

## *HOUSE ORGAN*

### **The EIN: Chapter Two What is to be Done?**

When the Ecosocialist International Network was founded on the Seventh of October, 2007 in the Parisian suburb of Montreuil, it was with a sigh of relief, a thrill of anticipation, and the recognition that there was a great big hole where the future is to be located: relief that so momentous a possibility had been set going; anticipation of being part of that history-in-the-making; and scarcely a clue as to whether what we had brought into being was in fact going to be.

Three principles define the EIN and unite its members—recognition of the ecocidal character of capital accumulation; the necessity for a socialist alternative as a model for surpassing capital; and the requirement that this new, or “eco” socialism must do more than deal with the toxic effects of accumulation, but needs also solve the great problem of social production: how to live within limits set down by ecological necessity.

These points are comfortably abstract; being so, they give ecosocialists a common name and some space within which to congregate and to get to know each other. However, we are not affected abstractly by the ecological crisis, but according to where life intersects with world-historical forces and brings forth concrete differences within the broad zones of agreement. Class distinctions, gender distinctions, distinctions along the great axes of empire, distinctions according to historical phase, or to generations—these are the raw material that must fruitfully interact if ecosocialism is to develop as the alternative to capital’s regime. Thus difference is to be respected as contestation and a place of nonviolent struggle. Differences between ecosocialists represent where ecosocialism should go to work.

Because Montreuil chiefly manifested a Northern European outlook, it was wisely decided that the 2009 plenary meeting should be held in the Global South. There is no place better to realize this than steamy Belém at the mouth of the Amazon, the old colonial town located one degree South of the Equator. And so it was good news that the World Social Forum had decided to hold their ninth global gathering there—and it was to be even better news that this was to be in the bellwether country of Brazil, for as we learned in the EIN meeting which piggy-backed on the WSF, the notion of ecosocialism actually arose in Brazil, in 1991, a full decade before Michael Löwy and I put together the first Ecosocialist Manifesto.

Brazil has the twofold distinction of containing the earth’s largest reserves of ecosystem resources and its most violent urban zones of industrialization; it is a land rife with “combined and uneven development,” ranging from sophisticated social-democratic zones in the South to frankly feudal areas within the great Northern forests where barons who are a law unto themselves exist alongside the planet’s most variegated communities of First Peoples, a country that has given us eco-cities like Curitiba and martyrs like Chico Mendes—in short, the logical place for the notion of ecosocialism to arise.

**Insert photo: DSC00729.JPG**

**Credit: Joel Kovel. Caption: On the road to the World Social Forum, Belém**

It was refreshing to have a bloc of Brazilians among the 110 delegates at the EIN meeting, and also a sizable contingent of Peruvians, including the redoubtable Hugo Blanco, who brought the indigenous perspective into the foreground of the meeting. But no matter who was there, the same challenge loomed. For whereas 2007 left one blinking at the amazement of getting started, those who attended the meeting of 2009 had to confront the matter of getting going.

The chief pathway of this was to be the development of the Ecosocialist Manifesto. The Manifesto of 2001 had essentially been a message in a bottle tossed into the ocean by two intellectuals who wanted to give the idea of ecosocialism some international currency. And indeed, a goodly number of people who showed up in Montreuil did so on this account. But as the sole organized product of the ecosocialist movement, so would the manifesto have to be the first object, so to speak, of ecosocialist labor. In other words, it would have to be rewritten, in part because of deficiencies in the first draft (which being composed late in 2001, had, among other problems, too much of the shadow of 9/11 hanging over it), and mainly because redoing it would be a way of getting the organization going.

A committee was contentiously chosen for this purpose, whose work was to be modified by a mechanism allowing for continual review by the membership, the process being conducted through the internet. We are grateful for this, and indeed, there would be no EIN without the internet. However, the difficulties of this means for composing the second manifesto, or as it came to be called, Declaration, can scarcely be overstated.

In any event, the Declaration was eventually completed, printed out, and presented to the meeting in Belém. Nobody was under the illusion that it went beyond the minimal adequacy of being the next rung on our ladder. (A copy of the English version is appended to this report; there are also translations into Portuguese, Italian, Greek and Turkish.) Its functionality is simple enough: the Belém Declaration presents the elementary principles of ecosocialism, principles that need to be worked on by an organization comprised of those who would subscribe to them. Thus, in order to join the EIN one has only, so to speak, let the Declaration into her or his heart, and affirm it while keeping in mind that it falls far short of where we have to go—and also affirm that we can begin to move to where we have to go by working collectively to develop and expand the Declaration through praxes that creatively engage the real differences that shape the innumerable activists who are drawn into ecosocialism. Neither dogma nor blueprint, the Declaration is essentially a parchment on which ecosocialism can become inscribed.

### **Climbing the Ladder**

We were able to gather some 500 signatures to the Declaration in the weeks leading up to the meeting in Belém on February 2, 2009. About 120 of these were from Brazil, with sizable collections from Britain, Canada, Greece, Turkey and the United States. Alas, only one person signed on from Argentina, Germany, and Indonesia, and none from China, Egypt, Iran, Japan, Korea, Russia, Sweden, and a hundred other nations. It is obvious that the most pressing task for the EIN is to expand this list all across the globe. We look toward

the day when spell-checks on computers no longer place wavy red lines of non-recognition under the word, *ecosocialism*.

The number of those who are ready to sign onto the EIN is very considerable; and the chief limiting factor is our capacity to organize them. Untold millions are becoming increasingly fed-up with capitalism and ready to think of radical alternatives. The EIN is from one angle, simply that which allows them to become “told.” Practically speaking, therefore, the size of the signatory list has nothing immediately to do with the aptness of people for the message of ecosocialism and everything to do with the organizing of those who canvass them. We readily admit that an instant poll of the world’s population would not at present come up with majority support for the cardinal principles of ecosocialism. But so what, so long as the number of those who do is a whole lot larger than 500. How large is this number? No-one knows for certain, but it could very well be in the millions: say 66 million, which is but one percent of world population, a very sizable, and certainly a reasonable, figure. What would a petition with 66 million signatures look like? 6.6 million? 660,000? or even 66,000?

Getting large numbers of people to sign on to the Declaration was the chief decision taken at Belém. This signifies far more than the passive registration connoted by the ordinary petition. It is just what it says: a declaring, an affirmation both by those who present the petition and those who sign it, a commitment to follow through on its precepts, a medium for propagating change, a signal to the world at large that major changes are afoot, and a warning to the powers that be. The gathering defined an intermediate goal for the EIN. The steps that need to be taken toward this are, one might say, the immediately visible rungs on the EIN’s ladder. The meeting in Belém began the discussion of what these should be, and we should carry it forward.

§ Yes, people should sign on to the Declaration. But this Declaration, the Declaration of Belém? Scarcely—not so much for its content, which is arguable, but because of its unwieldy form, excessive both in size and rhetoric. Somebody needs to redo it for the purpose at hand, which is to say, streamline it into a single side of a page, and use it to convey in as clear and straightforward a way as possible, a message intelligible to every sentient person on the planet earth, of what are the elementary principles of ecosocialism.

§ But this demands translation into the languages of the earth, not just the mainstream languages, but the languages of Africa, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the indigenous wherever they may be. And this of course requires translators, distribution networks, and ways of compiling the signatures and registering the signatories.

§ This in turn requires a de-centralized structure for the EIN. How should this be achieved? Should it be by language group, regionalized bloc, nation-state? In any case, we are led to a notion that the network is not like a spider’s web but that it needs to contain nodal points, with each node devolving in both general and particular directions. Last January, for example, a conference held in Oakland, California, set forth the idea of EIN-United States—or was it to be the Western United States, or California, or Northern California? Meanwhile another grouping shows signs of emerging in the Northeast of the United States. Similar formations have appeared in the U.K., Brazil, and Turkey, and doubtless elsewhere as well.

§ Logically and practically, this implies a kind of “central nervous system” for the EIN as a whole. There is no particular reason why this should be in a fixed place, but it does require a coherent identity and a means of reproduction. Here arises the dilemma of centralization of power. However, the only alternative to having such a dilemma is to not have an EIN at all. If the EIN is going to do work then it needs to have interdependent parts, and also some central function to which these relate. Further, there will be a need for funds and the gathering and distribution of same, inasmuch as we are not quite ready to usher the money-form off the stage of history. We should not be dependent upon existing governments or (in the great majority of cases) foundations for this. It would seem necessary, then, for the regional or national nodes to raise funds from their members and pass a certain quotient on to the international center. In any case, there needs to be a process of drafting constitutional by-laws for the EIN as a whole as well as for its constituted units. And there needs to be a kind of Constitutional Congress for this, and a way of choosing its members. It won't be easy. But the EIN is for life and of life. Life is self-replicating, evolving form; formlessness is heat death--of an individual, of the universe, and also of the products of human labor, including international ecosocialist organizations. The EIN must have a structure; it cannot simply be an internet group, and anyone who cares about an ecosocialist future for society needs to join in the process of building this structure.

§ This model has been derived so far from an elementary function of the EIN, the propagation of its membership base. But numerous other functions will normally arise as well. The Declaration, we have emphasized, is arguable. This means that ways of arguing about it need to be provided—ways that extend to the many differences that necessarily arise between those who espouse the core principles of ecosocialism. Yes, we are against capitalism--but what, really, is capitalism?; and what, really, is, or should be, socialism?; and how is production to be ordered so that humankind can express itself freely within ecosystemic principles? Anyone who is sure that he or she knows the answers to these questions is simply a fool. There are good grounds to believe that ecosocialism can do better than capitalism has done . . .but only if we provide the means for ecosocialists to explore the questions. And this, too, must be a prime function of the EIN: to provide a forum for all who sign on to the Declaration to argue and develop its points, and to bring in new perspectives. In the first, fledgling phase of the network, debates about such matters have spontaneously arisen on the internet: a perfectly sensible idea that has gone nowhere because there have been no means of going somewhere. Thus notion after notion is brought forth, provoking a spark here and a quarrel there, only to disappear into the emptiness of cyberspace. Clearly, we must do better. Everyone who espouses the common values must be provided the common means of interacting with others, undoubtedly using the internet as the most democratic modality we now have of communicating. But this cannot remain at that level. It must, rather, be solidified with more formal supports, through the web, no doubt, but in a more highly organized way. If there is to be funding for the administrative function of the EIN, this needs to be extended broadly to the educational and communicative sphere. We need a standing committee on the subject, one extending to the publication of journals and books—and even, down the road, to the provision of schools and training centers. I should think it highly important that this journal be drawn into the process at some level.

§ Thus, though it is certainly not appropriate to think of the EIN at its present stage of development as anything like a political party or—heaven forbid!—something along the lines of a “Fifth International,” I for one would not want the imagination stifled to the point of forbidding even the thought of such an outcome down the road. We are not ready now for such a highly developed role. But if and as we develop properly, there is no ruling it out as the EIN matures. And in the meanwhile there should be nothing restraining the emergence of ecosocialist activism from within the network-in-formation.

I am certain that each of the 500—or the 66,000, or the 66,000,000—members of the EIN would delight in the news from our most active Turkish delegation, 69 signatories of the Declaration strong, which sets a splendid example. Here is an extract from an email communication of March 22, 2009, from Elif Bokhurt, of Istanbul, to Michael Löwy and myself:

here, in Turkey; fifth world water forum was done; and we were in Istanbul to protest. Platform against the commercialization of water staged a demonstration; alternative workshops were held; 17 activists are arrested...Last week we were concentrated with these activities. . .

He goes on to ask for collaboration between the Turkish, French and English-language journals—and he will, I am sure, get it.

Some would no doubt counsel against such seemingly extravagant derivatives as have appeared in this little exercise in an imagined climb up a ladder of development for the EIN. And no doubt, what has been depicted here appears a long way off. We should keep in mind, however, that it defines a line of sight, and a path every step along which will be good in itself as well as the condition for the next step forward. The steps outlined in the Declaration correspond to the real practices of women and men who struggle against global capital. It is time for this struggle itself to take on a global aspect under the name of the Ecosocialist International Network.

—Joel Kovel

### **The Belém Ecosocialist Declaration**

*“The world is suffering from a fever due to climate change,  
and the disease is the capitalist development model.”  
—Evo Morales, president of Bolivia, September 2007*

### **Humanity's Choice**

Humanity today faces a stark choice: ecosocialism or barbarism.

We need no more proof of the barbarity of capitalism, the parasitical system that exploits humanity and nature alike. Its sole motor is the imperative toward profit and thus the need for constant growth. It wastefully creates unnecessary products, squandering the environment's limited resources and returning to it only toxins and pollutants. Under capitalism, the only measure of success is how much more is sold every day, every week, every year—involving the creation of vast quantities of products that are directly harmful to both humans and nature, commodities that cannot be produced without spreading disease, destroying the forests that

produce the oxygen we breathe, demolishing ecosystems, and treating our water, air and soil like sewers for the disposal of industrial waste.

Capitalism's need for growth exists on every level, from the individual enterprise to the system as a whole. The insatiable hunger of corporations is facilitated by imperialist expansion in search of ever greater access to natural resources, cheap labor and new markets. Capitalism has always been ecologically destructive, but in our lifetimes these assaults on the earth have accelerated. Quantitative change is giving way to qualitative transformation, bringing the world to a tipping point, to the edge of disaster. A growing body of scientific research has identified many ways in which small temperature increases could trigger irreversible, runaway effects—such as rapid melting of the Greenland ice sheet or the release of methane buried in permafrost and beneath the ocean—that would make catastrophic climate change inevitable.

Left unchecked, global warming will have devastating effects on human, animal and plant life. Crop yields will drop drastically, leading to famine on a broad scale. Hundreds of millions of people will be displaced by droughts in some areas and by rising ocean levels in others. Chaotic, unpredictable weather will become the norm. Air, water and soil will be poisoned. Epidemics of malaria, cholera and even deadlier diseases will hit the poorest and most vulnerable members of every society.

The impact of the ecological crisis is felt most severely by those whose lives have already been ravaged by imperialism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and indigenous peoples everywhere are especially vulnerable. Environmental destruction and climate change constitute an act of aggression by the rich against the poor.

Ecological devastation, resulting from the insatiable need to increase profits, is not an accidental feature of capitalism: it is built into the system's DNA and cannot be reformed away. Profit-oriented production only considers a short-term horizon in its investment decisions, and cannot take into account the long-term health and stability of the environment. Infinite economic expansion is incompatible with finite and fragile ecosystems, but the capitalist economic system cannot tolerate limits on growth; its constant need to expand will subvert any limits that might be imposed in the name of "sustainable development." Thus the inherently unstable capitalist system cannot regulate its own activity, much less overcome the crises caused by its chaotic and parasitical growth, because to do so would require setting limits upon accumulation—an unacceptable option for a system predicated upon the rule: Grow or Die!

If capitalism remains the dominant social order, the best we can expect is unbearable climate conditions, an intensification of social crises, and the spread of the most barbaric forms of class rule as the imperialist powers fight among themselves and with the Global South for continued control of the world's diminishing resources.

At worst, human life may not survive.

### **Capitalist Strategies for Change**

There is no lack of proposed strategies for contending with ecological ruin, including the crisis of global warming looming as a result of the reckless increase of atmospheric carbon dioxide. The great majority of these strategies share one common feature: they are devised by and on behalf of the dominant global system, capitalism.

It is no surprise that the dominant global system which is responsible for the ecological crisis also sets the terms of the debate about this crisis, for capital commands the means of production of knowledge, as much as that of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Accordingly, its politicians, bureaucrats, economists and 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.

But a person cannot serve two masters—the integrity of the earth and the profitability of capitalism. One must be abandoned, and history leaves little question about the allegiances of the vast majority of policy-makers. There is every reason, therefore, to radically doubt the capacity of established measures to check the slide to ecological catastrophe.

And indeed, beyond a cosmetic veneer, the reforms over the past thirty-five years have been a monstrous failure. Isolated improvements do of course occur, but they are inevitably overwhelmed and swept away by the ruthless expansion of the system and the chaotic character of its production.

One example demonstrates the failure: in the first four years of the 21st Century, global carbon emissions were nearly three times as great per annum as those of the decade of the 1990s, despite the appearance of the Kyoto Protocols in 1997.

Kyoto employs two devices: the “Cap and Trade” system of trading pollution credits to achieve certain reductions in emissions, and projects in the Global South—the so-called “Clean Development Mechanisms”—to offset emissions in the highly industrialized nations. These instruments all rely upon market mechanisms, which means, first of all, that atmospheric carbon dioxide becomes a commodity under the control of the same interests that created global warming. Polluters are not compelled to reduce their carbon emissions but are allowed to use their power over money to control the carbon market for their own ends, which include the devastating exploration for yet more carbon-based fuels. Nor is there a limit to the amount of emission credits which can be issued by compliant governments.

Since verification and evaluation of results are impossible, the Kyoto regime is not only incapable of controlling emissions, it also provides ample opportunities for evasion and fraud of all kinds. 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.”

The Bali climate meetings in 2007 opened the way for even greater abuses in the period ahead. Bali avoided any mention of the goals for drastic carbon reduction put forth by the best climate science (90 percent by 2050); it abandoned the peoples of the Global South to the mercy of capital by giving jurisdiction over the process to the World Bank; and made offsetting of carbon pollution even easier.

In order to affirm and sustain our human future, a revolutionary transformation is needed, where all particular struggles take part in a greater struggle against capital itself. This larger struggle cannot remain merely negative and anti-capitalist. It must announce and build a different kind of society, and this is ecosocialism.

### **The Ecosocialist Alternative**

The ecosocialist movement aims to stop and to reverse the disastrous process of global warming in particular and of capitalist ecocide in general, and to construct a radical and practical alternative to the capitalist system. Ecosocialism is grounded in a transformed economy founded on the non-monetary values of social justice and ecological balance. It criticizes both capitalist “market ecology” and productivist socialism, which ignored the earth’s equilibrium and limits. It redefines the path and goal of socialism within an ecological and democratic framework.

Ecosocialism involves a revolutionary social transformation, which will imply the limitation of growth and the transformation of needs by a profound shift away from quantitative and toward qualitative economic criteria, an emphasis on use-value instead of exchange-value.

These aims require both democratic decision-making in the economic sphere, enabling society to collectively define its goals of investment and production, and the collectivization of the means of

production. Only collective decision-making and ownership of production can offer the longer-term perspective that is necessary for the balance and sustainability of our social and natural systems.

The rejection of productivism and the shift away from quantitative and toward qualitative economic criteria involve rethinking the nature and goals of production and economic activity in general. Essential creative, non-productive and reproductive human activities, such as householding, child-rearing, care, child and adult education, and the arts, will be key values in an ecosocialist economy.

Clean air and water and fertile soil, as well as universal access to chemical-free food and renewable, non-polluting energy sources, are basic human and natural rights defended by ecosocialism. Far from being “despotic,” collective policy-making on the local, regional, national and international levels amounts to society’s exercise of communal freedom and responsibility. This freedom of decision constitutes a liberation from the alienating economic “laws” of the growth-oriented capitalist system.

To avoid global warming and other dangers threatening human and ecological survival, entire sectors of industry and agriculture must be suppressed, reduced, or restructured, and others must be developed, while providing full employment for all. Such a radical transformation is impossible without collective control of the means of production and democratic planning of production and exchange. Democratic decisions on investment and technological development must replace control by capitalist enterprises, investors and banks, in order to serve the long-term horizon of society’s and nature’s common good.

The most oppressed elements of human society, the poor and indigenous peoples, must take full part in the ecosocialist revolution, in order to revitalize ecologically sustainable traditions and give voice to those whom the capitalist system cannot hear. Because the peoples of the Global South and the poor in general are the first victims of capitalist destruction, their struggles and demands will help define the contours of the ecologically and economically sustainable society in creation. Similarly, gender equality is integral to ecosocialism, and women’s movements have been among the most active and vocal opponents of capitalist oppression. Other potential agents of ecosocialist revolutionary change exist in all societies.

Such a process cannot begin without a revolutionary transformation of social and political structures based on the active support, by the majority of the population, of an ecosocialist program. The struggle of labor—workers, farmers, the landless and the unemployed—for social justice is inseparable from the struggle for environmental justice. Capitalism, socially and ecologically exploitative and polluting, is the enemy of nature and of labor alike.

Ecosocialism proposes radical transformations in:

1. the energy system, by replacing carbon-based fuels and biofuels with clean sources of power under community control: wind, geothermal, wave, and above all, solar power.
2. the transportation system, by drastically reducing the use of private trucks and cars, replacing them with free and efficient public transportation;
3. present patterns of production, consumption, and building, which are based on waste, inbuilt obsolescence, competition and pollution, by producing only sustainable and recyclable goods and developing green architecture;
4. food production and distribution, by defending local food sovereignty as far as this is possible, eliminating polluting industrial agribusinesses, creating sustainable agro-ecosystems and working actively to renew soil fertility.

To theorize and to work toward realizing the goal of green socialism does not mean that we should not also fight for concrete and urgent reforms right now. Without any illusions about “clean capitalism,” we must work to impose on the powers that be—governments, corporations, international institutions—some elementary but essential immediate changes:



- drastic and enforceable reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases,
- development of clean energy sources,
- provision of an extensive free public transportation system,
- progressive replacement of trucks by trains,
- creation of pollution clean-up programs,
- elimination of nuclear energy, and war spending.

These and similar demands are at the heart of the agenda of the Global Justice movement and the World Social Forums, which have promoted, since Seattle in 1999, the convergence of social and environmental movements in a common struggle against the capitalist system.

Environmental devastation will not be stopped in conference rooms and treaty negotiations: only mass action can make a difference. Urban and rural workers, peoples of the Global South and indigenous peoples everywhere are at the forefront of this struggle against environmental and social injustice, fighting exploitative and polluting multinationals, poisonous and disenfranchising agribusinesses, invasive genetically modified seeds, biofuels that only aggravate the current food crisis. We must further these social-environmental movements and build solidarity between anticapitalist ecological mobilizations in the North and the South.

This Ecosocialist Declaration is a call to action. The entrenched ruling classes are powerful, yet the capitalist system reveals itself every day more financially and ideologically bankrupt, unable to overcome the economic, ecological, social, food and other crises it engenders. And the forces of radical opposition are alive and vital. On all levels, local, regional and international, we are fighting to create an alternative system based in social and ecological justice.