



Ten theses on why we need a “Social Science Panel on Climate Change”

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Abstract

This article discusses climate change from a critical social science perspective. Firstly, it is argued that climate change is not, in a fundamental sense, possible to understand from a natural science perspective, but demands an analysis of political power relations and our existing global political economy, capitalism. Therefore, climate change involves questions of global justice. Secondly, it is argued that the contemporary world economy, not only forcefully restructures climate, but also our societies, creating turbulent social strains, and therefore also an emerging global political reaction, one that is potentially giving hope for a solution, transnational justice and climate movements. However, thirdly, it is argued that these movements are not enough since they are still too ineffective to really challenge the basic injustices of global capitalism or its climate change effects. Social change is urgent, while solutions, strategies and mobilizations still seem too weak. Therefore, fourthly and lastly, we need a new kind of climate change panel, one that combines the theoretical-analytical skills of critical social scientists and the practical knowledge and organizational skills of movement intellectuals. A “Social Science Panel on Climate Change” is suggested in order to develop effective and realistic options and strategies.



On a freezing December day in 2009 some academics from different disciplines and countries gathered in the harbor of Copenhagen. We had warm clothes and stood on the pavement next to a coal corporation, with conference papers folded in our jackets or held in our hands, some drinking warm coffee from a thermos, chatting and nervously looking around the area. After a while the organizer, Kelvin Mason, called us all to attention. It was time for us to follow the seminar program and present our papers, while we stood in front of the gate, blocking the entrance of the coal plant, stopping the business as usual. At any time we might be arrested by the Danish police. As soon as the first paper presenter started, an upset guard came out and wondered what we were doing. Kelvin smiled and invited him to join us and listen to the arguments. A first version of this text was presented at this academic seminar blockade.²

Climate change is a major challenge to our contemporary societies and lifestyles; ecologically, fore sure, but also politically and economically. This article discusses climate change from a critical social science perspective. Firstly, it is argued that climate change is not, in a fundamental sense, possible to understand from a natural science perspective, but demands an analysis of political power relations and our existing global political economy, capitalism. Therefore, climate change involves questions of global justice. Secondly, it is argued that the contemporary world economy, not only forcefully restructures climate, but also our societies, creating turbulent social strains, and therefore also an emerging global political reaction, one that is potentially giving hope for a solution, transnational justice and climate movements. However, thirdly, it is argued that these movements are not enough since they are still too ineffective to really challenge the basic injustices of global capitalism or its climate change effects. Social change is urgent, while solutions, strategies and mobilizations still seem too weak. Therefore, fourthly and lastly, we need a new kind of climate change panel, one that combines the theoretical-analytical skills of critical social scientists and the practical knowledge and organizational skills of movement intellectuals. A “Social Science Panel on Climate Change” is suggested in order to develop effective and realistic options and strategies.

(1) Why “climate” is a matter of global concern: The relationship between world capitalism and climate change

When Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* he was convinced that there was a limit to the growth of capitalism. The reason was basically that the Earth itself was geographically limited, therefore also the supply of resources, material resources, as well as human labor, were limited and simultaneously essential for economic

² This is a substantially reworked paper originally presented for The Academic Seminar Blockade: Climate Change: Power, Policy and Public Action, Sunday 13 Dec 2009, Copenhagen, Denmark. I benefited from invaluable comments and criticism by Patrick Bond, Eoin Ó Broin, Håkan Gustafsson, Anders Malmsten, Kelvin Mason, Li Vinthagen and one anonymous reviewer. I am very thankful, also for the suggestions I did not follow. I am, finally, the only one responsible for the published text.

production, thus profit-making. Marx argued that capitalism involved a necessary tendency towards unlimited expansion of capital through increased exploitation. It attempts to postpone the existential limits to growth through endless attempts at developing new markets overseas. Marx understood this in a deeper sense than anyone before his time. This need to expand and exploit new territories made colonialism an inherent part of capital logic. This would later be the basis of Lenin's argument that capitalism had a tendency towards monopoly and that imperialism was the "highest stage" (i.e. the final stage) of capitalism. That however did not turn out to be the case. Or, rather classic imperialism (colonialism) was obviously not the upper limit of capital expansion. It thrived and developed even more in the post-colonial period.

According to Marx, capital's productive creativity was essentially a destruction of existing nature, societies and culture, and a simultaneous development of productive forces and new modes of production. Capital transformed existing social and natural life and transformed it to suit capital's needs. Within this "creative destruction" Marx did see the path of liberation, since capitalism simultaneously produced the objective conditions of the working class and the (really) free society, communism. With increased intensity of capital exploitation the working class grew in numbers and concentration, and potentially in consciousness of themselves and their strength. Thus, capitalism also stimulated the subjective conditions of the working class. And further, humans did not have to work as much anymore to live a good life, thus the increased productive forces (machines, new techniques) made communist freedom possible. This however did not turn out to be the case either, at least not yet. The growing working class organized itself according to national consciousness and became defenders of their (national) share of capital progress. Thus, workers in Sweden developed an antagonistic class interest to workers in e.g. India, China or Bangladesh. Although globalization might in time change that, making international working class interest develop in the long run, this is still an effective impediment to any political class consciousness, thus hindering an organized unity of a global working class despite the globalization of capital.

Marx did, better than others, understand the creativity of capital. Yet, even Marx underestimated the extent to which the public image of the fundamental limitless of capitalist production would dominate political economic discourse, even among capitalism critical social democrats. Capitalism has shown an impressive ability to invent new markets and produce new types of commodities to solve problems, not only "overseas" but everywhere. Temporary solutions most probably, but capitalism has, so far, resurrected from each crisis, seemingly stronger and more creative. 19-century industrial capitalism did not give Marx the possibility to understand that a "postindustrial capitalist" society was possible. He could not have foreseen the development of information as a basic resource of late-modern capitalism, a radical break with industrialism argued by Castells, who calls this new capital paradigm "informationalism" (Castells 1996; 1997; 1998).

According to Castells the capitalist pre-industrial farming society increased productivity with the help of increased land-use. That society was later replaced by the industrial capitalist society in which the productivity increased with the effective use of more and more energy. Now in the contemporary tendency towards a post-industrial capitalist society, productivity is, claims Castells, increased by the increased manipulation of information.

Although, some dare to critique the idea (and goal) of limitless economic growth, the increased importance of information in the production system is a fact. Some of the biggest corporations in the world are producers of computer software (Microsoft, Apple, IBM, Google, etc.), mobile-phones (Nokia, Ericsson, etc.), entertainment (Miramax, Nintendo, etc.) or media (Fox, CNN, etc.). Information communication technology (ICT) is also integrated in all types of production, e.g. manufacturing of cars, transactions in the financial market, transport logistics or administrative systems of transnational corporations (TNCs). Information has become both a basic exploitative resource of capital production and a productive force. Information (ICT) works on information, in order to produce new information.

There is a new boundlessness to the expansion in ICT since, although it depends on strategic minerals such as cobalt for cell phones (a mineral which is a key factor behind the war in Congo), the core products are produced from virtual resources, flooding the world with new forms of entertainment (like music, games, movies, pornography), software systems (like new Web browsers, computer games, video streaming, music editing), or similar “information” products.

In addition, the possibilities for manipulating the identities, emotional motivations, desires and perceived needs of people are endless. Our need to belong to a (virtual-) community (e.g. Second Life, Facebook, or “Climate change research” mail-lists) is possible to exploit for ever. The fulfillment of a particular need or the boredom we all eventually feel with e.g. Facebook, is no threat to the profit-making of informationalism, quite the opposite, it is its pre-condition for growth. When we get bored on one constructed identity, activity, information or “need”, there will be ten others we “just have to try out”.

Therefore, it might seem to many as if capitalism has finally solved the problem of an unlimited growth on a finite planet. Today both production and consumption seem to move towards virtuality. The more contemporary capitalism moves towards post-industrial informationalism, the lesser role natural resource limits will play for the expansion of capitalism. However, that might be a potential development, but is not the reality. Capitalism is not virtual, and will not be even when informationalism is the dominant mode of production, which it, for sure, is not yet. The dramatic move from the first generations of computers used by the military and universities to the personal computers we use today involve drastically less material resources for a dramatic increase in capacity. And it for sure might not look like we need resources if we look on the largest economic activity,

speculation. Over 90 % of the world economy consists of financial transactions, i.e. virtual production. However, we have not left profit-making based on industrial (fossil) energy. Quite the opposite. Industrialism is still thriving, and being developed, especially in the “developing countries”, and material resources are used also in an information capitalist society. Resources will continue to be necessary in the “real” economy.

Furthermore, we can clearly see that the change towards “informationalism” is not going as quick as Castells propose. Despite the growing telecom-industry and service sector, our biggest TNCs are still within oil (and banking) according to Forbes Global 2000, not ICT, and we continue to use more and more oil, chemicals, minerals, energy and natural resources. In fact we are still for every year using up more and more of the non-renewable resources according to the Global Footprint Network.³

How does then these suggestions of informationalism and industrialism fit together? I think post-industrial informationalism is possible to understand as a “new frontier” making continued capital expansion possible. Thus, in theory it seems like capitalism might expand for ever, unhindered by our limited Earth, but that is for sure not the reality. All production (also informationalism) use natural resources. Thus, capitalism’s tendency of unlimited expansion is still not sustainable on a limited earth. Capitalism has, as we will see below, now encountered a new resource limit, arguably its most difficult one so far, and possibly its final one, climate change. In the same sense, also climate change is, as we will see below, transformed into a new frontier of profit-making.

My conclusion and thesis 1 is that our development towards a virtual economy is going parallel with a growth of modern consumption based on industrial capitalism. Capitalism involves expansion of both informationalism and industrialism. That is the logic of the unlimited expansion of capital.

Climate as a new limit to Capital

Now society is aware of the fact that a new kind of resource limit exists, one that Marx of course had difficulties in predicting, the climate. It is ultimately however “nature” that presents a limit, thus in a sense one could call it the same limit as Marx suggested, the finite Earth. Throughout industrialization regimes and decision makers have assumed naively that the earth’s atmosphere and its climate is an unlimited, eternal, public and free resource, but this has not proved to be the case. Not unlimited or eternal, or as we shall see, also not public and free. Capitalists, especially, thought they could ignore its limits. Capitalist development has historically depended on the combined privatization of profits and collectivization (or externalization) of real costs (destroyed life, health, social

³ See http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/earth_overshoot_day/ (Retrieved Aug 26 2010).

structures, etc). Nature has all the time been a perfect dumping ground for the costs of capitalist exploitation, e.g. chemicals, deforestations, degraded land, polluted water, or emissions.

One of the major research collaborations in history has achieved something extremely complicated, the analysis and prediction of the development of one of the most complex systems that exist, the physical climate of the Earth. This UN organized Intergovernmental Climate Change Panel (IPCC) has shown, beyond reasonable doubt, that a 2 degree rise in temperature would be unacceptable for the future of humankind. In order to avoid that, the world needs to reduce greenhouse emissions already by 2020, and be fossil free by 2050.

But the IPCC has not clarified the root cause of climate change. Climate change is not, from a social scientific perspective, really created by greenhouse emissions, but by our mode of social production, capitalism.

‘Today the ecological crisis appears as a sum of “destructive” changes in nature: changes that are explained by the ways society transforms its material environment, i.e. the mode of social production. /.../ [T]hen this material degradation will automatically translate into an increase of production cost, a relevant decrease of the profit rate, and therefore, into devaluation or destruction of parts of the capital; in other words, into a factor of an over-accumulation crisis. /.../ [T]he social production that cause the degradation of the material conditions are not necessarily identical to the ones that suffer from it. /.../ It is exactly at this level ... social conflicts over the distribution of the crisis consequences develop. /.../ [W]hat is at stake in these conflicts is the direct control of the material conditions of production.’ (Nikisianis 2009)⁴

A significantly changed climate is bad for business, including virtual business, especially if most people do not survive. Thus it now seems as if capital has finally reached its real limit. But in understanding this limit, and especially in developing solutions, Marxism is not helping us very much. Marxist theory, in an orthodox sense, has like bourgeois ideology no real understanding of the role of nature, besides as a site of resource extraction. The difference is that orthodox Marxism aimed for a society where everyone shared the natural resources of the Earth. Resources existed not only in order to create freedom for profit. But the instrumental relationship to nature—that nature is something that exists as a tool for human needs and purposes—is an arrogant attitude that Marxism shares with capitalism and bourgeois enlightenment ideology. After all, communist liberation

⁴ The emphasis in the quote is from the original text. An “overaccumulation” crisis is a situation when the existing profits or surplus value is not possible to reinvest with enough of return in new market options. The continued need to create profit growth is blocked by a flood of capital, undervalued capital or lack of demand without proper investment possibilities. This is normally solved by moving production to new territories or to develop new markets. In the case of climate change these strategies are fundamentally undermined (at least in the long run).

comes after industrial capitalism has developed the productive forces that make it possible.

The bio-materialist reality, though, I would argue, is that humans exist as an integrated part of nature, an inescapable element within the ecological system. If we do not fit into the ecological system, we will be destroyed. Our civilizations, our societies and humanity as we know it is not necessary for nature. Nature will survive, it will find new sustainable forms. There will always be ecosystems, although very different from the diverse ones we see today. There maybe will be diverse ecosystems consisting on anaerobic organisms, bacteria that do not use oxygen, with its ecology, like it was earlier, before oxygen was produced in the photosynthesis. Or there might be other organisms that thrive, while yet others disappear. Change is no problem for nature. Ecological sustainability is possible in a forest, an ocean, or a desert. There was ecological sustainability also at the time of the dinosaurs, in all the millions of years of pre-human historic times. During the pre-human history nature has survived several catastrophes, e.g. continental plate collisions, raining meteorites exploding on Earth, or volcanic eruptions. These catastrophic changes lead to massive extinctions of different species, major ecological unsustainability, mass emigration of organisms and drastic transformations. But nature found new sustainable ecological equilibrium again, in new forms, without humans.

Humans are not necessary for the survival of nature, but nature is absolutely necessary for the survival of humans. Nature does not need us, that is something we have to understand. For nature, we and our climate change are not really a threat. To nature it is not even a problem, just change. Nature just is, it does not judge or care. But for humans, it would be a real problem, we would not fit, we would not stay an integrated element, thus our societies as we know them would not exist anymore.

Thus, my thesis 2 is that existing environmental systems of sustainability can be destroyed, e.g. the climate, but it is not essential for us to take care of nature for the sake of nature, that is not necessary since biological life and its systemic ability to recreate itself is simply stronger than us. We need to care for our own future, for our existence as a species, our possibilities to continue to live within a human-friendly environment.

Climate: The Global Commons

It is possible to argue that all earth is a global commons, i.e. our shared resource, since we only borrow it from future generations. In that sense all natural resources and land is collectively owned. That is even more evident with the climate. Climate is, similar to air and water, a global resource, since it—as opposed to land resources (soil and rocks)—circulates globally. In the long run, we all breathe the same air, live with the same climate system and drink the same water. We all depend on a human-friendly climate system. No individual has created it, but individuals can destroy it. Environmental destruction of our climate at one

place on earth is affecting the climate of people at other places. This means humans are all interconnected through the global environment of climate, in a similar way as with air and water. It also means that climate is our common resource, it belongs to us all, we that live now and future generations. Thus, humanity needs together to find out how to live on this planet, how to share and distribute its global resources and the global effects of our activities (with all its global goods and “global bads”). That is a fact, but how to manage that common resource is on the other hand not easy to answer.

However, my thesis 3 claims that, since climate is a global commons and we are all affected by individual actions, the climate change is not only an ecological issue, but equally important, a political and moral issue.

The necessity of capitalism change

Since the primary increase in climate changing emissions comes from industrial use of fossil energy, the main threat to the climate is contemporary world capitalism; the unlimited growth of production on a resource constrained earth. Despite the expansion of virtual markets, production and capital growth will continue to depend on the use of natural resources, especially production in the global natural resource bank of the “developing” world, i.e. Latin America, Africa and Asia.

We have to understand that despite modern industrial capitalism clearly being the root cause of climate change, it will, rest assured, be creative enough to capitalize (literally) on the crisis, and earn money trading on the same climate it is simultaneously destroying (Angus 2009: Chapter 5; Tanuro 2009, p. 252-263).

Climate change has already made the ice in the Arctic Ocean to diminish. To most that is a frightening warning sign. To capital and resource hungry states it is an opportunity, since the melting ice makes access to new oil reserves under the ocean possible, and it opens up new trade routes for shipping fleets ... This is so cynical that it could serve as the defining moment of the capitalist logic of “creative destruction”. This also shows the amoral or machine character of capitalism, as well as its lack of proper self-regulation. Thus, as long as we have a capitalism that works through fossil-dependent industrialization and production, we will threaten the climate system.

Today we have a paradoxical situation where the climate is threatened by that which is proposed to solve the threat. The main proposals of the Kyoto protocol are market-driven mechanisms, i.e. trade with different climate credits.⁵ Thus, capitalism and its market expansion is what created the problem, and it is now, through developing our climate into a new market, made into the solution. Climate, our global and common resource, is transformed into private property, and that is

⁵ For a critical evaluation of carbon trading see e.g. the scientific report prepared by Friends of the Earth www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/dangerous_obsession.pdf (Retrieved Aug 26 2010).

done, they say, in order to save it for our global and common good. This commodification of everything, not just of humans and nature, but also the atmosphere and our climate, transforms our future for humanity into a trade of shares on the carbon emission market.

Some people think the answer to this predicament, this internal threat coming from our expanding and self-destructive economy, lies in developing “green capitalism” or “ecological modernism” (Angus 2009: Chapter 4). The most ambitious proposal is to create a “Green New Deal”, with massive (private) investments in a green economy and technology. In general it is possible to say that, yes, in many sectors of society, and in many corporations it would be better and even possible if they became (really) more “green”. But, and that is the more important aspect here; “sustainable capitalism” is impossible. Capitalism is not proclaiming itself to be a matter of long-term planning, and also not a coordinated system. That is in fact the whole point with the capitalist system. It is per definition a matter of freedom or lack of regulation, and it is only as long- or short-sighted as it needs in order to serve its main logic of individualistic profit-making. The market ideology, then, claims this works through some form of “autoregulation”, i.e. that the egoistic behavior of individuals on the market accommodate to the needs and demands of everyone.

There is of course a form of functional self-regulation within the market mechanism, but that is a regulation that serves certain functions, while actively ignoring other. Autoregulation in the market secures the extinction of those market actors that are not able to create enough of profit in the competition with others. This form of regulation is exactly what forces those who want to survive to exploit oil and gas in the Arctic Ocean.

Thus, as long as a demand exists, the corresponding supply will exist. The profit making on the autoregulated and free market has a limitless need for expansion, and all expanded production consume resources, some which are renewable, some which are not. Thus, capitalism means limitless growth of everything that is not effectively regulated.

Thus, in order to create a “green capitalism” that is really sustainable in relation to not only the climate, but also chemicals, natural resource use and other ecological aspects, we have to change the political economy as such, in a fundamental sense, and bring it into accordance with some kind of global regulation. It is then not the same “capitalism” we are talking about. If that means capitalism needs to be abolished all together, or not, is not necessary to determine here. However, it, for sure, means we will need some kind of new and sustainable version of political economy, i.e. ecological regulations that are effective and global that limits economic growth to certain levels or to areas in which resources are unlimited or not affecting the climate (e.g. virtual ones, as software or knowledge, and maybe social service).

My thesis 4 is that contemporary capitalism is the root cause of climate change but a false solution to the problem. Some form of, more or less fundamental, change of our political economy or “capitalism change” is necessary in order to redeem climate change.

(2) Why “climate” is a matter of global justice and solidarity between the Global South and North

The earth’s climate is thus shared by us all. Climate change is also, although not initially. In some parts of the world we already see “climate crises”, while other parts can go on living like before, like nothing happened, for some time longer. This is both a pedagogical and moral-political problem.

Climate change has consequences for humans. The rising average temperature has actually far reaching consequences. It involves an increase of such things as firestorms, flooding, deforestations, degradation of farming land, hurricanes, change of ocean streams, rising sea levels, melting glaciers (which changes the water reserves, ecological sustainability systems, etc). The worst effected areas are in the developing world, especially small islands, coastal areas and already dry areas. Moreover the worst effected are the poor that have to live in the most dangerous areas, and they are the ones that have the least protection and least ability to repair damage (bad housing, no insurance, or savings, etc.). This means that climate change is a greater problem and risk for the poor in the developing world, since they have no other choice but to live in territories where no one else wants to live, e.g. the regularly flooded coastal areas of Bangladesh.

Climate change is already producing refugees, deaths, disease and wars, in some parts of the world. According to UNHCR there are already millions of climate and environmental refugees and it is expected to rise strongly in the coming decades.⁶ According to Patz (2005) in an article in one of the most prestigious physical science journals in the world, “Nature”, the deadly effects already exist.⁷ Human-induced climate change is already causing 150 000 deaths and 5 million incidents of disease each year... (from such conditions as malaria and diarrhea) and this is mostly happening in the poor countries of the world. These numbers are terrible, yet they are most likely low estimates.⁸

We also see how “climate wars” are spreading, wars where climate change or environmental destruction is a major factor driving the violence, e.g. in the water

⁶ <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/JBRN-7R4G47?OpenDocument> (Retrieved Dec 11 2009). There exist today criticism of some of the strongest predictions made during the 1990s, but irrespective if we are talking about millions or hundreds of millions, climate and environmental refugees are a social effect of climate change.

⁷ Nature 438, pp. 310-317 (17 November 2005). See <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v438/n7066/abs/nature04188.html> (Retrieved Dec 11 2009).

⁸ According to Kofi Annan’s former think-tank the Global Humanitarian Forum climate change is already causing 300 000 deaths a year, see The Guardian May 29, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/may/29/1> (Retrieved Aug 26 2010).

deprived Darfur. International Alert concluded in a report on climate and violent conflict in the developing world that:

In 46 states already affected by violent conflict, the dual problem of climate change and violent conflict can lock the state into a downward spiral where violent conflict restricts the adaptive capacity and climate change worsens the conflict. In a further 56 states, the consequences of climate change could move them into political instability, creating a high risk of violent conflict further on.⁹

Thus, climate change will affect the whole world and everyone in it although the almost seven billion humans who live on the Earth today are not affected in the same way. The effects of climate change are distributed unequally among different parts of the world. The ability to protect oneself is also distributed unequally.

Although some developing nations have fast growing industrial areas and are contributing more and more towards the climate problem, mainly China, India, South Africa and Brazil, this should not disguise the fact that the current climate threat has been created historically by the developed world, especially North America, Western Europe, Japan and Australia. In fact 60 % of the emissions of the last 150 years originate from 23 countries in the “developed” world (Oxfam 2008).¹⁰ “In 1992, these countries committed to return their annual emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. Instead, by 2005 they had allowed their collective emissions to rise more than 10 per cent ...” (Oxfam 2008: Executive Summary).¹¹

This means that the rich countries have an unrecognized “climate debt” that is many times bigger than the more known economic debt of the poor countries to transnational corporate banks (Republic of Bolivia 2009, p. 163-166; Tanuro 2009, p. 242-243).¹²

Thus, (1) climate change is created by the rich countries, and (2) it effects the poor countries and (3) the poorest groups in these countries the most. To this we need to add that (4) due to unjust distribution of resources in the present world order, the developing world, especially the least developed countries, have the least resources and possibilities to protect themselves from the consequences (of the problem the rich countries have created), or to develop ecological-friendly production forms.

My thesis 5 is that climate change leads to climate injustice since the world is an unjust political economy. Thus, the global effort to deal with climate change is necessarily also an effort to create global justice.

⁹ p. 37 in the International Alert report “A Climate of Conflict” (2007), see www.international-alert.org/pdf/A_Climate_Of_Conflict.pdf (Retrieved Dec 11 2009)

¹⁰ These countries are the home to only 14 % of the world population (Oxfam 2008: Executive Summary).

¹¹ And the emissions were even “exceeding 15 per cent in Canada, Greece, Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, and the USA” (Oxfam 2008: Executive Summary).

¹² For a detailed review of the climate debt, see www.wdm.org.uk/climatedebt (Retrieved Aug 26 2010).

Then it is no surprise that the “global justice movement”, which has existed since the end of the last century, today is linked to the growing “climate justice” or broader “ecological justice” movement.

The global justice movement grew out of the Chiapas rebellion in Mexico in 1994 against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle, USA in 1999. It is a collaboration between different social groups, organizations and movements from a broad range of countries that despite their very different social contexts, interests, ideologies or modes of action, live with the common problem of the globalization of unregulated capitalism (Gills 2000; Löfgren & Thörn 2006; Vinthagen 2002; 2003; 2008). The global coordination and growth of free market ideology, its neoliberal policies and profit-making transnational corporations create so much exploitation of human and natural resources and so much destruction of societies around the world, that it drives varied social groups into a global resistance movement. The movement was first named the “antiglobalisation movement” during the “Battle of Seattle”, later the “anti-war movement” after the start of the US “war against terror” and the invasion of Iraq, but today it is simply referred to as the “global justice movement”.

Let us explore the logic connecting the global justice movement and the climate justice movement.

The global justice movement and the climate justice movement

A: The fusion of different social action groups across the Global South was already ongoing in the 1980s, in what was then called “IMF-riots”, a phenomenon that spread in countries that were subject to “structural adjustment programs”, i.e. enforced neoliberal restructuring of societies. These programs were possible to enforce because countries needed to borrow money from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and their need to borrow was often a result of the global financial market, e.g. currency crises, natural resource price decreases, or interest increases.

B: At Seattle in 1999 the movements of the global south found willing collaboration with Western trade unions, environmental or system reformist NGOs and various other groups critical of capitalism. In Seattle movements of the US and EU realized the common interest they had with the movements from Latin America, Africa and Asia (Vinthagen 2002). With the development of the World Social Forum in Jan 2001, these groups created a permanent network and platform, which today is the biggest transnational collaboration between social movements and NGOs in world history (Vinthagen 2008), regularly gathering over 100 000 activists, as e.g. in the Amazons in Jan 2009.

C: After Sep 11 and the US attack on Afghanistan the “war against terror” created so much social strain and violent repression of communities that groups working with local social development and community rights, together with some

parts of the old and the new and growing transnational peace and anti-war movement started to collaborate and integrate with the global justice movement (Vinthagen 2003). The “coming out party” of that collaboration was the Feb 15 world-wide demonstration against the illegal US attack on Iraq in 2003. It was undoubtedly the largest antiwar demonstration in world history, a protest that made New York Times dub the movement the world’s “second superpower”. This was a grave overestimation but still the movement shows unprecedented levels of global mobilization.

D: As a reaction to the extremely well publicized Stern Review in 2006 on the economic consequences of climate change and the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, shared between the former vice president of the US, Al Gore (for his “An Inconvenient Truth”), and the Intergovernmental Climate Change Panel (IPCC), a “political opportunity structure” was created, making a rapid growth and mobilization of climate concerned movements possible. Al Gore and the Stern Review are pro-capitalist and argues for the economic gains from taking climate change serious. And the IPCC is of course assuming climate policy will build on governments and their national and common (state) interests. On the other hand, that is also why these reports mattered for changing the public debate. Both capitalists and states finally recognized science reports on climate change, and made it to a global issue.¹³ That influenced public opinion. The environmental groups that had existed and argued along these lines for decades could now suddenly recruit new members, governmental support and new resources. Action groups started to do “climate camps” in the UK (from 2006 on) and since then also internationally, where discussions on climate issues were conducted along with confrontational actions against what is today by some called the “fossil mafia” or the “corporate dinosaurs”.¹⁴ Through collaboration with environmental groups in the global south, the movement developed a justice perspective on the problem of climate change. During the unsuccessful climate negotiations between uncommitted governments in Bali in 2007, the Climate Justice Action network was created. The “Climate justice movement” was thus born. Today the Climate Justice Action consists of over 160 grassroots movements, Indigenous movements, ecological “watch” organizations, workers’ organizations, NGOs and others.

My thesis 6 is that what we saw in Copenhagen at the COP-15 UN summit was two things. First the “coming out party” of the emerging global climate justice movement, the latest off-spring or sister movement of that global justice movement, often correctly referred to as “the movement of movements”. COP-15

¹³ The scientific reports had existed since several decades, with e.g. the first world conference in Geneva 1979, but had not been recognized in broader political or corporate sectors in the world (Tanuro 2009, p 252).

¹⁴ The “greenhouse mafia” is a self-referential term used by the carbon lobby in Australia, specifically the Australian Industry Greenhouse Network, according to Dr Guy Pearse, a former industry lobbyist, political consultant and spin doctor. In Feb 2006 he turned whistle-blower and exposed the politics behind Australia’s response to climate change in the “Greenhouse mafia” episode on ABC’s Four Corners and in his book *High & Dry* (2007).

was, however, also a sign of how weak the climate justice movement is, how much that is still needed to be done before the movement begin to exert power.

Copenhagen was actually a rather weak mobilization, with only about 70 000 participants, despite being the biggest climate demonstration so far in history. Nevertheless the basis exists for more mobilizations in future. The less publicized movement activity, the parallel counter summit, named the “Klimaforum09”, gathered in total 50,000 participants to its numerous workshops and seminars, making it actually bigger than the official COP-15 gathering. And as a difference to the gathering of governments, the Klimaforum09 did unite on a climate justice deal, formulated in a declaration that is now signed by over 300 organizations.¹⁵

The need for new strategies

Now we are at a new important historical crossroads. It seems clear there is a need of a powerful mobilization of a global movement that can give force to the needs of people affected by climate change, and it needs to happen as soon as ever possible ... But how is that going to happen? This will, of course, mainly depend on grassroots movements taking the struggle to the local streets, shop-floors and kitchen tables all over the world. But global coordination is absolutely necessary, more than ever this time.

A global coordination of local struggles will be a matter of finding a strategy for engagements on global arenas, like the UN Conference of Parties (for example COP-15 in Copenhagen). Thus it is absolutely essential to develop an appropriate global strategy on how the movements could act effectively.

Will the Climate justice movement recreate the famous “Battle of Seattle”, the action that made the global justice movement strong enough to exert power? Will the new movement in a new city succeed in the same manner? Stopping the conference of the strongest political and economic actors of the world, and its course towards a weak and catastrophic deal, in order to enforce a discussion that takes the interests of marginalized groups and developing nations more seriously? A few things speak in favor of that scenario; for example, Copenhagen failed to produce an effective and strong agreement (as did COP-16 in Cancun and -17 in Durban), and much speaks towards continued failure in coming COP-gatherings. These conferences are regularly made into a global arena as Seattle, drawing a broad range of global actors—international regimes, international NGOs, transnational social movements, global mass media, corporate lobby groups¹⁶, etc. That makes global political struggle possible. Similarly, several nations in the global south are exasperated with Western privilege and arrogance, and many repeat the same phrase: “No justice, no deal” (mainly the Group of G77, i.e. the

¹⁵ “System change – not climate change: A People’s Declaration from Klimaforum09”, retrieved from <http://old.klimaforum09.org/Declaration?lang=da> (Aug 27 2010).

¹⁶ Numerous corporate lobby groups influence the climate negotiations, as e.g. in Copenhagen. See the documentation of their activities by CEO, <http://www.corporateeurope.org/>

coalition of developing countries)—meaning that the nation-state collaboration at the COP-process risks internal collapse in a similar way as WTO in Seattle.

Still, I think that this will be difficult to achieve. Some important things speak against a repetition of the “Battle of Seattle”. The situation is politically very different because this time we cannot survive without a deal, we do urgently need a deal. It is so urgent that even a weak deal seems better than no deal. Each deal that improves the situation, that lessens the irreversible alteration of the climate, might help, but that is only if we are able to make such a deal into a step towards a real deal, and avoiding it becomes the only deal. Furthermore, this time the police are a lot more prepared. In Seattle they were taken by surprise. They have had over 10 years of collective experience of several mass-protests at regime-summits. Even the larger and stronger global justice movements have not been able to repeat this. Thus, from now on we have to expect effective policing of all attempts to stop such summits. Lastly, activists want, I believe, to show something more than just our ability to riot, blockade and stop a conference of the cynical power holders of big nations and corporations. They want instead to push for a solution and an alternative route of development that is based on our creativity, our needs and our interests as humans. After a decade it is not enough to just, once again, shout “Another world is possible”. This time we need to both shout and show convincingly that “Another world is becoming, here and now, take part!”.

Thus, my thesis 7 is that, although the climate justice movement and the global justice movement are part of a similar struggle against anti-human versions of globalization, this time we need to be more proactive, creative and solution oriented in our resistance strategies. Climate justice is a matter of the urgent survival of humankind as it will eventually be too late to prevent. When that is, we do not know yet, but we do know we are approaching that point.

(3) The role of academics in making climate justice possible

So what is needed to be done? The crisis is already here, climate change continues, driven by global capitalism and fossil-dependent societies, and time is short. In addition, the global negotiation process between governments does not seem to be able to produce anything similar to that fundamental restructuring of our life-threatening modern development that is so necessary. It is not even on the agenda. Instead we get new market mechanisms, technological optimism or altogether failed deals. In this urgent time of climate crisis we also see an emerging but still insignificant global climate justice movement. Thus, we also seem to have one additional crisis, one that is even more serious; a political crisis, a lack of ability to respond properly in front of a threat to the existence of humanity. What is then possible to do?

In a very basic sense we need two things. We need an acknowledgement of this double crisis, the climate crisis, and the political crisis. We also need professional, committed and experienced work on how to deal with both of these crises. I am of the opinion that academics have a central role to play here.

Academics have already played a key role in putting “climate change” onto the global political agenda and making climate a regular topic of public discourse. This break-through has happened at least partly through the Stern-report and the UN Climate Panel. After several decades of ideological, political and academic struggle, the ideological dominance of the fossil lobby has been broken (although not their enormous influence) (Tanuro 2009, p. 252). Today, the climate skeptics do not get much governmental support anymore and are not taken very serious, despite the fact that for several years the Bush Administration and its fossil lobby successfully kept the lid on a critical discussion. Academic engagement has been absolutely essential to the public recognition of the climate crisis. Academics have dared to go beyond their normal ideology of “disinterested” scientific study. The motivating force has been a concern for human well-being and for the future of humankind, making it possible to collaborate across nations and disciplines in an unprecedented way, in order to review existing research and make projections.

The next step is necessary. We need a realistic strategy that helps us to make enough reforms or fundamental transformations of the present eco-destructive world capitalist system, especially to help us break the power of the fossil lobby and cynical links between corporations and governments around the world.

We already know that the present economic system and its corporate leaders have failed us. We also know that the present political system and our governments have failed to take responsibility. That failure was shown in COP-15, as well as in the two following Conference of Parties, obvious for anyone that examines the lack of substance behind the rhetoric of these agreements. The situation we have today with climate change and the lack of serious deals is a terrible evidence to that. Therefore, the solution is unlikely to come from political or economic leadership.

History is a matter of social struggles, and real and fundamental change happens through mass-based social movements that create a powerful pressure from below and transform social relations, as one of the world’s most respected historians, Charles Tilly, has shown in numerous books (e.g. Tilly 2004a; 2004b). There is again a need for ordinary citizens in civil societies and their social movements to engage and make the leaders of our economy and politics literally forced to take responsibility.

Two claims build my next thesis:

First, the question is not anymore what happens to the climate. We need of course to know more, but in a very important sense, we do know enough. We know that we need to act, decisively and quickly, before it is too late. Reductions of emissions need to be substantial, even by 2020, in order to be able to create a fossil free economy by 2050. There might (hopefully) be some mistakes in the current

predictions, but the survival of human kind is clearly at stake here, and we need to act now.¹⁷

Second, the question is also not so much a matter of how we technically need to change our production or life-style (see e.g. Diesendorf 2007). We know a lot already, enough to forcefully implement what we do know how to. We need of course to know more, but this is not the real problem.

This leads me to thesis 8 claiming that the essential question is actually not about climate change or technical solutions to it, but instead about how to change our political economy. That demands creative development of alternative economic systems, but more importantly it is a question of power and resistance; i.e. how do we deal with the strong power relations that make such a degree of destructive activity possible that we end up in a situation where our very existence in the ecological system is threatened? This means we need to find out how we force the fossil lobby and its institutional interests to resign.

How do we create climate justice in an unjust world?

How do we then create climate justice in an unjust world? That is a question that natural science or technical/physical science is not going to be able to answer. That is a question that demands engagement from social scientists in a similar collaborative and global engagement as that which made the Climate Change Panel possible. We need a new panel that takes climate justice serious, a Social Science Panel on Climate Change (SSPCC), aka the Panel on “Social Change, Not Climate Change”. That is, a global cooperation between scholars from political science, sociology, anthropology, human geography, ethnology, international political economy, gender studies, development studies, philosophy, peace studies, etc. Different however to the governmental Climate Change Panel, this needs to be a panel that works with and in close cooperation with movement intellectuals, leaders and organizers, who from their own experience and knowledge of daily struggles, can make the panel realistic and action oriented. The participation of social scientists is not guided by professional academic credentials or international status primarily, actual skills and knowledge on social change strategy is what matters.

This panel needs to gather those scholars and activists that are concerned and experienced enough, those that are prepared to develop a political-economic model of how to organize our societies differently in order to avoid more self-destructive economic activity, and a political strategy of how we make such a different world possible, despite the political and corporate interests that will try to stop real solutions from happening.

The political-economic model needs to secure sustainable societies and climate justice, i.e. principles and institutions that make sure all the difficult issues of who has the right to do what are resolved according to principles of ecology and

¹⁷ Some reports even suggest the IPCC's Assessment Report 2007 underestimate the speed of climate change ...

justice. The political model will give us goals, showing what we need to achieve. Here it is not enough to abolish capitalism, or the form of contemporary industrial capitalism we know of. Earlier alternative systems, like e.g. the “real socialist” countries in the Eastern Bloc, as East Germany for example, were even worse emitters of greenhouse gases than the capitalist ones (Tanuro 2009, p. 240-241). Thus, we need alternative political models of future societies that are ecologically sustainable.

The political strategy needs to give us a plan of how we resist all the forces that do not want the model realized. The cynical profit-makers of oil, coal and gas, air-traffic, automobile industry, transport, meat industry and so on, the corporations that profit from the non-renewable resource markets, the governments that facilitate or allow the unregulated market to destroy our life on Earth, the culture industry that entertain us and lure us into even more climate destructive consumption, the priests of the neoliberal think-thanks that propagate the fundamentalist market ideology, and all the other ones that thrive on short-sighted environmental destruction.

Thus, my thesis 9 is that we need urgently two new reports, this time from a climate justice panel (The Social Science Panel on Climate Change); one report on the alternative political-economic model, and one on the political strategy. Together they can tell us how we effectively can resist the anti-human and anti-ecological tendencies of world capitalism and nation-states.

Some issues for the SSPCC to focus on

The need for a Social Science Panel on Climate Change (SSPCC) might seem evident, while the issues and tasks on its table are less clear, and might even seem impossible. The challenge is to find ways of how to respond quickly, yet importantly in a way that builds the foundation for a really sustainable future world society. We need to use existing political structures, because there is no time or momentum for revolution. How then can we respond quickly, using existing political economic structures, without strengthening those structures and their power over us in future? It is tempting to win short-time gains by extensive compromise with self-centered national interests and corporate profit-making, focusing on the big cats, in order to get things moving. But the obvious danger is to create solutions that makes things even worse in the long-run.

We have the politicians we have, it is not realistic to imagine a fundamentally replacement in core countries within the next decades. We have the international system we have, with 200 states, of which about half is dictatorships and about 20 totally dominate our world economy. We have the economy system we have; a WTO-protected global neoliberal market economy in which the big TNCs outnumber states among the 100 strongest economies. Any realistic social science based strategy that takes the urgency of climate change serious needs to take the existing power relations into account.

The challenge is to find strategies that are able to combine (1) the need for acute measures to deal with the threat of immediate environmental catastrophes, with (2) the need to forge effective alliances and compromises that within a medium time are strong enough to make a real difference on a global scale (e.g. market rules, global taxes and funds, etc.), with (3) strengthening the basis for a long-term transformation of our societies towards greater resource democracy, sustainability, justice and a different political economy and relation to nature. Task 1 is a matter of acting in solidarity with those climate change victims that are already suffering. According to the IPCC we have until 2020 for task 2: radical reductions of emissions. In order to make the goal of 2050 possible, a fossil free world society, I would assume we need to achieve task 3 within the next 30-40 years ... How that is made possible is not easy to say. But in general it is a matter of using measures, opinions and crises consciousness from 1 to make 2, and most importantly 3, possible. These are the real problems we need to deal with.

Besides looking on fundamental issues like the meaning of “sustainability”, “climate justice”, “climate debt”, and critically examining existing vested interests in the fossil economy of today, various proposed climate solutions, alternative political economies and possible strategies of social change, such a social science panel need to engage with a number of challenging questions. What social forces, institutions, movements and groups exist that have an interest or commitment for a sustainable world free from fossil dependency? What corporate sectors and actors, state departments or global regimes are possible to work and create alliances with? How much influence do they have? What counter-strategies can we expect from various fossil interests? What “non-reformist reforms” are we able to identify that helps us to modify the existing non-sustainable fossil based industrialism and consumer capitalist economy, in such a way that is strengthens the position and possibilities of movement forces that struggle for a social transformation (Bond 2008)?

What specific strategies and movement repertoires are needed in order to achieve this? Obviously a combination of different methods are needed (lobbying, demonstrations, direct action, civil disobedience, boycotts, creation of alternatives, etc.), but which specific combinations and where? How can they be implemented? What is possible to do now, in the middle-range, or in the long-run? How do environmental movements move beyond its typical symbolic politics and compromise negotiations, and stimulate real sustainable change (possibly through “simulation politics”, Blühdorn 2007)?

There are clearly more issues and questions that a Social Science Panel on Climate Change need to deal with, but the ones mentioned will be enough to make it clear that the social change needed to deal with climate change is so complicated that such a panel is necessary. Climate change is never going to be dealt with in a proper way if we somehow do not do the work such a panel could do. If such a panel is not created, the work still has to be done by some.

Natural scientists simply provide “unbiased” research results and leave it to decision makers to act upon the results. Such a cop-out is not possible for social scientists. Social scientists need to find solutions to the political problem that decision makers in fact do not act appropriate. Therefore, social scientists have to be even more committed than the scholars of physical science that make up the Climate Change Panel. How that is going to be possible is unclear. However, there is no other option than collecting those scientists and movement intellectuals that are already committed and try to expand that group and its collaborative work.

My thesis 10 is thus that a joint venture is needed where a significant number of social scientists become an active and integrated part of the climate justice movement, and that presupposes these scientists to dare to break with the absurd fossil idea of “disinterested” science, that inherited stupid dogma from the early, arrogant and naive modern times of the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution (Kenrick and Vinthagen 2008).

Ironically this seems easier for some of the most respected members of science, medicine. In medicine it is a self-evident approach to strive towards human health and healing. The humanist bias is clearly stated. Those studying politics and society seem more afraid to take their research results serious. What we need is to acknowledge our fundamental interest in human survival, the protection of our ecological system, the complicity in climate injustice many of us have been part of for too long. We need a global mobilization of social scientists that dare to take a stand against the climate injustice done against the poor and repressed in the world.

We need the SSPCC now!

This work is urgent, very urgent indeed. We only have some years to make drastic changes to our societies. We risk that even more climate summits are not going to produce the climate deal we need. The politicians have failed for too long. Again, like they did in Bali 2007, in Copenhagen 2009, and subsequently in Cancun 2010 and Durban 2011, they will postpone a real deal. We will have to force them to take responsibility during coming summits. And in order to do that, it is even more urgent to develop a strategy and a uniting framework for real sustainability.

It might be argued that the financial crisis of 2008 undermined the neoliberal hegemony, and that the current climate crisis might eventually undermine capitalist hegemony. A crack might already have been opened, a possibility of change created. The only force strong enough to use that possibility is a really mass-based global climate justice movement. But in order to make such a mobilization possible we need a well founded strategy, proposed by experienced researchers and writers.

Social scientists and movement intellectuals of the world, unite!

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