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Zarah Sultana

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We cannot defeat climate change without defeating capitalism

Capitals want to divert the climate movement towards individual solutions. But paper straws and energy-saving light bulbs won't save the planet... To paraphrase an old saying, those who don't want to talk about capitalism should be silent about the ecological devastation.

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Zarah Sultana

We need a movement to end the system that is destroying it.

In its day, the main obstacle for environmental activists was climate change denialism. Secretly funded by the fossil fuel industry, the science was fiercely discredited. Misinformation was spread to hide a deadly truth.

Today, with a few notable exceptions, few deny the evidence of climate change. That argument has largely been resolved. Even oil giant Shell is forced to acknowledge the climate emergency, and recently implored us in a tweet to consider "What are you willing to change to help reduce emissions?"

But the refusal to properly understand climate change has not entirely disappeared. Instead, we face a different and more subtle form of climate denialism.

This perspective does not negate the science of the climate emergency: it denies politics. He pretends that it is enough to adjust the system here or modify it there to avoid disaster. It acts as if business as usual is feasible, focusing on banning plastic straws and encouraging eco-friendly bags. It suggests that the climate crisis is a personal consumption issue, as if a shift in consumer preferences could be enough to avert climate disaster.

Esta fantasía liberal va acompañada de otra noción engañosa: el llamado «Antropoceno». Un concepto cada vez más popular tanto entre los académicos como entre los activistas del clima, que sugiere que los seres humanos en general son responsables del aumento de las partes por millón de dióxido de carbono en la atmósfera de 280 en 1750 a 417 en mayo del año pasado.

Este enfoque de la crisis climática es similar a las escuelas de pensamiento del *establishment* que culpan de graves males sociales –como la pobreza o el analfabetismo– a la sociedad en su conjunto, en lugar de al sistema económico que los causa y a los pocos ricos que tienen poder para mejorarlos.



La tesis del Antropoceno tiene también un lado más oscuro. Si se puede culpar a los seres humanos colectivamente de los males del planeta, según la lógica, entonces una reducción de la población humana podría ser una solución. Esta idea, por supuesto, no es nueva: el economista británico Thomas Malthus expuso ideas similares en los siglos XVIII y XIX.

Poco después, la tesis maltusiana de la superpoblación fue criticada por Marx y Engels, que la calificaron de «difamación del género humano». Para los socialistas, Malthus había atribuido erróneamente a la humanidad en su conjunto la culpa de los problemas derivados de un determinado sistema social. Si las cosas se producían y distribuían en función de las necesidades humanas y no del crecimiento capitalista, y si la tecnología se orientaba hacia los mismos fines, no había razón para que los humanos no pudieran vivir en armonía con el planeta.

Las pruebas respaldan esta tesis. Un informe de 2017 del Carbon Disclosure Project mostró que 100 empresas han sido responsables del 71% de las emisiones mundiales desde 1988. En 2019, un estudio similar del Climate Accountability Institute descubrió que solo 20 empresas eran responsables del 35% de todo el dióxido de carbono y el metano relacionados con la energía en todo el mundo desde 1965.

Nuestro problema, en otras palabras, no es el Antropoceno. Nuestro problema es el capitalismo. El colapso ecológico al que nos enfrentamos hoy en día puede achacarse directamente a la acumulación de vastas franjas de recursos mundiales por parte de una pequeña élite, que impulsa el cambio climático con su codicia. El capitalismo es un sistema de poder altamente concentrado. Y ya sea como consumidores individuales (a través de sus jets privados y su lujoso consumo excesivo) o como capitalistas en la economía en general –impulsando nuevas extracciones de petróleo y gas y llevando la

producción a lugares más baratos pero más contaminantes–, la clase dominante tiene un impacto enormemente desproporcionado en nuestro clima.

In a class society, the desires of a small minority are prioritized over the survival of all, as capitalism recruits us for endless accumulation. Both capitalists and workers are disciplined under the rules of the market: we must sell or die. Capital, as Marx said, is a "self-valorizing value": wealth is forced to generate more wealth.

As we burn the ground beneath us and announce rising GDP figures on our finite planet, the current social order begins to resemble a cult of death. The particularity of capitalism is that it is both a system of class power and universal domination; These two impulses make it doubly toxic to the environment.

The thesis that capitalism as a system, and not the human being as a species, is responsible for our ecological crisis is increasingly popular. Swedish writer Andreas Malm, in his work *Fossil Capital*, explores the role that steam power played in the British Industrial Revolution in this dynamic, arguing that the logic of capital – and in particular its drive to subordinate labour – was crucial in the rise of climate-changing technologies.

Jason Moore, an environmental historian and sociologist at Binghamton University, goes further. He argues that it is not the Anthropocene that we are experiencing, but the Capitalocene, pointing out that most of the world's emissions come from production, something over which the masses of people have little or no control. In our economies, the means of production remain in private hands, in the hands of capitalists.



Throughout the world it is demanded to change capitalist system

Once we can name capitalism as the problem, the solutions become much clearer. If capitalism means class power and an endless pursuit of profit, socialism must mean

democratic power and production for necessity. Those two things should be our pillars in the fight against climate change.

A first step would be to attack the conspicuous and totally unnecessary consumption of the capitalist class. The main goal, as Moore suggests, must be to gain collective control over production itself, a way of ensuring that what is produced today is not simply the most profitable, but the best for society and the planet as a whole.

And let's think about the benefits this could have. Instead of spending our lives tied to our jobs, we could take democratic control and plan our resources and our labor. We could set climate targets and achieve them while ensuring that the standard of living of the majority of people increases, through the redistribution of wealth, the effective organization of production, and simply more leisure time.

And climate-friendly policies could also have much broader benefits. There are many houses that need to be insulated, and solar panels and wind turbines have to be built. We could train a new generation of workers to do green jobs that help repair the climate rather than pollute it more. States can do it, but only if they wrest wealth from capitalists and use it for common and useful, rather than private and lucrative, purposes.

This is the demand for a Green New Deal, whose radicalism is only growing as the climate disaster approaches. Their alternatives do not offer us a future: a green capitalism, favored by the liberal center, does not address the ecologically destructive tendencies at the heart of our system. Or worse, ecofascism: a growing ideology that aims to insulate a small Western minority from the consequences of climate disaster while forcing the world's poor masses to bear its costs.

This far-right environmental agenda highlights another aspect of our struggle. Capitalism is a global system. Any resistance to it must also cross borders. Failure to do so will fuel an increasingly exclusionary green policy, more concerned about garbage in our localities than flooding, which could displace one in seven people in Bangladesh by 2050.

Decisions made in a boardroom in London or New York can pollute Bangladesh's rivers or destroy rainforests in Brazil. A Green New Deal that powers electric cars with lithium batteries extracted in unsafe conditions in the Global South is not enough.

The coalitions we need to defeat fossil capitalism will win their power by bringing together flood victims, from England to Indonesia, and many others as well, in an ecosocialist movement that speaks on behalf of the global 99% and against polluting speculators, wherever they plunder the land.

These are the first principles of a green socialism. Much of the work is about filling in the details, but the climate movement must start by dispelling some illusions. To paraphrase an old saying, those who don't want to talk about capitalism should be silent about the ecological devastation.

Far from being the problem, it could be the solution: the idea of humanity collectively taking charge of our destiny, deliberately making history across borders in a common project to improve lives. Today, the demand for democratic planning, confronted with the anarchy of the market and the concentrated power of the capitalist class, is a demand for nothing less than survival.

Zarah Sultana

Edited by María Piedad Ossaba

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