

Extracts on environment questions from Stefan Engel, Dawn of the International Socialist Revolution

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Revolutionärer Weg, No. 33

II. The Strategy and Tactics of International Finance Capital in the Class Struggle Against the International Proletariat and Its Allies

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II.3 The Threat to the Foundations of Human Life from the Global Environmental Catastrophe

The unity of man and nature is the foundation on which all human societies and their modes of production develop. The book *Crises and Class Struggle* states:

Every act of production is a compound of labor and matter. Man produces, in that his labor wrests material wealth from nature; he alters the forms of the natural materials and creates the various use-values, or useful articles, for human society... This metabolic process occurring between man and nature is a condition for all human life and *basic to all forms of society*. (Willi Dickhut, *Crises and Class Struggle*, p. 9; emphasis ours)

From the outset, the capitalist mode of production involved factors for the destruction of nature. They were rooted in the low level of development of the productive forces, commodity production geared to profit, and inadequate knowledge of the long-term impact of human intervention in nature. The overexploitation of nature and environmental destruction could assume worldwide proportions only with the development to imperialism and the extension of capitalist commodity production to the whole world.

In the 1980s it had to be assumed that the "changes man causes in the natural environment [have] turn[ed] into an accelerated *phase of destruction* of soil, water, air, flora and fauna, affecting all fundamental conditions of human life." An *environmental crisis* had emerged which was not far from "turning into an *environmental catastrophe*, unless decisive steps are taken immediately" (*ibid.*, pp. 161 and 162).

At the time the MLPD aptly qualified the environmental crisis as "an *accompanying manifestation of the general crisis of capitalism*" because at that stage it was not yet an economic necessity for the functioning of capitalist production. Accordingly, the environmental crisis could be "eradicated by actively fighting monopoly politics as long as there is still a chance of rescuing nature" (*ibid.*, p. 166).

At the beginning of the 1990s there were first indications that the environmental crisis was turning into a global environmental catastrophe.

We refer to a *global environmental catastrophe* when the destruction of the natural metabolism existing between soil, water, air, flora and fauna has reached such dimensions that this metabolism loses its balance and the foundations of any human existence and production are destroyed. (*Neocolonialism and the Changes in the National Liberation Struggle*, pp. 219-220)

Four main features of the transformation of the environmental crisis into a global environmental catastrophe were in evidence then:

- the greenhouse effect as a result of massive emissions of greenhouse gases;
- the growing ozone hole;
- the accelerated destruction of the tropical rainforests;
- regional environmental disasters like floods, droughts, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the destruction caused by imperialist wars, for instance in the Middle East.

The Transformation of the Environmental Crisis from an Accompanying Manifestation into a Law-Governed Manifestation

With the reorganization of international production since the 1990s, the *environmental crisis* has become a *law-governed manifestation of the capitalist mode of production*. This means that capitalist production and consumption *only work now on the basis of the chronic crisis-laden destruction of the environment*. The development of capitalism therefore has reached a point where it is *irreconcilable* with the preservation of the *natural foundations of life* of humanity. There are mainly two reasons for this:

Firstly, with the reorganization of international production the *overaccumulation of capital* became *chronic*: the opportunities for investments promising maximum profit did not keep pace with the expansion of capital. For this reason, the ruthless exploitation of the natural resources as a source of wealth at a level of *systematic and all-around destruction of the vital unity of humanity and nature* for the first time became an *economic compulsion*; there was no other way for solely ruling international finance capital to continue realizing maximum profits.

Secondly, the transition to the global environmental catastrophe has reached a point where *irreversible damage* has occurred to the *global material cycles and the global ecological balance*. In the crisis-laden environmental destruction, factors have developed which unfold devastating self-reinforcing tendencies and additionally hasten the transformation to a global environmental catastrophe.

Economic Factors for the Intensification of the Environmental Crisis

To counteract the tendency of the rate of profit to fall under the condition of chronic overaccumulation, the international supermonopolies are forced to employ *new methods* which accelerate the destruction of the environment to a most extreme degree in particular through their scope and interaction.

Firstly: constant increase of mass production instead of planned satisfaction of the needs of the masses

New investment opportunities for growing capital only can be found if artificial needs are created and made fashionable, for instance ever new tools of communication or offers of entertainment. To an increasing extent, junk that nobody needs is thrown onto the market, while on the other hand a growing section of humanity lacks the bare essentials. At the same time, the useful life of products is deliberately limited, as in the case of mobile phones, computers, other electrical goods, clothing or cars, in order to artificially increase the need to buy. The struggle for domination of the world market forces the capitalists to shorten the time for capital turnover and constantly expand production. Mass production additionally is fueled by speculative capital – completely disregarding the shrinking possibilities for selling all products. This "throwaway production" wastes human labor power and natural resources on a growing scale. At the same time, however, with the renewal of the means of production on the most advanced technical basis and the internationalization of production all material prerequisites have matured to produce in such a way that nature is spared and all needs of the masses can be systematically satisfied.

Secondly: control of national markets by international finance capital and the flooding of these markets with goods

To enable the sales of the steadily swelling torrent of their mass production, the international monopolies have completely subordinated the world market to themselves. The World Trade Organization (WTO) sounds the battle cry of "market liberalization" worldwide and, for the benefit of international finance capital, eliminates all national rules with which especially the neocolonially dependent and oppressed countries seek to protect their domestic markets. In the process, environmental protection is rigorously subordinated to international practices and the maximum profit interests of the international monopolies. Open access to all the world's national markets is an essential political condition for the realization of unbridled commodity production and the ruthless destructive exploitation of clean air, water and soil. The last untouched areas of the globe now are flooded with goods and the accompanying mountains of rubbish.

Thirdly: ruthless overexploitation of the limited raw material stocks instead of a cycle economy

The exclusive control of the national and international markets by solely ruling finance capital makes most countries self-service shops for raw materials and labor. International finance capital sees the ruthless plundering of raw material reserves merely as a "natural" source of maximum profit growth. The international oil companies drove up petroleum production between 1999 and 2008 from annually 3.5 billion tons to almost four billion. The three biggest mining monopolies more than tripled their sales between 2000 and 2008 from US\$43 billion to \$151 billion. The imperialist competitive struggle is exhausting raw material supplies at an increasingly faster pace. In the case of crude oil, the discovery of new reserves has long since ceased to keep pace with the increase in production so that the historical zenith of output (peak oil) sooner or later necessarily will be reached. In view of this fact, the exploitation of petroleum and natural gas increasingly is extended to poorly accessible places (deepwater extraction, for example). The international supermonopolies do not even stop at the Arctic: 30 percent of the yet undiscovered natural gas reserves and 13 percent of the undiscovered oil reserves of the earth are said to lie there.

International finance capital will not shrink back from tearing all raw materials from the bowels of the earth and then wasting them. It practices a proliferating "throwaway culture" and fights tooth and nail against the introduction of a comprehensive cycle economy in which raw materials are recycled. The technologies are available, would conserve resources and be extremely remunerative in terms of the whole economy. But no use is made of them.

Fourthly: instead of renewable energies, energy production promising maximum profit

As mass production is intensified and labor productivity rapidly increases, the quantity of energy that must be input grows by leaps and bounds. Since energy-consuming monopolies are interested in cutting their costs, but the sellers, the international oil, mining and energy monopolies, ruthlessly seek to raise their profits and to this end increase the prices for energy, the technology of renewable energies cannot prevail spontaneously. The changeover from gasoline and diesel engines to electric motors and fuel cells would require billions in investments, for instance to set up a new filling station network. The same striving to make quick profits without making major investments is behind the refusal of the monopolies to put an end to the squandering of resources and poisoning of the environment through waste incineration, to shut down coal-fired power plants and give up the uncontrollable use of nuclear energy. In 2010 more than 145 new nuclear power stations were planned worldwide. Year in, year out they will produce thousands of tons more of radioactive waste whose radioactivity will persist for millions of years and pose a permanent threat to flora, fauna and humanity.

The Siemens group published a brochure in June 2008 misleadingly entitled, "Energy efficiency and environmental protection." The authors assume that worldwide electricity consumption will double between 2005 and 2030: from 18,000 billion to 35,000 billion kilowatt-hours. The increase in power generation from renewable sources of energy from about 360 billion to 3,150 billion kilowatt-hours is merely a green fig leaf in this connection. In fact, the generation of power from fossil sources of energy is supposed to increase over the same period at a virtually unbridled pace: from 12,060 billion to 21,700 billion kilowatt-hours. The vitally necessary reduction or cessation of fossil fuel combustion is neither planned, nor will it be voluntarily implemented by international finance capital and the imperialist governments.

Fifthly: environmental destruction caused by international logistics and global transportation

The scramble for cheapest raw materials and primary products has resulted in a system of worldwide transport and international logistics not geared to the protective treatment of humans and nature but to the just-in-time dictate of maximum profit. International supermonopolies cynically welcome even the melting of the ice masses at the poles. Max Johns from the German Shipowners' Association declared: "With the pack ice gone, raw materials can be carried away profitably for the first time." (Spiegel online, 17 September 2009 – archived at www.webcitation.org/5wFPeL95d)

Innumerable raw materials, product components and foodstuffs now are produced in all countries of the world. The progressive character of this international division of labor is perverted because the competition for the most profitable production has the result that freighters and tankers,

airplanes, trains and trucks cover millions of kilometers of senseless – in terms of the economy as a whole – and environmentally harmful transport routes every day. The European agricultural and food monopolies, for example, have pigs, cattle and poultry slaughtered only at places where they can cut costs and obtain maximum profits. For this reason, 26 million slaughter animals traveled the roads of Europe every workday in 2010, 75 percent of them in long-haul transport. Especially the trucks required for this contributed to the regular gridlock on freeways and major roads.

Sixthly: subjugation of agriculture to the interests of solely ruling international finance capital

In the quest for investment opportunities that bring maximum profit, the international agricultural, chemical and food monopolies have industrialized agriculture the world over and subjugated it to their financial interests. They control large parts of the arable land and seed as well as the gene banks. The excessive intensification of agricultural production results in the use of vast quantities of artificial fertilizers, highly toxic weedkillers and pesticides, and of other substances which are partly very hazardous to health in animal husbandry. More and more agricultural land is being destroyed, more and more foods are produced artificially or polluted with toxins. While hunger spreads worldwide, on the pretext of producing "bioenergy" an increasingly larger portion of the arable land is misused to cultivate renewable fuels. Meat production has become a tremendous business. In many countries it ties up plant products which then no longer can be used as human food. Mass animal husbandry with its methane emissions also contributes greatly to intensify the greenhouse effect.

Seventhly: destruction of the natural habitat dangerously impairs the production and reproduction of human life

In all big cities the water and waste, traffic and smog problems are growing along with the problem of an appalling or hardly existing municipal infrastructure. In 2009 half of the world's population lived in cities; eight percent already lived in megacities with more than five million inhabitants. The social and mental impoverishment which life without jobs, without social security, in residential areas with high crime rates or in slums gives rise to is particularly burdensome.

The environmental destruction affects people across all regions or countries. Damage caused by electromagnetic radiation (electric smog) and by ionizing radiation, which comes from radioactive substances, has physical causes. Poisoning and many of the alarmingly increasing allergies have chemical causes. It is estimated that capitalist production now has introduced more than 150,000 synthetic toxic substances into the biosphere, some of them in large quantities. They originate from plastics and waste incineration. Many of these poisons have harmful effects on biological processes, but are not used up in the process – they accumulate in the biosphere.

Of the tropical rainforest, which has greatest importance for the CO₂ cycle and the world climate, half of the area that existed in 1950 disappeared by 1985 due to logging and slash-and-burn practices.

Overfishing of the world's oceans has assumed dramatic proportions. Many species of marine organisms are faced with extermination or have already disappeared. The polluting of the seas with trash constantly increases. In the Atlantic and Pacific, gigantic swirls of trash have formed; plastic debris drifts there in an area several times the size of Germany. When it disintegrates into increasingly smaller bits ("microplastics") it poisons fish and other sea creatures.

Tanker accidents and other disasters increasingly pollute the seas, as in the case of the deep-sea drill rig *Deepwater Horizon* in 2010, when BP contaminated the Gulf of Mexico with some 780 million liters of crude oil. But about three times as much oil flows into the oceans each year through the normal operation of tankers and other shipping.

In part, these methods are not new. New is that on the basis of the dictatorship of international finance capital they are employed comprehensively and to a maximum degree. New, too, is that these methods have become *basic conditions for international finance capital's control* over the world market and for a production yielding maximum profit, and thus an *absolute economic necessity* for the internationalized capitalist mode of production. In their *interconnectedness and their dimension* they constitute a *new quality of the exploitation of natural resources*, which at this stage dissolves the fundamental dialectics of humanity and nature.

Irreversible Changes and Destructive Interactions in Nature

In particular where global warming is concerned, *self-reinforcing tendencies* have come into play which significantly amplify the destructive human intrusions into nature and speed up the transition to a global environmental catastrophe.

- At the end of the 1970s the *Arctic polar ice* occupied an area of about 15 million square kilometers in the winter and 7.5 to 8 million in the summer. Since then the ice has shrunk so that in summer 2010 only 4.6 million square kilometers remained. In 2007 the Northwest Passage north of Canada remained open for the first time. Also, the thickness of the remaining ice cover decreased from 1980 to 2008 by around 53 percent. This dramatic melting of the Arctic ice masses influences the climate of the whole world through the "*Albedo effect*." Water and ice reflect the sun's rays very differently: surfaces of ice reflect as much as 90 percent of the solar radiation back into space, whereas bodies of water absorb 90 percent of this radiation as heat. This has comprehensive effects on ocean currents and atmospheric currents and leads to a self-reinforcing acceleration of the warming at first in this region, but then all around the globe on account of the greenhouse effect.
- Since the 1960s the temperatures, for example, in Siberia have risen by three degrees Celsius; the permafrost is thawing. In Canada the permafrost boundary has shifted more than 130 kilometers towards the North Pole. *Tremendous quantities of CO₂ and methane* are beginning to escape from the permafrost, which up to now has covered large areas of Siberia, Alaska and Canada; this strengthens the greenhouse effect.
- Another consequence of the warming of the northern polar region is the accelerated melting of the onshore ice in Greenland. The thaw rate has increased twofold to fourfold in the first decade of the 21st century. The melting of glaciers along with the expansion of the warmer water is currently the main cause of the rising sea level. The sea level increased worldwide by an average of 17 centimeters already during the 20th century – at a quickening rate. If the Greenland ice were to melt completely, that alone would cause an *increase in the sea level* by seven to eight meters. Entire countries would be inundated and uninhabitable.
- The mass of plant plankton, the basis of the food pyramid in the ocean, has declined by 40 percent since 1950 as a result of the increase in the temperature of the oceans. Plant plankton makes up 50 percent of all the biomass on earth and is responsible for over 50 percent of the photosynthesis¹. The approximate *halving of the mass of plant plankton* is disastrous for the food chain in the oceans and the production of oxygen.
- The increasing concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere also is responsible for the *acidification of the ocean*, which has far-reaching consequences for the entire food chain in the ocean. In interaction with toxic wastes, dumped into the ocean illegally or as a result of accidents, acidic seawater harms plants, microorganisms, mollusks, fish and birds. The effect is usually not immediate death, but gene mutations occur more frequently, the capacity for reproduction is disturbed, chronic damage to the nervous and hormone systems spreads. The progressive disruption of the biological cycle and the biotic communities² of the oceans speeds up the transformation of the environmental crisis into a global environmental catastrophe.
- The *Amazon rainforest* is less and less able to perform its regulating function for the world climate. Phases of *extreme drought* are mounting: in 2005 and 2006 there were two once-in-a-century dry spells in immediate succession; the water level of the river fell to 13 meters; regions once covered by forest or in agricultural use were turned into steppes.
- Extreme variations in the weather can be observed as the climate catastrophe approaches: an increase in the number of *floods* – Pakistan 2010, California 2010, Australia 2011 – of *droughts* – Russia 2010 – of *extreme cold* – South America 2010, Europe 2010. Such weather extremes cause not only growing economic damage, but directly lead to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people while millions are made refugees.
- The human-caused *death of species* now is proceeding at an alarming pace. Annually, 27,000

¹ During photosynthesis, low-energy carbon dioxide and water are converted into sugar through the action of light, releasing oxygen

² Groups of interdependent organisms inhabiting the same region and interacting with each other

species become extinct. A report published on behalf of the UN Biodiversity Commission in spring 2010 came to the conclusion that from 1970 to 2006 almost a third of all recorded populations of vertebrates disappeared. The tendency to a further drastic decline is apparent especially among the tropical and freshwater species.

- A problem that has been the subject of little study to date and of still less concern is so-called endocrine substances: chemicals introduced into the environment that act like hormones. They change the control systems in living organisms, for example the action of sex hormones, and can lead *inter alia* to a reduced reproductive capacity. Changed or artificially manufactured foods or genetically manipulated plants and animals increasingly are being brought into circulation – with hardly foreseeable consequences. Worldwide, a tendency to the *deformation of proteins* is growing. Internationally, old and new epidemic diseases are spreading. Tumors, allergies, dementia illnesses are greatly increasing; new "syndromes" that impair the nervous system and the mental health of people are on the increase. All this is the expression of a beginning direct endangerment of the production and reproduction of human life in general.

When serious scientists see the danger that the ability of the biosphere to regulate itself and to preserve a relative balance between the higher living organisms is threatening to break down, this cannot be dismissed by any means. The world is in a state of transition to a phase of uncontrollable, eruptive unfolding of the contradictions between humankind and nature, which *directly* imperils the *foundation of human life*.

The Approaching World Climate Catastrophe

Despite the Kyoto Protocol³, despite the development of renewable energies, their share of the supply of primary energy to the world is decreasing; the consumption of renewable energies is growing at a slower rate than the total consumption of energy. In no other question has the imperialist environmental policy failed so obviously as in the saving of the world climate.

Between 1900 and 2007 the worldwide CO₂ emissions rose from approximately two billion tons to well over 30 billion. In November 2008 the UN Climate Secretariat had to admit that the emissions of greenhouse gases in 40 industrial countries had risen by 2.3 percent from 2000 to 2006 despite all the entreaties of the climate conferences. From 1990 to 2008, worldwide CO₂ emissions alone increased by 40 percent.

The advancing global warming no longer can be denied. The period from 1995 to 2007 saw 12 of the 13 warmest years since the recording of temperatures began in 1850. The world economic and financial crisis since 2008 caused the direct fossil emissions to decline worldwide by a few percentage points, but this did nothing to alter the fact that the CO₂ content of the atmosphere and especially the average world temperature are rising.

Scientific scenarios⁴ assume that by the year 2100 the average temperature on the surface of the earth may rise by 1.1 to 6.4 degrees Celsius from today's more than 14 degrees Celsius. Arable land and forests on the planet would dry out on a large scale – unless humanity puts a radical stop to this development.

An Offensive of Imperialist Environmentalism

Coinciding with the start of the reorganization of international production, international finance capital launched an offensive of imperialist environmentalism aimed at undermining the international environmental movement – mostly petty-bourgeois in character – which arose during the 1970s and 1980s, or at least winning it over for the imperialist "environmental policy."

In 1990 the US politician Al Gore presented a book entitled, *Earth in the Balance – Ecology and the Human Spirit*, in which he warned of a global environmental catastrophe and promoted an "ecosocial market economy." In Germany, in 1995 the journalist and theologian Franz Alt, the

³Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted on December 11, 1997, in Kyoto (Japan)

⁴Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), February 2007

former Saarland minister of the environment Jo Leinen (SPD) and the Green politician and future German foreign minister Joschka Fischer took up this swindle and published an appeal for an "ecological Marshall Plan." They gave a detailed and powerful description of the havoc caused by the global environmental crisis, but then declared:

Only the joint, vigorous action of all persons, organizations, companies and governments committed to environmental protection can still prevent the destruction of the environment, especially that of our children and grandchildren.... The saving of the natural foundation of life benefits everyone.... Ecological economics involving less consumption of energy and resources not only is good for the environment, but for business too. (www.ramsch.org/martin/uni/fmi-hp/oemp.html, archived at www.webcitation.org/5wFIMDr gv)

This appeal established the slogan of the "reconcilability of ecology and economy" in capitalism, which all bourgeois monopoly parties in the meantime also have adopted. Essentially, this simply says that environmental protection measures only can be taken if they are compatible with the profit interests of the monopolies. By that, those mainly responsible for the environmental crisis became saviors; they were allowed to continue raking in their maximum profits in ecological disguise. Imperialist environmentalism aims at making the active resistance of the environmental movement appear unnecessary because now the people in charge of the economy and public policy have taken up the cause.

Environmental technology has long since become a new field of capital investment and profit maximization. Even progressive technologies like biogas generation or wind power stations can turn into the opposite and entail new environmental destruction if wrongly and excessively used under the diktat of world market conquest. Energy-intensive underground storage of CO₂ from coal-fired power plants is being planned under the banner of "climate protection" and would spell devastating environmental harm and hazards for humans.

The worldwide trade in "pollution rights" is the best example of how those chiefly responsible for the threatening global climate catastrophe pervert environmental protection. In the book, *Ist die Erde noch zu retten?*⁵ we read:

The decisive method, pushed through in the world climate conferences between 1992 and 1997, was the "trade" in pollution rights.... The logic of privatization of the atmosphere is put into practice, of course, in keeping with the present economic and political balance of power: large-scale polluters get more licenses than small-scale polluters. Those who emitted nothing to date get no licenses at all. Developing countries which have little to show in the way of greenhouse gas emissions have only limited pollution rights, unlike the imperialist countries, and from the beginning, therefore, only a marginal share in the profitable business. The Kyoto process thus increases the economic inequality between neocolonial and imperialist countries and, in addition, is itself an instrument of neocolonial oppression and exploitation. (pp. 80 and 84)

"Climate protection programs" of those in power are not just a deception, but also weapons in the struggle against the imperialist rivals and instruments for heightening neocolonial exploitation and oppression. Especially for German corporations, environmental technology is developing into a "competition winner." The "ecological modernization" concerns not only renewable energies and biotechnology, but also an "efficiency revolution" in production methods and products; minimized use of material, energy and human labor power is supposed to go easy on the environment, but promises mainly maximized profits. And that is decisive in the end for international finance capital.

However, "environmental efficiency" means only quantitative economies. At best they reduce individual burdens, but do not solve the problem of the necessary change in the social mode of production suited to restore the unity of humanity and nature.

The Threat of a Global Environmental Catastrophe as New Main Contradiction in the Imperialist World System

In the transition to the global environmental catastrophe the environmental crisis becomes identical with the general crisis of capitalism because it has become a law-governed manifestation since the

⁵Neuer Weg author collective, *Ist die Erde noch zu retten?* (Can the World Still Be Saved?)

reorganization of international capitalist production. The global environmental crisis affects all people – though in different ways and to different degrees depending on their class situation. It even threatens the capitalist mode of production itself by increasingly depriving unbridled mass production and surplus value production of the natural foundations.

The threat to humanity from a global environmental catastrophe has given rise to a new main contradiction within the imperialist world system: the *contradiction between the capitalist mode of production and the natural foundations of life of humanity*.

The maturing of the global environmental catastrophe is not the inescapable fate of humanity despite the irreversible damage that already has occurred. The basis of this catastrophe is the present stage of imperialism, and this basis only remains unchangeable if the imperialist world system and its domination of humanity and nature can be maintained. Solely ruling international finance capital tries at all costs to perpetuate the subjugation of social production to its narrow-minded self-interest. But that is the surest road to capitalist barbarism.

In the social mode of production of socialism, the profitability of the funds employed for investment are just one criterion; others are no less important: which products society actually needs in which quantity and quality; how these products can be manufactured in an environment- and resource-sparing way; how far arduous physical labor can be reduced, and whether the production processes are not hazardous to health; how the growth of the population can be influenced and nutrition with healthy foods realized; how unnecessary effort for transport can be avoided and a transportation system that protects humans and nature can be developed; how the already strongly deformed natural environment can recover again, and so on, and so forth.

A comprehensive cycle economy with a dialectical unity of production and recycling to close the material cycles as far as possible calls for a new type of industrialization with a new level of integration of the different production and recycling processes. This necessitates a systemic mode of thinking which tolerates no rivalry, no claptrap, and no fragmentary knowledge and activity. This is identical with the worldwide establishment of socialism, where surplus value and accumulation of capital no longer are the center of attention, but the satisfaction of the needs of humanity in unity with nature.

From:

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Proletarian Strategy and the International Character of the Socialist Revolution

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I.5 Indelible Successes in Socialist Construction

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Environmental Protection in Socialism

In his book *Capital*, Karl Marx also developed the basic dialectical line of the communists concerning the relationship of humans and nature:

Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*⁶, they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition. (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p. 776)

The socialist countries were unable to comprehend and realize this principle immediately in all its aspects on account of the historical circumstances. The socialist Soviet Union had to take enormous efforts to make socialist large-scale production prevail or to prepare itself for the attack of Hitlerite fascism and create the industrial basis for the fight for survival. These were gigantic projects which had to keep sight mainly of the defense of socialism. The tremendous pressure of the imperialist camp on the socialist Soviet Union partly tempted economic policymakers into undertaking large-scale projects and programs which had a destructive effect on the unity of humankind and nature. Socialist China learned from this. As long as Mao Zedong lived it practiced exemplary environmental protection in many areas according to the existing state of scientific knowledge. At the First United Nations Conference on the Human Environment from June 5 to 16, 1972, in Stockholm, the head of the Chinese delegation, Tang Ke, reported:

Our Government is now beginning to work in a planned way to prevent and eliminate industrial pollution of the environment by waste gas, liquid and residue in accordance with the principles of overall planning, rational distribution, multiple utilization, turning the harmful into the beneficial, relying on the masses, everybody taking a part, protecting the environment and benefiting the people. For many years, we have been conducting mass patriotic sanitation campaigns and afforestation activities, stepping up soil improvement, preventing soil erosion, actively transforming the old cities, constructing new industrial and mining areas in a planned way, etc., so as to protect and improve the human environment. Facts have proved that, provided the people are masters of their country and the government genuinely serves the people and takes their interests to heart, development of industry will benefit the people and the problem arising from industrial development can be solved. (*Peking Review*, No. 24, 1972, p. 8; www.massline.org/Peking_Review/PR1972/PR1972-24.pdf, download 14 February 2011)

One main point of departure was the dialectical approach to the problems of environmental pollution. During one mass campaign the following was discussed:

If one proceeds according to materialist dialectics, waste and non-waste are only relative concepts. There is nothing in the world that is absolute waste. Under certain conditions a thing is waste, under other conditions it is something of value; what is waste in the case of one product, becomes good material for another. (*Peking Rundschau*, No. 6, 1971, p. 8; our translation from the German)

And so a mass campaign for the dialectical unity of socialist economic and environmental policy took shape which attracted much publicity throughout the world. Authoress Sylvia Rogge wrote in the introduction to the compendium *Umweltschutz in der VR China* (Environmental Protection in the People's Republic of China):

Long before this topic became fashionable, for example in the Federal Republic of Germany, environmental protection was popularized on a mass basis. According to the instructions of Chairman Mao, multiple utilization was realized, rivers and lakes were cleaned, excrements were made into fertilizers, sewage treatment plants were built, raw materials were gathered, etc. The importance of environmental protection was underscored by the Chinese leadership by establishing a connection between it and the revolutionary line of Mao Zedong. And thrift, multiple utilization, consideration for the local environment, decentralization of industry and reducing of urbanization have made China a country whose environmental awareness appears to be exemplary. (*Umweltschutz in der VR China*, Holger Strohm [ed.], p. 12)

⁶ Latin: good "fathers of the family"

Professor Dr. K. William Kapp concerned himself with the topic of environmental protection in the People's Republic of China intensely in the early 1970s and acknowledged that the People's Republic "has developed a special strategy and successfully won over the public for a cooperation which goes far beyond what is observable in other developing or industrialized countries" (*ibid.*, p. 74).

Initiated by the socialist German Democratic Republic, the collection and reuse of so-called secondary raw materials also were exemplarily organized. Private and state agencies gathered used paper, bottles and glass, and later on also scrap metal and old clothes. The proper handling of these raw materials already was propagated in schools. Children and youths – organized in their youth organizations – became environmental protection activists and financed their work with the proceeds from the collection of these recoverable materials. For the GDR, poor in raw materials, these far-reaching recycling measures also were a way of coping with the situation.

Basis of the farsighted environmental policy in socialism was the successful outcome of the societal debate that upon overcoming the capitalist mode of production with its orientation to profit maximization, the restoration of the unity of humans and nature and its development to a higher level could be made the goal and basic condition of the socialist economy.

From:

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III. The Marxist-Leninist Strategy and Tactics of the International Revolution

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III.3 Changes in the Strategy and Tactics of the National and International Class Struggle for the Preparation of the International Revolution

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The Vital Importance of the Struggle for the Protection of the Natural Environment and Against the Threatening Climate Catastrophe

The struggle to save the natural foundations of life from international finance capital's greed for profit becomes the *most important task of the international socialist revolution besides the struggle for social and national liberation*. Today the environment cannot be saved anymore with long-term effect without overcoming the capitalist mode of production!

Up to now, most environmental struggles focused on local or regional problems, for instance the toxic gas disaster in Bhopal, India; the Naples waste disposal scandal in Italy; the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; the criminal storage of life-threatening nuclear waste, or the threat to habitats and natural resources in many countries. In the meantime, however, the consciousness among the broad masses is growing rapidly that the environmental and climate crisis has global dimensions and that its root cause is the capitalist mode of production at its present level.

At the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba from 20 to 22 April 2010, more than 30,000 participants demonstrated and discussed – among them 20,000 peasants, indigenous people, workers, women and scientists from Bolivia alone. The People's Agreement of the World Conference declared:

Capitalism requires a powerful military industry for its processes of accumulation and imposition of control over territories and natural resources, suppressing the resistance of the peoples. It is an imperialist system of colonization of the planet... The model we support is not a model of limitless and destructive development. All countries need to produce the goods and services necessary to satisfy the fundamental needs of their populations, but by no means can they continue to follow the path of development that has led the richest countries to have an ecological footprint five times bigger than what the planet is able to support. Currently, the regenerative capacity of the planet has been already exceeded by more than 30 percent. If this pace of over-exploitation of our Mother Earth continues, we will need two planets by the year 2030.

(<http://pwccc.wordpress.com/2010/04/24/peoples-agreement>, downloaded 23 March 2011)

The central problem in the struggle for the protection of the natural environment is the separation of the environmental movement from the working-class movement as well as a narrow-minded emphasis on local problems or individual projects. In the petty-bourgeois environmental movement a certain arrogance towards the working-class movement and anticommunist influences were able to develop. This was furthered by the fact that the consciousness for environmental problems has been underdeveloped in the working-class movement. The Tenth International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations in 2010 discussed this problem critically and self-critically. A conference resolution reads:

The environmental question has become a subject of grave concern for all of humanity because of the irreversible damage caused to Mother Earth by the imperialist powers in realizing their greed for profit. The International Conference stated that there have been shortcomings of the Marxist-Leninist and working-class movement in the environmental issue... The working class must take on its leading role and, at the same time, work together openly with all serious environmentalists. The solution of the environmental question lies in the reestablishment of the unity of humankind and nature through socialism/communism where not profits, but the interests of humanity are the center of interest.

The Marxist-Leninist strategy and tactics of the environmental struggle requires

- overcoming a narrow-minded emphasis on regional or local problems and temporary projects in environmental struggles and creating an *international resistance front to save the environment from the greed for profit*. Currently the most important common goal of such an international front of resistance is to prevent the climate catastrophe;
- understanding the *struggle for pushing through advanced production methods of a cycle economy* as a field of the class struggle of the international working class and waging it in alliance with all mass movements which can be won on its behalf;

- connecting the *struggle for the most urgent immediate measures* for protecting the environment with the preparation of the international socialist revolution. The revolutionary working-class movement must put itself in the vanguard of the struggle for the protection of the natural environment.

III.4. Strategy and Tactics for Forging the Proletarian United Front

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Struggle to Protect the Natural Environment

The fight to save the natural environment today must be directed at the capitalist mode of production and the dictatorship of international finance capital and be developed into an international resistance front under the leadership of the working class. It cannot make the acknowledgement of the socialist goal a precondition; but the Marxist-Leninists must lead this struggle as a school of organized international action in the struggle against imperialism and for socialism.

Besides the working-class movement, in the last few years the environmental movement has become the movement in which the issue of the "system" has been raised most intensely. This is an important condition for making active resistance for the rescue of the environment a part of the society-changing struggle for socialism. At the same time, active resistance to save the environment is not confined to class struggle. It draws broad sections of the non-proletarian strata into the struggle, which calls for all-sided alliance-building work.

In its rank-and-file work the MLPD furthers the conscious handling of nature by the masses. It promotes the unity of ecological and social movement; the joint struggle of the workers and the broad masses, progressive scientists and environment-conscious forces of the non-monopoly bourgeoisie; the support of the environmental policies of anti-imperialist governments or the governments of particularly affected countries like the Pacific islands.

With its strategy and tactics of the struggle over the mode of thinking, the MLPD helps the masses to strengthen their environmental awareness so that they can resist the disinformation campaign of the monopoly-paid "climate skeptics," corrosive "gloom and doom" fatalism, and other influences of the petty-bourgeois environmentalist mode of thinking. International unions for the protection of the natural environment must be *überparteilich* and open in terms of world outlook, work on an antifascist basis, be democratically organized and financially independent. They must fight against any form of petty-bourgeois claim to leadership. Owing to the many years of dominance of petty-bourgeois activists in the environmental movement, the struggle against modern anticommunism has special importance.

In 2008 the MLPD published its *Climate Protection Program*. It contains and explains the proposal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70 to 90 percent by the year 2030 through one hundred percent use of renewable energies and at the expense of the monopolies.

The MLPD successfully works to bring about the international cooperation of revolutionary forces also in the struggle to save the environment from greed for profit. It supports international unions like the *Environmental Counsel* that was held for the first time in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, in 2009, with international participation, and systematically espouses such activities in the working-class movement. The joint struggle in the environmental policy field under the leadership of the working class – with publications and mass discussions on environment-friendly technologies or production processes and their enforcement – is also a school of socialist construction and the development of the leading role of the international industrial proletariat, the carrier of the most advanced productive forces.