

# Climate Reality

*Costas Panayotakis\**

**Ian Angus, ed. *The Global Fight for Climate Justice: Anticapitalist Responses to Global Warming and Environmental Destruction*, Fernwood Publishing and Resistance Books, 2010.**

We live at a time when capitalism's economic, social, and ecological contradictions are deeper than ever. The crises that result from these contradictions lead to great suffering for billions of people around the world as well as to ecological degradation that, in turn, leads to accelerating species extinctions, while also casting a dark cloud over the future of the human species itself. *The Global Fight for Climate Justice* provides a wide-ranging overview of ecosocialist thought through a collection, edited by Canadian ecosocialist Ian Angus, of dozens of essays and statements by ecosocialist politicians, activist organizations, and scholars. What unites the contributions to this volume is a conviction that the ecological devastation and human suffering that we observe all around us are indispensable components of a capitalist economic system that is driven by the logic of capital accumulation. Integral to this logic is the degradation of human beings and nature into the status of means that can be abused and reshaped in any way that the quest for profit demands.

The link between this degradation and the logic of capital accumulation is explored throughout the volume but especially in the collection of essays, speeches, and statements that comprise the first two sections of the book. Focusing on the link between capitalism and global warming, the first section includes contributions both by the editor himself and by Fidel Castro and Oxfam (which examines the climate crisis from a human rights angle). This section also includes a list, drawn from a 2007 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), of likely impacts of the climate crisis on each of the world's different continents. The second section focuses on the link between capitalism and the chronic food crisis faced by billions of people, especially in the global South. Here again the editor of the volume offers a comprehensive treatment of "World Hunger, Agribusiness, and the Food Sovereignty Alternative," while also including addresses by Fidel Castro and two other Cuban officials. At least as important, however, is his inclusion of the voices of peasants and small farmers from around the world, which come through in statements issued by La Vía Campesina as well as by the Nyeleni Forum for Food Sovereignty that was held in Mali in early 2007.

Sections 3, 4, and 5 of the book focus on the false solutions to ecological problems that are favored by capitalist elites. These solutions primarily focus on technological fixes and market-based solutions that are thoroughly debunked by most of the contributors to this volume. Ian Angus provides historical context to the rise of green capitalist pseudo-solutions through his discussion of Garrett Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons" thesis, which postulated that because of the absence of private property rights that they implied, common resources were bound to be abused and depleted. As Angus (and others in the past) have pointed out, Hardin's claims were not backed by any evidence and were in fact contradicted by the ability of communities throughout human history to develop norms that made it possible to use their commons sustainably. The paucity of its arguments notwithstanding, the essay in which Hardin advanced his thesis quickly became "a sacred

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\* [cpanayotakis@gmail.com](mailto:cpanayotakis@gmail.com)

text” (p. 66) because of its ideological function, which consisted in portraying capitalism not as the enemy of nature<sup>1</sup> that it really is but as a guarantor of ecological sustainability!

It is this view of capitalism as an ecologically benign force that explains the confidence of establishment thinkers in the possibility of addressing the deepening ecological crisis through such devices as the production of biofuels, carbon capture and storage (a method often described by the oxymoronic “clean coal” designation), and carbon trading. All of these devices are subjected to withering and well-deserved criticism by many of the contributors to the volume, including Nicole Colson, John Bellamy Foster, Joel Kovel, and Andrew Simms. As these, and other (see, for example, the analysis by Daniel Tanuro and the Fourth International) contributors to the volume point out, technological fixes cannot address the magnitude of the current ecological crisis and are more likely to shift problems around, so that each technical fix later on proves to have grave ecological effects that were not recognized when it was first adopted.

As for carbon trading, it has already proven a failure, since its inclusion in the Kyoto treaty has not stopped the acceleration of carbon emissions. This is not surprising given the strong influence of capitalist interests over the implementation of carbon trading schemes. Meanwhile, the acceptance of carbon offsets, which allow companies and countries to continue polluting as long as they fund projects that are supposed to reduce emissions in other parts of the world, have not only been rife with fraud but often end up displacing people in the global South, including indigenous peoples, who are least responsible for the climate crisis. In fact, section 6 of this volume gives the reader an idea of the mobilization of indigenous peoples around the world against carbon trading and capitalist pseudo-solutions to the ecological crisis (see the Cochabamba, Bali and Anchorage Declarations). The global South is also represented in that section through addresses by the Bolivian President, Evo Morales, and the ALBA countries’ statement at the 2009 Americas Summit.

The picture that emerges from *The Global Fight for Climate Justice* is one of a grave ecological crisis that can only be addressed by rapid and decisive action to challenge capital, drastically transform the ecocidal lifestyles that capitalism promotes in the global North, and create room for the global South to meet its needs in ways that do not further compromise the ecological integrity of the planet. As many of the contributors to the volume emphasize, to achieve these goals the countries of the global North have to pay their ecological debt to the South, thus making it possible for the countries of the global South both to defend themselves against the consequences of the North’s long history of ecological malfeasance and to meet their needs through technologies that are more ecologically sustainable than the ones used by the affluent countries in the global North. Since such measures run against the logic and historical practice of the capitalist system, Patrick Bond is undoubtedly correct to argue in his contribution that “[o]nly political activism and class struggle can save the planet.” This statement encapsulates well the spirit of sections 7 and 8 of the volume that focus on the strategies that ecosocialists should deploy both in fighting the ecological devastation wrought by capital and in seeking to build alternatives.

All in all, *The Global Fight for Climate Justice* provides a valuable overview of the ecosocialist stream of thought and action—a stream that is likely to receive greater attention the more the inadequacy of green capitalism becomes clear to the general public. Given the gendered nature of the ecological crisis (which is acknowledged in some of the contributions to the volume), the only thing that could have made this volume even stronger would be the inclusion of the contribution to

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* (London and New York: Zed Books and Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2007).

the ecosocialist project made by ecofeminism, including such thinkers as Maria Mies and Ariel Salleh. Perhaps this is something that could be addressed in future editions of this volume.