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Climate change

Some comments on the draft ecosocialist “Belem Declaration”

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Dear friends and comrades,

The “Belem Declaration” is an important document issued at a very important moment.

As an ecosocialist focused on climate change, I totally agree with the general orientation of this document: denunciation of capitalist growth, productivism, and capitalist strategies to cope with global warming. Among other points, the link with the indigenous peoples, their culture and their struggles is especially important, in my view.

But the declaration lacks some key aspects, on the one hand, while some precise statements are clumsy or wrong, on the other hand.

My main remark is that an ecosocialist declaration should absolutely link the climate crisis to the worst and deepest business crisis since 1929. This is a key condition if we want to get some influence among the workers and the poor in general.

We should explain that the combination of both crisis opens a totally new situation. Indeed, this combination means nothing less than a general exhaustion of the capitalist system: on the one hand, a new long wave of capitalist growth would ask a very brutal attack against the working class and the poor in general, on the other hand a real business recovery –even a green one- would provoke a catastrophic runaway climate change. In this context, there is simply no alternative, but an ecosocialist one.

(I have just written a document about this combination and some strategic conclusions to draw of it. You can find it – in French- on Europe Solidaire sans Frontières: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12340>.)

Because the globalisation of economic and climate crisis makes ecosocialism so urgent and necessary, the declaration should give much more importance to the social demands of workers. Rich economies have to reduce their energy consumption by 50% or more. Such a reduction can not be achieved only by better energy efficiency: a certain “de-growth” of material production and consumption will be necessary. This means the declaration should absolutely support and promote demands like a radical reduction of working time without wage losses, the nationalisation with expropriation of utilities, the retraining of workers without wage losses and under workers control, public services devoted to the insulation and energy improvement of buildings, a redistribution of wealth thanks to the taxation of the rich and the nationalisation of the bank system, etc.

By the way, I find following statements clumsy or even false (in some cases):

– “for the capital commands the means of production of knowledge (...), accordingly, its professors send forth an endless stream of proposals, all variations on the theme that the world’s ecological damage can be repaired without disruption of market mechanisms and of the system of accumulation that commands the world economy”. Would you say that to James Hansen, or Ignacio Chapela, or others scientists like these two? Surely, they are not ecosocialist

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activists, but neither are they “professors of the capital”! We should encourage honest scientists in their fight against capitalist lobbies, call them to take their political responsibilities, and start a dialogue with them. The text is really clumsy from that point of view.

– (in the Kyoto system) “polluters are not compelled to reduce their carbon emissions”. This is simply not true. Polluters are compelled to reduce their emissions, they will even be fined if they do not 100 (Euros/t in the ETS). Though, this is the reason why they managed to get an overallocation of quotas, free allocations and more carbon credits. This is one of the “positive” aspects of the Kyoto Protocol. Though, another “positive” aspect is that there are indeed some limits “to the amount of emission credits which can be issued by compliant governments” (and to the kind of activities giving right to credits, too). Even if the Protocol is bad, insufficient, dangerous, we should not underestimate some “positive” aspects of it, because there is a risk that the new treaty will be worse.

– “Since verification and evaluation of results are impossible, the Kyoto regime is not only incapable of controlling emissions...”. This is partly true for carbon credits (due to the loopholes in the CDM) and for carbon sinks (technically very difficult) but not for the CO₂ emissions in developed countries, which are very precisely measured, reported and verified.

– As even the Wall Street Journal put it in March, 2007, emissions trading “would make money for some very large corporations, but don’t believe for a minute that this charade would do much about global warming.” We should be careful with that kind of quotations coming from that kind of bourgeois newspaper. The Wall Street Journal, like many others in the US, is (was?) opposed to Kyoto for very bad reasons, indeed!

– “Bali avoided any mention of the goals for drastic carbon reduction put forth by the best climate science (90% by 2050)”. Sorry, this is untrue. Instead, the footnote in the Bali roadmap clearly refers to very precise and very important pages in the IPCC AR4. Page 776 of Working group 3 contribution, for instance: from the table at this page, one must conclude that developed countries must reduce their emissions by 80-95% by 2050 while developing countries must “deviate substantially from the business as usual scenario”. Ecosocialists should repeat and repeat that the drastic emission reductions “put forth by the best climate science” ARE mentioned in the Bali agreement, and that this agreement engages the governments. They should denounce the governments because they do not respect their Bali engagement. Actually, not to do that makes it easier for the bourgeois governments to kick “the best climate science” into the long grass. This, in my view, is a very important tactical point in the mobilisation. Not only towards the governments and the media, but also towards the environmental NGO, which also dodge some figures from the Bali roadmap (see my article – in English - on this very on <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article11808>). By the way, for the same tactical reason, the declaration should quote the Intergovernmental PCC on this point, instead of using a vague formula about “the best climate science”.

– “Ecosocialism involves a revolutionary social transformation, which will imply the limitation of growth”. Two remarks: (i) a negative growth (and note barely a limitation of growth) of the MATERIAL production and consumption (not a general one) is needed now, immediately, in the developed countries, and (ii) I suggest ecosocialists to make a difference between growth on the one hand and development on the other hand.

– The concrete demands relating to the energy system should give the absolute priority to energy efficiency and the reduction of energy consumption. This a “sine qua non” condition for the transition towards a system based on renewable sources. Giving this priority is also very important in the polemics against green capitalism, green win-win recovery, etc. By the way, all renewable energy sources, except geothermal, are solar sources. I do not know if it is still possible to change the document. I hope so, because the initiative is excellent and we all need something like that, indeed.

Comradely yours

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