

The Climate Crisis or the Crisis of Climate Politics?

The threat of an impending climate crisis has rightly dominated the headlines over recent years – unabated carbon emissions, alongside peak oil, are leading us to a bleak, even apocalyptic scenario. In addition to this we are experiencing a crisis of neoliberalism, where the restructuring of capital is finding ways to exploit (and hence worsen) the ecological collapse it has fermented. Both in the UK and worldwide, we have seen the emergence of movements aiming to tackle climate change. These movements embody a politics that appears to cross the political spectrum, but in fact all gravitate around a single apolitical space, or as Steven has termed it a ‘post-political space’.

As the UN prepared to meet for the COP15 in Copenhagen, we found our movements in a state of political crisis. Dominated by methodologies that rely on an emerging carbon consensus as the basis of their (a)politics, movements such as the Camp for Climate Action find themselves powerless to engage with the decentred problem of climate change. There is an urgent need to reassess climate change in terms of power & productive relations, and to move beyond the single-issue environmentalism that has isolated climate change as the preserve of a specialist eco-activist vanguard.

This paper understands the COP15 and its aftermath as a potential for the revealing & overcoming of the schizophrenic tension of environmental movements. We point towards the emerging climate justice movements as an opportunity to move beyond the postpolitical towards an antagonistic politics of the commons.

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Introduction

It can be argued that over recent years, the UK has seen the development of a broad popular response to the clarion call of tackling anthropogenic climate change. At the forefront of this movement, at least from the authors perspective, is the ‘Camp for Climate Action’ (CCA), a movement that began in 2006 as a ‘place for anyone who wants to take action on climate change... and for anyone who’s worried about our future and wants to do something about it’¹. Elsewhere we have seen widely recognised environmental NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace joined by more traditional development or aid NGOs such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, often in broad coalitions such as ‘Stop Climate Chaos’. Even governments have jumped on the ‘social movement’ band wagon, with the UK’s Environment Secretary, Ed Miliband, calling for a ‘popular mobilisation’ to tackle climate change².

Despite this seemingly burgeoning response, the political imaginary of those responding to the crisis of climate change has been stifled by a scientific discourse that has fostered an apolitical

space³ and resulted in a carbon consensus. A fundamental compatibility has arisen between autonomous organisations, NGOs, government and business, around the shared discourse of ‘parts per million’, facilitating a politics-without-antagonism where ‘the ‘enemy’ is a mere thing [CO₂], not socially embodied, named and counted’⁴. The result of this abstraction is the suspension of the political, where the only debate that remains is over what technical or ascetic measures are best placed to remedy the crises we face. The politics of these movements have become focused on carbon-cuts and tipping-point timelines, and despite sometimes fiery rhetoric, the methods for affecting change become hardwired to affecting a thoroughly apolitical debate.

This apolitical space means groups such as the Camp for Climate Action have failed to find the antagonism they need in order to develop a fully anti-capitalist perspective, and as the UK Anarchist Federation state, ‘there is a very real danger of the Climate Camp being turned from a genuine movement for social change into a lobbying tool for state reform’⁵. As capital restructures itself around so-called ‘green’ policies, the emerging climate movement risks unwittingly bolstering this restructuring, ushering in a form of ‘green capitalism’.

However as we enter the period of the UNFCCC 15th Conference of Parties (COP15), the emerging climate justice movement, composed of diverse networks such as Climate Justice Action (CJA) and Climate Justice Now! (CJN!), is pushing the tension between the liberal carbon consensus and a properly anti-capitalist analysis to its limits. Whilst this appears as a crisis in climate politics, we encourage the reading of ‘crisis’ in a positive sense. This political crisis is indeed the ‘hope of Copenhagen’, the hope that what may emerge from the period of the COP15 and the following months is a more expansive politics that moves beyond the restrictions of existing climate change movements towards a struggle over life itself.

The Postpolitics of Climate Change

The global warming that we have experienced over the past 150 years is directly linked to the increase in CO₂ and other greenhouse gases emitted as a result of human activity. The full range of the political spectrum have nailed their colours to the mast – to be a climate change denier is akin to being a ‘flat earther’⁶ – and the calls for urgent action to tackle the impending climate catastrophe are being heard on a daily basis. Although difficult to predict accurately, the effects of anthropogenic climate change are already contributing to over 300,000 deaths a year, widespread droughts and famine, and the increasing precariousness of global security⁷. The Refugee Studies Centre considers that ‘human migration, forced or otherwise, will undoubtedly be one of the most significant consequences of environmental degradation and climate change in decades to come’⁸, both directly and through an increase in conflict over access to arable land or fresh water. In short, the climate crisis is the ‘greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced’⁹.

Given the grave implications of maintaining existing levels of global emissions, let alone increasing them, stunningly little has been done to change global trends of production and consumption. The so-called attempts to reduce global emissions, most notably the UNFCCC process and its infamous Kyoto protocol, have been deemed woefully ineffectual in creating any real emissions reductions. Indeed, the only significant reductions in CO₂ emissions in the last thirty years have coincided with the collapse of the state-capitalist economies of the Soviet Union, and the current neoliberal crisis¹⁰.

The reality of the climate crisis combined with the complete lack of concrete global emissions reductions has been responsible in part for the significant rise in civil society groups campaigning ‘against’ climate change. In the UK, climate change has over the course of the past decade risen to the top of the agenda not just for environmental NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, but also for more traditional aid and development organizations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, often in broad coalitions such as ‘Stop Climate Chaos’¹¹. Outside of the NGO sector, campaign groups such as Plane Stupid and Climate Rush have emerged, taking actions ranging from runway occupations to supergluing themselves to a number of symbolic subjects/objects, such as the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, the Department for Transport, BP Headquarters, and the statue of Viscount Falkland in the Houses of Parliament.

Of standalone significance, the Camp for Climate Action (CCA) is a network that aims to build a ‘social movement to tackle climate change’¹², which developed directly out of the ‘Horizon’ camp at the Gleneagles G8 in 2005. Taking inspiration from the Argentinian uprising in 2001, the Horizon was organized into a series of ‘barrios’ that represented the different geographical regions of the UK; the CCA still organizes on this principle, but has dropped the term ‘barrio’ in favour of ‘neighbourhoods’. The CCA publicly emerged in 2006, where it organized a week-long action camp outside Drax coal power station in Yorkshire, the UK’s largest single point emitter of carbon emissions. It has subsequently organized a yearly week-long camp along the four principles of ‘education, direct action, sustainable living, and building a movement to effectively

tackle climate change'¹³. Whilst the yearly camp has been a mainstay of the CCA, it has also organized a number of high profile direct actions including 'The Great Climate Swoop' (a mass invasion of Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station) and a protest at the European Climate Exchange in the City of London as part of the G20 protests.

Given the diversity of groups that are calling for action on climate change, even the UK Climate Change Secretary Ed Milliband has called for a strong social movement, it may seem absurd to suggest that climate change exists in a postpolitical space. However, despite the apparent diversity represented by these groups, they all place scientific discourse at the centre of their understanding of the problem and also the solutions. As such, all antagonistic positions are subsumed 'within a new political space grounded upon science and technocratic administration, where the only legitimate debates that remain concern the finer points of the governance mechanisms to be implemented'¹⁴. The post-politics of climate change is therefore one of liberal consensus, where 'there is no contest on what appears, on what is given in a situation and as a situation. Consensus means that the only point of contest lies on what has to be done as a response to a given situation'¹⁵.

Whilst the science of global warming has formed arguably the most totalizing liberal consensus, it is by no means the first time what we have experienced the apolitical effect of liberal governmentality. The nature of liberal consensus is by definition the exclusion of real difference, the reduction of contestation to nothing but quantitative variations on a predetermined identity. Alain Badiou makes this point through his assault on liberal multiculturalism, in which he finds that the demand for respect of the "Other" is a rhetorical stand in for assimilation or exorcism. This "Other" - the Pakistani, Turkish, Jewish, Whoever - is only tolerable if it is understood as a variation on the self, as something that can be related to the "Self" through association. However, as the unfolding of global conflict at the hands of Western governments since 9/11 has shown, 'the self-declared apostles of ethics and of the right to "differences" are clearly *horrified by any vigorously sustained difference*... this celebrated "Other" is acceptable only if he is a good other - which is to say what, exactly, if not *the same as us*?¹⁶. The essential characteristic of liberal consensus, as Foucault traced in his genealogies of judicial and medical institutions, is therefore the exclusion of dissenting views and the homogenization of difference.

Previous attempts to establish consensus have been based on seemingly more ideological grounds such as 'development' or 'democracy', ground which *could* ultimately be contested. As has been highlighted by Hardt & Negri, the two decades that ensued the fall of the Berlin wall and the overcoming of the binary between 'East' and 'West' were dominated by a project to establish a unilateralism based on a liberal consensus of *democracy*. The discourse adopted to support this project was one of terrorism, the 'Other' which was posited as the ultimate threat to the liberal consensus. Yet the 'financial and economic crisis of the early twenty-first century', along with the increasing lack of legitimacy in contradictory attempts to export 'democracy' through bloody wars, ultimately sounded the end of this fragile consensus¹⁷.

The unique nature of the 'carbon consensus', and what makes it infinitely more dangerous than previous attempts to establish liberal consensus, is that there can be no tolerable 'Other'.

Anthropogenic climate change is a totalizing force that encompasses the entirety of human activity, and given the apocalyptic picture that has been painted, it becomes ‘morally’ impossible to be opposed to the ‘carbon consensus’ and those regimes that act in the name of it. What is evident is that ‘the parameters of democratic governing itself are being shifted, announcing new forms of governmentality, in which traditional disciplinary society is transfigured into a society of control through disembedded networks of governance’¹⁸. This new form of governmentality will be based on a set of moral principles embedded in the carbon consensus, and will be enforced using new tools of governance such as carbon rationing and the subsequent monitoring of every aspect of our daily lives. As with all regimes of governmentality, the ‘madman’ or the ‘terrorist’ will forever be created in a witch hunt that ends in either exclusion or destruction, where the role of government-as-police extends to the elimination of both internal ‘dissidents’ and external ‘rogue’ states that fail to conform.

Whilst the carbon consensus may provide the new-and-improved platform on which an emerging governmentality is developed, overcoming the present crisis of political legitimacy, the ‘postpolitical condition is [also] one in which a consensus has been built around the inevitability of neoliberal capitalism as an economic system’¹⁹. This is a reflection of Fukuyama’s thesis that after the collapse of ‘actually existing socialism’ we have reached the ‘end of history’, where the neoliberal capitalist method of organisation has emerged the eternal victor²⁰. This ‘end of history’ is a fundamentally postpolitical condition, since it describes a space with no political contestation, just the absolute hegemony of neoliberalism. As Žižek has outlined, ‘it is easy to make fun of Fukuyama’s notion of the “End of History”, but most people today *are* Fukuyamean, accepting liberal-democratic capitalism as the finally found formula of the best possible society, such that all one can do is to try to make it more just, more tolerant, and so on’²¹. Much as in the political manifestation of the liberal consensus there is no room for *real* contestation but rather only difference in relation to the self, the neoliberal condition is one where *all* forms of economic organization are ultimately subsumed to the ‘ultimate’ leveling force of *the* market.

The crisis of climate change not only offers a way to reinstate liberal forms of governmentality, but to ‘reboot’ the neoliberal failure as ‘Capitalism 2.0’. As the chairman of Shell UK has noted, ‘for business, tackling climate change is both a necessity and a huge opportunity. This creates a huge new opportunity for British business nationally and internationally’²². This postpolitical carbon consensus fosters a situation in which capital-in-crisis is capable of restructuring, unleashing a new round of accumulation made possible through initiatives such as the ‘Green New Deal’²³ and carbon trading, thus maintaining capitalist hegemony even if its neoliberal clothing is out of fashion. The carbon consensus can therefore be understood as the much sought elixir that not only allows for the reformation of political systems but the reengagement of capitalist processes of expropriation and accumulation.

‘We come armed only with peer-reviewed science’²⁴

The conditions of the emerging postpolitical consensus around climate change are somewhat different to previous regimes of governance. What makes the climate consensus not only possible but so dangerous is the supposed neutral prophecy of the 'science' which supports it; the only ground for contestation appears to be within the domain of science itself. The political is erased from the debate, as the only way to affect a change in policy is to contest within science itself. Whether it be 'climate deniers' jumping on the UEA email scandal like a pack of wolves or environmental activists holding up the IPCC Fourth Assessment report as the holy grail, politics becomes nothing but a management process. All this points to a 'coming of age' of liberalism, in perhaps its most frightening of guises, and demands a reassessment of the existing political attempts to engage with climate change.

As has been outlined in the previous section, the past decade has seen a dramatic rise in the number of civil society groups and NGOs mobilizing around the issue of climate change, deploying methods from postcard campaigns to the blockading of coal power stations. Despite this, climate change has remained almost uniquely as an 'environmental' issue, 'an issue of *science* rather than *politics*'²⁵, and the various goals or demands of these movements have a dangerous tendency towards supporting the emerging carbon consensus and the associated shift in governmentality and neoliberal restructuring.

The broad environmental coalition 'Stop Climate Chaos' (SCC), which incorporates over 100 different organizations, is the *sine qua non* of this postpolitical tradition. Joint founded by Ashok Sinha, who was also behind the much maligned 'Make Poverty History' coalition responsible for the suffocation of dissent at the G8 in Gleneagles²⁶, SCC has organized a series of campaigns such as 'I Count' which lobbied for a stronger climate bill in UK parliament. In response to the imminent COP15 conference, SCC has organized a march through London entitled 'The Wave', calling on 'world leaders to take urgent action to secure a fair international deal to stop global warming exceeding the danger threshold of 2 degrees C'²⁷, and calling for 'a green economy and [the creation of] new jobs'²⁸.

The methods used by groups such as SCC and their member organizations tend to be eschewed by campaign groups such as Climate Rush and Plane Stupid as either ineffective, or as inaudible without more 'militant' direct action forcing these concerns to be addressed by those in the seat of power. It is possible to distill the actions of these groups in to two categories; firstly, the explicit attempt to put pressure on decision makers, an example of which is a Climate Rush 'banner drop' at the UK Coal headquarters in February 2009, which was part of 'calling for tougher measures to control CO2 emissions'²⁹. This form of action can be considered as 'militant lobbying' which in no way questions who makes decisions or the interests in which they make them, but seek to use more dramatic and often illegal methods to influence the decision makers. The second form of action is a more direct intervention where the purpose is to have an immediate impact on carbon emissions. Examples of this include when 29 activists halted and boarded a coal train bound for Drax power station in June 2008³⁰, the shutting down of Kingsnorth power station in August 2008³¹, or the recent Didcot power station occupation in October 2009³². For many involved, these actions aim to directly prevent carbon emissions at points of production. Nonetheless, these highly

media orientated actions also appeal strongly to the first category of action, demanding popular support for their effectiveness, and more often than not have carefully crafted press releases designed at placing pressure on either corporations or governments.

The actions taken by these groups often get interpreted as being more 'radical' or 'militant' than the methods deployed by major NGOs. However, this appears to us to be no more than a battle of rhetoric, based on a flawed logic of what it means to be taking more radical or militant action. The approaches of both SCC and some direct action groups illustrate an underlying complicity, and indeed reliance, on the liberal 'post political environmental consensus', and is therefore radically reactionary, as it obstructs the development of divergent and conflictual trajectories. Underpinning these diverse methodologies is an agreement on how we interpret the climate crisis, meaning the 'only debate [is] over technologies of management, the arrangements of policing, and the configuration of those who already have a stake whose voice is already recognized as legitimate'³³.

Some groups, such as the CCA or Workers Climate Action entertain more explicitly anti-systemic politics, however, as we will argue in the next section, even for those elements of the burgeoning climate movement who proclaim an affinity with anti-capitalism, there is a problem with locating an antagonism in their political analysis which would enable them to develop a full anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian praxis.

'We're all anti-capitalists... tomorrow'

The Camp for Climate Action has a headache. It wants to deal with capitalism; many of those involved consider themselves 'anti-capitalists', there are wide ranging debates and about the role of capitalism in the climate crisis at workshops held during climate camps, and there is possibly even a general agreement between those active in the climate camp process (those who attend monthly national gatherings, are involved in working groups and local neighbourhoods) that capitalism is the root cause of climate change. However, any concrete engagement with an anti-capitalist politics is shut down, either by the perceived 'urgency' with which it is deemed necessary to act, or through the lack of antagonism present within its politics. This means that CCA has papered over the real cracks of tension present within its politics and actions, rendering itself a paper tiger.

The urgent nature of the climate crisis has a debilitating affect on the development of more radical forms of political engagement within the CCA. Whilst it is foolish to contest that the crisis of climate change is of immediate concern to us all, the invoking of urgency generally plays into the development of the liberal carbon consensus. Reports such as the New Economics Foundation's '100 months' report and the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report, which predicted the need for a peak in global emissions by 2015³⁴, has infused a need to deal with climate change 'first', where everything else becomes relegated to something we can deal with tomorrow. As Monbiot states, 'stopping runaway climate change must take precedence over every other aim'³⁵. It is not only thinktanks and external commentators that have fallen into using the urgency card, individuals active within the CCA have also proclaimed that 'the aim of climate camp should be to stop human

kind destroying the planet, leave aside the socialist/capitalist debate. The system we have is capitalist, stopping climate change is more important than stopping capitalism³⁶. As is made explicit above, this ‘invoking [of] urgency is essentially a politically indeterminate move’ whereby those that invoke urgency do so to explain why a certain political project demands precedence³⁷. This is the underlining of the carbon consensus, a fundamentally apolitical position that ‘legitimizes itself by means of a direct reference to the scientific status of its knowledge’³⁸.

The implication of this consensus is, as outlined above, the suffocation of the space for antagonistic politics. Rather than simply an abstract point, this suffocation has concretely emerged within debates within the CCA - a number of workshops at the 2009 Camp at Blackheath stand out as examples of this widely experienced tension. The first of which was a workshop attended by one of the authors and around 200 other participants entitled ‘If not Carbon Trading then what?’. The discussion took as its starting point the illegitimacy of carbon trading as a solution to the climate crisis, but rather than opening up a discussion on the problem of the financialization of climate change, it proceeded to offer a number of more ‘workable’ solutions such as ‘Tradable Energy Quotas’, a ‘Green New Deal’, or a ‘Kyoto 2’. Despite contributions from the audience challenging the underlying premise of what was being offered to us as ‘workable solutions’, the urgency of climate change was reasserted by both the speakers and a number of voices in the audience, re-grounding the debate firmly ‘over technologies of management’³⁹.

Damien Abbot found this same problem in his attendance at the workshop ‘Green Authoritarianism: Can we save the climate without surrendering our liberty?’. In a discussion around the legitimacy of an aviation tax, the prevailing sentiment was that despite ‘our’ anti-capitalist politics, a tax is a measure that we should accept as it would reduce the demand for aviation and hence benefit the climate. What he observed as ‘more pernicious’ was the regularity with which ‘the time-frame in which it is posited that something can be done to halt a global temperature rise [was] used as a bludgeon to quell any argument’⁴⁰. A report by the Anarchist Federation on the workshop entitled ‘10 Years on from Seattle: anti-capitalism, where now?’ again highlighted this tendency to stress ‘the urgency of climate change, and the time scale we have to work with’ and the corresponding ‘possibility of using the state as a strategic tool for our movement’ – yet these very same points were held side by side with a discussion of ‘what “our” (ie. anti-authoritarian) alternatives are’⁴¹.

This regularly-experienced suffocation of antagonist anti-capitalist positions exists as form of schizophrenic⁴² tension, for both individuals⁴³ and with the CCA as a whole, between an anti-capitalist desire and the quasi-gravitational pull of the liberal carbon consensus. To this extent, we argue that it is not the case that the CCA is full of entrenched liberals wishing to take the camp on a more liberal trajectory (although this may will be the case with certain individuals), but rather that the presence of this schizophrenic tension, and the consequent attempts to commensurate two fundamentally incompatible positions, leads to contradictory and often unintelligible political positions.

This schizophrenic tension manifests itself not only in discussion but also in the emerging political demands for ‘green jobs’ and ‘just transition’, along with some of the actions taken by the CCA. The demand for ‘just transition’ has been taken on by Plane Stupid and the group Workers

Climate Action, a group that formed and has been largely active within the CCA, but has over the past year been active with a number of non-aligned campaigns such as the Vestas and Visteon disputes. The underlying principle of a just transition is that the interests of workers in environmentally damaging jobs, such as the coal, automobile and aviation industries, need to be a fundamental part of our transition to a low carbon future. Given the necessity of closing down these industries if we are to drastically reduce carbon emissions, those that campaign for just transition recognize that it is morally vacuous to abandon these workers to the scrap heap of precarious labour, and that the ‘interests of the working class’ in these industries is incompatible with the environmentally driven demand for the closure of these industries. As such, the push for a just transition prioritizes the ‘reskilling’ of these workers in ‘green jobs’ such as windmill production or environmental auditing, facilitating both the closure of environmentally untenable industry *and* the provision of jobs in new ‘clean and green’ sectors.

Whilst these demands may appear to be a highly progressive step forward for environmental and class politics, they make a fundamental mistake about the ‘interests’ of the working class that makes these demands fully compatible with the restructuring of neoliberalism as a ‘green capitalism’. This demand for a just transition to a green economy is ‘in line with dominant political and economic structures and interests’⁴⁴, as neoliberalism seeks to overcome the ecological ‘limits to capital’ through internalizing the contradiction between environment and capital accumulation, installing it as a fundamental driver in the new round of ‘green’ capitalist accumulation. This demand for ‘an economic transition... ensuring a just transition of the workforce’ has been incorporated in the UNFCCC negotiating texts⁴⁵ and at a national government level as Gordon Brown promises ‘100,000 Green New Deal jobs’⁴⁶ as part of providing a ‘good driver of growth’⁴⁷ that can allow neoliberalism to restart accumulation. Yet as any coherent left analysis of capitalism will tell you, the interests of capital and of the workers are *fundamentally* opposed⁴⁸. As a worker during the Liverpool dockers strike from 1995 onwards exclaimed:

“I don't particularly want a politics centred on "the right to work at all costs". I don't want to see my kids struggling for crap jobs. I think we're actually going through a revolutionary period, one where we should be saying "fuck you and your jobs and your slave labour". If wage labour's slave labour, then freedom from wage labour is total freedom... [H]ow many socialists within the political groups that have supported us have or would build a political strategy out of the refusal of wage work? I haven't come across any, but I know that's what Reclaim the Streets activists consistently argue and find that a breath of fresh air... Yer know, when we unite with people like Reclaim the Streets, we have to take on board what they are saying too, which is: "Get a life. Who wants to spend their days working on the production line like that famous poster of Charlie Chaplin depicting modern times?" I think this is a concept the labour movement has got to examine and take on board”⁴⁹.

The current calls for 'just transition' by environmental groups, which have also been made by large labour unions in the US such as the AFL-CIO⁵⁰, face the very real danger of playing the 'role that trade unions played in the Fordist era: acting as safety valves to make sure that demands for social change remain within the boundaries set by the needs of capital and governments, and actually further drive capitalist growth: the more they protest, the more 'green technologies' will grow'⁵¹.

It is not only through engagements with just transition and 'green economies' that environmental groups have attempted to commensurate anti-capitalist politics and the climate crisis. At the beginning of 2009 the CCA made a decision to link the climate crisis and the financial crisis, in both its propaganda and its actions. This led to a 'swoop' and subsequent establishment of a Climate Camp held outside the European Climate Exchange in London as part of the G20 summit protests. The location of the camp was designed to send a clear message about the links between capital, carbon trading and the climate crisis. This attempt to develop an anti-capitalist direction to CCA repeats many of the criticisms leveled at the J18 'Carnival against Capital' in 1999, namely that activists skilled in specific issue-based campaigns, well versed at the occupation of head offices and construction sites, mistakenly applied the same action repertoire to capitalism, locating its centre, or at least a key node, in the City of London.

Although this criticism almost certainly doesn't apply to all involved, many of whom would have had a more nuanced analysis, the targeting of the City creates a mystification of capitalism with an overemphasis on financial capital. We would level the same criticisms at the G20 meltdown demonstration outside the Bank of England, which although a good symbolic target, given the collapse and bailouts of the banking industry, personified capitalism as 'those greedy bankers' rather than articulating a generalized critique of capitalism. These events placed too much emphasis on financialization and risk being steered from generalized anti-capitalist critique into a call for more regulation, or worse, a moral indignation with the banking industry resulting in a scapegoating where 'someone' is to blame.

We must recognize that the schizophrenic condition between anti-capitalist politics and the liberal carbon consensus cannot be reconciled. Attempts to do so, as have been outlined, arrive at the subsumption of the values of one (anti-capitalism) in the process of the other (liberal consensus). Rather, we need to first diagnose our own schizophrenic political condition, and then tackle the mechanisms that serve to subsume the anti-capitalist to the liberal position. As the COP15 approaches, our split personality may be entering a decisive moment of crisis, unable to contain these two personalities within the same subject. There is no dialectical synthesis to this crisis.

Copenhagen: Just another summit mobilization?

'Crises precipitate change'⁵²

From the 7th-21st December the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) met in Copenhagen for the Fifteenth Conference of Parties (COP15). The COP

process emerged from the 1992 Rio Summit on the Environment and Development, or what has become colloquially known as the 'Earth Summit'. The most high profile of the COPs was in Kyoto in 1997, where the infamous 'Kyoto Protocol' was adopted introducing a series of 'carbon reduction' strategies such as Cap and Trade and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)⁵³. The COP15 has been elevated to a messianic position by media and politicians alike, heralded as not only 'compar[able] with Bretton Woods or peace treaties after the war' but 'the most important negotiation the world will ever see'⁵⁴.

The apocalyptic discourse surrounding the COP15 was echoed by the vast majority of NGOs campaigning around the issue of climate change. The UK's 'Campaign Against Climate Change' understood the COP15 as 'our last chance to avert a global catastrophe of unimaginable proportions' and along with major NGOs such as Friends of the Earth Europe, are calling 'world leaders to take the urgent and resolute action that is needed to prevent the catastrophic destabilisation of global climate'. Together these NGOs mobilized up to a hundred thousand concerned citizens to march on the streets of Copenhagen on the 12th December, rallying behind a core of demands that call for 'world leaders [to] take urgent and resolute action'⁵⁵. Much like past summit mobilizations such as Gleneagles G8 in 2005, a large 'alternative' network also mobilized for the summit. Beginning in September 2008, the global network Climate Justice Action (CJA) formed around a 'call to action'⁵⁶, which the UK's Camp for Climate Action unanimously supported. Through a number of international meetings throughout 2008 and 2009, a series of working principles and 'network goals'⁵⁷ were developed that illustrated the shared trajectories of CJA and the 'movement of movements' that had been dominant throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. This shared trajectory has led to those (mostly legitimate) criticisms of summit hopping that were directed at the 'movement of movements' to be regurgitated and directed at those groups mobilizing around the COP15⁵⁸. For instance, a recent article in the UK movement publication, *Shift Magazine*, claimed that 'besides having a good time' what could be achieved by the mobilizations 'will be minimal'⁵⁹. Contra to these criticisms, we argue that the COP15 offers a unique place in terms of summit mobilizations, falling in time with a series of multiple crises.

It is not only the climate that is in crisis; as Mueller has outlined, we also face (at least) a biocrisis, a capitalist crisis, and a crisis of political legitimation⁶⁰. The COP15 arrives at time when we face not only a tipping point for our complex climatic systems, but a tipping point in terms of how capital organizes its accumulation and expropriation. Yet the nature of tipping points is that they are full of potential, they are when our systems are precariously balanced on an 'edge of chaos' where anything can happen⁶¹. It is for this reason that we must embrace crisis for all of its potentials, crisis as *opportunity* for something different. The COP15 spectacle was precisely an attempt to force these crises to unfold in a certain way, pushing systems back into a state of equilibrium where our potentials for radical change are once again extinguished. Yet there is no teleology in a crisis, they unfold based on the decisions and actions we take in the here-and-now. As

Joel Kovel has noted, 'these meetings will be a turning point. The question remains as to the direction taken, whether toward eco-catastrophe or hope for life'⁶². The COP15 may well become understood as the point where one half overcame its other, where the schizophrenic subject of the environmental movement was forced into a final resolution or split entirely⁶³. But let us reiterate the point - we must embrace this *subjective* crisis, fermenting the split between the liberal consensus and the antagonistic movements it captures. It is only through overcoming our personal political crisis that we will be able to form movements that can truly engage antagonistically with capitalism, governmentality *and* climate change.

The Hope of Copenhagen From Above

Copenhagen, or 'Hopenhagen' as it was branded by some, was representative of a crisis of values - do we solve climate change and move towards a more sustainable way of life, or do we start a new cycle of accumulation? This value-crisis is a battle between Copenhagen from *above* and Copenhagen from *below*. The battle of Copenhagen from above and below is a battle over 'justice', a battle of values. Capitalism wants to maintain and extend its system of value over all existence - whereas the 'below' wants to change what it means to value existence in all its forms. Mainstream discourse branded Copenhagen as the 'Bretton Woods' of the twenty-first century, an epoch defining summit. Beneath this hyperbole lay a concrete aim to use Copenhagen to restore faith in the capitalist system and representative democracy in the midst of both a political and economic crisis. As Mueller & Passadakis state, 'the biocrisis is the opportunity that *might* just allow capitals and governments to at least temporally deal with the legitimation and accumulation crisis'⁶⁴.

Not only was the COP used in attempt to bolster the ideology of neoliberalism, governments attempted to use the climate and the biocrisis as an opportunity to restructure and unleash a new round of enclosures. As the Turbulence collective point out, 'the secret of capital's longevity lies precisely in its ability to use limits and the crises they engender as a launch pad for a new round of accumulation and expansion'⁶⁵. One example of this new round of accumulation is the development of new international regulation for the "rights to pollute", which as Brunnengräber affirms is 'the precondition for the creation of new markets'⁶⁶. The 'cap and trade' initiatives introduced at Kyoto are a fundamental part of this, providing a new basis for investment in the model of the derivatives markets. Yet as Lord Nicholas Stern has outlined, it is not enough to create new cycles of demand, the neoliberal model demands the creation of a 'good driver of growth' through 'a sustained programme to invest in and deploy energy conservation and renewable energies'⁶⁷, incorporating the environmental limits of existing neoliberalism as the very driver of the new 'green capitalism'.

This new round of accumulation and governmentality isn't something that has its beginning in Copenhagen, elite climate change 'solutions' have always had capital accumulation as their

rationale. As Brunnengräber states, 'the Kyoto protocol was [...] the starting point for the emergence of an international regime of resource management that would soon open up new business opportunities'⁶⁸. Not only do these false 'solutions' generate more profit for capitalists, but in addition a 'number of ecologically sustainable forms of producing and living have actually been put under pressure not just by globalized capitalism, but more specifically by a top down kind of climate politics'⁶⁹. The attempts to both reassert new forms of governmentality and to begin a new cycle of accumulation will not only fail to solve the climate crisis, but will also shut down grassroots alternatives in the here and now.

To be clear, there is no conflict between the 'greening' of society and the continuation of the capitalist mode of production. Even Thomas Friedman has gone green, stating, 'making America the worlds greenest country is not a selfless act of charity or a naive moral indulgence. It is now a core national security and economic interest'⁷⁰. It would appear that Brunnengräber is right when he suggests that 'we are witnessing the emergence of a climate neoliberalism'⁷¹. The development of 'Green Capitalism' is more than greenwash or a rebranding exercise for Capitalism 2.0; while some reactionary capitalists may drag their feet and fail to pick up on the new direction markets are going, green capitalism 'embodies the faction of the global bourgeoisie that understands the reality of climate change and of its own decline in political legitimacy in the face of the banking crisis and the consequent end of the the neoliberal monetarist hegemony'⁷².

Green capitalism may help shore up capitalism's legitimacy crisis, but as Mueller & Passadakis state, it will not 'solve the antagonism of the biocrisis, it will draw energy from it to drive forward which always must be capital's first and foremost project: the accumulation of *more* capital'⁷³. This accumulation rests ultimately on the capture of the common(s). As Foti states, 'green capitalism wants to solve the economic crisis via green jobs and a new welfare system, but it will succeed in its task, only if it manages to widely redistribute what Negri and Hardt call 'commonwealth''⁷⁴. The struggle over Copenhagen from *above* and *below* was a value-struggle over our commonwealth, and this commonwealth is central to our antagonism over the crises we face.



This antagonism is completely lacking in the discourse of the big NGOs and the majority of environmental movements, they inhabit the post-political space they have helped to create and foster. Copenhagen from *above* thrives on this apolitical space that has been manufactured around the climate crisis. Many environmental lobby groups even go as far as being entirely incorporated into the false solutions being proposed by the big corporations, making them indistinguishable in their solutions to the current crises. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), for example, fundamentally supports capitalist strategies for dealing with the biocrisis, giving its logo, and therefore tacit support, to a huge advert 1km from the Bella Centre⁷⁵ that states 'climate responsibility is simple, it's just good business sense' going on to say 'let the clean economy begin'. On their website they state that 'WWF partners with companies to help them achieve their environmental objectives'⁷⁶.

Commentators were correct in placing the COP15 on a level of equal or greater importance than Bretton Woods, but for all the wrong reasons. Despite those 'inside' voices hopelessly fighting for progressive solutions – we do not deny the heterogeneity of the conference itself – the UNFCCC negotiations are part of a dominant framework that has 'precious little to do with the climate, and everything to do with the haggling over percentage points of economic growth'⁷⁷. Copenhagen 'from above' was concerned with establishment of new regimes of governing and the emergence of a new round of capitalist accumulation, representing a fundamental restructuring in both the political and economic rules of the game.

The Hope of Copenhagen From Below

'Meltdown expected, the wheat is growing thin Engines stop running, but I have no fear'

The Clash

The crises we face are by definition an opportunity, both for capitalist accumulation/restructuring, and the creation of a new world. We need to keep the categories open and in flux. The temptation in struggles around crises and the precarity these crises engender is an entirely understandable desire to return to some form of normalcy. Yet we need to resist this conservative urge, as well as the apolitical overcoding that attempts to close these open moments into either 'environmental' (partial) struggles devoid of political content, or from economic crisis to 'recession' or 'recovery'. We must resist attempts to determine these crises as 'depressions' or 'instabilities', as events that already have a preordained resolution in the continuation of that which already exists. The crises we face are unique, and offer us the opportunity to remake the world on our own terms.

Copenhagen offered us more than just a summit protest, more than the sum of its parts, whether it had turned out to be another round of street battles, like those over the eviction of *Ungdomshuset* in 2007, or a more carnivalesque creative spectacle, such as that planned by the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination and their 'bikebloc'. Copenhagen promised to be an Event, and the 'Reclaim Power' action on the 16th can be viewed as an attempt to create a rupture with the refigurations of capital and governance that are underway. The call to host a 'peoples summit' when demonstrators enter the UN conference was not a call for a 'different' set of talks or a 'better' agreement. As dissident delegates on the inside disrupted the sessions and participated in an exodus from the proceedings, we witnessed a fundamental challenge to the process of Copenhagen from above and all it entails.

This is not just a struggle *against* climate change, or even the biocrisis more generally. It is crucially an affirmative struggle, or as Mueller & Passadakis put it 'a struggle not just *against* green (or any other) capitalism, but struggle *for* the constitution of alternatives'⁷⁸. For us, these struggles, and the alternatives we hope to foster are fundamentally about the creation and defence of the common(s), in both their material and immaterial forms. Copenhagen and its affects must force a change in how we struggle around climate change. The traditional PPM framework and the value-neutral carbon consensus is incapable of accounting for the fields of struggle that animate the world we create. The inconsistencies and tensions that vitalize this emerging movement have the potential to force the crisis of climate change out of its environmental strait-jacket and into a fundamental struggle over life itself.

The uncertainty of the world that we face is something to be seized - for better or for worse. Copenhagen is an uncertain and open space occupied by forces from above and from below. We need to make sure that our energies have not become captured, constantly reaffirming our politics to the hope from below. We need to ensure that our struggles don't become a 'Make Poverty History' that cheer on government leaders in their business of expanding business, prioritizing endless economic expansion over life. The battle we face is clear - capital or life.

In-conclusion

*'Tomorrow dawns a day when nothing is certain'*⁷⁹

The COP15 came hot on the heels of the ten year anniversary of the Seattle WTO demonstration in 1999. Ten years before that, 1989 saw the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of 'actually existing Socialism'. A decade earlier in the UK the election of Margaret Thatcher ushered in an era of neoliberal policies and the totalising mantra that 'there is no alternative'. Ten years before that the Piazza Fontana massacre marked the beginning of the 'strategy of tension' in Italy, part of a state-sponsored right-wing attack on the Italian left's 'Hot Autumn'. What do all these dates and events illustrate? That the circulation of struggles to remake the world from below, and of those that wish to close down that space and return it to the profit motive, is a refrain throughout history. It is more than possible that the COP15 will be looked back on as the point at which we entered a new cycle of (carbon) struggle.

The sense of hopelessness that is implicit in the failure to find non-capitalist solutions has been deliberately produced through the post-politics of the carbon consensus; we need to collectively overcome this hopelessness and replace it with a 'hope in common'. This common hope is the prerequisite for the creation of 'other values' which will help us to struggle against the biocrisis whilst also expanding the common(s), creating the possibility of a real movement that can abolish the present state of things. To this extent 'Hopenhagen' is not an empty concept, but rather the prerequisite for a new politics.

This paper is a call for both political activity beyond measure – beyond *economic* value – and also towards the affirmative creation of common values. As De Angelis states, 'either: social movements will face up to the challenge and re-found the commons on values of social justice in spite of, and beyond, these capitalist hierarchies. Or: capital will seize the historical moment to use them to initiate a new round of accumulation'⁸⁰. The climate, or the 'environment' even, isn't just another 'issue', it's a central political battleground from both *above* and *below*. We need to fully realise this and act accordingly. We need to put aside purist political positions and become involved in the messy world of actually-existing social struggle. As Böhm states, 'in times of crisis, act!'⁸¹.

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