

**A CLIMATE  
OF  
MISTRUST?**

**The Working Class  
&  
Climate Camp**

# CONTENTS

Introduction page 3

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## 'A Militant for Humanity'

A Short Article by Laurens page 6

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## 'The Deafening Propaganda of the Status Quo'

An Extended Article by Rachel page 8

### **Sub-Headings:**

'The Middle-Class Voice' page 8

Old King Coal page 15

Carry on Camping page 19

Bone of Contention page 23

---

End Notes page 25

## **INTRODUCTION**

After years of denial by governments and the media, it seems that climate change is suddenly the issue of the moment and, whatever their take on the subject, it seems to be on everyone's agenda.

In March 2007, Channel 4 broadcast Martin Durkin's controversial documentary, *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, which led those who doubt a human element in our changing climate to immediately declare their scepticism vindicated. Meanwhile, the 'green lobby' declared Durkin as an evil-doer of the worst kind before venting their spleen to Ofcom.

Whether or not Durkin's work is helpful to the wider debate on climate change, we must remember that *The GGW Swindle* was a self-confessed work of polemic, which means that it comes with the usual caveats about its aims and the 'evidence' presented. The film may have given those already in denial an excuse to stick their heads further in the sand but it also raised some interesting points on the way in which climate change is perceived by all sides of the debate.

There is a worrying tendency amongst some 'greens' to act as though climate change is an entirely manmade phenomenon, despite the fact that the Earth's climate has warmed and cooled naturally over millions of years (and certainly long before humans ever graced its surface with their presence). Sceptics are able to use this to further muddy the waters, despite their own tendency to conveniently ignore other compelling evidence that there has been a marked acceleration in the warming of the planet since the so-called 'Industrial Revolution'. This has gone hand in hand with more unpredictable and extreme weather patterns.

That these arguments have become so polarised as to be virtually irreconcilable is not surprising given the gravity and complexity of the subject matter nor are we expecting the scientific community to be skipping over common ground together at any time soon.

However, this is in itself indicative of the more worrying human tendencies at play here, not least a seemingly unerring willingness to hand over the responsibility for shaping our opinions, our lives and our futures to governments, corporations or those who nominate themselves as ‘experts’ in any given field. In so doing, we allow these elites to mould us into the image they require for their own purposes, under the auspices of humanitarian intent.

This is particularly evident under capitalism where most human beings are not only told what to do by those with no authority over them other than wealth, they accept the right to consume as a just reward for their submission. Of course, if the carrot of consumerism doesn’t work then the stick of stigmatisation can be brought into play - a double whammy of social control.

It’s understandable that those at the top of the pile want to pull the ladder up and equally so that they will defend their superiority by any means necessary. What is perhaps more bemusing is those at the bottom who seem to value their inferior position in a similar way.

In response to the decision to hold the 2008 Climate Camp at the proposed site for a new coal-fired power station at Kingsnorth on Kent, trade unionists and other pro-worker groups/individuals lambasted the camp for being anti-worker, middle-class and supportive of the anti-coal governments of Wilson/Thatcher/Major. One of the most vocal of these critics is Dave Douglass of the National Union of Mineworkers, who also criticised the 2006 camp at Drax coal-fired power-station (a theme that he continued to pursue even when the 2007 camp targeted aviation rather than coal).

This pamphlet is a response not just to Dave’s criticisms of Climate Camp but to the worrying perception that the demands of labour in the present should take priority over the pressing need to address the climate crisis looming in the not-to-distant future.

The arguments so far have been polarised, which is understandable given what is at stake in the eyes of both the workers and climate activists. However, we do not believe that the two groups are as far apart as recent debates would suggest, indeed, the workers will almost certainly be the ones hit hardest by the effects of climate change.

Some of the views expressed here may be unpalatable to some but we have not endeavoured to further polarise the debate, merely to suggest that if our future is to be a safer one for all, the workers have as important a role to play in this as anyone.

It would be great if things were to change tomorrow and there was never the need for another Climate Camp but we don't think that's not going to happen. Let's hope that by the time Climate Camp 2009 pitches its tripods, climate activists and workers (and the large number of people who are both) will be a significant united voice in the global movement for change.

*Wrekin Anarchist Group Press*

August 2008

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## 'A Militant for Humanity'

I forget whether it was Peter Turner or Roy Frye who, while on a support picket for a direct action demo at a future rocket base, was barracked by a construction workers' shop steward:

*I don't suppose you've ever met a building worker?*

To which he replied:

*Well actually, I'm convenor of shop stewards at the largest building site in South London [possibly the largest in the country].*

Ironies like that are bound to happen when revolutionary industrial unionists campaign on issues where the needs of the working class as a whole conflict with the sectional needs of part of that class. I would be astounded if Dave Douglass told me that he's never experienced this and I am fairly certain that he has told me in the past that he has. Moreover, his grandfather was a De Leonist, at the time of World War I, and so, he too must have experienced similar allegations.

He [Dave] has been a well-known activist (anti-militarist and anti-racist, as well as industrial) since the mid-Sixties, when the twin issues of unilateral disarmament cut across the old union divisions and when the Committee of 100 was at its height. Only four years earlier [before the Communist Party changed its line and decided to climb aboard the CND bandwagon], all unilateralists were regularly denounced by Stalinists as anti-working class (there were still many Stalinist shop stewards around in the Sixties, who didn't seem to have heard about the change in party line). These denunciations found sympathetic ears, not only amongst arms workers but also in the building industry, amongst lorry drivers and most of all, workers in the electronics industry.

Even without the Stalinists, there were speakers/writers within the London Anarchist Group and in the letters pages of the Socialist Leader (as late as 1961) who assumed and stated (without evidence) that anyone who used direct action against the Bomb could not care about industrial issues.

Whilst in 1963, Dave Pude, a syndicalist with a long record of activity in the Liverpool docks, made the same assumption about anti-racist campaigners and resigned from the SWF.

Of course, there must have been some people within CND, DAC, the Committee of 100, the WWI 'No More War' movement and the anti-racist movement of the 1960s who fit such stereotypes and no doubt, there are some within the present Climate Camp grouping. But I am sure that Dave's recollections of the earlier instances would assure him that they were a minority and I beg him to consider that they may be too in the case of Climate Camp. No doubt the fact that he is the last real voice of the miners, standing up for people who were wounded in the front line of earlier class battles, puts him in an awkward position but this argument conflicts with his own history (and indeed, that of the miners).

As Tom Brown once said when someone argued that the Bomb was not a working class issue:

*Before a [wo]man is a worker [s]he is first of all a [wo]man. Before one can be a good industrial militant, one must first be a militant for humanity.*

*Laurens*  
August 2008

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## **The Deafening Propaganda of the Status Quo**<sup>1</sup>

When I heard that this year's Climate Camp would be at King's North coal-fired power station in Kent, I didn't expect Dave Douglass of the NUM to be packing his rucksack with waterproofs and d-locks before heading south with a spring in his step. Nevertheless, his 'Urgent Dialectic' on Indymedia still came as something of a surprise and a disappointment. [Dave and I have debated our opinions on this subject at several Northern Anarchist Network meetings (most recently in September 2007) with me in the 'green' anarchist corner and Dave in the 'industrial'].

Although I can't help but agree with some of the criticisms Dave makes of the way in which Climate Camp engages (or fails to) with workers employed by the industries they target, I don't think it's just climate protestors who are guilty of short-sightedness. Those opposing them from within the trade union/labour movement are often equally detached from wider issues and are hardly known for their openness or inclusive approach either.

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### **'The Middle-Class Voice'**

In a recent attack on Climate Camp via Indymedia<sup>2</sup>, Dave suggests (not for the first time) that CC speaks with a '*middle-class voice*' when it opposes coal. An opinion of environmentalists that he shares with ideological giants like George Galloway and others who use the old middle-class chestnut to describe anything that doesn't fit their cosy image of the workers. Indeed, Gorgeous George himself apparently prefers to refer to those of a more verdant hue as '*the whites*' because they are all white and, you guessed it, middle-class. In other words, anyone who actually advocates the radical change required to halt or more likely, slow, the effects of climate change is some how putting the boot into working class communities, even though these communities will be hit hardest if said changes aren't made and made quickly.<sup>3</sup>



In contrast to Galloway, Dave is certainly not one of the usual suspects from the vanguardist left and probably knows more about the decimation of working class communities by capitalism than many of us (which, it should be noted, is from first-hand experience, not from reading it in a book). However, I can't help but feel a little uneasy about the traditional image of 'the worker' as being part of an homogenous, entirely industrial proletariat, forced to sell their labour just to put food on the table, especially in these times of New Labour's so-called meritocracy.

Of those of us for whom work is considered an inescapable factor in their daily grind, many are not merely working to scrape a living for themselves and their families but to equip themselves with other trappings of the consumer society, which they have been led to believe are nothing short of basic human rights. After all, how will people know what a noble and rewarding thing selling yourself in the labour market has been unless you have the material proof?

I believe that such attitudes show little consciousness of what the very existence of a 'working class' says about our unequal world. To suggest that anyone who thinks otherwise is a whinging bourgeois do-gooder sticking the boot into the workers does a disservice to those amongst the working class who accept the need to reduce our consumption. It also conveniently overlooks those workers who actually want to believe Blairite mantras like "*we're all middle class now*" and whose 'middle-class voice' is provided by corporate ventriloquists, manipulating their puppets with 'rewards' like plasma TVs, people-carriers and every busy parent's favourite baby-sitter, the games console.

Not that these pay-offs for the good little wage slave were entirely thought up by New Labour. Back in the 1860s the American labour spokesman, Ira Steward, suggested that a reduction of working hours and increased wages would encourage "*...the workers, through their new leisure, to unite in buying luxuries now confined to the wealthy.*"<sup>4</sup> Hasn't 150 years been long enough to work out that consumerism is never an even playing field?

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Here in Telford, we are threatened with an opencast mine and since the plans were made public, the surrounding communities are, indeed, split along class lines. The 'middle-class' residents from the more picturesque areas affected generally oppose the mining whilst the local Labour councillor (who is against the scheme) reports that she is struggling to muster opposition in the 'working-class' estates nearby.

Dave may argue a case for nimbyism on the part of those who don't want coal mining on their doorstep but still want their multitude of gadgetry to work at the flick of a switch. He might even suggest that the working class areas (which do have a history of mining in the not too distant past) are merely being realistic and keeping their eye on the benefits of the scheme.

That there is a 'not-in-my-back-yard' mentality at play here is not in doubt, indeed, the 'action group' set up to oppose the scheme seem as concerned about house prices as they are about other factors. However, this is not necessarily contrasted with a concern for socio-economics on the other side of the social divide. It would be more accurate to note that most people just aren't interested - either about pollution, increased traffic and the destruction of local ecology or the jobs created by the proposed mining.

In fact, the amount of jobs provided (currently said to be around 40) will be relatively small, especially as the area is also subject to large-scale housing development. Furthermore, if past history is anything to go by the average 'worker' in Telford wouldn't want this kind of job anyway as it's usually their policy to leave this kind of dirty, difficult and potentially dangerous work for immigrants (whilst at the same time branding them as the evil others stealing all 'our' jobs).

Such attitudes have been all too evident in the recent activities of local MoD logistics workers, who have traditionally been at the top of the pile in Telford when it comes to wages, job security and other perks.

Now these workers have been stripped of their traditional reliance on nepotism and their jobs are actually under threat, they are marching under banners proclaiming the need to ‘Save our Community’ although they cared little about everyone else in the community when they were riding high. What’s more, they are part of an industry that is all about destroying communities, albeit thousands of miles away - or are workers in Bahgdad, Kabul, Belgrade and Tehran somehow inferior?

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Thankfully, I’ve never had to work in a pit or for the MoD but I have had to do some pretty unpleasant jobs to pay the bills. I wonder how, therefore, the idea has arisen that selling your labour for the vast majority of your life is somehow admirable, however unpleasant the industry you work in may be. To me, it is merely part of the spurious mythology of the ‘human condition’.

As Chomsky points out, feudalism at least acknowledged a human right to life, albeit within oppressive and violently enforced parameters, whereas under capitalism,

*... people had to have it knocked out of their heads that they had any automatic “right to survival” beyond what they could win for themselves in the labour market. And that was the main point of classical economics.<sup>5</sup>*

And what could be more short-sighted than rubber-stamping a system that is putting all of humanity and thousands of other plant and animal species in danger, just because you might be in charge yourself one day? To me, it doesn’t matter whether the means of production are in the hands of the workers or not when said means are part of a system jeopardising the future of everyone on the planet. Do some trade unionists perhaps foresee a ‘Rapture’ scenario, whereby in the event of a climate catastrophe the noble worker will be spirited away to a land of milk and honey, or are they merely ignoring the obvious effects of environmental degradation on working people.<sup>6</sup>

During and after the Heathrow camp last year, some were heard to proclaim that climate camp had ‘radicalised’ the local community but this isn’t strictly true. Heathrow has provided work for locals for years and many were part of this purportedly symbiotic relationship between capitalism and community until it threatened to bulldoze their homes for a third runway.

Local residents did indeed come to the camp and many engaged with the protestors, as well as helping out on site, but some were abusive and threatening too, whilst others just ignored us. Even in the case of those who supported us, I would hardly go as far as to say that they were radicalised by the experience and to be honest, I think most saw us as more of a convenient curiosity than valued comrades in a wider struggle for a better world.

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Things are a little more complicated than changing the multifarious lifestyles of some six billion people worldwide with an immediate transition to composting toilets, veganism and self-sufficiency but I don’t think anyone from Climate Camp suggested otherwise. However, I believe that it is also naïve to reject or delay the transition to a future sustainable in terms of people and the planet because of a refusal to confine certain ways of life to the past.

I have heard Dave Douglass say that the miners were faced with something of a dichotomy in having to fight for jobs that no-one in their right mind would actually opt for given the choice. And yet, as with the previously mentioned MoD workers, arguments advocating the continuation of environmentally damaging industries, instead of seeking modes of transition to more sustainable community employment, are all too often taken up by the left without question.

Of course we should never forget our comrades who fought those seeking to crush them underfoot but we need to adapt to changing times and sustaining industries such as coal mining, ‘defence’ and aviation might not seem such a good idea when their effects hammer the final nail into the coffin of the workers via climate change.

Coal mining in the UK currently employs around 5,600 people whereas Germany has managed to create 250,000 jobs in the renewables sector in the last six years alone. Whilst it is true that we should not be blindly seduced by the propaganda surrounding some renewable energy sources, surely it is better for workers to be above ground looking to the future than sticking their head in the sand and looking to the past.

Even our local Greenpeace group, who could hardly be described as doyens of class war, were preaching to landlocked Salopians about over-fishing whilst at the same time, trying not to 'offend' fishing communities by taking the campaign to them.

Notwithstanding the fact that there have been some very successful projects between environmentalists, fishing communities and other workers around the world<sup>7</sup>, why shouldn't we challenge those who continue to contribute to species decline? It's not like their activities will be good for them in the long run either and whilst trying to have a conscience about the work that you do might not put food on the table, stubbornly upholding tradition may be, quite literally, taking food out of the mouths of future generations.

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Although some still see the union movement as the ultimate expression of solidarity between workers of all trades, in my experience such unity is neither possible under the current system nor championed by the workers themselves.

Dave offers the example of rail workers as an industry being disregarded by the anti-coal stance of Climate Camp but it is air and road travel/haulage that are rapidly replacing rail as the favoured method for shipping people and most kinds of freight into, out of and around the UK. We may therefore note that whilst Climate Camp may be criticising industries with traditional associations to their own in ways these workers don't like, I could also be argued that the immediate threat to their livelihoods comes from other industries and, therefore, other workers, who are undoubtedly as eager to protect their own interests.

In 2007, the Heathrow protest led to further allegations that holier-than-thou environmentalists were trying to stop decent, hardworking people enjoying the two-weeks in the sun that they had looked forward to for the other 50 weeks of thankless toil. But what of the coastal resorts in the UK destroyed by the package holiday industry and what of the workers in the communities behind the scenes of overseas resorts, who receive a mere fraction of the income generated by British tourists?

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At the time of writing, Arthur Scargill had just spoken at the Kingsnorth camp and in a somewhat perplexing take on the coal -v- Climate Camp debate, Indymedia reported:

*Concluding, Scargill reiterated that we must develop a unified energy policy, and that although the opinions of the miners and those of the camp are different, they are not that different. We are together in this class struggle.*<sup>7</sup>

Are we therefore to assume that the camp is no longer middle class because the NUM have graced it with their presence or should we rather take care not to let talk of being united in class struggle distract us from Scargill's rather empty promise that:

*...he would join us in our protest if it was against the burning of foreign coal, mined in shocking conditions in countries like China, conditions British workers have not suffered in 200 years.*<sup>8</sup>

I understand that Dave Douglass fulfilled his promise to attend the camp and that he intended to speak on both trade unionism and the relevance of the 1984/85 Miner's Strike, so we may feel safe in assuming that this is a genuine gesture to achieve some common ground. However, his claims elsewhere that most of 'them' [Climate Camp] know nothing of the strike or trade unionism is yet another spurious assumption on his part and I doubt very much whether the prejudices evident in his musings on the camp so far were left at the entrance when he arrived.

Like Scargill, Dave's own advocacy of coal is supported by a dangerously optimistic faith in 'clean coal' technologies (see '**Old King Coal**' below) and a belief that being anti-coal and pro-nuclear are one and the same. Moreover, it implies that this is a struggle over who can and can't be deemed working class based on two different visions of the future - one from the brush of Lowry, the other from the spray-can of Banksy.

In the weeks leading up to the Kingsnorth camp, Dave Douglass urged fellow workers and unions to join a 'workers contingent', which he hoped would march on the camp and give those deluded idiots a damn good proletarian piece of their mind, Dave asks of his comrades,

*... use your influence to organise a workers contingent to let the Climate Camp know we the workers have a point of view and we don't need to sit and do as we are told by anyone including them.*

I find this statement problematic for a number of reasons, not least because it presupposes that no one at Climate Camp is a worker, let alone capable of independent thought and opinion-forming. What's more, it hardly seems wise for someone who is so keen to level allegations of jumping into bed with the establishment to be party to reinforcing the entirely false image of the camp as mindless missionaries offered by the Government's puppet media. What I find most disturbing, however, is the implication that 'the workers' have a proven track record of not needing to sit and do as they are told because, to me, that's really what accepting this descriptive is all about.

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### **Old King Coal**

I do not share Dave Douglass and Arthur Scargill's faith in the potential of 'clean burn' coal technology and although Dave's contribution to Indymedia offers what appears to be compelling evidence for the potential of carbon capture, this view is seemingly not shared by others in the coal industry.

The Government is currently running a competition in which it is offering financial incentives to the company who come up with the best demonstration model for 'clean burn'/carbon capture technology. However, on Radio's 4's *File on 4* [10 June 2008], Chris Ellstone, the Director of Projects for RWE Npower, pointed out that even if the Government had included the money for this project in its latest spending round (which it did not) the demonstration would not be on-line until at least 2018-2020.

In addition, a model on the scale proposed will only be able to capture around one-twentieth of the carbon produced by a large coal-fired power station, with industry-wide carbon capture not likely to be available until 2030 at the earliest.<sup>9</sup>

Even if carbon capture works (and there is no proof that it will) it will also have pitfalls in terms of efficiency, as it reduces the energy output of a coal-fired plant by around one-third.

Many of the communities who are now having the coal industry inflicted on them via open-cast schemes are hardly overflowing with joy and certainly do not see it as a panacea for all their ills, rather the opposite. Members of our anarchist collective and the wider grouping around Climate Camp joined locals in Merthyr for a protest against mining earlier this year and this was hardly case of lecturing the community on what they should or shouldn't be doing, in fact, a significant number of locals have been running a vigorous anti-coal campaign for some time, including a 10,000+ petition against open-cast.

One local resident, Alison Austin, whose home is just a few hundred metres from the Merthyr open-cast site spoke to Radio 4 and pointed out that although many local residents and the local planning authority rejected the scheme, it was forced through by central Government.

This hardly suggests that those opposing coal-fired energy production are in the pockets of an anti-coal government and the mining industry must have been delighted to hear Energy Minister, Malcolm Wickes, suggest that removing coal from the equation is '*a total nonsense*'.



The Labour Government has forced through open-cast mining projects in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Northumberland too, despite this being directly at odds with their previous planning guidelines regarding open-cast coal mining. But of course, this has less to do with reversing years of Tory anti-coal propaganda and more to do with the nasty shock of Russia turning off the gas supply to its neighbours.

It's now virtually unheard of for a Government minister to discuss energy policy without mentioning 'security of supply' and those desperate to continue the mining industry in the UK will undoubtedly point to the role of coal in achieving this. Dave suggests that there is around 500 years worth of coal left in the UK, a resource that he rather unfortunately describes as '*breathing space*' to develop renewable resources.

This is another area in which Dave and I disagree. Solar and tidal power are fine and dandy he proclaims but not destructive wind estates, '*laying siege to the bits of free land and crags and moorland we have left*'.<sup>10</sup> Are we therefore to assume that ripping the heart out of 'free land' for an open-cast mine is acceptable but the erection of wind turbines is not? Or is open-cast okay because after 10 years of raping and polluting the environment, companies like Banks Mining intend to install 'landform sculptures' to disguise the effects of their operation?<sup>11</sup>

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I'm not personally convinced by the contribution that large-scale wind farms have to make to a truly sustainable future and suspect that the Government has put wind power, neither the cheapest nor the most efficient of the renewables, at the heart of its purported commitment to sustainable energy knowing that wind turbines are unpopular. What better route to getting your own way than citing public opinion as being against your efforts on renewables before promoting nuclear as a low-carbon alternative?

As Dave rightly points out, successive governments have long since planned to make Britain nuclear dependent, hence the closing of the coal mines, their slow action on renewables and the lack of funding for carbon capture development. *File on 4* heard the current Government's energy policy described as '*muddled*' but a more accurate description would be that they are inducing failure in all non-nuclear energy-generating industries, in order to force through their pro-nuclear agenda, which is no less vigorous than that of the Tories.

I do believe that wind power would play an important role during a transition period towards a society where individuals and communities take responsibly for their own energy supply. But unfortunately, many people would rather allow themselves to be seduced by the myth of clean, green coal or nuclear power than actually do something about reducing their energy consumption or, heaven forbid, taking responsibility for their own energy generation. The negative aspects of wind power, both in terms of the spread of turbines and inefficiency, are largely due to the scale of operation required to match the current demand for energy whilst tidal power has its own environmental pitfalls in this regard.

The role of Big Bad China couldn't go unmentioned, although the miners' perspective on this goes a lot deeper than usual mantra of '*China's doing it so why shouldn't we?*' Nevertheless, there's still a lack of recognition that if the burning of fossil fuels continues to accelerate the current rise in global temperatures, appalling working conditions and unemployment will be a widespread global problem.

That is not to say that the '*mass slaughter*' in Chinese collieries or unemployment and social decay in UK mining communities should be ignored in the here and now, but this isn't an issue of whether coal is produced in the UK or whether imported coal is 'fair-trade' from ethically-run mines. It's about the fact that we no longer have the 'breathing space' to put our faith in a technology that has already caused massive environmental damage and, as yet, has no way of making itself 'clean' without massive reductions in efficiency.

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## Carry on Camping?

Whatever you think of Climate Camp's way of doing things, the one thing they have said from the beginning is that this is about real alternatives and not relying on Government, whatever its political colours, to do things for you.

At Heathrow 2007, some 2,000 of us had the opportunity to thumb our noses at authority, make decisions by consensus, live communally and bravely limit our environmental impact by tackling the composting toilet facilities at night. Less rain and committees would have been nice but, hey, you can't have everything and the overall experience was one of inspiration and empowerment.

Flippancy aside, I left Climate Camp feeling genuinely inspired to do things for myself, although I admit that this hasn't proved the 'easy steps to Utopia' that I left the camp imagining it would be, especially when faced with the constraints of the prevailing system.

However, what I learned from others at the camp has not only inspired me but given me practical knowledge on how to do things like feed my family, generate my own energy, deal with my own sanitation requirements, etc without having to rely on a government body or corporation to do it for me, for a hefty price. I wonder how many of the union representatives marching on Climate Camp in protest could offer their members the same advice?

The last time I was in a trade union the best they could do was offer me cheap car insurance - hardly a path to liberation for the average wage slave like me. I'm now a student and like their industrial counterparts, the Students Union fairs little better in the radical thought stakes. But they do get you discounts at Top Shop, one of the high street's main champions of sweatshop and non-unionised labour!

Of course, the environmental movement does include those 'dark greens' who would probably disagree that there is any need for debate between them and the industrial working class whilst themselves offering little more than a puritanical religion of environmentalism.

Murray Bookchin labels their primitivist rituals and self-centred spirituality as a 'hugging culture' but his own 'social ecology' is hardly made of ideological granite and, as Bob Black notes, is little more than '*vulgar Marxism in disguise*'.

There was a strong anarchist influence at the Heathrow camp whilst the usual bandwagon-hoppers from the SWP et al were conspicuous by their absence. It was somewhat refreshing not to have the usual bowdlerised Marxist/Trotskyist mantras delivered in Orwellian fashion from every corner of the camp but if they had been there, they would not have been prevented from speaking. Vigorously challenged, maybe, but still given a hearing.

That Dave chose to vent his spleen in Freedom rather than come to the Heathrow camp and speak was his decision, he was not excluded, no-one was, nor did he need to wait for an invite this year as he seems to imply. As Paul from Climate Camp admitted in his response to Dave on Indymedia, some environmentalists have failed miserably to engage in class politics but not all trade unions are exemplars of open-mindedness and class solidarity either. [Sadly, Paul has since requested that his response be removed from the site, as it was 'not for public consumption'].

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Dave Douglass has a lot to say on the subject of class struggle and I have certainly gained immensely in knowledge from hearing him speak and debating with him. I'm really glad that he went to Climate Camp and not to see him hectorred for his perceived role in the collapse of planet earth as he seemed to expect, but because I think that his argument needed to be openly debated with the people he has criticised. I would suggest that Dave was no more in danger of entering a lion's den at Climate Camp than someone from the camp would be at an NUM conference. I merely suspect that the prejudices and assumptions evident in his letter on Indymedia will be the real barrier to the 'balanced approach' he claims to seek.

I did not attend Climate Camp this year because as much as being able to ‘live the dream’ was good last year, I can’t help but feel that it’s time to start living that dream in my everyday life. Something that I’d have a lot more time to do if I wasn’t so busy travelling to one place or another for a mass protest, notching up the fuel miles as I go and ignoring what is happening on my own doorstep.

Climate Camp is a fantastic place to go to get ideas on different ways of living but like all such gatherings, it has the potential to lose its ideological and practical purpose and become just another summer festival, where hangers-on dip their toes into the realms of the ‘alternative’.<sup>12</sup> It is also impossible to ignore the ominous signs of hierarchy creeping into the camp psyche and what’s more, I don’t want to be part of a Climate Camp ‘brand’ or to have to identify myself as such with an air of smug superiority wherever I go to protest. This isn’t a competition about who’s the most ‘green’.

Telford and places like it the length and breadth of the British Isles may not stand out because they have an infamous nuclear base or airport but Telford alone has a coal-fired power station (named by FoE as one of the most polluting in the country) and various military installations. This goes hand-in-hand with recently announced plans for an opencast coal mine and continued unsustainable development of green space.<sup>13</sup>

There’s plenty to protest about right here on our own doorstep and plenty of local establishment flunkies ready to tell local workers that defending these industries against criticism is about ‘community’ not capitalism.

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Since Dave and I debated this same issue at a Northern Anarchist Network meeting in September 2007, I have tried really hard to learn from his experiences and appreciate his point of view. However, I take issue with his repeated suggestion that: a) everyone at Climate Camp has little or no concept of workers’ and/or class struggle; and b) that ‘the miners’ are paragons of such struggles to a man (for all ‘workers’ are inevitably seen as a male entity).

Thus, Dave feels entitled to pigeonhole all climate activists as middle class under the banner of ‘Climate Camp’ but when he uses the broad term ‘the miners’ it is to be taken foregranted that this does not include the likes of the UDM.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, Dave isn’t the only one with a habit of muddying the water with generalisations. For example, ‘climate change’ is a naturally occurring phenomenon that has been going on since our humble speck of rock first came into being, so it would impossible for it to be entirely the fault of the human species. I believe that a failure on the part of environmentalists to qualify their claims in this regard has not only led to confusion on the part of the wider public but also gives those who deny a human factor something to pick holes in.

I also believe that it’s also a supreme arrogance to talk about ‘saving the planet’ when what it actually boils down to is keeping ourselves alive, if possible, on a planet that has seen dominant forms of life come and go, regenerating itself without them. There is strong evidence that human activity is both accelerating natural climate change and making the climate more unpredictable but for me, a desire to protect the environment isn’t just about the issue of a changing climate. It’s also about protecting what we have whilst we’re still around to enjoy it and in that context, polluting the planet with fossil fuels, plundering it for whatever a select few can make money out of and wiping out entire ecosystems and species for the sake of profit and consumption is insane.

Okay, these things are very much down to your perspective but in this case, putting things into perspective involves admitting that we’re not as significant in the big scheme of things as we like to think. We have been fortunate enough to live during a time when our planet is home to a massive diversity of amazing species and I believe that this privilege should not be taken foregranted, let alone destroyed before its time.

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## Bone of Contention

Dave Douglass hasn't pulled many punches in his criticisms of Climate Camp but perhaps its most vehement critic has been Ian Bone, sniping away from the confines of cyberspace.

I agree with some of what Ian has to say but when I read his vitriolic blog, I can't help but be put in mind of the relationship between the militant class war brigade and the animal rights movement in the 1980s.

One day they were slating anti-vivisection 'bureaucrats' like the BUAV for failing to support militant animal rights activists and the next, eating meat was suddenly a badge of 'working class identity', which would only be criticised by some mindless bourgeois wanker.<sup>15</sup> As the latter term is their most favoured descriptive of anyone who doesn't agree with them, are we to assume that onanism is the only indulgence that the working class are not permitted to allow themselves?

Maybe Ian is hoping that we'll all read about how Revolution™ should really be done in his autobiography or that we're eagerly awaiting the film based on it, the rights to which he's sold for a humble tenner. Or maybe he's just so wrapped up in his own self-aggrandisement that he can't believe anyone else has a view of the world beyond their 'right' to work and consume.

Here's a thought from Angry Ian, which makes me think that perhaps the leftie doth protest too much!

*Has there ever been a bunch of middle class wankers to match that crew of self-righteous smug holier than thou trustifarians at CAMP CLIMATE CHANGE dedicated to stopping working class families having a cheapo holiday in Spain while no doubt planning their gap year round the world save the Kalahari bushmen eco-friendly filmed for Channel 4 planet saving organic soil association junket! Surely one plum in the mouth GEORGE MONBIOT is enough but a whole fucking field of them.....where's foot in the fucking mouth when you fucking need it? EH?<sup>16</sup>*

As it happens, I'm can't think of anyone I came across at Climate Camp who is bothered by what some people say to get themselves a bit of kudos in the Guardian and one thing's for certain, most of the people I met had a lot more constructive ideas about revolutionary change than hero-worshipping George Monbiot. But, as Monbiot himself admitted recently whilst indulging in a spot of handbags at twenty paces with Julie Burchill, stereotypes of any mass movement are '*lazy, familiar and sometimes true*'.<sup>17</sup>

We're fighting for our future here (in more ways than one) and George Monbiot aside, I'd much rather fight to live in a world inspired by the 'just transition' of the Climate Camp community than one designed around the tyranny of Ian Bone's prole-cult.

*Rachel*  
August 2008

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## End Notes

1. Quoted from EP Thompson (I couldn't track down the exact page but I'm pretty certain that it comes from The Poverty of Theory & Other Essays (1978).
2. See <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/07/403441.html>
3. A 2003 study by the World Health Organisation linking widening social inequities, loss of biodiversity, climate change (specifically global warming) and increased rates of infectious disease. McMichael AJ, Campbell-Lendrum DH, Corvalán CF et al (eds.) (2003) Climate Change & Human Health: Risks & Responses Geneva: World Health Organisation. Source Specific URL: <http://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/cchhsummary/en/>
4. From Ira Steward A Reduction of Hours, An Increase in Wages (1863) cited in Eli Zaretsky Capitalism, the Family & Personal Life (1976: 1980 Edition) pg. 64
5. Noam Chomsky (2003) Understanding Power pg. 252
6. It is unfair to suggest that all unions are failing to address the issue of climate change. There are unionists, for example within the CWU, who have been working with the Campaign Against Climate Change (who participate in Climate Camp) and a CCC Trade Union Conference in February 2008 was attended by 300+. Unions have also participated in CCC marches. For more information see: [www.campaignccc.org/unions.shtml](http://www.campaignccc.org/unions.shtml)
7. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/feb/07/conservation.water> gives details of a project between environmentalists and the fishing community on the Isle of Arran whilst in the US, Earth First! worked with lumber trade unionists to prevent old growth forest destruction under the banner 'No Jobs on a Dead Planet'.
8. See Scargill at Climate Camp <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/08/405465.html>
9. The programme can be listened to in full via [www.thecoalhole.org/fileon4.mp3](http://www.thecoalhole.org/fileon4.mp3)
10. See (2.)
11. When the Shotton open-cast mine in Northumberland has run its course, Banks Mining propose to turn the landscape into a huge landform sculpture called 'Northumberlandia'. It will take the form of a naked woman, with added lakes and visitor's centre. Discussed in (8.) above.
12. Even before the 2007 camp at Heathrow, the liberal press were describing Climate Camp as '*Glastonbury, science seminar and protest all rolled into one*' [The Independent]. This was taken up by the camp and used in some promotional material.
13. The Ironbridge power station actually falls under the control of Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council but it is right on the border with Telford and is generally considered a feature of the town and the World Heritage Site at Ironbridge.
14. See Strikebreaking Union Accused of Profiting from Sick Miners The Guardian 01.03.2004 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/mar/01/uk.tradeunions2>
15. For a more in-depth analysis of this issue, see the pamphlet Beasts of Burden: Capitalism, Animals & Communism (1999 & 2004). Available from Active Distribution, BM Active, London WC1N 3XX or via [www.actedistribution.org](http://www.actedistribution.org).
16. For original forum posting see: <http://ianbone.wordpress.com/2007/08/15/camp-climate-change-no-thanks/>. Entering 'climate camp' into the search bar on the site will bring up more articles in a similar vein.
17. See I'd Rather be a Hypocrite Than a Cynic Like Julie Burchill The Guardian 06.08.08 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/aug/06/activists.kingsnorthclimatecamp>