

# Climate Change and the Fight Against Neoliberalism

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Dear friends, dear comrades,

Thank you for the invitation to talk at this international event.

I'm glad to tell you that the British Campaign Against Climate Change has been an example and a source of inspiration for us, in Belgium.

In Brussels, on Dec. 8 last year, 4000 people joined the demonstration called by Climate and Social Justice and co-organized by the broad Climate Coalition. It was the first street demonstration on this issue in Belgium, and it was a success, taking into account that a lot of people couldn't come to the capital city, because the rail workers were on strike.

Climate and Social Justice has just launched a new appeal to demonstrate on Dec. 6, this year, within the framework of the Global Climate Campaign. Once again, we have invited all members of the Climate Coalition, including the unions – which participated the demonstration last year, to build up the mobilization with us. It is decisive to increase the pressure in preparation for the Poznan and Copenhagen conferences.

We have to shift the relationship of social forces. A powerful global grassroots mobilization, not lobbying, is the most effective way to struggle against climate change. Governments do nothing, or nearly nothing. The Kyoto Protocol is peanuts and even its commitments won't be respected. More important: the proposals for a new international treaty are totally insufficient.

Let me quote a few figures. The 20% European Union reduction objective for 2020 is below even the IPCC recommendations discussed in Bali. For 2050, most political leaders talk about a 50% reduction, even though the IPCC recommendations range from 50 to 85%. According to James Hansen's studies on the threshold for the ice-caps disintegration, even a 85% cap could be too low, but the governments refuse to take this warning into account.

What does it mean? It simply means that governments in rich countries are completely ignoring the precautionary principle. Why? Because Climate Change will mainly hit poor people, especially in poor countries. And because governments are linked to the rich, to business lobbies, especially the oil, car, petrochemical and coal lobbies. Here we see the real "inconvenient truth."

This linkage explains why climate policies are not only insufficient, but also deeply unfair. They're particularly unfair to the poor in the South. The threats are enormous, but the numerous multilateral funds supposed to help poor countries adapting to climate change only total 26 million dollars. As a comparison, according to the UNDP, the United Kingdom spends the same amount on its anti-flooding protection system every week.

The present funding for adaptation is ridiculous and cynical, by comparison with the huge costs of climate related catastrophes, like Cyclone Nargis in Burma. According to the UNDP's (under)estimation, the adaptation budget needed to prevent catastrophes in the South will be 85 billion dollars a year in 2015. Who will pay?

Another example of unfairness is the use of overseas carbon credits. At the moment, in Europe, the ceiling is 280 Mt/yr. Since the emissions reduction is about 130 Mt/yr, this means Europe could completely fulfill its commitments without reducing its own emissions at all. In other words, the ceiling is a hoax. One must ask, what remains of the "common but differentiated" principle? What remains in practice of the Kyoto policy that Clean Development Mechanism credits should only be used as "complements" to domestic measures in the developed countries? Very little, indeed! Actually, the South will be the site both of catastrophes and of support for most (insufficient) reduction efforts in the North. This is the neoliberal climate scenario.

It should be stressed that climate policy is unfair in rich countries, too. Today, governments blame the population for climate change, exhort everybody to do more and pay more in order to save the climate.

They do not themselves set an example, as their rising military budgets show. Instead each of us has to change personal behaviour, and question our consumerism. Of course we must try to be green, as far as it is possible in this society — and yes, it makes a difference. But the mess won't be cleaned up by individual actions alone, far from it. Structural changes are necessary in the building, energy and transportation sectors. Because they're not profitable, public investment is needed in public services. This raises the same question as in developing countries: who will pay?

There is a parallel between North and South: in our view, the common but differentiated responsibility principle should apply in the North, too. Big business should pay the major part of the bill. If that doesn't happen, there is a serious risk that some peoples' groups and sectors will oppose environmental policies in name of keeping prices down.

Climate and Social Justice is far from representing the entire climate movement in Belgium. We are a left current. While collaborating to build the broadest possible mobilization, we want to spread our message: it is absolutely necessary to mainstream the climate issue in the workers' and poor people's struggles against neoliberal policies. This means more than just "linking the social and environmental challenges." The profound transformation of world society that is needed to avoid catastrophic climate change, is also a profound social and thus political question. Real democracy and a huge redistribution of wealth will be essential for its success.

I started this speech saying you had been an example for us. You are an example for others, too. New countries, including France and others, will join the mobilization this year. Hold on! All together, let us fight for an international climate treaty that is both environmentally efficient and socially just!