

Corporate Watch



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- A critique of free market solutions to climate change
- 'Contraction and convergence' - a way forward?
- BP's shifting shape

Also:

- Prison building
- Oil, arms and biopiracy in Mexico
- Corporations and fascism

Climate change - has the fat lady sung for planet Earth?

The Earth is not dying, it is being killed. And those who are killing it have names and addresses. - Utah Philips.

Climate Change – no safe haven

Climate change is happening; it is affecting every part of our ecosystem; and the way globalisation currently works means it is inevitable, at least in the short term.

This is frightening and no-one is saying any different – whether ‘left’ or ‘right’, advocate of gradual change in due course or revolution now.

The climate change-themed articles of this magazine look at some of the political trends surrounding the issue. As corporations themselves start investing in solar energy, or use rhetoric of which any anarchist would be proud, decrying governments’ inability to act, the clear water around corporate behaviour becomes muddied. At this point it becomes more difficult to analyse whether the corporate grip on political power is being loosened and radical change is taking place – or whether corporations are merely shifting shape and ducking the systemic changes needed to halt climate change and reconsider humankind’s relationship with nature.

The next international institutional attempt to address climate change takes place at The Hague in the Netherlands this November with the next round of

meetings (COP6) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. This summit will take forward agreements made in Kyoto in 1997 and will try to figure out exactly what has to happen to stop our glorious Corporate Watch cover girl from taking to the stage.

The nuclear industry is getting excited: as part of negotiations leading up to COP6 the UK government is lobbying for nuclear power, which does not produce CO₂, to be part of the Clean Development Mechanism. This scheme is an opportunity for ‘developed’ countries to claim carbon credits if they help ‘developing’ countries to install clean technologies. BNFL is already competing to sell nuclear power stations to China, using carbon credits as a selling point.

Plans for COP6 are largely based on extension of emissions trading, a mechanism examined by Larry Lohmann on page 4. Corporations, which favour this scheme, are grasping at straws. It is an instinctive response for them to act in this manner – to look to an extension of capitalism as a solution. This of course will not address our CO₂ output. For the past four decades, the output of CO₂ and Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) from globalised industry have increased almost exactly in proportion to each other. Breaking this ‘lockstep’ means a dramatic cut in emissions - implying a major change from current ‘business as usual’.

A basic question still remains: is it possible to ensure the survival of a planet through social structures which are inherently inequitable and oppressive? The answer quite simply is no, it is not. Not just because life has to be recognised as more than a commodity, but also because neither civil society nor our complex ecosystem are passive entities which will obligingly accept their own demise.

One framework attempting to create political space to tackle climate change is ‘Contraction and Convergence’, outlined by Aubrey Meyer on page 8. This framework uses a solid scientific grounding to look at more equitable distribution and to allow for the atmosphere to be viewed as a common resource for all life on the planet. Contraction and convergence avoids ideology yet keeps at its heart the alleviation of oppression.

Contraction and convergence takes a pragmatic stance of starting from the world as it currently operates, yet refers to the overall framework of equity. It gives rise to a number of questions:

- If contraction and convergence were to be seriously considered by the powers that be, would this mean being watered down to become meaningless?
- How radical a context does this framework present for emissions trading and the complexities which this throws up?
- What conclusions do we draw from the recognition, forced upon us by climate change, that we are part of an ecosystem?

Considering a strategic response to climate change will throw up difficult questions – that is inevitable when you begin to engage with the issue. However, burying your head in the sand has never been a safe haven and the scale of climate change is crying out for a response. It also calls for coalition-building and action at a range of levels – some ideas for this are thrown into the pot by S.L. Maybe on page 10.

Moving beyond despair or denial around climate change is essential. Aubrey Meyer presents this effort as one which: “seeks to recognise the political space between disinterest, doubt and despair about climate change, since without the effort to create such a space we all may go rapidly from confusion to conflict with nothing in between”.



“MR. NOAH, DON'T YOU THINK THE PROPHESES OF A GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE ARE A BIT EXAGGERATED?”

Keeping the climate in the common treasury

The Global Commons Institute is calling for equity to be at the core of the global movement to stop climate change. To entrench this it advocates a pattern of 'Contraction and Convergence'.

Aubrey Meyer explains.

Changes in global climate have never until now been caused by human beings. Now, human pollution to the atmosphere is accumulating so fast it is trapping increasingly more of the sun's heat than is released back to space. It is this rise in global surface temperature that is implicated in the more and more variable and violent weather events and damages around the world, in places like Honduras, Orissa and Mozambique.

These are as much social as environmental disasters, and the trend of their increase is well established and getting faster. Even within corporations' own criteria for success - the financial bottom line - the situation is rapidly becoming untenable. Insurance industry figures for 'economic losses' from 'natural disasters', show damages growing globally at a staggering 8% a year since the 1960s. This is 5% faster than the rate at which we supposedly 'create wealth' measured as GDP (Gross Domestic Product). If this continues, the gross global destruction of wealth from climate change will actually exceed its alleged creation each year. A failure to act despite this glaringly obvious impending disaster demonstrates how fixed are the blinkers on the energy industry. The level of change needed is profound.

The scientific evidence linking these damage trends to human pollution is now accepted by most major scientific, political and commercial institutions. And yet they have failed to come forward with effective plans to slow the damages and to help the victims of

those damages that aren't prevented. The dominant priority of business and governments remains the growth of financial profits in spite of this growing negative impact. A profit to whom, we might ask?

Contraction and Convergence means, in a nutshell, that all the countries that make up the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) would agree a revisable global greenhouse gas emissions 'contraction budget'. This would secure a precautionary and safe future stable value for the rising greenhouse gas concentrations - say 80% cuts globally by 2060. If we were lucky this level of cuts would return atmospheric concentrations to today's value within a hundred years and limit the worst of the damage.

The international shares in this budget would then be 'pre-agreed' on the basis of 'convergence' from now, where shares are proportional to income, to a target date in the budget time-line - say 2030 - after which they remain proportional to an agreed base year of global population. This means that 'over-consumers' like the US contract sharply, while 'under-consumers' like Bangladesh can continue to rise for a while. This is a politically feasible way of instituting a precautionary and equitable global framework, by applying the principle of 'equal rights'.

A rapid and orderly retreat from fossil fuel dependency in favour of clean and renewable forms of energy is obviously needed. And if there is any

agreement to have international emissions trading, it must be structured to this end and secured on the basis of equity, as Contraction and Convergence, and even the UN's own Climate Convention, require. As such, trade may play a vital part in preventing catastrophic changes in the climate by hastening the avoidance of emissions.

Contraction and Convergence is just a framework for the numerous and diverse practical actions and changes that are necessary to save the planet from climate change disaster. It is not a cure-all. But it may well be politically necessary if there is to be an effective, precautionary agreement at the global level.

Key to Contraction and Convergence is the need for it to also be empowering at a local level. With reference to the larger scheme, people can use the same argument to organise for equity within their societies and communities in their own countries. This is a radical approach - one which re-normalises equity at each level of political discourse.

Locally, nationally and globally, we all need an agreement to secure fragile and finite resources. Strengthening broad strategies to reach some agreement will not be easy. However, continuing our current behaviour is no more than an endgame for humanity with the rich finally committing suicide by continuing to rob the poor.

It is morally but also practically sensible to avoid this. Contraction and Convergence thus presents the simple idea of equity for survival. It puts the need to protect people and planet ahead of the need for profits. In practice we all do have equal responsibilities in this but it can only work as part of an overall agreement that is sustainable in total secured on the principle of equal rights.

The founding statement for this and the Global Commons Network is at <http://www.gci.org.uk/indlet.html>

Aubrey Meyer works with the Global Commons Institute - www.gci.org.uk

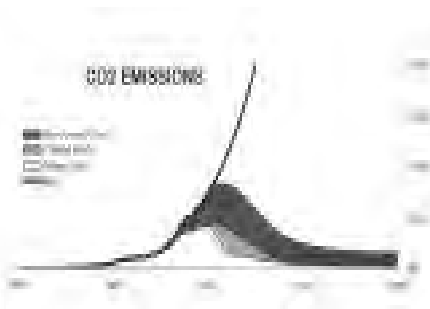
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Carbon Generations



CO2 concentrations

Recorded rise in atmospheric CO₂ concentration from 1860 until 2000 shows an increase of 34% over pre-industrial levels. This is a rise both higher and faster than anywhere in the ice-core sampling back 440,000 years before now. Concentrations are rising as the result of accumulating emissions. In future, the worst case is the upper line as Business-As-Usual (BAU). The best case sees this rise stabilised at twice today's level due to a 60% global contraction in the underlying emissions by 2100.



CO2 emissions

The upper line shows Business-As-Usual CO₂ emissions. The solid segments show "Contraction, Convergence, Allocation and Trade" [C-CAT] to manage emissions down by at least 60% within a given time frame with an agreed 'contraction budget' (here 680 billion tonnes of carbon). The internationally tradable shares of this budget result from convergence to equal per capita by an agreed date and population base year (here 2020). The 'traded area' is the difference between that and convergence by 2100 (here, 100 billion tonnes). If this is invested in no-emissions technologies, risk and damages are lowered further as the budget is then net of these emissions as well.

Continued from page 7

It is worth nearly £600 million. Ruth's mother Margaret spends two days baking for a street party to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee

1982

Ruth passes driving test at second attempt. For her, 21 years old and keen to be 'independent', this is identified as giving her freedom

1991

Gulf War on TV

1993

Raven born

Average global temperature: 15.50 °C

1994

Pneumonic plague resurfaces in India

1995

Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others campaigning against devastation caused by oil extraction in the Niger Delta are condemned to death. The wives of the condemned men tried to take a meal to their husbands but were not allowed into the prison. "Oh God, what am I going to do? He is the only thing I have in the world," sobbed Hauwa Saro-Wiwa at a news conference later that night.

The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that "the balance of evidence suggests there is a discernable human influence on global climate"

1996

Ruth is charged with 'obstruction of the sheriff' - one of almost 1,000 arrests during the 'Third Battle of Newbury'. In the wake of the campaign against the Newbury bypass approximately 500 of the 600 road schemes originally proposed in 1989 have been scrapped

1997

The UK Met Office states that the 1997/8 El Niño was "the most extreme on record". It brings violent downpours and landslides in the Atacama, one of the driest deserts in the world, and demolishes entire coffee plantations in Mexico. On the other side of the Pacific Papua New Guinea declares a state of emergency as crops fail. Fires rage in Indonesia, months after being lit by forest clearers, and burrow down into the forest's massive peat bogs, releasing into the atmosphere carbon that had been stored over the past 10,000 years.

Agreement reached on Kyoto Protocol. For the first time it meant some commitment by governments in the North to legally binding obligations to reduce greenhouse gases. Problems in realising these agreed reductions to follow.

2000

Ruth's parents, now retired, discover foreign travel. Spend pension and free time on visiting new places. In this year they visit Venice in northern Italy. Outward flight involved travelling about 1,000 kilometres with perhaps 130 passengers and collectively consumed about 7,500 litres of aviation fuel; 58 litres or 15 gallons each.

A Christian Aid report states that 9 of the past 11 catastrophes to which it has responded have been caused by extreme weather conditions. The same report claims that 16 million people in the horn of Africa, including those in Ethiopia and the Sudan, face starvation and have had their lives shattered by the failure of rains for the third year running. It calls on the world's wealthiest countries to cut emissions of greenhouse gases.

2028

Ruth's grandchild Alex born.

Average global temperature: 16.05 °C

2058

Greatgrandchild Kate born. She is the seventh of the Carbon Generations.

Average global temperature: 16.60 °C

In 1995 Dr Mayer Hillman of the Policy Studies Institute wrote that on a per capita basis the UK needs to cut its carbon emissions by over 90%. In the late 1990s the annual emissions for a typical household was over 25 tonnes. A member of the sixth Carbon Generation, for example, will have to live on 10% of Ruth's current CO₂ emissions.

What will this mean? Will cars again become a rich person's vehicle? Will mass air travel come to be seen as a blip that lasted maybe two generations? And what about the food that we eat, currently transported around the globe from land far away? What about the ways in which we work, the technology we currently rely upon? What will this mean for how we live?

Average global temperatures are IPCC figures - future predictions are from GCI based on Business-As-Usual from IPCC figures. Based on work by