

On Climate Change and Social Change

By Doyle Canning

Recently I have been having a lot of discussions with friends and colleagues about the state of environmental activism in America, and the prospects for synergizing an ecology movement that can actually address the ecological crisis, and reclaim a future for freedom and life on Earth. The call for an 'Eco Bloc' at the November protests of the Summit of the Americas in Miami is a key part of this conversation. The Eco Bloc made its first appearance at the World Bank protests in Washington in 2002, and its objective is to integrate ecological activism under the banner of "global ecology, global democracy now!"

This project has never seemed more necessary. As I write, the Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, the Arctic's largest and a feature for 3,000 years, has completely cracked and broken off from Ellesmere Island in Canada. Meanwhile, the giant Antarctic iceberg "C-19," which is about twice the size of Rhode Island and broke from the Ross Ice Shelf in May 2002, was recently blamed for a dramatic drop in the population of phytoplankton. Apparently the rest of the Ross Ice Shelf has already begun to cave and shows evidence of severe fracturing.

Our planet is literally falling apart at the seams.

Russia Reverses on Kyoto:

These recent revelations about bi-polar iceberg drift were buried in the science sections of news wire websites, and were not to be found in the business section, where dispatches from the UN World Climate Change Conference in Moscow announced Vladimir Putin's u-turn on Russia's endorsement of the Kyoto Protocol.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol calls for countries to reduce their level of greenhouse-gas emissions to 5.2 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Even the most conservative environmental advocates of Kyoto admit that this is only a baby step towards addressing the crisis of global climate change. After Bush backed out of the treaty, citing sketchy science and the 'unfairness' of placing responsibility for emissions reduction on the developed world, Russia became the "swing state" on Kyoto. Putin's recent anti-Kyoto announcements, and mocking commentary that the melting permafrost in Siberia will benefit Russian agriculture, seem to indicate a setback in the Protocol process.

Carbon Credits and the Globalization of Trade in Pollution:

While environmentalists in Moscow urged Russia to ratify "as urgently as possible," the business press also rallied for Kyoto. Carbon credit trading, the proposal that countries with lower emissions can sell off volumes of their below quota status to countries with emissions above quota, is welcomed by industry as the answer to climate change.

Corporate interests pleaded that Putin was overlooking the gift of Kyoto for Russia. As Ecolinks Newswire reported in 'Polluters Rally to Ratify Kyoto,' "Russian businesses could attract an estimated \$1.2 billion a year in joint investment as well as sell as much as \$800 million in credits within the first three or four months of the Accord's implementation."

In fact, the World Climate Change Conference in Moscow was held simultaneously with a summit of the World Economic Forum. The pro-Kyoto International Emissions Trading Association, boasting members like BP, Shell and Dupont, was there advocating for "harmonized international emission trading rules" -a sort of World Trade Organization (WTO) regime for carbon credit trading. According to some accounts it is seemed as if Big Oil and 'Big Green' NGOs were rooting for the Kyoto Protocol in solidarity to "save the planet."

Getting Beyond Greenwash and Corporate Environmentalism:

This disenchanting turn of affairs in climate activism isn't all that surprising, given the state of "environmentalism" in the West. The voices on Kyoto in Moscow were not those of the grassroots Critical Mass bike riders advocating livable "car free cities," or direct actors who occupy oil refineries and the like to call attention to the corporate culprits in the climate debacle.

The climate change discourse is now largely dominated by waxing on the intricacies of Kyoto, personal carbon reduction pledges, and schemes like corporate carbon credit trading, and so-called carbon offset forestry. WWF USA, who released a press statement urging Russia to ratify, partner with folks like Chevron, Mobil, Citigroup and Phillip Morris. Conservation International has even teamed up with Shell, biotech giant Aventis, and UTC/Sikorsky (makers of the Blackhawk helicopter and corporate target of the National Mobilization on Colombia), to form the coalition "Responding to Climate Change."

The 21st century logic of capital is so pervasive that, despite its 'self realization' that it is killing the planet with the greenhouse effect, it perseveres in its growth imperative and gobbles up ecological common sense. Advanced capitalism enables corporations to swallow the ecological crisis and regurgitate it as a PR opportunity, and as a another source of profits at the expense of communities and the Earth:

suggesting the corporate trading of 'carbon credits' to profit from climate change; water privatization as water preservation; and genetic engineering as compensation for the failures of chemical intensive farming and deforestation.

These thinly veiled exploits and crocodile tears from Shell, Citi, Monsanto et. al. will not save the Planet. We are in the midst of an ecological crisis. Climate change is perhaps the most systemic symptom of a systemic problem: a "grow or die" economy that cannot continue to grow indefinitely on a finite planet.

The reality of C 19 the iceberg and the fracture of the Ward Hunt ice shelf is that global warming is happening, and something serious has to be done. Attempting to preserve certain areas of rainforest etc., when climate change may wipe them out, is a flawed strategy for addressing this crisis. And working with the likes of Exxon-Mobil on Kyoto isn't exactly a holistic vision for advancing ecological justice.

In the age of global climate change and advanced capitalism, traditional campaigns for conservation, and lobbying at the UN for Kyoto, are frankly outdated and ineffective strategies. Any vision or strategy for a movement to stop the War or stop the WTO has to consider the ecological implications of climate change, and vice versa. Protest movements must move towards becoming social movements, and incorporate a long-term vision of an ecological and free society.

Direct Action Against the Empire:

The September actions at Chevron-Texaco in the Bay Area by the rowdy cohort of affinity groups known as Direct Action to Stop the War () is an example of the integrative and visionary action that is clearly necessary at this juncture. In solidarity with the farmers and others in Cancun, Mexico at the demonstrations against the WTO, Bay Area activists called for nonviolent direct action the Richmond, California Chevron-Texaco refinery, an important symbol of the Empire and the War on the Earth.

Activists cited the recent shipments of Iraqi oil to the facility; the Bush Administrations' ties to Chevron; the company's pollution of rivers in the Amazon, and involvement in the murder of activists in Nigeria; the war on Iraq for oil and domination; global climate change driven by fossil fuel emissions; the WTO and corporate power; and the local struggle to demand the Chevron-Texaco refinery clean up its act, as it is a major polluter in a working class area.

This nonviolent direct action linked economic and environmental justice, the local and global, the war and the WTO. This action is an

illustration of DASW's commitment to "uproot the system behind war," a commitment that led them to shut down San Francisco when shock and awe hit Baghdad; to team up with the Longshoreman and rail against police brutality in Oakland as part of their anti-war agenda; and to march in Sacramento against biotech agribusiness and the WTO at the June 2003 Mobilization for Food Sovereignty, Democracy, and Justice.

The Eco Bloc and Mobilizing an Ecology Movement to Reclaim the Future:

Addressing the World Economic Forum, held along side the World Climate Change Conference, Putin correctly proclaimed: "Even 100 percent compliance [on Kyoto] won't reverse climate change."

Unfortunately he is right. And I don't know scientifically exactly what it will take to reverse climate change; I am not a climatologist, or even an NGO climate campaigner. But I do know that "uprooting the system behind war" is also uprooting the system behind the eminent ecological collapse.

The 'Eco Bloc' hit the streets a year ago at the September 2002 protests of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC. Led by Bolivian water-war veteran Oscar Olivera and other leaders from the Global South, the march from the Washington Monument to the World Bank was flanked by the 'living river,' the biotech noise brigade, and a giant red wood stump brought all the way from California. The Eco Bloc welcomed global justice activists into the sea of green flags to call attention to ways that structural adjustment and corporate globalization are advancing the war on indigenous peoples, communities, and the Earth, and show the world that the resistance to the IMF and World Bank is part of a global ecological justice movement.

The call to act for the Earth and the future in the streets of Miami as an Eco Bloc at the upcoming protests of the Summit of the Americas is the natural continuation of this project. The Miami protests in November will call attention to the proposed expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) via the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). NAFTA has resulted in the loss of millions of jobs, as well as toxic dumps, habitat destruction, and contamination of Mexican indigenous corn varieties by genetically engineered organisms.

The Eco Bloc will mobilize to call attention to the ways the FTAA will accelerate ecological disaster and erode environmental protection throughout the Western hemisphere, and amplify the voices of peace activists, trade unionists, students, food sovereignty movements and others who will be marching to stop FTAA. But Eco Bloc Miami, with the tagline "We Are Stronger Than Greed or Fear," is understood as part of a larger project of building an ecology movement in America capable of

interrupting the train wreck economy. It is a step towards further opening the space for integrative ecological activism to confront corporate rule and endless war, and to build an ecological future, in 2004 and beyond.

Eco Bloc will continue from Miami with the "Beyond Voting Track" alongside election year madness. Eco Bloc will emerge in New Hampshire in January 2004 at the Peoples' Primary-as a parallel project to the presidential primary race that will contrast ecological sanity and direct democracy with the endless war on Iraq, on workers, and on the Earth. Eco Bloc will march in April to decry the greed and injustice of the World Bank and IMF on their 60th anniversary. Eco Bloc will confront the Biotech industry in San Francisco in June at Biodevastation/Biojustice 2004. Eco Bloc will continue to mobilize for peace, ecology and democracy at the Democratic (Boston) and Republican (New York) National Conventions. And Eco Bloc will continue at an anti-war demonstration, civil liberties rally, or picket line near you!

Building an ecology movement is moving beyond single-issue environmentalism and into a genuine social movement for systemic change. As the icebergs are showing us, another world is not only possible; it is clearly necessary. Building an ecology movement is embedding the necessity of a systemic response to the systemic breakdown of the planet, in the necessity of synergizing the global movements for peace, global justice, freedom, and direct democracy. It is the project of building a social movement that can simultaneously confront institutions like the WTO and racist war, and cultivate peoples' food sovereignty and direct democracy at the grassroots level. This is the project of the 21st century ecology movement, and this is the strategy that can ultimately win the struggle to control our lives, and to save the planet.

For more info on the eco bloc see <http://www.stopftaa.org> or email eco-bloc@riseup.net

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