Green is the New Spectacle

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The Spectacle — Environmental issues can oftentimes be very complex. Some issues directly relate to climate change, and some do not. However, it is very important to connect the dots between issues because almost all environmental problems are caused, at their base, by capitalist expansion, commodification and privatization. Corporations have used the climate crisis and growing public concern about environmental issues to their advantage. They have learned to use the rhetoric of environmentalism to justify extremely oppressive projects whose sole purpose is to increase their power and to continue the cycle of production and consumption. Incredibly destructive projects, such as hydrofracture natural gas extraction in Upstate New York, are marketed as clean. This absurd spectacle must be stopped.

In Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, he writes, "The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification … The spectacle grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production.

It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life … It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory." And now the light of that sun is green. The green spectacle is confronting the climate crisis with hollow solutions presented to us in a pleasant, prefabricated package that can be bought if we can afford them and allow us to pollute in good conscience. In an absurd twist, these corporate false solutions cause the poor, and those who resist these schemes, to be blamed for destroying the planet. "It is not the oil companies who are to blame for climate change, but the poor who do not buy carbon offsets when they travel." Thus, the climate crisis becomes another way to make money and increase corporate power.

In short, the green spectacle is an image of a greener, more natural society, reached by corporate solutions. The green spectacle is created by the undeniable urgency of our climate crisis and capitalism's need to reinvent itself and present its own solutions to climate change, because it is clear that any real solution would eliminate capitalism. Sadly, many groups that wish to solve climate change are limited in their ability to combat it because they must live within the spectacle and believe the corporate media's lies. So even people fighting against the system get caught up in its maze, never attacking the root systemic causes of our issues. We must create our own narrative and attack the roots of this ecocidal system. We cannot let corporations trick us into accepting false solutions.

The Lies: Biofuels, Carbon Trading and Privatization

Biofuels are often said to be a possible solution to the climate crisis. However, they are more likely to make the problem worse than better. Not only does it take more energy to produce biofuels than they contain, but biofuels are an expansion of industrial agriculture, which is a major cause of climate change, deforestation, the dispossession of local communities, bio-diversity loss, water and soil degradation, and loss of food sovereignty and security. Additionally, the production of biofuels takes farmland that could be used to feed people and instead uses it to grow ethanol for our cars. Food riots have already broken out in Mexico, where prices rose on corn because of ethanol production. With over 865 million hungry people in this world, it is puzzling why we would be growing food for hungry cars and not hungry people.

Carbon trading, too, is nothing more than a way for the biggest polluters to look like they are doing something about climate change and make a fortune in the process. Governments arbitrarily give out carbon credits, usually to the biggest polluters, and they are traded as a normal commodity. Two of the largest carbon trading schemes that have already been implemented are REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) and CDM (Clean Development Mechanisms). Their joint implementation is a way of privatizing, selling and profiting more from our natural resources.

REDD takes land rights away from local people and puts them in the hands of corporations. In many cases, non-native trees are planted, such as monoculture eucalyptus trees in Brazil, which changes the ecosystem, drying up the land and hurting the plants that local people use to survive.

CDM allows industrialized countries with a greenhouse gas reduction commitment (such as the Kyoto Protocol) to invest in projects that (in theory) reduce emissions in developing countries, instead of more expensive emission reductions in their own countries. CDM projects, for example, allow companies to privatize rivers to create “clean” hydroelectric dams. Since the dam produces less carbon emissions than a theoretical coal plant that might have been built, the company receives carbon credits, allowing it to pollute more, or sell the credits.

All this privatizing also means more surveillance and displacement. Since the forests now exist for profit, indigenous people who have lived in them for generations are being forced off their land.

One of our most important resources is already being privatized: water. Less than one percent of the world’s freshwater (or 0.007 percent of the world’s water) is accessible and potable. This needs to be shared by the world’s 6.7 billion people, the myriad wildlife and ecosystems, and human agriculture and industries. However, this resource is no longer being treated as a commons. Water is being

privatized to create hydroelectric dams that produce "clean energy" for destructive processes such as aluminum smelting. Dams destroy ecosystems by turning them into stagnant cesspools, displace whole communities by forcing them off the land, and release huge amounts of methane from flooded vegetation. Water has even begun to be traded in global stock exchanges. Today, an individual or corporation can invest in water-targeted hedge funds, index funds and exchange traded funds (EFTs), water certificates, shares of water engineering and technology companies, and a host of other newfangled water investments. Privatized water is now a $425 billion industry and is expected to grow to a $1 trillion industry within five years.

Often, the picture painted by mainstream media and water-rights activists is too simple — that of a single corporation (such as Coca-Cola in India or Bechtel in Bolivia) "corporatizing water;" the real story is not just of flamboyant tycoons or individual corporations sucking dry springs and groundwater to the detriment of poor subsistence farmers or slum-dwellers. Water is being privatized by a complex global network of investment banks, private equity firms, public pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and multinational corporations that are buying up and controlling water worldwide. Investment banks, including Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Morgan Stanley, Deutsche Bank and Credit Suisse are aggressively buying up water rights all over the world. As climate change shrinks fresh water resources, there will be even more money to be made in private water.

The Result: Militarism and Xenophobia

The New York Times recently wrote that, according to military and intelligence analysts, "the changing global climate will pose profound strategic challenges to the United States in coming decades, raising the prospect of military intervention to deal with the effects of violent storms, drought, mass migration and pandemics." These analysts, experts at the Pentagon and other intelligence agencies, say that such climate-induced crises could topple governments, feed terrorist movements or destabilize entire regions. The U.S. military recently launched its "war on global warming," stating that the "military [will] play a key role in tackling climate change, and are developing military strategies to deal with it." It's a whole new frontier in the fight for freedom and justice.

In particular, military experts say that the potential scale of catastrophe could trigger revolution and political upheaval. One report states, "When a government can no longer deliver services to its people, ensure domestic order and protect the nation's borders from invasion, conditions are ripe for turmoil, extremism and terrorism to fill the vacuum." The report advocates bolstering U.S. military bases and key allied governments in unstable regions of the world. Other military officials

have said that climate change will increase demands for our military to carry out "relief" and "disaster" assistance missions. Disaster relief will become a military occupation.

Unsurprisingly, the United States defends the short-term interests of its ruling elite by seizing natural energy resources through both privatization and war. However, it must rely on the military-industrial complex, which is increasingly privatized and fragmented. As Naomi Klein describes in *The Shock Doctrine*, disaster capitalism profits greatly from crisis, real or imagined. As the Climate War becomes the dominant organizing principle for the planet, the military-industrial system will seek to profit from both the destruction of war and the rebuilding of damaged systems.

War is big business and a major industry that thrives on crisis. It alone ensures constant crises either by physical force or by political discourses that justify a constant cash flow. The United States and European Union use large numbers of likely climate refugees in their own right-wing propaganda, creating fear against these people, and using that fear as a means to strengthen border security. Since capitalist states have no means of addressing climate change other than making preparations for cracking down on social unrest, Fortress Europe and the United States will strengthen their borders even more, criminalizing and blaming migrants and asylum seekers, saying it is the poor who are truly responsible for climate change.

Every year we see thousands of people flee their countries of origin in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia, hoping for a better life. While the majority will move to nearby countries, many will attempt the long and dangerous journey to Europe or the United States. It is impossible to determine exactly how many people are forced to migrate directly because of climate change. What is clear is that the position of wealth and privilege in the Global North is, to a large extent, the result of the exploitation of land, people and resources in two-thirds of the world, the very same processes that have driven industrial capitalism and caused climate change.

The world's poor did not cause climate change, but they are more vulnerable to its effects because of where and how they live. Whether in agricultural areas or city slums in the Global South, they have fewer options available when things go wrong. Africa and South East Asia, for example, are some of the most geographically vulnerable places on the planet.

Climate change is already being used to give further legitimacy to the concepts of "national preservation" and "homeland security." For example, Lee Gunn, president of the American Security Project has said, "Here's how Washington should begin preparing for the consequences associated with climate change: Invest in capabilities within the U.S. government (including the Defense Department) to man-

age the humanitarian crises — such as a new flow of 'climate refugees' — that may accompany climate change and subsequently overwhelm local governments and threaten critical U.S. interests." Once again, state and capital interests are the top priority, and the wellbeing of people and the environment are not even a consideration. He goes on to say that the United States should "lead the world in developing conflict-resolution mechanisms to mediate between climate change's winners and losers." And we all know who the winners will be. India has begun putting these ideas into practice. They are currently building a perimeter fence around their entire border with Bangladesh, a country more at risk than almost any other from the devastating consequences of rising sea levels. The fence has been explicitly talked about as a barrier to migration. If sea levels rise and Bangladeshi people are driven from their homes, they will find themselves trapped inside this cage.

A crucial part of the fight for climate justice is building a radical movement that challenges the use of the threat of climate chaos as an excuse for even more draconian migration controls and national and international security measures.

Conclusion

Capitalism results in the need for continuous war and ever-increasing rates of resource extraction, causing environmental degradation, climate change, social injustice and more war. The solutions to climate change within this system only feed the war machine and strengthen authoritarian regimes of control, while further degrading the rights of indigenous peoples and animals. The powerful have divided and conquered us for too long, and they have many tools to keep us mired in false conflict. But they are all human-made tools. We must build up our hearts, and realize that pacifism does not imply love. Love has emotion, and emotions are not passive and flat-lining. So to topple this system and create horizontal communities, we must fight with this love for ourselves, love for our families, friends and comrades. This is not a passive love — this is an emotional, burning love. True love is radical, and dangerous to this sterile system.

As Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War*, "However desperate the situation and circumstances, do not despair. When there is everything to fear, be unafraid. When surrounded by dangers, fear none of them. When without resources, depend on resourcefulness. When surprised, take the enemy itself by surprise."

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