

HOUSE ORGAN

All Aboard for Copenhagen!

Mark the month: December, 2009. And the place: Copenhagen, capital of liberal, sophisticated, happy Denmark. And the significance, which cannot be overestimated. For it is then and there that the UN will negotiate the successor to the Kyoto Protocols, to be installed in 2012. Given the ever-diminishing window between the uneasy present and the likely appearance of runaway climate change once positive feedback loops check in, it may well be that the outcome of the meetings in Copenhagen will seal the fate of civilization. It is not too often one gets to say something like that.

Capital is already preparing. Something called the “Copenhagen Climate Council” sprang into being in May 2007. It’s mission:

presenting positive, achievable and innovative solutions to climate change, as well as assess what will be required to make a new global treaty effective. The Council will seek to promote constructive dialogue between government and business, so that when the world’s political leaders and negotiators meet in Copenhagen in 2009, they will do so armed with the very best arguments for establishing a global treaty that can be supported by global business. What is needed to succeed is to involve global businesses in the greatest innovation project on climate ever.

Good old capital, ever upbeat and optimistic. In a statement which could have come from Al Gore, we learn that “tackling climate change also has the potential to create huge opportunities for innovation and economic growth.” Isn’t it nice to know that huge opportunities are in the offing?

Global civil society is also gearing up, looking ahead to this year’s December meetings in Poznan, Poland, as a prelude to Copenhagen in ‘09. The Global Climate Campaign (<http://www.globalclimatecampaign.org/>) can point to some 90 countries where people are organizing from below against the menace of climate change. This is a very good, indeed, necessary thing. It is heartening to see people coming together in so many places to express a new awareness. But the awareness scarcely begins to extend into the realization that capital accumulation is driving climate change, that capital controls the state, transtatal organizations like the UN, and the production of ideology, and that, therefore, the existing climate protocols, as well as those likely to be developed in Poznan and Copenhagen, are recipes for doom. It is not reassuring to see on the Global Climate Campaign website a banner montage which includes an image of an activist holding aloft a sign on which appears the words, “Make Kyoto Strong,” because the stronger accords like Kyoto are, the weaker will be our ecosphere, and the more threatened the firmament of life.

It was good, then, to attend the climate change conference held last February in Amsterdam under the sponsorship of the International Institute for Research and Education. This may well have been the first climate change conference whose ethos was ecosocialist and grounded in the principle that all economic and technological measures are to be subsumed into an anti-capitalist project: saying yes to renewable energy in the context of a global struggle for ecological justice, and beyond the cancerous logic of “growth.”

The IIRE is linked to the Fourth International, whose annual meeting followed the climate change conference and bore its imprint. In another first, an international Marxist-Leninist organization was able to incorporate a radically ecological perspective. Its concluding statement stressed that what is required is

a break with the logic of growth, with capitalist globalization and consumption (suppression of sectors of activity that are useless or harmful such as armaments and advertising, dismantling the industrial complex based on the use of fossil fuels, retraining of workers and a radical reduction of working time, partial relocation of agricultural production and consumption), the renewal of the public sector, collective ownership of energy resources, a very broad redistribution of wealth between countries and classes (cancellation of the debt of the South, heavy taxation of the profits of the energy sector and of inheritances...) as well as the involvement of the masses through democratic practices of control. . . . The energy/climate crisis makes even more necessary a major redefinition of the socialist project as a global ecosocialist project (incorporating both the satisfaction of real human needs, democratically decided, and the precautionary management of the biosphere). The formation of the international ecosocialist network represents an important step.

Forty radicals in an Amsterdam conference room do not a social transformation make. But a step in the right direction is needed at this time of gathering crisis. Now the massive work begins to prepare for Copenhagen, fortuitously set a decade after the great Seattle events that showed the way for a new kind of politics. I should think a million people in the streets of the city could do the job. We shall see.

What follows is an excursion into the ethos of ecosocialism. It has seemed to me for some time that the ecological crisis, with its threat to life itself, demands a more fundamental rethinking than that assayed within the framework of political economy, or even traditional Marxism. Some of this has appeared in *The Enemy of Nature*, but more is needed, or to be more exact, more and deeper reflection into the radically new, yet ancient, dilemma into which we have been plunged.

—Joel Kovel