

**THE COMMUNISTS**  
**AND**  
**THE CLIMATE**

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## **Preface**

The natural world and its resources are utilized today in such an inappropriate way that a radical transition is needed - and this must take place within a few decades. If this transition does not take place, the road is open for a drastic collapse in ecosystems and worsening conditions for people.

The cause of the crisis is well known. Our society's framework is based on an enormous consumption of energy in the form of fossil fuels, which pollute the atmosphere with the greenhouse gas CO<sub>2</sub>. It has been known for decades that this emission of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases directly lead to climate changes. Today, the effects are manifesting themselves.

At the same time, we must realize that our way of production does not have the ability to correct itself. On the contrary, the lack of balance between human ecology and the rest of nature keeps increasing, and nothing within the system gives any confidence that the problem will be solved.

The communists present here our analysis of the climate crisis and argue that a solution is not possible within the framework of the capitalist system.

# **TRANSITION IS NECESSARY**

## **Increasing temperatures**

We shall not present details about the changes which the emission of greenhouse gases evokes. It suffices to observe that the global temperature today (2019) has increased by 1.0 degree relative to the level before the industrial revolution. If this trend continues, the temperature increase by the turn of the century will most certainly be more than three degrees.

This scenario even presumes that the sponsoring countries keep the promises they gave concerning CO<sub>2</sub> reduction in connection with the Paris agreement - the agreement which a great majority of UN member countries made in 2015. If the Paris goals are not met, the increase in temperature may reach four to six degrees.

Even though the Paris agreement stipulates a goal of preventing an increase in temperature greater than two degrees, and preferably not greater than 1.5 degrees, the concrete promises which the countries have given regarding the reduction of emission of greenhouse gases, only will limit the increase to about three degrees.

## **The social geography of the climate crisis**

The extent and consequences of climate change on human populations depend a great deal on geography. The pattern of precipitation is changing, affecting the water resources in many countries. Generally, these changes bring more negative than positive effects on the yield of crops. Extreme weather situations have become more frequent, resulting in many casualties.

Hardest hit are the people in the poor countries of the global south. Even more people will experience water shortage, hunger and desperation. Many will be forced to leave the area where their kind have lived for generations. The World Bank estimates that the number of climate refugees will increase from 10-40 million per year

to 140 million per year by 2050. An increasing number will knock on the doors of the privileged part of the world.

Thus, the crisis will amplify the great inequality between North and South.

### **The official strategy for transition**

The situation cries out for a radical transition in the way production and consumption take place today. The official solution is “green growth”, a strategy promoted 2009 by OECD, the western world's liberal organization for economy.

The core of the strategy is that economic growth and greenhouse gas emission must be detached from each other. Growth is necessary, it is claimed, in order to secure financing of the transition. Multinational and national enterprises will wisely make their technological products “greener”, so that they do not strain nature. The production of energy will be based on wind power and solar energy. The state must promote research and technological development of the enterprises. It must influence the behavior of business and consumers through information, quotas and taxes.

We still are waiting to see whether that strategy works. In any case, the emission of CO<sub>2</sub> keeps increasing.

“Green growth” is completely aligned with the dominant economic paradigms and ideology. The strategy challenges in no way the private ownership of capital and means of production.

### **Individualization as a deceptive maneuver**

As a deceptive **maneuver**, it attempts to make the citizens - the consumers - personally responsible: “live climate-friendly, eat less beef, drop long air voyages”. We are served moving tales about enterprises who have made products greener. The daily newspaper *Politiken* has developed an app to enable one to calculate one's own

climate footprint. It follows a climate-aware family and reports on its efforts.

Of course, scattered and uncoordinated initiatives do help. But the climate struggle must not just deal with solar panels on the roof and reduction of the use of plastic bags.

For, in the wake of good ideas and messages, the obvious social character of the problems is pushed into the background. The focus is taken away from the system's lack of ability for effective action - something which many politicians consider very convenient. They neither can nor want to engage in, say, forcing the 25 multinational companies who are responsible for half of the world's CO<sub>2</sub> emission to bring it down to zero.

With a socialist rule, one would, as one of the first efforts, nationalize the big monopolies, and embark on the task.

### **Popular actions extend**

In global populations, the dream of a good future for oneself and one's descendants is fading, without real effective action by those who possess the power to do so.

The reactions vary. Some experience impotence and pessimism. But fortunately, an increasing part of the population will not tolerate the passivity of powerholders. They show their anger and frustration and participate in demonstrations, write blogs etc. The Friday strikes of the teenager Greta Thunberg have shaped the mass activism of the young on an international scale: Action now!

Politicians can no longer dodge the issue by talking about "climate idiots", so now they fill the air with promises about what will be achieved in 2030 or 2050 - rather than making an effective concrete effort here and now.

## **Inequality and the arms race worsen the climate crisis**

What further aggravates the critical situation is that the climate crisis is not the only problem bothering mankind. It is tightly interwoven with at least two further crises:

First, an inequality with an abyss of material differences between people, both within the individual countries, and between countries, forcing half of the population of the Earth to live under miserable conditions. And secondly, an apparently eternal tension with associated arms race, swallowing enormous resources. These tensions can lead to war with devastation that make even the climate crisis fade.

Even though many of those who are concerned with the global crises often direct their criticism against aspects of the capitalist system, there is an invisible circle that is not crossed. It is not mentioned that there could be an alternative to capitalism. The communists do not respect this taboo and have never done so.

## **CAPITAL IN CRISIS**

### **The source of the climate crisis**

To understand the background and development of the crises, one must initially consider the way the capitalist system functions, and the related class division of society.

During the last couple of centuries, the owners of capital have acquired decisive economic - and hence political - power in more and more countries, often under a democratic facade. By means of the state apparatus, the capitalist class in the imperialist countries has secured its power, both in their own nations and in the poor (but resource-rich) global south. Enormous productive forces have been put in motion rooted in the desire of individual capital for



accumulation of value.

Parallel with this development, a global army of workers has been created. They get wages, high or low, but they don't get a share of the accumulated values.

Enormous amounts of commodities and infrastructure for extraction and transportation are produced at increasing pace. The resources for this production are consumed without respect to whether their source, nature, can be sustained. In the same way, enormous amounts of waste are dumped. The bill must be paid by present and especially by future generations, in the form of climate change, diminished biodiversity, and widespread pollution.

### **Marx's criticism of capitalism**

The criticism of capitalist society and its relation to nature is far from new. Thus, Karl Marx pointed out that capitalist-led production will lead to what he calls a break in the natural metabolism between man and nature. Such a break will impede the natural circulation and will therefore in the long run damage both man and nature. For instance, Marx stressed that the production of grain for the market (without the use of artificial fertilizers) gradually will deprive the soil for its natural nutrients, and thus its fertility.

With Marx, the alternative to capitalism, namely socialism, was clarified. The thoughts of Marx about the relation between man and nature were neglected for many years, but they are, like the analysis of capitalism, revived and further developed by contemporary Marxists, like the American John Bellamy Foster.

In connection with the climate crisis, the criticism of the capitalist system has experienced a boom. But many critics see the solution in terms of some reform, one way or the other, of the system. That is not a viable road.

## **No capitalism without growth**

Capitalism is an anarchist system of capitals, each of which is looking for the most profitable productions and methods of production. The profits form the basis for new investments, without which the capital will wither. Growth is therefore a vital condition.

Capitalism is fantastic at creating economic growth, when there are sufficient resources to consume and sufficient room to use. But solving social problems is not among its prime capacities.

One cannot reform away the basic features of capitalism. If there is capitalism, the problems will increase and increase, until they choke us: degrading our natural environments and generating inequality, the arms race and international tension, which will block the way for global solutions.

The old social democratic concept, that the democratically elected government will take firm control and use capital to pull the carriage of society, has proved to be an illusion. The capitulation of the social democratic parties and their transformation into neoliberal center parties is the most obvious refutation of such ideas.

A transformation to sustainable production requires the opposite of growth: limited use of non-renewable resources, and greater planning and coordination. It requires optimization, not of profit, but of the well-being of people. These are requirements that only can be met by a socialist system.

## **The climate crisis and the unequal world**

In the present late-imperialist phase of capitalism, capital has enforced the right to free movement across borders. If a government seriously attempts to restrain capital (challenging the right of property and right of management), it will, in natural self-defense, seek greener pastures in some other country, with devastating effects for the first country.

The capitalist law of the jungle implies that the strong ones appropriate at will. This creates inequality, both inside countries and between them.

Therefore, we have on the one side a busload of multibillionaires, who own a great chunk of the values of the globe, and on the other side textile workers in Bangladesh, who, in spite of a 60-hour working week, can hardly earn starvation wages.

The working class in the imperialist countries is better off but is pressed by the outsourcing of jobs and by import of a low-wage foreign workforce.

Inequality creates human misery, and it is a source of conflicts both between and inside societies. This is widely recognized in more humanistic contexts like the UN. “Reduced inequalities” is, just as “climate action” among the 17 UN sustainable development goals. The UN also emphasizes the necessity for a coordinated approach in tackling the problems.

### **Democracy is usurped**

While groups of people in the South are forced to flee because of imperialist wars and the pressure of climate change on their living conditions, leaders in the North build Fort EU and Fort USA to keep them out. Walls and barbed wire fences are erected against these refugees. Large amounts of money are paid to have them hidden away in remote camps under inhuman conditions. The surveillance of citizens intensifies, in collaboration with the Big Tech monopolies.

Unbridled climate change means not only more extreme weather, drought and forest fires, but also aggravates the risk of societies developing in a fascist direction.

## **The climate crisis in the shadow of the danger of war**

The competition between the monopolies over resources and markets creates life-and-death contradictions between countries and blocks of countries. This leads to smoldering and exploding security crises. Armaments consume enormous resources which could have been used for the benefit of the climate, and it transforms mass destruction from a possibility to a real threat.

In such an international atmosphere, the chances for making trustworthy binding agreements for reducing climate gases are greatly reduced. The tensions will be released through interference in, and triggering of, previously minor wars with horrible effects for the countries involved.

In addition, the military activities by themselves are very polluting and devastating for the environment. For instance, the emission of greenhouse gases by the American military during the so-called war against terror from 2001 to 2017 was one and a half times as big as Denmark's total emissions in the same period. Thus, it would be far more beneficial for the climate if the US cooled down the its appetite for war than if all Danes abandoned eating beef and flying to tourist destinations in the south.

To sum up: a successful struggle against climate change is only possible, if it is combined with a fight against inequality and against war, and if it has socialism as its goal. We are facing a network of crises, all of which have their origin in the malfunctioning of capitalism. To segregate the climate crisis and attempt to solve it "in isolation", without challenging capitalism, will not lead to the goal.

## **"Green growth" is bogus**

"Green growth" is nothing but capital's usual growth strategy dressed up in green. Of course, capital does not have objections to the production of more sustainable products, like windmills and low-energy light bulbs, provided there still is money to be earned.

Industry also willingly accepts state support for the development and marketing of green technology.

With “green growth”, production will no doubt become greener at a certain rate. But the process is uncoordinated and will require great sums of tax money. This is difficult, because industry keeps demanding tax reduction, and the working class of course will not support the environment at the cost of welfare.

### **The left-wing parties and the environmental movement**

“Green growth” is not only a climate strategy for the bourgeois parties, but also for the social democratic working-class and left-wing parties.

For instance, in our country, the “Enhedslisten” has a climate plan. Naturally enough, it is meant for the existing capitalist Denmark, but does not challenge capitalism. It stays inside the tools of “green growth” strategy, at the same time as the party denies the growth imperative.

The growth imperative is being met with increasing skepticism in the environmental movement. It is worth noting that the umbrella organization for the European climate- and environmental movements (the European Environmental Bureau or EEB) released a critique in 2019. Their conclusion is that “Green growth” is an attempt to brake at the same time as pressing the speeder. Thus, the EEB rejects growth, the vital condition for capital, but without rejecting capitalism. When the environmental movements rally around this conclusion, the struggle will enter a new phase.

### **The climate crisis and the labour movement**

The international labour movement is divided between a reformist and a revolutionary line. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is, with its approx. 200 million members, the global

superstructure of the social democratic labour movement. The main demand in relation to the climate crisis is “fair transition”.

“Fair transition” refers to a humble demand that the transition to a sustainable society must not mean that the workers in “black” industry and extraction fields be fired, but that they be re-educated for the new “green” jobs. The fact that society is capitalist is not contested.

FH, the joint labour organization in Denmark, is a member of ITUC, and shares these viewpoints. FH has not formulated a climate policy as such, but the chairman, Lizette Risgaard warned that class struggle should not enter the climate question (*Politiken*, June 25, 2019).

Confronting the ITUC positions on the global scene is the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) - a red, class conscious organization with almost 100 million members, mainly in the countries of the South. The conclusion of the WFTU is that the climate crisis only can be dealt with through a showdown with capitalism and imperialism, and by a transition to socialism.

## **THE WORLD IN WHICH WE WANT TO LIVE**

### **Another society is necessary**

We demand a society which both can solve serious problems like the climate crisis and create equality and democracy. It must secure (re-establish and maintain) a diversified nature. And it must give future generations the possibility for a good life.

Neither a democratically elected parliament, subject to the whims of capitalism, or the “nice” capitalists, like Soros and Gates, can provide us with this sustainability. Rather, this can only be expected from a society whose exercise of power is based on the people itself, an

active working class in alliance with popular movements for a better life: the environmental movement, the peace movement, solidarity movements, the housing movement.

For many, the idea of such a society is sheer utopia. The thought of the possible chaos and uncertainty of the upheaval appears to be an unsurmountable hindrance. The experiences with realized socialism are disputable. Therefore, many maintain, against all odds, the hope of a “smart” capitalism, which will save us from catastrophe.

### **Economy governed by the people, and ecological balance**

The alternative is that we fight for a different form of society, whose dominating characteristic are socialism, people-governed economy and ecological balance.

Through a democratic and planned use of the material and human resources of society, one secures that all basic needs are fulfilled for all members of society. The society of competition becomes a society of solidarity.

History has taught us that a modern society is capable of functioning without capitalism. Despite errors, non-capitalist countries like the Soviet Union have experienced material and cultural progress, and have over decades provided food, education and health for its inhabitants.

Through the engagement of the people, it is secured that democracy is achieved and developed.

### **Socialism - how?**

Modern anti-capitalists have developed various ideas about such a society. One direction argues for counter-growth, where the idea is that small socialist enclaves grow in the pores of the capitalist society and finally become dominant. In fact, such small societies do exist, and can function as models. Here, the community plans and leads the

production and distribution of the goods.

Capital will hardly allow such alternative societies to become widespread. One may also object that the enclaves isolate themselves from the general development in the capitalist society, and therefore also from the struggle against it.

Others, like for instance the eco-socialists, imagine a transition to socialism, based on mass insurrection and with total democracy in all phases. The opinion of the communists is that one hereby anticipates communism (in the sense of Marx). Everything indicates that the new society first must pass through a, presumably protracted, socialist phase.

## **STRUGGLING FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD**

### **An organized insurrection**

A radical insurrection, as is required in the present situation, needs a mass basis. This basis is made up of the working class - which is most of the population, and which in the Global South has increased substantially - together with peasants and indigenous peoples. If these forces are united with the environmental movements, they make up a potentially invincible force, facing the heavily armed, enormous, but increasingly groggy monster of capitalism. At a suitable stage of the deterioration of the monster, the insurrection may even succeed without too violent a battle.

The working class must have the key role in the insurrection. In many countries, it is the most numerous class. As the executive force in production, it is also the one which can shut it down. It has organizational experience from the struggle for decent wages and working conditions. The lead must in the critical phase be central and in the hands of experienced forces. Demonstrations or actions are



elements in this struggle. Demands must be raised which are concrete and carefully balanced between the forces participating. Through this common action, such solidarity as well as a democratic spirit will be developed which will be fundamental in the new society.

But the working-class today is divided. Many workers do not consider themselves as workers, which results in them joining the social democratic and even bourgeois or populist parties. However, it is important to keep in mind that those who work for a wage, irrespective of consciousness, are not members of the capitalist class, and cannot have a genuine and stable loyalty towards this class. The conclusion must be, that the alliance for insurrection must take its starting point in the class-conscious part of the working class and its organizations.

### **International solidarity is necessary**

It is not too realistic that Denmark in isolation should be able to successfully fight for and maintain a socialist society. The movements toward insurrection must be coordinated globally, or at least in larger blocks of countries. The working class in the South is an immense force by virtue of its size and proletarian status. To create international North-South solidarity is a fundamental necessity.

On the domestic front, we are fighting to secure that the Danish burden on global climate change is as small as possible, while at the same time, we continue to develop our welfare and reduce inequality.

We are fighting for Denmark to conduct a policy of international understanding and disarmament.

Regarding development policy, we are fighting for Denmark to provide an increased contribution to support the development of the South countries on their own terms.

As part of the struggle to prevent poverty, starvation and emigration, we are supporting the people in the South in their efforts to protect themselves against mounting climate change.

We strengthen the solidarity with the working class in the South by supporting their struggles against international monopolies - for organization, better working conditions and against destruction of the environment.

**We know that the confrontation cannot be postponed to some point in the future**

In the present situation, it is urgent that climate- and environmental movements develop a clear perspective regarding capitalism. It is important that there be contact between these movements and the class-conscious part of the working class and its organizations.

Environmental activists, who achieve a Marxist view on society, must also in this process take a stand on whether they will organize themselves in a communist party. If they do, the possibilities are increased that the communists can be a force able to organize the necessary alliance of the popular movements, as has previously been seen in history.

### FURTHER READING

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