

MOUVEMENT COMMUNISTE/KOLEKTIVNE PROTI
KAPITALU

**THE “ENERGY TRANSITION” TURNS
INTO AN ECOLOGY OF WAR**

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NOTE TO THE READER

We thank Mr. G. Bouvin who, as the editor responsible, makes it possible for us to legally publish and distribute this publication. We wish to point out that Mr. G. Bouvin is not responsible for the political content of the articles and, more generally, for the programmatic positions defended in our press.

PRESENTATION

This document is simultaneously published in three languages: Czech, English and French. This is not because we are such efficient translators but because it is the result of a common work by speakers of these three languages since its very conception. It is a work jointly performed by comrades from KpK, MC and others. We hope that this first step of common political work will be confirmed and amplified in a way which tends towards the unification and centralization of communists..

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THE CONTEXT

The Green Deal for Europe (December 2019) and the American Green New Deal¹ describe solutions for the “ecological transition” in the advanced countries of capital, initiated by means of subsidies and investments distributed by states. These are massive plans favouring the “Green Economy”, and are presented not just as a response to recurring natural disasters and global heating due to greenhouse gases, but also to other industrial pollutants or even to present or future zoonotic viruses.

The effects of climate change translate into repeated extreme events (heatwaves, droughts, hurricanes, floods etc.). This affects the profitability of capital: “By 2100, global GDP could be 37% lower than it would be without the impacts of global warming. ... Depending on the scale of the impact on growth, the economic costs of global warming this century could represent up to 51% of world GDP.”² The problem of cost for capital is posed in particular for states which have to finance important and growing unproductive expenses to repair damage and to adapt to climate change. Thus, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the US Department of Commerce stated in January 2023³:

“Last year, the U.S. experienced 18 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters, leading to the deaths of at least 474 people. The following 18 events, each exceeding \$1 billion, put 2022 in third place (tied with 2011 and 2017) for the highest number of disasters recorded in a calendar year, behind 2021 — with 20 events — and 2020, with a record 22 separate billion-dollar events ...

Hurricane Ian was the most costly event of 2022 at \$112.9 billion, and ranks as the third most costly hurricane on record (since 1980) for the US, behind Hurricane Katrina (2005) and Hurricane Harvey (2017).”

According to the “Ecological Threat Report”⁴ of October 2022 from the Institute for Economics and Peace: “The cost of natural disasters has also risen from \$50 billion per year in the 1980s to \$200 billion per year in the last decade.” As the graphic below indicates, the number of natural disasters has tripled between 1981 and 2021.

¹ The concept was popularised by Jeremy Rifkin in his work *The Green New Deal* (2019), which has sold millions of copies. In reality, the expression was invented by Kenny Ausubel, an ecology activist, in relation to the policies of the German Greens who came to power in Lower Saxony in elections in 1990. During their ten years in power, they launched structural changes to promote “Green” production, for example by encouraging industrial companies, like Volkswagen, to use recyclable or reusable materials, while increasing taxes on the treatment of waste and a levy on water to provide for an ecological fund.

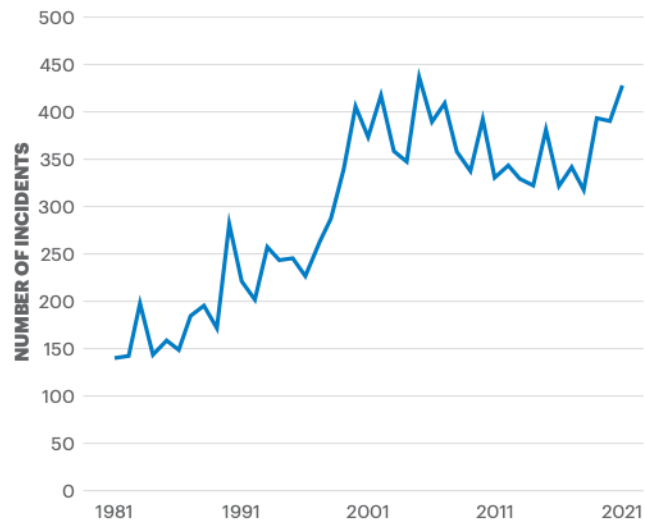
² See: <https://www.labanquepostale.com/content/dam/lbp/documents/etudes/eco/rebond/2023/rebond-macro-transition-janvier2023.pdf>

³ “Record drought gripped much of the U.S. in 2022”: <https://www.noaa.gov/news/record-drought-gripped-much-of-us-in-2022>

⁴ See: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ETR-2022-Web-1.pdf>

Trend in the number of natural disasters, 1981-2021

The global number of natural disasters has tripled over the past 40 years.



Source: EMDAT

According to Thomas Blunck, member of the Board of Management of the reinsurance company Munich Re: *“Climate change is taking an increasing toll. The natural disaster figures for 2022 are dominated by events that, according to the latest research findings, are more intense or are occurring more frequently. In some cases, both trends apply. Another alarming aspect we witness time and again is that natural disasters hit people in poorer countries especially hard. Prevention and financial protection, for example in the form of insurance, must therefore be given higher priority.”*⁵

And yet, capital and its states only take concrete action against global warming to the extent that it entails substantial and increasingly uncontrollable unproductive costs, which affect valorisation and result in a reduction in the growth of the rate of exploitation of social labour. On the other hand, these actions against pollution can be used to finance new productive activities in the so-called “green” sectors of energy efficiency, recycling and the relative reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and thus act in favour of capital accumulation in general. It is in this dialectic between additional unproductive costs for capital as a whole, induced by climate change and other environmental upheavals, and additional accumulation of capital as a whole, made possible by the emergence of a new “green” sector of productive capital, that the environmental policies of individual states and individual capitals are defined. In other words, it is about the budgets of the former and the balance sheets of the latter.

⁵ See: <https://www.munichre.com/en/company/media-relations/media-information-and-corporate-news/media-information/2023/natural-disaster-figures-2022.html>

In addition to these factors, the current geopolitical context introduces a new variable that is shaping the contours of “environmental” plans. The outbreak of war in Ukraine has encouraged and accelerated European countries’ quest for energy independence in the face of the strengthening of competing regional blocs. Of course, Russia’s recentring towards China is a central expression of this.⁶ The geopolitical situation has thus strongly conditioned the implementation of the European “Green” plans drawn up before the war in Ukraine and following the exogenous crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The preservation of the national and supranational sovereignty of the bloc, the recomposition of geostrategic alliances and the consequent reshaping of the productive territories, “value chains” and supply chains shaping the global market⁷, while the next global armed conflict looms, have also made political ecology a moment in the general course towards war.

THE LOGIC OF “ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION” PLANS AND THE NEW MAP OF GEOPOLITICS

The bet on the relaunch of labour productivity by “green” investments

In the period leading up to the Russian colonial expedition in Ukraine, the “Green Deals” formulated by both the United States and Europe can be sketched out as follows: to transform economic formation (above all transport, construction, energy and agriculture) with a view to containing, as far as possible, under the domination of capital, the global warming caused by human productive activity⁸. Three months after becoming President, Joe Biden pledged, under the Paris Agreement, to reduce US greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels, with a goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. The Build Back Better Act, now the Inflation Reduction Act, was approved by the US Congress on 16 August 2022. Europeans, meanwhile, are aiming for a 55% (Fit for 55) reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared with 1990 levels by 2030, and climate neutrality by 2050.

The necessary condition for the realisation of “Green” plans is growth in the productivity of social labour and the valorisation of capital. The European Commission has said that *“Climate change is the biggest challenge of our times. And it is an opportunity to build a new economic model.”*⁹

⁶ See: Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivně proti Kapitálu “Ukraine: Russia’s colonial expedition accelerates the course to world war”: <http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT2202ENvG.pdf>

⁷ See: Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivně proti Kapitálu “Sanctions and the course to war”: <https://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Letters/LTMC2250%20ENvF.pdf>

⁸ The global increase in carbon dioxide concentration is mainly due to fossil fuel use and land use change, while the increased concentration of methane and nitrous oxide is mainly due to agriculture. – IPCC Report 2021: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

In 2020, fossil fuels still accounted for 83.1% of the global energy mix (versus 84.3% in 2019 and 84.7% in 2018) and 61.3% of global electricity production. Oil remains by far the main source of energy consumed worldwide (31.2% of global primary energy consumption in 2020), ahead of coal (27.2%). (BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2021). Individual (domestic) behaviour accounts for only a small proportion of the pollution caused by human activity, with the bulk coming from the industrial sphere. Global GHG emissions by economic sector: industry (24%); agriculture, forestry and other land uses (22%); electricity and heat production (22%); transport (15%); buildings (6%); other energies (12%). Source: IPCC Report 2021, *op. cit.*

⁹ See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en

Capital needs productive investment to revive accumulation in a context where, for at least the last two decades, the productivity of social labour in the advanced economies has grown essentially only through the intensification of work, increased labour flexibility and, since the 2007-2008 crisis of valorisation, the stagnation of nominal wages. The shortfall in productive investment was itself largely determined by the global crisis in the credit system in those years. And the absence of major technological transformations applied to the basis of productive processes capable of bringing about a new leap in the productivity of social labour completes the picture.

How will the ambition set out in the American Green New Deal and in the European plans be concretised? In the United States, in April 2021, the executive proposed a staggering \$2.2 trillion in infrastructure spending, including decarbonisation and CO₂ capture. This plan has now been scaled back, however, to \$1,700 billion¹⁰. Following that, the Inflation Reduction Act¹¹ was adopted in August 2022, which is intended to devote \$369 billion to renewable energy and climate change, in the form of tax credits and loans. On the European side, the Green Deal is co-financed by part of the seven-year budget of the EU, corresponding to a third of the €1,800 billion of investment in the NextGenerationEU recovery plan¹². The REPowerEU¹³ plan has also added €300 billion, to be disbursed from 2023, with the aim of freeing the EU completely from dependence on Russian gas by 2027. The Green Deal also includes the creation of a €40 billion Transition Fund for the period 2021-2027. This fund makes up part of the Just Transition Fund (JTF¹⁴), operating in parallel with two other initiatives of the same type: InvestEU and the deployment of loan facilities from the European Investment Bank (EIB). In total, the JTF is expected to raise a trillion euros in public and private investment.

¹⁰ See: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/business-and-tech/20210521-white-house-slashes-infrastructure-proposal-in-bid-to-lure-republicans>

¹¹ See: https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/inflation_reduction_act_one_page_summary.pdf

¹² See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/recovery-plan-europe_en

¹³ See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repower-eu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en

¹⁴ “*The Just Transition Fund is a financial instrument within the Cohesion Policy, which seeks to provide support to territories facing serious socio-economic challenges arising from the transition towards climate neutrality. The Just Transition Fund will facilitate the implementation of the European Green Deal, which aims to make the EU climate-neutral by 2050.*”

See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/214/fonds-pour-une-transition-juste>

“Green plans” and the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine and the course towards world war have reframed the “green” plans of states, revealing, if proof were needed, the inability of the capitalist system to really combat the causes of global warming and other major environmental crises on the planet. The urgent need to secure the energy sources needed to accumulate capital has suddenly taken centre stage in the antagonistic geostrategic blocs being created, relegating the “ecological” cause to a mere walk-on part.

The most visible expression of the change made by Europe in the implementation of these “green” plans is the resolution taken on 6 July 2022 to include gas and nuclear power in the new European “taxonomy of sustainable sources of energy”. According to this decision, these two sectors will be included in the European classification of energies considered to be “green”, and will benefit from generous EU subsidies. This ruling will benefit Germany, which is traditionally heavily dependent on gas, but also France, where nuclear power accounts for almost 70% of electricity production.

As well as taking these polluting energy sources into account as a “temporary” support for the development and transition to renewable energies, consumption of oil and coal, the energy sources that emit the most CO₂, is being maintained or even increased. For example, the use of coal in the EU grew by 7% in 2022¹⁵.

“Global consumption of coal, the leading source of CO₂ emissions, is set to reach a new record in 2022. This rise is due in particular to increased, albeit temporary, demand from Europe, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA) in a report published on Friday. Global coal consumption is expected to rise by 1.2% year-on-year, to more than 8 billion tonnes, breaking a record set in 2013, according to the annual report on coal drawn up by the agency. Global demand is then expected to remain at around this level until 2025, “in the absence of additional efforts to accelerate the energy transition”, according to the IEA. The IEA sees a decline in advanced economies, but still “robust” demand in Asia. The consequence for the climate is that coal, the most harmful of all energy sources, will remain by far the biggest source of CO₂ in the global energy system for the time being. “The world is close to a peak in its use of fossil fuels, starting with the expected decline in coal, but we are not there yet,” sums up Keisuke Sadamori, Director of Energy Markets and Security at the IEA.” - L’Écho, 16 December 2022¹⁶.

As a result of the upheavals underway, the debate on energy transformation in the advanced countries has changed direction and meaning significantly. “Green” plans now revolve around liquefied natural gas (LNG) and nuclear power – with coal being used to a much greater extent – and much less, as in the initial versions, around renewable energies. The financing of renewable energies is of course still on the agenda, but it seems to have been put off until much later. It is now clear that the “energy transition” envisaged after the Covid pandemic will be postponed indefinitely to allow advanced countries to prepare for their future energy needs in the event of war. The assertion of the ecology of war thus complements the government projects of the various geostrategic blocs in the making, which provide for a surge in military spending.

To simplify somewhat, the ecology of war and energy self-sufficiency are nuclear power plus subsidised gas prices, plus coal, in order to boost accumulation in the advanced countries. If we need further proof of the change in direction of the “Green” plans, we need look no further than COP27, which in fact formalised the burial of COP21. The states involved have changed their immediate

¹⁵ <https://www.techniques-ingenieur.fr/actualite/articles/leurope-echappe-a-un-retour-en-force-du-charbon-119990/>

¹⁶ See: <https://www.lecho.be/economie-politique/europe/general/nouveau-record-attendu-en-2022-dans-la-consommation-de-charbon-selon-l-aie/10435167.html>

priorities by focusing on emergency energy plans (gas, coal, nuclear). The clear failure of the Sharm El-Sheikh conference has even been acknowledged by all the organisers, NGOs etc.

Often heavily indebted, “emerging” and Low-Income Countries (LICs), which are bearing the brunt of environmental crises and emitting more and more CO₂ as they industrialise and rapidly urbanise, simply do not have the budgetary resources or infrastructure to curb the phenomenon. And the advanced economies commit their public finances to these countries only when they are useful to them. A case in point? At COP27, South Africa, one of the twelve biggest polluters on the planet, obtained a loan of €400 million from the European Investment Bank¹⁷ to develop its renewable energies. France and Germany had preceded the EIB by granting an initial loan of €600 million to support the energy transition¹⁸. The unacknowledged reason for Europe’s generosity towards the country must be sought in its rich uranium reserves, which account for almost half of Africa’s reserves of this strategic mineral.

In Europe, the “debate” on energy transition plans revolves around the question of how to finance them. Not the financing of the expenditure needed to develop renewable energies, but that needed to contain the rise in energy prices and strengthen energy self-sufficiency. It is being driven mainly by countries experiencing budgetary difficulties, such as Italy, Greece, Spain and, taking a back seat, France. These countries simply want the European institutions to pay them the additional costs generated by the surge in hydrocarbon prices, first and foremost by mobilising the REPowerEU mechanism. But they are facing fierce resistance from countries that are said to be virtuous in their management of public funds, such as Germany and the Netherlands. This is yet another issue dividing the European Union in the wake of the outbreak of war in Ukraine and growing tensions between China and the United States. Germany was one of the first countries to draw up a €200 billion national support plan for its companies hit by the energy crisis, presenting its indebted “allies” in the European Union with a *fait accompli*.

The ecology of war and strategic resources

In the current political cycle of capital, the strengthening of geopolitical blocs is played out in particular on the terrain of independence in terms of strategic resources. The Covid-19 pandemic was the first warning shot to states about their ability to cope with a breakdown in supply chains (masks, but above all drug components and microchips) that seriously threatened several “value chains”, i.e. segments of the process of capitalist valorisation in its entirety.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was a stark reminder of Europe’s dependence on Russian fossil fuels¹⁹ and forced it to find a form of strategic independence for its “Green” shift. In response to the Russian aggression, the 10-point plan for Europe presented by the International Energy Agency highlighted the need to reduce Russian gas imports by a third (or 50 billion cubic metres) by 2023²⁰. On 14 December, the EU also ruled on a proposed €20 billion in subsidies to member states to finance independence from Russian fossil fuels. This war not only hastened the upheaval of the very

¹⁷ See: <https://www.eib.org/fr/press/all/2022-479-european-investment-bank-and-development-bank-of-southern-africa-launch-eur-400-million-south-africa-renewable-energy-investment-initiative>

¹⁸ See: <https://www.financialafrik.com/2022/11/09/cop27-lafrique-du-sud-signer-deux-accords-de-pret-de-600-millions-deuros-avec-la-france-et-lallemagne/>

¹⁹ Before the Russian invasion of 24 February 2022, the EU imported 40% of its gas, 25% of its oil and 40% of its coal from Russia. See: <https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/societe/la-co-dependance-energetique-de-l-europe-et-de-la-russie-en-chiffres-197461>

²⁰ <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/questions-d-europe/0639-la-fin-de-la-dependance-europeenne-aux-hydrocarbures-russes>

structure of geopolitical rivalries between the blocs, but also established a solid link between the “resolution” of the environmental crisis and ideological, economic and nationalist mobilisation within the blocs.

The days when Europe was content to be energy-dependent, whether on the United States, the Middle East or Russia, are potentially over, while a new global course to war endures, in which the new ideology of the “ecology of war” is an important element. This applies as much to the economic aspect as to public support for the call to war under the guise of energy conservation and national independence within emerging geopolitical blocs.

“...an effort is required of civil society in the context of strategic rivalry, an effort that tends to assimilate private behaviour, individual choices, to a direct contribution to the dynamics of confrontation. Conducting the war by means of ecology, in this case of precipitous energy sobriety, makes each of us a potential actor in the mobilisation, and brings into play the responsibility of each individual in the deployment of events. ... It is in this respect that it is no longer just a question of bringing energy into play as a means and an end to the confrontation, but of embarking on a new grand historical narrative for climate policies. Whereas the sacrifice demanded by environmentalists from industry and consumers to mitigate the climate shock was usually coded as a burdensome, uncertain, cumbersome constraint, this same effort now re-characterised as a matter of international security, subversion of tyranny, and in a way patriotism, suddenly becomes not only acceptable, but actively sought after.”²¹

This says it all. Thus, the European energy transition plan initially mixed with “the fight against global warming” increasingly doubles as a paradigm for the ecology of war, in the name of sovereignty and democracy.

“The ecology of war consists, in the context of a military aggression led by an oil state against one of its neighbours for the purpose of imperial consolidation, in seeing the turn towards energy restraint as ‘a peaceful weapon of resilience and autonomy’. The starting point is simple: Europe’s energy dependence on Russia, particularly in terms of oil and gas supplies, implies indirect financing of the military enterprise led by Vladimir Putin, and thus unwitting complicity with the war. While the economic sanctions imposed on Russia were designed to bring about an immediate strangulation of the regime and its downfall – with very uncertain success – the transition to energy sobriety makes more sense in an intermediate time frame. It is a question of breaking with a toxic dependence both in geostrategic terms and in terms of climate policies. Sobriety, within the framework of the emerging ecology of war in Europe, makes it possible to kill two birds with one stone by aligning the imperative of coercion towards the Russian regime with the imperative of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In other words, the ‘economic weapon’ is broken down into a first moment that must affect the immediate financing of the Russian war machine and a second, more structural moment that is supposed to affect the very logic of the political economy of this oil and gas state while giving a new impetus to European energy reorientation plans. In this second moment, the principles of political ecology are not simply adjusted to the time of war, they are redefined and subordinated to the imperative of conducting war, integrated into a logic of confrontation in which the enemy is both the source of geopolitical destabilization and the holder of the toxic resource. The ecology of war thus emerges as the historical heir and ideological relay of the war economy.”²²

The European and American “ecological transition” plans have now ideologically merged with the broader framework of national security. As a result, governments are taking deliberate steps to transform the regulation of industrial and domestic consumption patterns. This regulation has been legitimised by the mobilisation of civil society as a whole in the name of peace, stability and

²¹ See: “La naissance de l’écologie de guerre”: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2022/03/18/la-naissance-de-lecologie-de-guerre/> (all English excerpts are our translation)

²² *La naissance...Op. cit.*

national autonomy. The historical link between energy policies and war is thus once again explicitly affirmed.

This situation gives rise to a number of bizarre paradoxes, including the return to saintly status (including within the ecology movement) of arms companies that were widely condemned before Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

*"In the maelstrom of immediate reactions to the war in Ukraine, there is also an expression of opposite symmetry to these feelings of benevolent solidarity. From the very first days of the war, some actors in international finance demanded that investments in armaments be recognised as part of social and environmental impact finance. The logic is implacable and cynical: if the common objective of liberal democracies is to guarantee the security of their peoples against Russian military aggression, then armaments are a vector of democratic stability in the same way as the decarbonisation of the economy. Kenneth Rogoff, professor of economics at Harvard, explains that the peace dividend – the idea that the global economy and prosperity benefit from peace – risks becoming obsolete if the famous 'liberal values' are not protected by a robust framework in which sustainable growth and the defence industry are seen as two complementary pillars. The argument has the merit of pushing the logic of war ecology to its limits: if the defence of democracy is based on total mobilisation against Putin's Russia, and if this mobilisation is based on energy restraint and the ability not to give in to a showdown, then the spheres of influence linked to renewable energies and armaments share common interests and values. This gives the English expression 'climate hawk' a whole new dimension."*²³

Finally, the concept of the "ecology of war" highlights the fact that the possession and control of fossil fuel resources, which are so strategic, is no longer simply a reflection of the power (military, economic and diplomatic) of the geopolitical blocs involved, but has become a factor of weakness and high-risk dependence from which they need to free themselves. The parallel, indeed the ideological continuity, between the "ecology of war" and the "economy of war" has thus been established.

²³ *La naissance...Op. cit.*

Belgium, France, Czechia: the ecology of war, the survival of companies and social cohesion

High energy prices oblige the EU and its states to “lighten” their effects on businesses and households. On 30 September, the EU sought an agreement to take part of the profits of energy producers (electricity from nuclear power and renewables such as wind, solar and hydroelectric) for redistribution to consumers. The European Commission hoped to collect €140 billion. On top, there was a “temporary solidarity contribution” from the producers and distributors of gas, oil and coal.

Let’s look at a few examples:

In France, the government has capped the increase in gas and electricity prices at 15%. An exceptional “energy voucher” was paid out at the end of 2022 to 12 million households, representing €200 for the lowest 20% and €100 for the next 20%. This limited the rise in gas prices to 15% in January 2023 and 15% in February for electricity instead of 120%. This means that the monthly increase will be €25 instead of €200 for those heating with gas, while for those using electricity, the monthly amount will be €20 instead of €180. For those using fuel oil or wood, assistance was paid out at the end of the year. The tariff shield is temporary, however, and as Macron has announced, it will not hold, heralding difficult months ahead. All the more so as such a measure distorting competition could encourage suppliers to sell their products first to countries that do not restrict prices.

In Belgium, state intervention in 2022 amounted to €5.5 billion²⁴. In 2023, federal government expenditure will amount to €3.2 billion. The three regions will contribute a total of €1.5 billion. On 11 October, the federal government included the following measures in the 2022-2023 budget to reduce household energy bills: the 6% VAT rate on electricity was maintained from March 2022, and on gas from April 2022. At the beginning of 2022, the government distributed a heating subsidy of €100 euros. On 1 February 2021, the social tariff was extended to Beneficiaries of Increased Intervention (BIM), i.e. pensioners, single-parent families in financial difficulty and people with a gross annual income of less than €23,680. The extended social tariff has been extended until 31 March 2023 for one million households. For those not receiving the social tariff, the government has introduced a flat-rate monthly reduction for November and December, amounting to €135 on the electricity bill and €61 on the gas bill. This reduction is available to single people with an annual net income of less than €62,000 and to couples – without dependants – whose combined annual net taxable income is €125,000. With dependants, the ceilings of €62,000 and €125,000 are higher. An additional €3,700 per person is required. Finally, for households exceeding the above-mentioned incomes, there is a reduction of €100, but they will have to repay this sum the following year via personal income tax. People heating with fuel oil or propane must apply for a one-off, flat-rate allowance of €300. The same will apply to those heating mainly with a pellet boiler (bonus of €250). Excise duty on energy is being temporarily modified to cushion any increase in gas and electricity prices. Since March 2022, excise duty on petrol and diesel has been reduced by 17.5 cents per litre. This measure has been extended until March 2023. However, as fuel prices fall, the rate of special excise duty will gradually rise to that applied on 1 January.

Czechia’s dependence on Russian gas has decreased considerably over the past year. While Russian gas made up 98% of supplies at the start of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, no Russian gas has entered the Czech Republic since September 2022, according to the Ministry of Industry. Most purchases come from Norway, and the Czech Republic also buys

²⁴ See: <https://www.lesoir.be/480804/article/2022-12-03/en-2022-letat-debourse-55-milliards-pour-limiter-limpact-de-la-crise>

liquefied natural gas, mainly from the United States. Czech gas storage facilities are 99% full and contain 3.3 billion m³ of natural gas. When reservoirs are full, the Ministry of Industry intends to supply gas for daily consumption as quickly as possible. The state plans to start filling the tanks as soon as the heating season is over.

CAPITALISTS AND PROLETARIANS IN THE “TRANSITION”

The “commitments” of companies in the advanced countries

Since the Paris Agreement in 2015, the number of companies announcing net zero Green House Gas (GHG) emissions has risen sharply. Around 60-70% of the world's production of heating and cooling equipment, road vehicles, electricity and cement comes from companies that have announced “net zero” targets²⁵. Nearly 60% of gross sales in the technology sector are also generated by companies that have set themselves the target of net zero. Net zero emissions pledges concern 30% to 40% of aviation and maritime operations, 15% of transport logistics and 10% of construction²⁶.

While some companies were ahead of the game (FedEx, ArcelorMittal, Maersk), others announced measures under duress, such as Shell, which was ordered by a Dutch court to cut its emissions by 45%. Meanwhile, TotalEnergies is putting on a brave front by trying to pass itself off as a champion of the climate cause. These two companies have each invested \$200 million since 2015 to put the brakes on applying COP21, not without having for decades hidden the results of internal studies that warned of the warming caused by fossil fuels²⁷. As masters of creative accounting, the major groups are also improving their carbon footprints by buying up “Green” companies that provide them with low or zero direct emissions.

²⁵ See: <https://www.ica.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050>

²⁶ *Net zero by 2050, Op. cit.*

²⁷ See: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378021001655>

The consequences for the workforce

Just as the widespread use of robots in industry has not led to a collapse in demand for labour – quite the opposite – this industrial restructuring will also require additional labour. A recent report from the European Commission suggests that there will not be massive job losses on the Old Continent. According to official estimates, however, there will be major regional disparities, with some regions experiencing a decline in their productive base and a rise in unemployment.²⁸

There's very little chance of companies investing capital with no hope of financial return, and that's the problem. The fight against global warming concerns all businesses, but often brings no immediate return to individual companies. Competition between them demands that capital be invested profitably and with the fastest possible returns. Only states, or rather groups of states, can organise and impose this change. And if states want to go ahead with their plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, some production will have to be transformed or abolished. For example, if states (or groups of states) and car manufacturers switch to electric power, all production of combustion engine blocks will sooner or later disappear. This will also mean that workers will have to be trained on electric motors (or some other activity).

The changing skills required of the workforce engaged in “green” industries will put many proletarians out of work. Governments and companies assure us that training plans will be put in place to retrain workers who fall victim to “ecological” restructuring. However, it is by no means certain that training costs will be financed in line with needs. The trade-off, as always, will be between an available workforce that can be easily and cheaply adapted to the new direct production processes, and sectors of the exploited class requiring “heavy” training that is long, expensive and with no guarantee of success. This potential source of social conflict has been identified by the various executives of the bourgeoisie in the first circle of countries, whose current policy reforms concerning unemployment insurance, pension schemes and other measures to preserve social peace in times of fiscal crisis are currently being reviewed and modified to respond to it at lower cost, both in financial terms and in terms of possible social tensions.

However, to return to the subject at hand, the vast majority of employees in “green” industries are not promised “interesting and creative” jobs. On the contrary, the mechanisation of social labour, automation and the reinforcement of corporate command will take a leap forward.

This is already visible in the central productive sectors of valorisation:

- For the German auto industry, the IFO economic research institute estimates that, by 2035, around 614,400 workers involved in the production of conventional (internal combustion) engines will no longer be needed in their current jobs. The European Association of Automotive Suppliers, Clepa, estimated in 2021 that half a million roles would disappear in the five years before that date²⁹. What's more, if we consider that the major carmakers are in a position to redirect their production and workforce towards electric vehicles, this is unlikely to be the case for the very many smaller subcontractors. Between the new jobs created by the electric vehicle market (226,000) and the losses (501,000), 275,000 jobs will disappear in Europe³⁰ between now and 2035 (the year in which the legislation banning combustion engines comes into force).

²⁸ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=SWD:2020:176:FIN> cited in: <https://www.politico.eu/article/green-deal-job-drain/>

²⁹ *Financial Times*, “European auto suppliers warn shift to electric would put 500,000 jobs at risk” in: <https://www.ft.com/content/1e0040c9-aab2-4881-828b-e992f23a9f3e>

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

- Bosch, Europe’s largest automotive supplier, has estimated the cost of retraining its 400,000 employees at around €2 billion. One billion has already been spent over the past five years, and the company is committed to spending the same amount over the next five years (equivalent to 500 euros per employee per year). Despite this, some of its workforce will have to leave its factories, as they are unable to adapt to new technologies and production methods.

As usual, these job cuts will leave workers out in the cold, and if they don’t mobilise, they’ll be left with nothing but tears in their eyes. The state unions and the left will claim that they are defending jobs in order to save the region, the town, etc. Yet technological change is inherent to capitalism and is happening all the time. What can the exploited do to defend themselves when their place of exploitation disappears? For the workers, the only solution is to block production and stocks, through actions involving more than strikes, and to demand that the bosses continue to pay their wages. If they organise themselves autonomously, the exploited can make capitalists and states pay dearly. Fighting means that workers don’t wait for union officials to do their job for them, but that they take it into their own hands to determine the objectives and organise themselves accordingly.

WORKERS’ STRUGGLES AGAINST HARMFUL PRODUCTION

Porto Marghera

If we are interested in workers’ struggles waged against harmful production, an obvious example is that of Porto Marghera, an industrial zone near Venice, but on solid ground³¹, where the workers fought against the ravages of the chemical industry. The struggle was led first by the Montedison Workers’ Committee (from 1968 to 1978) and then by the Autonomous Assembly of the entire region (from 1973 to 1975)³². The heart of this productive territory was the Montedison plant *Petrolchimico*³³, nicknamed the “cathedral of chemistry”, employing 3,000 manual workers, 1,000 technicians and 2,500 subcontractors and temporary workers. The latter were assigned to the least skilled and most arduous jobs. It was in this plant, at the end of 1965, that a core group of workers and technicians formed an alliance with “external” activists. The group made its appearance in the spring of 1968 and organized itself into a workers’ committee. At the end of June, the committee launched a struggle for a uniform increase in wages and parity in benefits between workers and white-collar staff.

With committees in other factories (Châtillon, Fertilizzanti and Ammi), the comrades of the Montedison committee decided to create, in 1973, an organisation independent of the extra-parliamentary groups and the unions called the “Autonomous Assembly of Porto Marghera”. The principle which would guide the assembly was no longer that of asking, of demands (which imply

³¹ In 1972, at its height, it employed more than 45,000. All sorts of chemical products were made there (from oil derivatives to artificial fibres and fertilisers) but there were also aluminium foundries and zinc metalworking. The main factories were Montevecchio (zinc), Ammi (zinc), Sirma (furnaces), Sava and Leghe Leggere (aluminium alloys), Ilva (rolled steel), Vetrocoke-Azotati (ammonia). Each factory employed between 1,000 and 2,500 workers.

³² To know more about the history of workers’ struggles and their organisations, read the book *Pouvoir ouvrier à Porto Marghera. Du comité d’usine à l’assemblée de territoire (Vénétie – 1960-80)* – not yet available in English – by Devi Sacchetto and Gianni Sbrogiò, published by Nuits rouges in 2012: <https://lesnuitsrouges.com/produit/les-nuits-rouges/paru/pouvoir-ouvrier-a-porto-marghera/>

³³ Montedison was formed in 1966 from Montecatini and Edison giving birth to the second biggest industrial group in Italy, employing 118,000 staff across the whole country in 1969.

recognition of the right and power of the adversary, the boss and the state) but that of achieving by direct action the objectives which it gave itself.

*“Working hours are too long, organise yourselves to reduce them, without asking the boss’s advice. The price of transport is too high, organise yourselves to make it free. Electricity bills are too high, organise yourselves to reduce them.”*³⁴

Contestation practically calling into question the command of the factory, the authority of the state, of the commodity, were elements of struggle allowing anticipation of other forms of collective life, preparing the end of wage labour and therefore of capitalism. The autonomous assembly also pushed struggles for the reduction of electricity bills³⁵, occupations of housing³⁶ and self-reduction of prices in supermarkets.

When strikes were planned by the unions, they would enter into endless discussions with the boss to assess how many workers should remain at work to watch over the installations involved in continuous chemical production. The assumption was that these processes could not be paused without danger of explosions or permanent damage to the machinery. After meticulous investigative work, the committee succeeded in bringing a workshop to a halt by strike action, making it safe and, once the strike was over, restarting it without any danger under the astonished eyes of the management and engineers.

The other important point of union practice was the “monetisation of health”. According to this approach, the more dangerous the workshop, the higher the bonuses (“danger money” as it would have been called in the UK). The committee always opposed this, proposing, on the contrary, the improvement of these workshops in order to eliminate their harmfulness, or else their closure. All without any loss of pay. It was on the basis of this fight that the Workers’ Committee extended its thinking on the harmfulness of chemical installations throughout the territory.

The workers’ committee’s struggle began with the search for evidence that the illnesses (often fatal) suffered by chemical workers were due to the immediate production process and the products being handled. To do this, they relied on the expertise of doctors who were members of a health workers’ committee in Padua. This committee organised “wildcat” medical check-ups during working hours, to detect the real causes of occupational illnesses and have them recognised.

Starting from these struggles, the committee went on to purely and simply call into question the existence of dangerous work. Thus, at the start of 1973, it declared that: *“Harmful work, we fight it with the guaranteed wage and the refusal to work in dirty and dangerous workshops; harmful work, we fight it with a 36-hour week for all.”*³⁷

For the committee, if an installation was dangerous, it was up to the boss to stop it, to study how to neutralise the harmful effects or, if this was impossible, to close it down. In the meantime, workers were to keep their wages while not working in the installation in question. This practice became systematic from 1975 onwards. In the wake of these struggles at the plant, the Autonomous Assembly began to take an interest in the dumping of “chemical shit” in the lagoon and on land, denouncing the practices of companies in the area that didn’t care about any waste treatment.

³⁴ *Pouvoir ouvrier, Op. cit.*

³⁵ From February 1973 to December 1974, with around a hundred thousand bills self-reduced, the struggle was concluded by a reduction in the price of electricity.

³⁶ Organised by the tenants’ committees that drove it, this included: rent strikes, freezing of rents and reduction of other charges.

³⁷ *Pouvoir ouvrier, Op. cit.*

The action of the workers' committee in the zone of Porto Marghera, and then the Autonomous Assembly, can only be understood in the context of Italy in those years: that of an active workers' autonomy³⁸, which saw the creation of numerous workers' organs (unitary workers' base committees and autonomous assemblies) in the big factories of the Italian Peninsula. Nevertheless, its singularity resulting from work in the chemical industry led the committee to question work that was harmful to the workers and also to the surrounding population. From there, opposition to a world based on wage labour helped to sketch out the conversion and dismantling of these industries in a hypothetical future transition to communism.

The committee's experience contains some important lessons. Workers' health cannot be exchanged for money. Either the workshop is made healthy, or it is closed for good. And this is not a request made to the boss, it is a balance of power that imposes it. Workers' health is a matter for the workers themselves, with the help of health staff who are sensitive to these issues. The health of workers (and of the population) outside production sites must also be controlled by the workers themselves. Any management or political blackmail that weighs the health of workers (and the population) against the costs of reducing the harmfulness of production, by means of bonuses, or the defence of jobs, must be fought relentlessly and without compromise.

Ilva at Taranto (Italy) in 2012

The Ilva steel plant was in Taranto, a town of 200,000 inhabitants in Apulia. It belonged to the Riva group, and was constructed in 1961³⁹. In 2012, it was not only Italy's biggest steelworks, and the oldest in operation, but also the most dangerous and polluting. At the time, it employed 11,500 people directly and almost 9,500 indirectly through subcontractors, in a region where the official unemployment rate was 30%.

On 26 July 2012, the Taranto court ordered the closure of the blast furnaces and coking plant on the grounds of pollution, including dioxin release, which, according to experts, had caused 386 deaths in 13 years. Immediately, there was a chorus of unanimous protests, bringing together the boss, the plant's unions and all the political parties: jobs (and therefore the plant) had to be defended. It looked like a done deal. But a small minority of Ilva workers, workers from other factories and many residents of the surrounding area wanted the plant closed and refused to be blackmailed into keeping their jobs at the cost of their health.

They decided to set up a committee to disrupt union meetings and then take control of them. The committee met every day in the main square next to the factory, and held meetings at which they condemned the positions of the unions and the factory's defenders. On 17 August, it gathered 2,000

³⁸ The concept was widely diffused in Italy between 1968 and 1980. We can even say that it personified this movement. It indicated the actor, the working class, and its fashion of acting, autonomy. It indicated, therefore, for the working class its action independent of and opposed to, obviously, the state, but also and above all to the unions (in the Italian case, the CGIL, CISL and UIL) and to the parties of the "left" (PCI, PSI and PSIUP). Workers' autonomy defined all at the same time, for the working class in struggle, its objectives, the means for achieving them, their modes of organisation and its capacity to think through struggles before, during and after they happened. Worker autonomy thus translated itself into a fighting political centralisation starting from the workshops, founded on the refusal on principle of delegation, and the active participation of the greatest number. In this process of the political singularisation of the proletariat, the organisation did not confine itself to the factories but invaded the whole of society, taking on the question of housing, of harmful conditions of work and production, transport, via education and provisioning. Fully deployed, it fought toe to toe the invasion of capital into all spheres of human activity and anticipated what a communist society could be.

³⁹ See: Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivně proti Kapitálu, "Refuse the false choice "health or jobs", fight for a guaranteed income! – The example of ILVA in Taranto": <https://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT1208ENVF.pdf>

demonstrators in front of the prefecture, defying the ban on demonstrations. The government tried to calm things down by releasing subsidies to improve the plant without closing it.⁴⁰ The committee continued its actions until September, but the government's pressure on the courts led to the suspension of production being withdrawn. The committee remained in place for a while, but its action waned as it fell victim to isolation and the refusal of workers at other Ilva plants to support it. While the committee's attempt brought back memories of the struggles at Porto Marghera forty years earlier, with its refusal to accept "jobs or health" blackmail, the context, both general and local, was obviously no longer the same.

What can we learn from Ilva's courageous fight? First of all, not to trust the justice system, even if in the case of Ilva it was a courageous judge who dared to condemn the biggest employer in the region. Justice, like any separate body produced by class society, is part of the opposing camp. The militants on the committee experienced this. Under no circumstances should appeals to the courts replace the autonomous activity of workers fighting for their needs.

Reject, of course, the blackmail by employers and unions to put a price on the health of workers and the population. Put forward the demand for an income independent of activity, the central point of the struggle, to provide a perspective during the shutdown of the plant for pollution control, or after its closure. But if we hope to achieve this, we need to organise workers both inside and outside the plant concerned.

In China, peasants, workers and employees in the cities are affected by the monstrous pollution which covers the country

For decades, the Chinese state and Chinese companies have shown little interest in pollution and the destruction of the natural environment and workers' health. The official Xinhua agency ranks the country 100th out of 118 developed or developing nations in terms of ecological modernisation. Locally, pollution accidents, or more recurrent problems, can endanger the health, and even the lives, of the inhabitants of the towns most seriously affected. According to the 2007 report of the World Bank and the National Administration for the Protection of the Chinese Environment (Sepa), every year pollution is the cause of 750,000 premature deaths⁴¹. This alarming report was cut and censored on the instructions of the Chinese government.

On 10 April 2005, in the town of Dongyang (Zhejiang province), there was a strong peasant response to water pollution caused by a factory. To combat plans to build a new factory in the Huashui area, which was already home to 13 factories, 20,000 peasants fought the police and around sixty official vehicles were overturned or destroyed. More than 30 people were injured in this "mass incident". More than 3,000 members of the police force were mobilised for the action. The riots were sparked by concerns for children's health, as local crops had become unfit for consumption due to extreme soil and water pollution.

Following these events, which quickly became known throughout the country, the rioters won their case and the factories were ordered to move. In the months that followed, the city's 13 polluting factories closed. But the price paid was high, as some farmers were beaten and others arrested. A dozen protesters received prison sentences of up to five years⁴². Despite the harshness of

⁴⁰ Almost 482 million euros while it needed 5 to 8 billion. Without counting the billions necessary to partly clean up the damage caused to human beings and the environment by decades of industrial pollution (figures from 2012).

⁴¹ The World Bank, Sepa, *Cost of pollution in China: Economic estimates of physical damages*, 2007.

⁴² Events reported by: Zhang Yulin, *Tansuo yu zhengming*, n° 5, May 2006. See also: *LA Times*, 3 September 2006; *Washington Post*, 13 June 2005.

the state's response, these clashes between farmers, local authorities and the forces of repression, referred to by the authorities as “mass incidents”, are very common⁴³.

THE LIVING WORLD AND THE HUMAN BEING, A NATURAL RELATION MEDIATED BY LABOUR

*“Spinoza eliminated the dualism of God and Nature, since he declared that the acts of Nature were those of God. However, it was just because he regarded the acts of Nature to be those of God, that the latter remained, with Spinoza, a being distinct from Nature, but forming its foundation. He regarded God as the subject and Nature as the predicate. A philosophy that has completely liberated itself from theological traditions must remove this important shortcoming in Spinoza's philosophy, which in its essence is sound. ‘Away with this contradiction!’, Feuerbach exclaimed. ‘Not Deus sive Natura [God or Nature] but aut Deus aut Natura [either God or Nature] is the watchword of Truth.’” – Georgi Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*⁴⁴*

In his *Ethics*, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) stated that there is no other substance than Nature (or God, which for him was a synonym), infinite, eternal and reproducing itself. “*Deus sive Natura*” in Latin (“God, that is to say Nature”) implies that nothing is outside nature, including the human being. This Dutch priest, originating from of Sephardic Jews, rationalism and the Enlightenment, also paved the way for modern materialism and Marxism by burying the dualism which made the human being something “other than itself”.

*“In particular, after the mighty advances made by the natural sciences in the present century, we are more than ever in a position to realise, and hence to control, also the more remote natural consequences of at least our day-to-day production activities. But the more this progresses the more will men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature, and the more impossible will become the senseless and unnatural idea of a contrast between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body, such as arose after the decline of classical antiquity in Europe and obtained its highest elaboration in Christianity” – Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man⁴⁵*

*“But if the further question is raised what thought and consciousness really are and where they come from, it becomes apparent that they are products of the human brain and that man himself is a product of nature, which has developed in and along with its environment; hence it is self-evident that the products of the human brain, being in the last analysis also products of nature, do not contradict the rest of nature's interconnections but are in correspondence with them.” – Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*⁴⁶*

Consciousness of itself proceeds in the human being from recognition of being an element of the living world. The relation to the other human being cannot be conceived outside this recognition. The humanity of the human being is consubstantial with this immediate relation to the living world including sexual reproduction, constituting the principle at once natural and social. The primary social relation is thus the one which allows the perpetuation of the species. This relation is clearly inscribed in the revolutionary work of re-establishing relations between the human being and the living world. It is a “detail” that political ecology forgets or, at best, relegates in the separate case of “ecofeminism”.

⁴³ A figure which rose to 87,000 cases in 2005 (with 240 incidents per day, by the figures for 2005 and 2006), according to the Xinhua press agency, on 9 December 2006. See: https://www.persee.fr/doc/perch_1021-9013_2008_num_103_2_3628

⁴⁴ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1907/fundamental-problems.htm>

⁴⁵ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm>

⁴⁶ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch01.htm>

“In this natural species-relationship man’s relation to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature – his own natural destination. In this relationship, therefore, is sensuously manifested, reduced to an observable fact, the extent to which the human essence has become nature to man, or to which nature to him has become the human essence of man. From this relationship one can therefore judge man’s whole level of development. From the character of this relationship follows how much man as a species-being, as man, has come to be himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being.⁴⁷ It therefore reveals the extent to which man’s natural behaviour has become human, or the extent to which the human essence in him has become a natural essence – the extent to which his human nature has come to be natural to him. This relationship also reveals the extent to which man’s need has become a human need; the extent to which, therefore, the other person as a person has become for him a need – the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the same time a social being.” – Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Private Property and Communism⁴⁸

That said, the human being enters into a particular relation with what can be called nature which is external (but not foreign) to him. This relation is shaped by a faculty that the former has developed in the extreme: its capacity to transform and then dominate the latter.

“Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened man’s horizon at every new advance. He was continually discovering new, hitherto unknown properties in natural objects.” (...) *“Animals, as has already been pointed out, change the environment by their activities in the same way, even if not to the same extent, as man does, and these changes, as we have seen, in turn react upon and change those who made them. In nature nothing takes place in isolation. Everything affects and is affected by every other thing, and it is mostly because this manifold motion and interaction is forgotten that our natural scientists are prevented from gaining a clear insight into the simplest things.”* – Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man⁴⁹

“The specialisation of the hand – this implies the tool, and the tool implies specific human activity, the transforming reaction of man on nature, production. Animals in the narrower sense also have tools, but only as limbs of their bodies: the ant, the bee, the beaver; animals also produce, but their productive effect on surrounding nature in relation to the latter amounts to nothing at all. Man alone has succeeded in impressing his stamp on nature, not only by shifting the plant and animal world from one place to another, but also by so altering the aspect and climate of his dwelling place, and even the plants and animals themselves, that the consequences of his activity can disappear only with the general extinction of the terrestrial globe. And he has accomplished this primarily and essentially by means of the hand. Even the steam engine, so far his most powerful tool for the transformation of nature, depends, because it is a tool, in the last resort on the hand. But step by step with the development of the hand went that of the brain” – Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, Introduction⁵⁰

⁴⁷ The human species, like every species, must reproduce itself to exist. The “natural” relation to reproduce the species is the “relation between man and woman”. The usage of this quote in no way seeks to standardise the sexuality of human beings, all the more so as the human species has the capacity to practice its sexuality outside times of reproduction.

⁴⁸ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm>

⁴⁹ *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁰ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/ch01.htm>

Labour is the key to the human-nature relation. By concrete cooperative labour, the human species appropriates natural forces and tames them, channelling them to realise its ends. It is in this way that the species affirms its domination over nature.

“Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature’s productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway.” (...) *“The labour-process, resolved as above into its simple elementary factors, is human action with a view to the production of use-values, appropriation of natural substances to human requirements; it is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature; it is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore is independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every such phase.”* – Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book 1, Part III, Chapter 7⁵¹

Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal’s product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product. An animal forms only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object. – Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *Estranged Labour*⁵²

“In short, the animal merely uses its environment, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence; man by his changes makes it serve his ends, masters it. This is the final, essential distinction between man and other animals, and once again it is labour that brings about this distinction.” – Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, *The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*⁵³

However, the domination of human beings over nature, the humanisation of nature, is only conceivable at the level of the species and not the individual. The relationship with nature is therefore immediately social, because it can only be understood insofar as human beings cooperate to transform it in their own image. By extension, nature truly becomes the body of the species, an “inorganic” body that complements its organic body and maintains a permanent, dynamic exchange with it.

“The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body – both inasmuch as nature is: 1) his direct means of life, and 2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man’s inorganic body – nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself human body. Man lives on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature” – Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *Estranged Labour*⁵⁴

⁵¹ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch07.htm>

⁵² <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

⁵³ *Op. Cit.*

⁵⁴ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

However, humanised nature is not totally subservient to human beings. Nature outside human beings follows its own laws and dynamics which, on the one hand, offer resistance to human transformative actions and, on the other, are influenced by them. However, humanised nature is not totally subservient to human beings. Nature outside human beings follows its own laws and dynamics which, on the one hand, offer resistance to human transformative actions and, on the other, are influenced by them. In a complex system, these influences can trigger chain reactions, some of them catastrophic, which humans are unable to anticipate fully. The very reality of nature, distinct from that of human beings, with its particular rhythm punctuated in particular by long reproduction cycles and circular movements in which all its components are linked, deserves at the very least to be recognised by the human species. Otherwise, the human species will become an ever more systematic victim of global environmental crises that will be increasingly difficult, and in some cases impossible, to resolve.

*“Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present forlorn state of those countries. When the Italians of the Alps used up the pine forests on the southern slopes, so carefully cherished on the northern slopes, they had no inkling that by doing so they were cutting at the roots of the dairy industry in their region; they had still less inkling that they were thereby depriving their mountain springs of water for the greater part of the year, and making it possible for them to pour still more furious torrents on the plains during the rainy seasons. Those who spread the potato in Europe were not aware that with these farinaceous tubers they were at the same time spreading scrofula. Thus, at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.” ... In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result; and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different, are mostly quite the opposite in character; that the harmony of supply and demand is transformed into the very reverse opposite, as shown by the course of each ten years’ industrial cycle (...).” – Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man⁵⁵*

Friedrich Engels’ warning is still highly topical. However, in political ecology, the nightmares of an external nature entirely destroyed by man or, its apparent opposite, of a nature that will take its revenge, are the stuff of mystical catastrophism. Human beings and nature are one and the same, even if their organic exchanges, particularly within the capitalist mode of production, have led to repeated environmental crises.

⁵⁵ *Op. Cit.*

CAPITALISM OVERTURNS THE RELATION BETWEEN HUMANS AND THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Preserving the natural productive forces, ensuring their reproducibility, is an imperative necessity that class-divided societies have systematically neglected. Capitalism is in this respect the mode of production which has most increased the productive force of social labour and, in so doing, the exploitation of natural productive forces. Their usefulness to human beings has increased disproportionately under capitalism, even though capitalism threatens their use value at various points.

If human production from its very beginnings has consisted of an organic exchange between man and nature, the capitalist mode of production has brought about a historic rupture, manifested in a contradiction between the hyper-development of nature's productive forces and their destruction. The growing accumulation of capital is only possible by pushing labour power to its ultimate limits (by extending and intensifying the working day) in order to constantly increase the quantity of surplus labour, and therefore of surplus value. Simultaneously, nature is used by large-scale mechanised industry – in tendency – without any limit and up to the exhaustion of its resources, that is to say it “prevents the return to the soil of its elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing” – Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book 1, Chapter 15, Section 10⁵⁶

What's more, as the concentration of capital leads to a tendential fall in the rate of profit, capital must increase its production volumes again and again in order to increase the mass of profits. This absolute imperative of capital accumulation only takes into account *ex post* (when it is possible and when it can no longer be avoided) the need to preserve its access to natural productive forces. This is why the increase in human and natural productive forces comes at the price of their eventual decline.

“In agriculture as in manufacture, the transformation of production under the sway of capital, means, at the same time, the martyrdom of the producer; the instrument of labour becomes the means of enslaving, exploiting, and impoverishing the labourer; the social combination and organisation of labour-processes is turned into an organised mode of crushing out the workman's individual vitality, freedom, and independence. The dispersion of the rural labourers over larger areas breaks their power of resistance while concentration increases that of the town operatives. In modern agriculture, as in the urban industries, the increased productiveness and quantity of the labour set in motion are bought at the cost of laying waste and consuming by disease labour-power itself. Moreover, all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth — the soil and the labourer.” – Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book 1, Chapter 15, Section 10⁵⁷

Today, the ambition of advanced countries to replace fossil fuels with energy sources that emit less, or even no CO₂, and to optimise energy use, is indeed an objective factor in the level of global warming. But the capitalist defence of the environment is fuelled by the illusion that further technological development can overcome the causes of environmental destruction. But technology cannot be separated from the goals of the mode of production. The myth that science is independent

⁵⁶ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm>

⁵⁷ *Op. Cit.*

of its efficient cause inspires ecologists in the service of capital. On the contrary, science develops in the bowels of production and by means of it. Its concrete applications (technologies) have to pass the test of valorisation before they can be widely adopted. If they do not contribute to increasing the productivity of social labour, and therefore to producing more and more profits, they are simply discarded and their development is not financed.

For proletarians, posing the environmental question means directly asking the question of whether capitalism deserves to survive. The destruction of natural productive forces is the rule of capitalism, and when a correction is necessary, it is never complete, never carried out in time, nor sustainable over the long term for both human and natural productive forces. The urgency of tackling the climate problem – largely relativised by the war in Ukraine – is not the result of a sudden environmental awareness on the part of the capitalist system. On the contrary, it corresponds to the desire to maintain the profitability of capital in the face of a stagnating rate of profit and the increase in unproductive expenditure needed to contain the negative effects of climate change.

THE THEORETICAL AND POLITICAL INADEQUACY OF ECOLOGICAL IDEOLOGY IN THE FACE OF THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION

Two false ideas circulate in ecological scenes. Exaggerating somewhat, the first would have it that nature is the victim of the Anthropocene, “*a new geological epoch which is characterised by the advent of humans as the main force of change on the Earth, surpassing geophysical forces. It is the age of humans! That is an unprecedented planetary disorder*”.⁵⁸ The second claims that the human being will be detached from its natural being by destabilising the totality of living things. From this comes a new ideology, that of political ecology as “*regulation of equilibria and biological cycles*”, because the “*ecosystem, not being an organism, is lacking*” in such a purpose⁵⁹.

The first variant of political ecology conceives of the human being as “other than itself”, a metaphysical vision of the human being whose quality of being a component of the living world is erased. The human being is reduced to the Platonic demiurge⁶⁰, the producing cause and then unique motor of living things. The second, more subtle approach, on the other hand, advocates collective action by human beings to restore the balance between nature and human beings. Here, the human being is not identified as “other than itself” in relation to living things.

Conceptually, this trend is part of regulation theory⁶¹. This ideology, enunciated in the 1970s by the economists Robert Boyer, Michel Aglietta and Yves Saillard, certainly places social relations and capitalism at the heart of its analysis, but its aim remains the correction of imbalances in the dominant social and economic formation. The philosophical starting point is precisely the search for a balance between man and machine, man and society, man and nature, and so on. The ecosystem, devoid of purpose (as in the first mentioned current), requires the conscious activity of human beings to “rebalance” itself.

Yet, for modern materialists, from Darwin to Marx and Engels, the living is in permanent movement, therefore creating and recreating disequilibrium, breaks and crises. Every natural system evolves, from its own reproductive base, through periodic discontinuities as it adapts violently to a changing environment. And so it is for the human species. These constantly destabilized bases give rise to environmental crises, which clearly demonstrate that natural systems cannot be reduced to human dynamics.

Movement prevails over equilibrium, because movement is permanent and equilibrium only transitory. Motion is the general law of matter, including living matter, while equilibrium is merely one of its particular states. Equilibrium is a moment (temporary, fragile) of movement (that is to say, of disequilibrium).

“Equilibrium is inseparable from motion. ... On the earth motion has become differentiated into interchange of motion and equilibrium: the individual motion strives towards equilibrium, the motion as a whole once more destroys the individual equilibrium. The rock comes to rest, but weathering, the action of the ocean surf, of rivers and glacier ice

⁵⁸ See: <https://www.vie-publique.fr/parole-dexpert/271086-terre-climat-quest-ce-que-lanthropocene-ere-geologique>

⁵⁹ See: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-ecologie-et-politique-2010-2-page-41.htm>

⁶⁰ See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demiurge>

⁶¹ “Over the last twenty years, regulationists have attempted to outline a post-Fordist model which, in ecological terms, has remained fairly close to the original industrialist model. This research has focused above all on the configuration of the organisation of work and the productive apparatus, based on an ecological reality and an environmental paradigm dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century.” in: <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/crs/2008-n45-crs1518250/1002497ar.pdf>

continually destroy the equilibrium. Evaporation and rain, wind, heat, electric and magnetic phenomena offer the same spectacle. Finally, in the living organism we see continual motion of all the smallest particles as well as of the larger organs, resulting in the continual equilibrium of the total organism during the normal period of life, which yet always remains in motion, the living unity of motion and equilibrium. All equilibrium is only relative and temporary.” – Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature, Notes and Fragments*⁶²

Political reliance on equilibrium reflects an excessively anthropocentric (and therefore dualistic) idealism, which would have us believe that conscious, voluntary action on the part of human beings could restore the Arcadia of Virgilian myth, where shepherds and sheep lived in a world without contradiction between the human species and external nature. But there’s no going back. Neither the human species nor external nature will return to their more or less mythical origins of the noble savage who merges with his external nature, and the equally wild nature that overwhelms man.

The most obvious political consequence of the theory of regulation is the preservation of the existing order, with necessary corrections to both social relations and the relationship between human beings and external nature. More generally, political ecology, in its two main variants, mystifies the relationship between human beings and the living world, and reaches the conclusion of maintaining the existing order based on class-divided societies. Yet a world subjected to the dictatorship of the commodity, and thus to the exhaustion of human beings and nature, cannot “save” them. A barely apparent paradox...

The critique of “sustainable capitalism” is the first and most obvious step, and must be taken by revolutionaries, first within the workers’ movement, then within the environmental movement. The relationship between human beings and the rest of the living world can only be restored by emancipating ourselves from capital and the race for profit, through a radical change in the social relations of production on a global scale.

Capital is not displaying “degrowth” either, and never will, because short-term accumulation (so-called growth) remains its major imperative. A purpose that makes it impossible to deal correctly and radically with the climate issue, which requires – as with pandemic management – a totally different organization of space (notably by putting an end to urban hyper-concentration).

“Accordingly, abolition of the antithesis between town and country is not merely possible. It has become a direct necessity of industrial production itself, just as it has become a necessity of agricultural production and, besides, of public health. The present poisoning of the air, water and land can be put an end to only by the fusion of town and country; and only such fusion will change the situation of the masses now languishing in the towns, and enable their excrement to be used for the production of plants instead of for the production of disease.” – Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*⁶³

Capitalism can only exist in a form that demands the constant valorisation of capital, which alienates the direct, conscious link between human needs and their material satisfaction. Capitalism has radically transformed the chain of needs characteristic of previous modes of production, themselves defined by situations of scarcity. This change was brought about by the massive increase in productive forces that accompanied widespread industrialisation. The resulting new system of market needs which followed has been perfectly successful in disguising alienated needs as human needs.

⁶² <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/don/ch07d.htm>

⁶³ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch25.htm>

“We have seen what significance, given socialism, the wealth of human needs acquires, and what significance, therefore, both a new mode of production and a new object of production obtain: a new manifestation of the forces of human nature and a new enrichment of human nature. Under private property their significance is reversed: every person speculates on creating a new need in another, so as to drive him to fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of enjoyment and therefore economic ruin. Each tries to establish over the other an alien power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need. The increase in the quantity of objects is therefore accompanied by an extension of the realm of the alien powers to which man is subjected, and every new product represents a new potentiality of mutual swindling and mutual plundering.” – Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property⁶⁴

The issue of the crisis of external nature – and it is a real crisis, serious and long-lasting, but it does not sound the death knell of the capitalist mode of production – cannot be reduced to global warming alone. The latter can hardly be isolated from the many other manifestations of this crisis: the disappearance of wilderness, the extinction of living species, increasing desertification, seas drying up, deforestation, uncontrollable fires and so on.

On the contrary, it must receive a planned, multi-generational response from humankind that places the progressive restoration of the productive forces of external nature at the forefront of its historical objectives, establishing a conscious link between the needs of human beings and the way they act as a natural force to satisfy them. There is no other way to achieve this than by confronting the current mode of production.

“When communist artisans associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means becomes an end. In this practical process the most splendid results are to be observed whenever French socialist workers are seen together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring them together. Association, society and conversation, which again has association as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies.” – Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, “Human Needs & Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property”⁶⁵

Capitalist society, which endlessly aggravates and extends a destructive asymmetry in relations between human beings and external nature, is absolutely incapable of confronting the question of its sustainability. Capitalism just creates *“the material conditions for a higher synthesis in the future, viz., the union of agriculture and industry on the basis of the more perfected forms they have each acquired during their temporary separation.”* – Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book 1, Chapter 15, Section 10⁶⁶

To this end, the associated producers of the new society must establish organic exchanges between humans and the earth *“as a regulating law of social production, and under a form appropriate to the full development of the human race.”*⁶⁷

Fully realised communism is thus the opposite of regulating what already exists. It is embodied in the planning of a dynamic relationship between the human species and its natural environment which *tends* to minimise the violent reactions of specific natural systems. By freeing themselves from the general reification of human and natural productive forces, human beings must

⁶⁴ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm>

⁶⁵ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm>

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*

establish relationships with external nature that minimise environmental crises and disasters. To achieve this, humankind must recognise that it is itself nature, and oppose the dualism between consciousness and external nature. At the same time, it must recognise the material basis of the contradictions and conflicts between the dynamics of natural systems external to human beings and human beings themselves.

And only then, *“From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like boni patres familias [“good family fathers” – a concept from Roman law], they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition”* – Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book 3, Chapter 46⁶⁸

This possibility might seem far off. What is certain is that it will not be achieved by begging the ruling classes, during their COPs or at the UN. The capitalists are perfectly aware of the situation, and if they do not perceive any urgency, it is because they are only acting in their class interests. Without a foothold in the productive territories, where the reproduction of capital is played out, no shift in the balance of forces is possible. Outside the productive territories, there is no space for struggle, whether defensive or offensive. Action based on demands can only give rise to hollow slogans that are ultimately demobilising, such as those concerning the temperature of global warming, which may or may not be acceptable. Following the example of the Porto Marghera workers, it’s not a question of asking, but of taking, here and now, what mankind needs. It’s about organising ourselves, here and now, not to make ambitious development plans, but right inside the productive territories to take back power over our working conditions and our relationship with nature. We need to break down the walls that the capitalist mode of production erects between our bodies as social individuals and our natural bodies. It is a matter of freeing nature and humans from subjugation to capital accumulation.

⁶⁸ See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch46.htm>

APPENDIX – Pannekoek, the Destruction of Nature

Anton Pannekoek, “The Destruction of Nature”⁶⁹, July 1909.

We present here a short text by Anton Pannekoek, written at the beginning of the previous century on the destruction of forests, to show that the ecological question was not absent even then from the thoughts of the workers movement:

There are numerous complaints in the scientific literature about the increasing destruction of forests. But it is not only the joy that every nature-lover feels for forests that should be taken into account. There are also important material interests, indeed the vital interests of humanity. With the disappearance of abundant forests, countries known in Antiquity for their fertility, which were densely populated and famous as granaries for the great cities, have become stony deserts. Rain seldom falls there except as devastating diluvian downpours that carry away the layers of humus which the rain should fertilise. Where the mountain forests have been destroyed, torrents fed by summer rains cause enormous masses of stones and sand to roll down, which clog up Alpine valleys, clearing away forests and devastating villages whose inhabitants are innocent, “due to the fact that personal interest and ignorance have destroyed the forest and headwaters in the high valley”.

The authors strongly insist on personal interest and ignorance in their eloquent description of this miserable situation but they do not look into its causes. They probably think that emphasising the consequences is enough to replace ignorance by a better understanding and to undo the effects. They do not see that this is only a part of the phenomenon, one of numerous similar effects that capitalism, this mode of production which is the highest stage of profit-hunting, has on nature.

Why is France a country poor in forests which has to import every year hundreds of millions of francs worth of wood from abroad and spend much more to repair through reforestation the disastrous consequences of the deforestation of the Alps? Under the *Ancien Régime* there were many state forests. But the bourgeoisie, who took the helm of the French Revolution, saw in these only an instrument for private enrichment. Speculators cleared 3 million hectares to change wood into gold. They did not think of the future, only of the immediate profit.

For capitalism all natural resources are nothing but gold. The more quickly it exploits them, the more the flow of gold accelerates. The private economy results in each individual trying to make the most profit possible without even thinking for a single moment of the general interest, that of humanity. As a result, every wild animal having a monetary value and every wild plant giving rise to profit is immediately the object of a race to extermination. The elephants of Africa have almost disappeared, victims of systematic hunting for their ivory. It is similar for rubber trees, which are the victim of a predatory economy in which everyone only destroys them without planting new ones. In Siberia, it has been noted that furred animals are becoming rarer due to intensive hunting and that the most valuable species could soon disappear. In Canada, vast virgin forests have been reduced to cinders, not only by settlers who want to cultivate the soil, but also by “prospectors” looking for mineral deposits who transform mountain slopes into bare rock so as to have a better overview of the ground. In New Guinea, a massacre of birds of paradise was organised to satisfy the expensive whim of an American woman billionaire. Fashion craziness, typical of a capitalism wasting surplus value,

⁶⁹ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoe/1909/nature.htm>

has already led to the extermination of rare species; sea birds on the east coast of America only owe their survival to the strict intervention of the state. Such examples could be multiplied at will.

But are not plants and animals there to be used by humans for their own purposes? Here, we completely leave aside the question of the preservation of nature as it would be without human intervention. We know that humans are the masters of the Earth and that they completely transform nature to meet their needs. To live, we are completely dependent on the forces of nature and on natural resources; we have to use and consume them. That is not the question here, only the way capitalism makes use of them.

A rational social order will have to use the available natural resources in such a way that what is consumed is replaced at the same time, so that society does not impoverish itself and can become wealthier. A closed economy which consumes part of its seed corn impoverishes itself more and more and must inevitably fail. But that is the way capitalism acts. This is an economy which does not think of the future but lives only in the immediate present. In today's economic order, nature does not serve humanity, but capital. It is not the clothing, food or cultural needs of humanity that govern production, but capital's appetite for profit, for gold.

Natural resources are exploited as if reserves were infinite and inexhaustible. The harmful consequences of deforestation for agriculture and the destruction of useful animals and plants expose the finite character of available reserves and the failure of this type of economy. Roosevelt recognises this failure when he wants to call an international conference to review the state of still available natural resources and to take measures to stop them being wasted.

Of course, the plan itself is humbug. The state could do much to stop the pitiless extermination of rare species. But the capitalist state is in the end a poor representative of the good of humanity. It must halt in face of the essential interests of capital.

Capitalism is a headless economy which cannot regulate its acts by an understanding of their consequences. But its devastating character does not derive from this fact alone. Over the centuries humans have also exploited nature in a foolish way, without thinking of the future of humanity as a whole. But their power was limited. Nature was so vast and so powerful that with their feeble technical means humans could only exceptionally damage it. Capitalism, by contrast, has replaced local needs with world needs, and created modern techniques for exploiting nature. So, it is now a question of enormous masses of matter being subjected to colossal means of destruction and removed by powerful means of transportation. Society under capitalism can be compared to a gigantic unintelligent body; while capitalism develops its power without limit, it is at the same time senselessly devastating more and more the environment from which it lives. Only socialism, which can give this body consciousness and reasoned action, will at the same time replace the devastation of nature by a rational economy.

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“By cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they [the workers] would certainly disqualify themselves from the initiating of any larger movement”

Karl MARX,
Wages, Prices and Profit, 1865