating to the looming environmental crisis, ceding ground to the ecologists and the Green parties in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - at least as far as the urgency of the situation is concerned. It is now time to reassert that not only is the defence of the environment firmly located in the Marxist tradition, but that it is only through such a critique that a lasting and adequate solution to the ecological crisis will be found.

A key theoretical refounder of this tradition has been John Bellamy Foster in his book *Marx's Ecology*. He systematically established that ecological conceptions were central to the ideas of Marx (and indeed of Darwin) in their battles to establish a materialist conception of history in the middle part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That it was the idea that humankind was a part of nature, a product of it rather than divine creation, which established the basis for the relationship between humankind and nature and an ecological as well as an historical-materialist conception of history.

Bellamy Foster consequently contends that: "Marx's world-view was deeply, and indeed systematically, ecological and that this ecological perspective derived from his materialism".

From the start Marx's notion of the alienation of human labour from what it produced was connected to an understanding of the alienation of human beings from nature. Marx pointed out that the commodification of nature under the capitalist mode of production and private ownership led to the "practical degradation of nature". In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx points out that the large towns workers had to endure conditions where light, air and cleanliness were no longer part of their existence but rather darkness, polluted air, and raw sewage, constituted their material environment.

It was in *Capital* that Marx's materialist conception of nature became fully integrated with his materialist conception of history. As Bellamy Foster points out: "Marx employed the concept of 'metabolism' to define the labour process as "a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism with nature in a rational way," completely beyond the capabilities of bourgeois society".

True Marx and Engels saw the issue of ecology as mainly from the point of view of the degradation of the life of the proletariat rather than a major factor in the revolutionary process itself – which is the concept ecosocialists or revolutionary ecologists have to come to terms with today. The goal, as Bellamy Foster puts it, is to "understand and develop a revolutionary ecological view of that links social transformation with the transformation of the human relation with nature in ways that we now consider ecological".

The Socialist Resistance ecosocialist turn also bases itself on work done by third world activists, including those clearly identified as part of the radical left, on the question of the environment. Vandana Shiva's 1992 critique of the Green revolution in India for example is a searing indictment of productivism in a rural agricultural context. Her activism and that of a whole section of the Indian left, particularly feminists, around water and in particular the question of dams has important lessons for us.

Our Latin America solidarity work has allowed us to discuss some of these questions, as Cuba and Venezuela have both attempted to integrate ecological dimensions into the revolutionary process.

### **3. Capitalist productivism**

Revolutionary socialists have always been in favour of the development of the economy, on a global and national basis, to meet the needs of humanity. But that doesn't mean we favour the production of an increasing number of commodities of any type whatsoever. On the contrary, huge swathes of production under capitalism are socially useless, and either redundant or

directly harmful. Some products – like cars - harm the environment directly; others are useless and just use up huge amounts of the planet's resources.

In the past Marxists have acted as though the production of commodities and the use to which they are subsequently put have no impact on the environment. In fact they can have a huge effect on the environment. The profligate waste of the planet's resources in pursuit of an unending cascade of commodities, artificially created 'wants' generated by the advertising industry, is criminal. It only exists *because that's the way that capitalism functions*. The constant stream of 'new' commodities is vital to maintain profits and fight off rival firms.

However, our critique of the so-called 'commodity spectacle' does not mean we are against all further economic development, especially in the third world. Neither does it mean that decisive new inventions in the future should not be applied, and the level of technology should remain stagnant. But it does mean that new products have to be justified on the basis of their social usefulness, and not because they are a repackaging of an established product to make more profits. We cannot abandon industrialisation and go back to the feudal village. But we can reorganise society so that the goods and services produced are socially useful and environmentally friendly. And we can make democratic decisions about the trade off that people want to make between working time and economic development. *Maximising* economic growth is far from rational because it means that the central priority in the lives of most people is (increasing amounts of) work.

That much production under capitalism is useless is obvious. A classic example is Margaret Thatcher's 'great car economy'. No rational person could possibly think that the socially and environmentally most friendly way to organise transport was to centre it on private cars, and leave public transport to fill in the gaps. But that is just what has happened in the last 25 years with catastrophic results to the environment and neglect of public transport.

Huge inputs of socially useless labour time are put into the design of competing yet near identical models, their advertising and sales, the consequences in terms of deaths and injuries on the roads, the production of oil to keep the cars going etc. A fraction of the inputs of labour time and energy could produce a functioning, socially useful and much more environmentally friendly integrated public transport system. But it doesn't happen because that is not the way that capitalism works. The 'great car economy' is a classic example of how human priorities are distorted by the priority of profits.

#### **4. Social dimensions of the environmental crisis – Apocalypse Soon**

The recent UN report highlighted the likely outcomes if global warming and carbon emissions are not tackled. It is not a question of whether climate change will occur – we are already in the thick of it. Rather the question is whether starting from today's position, how can we minimise further emissions of greenhouse gases and how we can manage the effects of global warming as they kick in.

In Britain the discussion of climate change has escalated but the "solutions" proposed remain marginal. The government has come up with a draft Bill which, though proposing statutory target for emissions, falls far short of what is necessary to tackle dangerous and accelerating climate change. Its proposed 60% cuts by 2050 and an interim 26-32% by 2020 are way below

what is needed to prevent reaching the 2°C tipping point, when potentially global warming could spiral out of control.

Many scientists and environmentalists now agree that reductions in the order of 90% are going to be necessary to reverse the global warming process already underway. Meanwhile airport expansion goes ahead at a great pace and the government tells us that there will be no need for people to restrict their flights.

We are told that in any case Britain only accounts for 2% of world emissions (not an accurate figure of course) and what ever we do will be massively cancelled out by the escalating rate of emissions in China and India - with China completing a new power coal-fired station every two weeks. This ignores the fact that it is the rich countries which have polluted the world and continue to be the main polluters. It also ignores that fact that there is little chance of countries like China and India doing anything serious about their emissions whilst the rich countries carry on polluting just the same.

As the IPCC report makes clear, the effects of desertification, water shortage and drought, crop loss and food crisis, an upsurge in diseases caused by lack of clean water and other environmental effects, will hit disproportionately at “those who are worst placed to deal with it” – ie the poor. The rural and urban poor are the least able to find the resources to quickly modify their lives – to change location, to find alternative sources of water and food, to find medicines and medical care or to get emergency help in case of disaster. It will be the poor who will be the first victims of environmental crisis as the state and the ruling elite mobilises to defend the rich. This is true both in rural and urban areas, in the poor countries and the advanced capitalist countries as well.

In this context, the effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans was a highly symbolic warning. It is highly likely that it was a climate change induced event – hurricanes and tropical storms are becoming more frequent and fiercer as the oceans off West Africa and the Caribbean get hotter each summer.

Second, the victims were disproportionately poor. The troops rushed to the city were there to defend order (in the rich areas) and property (ditto). The poor were left to fend for themselves for days on end while hundreds died, while the rich plotted how to use the catastrophe for a class-based eviction of undesirables (ie the poor and black people). The tourist downtown area is restored to its full glory to ensure the tourist economy ticks over, while a huge section of the indigenous population is evicted.

In the third world, the increasing frequency of climate change-induced events, particularly floods, always hits the poor worst – because they live in the flimsiest housing, often in places where are insecure and dangerous – on floodplains, next to environmental squalor, with no adequate drainage and sanitation facilities.

Capitalism always rations resources in short supply towards the rich. Its weapons are military repression and the market – both are brutal killers. Environmental crisis will make security, health, food, water and adequate housing in extremely short supply – and the poor will go the wall unless they fight back. *That's why we shall see increasingly that class struggles in the third world and beyond will take the form of struggles to get and to defend basic resources like*

*food, food and housing.* Privatisation will be deepened to make all resources difficult to obtain by the poor – and always available to the rich. For the rich, everything is cheap.

According to Mike Davis, of the world's 6bn people, one billion live in slums – and the number is increasing rapidly. Subject to the vagaries of environmental damage, especially through floods, and with grave shortages of drinkable water and sanitation, the third world slums are likely to become – even more than today – massive centres for disease and the generation of pandemics. As Mike Davis points out, the first great wave of Avian 'flu is much more likely to come from Jakarta than East Anglia.

*Mark Lynas in his book 'High Tide' points out that the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has estimated that 160,000 people are dying each year from the consequences of climate change - malaria, dysentery and malnutrition. And even that excludes some of the most extreme storm disasters plausibly linked to climate change, notably the tropical cyclone in Bangladesh in 1991, which killed 138,000, as well as Hurricanes Mitch and Andrew in the Caribbean, both hyper-intense category-five typhoons."*

In its infamous document for a 'worst case' scenario, the Pentagon projects a world ecological collapse – not in 200 years but in 20 or 30 years. According to the Observer (22 Feb 2004): "A secret report, suppressed by US defence chiefs and obtained by The Observer, warns that major European cities will be sunk beneath rising seas as Britain is plunged into a 'Siberian' climate by 2020. Nuclear conflict, mega-droughts, famine and widespread rioting will erupt across the world.

"The document predicts that abrupt climate change could bring the planet to the edge of anarchy as countries develop a nuclear threat to defend and secure dwindling food, water and energy supplies. The threat to global stability vastly eclipses that of terrorism, say the few experts privy to its contents."

The response of the Pentagon is a highly militarised society, "Fortress America", whose primary purpose is to keep out those fleeing from the poor countries, and to defend the rich internally from the wrath of the dispossessed poor. It envisages using massive amounts of violence, including nuclear weapons, against anyone who stands in the way of the US gaining the resources it needs from anywhere in the world.

If it is always the poor who will pay the price for environmental disaster, it will be particularly women and children who pay the price. Children because they are more vulnerable to disease, and less able to defend themselves from violence; and women because they have the main responsibility for childcare and child raising in nearly all poor societies – urban and rural, third world and first world. In the third world, it will be overwhelmingly women who have to try to find water, firewood and food for families. Climate catastrophe is not only a class question, it is also a gender question. Lack of food, shelter and water will increasingly force families to sell their children to become bonded labourers, virtual slave (as already happens on a mass scale in India) or sex slaves, as already happens in many countries of the third world.

A world of environmental catastrophe opens up the danger of massively increased militarism, repression and war. Ecological collapse may be survived by the rich minority, but it will devastate the poor. The fight against it is a vital part of the class struggle for socialism.

## **5. Population growth and the empowerment of women**

World population is forecast to rise from a current 6 billion to 9 billion by mid century, if not before. Such levels are unsustainable under capitalism. So the debate about population control is already with us. If Malthusian, misogynist and racist solutions are not to triumph, ecosocialist solutions based on overcoming poverty and empowering women have to be fought for.

Whilst it is true that high birth rates generally accompany poverty and ignorance, most poor women do not actually want to spend their lives in childbirth and rearing. So a central demand of women's movements in both North and South has always been for access to safe and reliable (preferably free) contraception and abortion. Poor people often have large families as an insurance against poverty in old age. When people become richer, birth rates go down.

Collectivisation of housework has also been a demand of feminists and socialists, and we need to revisit this area, when considering an alternative to capitalist individualism. Domestic violence and violence against women always increases dramatically during any societal breakdown.

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## **6. Savage capitalism in the advanced countries: Treadmill Society**

For 25 years the Western countries have been gripped by the policies of neoliberalism. This replaced the Keynesian, mixed economy, welfare-state model of the 1950s and '60s. The essence of this system is massive privatisation and marketisation; nationalised industries like the water and energy utilities are privatised, and privatisation to varying degrees is even introduced in to the education and health systems. Neoliberalism destroys social goods in favour of private goods; through privatisation of utilities and key aspects of social care like homes for the elderly, the financial surplus is squeezed out of workers current incomes and savings – all to the benefit of finance capital to whom all the utilities have huge debts. Mass insecurity is the result: the work process is transformed and labour discipline tightened. People work harder and longer to lead less secure and healthy lives.

This has been rightly characterised by John Bellamy Foster as the “treadmill society” (<http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1&2/foster.html>). The devastating effects on the environment of the treadmill society have been described above. But now neoliberalism, as it degenerates into savage capitalism, is preparing another twist of the screw. This is called private equity capital (PEC). PEC constitutes a new and massive threat to millions of workers. Briefly summed up, private equity companies are short term arrangements for borrowing vast amounts of money for a limited time. These huge amounts of money are then used to buy up companies which are said to be ‘under-performing’ (like Sainsbury's, a target of private equity spivs). Once in the hands of PEC capitalists, the companies are asset stripped, workers fired, those retained pushed onto poverty wages without pensions or benefits, and a huge profit on the borrowed money. PEC evidently builds nothing, contributes nothing and makes nothing – except short-term profits. Gordon Gecko – Michael Douglas' asset stripping sociopath in [Wall Street](#) - is a model of sanity and conscience compared with today's equity capitalist robbers. Needless to

say PEC is warmly welcomed by New Labour, in particular Gordon Brown. According to the Independent (2<sup>nd</sup> March 2007)

“Gordon Brown praised the private equity industry's ability to create jobs yesterday despite the scathing attack on the sector from trade unions concerned over job losses.... Mr Brown is the latest Labour politician to address the private equity issue amid a growing storm around the industry. Trade unions and some Labour politicians have lambasted private equity companies for asset stripping, job cutting and a lack of openness over recent weeks as a potential bid for the supermarket chain Sainsbury's has thrown the publicity-shy industry into the spotlight.... Mr Brown's defence of the sector comes in the wake of Tony Blair's public support of private equity investment this week.”

PEC mania comes at a time when savage capitalism is preparing for a major assault on the last-ditch redoubts of welfare capitalism – the NHS and education, where the methods of the market, artificial targets and the introduction of private capital are evident.

Neoliberalism has swiveled the priorities of production into luxury production, as more and more companies covet the luxury end of the market where profits are highest. You can see this clearly in the space allocated to ‘first’ and ‘business’ class on airlines, or on trains. Luxury goods – haute couture clothes, watches, luggage, yachts, luxury cars (including SUVs), luxury hotels, luxury mansion, high-value tourism and cruises – all these make much higher percentage profits per unit (often in the hundreds of per cent) than mass production goods. Luxury goods production adds insult to injury as far as the ordinary workers and the environment are concerned. Flaunting an unattainable lifestyle of comfort and ‘style’, these goods are literally socially useless and consume huge amounts of scarce raw materials (gold and silver!) and energy.

Savage capitalism is a counter-revolution against the gains of the workers movement in the post-war world. It wrecks the health and lives of millions of the working class and the middle class, and consigns them to the treadmill of insecurity and endless work, and increasingly to a poverty-stricken old age. All this in the interests of the mega-rich, who become richer by quantum leaps as class divisions and social inequality are deepened.

All this is held together by a deepening cultural dumbing down, the erosion of social solidarity and a brain-dead culture of ‘success’ and ‘celebrity’. In a ghastly parody of Any Warhol's prediction that everyone would become famous for 15 minutes, people now become celebrities for being famous, not for anything they have actually done. On humiliating and idiot TV programmes like Big Brother and Castaway, people compete to ‘win’ – and thus become famous and rich for being...a celebrity. The empty and boring lifestyles of the rich are endlessly celebrated to create a new morality which fundamentally breaks with that of even welfare capitalism – to be rich is worthwhile, to be poor is worthless. The inevitable result is a dumbing down of mass culture and the multiplication of worthless ‘cultural’ commodities – 85 television channels, nothing worth watching.

Our conclusion is that the fundamentals of inequality, power and wealth cannot be addressed in the advanced countries without a revolution in work, education, leisure and culture - not only in equality of reward, but in the nature of what is produced and how it is produced. Getting off the treadmill means leading a more human life with different priorities, different products,



different sources of energy – and a different set of relations between people. A human society which defends the environment is incompatible with capitalism.

## **7. Fake pro-capitalist solutions**

However, before turning increasingly to authoritarian solutions, capitalism will also try to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as co-opt anti-capitalist opposition.

This involves the market, new technology and some rationing and taxation. It centres on the commodification of everything, down to the air itself. This is the meaning, for instance of Kyoto and similar regional and national agreements, which create carbon markets basically advantageous to the imperialist North. We can expect a radical switch to 'low carbon economies' through lucrative investment in renewables and energy efficient products. This will include nuclear and all sorts of actually socially and environmentally damaging technology, spun as ways to save the planet.

As climate instability accelerates, corporate capitalism will also be faced with massive insurance bills (Hurricane Katrina is estimated to have cost \$140bn), a large part of which will be passed on to workers, but a significant part of which will be paid for by business itself.

So we can expect panic measures to include ever more wacky and dangerous techno-fixes, such as giant sulphur screens to block out the sun and silver iodide bombs to divert the storm clouds (to where?).

At the same time countries such as Canada and Russia will profit from a short term 'gold rush', as the melting ice-caps of the Arctic open up the last remaining fossil fuel deposits.

Measures such as the Clean Development Mechanism will colonise the South with carbon sinks and biofuel plantations, enabling the North to carry on polluting without changing lifestyles ecological profligacy in the North and consequent catastrophe in the South.

However it is necessary to be aware and critical of the role of the Southern elites in this process. Ugandan President Museveni recently called global warming "an act of aggression by the rich (of the North) against the poor (of the South)". Yet this man is currently allowing the selling off and destruction of his own country's rainforests and is brutally repressing opposition.

As precious resources are depleted and climate instability increases, so will the current wars in the South become more and more brutal (Darfur writ large). Millions will be forced to flee or submit 'for protection' and survival to ruthless warlords. We urgently need to integrate an understanding of this into campaigning work around refugees and asylum.

## **8. War and imperialism**

Savage capitalism is at its most open and overtly brutal in its profligate use of violence. The term 'imperialism' to describe the US and British relations with countries of the third world, especially in the Middle East, is now hardly challenged – indeed in the case of people like Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff – openly celebrated.

Imperialist military intervention is justified as part of the “war against terror”. But it is clear that American imperialism has gone to war in the Middle East to capture control of the world’s largest known oil reserves and the oil routes, but also to occupy a crucial part of Eurasia, which is regarded as central to ensure continued US economic and political dominance worldwide. Faced with growing competition from Japan, Europe and now China, the United States has in the last 20 years unleashed the one instrument in which it is completely dominant internationally, the military. Today there are more than one million US service personnel stationed abroad. Eighteen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, the ‘peace dividend’ has not materialised, showing in its own way that US military aggression abroad was certainly not a matter of defending US interests against ‘Communism’.

Today US military aggression – supported by the British, giving political cover – is aimed not just at regimes that the US regards as hostile, like Iran, but also against popular movements. In both the Philippines and Colombia US advisors and security ‘consultants’ from military firms like Blackwater, are part of a large scale US military intervention capability. US troops are now ensconced in the Central Asian republics and in the Horn of Africa, as well as their hundreds of bases worldwide.

The vast expense of this massive military machine – and Britain’s small scale imitation of it – is itself one of the most irrational uses of resources imaginable, and itself is causing massive environmental damage. Indeed imperialist militarism, savage capitalism and third world exploitation are at the ‘cutting edge’ of environmental damage. Examples from imperialism’s recent wars are legion. Israeli attacks on the Jiyee power plant in the summer of 2006 led to an oil slick which has probably destroyed Lebanon’s coastal marine life and threatens the whole ecosystem of the eastern Mediterranean.

According to Mark Lynas: “More than 15,000 tonnes of fuel oil has leaked from the Jiyee power plant since it was attacked by Israeli warplanes on 13 July. As if deliberately to hamper any attempts to staunch the flow of oil, Israel then bombed the power plant again two days later, preventing emergency workers from gaining access to the site. An indication of the scale of the disaster comes from satellite photos showing a 3,000-square-kilometre slick along two-thirds of Lebanon’s coastline. The oil has now begun to wash up in Syria.

“None of this will come as a surprise to the Palestinians, who have suffered the environmental consequences of Israel’s scorched-earth policies for decades. The water supply to nearly a million people in Gaza was cut off by bombing last month. Untreated sewage lies in pools on the beach, thanks to Israeli shelling of the Gaza City waste-water treatment plant in 2002. Landfill sites are overflowing and on fire, and two pilot composting plants - constructed with outside help as an alternative to landfill - lie idle, having also been damaged by Israeli bullets.”

The environmental effects of direct military intervention are of course just a small part of the overall environmental crisis for the peoples of the most exploited countries. Much of the most immediate environmental damage comes from extraction industries, notably logging, mining and the oil industry. Much of this is the result of bandit and semi-legal capitalism, which is generally in league with national governments and ‘respectable’ transnational corporations like BP, who drop their respectable mask when confronted with the ‘natives’. Logging in particular is doing the most long-term damage with global implications, particularly the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and the destruction of Siberian forests to feed the demand of Chinese

industry for wood, after the Chinese government banned logging in its own country because of a number of high profile disasters caused by logging (flooding and landslips).

The insanity of the military-imperial system is revealed by the massive expenditure and waste of two systems – the US anti-missile shield which over time will cost hundreds of billions of dollars and the Blair-Brown pledge to renew the Trident submarine missile system, which is expected to finally run out at a cost of something like £70 billion.

Today, the bi-partisan policy of the US ruling class that backed the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan has crumbled in the face of the setbacks (quagmire), which the US-led coalition has suffered. However, the debate in Washington is not questioning the strategic importance for the USA of controlling the Gulf region, but how to do it successfully.

Nonetheless, the US administration has shown its determination to continue its war effort with the policy of the 'surge', but not only in Iraq. In Afghanistan, Palestine, the latent war in the Lebanon, its intervention in Somalia and its very public preparations for war against Iran, indicate its preparedness to broaden the scope of its interventions. (See FI resolution: *Middle East in Flames*, published in *Resistance* No 43, March-April 2007.)

The divisions in the imperialist ruling classes are creating favourable conditions for a renewed offensive by the anti-war movements in the imperialist centres and it is urgent that we build/rebuild the movements.

We stand for:

- An end to all imperialist expeditions and the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan;
- Against any provocations or attacks on Iran;
- For the withdrawal of NATO troops from Lebanon;
- For an end to interference in Palestinian internal affairs and for the lifting of sanctions on the Palestinians.

We support all resistance movements against imperialist intervention that do not engage in sectarian killings, in particular Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, while criticising their religious fundamentalism and their political and social programme.

We prioritise establishing links of solidarity with the trade unions (for example, the independent Oil Workers Union in Iraq), and political forces who are constructing progressive and socialist struggles in the region (for example, the Lebanese CP). Our aim is to assist in the emergence of a socialist left in the region, which is democratic, feminist and anti-imperialist.

## **9. Global injustice – Latin America fights back**

Savage capitalism everywhere attempts to further enslave and exploit the countries of the third world. It is not surprising that some of the most advanced examples of revolt against neoliberalism and imperialist exploitation have emerged in the poor countries – particularly Latin America. As we saw negatively with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the existence of positive examples - in life and not just in theories and programmes – is vital for developing opposition movements and an anti-capitalist perspective.

On no continent is neoliberalism so widely rejected as in Latin America, and nowhere has the resurgence of the Left been so powerful. The election of Evo Morales in Bolivia and the evolution of the Hugo Chávez government in Venezuela are hugely ideologically important. Whatever the direction and eventual outcome of these governments, they have already done an enormously important thing – raised the banner of socialism as a mass current with mass credibility again. This is especially important in relation to the younger generations for whom the ideology and reality of socialism has less purchase.

Even the election of moderate centre-left governments, like those of Lula in Brazil, Bachelet in Chile and Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay are the product of a long period of struggle against neoliberalism and the right.

While we solidarise with all movements fighting back against savage capitalism internationally, the central thing about the Latin American developments is that they centrally raise the question of socialism. A central part of our orientation in the next period will be:

- Solidarity with the developing revolutionary processes in Bolivia and Venezuela.
- Defence of Cuba against the deepening reactionary offensive of imperialism, which will hit crescendo levels when Fidel Castro dies.
- Propaganda on the advances made in Cuba, especially in the fields of social welfare, health and the environment, as demonstrations of what can be achieved, even in a poor country, on an anti-capitalist basis.

## **10. The surveillance- security, lock-down state**

Today a new regime of security is being introduced by the major states, in the first place Britain and the United States. Savage capitalism has created a more unstable world and for the ruling class new methods of surveillance and repression. As well as restrictions on civil liberties are needed to deal with it. Terrorism is in reality a small problem and used only as the banner headline behind which the new repressive state mobilises against national and international protest movements. The real targets are labour movements, global justice and peace movements and movements for national self-determination. Only a small minority of these struggles have a military dimension (Palestine, the Kurdish question), but increasingly movements which use the normal methods of mass mobilisation (which may include civil disobedience) are the victims of paramilitary repression.

The worst examples are still in the third world – for example the struggle in Oaxaca State Mexico in 2006, led by the school teachers, against a hugely corrupt state government. Dozens were killed and disappeared; others committed to indefinite jail with no appeal. However mass movements in advanced capitalist democracies also find themselves increasingly hemmed in by new police powers and restrictions, and sometimes simply by brutal police .

Surveillance of the domestic population is at its highest level ever. Vast new databases and sophisticated computer equipment enables the US government especially, but also governments in other imperialist states, to monitor all email and internet traffic and to build up a detailed real-time profile of the activities of any citizen. There is a secular trend towards the criminalisation of more and more forms of protest, or at least to make forms of protest dependent on the indulgence and toleration of the state – which can easily be withdrawn.

In the United States this has resulted in the Patriot Act, which essentially gives the state the right to illegalise anything, and hold anyone in secret detention for indefinite amounts of times and in secret.

At an international level this has led to the re-legitimisation of torture and the huge secret Gulag of US prison camps and 'special rendition', where torture is used or – in the case of special rendition, torture is outsourced to third world regimes.

The security-repressive state goes hand in hand with the new imperialism. In many places (the Philippines, Colombia and Palestine) local repressive states work hand-in-hand with US special forces, private armies like Blackwater and/or the CIA. Savage capitalism has created a vast continent of repression and violence with a daily toll of the murdered, the disappeared and the tortured. This is justified and even celebrated in the ideologically most backward parts of modern society (like [video games](#)). Defending civil liberties and opposing militarism is a crucial part of the fight for socialism and human civilisation today.

The move towards mass surveillance and restrictions on civil liberties, including the paramilitarisation of the policing of protest is, as we have seen in the Pentagon's plans for eco-catastrophe, laying the basis for a more total lock-down state if apocalypse happens. The catastrophic results of environmental breakdown, including an outpouring of desperate [eco-migration](#), could only be managed on the basis of military dictatorship.

## **11. Strategy and the fightback**

Our strategic conclusion on planetary crisis should start with the following assumptions:

- a) Creating a sustainable civilisation requires a wholesale conversion of production and consumption, and this is incompatible with capitalism. Not only are the corporations and government unwilling to act against short-term capitalist interests, but as we explained above a sustainable environment is contrary to the inbuilt productivism bias of the capitalist mode of production.
- b) Environmentalism without class, without anti-capitalism, has massive limitations which invalidate it as a long-term strategy. Indeed the kind of green politics which attempts to counterpose itself to left and right can be positively damaging to the kind of alliances necessary to confront eco-catastrophe.
- c) At the same time as trying to elaborate a new Marxism for the 21st century which builds on Marx's understanding of a materialist approach to the environment in order to meet the challenge of climate change, we continue to put forward a Marxism that is feminist, anti-racist and opposed to homophobia.

In Britain at least some of the programmatic gains in sections of the revolutionary left that were won as a result of the self-organisation of women and of black people particularly have to some extent been lost in a period where the working class as a whole suffered a whole range of defeats under first Thatcherism and then New Labour.

This means that we need to rediscuss some of these questions in and of themselves with comrades who were not part of the same historical experiences and bring our analysis up to date in order to attempt a new synthesis in developing an accessible Marxism for today.

We don't think there is any contradiction in doing this while at the same time developing an eco-socialist approach – rather we think that these discussions will enrich and complement each other

This is important at two levels: giving us a chance to succeed in the synthesis that is necessary in its own right and developing the sort of profile we want through our press, web sites, educational events etc

d) As is traditional in our politics we do not counterpose reforms to anti-capitalist transition. However we do point out the extremely small gains which are likely to be made on climate change without national and international planning and without a massive social and economic conversion.

e) The decisive force on a world scale for anti-capitalist struggle remains the workers' movement. A central fight for Marxists is that to win the workers movement to an environmentalist (and hence eco-socialist) perspective. A massive aid to this is the example of environmentally friendly mobilisation and policies of Cuba, and to a lesser extent Venezuela.

Evidently the major forces willing to take to the streets today on the environmental question are in diverse protest movements (and none), and generally not from the workers movement. Huge forces can develop on this issue outside the workers movement. For us – as is normal in our united front politics – an alliance of the workers movements and social movements, on a class struggle and anti-capitalist basis, is what we fight for. However, we do not consider all these forces to be equivalent in strategic terms. This is not a moral question, but one of hard headed political and social analysis which has been explained well in recent articles by Daniel Bensaid and Martha Harnecker. [Bensaid says](#):

“From a certain point of view, capitalism will indeed be overthrown by an alliance, or a convergence, of mass social movements. But even if these movements, because of their liberatory projects, perceive capitalism to be their enemy (which perhaps is the case for the women's movement or the environmental movement, not just the workers movement), I don't think these movements all play an equivalent role. And all are traversed by differences and contradictions that reflect their position, in the face of capital as a global mode of domination.

“There is a 'naturalist' feminism and a revolutionary feminism, a profoundly anti-humanist environmentalism and a humanist and social environmentalism... if you consider these arenas are not structured in a hierarchy, but simply juxtaposed, then perhaps you could devise a tactic of putting together changing coalitions ('rainbow coalitions' on immediate questions). But there would be no solid strategic convergence in such an approach. I think, on the contrary, that within a particular mode of production (capitalism) , relations of exploitation and class conflict constitute an overarching framework that cuts across and unifies the other contradictions. Capital itself is the great unifier that subordinates every aspect of social production and reproduction, remodeling the function of the family, determining the social division of labour and submitting humanity's conditions of social reproduction to the law of value. If that is indeed the case, a party, and not simply the sum of social movements, is the best agent of conscious unification.”

[Martha Harnecker](#) says:

“...when one criticizes parties, people think one is betting on the emergence of movements that will lead the struggle. Social movements are sectoral movements and require an instrument for articulation, call it party, sociopolitical movement, front, or whatever. But what's needed are political instruments that articulate and raise a national proposal, that make an ideological proposal in today's world, where the wars are fought in the plane of ideas, where the means of communication in the hands of the powerful are almost overpowering. We can see what is happening with the media in Venezuela.”

Swiveling our orientation towards ecosocialism however does not alter our fundamental strategy, but it requires its renovation:

a) We maintain our orientation towards the creation of a broad anti-capitalist, ecosocialist party to the left of Labour, as a first step towards resolving the crisis of leadership of the working class and other popular layers.

b) We need to develop an action programme of immediate and transitional demands which incorporate the centrality of the fight to save the environment.

What does it mean to call Socialist Resistance ‘Ecosocialist’ ?

To define ourselves by the term ecosocialist does not mean dropping our commitment to anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, feminism and the rights of the oppressed, anti-racism, etc. Nor does it mean a radical version of the Green Party: rather it is a recognition that capitalism cannot solve the problems posed by climate change and global warming as, by its very nature, it is based on production for profit not need, regardless of the impact on the planet. It is therefore either ‘Ecosocialism or Barbarism’.

## **12. Anti-capitalist positions on key environmental debates**

However, as well as exposing the incapacity of capitalism, especially in its present ‘savage’ or ‘morbid’ phase, dominated as it is by neo-liberal economic strategies, to resolve the ecological problems it has created, we also have to develop our politics on more immediate issues raised by the crisis. But these responses have to be founded on a socialist framework – using Marxist theory and class analysis to pose solutions.

For example on the vexed issue of green taxes, all other mainstream parties, including the Greens, have a policy of taxation to try and deal with carbon emissions. The congestion charge, already in place in parts of London (and being introduced in Manchester, Durham and elsewhere), has reduced the number of cars entering the centre of London. But it is clear that the reduction is based on the cars of the poor.

Traveling in central London during the week shows this clearly – only large expensive cars and taxis are on the road. Poor people have been forced, especially since the hike in the cost to £8.00 a day, to take inadequate and overcrowded public transport. It is true that some money raised has gone to improve public transport – but not to reduce fares that are the most expensive of any city in the world. The congestion charge is a flat tax (like the poll tax) that penalises the poor, and is divisive. The only form of capitalist taxation socialists can support

would be steeply progressive taxation intended to drive the large gas-guzzlers off the road. In other words a tax on the rich.

Similarly on the question of air travel emissions. The government pretends that these are not very high, but international air travel is not at present counted as part of British emissions. It is true that there is no tax on air fuel as there is on fuel for cars, buses, etc. but the proposal to raise a flat tax on air travel, either on fuel or flights will again hit the poor and we should oppose it.

But we also need an answer to the problem of increasing air travel. The fairest way to reduce emissions would be to ration its use to say one or two flights a year, or to a number of air miles traveled. In addition, so that the rich cannot buy others' rations, this should be made illegal. No doubt in our present system an illegal market would come into existence, but we have to argue for what is just and fair and in the interests of the working class and the poor, not only what is possible at once.

Nor is it not simply a question of justice. We have to work out ways of uniting as many as possible to what is necessary. Ordinary people will not change their outlook if they feel they are the only ones having to pay. This will certainly be the project of the rich – make the poor pay, both here in the developed world, and in the developing world, but we have to propose an alternative.

“Contraction and Convergence” is another controversial issue on the left. Developed by Aubrey Meyer, the theory accepts that the present situation has been created by the industrialised world and that we have to drastically cut back our emissions – the ‘contraction’ bit. The developing world, quite properly also wishes to industrialise and this should be allowed – up to a certain point.

At a fixed point in the future and this must be agreed by international treaty for it to work, the contracting emissions of the developed world will coincide with the increased emissions of the developing world - this is the ‘convergence’ bit. But this theory incorporates a ‘carbon-trading’ element. That is the rich countries could buy rights of emission from the less emitting developing areas if they produce less carbon than their ration. We should therefore oppose it.

The majority of the more or less organised currents look to capitalist solutions in market mechanisms, carbon trading, supplemented by taxation. The currently operated system is the European Union's Emissions Trading System (ETS), is the most regressive of all carbon-trading schemes and operates according to the principle laid down at Kyoto. Permits for 6527 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emission have been allocated to big energy users.

This does not encourage cleaner energy but simply given them a profit bonanza, as the price of permits rose to €27, making the whole distribution worth €177 billion. They have also passed on ‘extra costs’ to the consumer even though they did not have to buy the permits – leading to rising prices. The EU officials have said that they knew this would happen and state that the market economy is the only way (i.e., higher prices) that energy consumption will fall.

Most climate change activists oppose Kyoto and the EU schemes. Contraction and Convergence (C&C) is seen as an alternative to the EU (ETS) and the Kyoto protocol and is the most widely supported system, but there are other systems that are hotly debated, most of



which involve carbon trading and taxation of some kind, but some are more equitable (a key word in the movement) than others.

The more equitable systems, for example, Cap and Share (C&S), or Tradable Energy Quotas (TEQs), which involve capping and the distribution of tradable allowance to the population based on the equal 'right to emit'. However, there is no such human right under capitalism except for those rights claimed by the owners of the means of production.

Our biggest immediate policy difference (there is a big programmatic gulf) with the capping movement is their insistence on tradable allowance. We oppose this because it benefits the big emitters and penalizes the working class (ironically this is often the main objection to a tax perspective by those left leaning Greens).

We should support planned capping (or equitable rationing) without the right to trade (e.g., as in Second World War). The reply, like all reformists of the existing system, is that we are unrealistic because without trading of carbon permits it would be totally unacceptable to big companies and would probably bring the capitalist system down.

Carbon trading (along with taxation) is the premier bourgeois answer to climate change, allowing the rich north and west to buy their way out of trouble while keeping the poor south and east in a pre-or semi-industrialised state. The Stern Report itself, while recognising the failure of the market, nonetheless poses the same mechanism to solve the crisis.

### **13. Our Demands**

Ecosocialists have to start from a class analysis, an analysis that can unite the largest possible number of people to make the rich, not the poor, pay. We support the building of a mass movement, nationally and internationally to impose the types of demand below.

1. For a unilateral reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Britain of 90% by 2030, with similar reductions in other developed countries;
2. For an international treaty to cap global carbon emissions, not because we think this is an easy option, or even likely to be achieved (this depends on the balance of forces), but because it is necessary and can unite the movements internationally against the failures of the capitalist system;
3. For international rationing of air travel, any market in rations to be made illegal;
4. Opposition to nuclear energy and the building of any new nuclear power stations;
5. For a massive expansion of renewable energy;
6. For subsidies from national and local government:
  - to replace the use of cars by providing cheap, accessible and frequent public transport;
  - to ensure all new buildings are zero-carbon;
  - to provide insulation, energy conservation, etc. for all homes to make them energy efficient.

On climate change we should campaign around the following transitional and immediate demands which are designed to halt and reverse the global warming process and thus prevent climate chaos and rising sea levels. These should include a 90% reduction in fossil fuel use by 2050, based on a 6% annual target, monitored by independent scrutiny. The industrialised

countries, who have caused the problem, must take the lead in this. The most impoverished peoples are paying the highest price for the actions of the advanced countries. There is no point in asking them to take measures not being taken in the industrialised countries.

This means:

- Cancellation of the third-world debt. There is no point on calling on impoverished countries to tackle climate change if they are saddled with debt.
- A massive increase in investment in renewable energy including solar, wind wave, tidal and hydro power (with the exception of destructive mega-dam projects). These should be monitored for anti-social consequences. No nuclear power.
- End the productivist throwaway society: production for use and not for profit.
- Tough action against industrial and corporate polluters.
- Free, or cheap, integrated publicly owned transport systems to provide an alternative to the car.
- Nationalisation of rail, road freight and bus companies.
- Halt airport expansion, restrict flights and end binge flying. Nationalise the airlines.
- Redesign cities to eliminate unnecessary journeys and conserve energy
- Scrap weapons of mass destruction and use the resources for sustainable development and renewable energy.
- Massive investment to make homes more energy efficient. Moves towards the collectivisation of living spaces.
- Nationalisation of the supermarkets, localised food production and a big reduction in food miles.
- No GM crops for food or fuel.
- End the destruction of the rain forests.
- Defend the rights of climate change refugees and migrants. Protect those hit by drought, desertification, floods, crop failure and extreme weather conditions.
- Renationalise water and protect water reserves. End the pollution of the rivers and the water ways.

**Both Socialist Resistance and a growing number of SWP cadre and Left Greens are actively developing a theory and practice of ecosocialism. Our goal is to thereby build a credible anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist ecosocialist alliance to the left of Labour and firmly rooted in the labour movement and among young people.**

#### **Footnote**

1. *Live Working or Die Fighting* – How the Working Class went Global, Paul Mason, Harvill Secker London 2007