



Movements and Moments for Climate Justice: From Copenhagen to Cancun via Cochabamba

Bertie Russell¹

School of Geography, University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT, United Kingdom
geo3btr@leeds.ac.uk

Andre Pusey¹

School of Geography, University of Leeds
Leeds, LS2 9JT, United Kingdom
gyap@leeds.ac.uk

Leon Sealey-Huggins¹

School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, United Kingdom
spl4lash@leeds.ac.uk

Introduction

From the 7th to the 20th of December 2009, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) brought together 192 countries for a conference that had been widely billed as of equal or greater importance than Bretton Woods. The official aim of the fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP15) was to develop a new protocol on climate change to replace the infamous Kyoto Protocol, which is due to expire in 2012. The conference has widely been

¹  Creative Commons licence: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works

considered a failure by all but the masters of spin; a small group of nations pushed through an ineffective non-binding accord that ultimately was only ‘noted’ by the UNFCCC, a level of recognition so low within the UN’s bureaucratic terminology that it’s not even referred to as ‘an agreement’. The summit was accompanied by a series of street protests, the largest of which were a traditional march on the 12th and the ‘Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice’ action on the 16th. The various networks that mobilized for the protests were greeted with an unprecedented level of police repression for Denmark, involving more than 1900 arrests and the systematic use of teargas, pepper spray and baton charges.

Nonetheless, the experience of the Copenhagen mobilizations suggested that a new form of political engagement was perhaps emerging, a movement that not only understood climate change as other than an environmental issue, but that is asking questions about the possibility of working with non-movement actors in the struggle for a different world. From Copenhagen we travel to Cochabamba, Bolivia, where we outline how the first Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (CMPCC) in late April contributed to the development of these threads of climate justice. We examine how the CMPCC was part of a strategic move on behalf of ALBA² to challenge the global neoliberal hegemony at a time of weakness. We also highlight how the development of the ‘post-environmental assessment’ is shared between movements and states, raising a number of questions about strategic ways forward for those in the developing climate justice movements.

We then turn our attention to the COP16, held in Cancun between the 20th November to 10th December 2010. If the CMPCC had shown some promise of an emergent ‘climate justice’ movement that based its analysis of climate change on wider social justice issues, then Cancun, one year on from Copenhagen, was be a test of this possible movement. We describe the four different ‘civil society’ or ‘movement spaces’ protesting the COP16, Klimaforum10, Espacio Mexicano, La via Campesina and ‘anti-c’, and tensions between them. These movement spaces are contrasted with the Mexican government sponsored representation of civil society space, the ‘Climate Change Village’. We then go on to analyse the COP16 itself, criticising its market-orientated ‘deal’ as a leap backwards.

We conclude that Copenhagen can be seen as a space where neoliberal discourse on Climate Change was, at least in a small way, ruptured. Bolivia was a space where another form of discourse emerged, albeit problematic. Cancun, however, can be seen as a space whereby this ‘other discourse’ was almost entirely subsumed within the dominant framing of climate change. It remains to be seen as to whether a movement will emerge strong enough to challenge the capitalist logic

² ALBA is the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas, an international alliance of Latin American states including Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela.

underlying the failure of these summits. However, we feel it is ultimately unlikely that 'climate justice' can be a banner under which this movement could coalesce.

This intervention is based on field work we carried out in Denmark, Bolivia and Mexico between November 2009 and December 2010.

Introducing The Movement

Our participation in the COP15 mobilisation came through our engagement with the grassroots activist networks Camp for Climate Action (CfCA) and Climate Justice Action (CJA). CfCA is a UK based movement that developed directly out of the 'Horizone' camp at the Gleneagles G8 in 2005, aiming to build a 'social movement to tackle climate change' (CfCA, 2009). The CfCA publicly emerged in 2006, where it organized a week-long action camp outside Drax coal power station in Yorkshire, the UK's largest single point emitter of carbon emissions. It has subsequently organized a yearly week-long camp along the four principles of 'education, direct action, sustainable living, and building a movement to effectively tackle climate change' (CfCA, 2009). Whilst the yearly camp has been a mainstay of the CfCA, it has also organized a number of high profile direct actions including 'The Great Climate Swoop' (a mass invasion of Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station) and a protest at the European Climate Exchange in the City of London as part of the G20 protests.

In late 2008, the CfCA adopted a call for action at the COP15 summit in Copenhagen, and became an active part of the network Climate Justice Action (CJA). CJA is a predominantly European network of individuals and organisations that formed around this call to action in September 2008. A series of working principles and network goals provided CJA's cohesion, such as challenging false and market-based solutions and to build a global movement for climate justice. Whilst the heterogeneity of participants is reflected in the somewhat cautious wording, one particular goal – 'To both sharpen our understanding of, and to address, the root social, ecological, political and economic causes of the climate crisis towards a total systemic transformation of our society' – reveals the radical pretension of a network whose concerns go far beyond 'climate change' as an isolated and apolitical condition.

The mobilization around COP15 was a politically messy process, as illustrated by the tiresome 'shut them in or shut them down' debates that raged on for months like a bad hangover from the counter-summit cycle of struggle (see Klimax 2009). Throughout the alter-globalization 'movement of movements', the international conferences of global financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO were targets that mobilized a clear antagonism. It was widely understood that the only possible outcome of these summits would be the extension of neoliberal policies, hence a strategy of 'shutting them down' was a straightforward tactical decision. On the other hand, the 'shut them in' strategy proposed in the lead up to COP15 operated on the logic that due to the urgency of

climate change the conference must reach a positive conclusion, and for that reason we needed to force the conference to take ‘more effective’ action.

In actuality, these debates illustrated there was no easy ‘inside/outside’ relationship with the COP15 summit, providing simple alliances between those ‘against’ climate change opposed to those ‘for’ it. Rather we faced a complex institutional process that pulled together NGOs and governments around the myth that they were there to ‘solve climate change’. As one commentary before the COP15 noted, ‘there is no shared understanding of what is at stake and who or what is to blame’ (Notes From Below, 2009). The reality is that the COP15, despite the intentions of many of the participants, was as an attempt to inaugurate a new round of ‘green’ capitalist accumulation and to establish new regimes of political legitimacy. In the most literal of terms, these high level political processes are designed to capitalize on the environmental crisis³.

In the run up to COP15 the Danish government brought in a series of new laws that amongst other things enabled the police to make pre-emptive arrests. Termed the ‘lømmelpakke’, roughly translated as the ‘hoodlum package’, these laws were widely criticized from across civil society for their potential to reduce free speech and control protest. Whilst laws passed to control the drug gangs across Copenhagen already provided ample ability to control peoples movement, the ‘lømmelpakke’ significantly increased the fines for participating in ‘illegal’ protests and provided police with powers to preventively detain people without suspicion. In circumstances when there was ‘not enough time’ to apply for a warrant, the package also granted police the power to search premises without approval from the courts, leading to a number of raids on sleeping spaces and social centres. Some of these raids, such as the ones on the Ragnhildgade convergence space, have since been recognized by the Danish courts as having been conducted in an illegal manner (Klima Kollektivet, 2010). Ultimately these laws, or more importantly the legitimacy offered to the police as a result of the ‘fear’ created by the introduction of these laws, facilitated the arrest of over 1900 people across the course of the week, with only a handful charged. To facilitate the huge influx of arrestees, the Danish police built a temporary prison, effectively a gym hall full of cages, with the capacity for 350 people (See Figure 1).

COPenHagen

The largest of the mass arrests came on the 12th December when more than 900 people were ‘preventatively detained’ out of a 100,000 strong march. In an obviously preplanned action, the police emerged from two side roads to form a cordon and proceeded to arrest everyone between their lines. Arrestees were quick cuffed with cable ties and placed in ‘trains’ – sat in long rows between each other’s legs – for more than 6 hours. Temperatures dropped below zero degrees and many urinated themselves. The detainees were eventually removed in coaches, a common

³ See for instance: Mueller, T. & Wolf, F. (2009) and Brand, U. et al. (2009)

practice in Denmark, and taken to the cages of the temporary prison in Valby where only a handful faced charges. A number of people reportedly witnessed the preventative arrest of an individual on the premise that he was standing near a brick which he may throw in the future. Whilst there had been previous arrests at the unsuccessful ‘Don’t Buy the Lie’ action the day prior, the scale of arrests on the 12th was unprecedented not only at the COP but in Danish history.



Figure 1: temporary prison, http://multimedia.pol.dk/archive/00399/Modtagecenter_399502y.jpg

The following day the ‘Hit the Production’ action, aimed at blockading a local harbour, faced the same police control. The action was mobilized primarily by the Never Trust a Cop (NTAC) network with the support of CJA. Emerging out of a CJA international planning meeting in March, NTAC could be interpreted as a ‘sister’ network to CJA in response to the perceived need for a more explicitly anticapitalist organising platform in the mobilizations. The March meeting was largely directed at developing the goals of the network, and the formation of NTAC was arguably grounded in concerns that NGO elements within CJA were compromising the politics of the network to the point that it was impossible to maintain an explicitly anticapitalist and antagonistic position. Indeed, NTAC’s original call out stated – “we will refuse to side with sell-out NGOs and all the would-be managers of protest” (NTAC, 2009). The harbour was chosen as the site of the action as ‘a key symbol of the global free-market economy. Here becomes visible what is usually hidden: ecological deterioration, economic and social exploitation, and utter injustice’ (CJA, 2009). On the day protesters were kettled by

police within minutes of leaving the meeting point, long before they arrived at the harbour, with an estimated 700 preventative arrests.

On the 14th December there was a No Borders⁴ day of action that had been organised to highlight the links between climate change, migration and border controls. That the demonstration was legal, having been arranged with the police in advance, didn't stop the arrests of several people before the demonstration had even started and the confiscation of many props and art materials. The demonstration marched to the Ministry of Defence, accompanied by sound systems and samba bands, but when it arrived at Parliament Square police tried to stop the demonstration from going any further. Frustrated protesters decided to appropriate a giant inflatable globe, representing a tonne of CO₂, which was tethered outside parliament. Police and dogs followed, resulting in at least one protester being bitten, before the streets were cordoned off and what remained of the demo was pushed in the direction of the Freetown of Christiania.

Later that evening Christiania played host to a party which had been organised months in advance, the aim being to 'defuse' any emotions that had been running high from the past few days. On top of the normal numbers living in and socialising at Christiania, a thousand or so protesters turned up to enjoy the occasion. Unfortunately, the police attempted to raid Christiania during the party, and battles erupted as people attempted to defend their homes with burning barricades, petrol bombs and cobblestones. Eventually the police fought their way into Christiania using CS gas and, for the first time in Danish history, a water cannon on loan from the German state. Nearly two hundred people were arrested that night, including many who were just socialising in one of Christiania's bars - again people were mass arrested under the auspices of 'preventing' a non-defined crime that may occur in the future.

Along with these mass arrests, a number of CJA spokespeople had been arrested and imprisoned before and during the Reclaim Power action. Some remained in prison for several weeks, over the Christmas holiday period, and several are currently facing charges that could lead to lengthy prison sentences - their trials are at the end of August. Far from being embarrassed by the international condemnation of the arrests and new laws, both the police and the majority of political parties in Denmark supported the new law. It is important to see these laws and the police action during COP15 in the wider context of the *Ungdomshuset*⁵ struggle and 2002 EU protests, and the broader militarization of police across Europe.

⁴ No Borders is a loose network of groups that support freedom of movement for all and the abolition of migration controls. Local groups undertake work such as supporting those seeking asylum, campaigning against detention centres, and support work at the Calais migrant camps.

⁵ *Ungdomshuset* is the Danish for 'Youth House', was a long-standing social centre in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen. In 2007 the biggest riots in Danish history erupted as the police evicted *Ungdomshuset*, it later being demolished. A new *Ungdomshuset* has since been opened in Bispebjerg.

Of the numerous actions that took place during the COP15 summit, the 'Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice' action on the 16th was arguably the most politically significant. The Reclaim Power action emerged from the middle of the 'shut them down/shut them in' debate, not taking 'sides', but rather indicating a new style of political engagement, what some people have begun to term 'diagonalism' (Notes From Below, 2010a & 2010b). The aim of this action was to get dissident delegates inside the conference to come out and meet activists on the outside who would be attempting to get into the UN conference area. Those from the outside and the inside would then gather, effectively forming a "third space", in order to hold a 'people's assembly for climate justice'. This action concept became much more realisable when Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) made a decision to co-organise the Reclaim Power action at their Bangkok meeting in September 2009. CJN are a loose network of organisations with strong representation from the Global South unified by their opposition to carbon markets and the burning of fossil fuels, and their shared commitment to building local grassroots movement for climate justice. Many of the member organisations have continued to be active within the COP process, actively resisting attempts to construct carbon markets and other "false solutions".

On the 16th those of us on the outside failed to get into the UN conference area, largely due to the level of policing, mass arrests and our relative lack of numbers – around 2-3000 people participated in total. Those of us on the outside had broken into different 'blocs'. The Blue Bloc was to march along a route to the conference centre previously agreed with police. This bloc would be carrying much of the equipment needed to host the People's Assembly, and many of the participants from the global south. A 'Green Bloc' was organised as a more mobile group. This bloc started at a legal meeting point, but when it departed on a self-determined route the march became illegal. The police attempted to arrest everyone on this bloc, resulting in several hundred arrests. Separate to these blocs was the 'Bike Bloc', which aimed to use modified bikes to strategically support the action and peoples' assembly. On top of these blocs there may have been autonomous groups attempting to gain access to the conference areas, as well as affinity groups with their own plans inside these blocs.

The political antagonism of the Reclaim Power action was significantly more complex than that found in previous summit mobilizations. The police lines in Seattle, Genoa, Cancun and other historic summit mobilizations clearly defended the interests of a certain political ideology against a diverse number of voices on the outside. The infamous rallying call of 'One No, Many Yeses'⁶ illustrated clearly the antagonism between those seeking to extend neoliberal policies and those opposed to them. In contrast, the Reclaim Power action could not be reduced down to those on the outside against those on the inside, and the police lines

⁶ 'One No, Many Yeses' was a slogan that emerged during the alter-globalization 'movement of movements', and was later adopted as the title of a 2004 book on the movement of movements by Paul Kingsnorth.

surrounding the Bella Centre conference building had to face both directions – the police needed to be more two faced than usual! Instead, what united dissenting voices on the inside and the outside of the Bella Centre was the opposition to policies that would fail to address climate change and instead inaugurate a new round of capital accumulation under the guise of ‘green capitalism’. There was no simple rejection of institutional actors – a legitimate response to earlier summit protests – but rather a more complex meshwork of allegiances and working relationships looking to assert their own politics. The political and police lines were not aimed at the outside, but rather at dissenting voices and rebellious bodies – wherever they emerged.

From Copenhagen to Cochabamba

The frame which provided the context for the mobilisations around the COP15 was ‘climate justice’, a term shared by the CJA and the CJN! networks amongst others. Climate justice is a highly contested concept; what it means to adopt a position calling for ‘climate justice’ remains open. Whilst this facilitates cooperation behind a banner, it also hides some significant contradictions which may or may not be resolvable. CJA recently released a discussion paper entitled ‘What does Climate Justice mean in Europe?’ (CJA, 2010b), which tends towards framing the issue of the climate as one of many problems stemming from the predominant global economic and political processes. Such a critique suggests that traditional environmentalist discourse, with its limited political potentials, is being surpassed within climate movements by a much broader social critique that accounts for the relationships we occupy in everyday life. Such a step opens significant potential for a qualitative change in the politics of climate change, providing a new common language through which we can understand and contextualise social conditions and struggle.

The next major opportunity in which to debate and develop the political content of climate justice came from Bolivia. In response to the failure of the COP15, Evo Morales announced the Peoples’ Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (CMPCC) to take place from the 19-22nd April 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia (see CMPCC, 2010 & CJA, 2010a). The CMPCC promised to be everything that that the COP15 failed to be; where the latter was an exclusive space where participation was ultimately limited to only the most powerful of governments, the CMPCC claimed to offer a space shaped by the engagement and expertise of social movements. Where Copenhagen excluded any position that did not take the continuation of the (failed) neoliberal organisation of capital as an a priori, Cochabamba threatened to provide a space where a critique of the systemic causes of climate change could be explored and where concrete alternatives developed. Not only did the CMPCC offer a space of hope in an otherwise dark time, but it opened up the possibility of a further development of the movement relationships that had emerged throughout Copenhagen, and to further interrogate the emerging discourse on climate justice.

Cochabamba was an appropriate space to develop upon the open questions of climate justice and the relationship between movements and the state. The election of Evo Morales in 2005, Bolivia's first indigenous head of state since the country's establishment, was predicated on the mass mobilizations of the country's social movements, not least the indigenous and peasant communities. Cochabamba itself was the scene of the 'water wars' in 2000, where people openly revolted against the World Bank forced privatisation of the water resources by the Aguas del Tunari consortium led by US water giant Bechtel (Olivera, 2004). At the same time, many of the communities in Bolivia – the poorest country in South America – are also on the front line of the effects of climate change. As melting glaciers diminish an already scarce water supply, leading to droughts and a reduction in basic food crops, there is little need for highly-educated scientists to inform the Bolivian population of the potential effects of climate change. These communities benefit the least yet suffer the most from the global relations of capital.

There were a number of stated aims to this conference, including the creation of a World Referendum on Climate Change, a Universal Declaration of Mother Earth Rights and a move towards establishing a Climate Justice Tribunal. Yet the underlying premise of this conference was clear; the UNFCCC is an institution designed to manage capitalism and ensure the (ecological) conditions for further exploitation and accumulation. Contra this, the CMPCC promised to directly implicate capitalism *as the crisis*, and to contribute to the development of strategies to deal with the cause rather than the effects.

According to the Bolivian government, the conference brought together more than 35,000 participants from 142 countries, with almost 10,000 visiting Bolivia from abroad, including representatives from 48 governments. The overwhelming participation came from within Latin America, followed by a substantial number from North America. Europe and Asia were poorly represented – both relied on flights through Europe, which were largely disrupted by the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull. Representation from Africa was also low; whilst the volcano may have had some impact, the cost of reaching Bolivia from much of the continent excluded the vast majority of potential participants.

Alongside the 14 plenaries and more than 160 self-organised workshops, the main focus of the conference was the production of the 'Peoples' Agreement'. A well intentioned but largely ineffective online pre-conference process initiated 17 working groups, and led to the preparation of the initial conference texts⁷. Whilst legitimate concerns arose regarding the role of the Bolivian state in 'cooking' the texts to affirm existing government policies, such as support for the Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) initiative, the two-and-a-half days of working groups largely addressed these problems. Despite the

⁷ All of the working group documents, and the final Peoples' Agreement, are available on the CMPCC website (<http://pwccc.wordpress.com/>).

inclusion of a potentially dangerous government proposal for a top-down ‘World Peoples’ Movement’, the final Peoples’ Agreement reflected the broad contributions of the working groups⁸.

Acting on behalf of ALBA, Venezuela made an official submission of the Agreement to the UNFCCC only four days after the end of the conference in Bolivia. The alleged reasoning behind the submission was so that the proposals – such as the rejection of free trade agreements and carbon trading, and the demand for an Adaptation Fund and a reduction in emissions of 50% based on 1990 levels by 2017 – could be included for consideration at the UNFCCC intersessional meeting in Bonn, June 2010. This meeting is one of many UNFCCC meetings held throughout the year, the role of which is to prepare a negotiating text for consideration at the Conference Of Parties that typically occur in early December.

Whilst the June UNFCCC meeting failed to acknowledge the Peoples’ Agreement as part of the negotiating texts towards Cancun, the subsequent Bonn intersessional held in August incorporated numerous proposals from the Agreement. As the Bolivian Ambassador to the UNFCCC, Pablo Solon, noted in a press conference on the 6th August, ‘the vast majority of those proposals [from the Peoples’ Agreement] have been included in the negotiating text’⁹. These include amongst others the need to return to 300ppm of carbon concentration, an equitable distribution of atmospheric space, a recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ and climate migrants’ rights, a proposal to recognize and defend Mother Earth’s rights, a proposal for a climate justice court, and the proposal for 6% of the GDP of developed countries to be used to address climate change-related issues.

The proposals were included ‘in brackets’ in the negotiating text, meaning their presence in the final text was far from guaranteed. Nonetheless, and despite the fact that the EU’s climate commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, declared that the “negotiations [in Bonn] have if anything gone backwards”¹⁰, the proposals remained in the negotiating text at the October preparatory meeting in Tianjin, China.

The fact that proposals generated at an avowedly ‘anti-capitalist’ conference have been included within a process that is premised on sustaining capital accumulation raises interesting questions regarding whether the strategies proposed by the CMPCC actually match up with the anti-capitalist rhetoric. Whilst some proposals are ultimately untenable – the limiting of temperature rises to 1⁰C is implausible as recent science suggests we are already committed to surpassing that limit – there is every possibility that proposals such as the Declaration of Rights for

⁸ For a more detailed account of the processes of the CMPCC, see Building Bridges Collective (2010) Space for Movement, Leeds: LUP

⁹ Pablo Solon press conference accessible here: http://unfccc2.meta-fusion.com/kongresse/100802_AWG/templ/play.php?id_kongresssession=2959

¹⁰ EU Observer article, ‘World climate talks ‘going backwards,’ EU says’, accessible here: <http://euobserver.com/9/30597>

Mother Earth and an International Climate Tribunal may become significant pillars in a new regime of capitalist accumulation and an associated climate security regime.

From Cochabamba to Cancún

If Cochabamba had shown some promise in terms of articulating an explicitly political¹¹, movement-based analysis of climate change, then the 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) in Cancún would be a test of that promise. As mentioned above, key elements of the Cochabamba Agreement were included in the draft document to be debated at the COP16 from 29th November to 10th December 2010 in Cancún. Before discussing how the Cochabamba proposals fared within the COP, it's worth considering the role that movements played outside of the official negotiations both in Cancún and further afield.

Recognising that many people would be unable, and, after Copenhagen, perhaps unwilling, to travel to Cancún for a summit mobilization, La Via Campesina (LVC), the international peasants organisation, issued a global call for action commonly referred to as '1000 Cancúns'. They called for 'people to organise thousands of protests and actions to reject the false and market solutions' and 'to create thousands of solutions to confront climate change'¹². Their call was answered by a vast array of networks and groups, as tens of thousands of people mobilized from countries across the globe. Actions were varied and included counter-summits, seminars, occupations and protests in places such as Bangladesh, Korea, Canada, France, Honduras and Turkey, to name a few¹³ (CJA 2010c). Clearly the call for 1000 Cancúns resonated with actors within the climate justice movement globally, and can be understood as a novel attempt to find alternatives to the hierarchical, exclusionary and elitist format the mainstream UNFCCC COPs follow.

In addition to internationally organised activities in response to LVC's call-out, there were a range of mobilisations within Mexico during the time of the COP. Unsurprisingly, these tended to draw heavily on the resources of existing networks and struggles, including representatives from the autonomous communities in Chiapas, Oaxaca and from the Movement for National Liberation. To better understand the dynamics of events in Mexico, it is necessary to briefly outline some of the tensions existing between the various convergence spaces in Cancún during the COP16.

¹¹ Political in Swyngedouw's (2010) sense of challenging the idea that climate change should, or even could, be responded to within the context of capitalist social relations.

¹² Viewed here at: http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=973:mobilise-all-over-the-worldthousands-of-cancuns-for-climate-justice&catid=48:-climate-change-and-agrofuels&Itemid=75

¹³ See http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=50&Itemid=195 for more details.

There were four main ‘civil society’ spaces in and around Cancún, with people attending from a wide spectrum of political movements. One of the most problematic aspects of movements’ mobilizations in Cancún was the sense of disjointedness and disconnect between what seemed to be a series of competing counter-summits.

The first to be established was Klimaforum10 (KF10). KF10 was loosely modelled on the Klimaforum09 in Copenhagen, marketing itself as ‘a people’s climate change summit’. It was a space where environmental NGOs, interested publics and others could go to attend workshops on topics such as the problems with REDD+, environmental racism and climate justice¹⁴. Yet KF10, and its ‘eco-village’ camp site, were located on the grounds of an elite and exclusive polo club which had been hired out for the duration.

The KF10 organisers had expected thousands of visitors, but received hundreds, most of whom had registered as volunteers, leading to a series of tense clashes between the management committee and the unpaid volunteers. Additionally, KF10 was located some 45 minutes outside of central Cancún making it difficult to access. Thus it was both physically and politically distant from the other movement activities in Cancún. The organisers, however, were keen to emphasise the fact that KF10 was autonomous from the ‘Big Green’ environmental organisations, and as such claimed KF10 actually had closer connections to grassroots movements. The latter claim is hard to sustain when the KF10 is brought into comparison with the other spaces.

La Vía Campesina¹⁵ (LVC) arrived in Cancún with a series of caravans which had travelled from across Mexico. Their journeys included visits to high-profile sites of ecological degradation and social conflict thus enabling travellers to gain firsthand a sense of the meanings of climate (in)justice¹⁶. LVC established a ‘Global Forum For Life, Environmental and Social Justice’ at a sports stadium in central Cancún. Numbers in attendance were much lower than had been anticipated by the organisers, and this was evident by the piles of mattresses that stood unused in the centre of the space.

Not far from LVC was the Espacio Mexicano (EsMex), also known as Dialógico Climático, which is where most of the big green NGOs and their Mexican counterparts met and stayed. Why the EsMex and KF10 spaces were separate is somewhat unclear, but one commentator has suggested that the Mexican organisers of KF10 had ‘very strict rules about who they can (grassroots groups, peasants, worker unions, etc) and cannot (governments, corporations, corporate-backed NGOs) collaborate with’, leading mainstream NGOs such as Greenpeace

¹⁴ See <http://klimaforum10.com/en/> for a full record of the events and activities that took place.

¹⁵ LVC is an international movement of peasants, farmers, and landless peoples that formed in 1993.

¹⁶ For more see: http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=984:the-international-caravan-of-la-via-campesina-advances-for-cancun&catid=48:climate-change-and-agrofuels&Itemid=75.

and Oxfam to form their own 'alternative space' in the form of EsMex¹⁷. Such a thesis would be supported by the fact that mainstream NGOs were not given a platform at the KF09 in Copenhagen. Whilst inconclusive, it is likely that LVC's decision to create their own space was so as to circumvent engaging with these specific political disputes. Nonetheless, in practice many people moved between these different spaces depending on the events and activities taking place. The Climate Justice Now! Meetings were held at EsMex but attendees were actively involved in events primarily coordinated by LVC.

The fourth, and most critical space to emerge in response to the COP16 was the ANTI-C@P ANTI-COP (or Anti-C@P). In contrast to those who view corporate involvement in governance as the problem¹⁸, those involved with the Anti-C@P recognised that all forms of capitalism are likely to lead to the same tendencies of inequality, exploitation, ecological degradation, and attempts at the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Their analyses of the causes of climate change highlight the fact that there are fundamental contradictions within capitalist socio-ecological relations which will inevitably generate further contradictions, even if some are overcome. Furthermore, many of those active in the Anti-C@P were not interested in maintaining amicable relationships with states, no matter how 'progressive'.

Tensions existed between the Anti-C@P and the LVC organisers who at one point threatened to deny Anti-C@P a space within the LVC site. This can partially be explained by the fact that the Anti-C@P maintained an uncompromisingly antagonistic position towards any form of governmental engagement, leading to LVC being occasionally critiqued for 'selling out' by some participants in the space. Such an openly anti-government agenda is also likely to have been responsible for the police attempts to infiltrate, document and monitor activities in the Anti-C@P space.

The Anti-C@P participated in the LVC organised 4,000-strong protest on the 7th December. The Anti-C@P block were a key contingent in a group of activists who refused to stop at the designated 'rallying point', instead marching right up to the police's steel barricade, erected to stop protesters from reaching the Moon Palace complex where negotiations were taking place. In an act that was clearly symbolic, protesters charged at the fence with a giant inflatable silver hammer. Needless to say the thousands of paramilitary riot cops standing on the other side of the barrier made short shrift of deflating the hammer.

¹⁷ Email from Fernando Austin to the Climate Justice Now! email list, dated 31/10/2010, titled 're:Klimatforum10, ESMEX - let's please get to the bottom of it'.

¹⁸ Many of those who bemoan the excesses of neoliberalism believe that capitalism could become benign if 'corporate' involvement in governance were reduced. However, this analysis mistakes the causes of capitalism with its effects. Neoliberalism is an expression of capitalism that rather than being viewed as an anomaly, should be seen as representing an intensification of capitalist logics, and the tendency towards this kind of intensification is itself a consistent feature of capitalism in general.

Another activity organised within the Anti-C@P space was a ‘Reclaim the Streets’ style street party on the final day of the LVC camp. Police looked on as a square not far from LVC was transformed by the use of a bicycle-powered sound system into the scene of a street party. A mix of local people and activists joined the party dancing along to the music, and the staging of a piece of interactive satirical street theatre attracted more spectators. Due to the high levels of police infiltration, and the relatively small size of the Anti-C@P contingent, other planned actions were forced to be abandoned or curtailed. Nonetheless the Anti-C@P space still constituted an important part of the mobilizations in Cancún, and ensured that there was an uncompromisingly antagonistic anti-capitalist presence.

Finally, and in contrast to the four movement spaces, the Mexican government had its own representation of a ‘civil society’ space in the form of ‘Climate Change Village’. This was essentially a corporate-sponsored ‘green’ trades fare where members of the public could be reassured that responding to climate change would not involve any substantial changes to their consumption habits.

Deal or no deal?

Possibly the best attended event at the LVC space was a high-profile speech given by Evo Morales. It was apparent throughout the Cancún counter-mobilisations that many had placed great faith in hope that the Bolivian president might be able to pursue an agenda for climate justice from within the COP16. It rapidly became clear, however, that the Bolivian negotiation team were considerably more isolated than they had been in Copenhagen.

Evidence, including that released by Wikileaks, shows that the US and other rich nations clearly ramped up their efforts to try and ensure that the talks took a market-friendly course, using a mixture of bribery, bullying and blackmail (Bond 2010; Carrington 2010). Nonetheless, the Bolivian government stood as a ‘climate justice’ figurehead within the negotiations in pushing for a deal based on the Cochabamba Declaration; a point that helps to explain Morales’ popularity in spite of contradictions between his rhetoric in international dialogue and the domestic expansion of extractivist policies (Building Bridges Collective 2010).

Ultimately, Bolivia was so isolated within the negotiations that demands from the Cochabamba Agreement had little-to-no traction. The final deal reached in Cancún actually involved the UNFCCC achieving a form of ‘consensus’ that simultaneously ignored the objections of the Bolivian delegation.

The ‘progress’ claimed by those involved in the negotiations amounts to little more than the agreement to push ahead with the highly controversial market-instruments of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and REDD, and vague commitments to ‘assist’ developing countries. A Green Climate Fund was established to deliver £100 billion a year until 2020 to developing countries; yet with the World Bank to be appointed as its trustee, this funding is liable to be

highly conditional. There were no extensions of binding emissions reductions targets, let alone any kind of recognition of Indigenous Peoples' and climate migrants' rights or an international climate justice court. Hence Bolivian ambassador Paulo Solon's (2010) assessment of the 'deal':

'[m]any commentators have called the Cancún accord a "step in the right direction." We disagree: it is a giant step backward. The text replaces binding mechanisms for reducing greenhouse gas emissions with voluntary pledges that are wholly insufficient. These pledges contradict the stated goal of capping the rise in temperature at 2C, instead guiding us to 4C or more. The text is full of loopholes for polluters, opportunities for expanding carbon markets and similar mechanisms – like the forestry scheme REDD – that reduces the obligation of developed countries to act'.

Deterritorialisation - Reterritorialisation?

For a conference that offered so little in terms of formal progress that it went backwards, the COP15 provided a potential bifurcation point from which new political opportunities emerged. The legitimacy of dominant 'environmental' approaches and associated techno-managerial 'solutions' to climate change, mostly associated with a moribund neoliberal ideology, is being challenged on a number of fronts. Whilst new movements have begun to coalesce around the loose and open banner of 'climate justice', there remains an open contestation over what can be included within this rubric.

If the potential for a new politics emerged in Copenhagen, then the Cochabamba summit offered the political and geographical space for this politics to manifest itself. The 'Peoples' Agreement' - and the processes that formed it - offered the potential of a different trajectory for politics around the climate. It allowed for the assertion of a climate discourse 'Other' to that of the UNFCCC, not least in its identification of the capitalist system as being in direct contradiction with the earth's biophysical limits.

The opening of this confrontational discourse also raised the potential for a break or rupture with the established institutional processes for tackling the issue of climate change. Fuelled with a socialist / anti-capitalist rhetoric, and closely associated within the institutional parameters of ALBA, the CMPCC may well have been a significant point for fomenting a political antagonism - a vying for hegemony over who or what is the acceptable forum and/or ideology for tackling climate change. Channelled through a discourse of 'socialismo o muerte', or perhaps updated and eco-friendly in the form of 'capitalism or life', the CMPCC offered the potential (desirable or not) to confront the neo-liberal market driven approach that dominates the UNFCCC with an ALBA-style political economy.

However, despite the rhetoric of ALBA as defenders of 'mother earth' in the face of capital, and despite the geopolitics occurring around the ecological crises,

the ALBA states have been unable to provide a fundamentally different way of organising our societies. Whilst we agree with the assertion of an opposition between capital and an ecologically harmonious life, the political economy of the ALBA nations themselves fails to challenge the method of capitalist expansion unfolding in much of Latin America. According to Eduardo Gudynas, the ALBA project is fueled by a ‘new extractivism [that] maintains a style of development based on the appropriation of Nature’ (2010). Although there are clearly significant differences between the Bolivarianism of ALBA and the neoliberal project, the ALBA project can be interpreted as a form of neo-Keynesianism based on the partial nationalisation of extractive industries and significant wealth redistribution.

If Copenhagen was the space when the dominance of neoliberal discourse and institutions surrounding climate change was (partially) ruptured, and if Cochabamba was the space where an other discourse emerged, then Cancun must be understood as the space of an almost total reinscription and subsumption of this ‘other’ discourse back within the dominant framing. Any emerging ‘war of position’ over which institutions (and whose discourse) has the legitimacy to govern on the issue of climate change was extinguished. This tendency can perhaps be located with the August ministerial in Bonn - the point at which substantial recommendations of the Peoples’ Agreement was included within the negotiating text - yet it is only with the ‘Cancun consensus’ that the prevailing discourse, and the legitimacy of the UNFCCC, became re-solidified.

There is perhaps a morbid irony to the fact that such a suicidal deal was reached in a city noted as being the suicide capital of Mexico, dependent as it has become on the ‘self destruction model of tourism development’ (Weise in Lavato 2010). What remains to be seen is whether a movement will emerge which is strong enough to be able to reverse the coming suicide and challenge the self-destructive capitalist hegemony which fuels it. Any such movement must surely place little faith in the UNFCCC, understanding it as an institution tied up with a prevailing logic of governance that takes the market as its fundamental basis of legitimacy. Moreover, such a movement must provide a different governmental logic, with its legitimacy rooted not in the market but in some other transversal principles. Whether ‘climate justice’ can be the banner under which this ‘other’ movement occurs is open to question, but the closure of the contestation that took us from Copenhagen to Cancun suggests that such an opportunity may well be over.

References

- Bond, Patrick. 2010. ‘*Climate Capitalism*’ Won At Cancun – *Everyone Else Loses*’ [Internet] <<http://www.zcommunications.org/climate-capitalism-won-at-cancun-everyone-else-loses-by-patrick-bond>> [Accessed 30 December 2010]
- Brand, Ulrich, Nicola Bullard, Edgardo Lander, and Tadzio Mueller. 2009. Radical climate change politics in Copenhagen and beyond: From criticism to action? In, Brand, Ulrich, Nicola Bullard, Edgardo Lander, and Tadzio Mueller

- (eds.), *Contours of Climate Justice: Ideas for shaping new climate and energy politics*. Dag Hammarsköld Foundation: Uppsala, pp. 9-11.
- Brien, Yasmine., Cutler, Alice. & Russell, Bertie. *forthcoming*. Global Struggles for climate justice: the ALBA Council of Social Movements. In Muhr, T. (ed.) *Resistance to Global Capitalism: ALBA and the Bolivarian Revolution in Latin America and the Caribbean*. London: Routledge.
- Building Bridges Collective (ed.) 2010. *Space for movement?: Reflections from Bolivia on climate justice, social movements and the state*. Leeds: Leeds University Press.
- Carrington, Damian. 2010. WikiLeaks cables reveal how US manipulated climate accord. *The Guardian*. 3 December 2010 [Internet] <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/dec/03/wikileaks-us-manipulated-climate-accord>> [Accessed 17 January 2011].
- CJA 2009. *Hit the production*. [Internet] <<http://www.climate-justice-action.org/news/2009/08/14/december-13th/>> [Accessed 21st April 2010].
- CJA 2010a. *People's conference in Bolivia*. [Internet] <<http://www.climate-justice-action.org/mobilization/cochabamba/>> [Accessed 19 April 2010].
- CJA 2010b. *What does climate justice mean in Europe?*. [Internet] <<http://www.climate-justice-action.org/resources/documents/what-does-climate-justice-mean-in-europe/>> [Accessed 19 April 2010].
- CJA 2010c. *1000 Cancuns, Cop16 – The People's Report Backs II December 16 2010*. [Internet] <<http://www.climate-justice-action.org/news/2010/12/16/1000-cancuns-cop16-the-peoples-report-backs-ii/>> [Accessed 10 January 2011].
- CMPPCC 2010. *World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* [Internet] <<http://pwccc.wordpress.com/>> [Accessed 28 April 2010].
- Gudynas, Edgardo. 2010. *The New Extractivism of the 21st Century: Ten Urgent Theses about Extractivism in Relation to Current South American Progressivism*. Americas Program Report, January 21, 2010.
- Harvey, David. 2009. *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism*. London: Profile Books.
- Klima Kollektivet 2010. *Police Raids during COP15 recognized as illegal!* [Internet] <<http://www.climatecollective.org/post/68>>
- Klimax 2009. *Mass action concept during COP15 in Copenhagen*. Shift 5 [Internet] <<http://shiftmag.co.uk/?p=230>> [Accessed 19 April 2010].
- Lavato, Roberto. 2010. *Dispatch From Cancun Developing Paradise In The Suicide Capital*. [Internet] <<http://www.zcommunications.org/dispatch-from-canc-n->

- [developing-paradise-in-the-suicide-capital-by-roberto-lovato](#)> [Accessed 10 January 2011].
- Mueller, Tazio & Frieder Otto Wolf. 2009. Green New Deal: Dead end or pathway beyond capitalism? *Turbulence* 5, pp. 12-16.
- Notes From Below 2009. *COP15: Thoughts before Copenhagen*. [Internet] <<http://notesfrombelow.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/13/>> [Accessed 18 April 2010].
- Notes From Below 2010a. *Interview with Tazio Müller – C.J.A Spokesperson*. <<http://notesfrombelow.wordpress.com/2010/01/18/interview-with-tazio-muller-c-j-a-spokesperson/>> [Accessed 19 April 2010].
- Notes From Below 2010b. *Reflections on Cop-15 call out for articles*. [Internet] <<http://notesfrombelow.wordpress.com/2010/01/07/reflections-on-cop-15-call-out-for-articles/>> [Accessed 19 April 2010].
- NTAC 2009. *NTAC call against the COP15 summit in Copenhagen in Dec 2009*. [Internet] < <http://nevertrustacop.org/uploads/Main/NTAC-call-en.pdf>> [Accessed 19 April 2010].
- Olivera, Oscar. 2004. *Cochabamba!: Water Rebellion in Bolivia*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Soron, Pablo. 2010. *Why Bolivia stood alone in opposing the Cancún climate agreement*, [Internet] <<http://pwccc.wordpress.com/2010/12/21/why-bolivia-stood-alone-in-opposing-the-cancun-climate-agreement/#more-2550>> [Accessed 12 January 2011].