

## ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF A “JUST TRANSITION” FROM FOSSIL FUEL CAPITALISM

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### ABSTRACT

This paper argues that confronting the deepening ecological crisis in a just transition could contain the embryo of a democratic eco-socialist future. The core of eco-socialism is to link the principles of ecological sustainability and social justice. This implies that the socialist emphasis on collective ownership and democratic control of production needs to be connected to a number of other alternative concepts such as food sovereignty. New social forms are emerging from the margins of South African society around these concepts, involving grass-root networks marked by relations of reciprocity, cooperation and solidarity. They embody fragments of a vision of an alternative post-capitalist future.

*“If we don’t know where we want to go, no path will take us there” (Leibowitz, 2010: 7).*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to answer three questions:<sup>1</sup>

1. What are the main approaches to a “just transition”?
2. What would an eco-socialist society look like?
3. What do we have to do to get there?

It has been suggested that addressing the climate crisis amounts “to a set of changes as dramatic as those of the Industrial Revolution” (Brown, 2009: 13). The author of those words was at the time the CEO of one of the largest fossil fuel companies, BP, and the highest paid executive in Britain – hardly a radical voice. However, there is no consensus on the depth or direction of those changes. For Birgit Mahnkopf (2014: 18), for example, “... it is an open question whether there is a historic opportunity for another *Great Transformation* or whether reactionary forces will take advantage when the socio-ecological crisis starts to turn into political instability”. In one sense the “just transition” is a shallow and incoherent notion, an empty signifier with no agreement on its substantive content.

Powerful social forces, especially those linked to the fossil fuel industry, are promoting the notion of a transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient, neoliberal capitalism packaged as a “green economy”. An alternative is necessary because the fundamental cause of the crisis, and of climate change specifically, is the expansionist logic of capitalism. “No serious observer now denies the severity of the environmental crisis, but it is still not widely recognised as a capitalist crisis, that is a

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on a review of relevant primary and secondary literature, interviews with key informants from the labour and environmental justice movements. It is grounded in my participation in the COSATU/NALEDI Reference Group on Climate Change in the newly formed COSATU Environmental Policy Group. It has been enriched by my work with different groups of environmental justice activists including young African men organized in the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA) and with many older African women organized in the Feminist Table, as well as Earthlife Africa’s Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Project.

crisis arising from and perpetuated by the rule of capital, and hence incapable of resolution within the capitalist framework” (Wallis, 2010: 32; see also: Harris-White in Panitch and Leys, 2006; Kovel, 2001; Foster, 2009; Klein, 2014). These critiques have been rooted in the understanding that *capital's logic of accumulation* is destroying the ecological conditions which sustain life.

### **AN ALTERNATIVE POST-CAPITALIST FUTURE**

If we are aspiring, as James Ferguson (2009: 167) suggests we should, “to link our critical analysis to the world of grounded political struggle – not only to interpret the world in various ways, but also to change it, we should move beyond „denunciatory analyses“ to ask „what do we want?“ This is a quite different question (and a far more difficult question) than: what are we against?“ This is not an easy task. Many of us suffer from a lack of political imagination. As Donna Haraway (1991: 23), one of our most creative, left intellectuals, once admitted, “If I had to be honest with myself, I have lost the ability to think of what a world beyond capitalism would look like“. This inability is being further eroded by some of the commentaries on the ecological crisis which are promoting “catastrophism” – an apocalyptic vision of a future in which human existence is uncertain.

At the same time the ecological crisis is deepening. In South Africa there is the degradation of land, water scarcity, air and water pollution, acid mine drainage, acidification of the oceans and loss of biodiversity. Despite twenty-one years of international negotiations there is no binding global agreement on the reduction of carbon emissions. In fact, carbon emissions are rising (61 per cent since 1990), which means climate change is intensifying and having devastating impacts – particularly on the working class – in the form of rising food prices, water shortages, crop failures and so on. Africa is the worst affected.

### **CONTESTED NOTIONS OF A JUST TRANSITION**

Three broad approaches to the goal of a just transition may be identified:

- The “extreme” version of a green economy, which emphasises providing capital with incentives to change by arguing that the climate crisis can be a source of speculation and profit.
- A more moderate version of a shift to a low-carbon economy (also sometimes framed as a “green economy”), which involves shallow, reformist change focused narrowly on constructing a new energy regime with “green” jobs, new technology, social protection and consultation. The emphasis is defensive and shows a preoccupation with protecting the interests of the most vulnerable.
- An alternative notion, which views the climate crisis as a catalysing force for massive transformative change, an alternative development path and new ways of producing and consuming. In this sense the climate crisis could be a historic opportunity, a turning point, a catalysing force for fundamental change to reclaim the commons and build a socialist future. For Kovel (2001: 258), for example, the climate crisis means that “a moment for the global realization of ecosocialism has arrived”.

### **CAPITAL'S APPROACH TO A JUST TRANSITION: A GREEN ECONOMY**

Capital's response to the ecological crisis is that the system can continue to expand by creating a new sustainable or green capitalism, bringing the efficiency of the market to bear on nature and its reproduction. The two pillars on which green capitalism rests are technological innovation and expanding markets, while keeping the existing institutions of capitalism intact. Underlying all these strategies is the broad process of commodification: the transformation of nature and all social relations into economic relations, subordinated to the logic of the market and the imperatives of profit (Cock, 2014).

The latest extreme version of this green capitalism packaged as “the green economy” relies on new technology and expanding markets to make the climate crisis a source of economic growth and profit (Cock, 2014; Satgar, 2014). This version of the green economy includes the “financialisation” of nature, thus reducing nature to “natural capital”. It is part of what Bond (2014)

calls “climate crisis capitalism”, which involves the global managerial elite strategy of turning the climate crisis into a source of speculative profit.

This market-based approach assumes that nature should be measured and valued according to the “ecosystem services” it provides (the way wetlands clean water, and soil captures carbon and so on). In this way nature’s services can be costed, offset, and traded on markets via credits similar to carbon trading. It means the expansion of the market into all aspects of the natural world and represents an attempt by capital to effect the last enclosure of the commons – that of Nature itself.

This extreme version of the green economy is being actively promoted by the powerful forces that Susan George (2010: 7) has called “the Davos class” – an alliance of government leaders, philanthropists and corporate executives who form the “nomadic, powerful and interchangeable” global elite created by capitalist globalisation. As Richard Branson expressed it at the Rio+20 conference, “Our only option to stop climate change is for industry to make money from it”.<sup>2</sup>

## THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATE’S APPROACH TO A JUST TRANSITION

### THE GREEN ECONOMY

For the South African state the green economy, in both its moderate and extreme versions, is the driving notion in a green neoliberal capitalism. The discourse of a just transition is sometimes used to legitimate this approach. There is an incoherence in some of the policy documents, and the green economy is often either undefined or defined in a very narrow, technicist sense. As Satgar (2014: 147) writes,

South Africa’s planning blueprint, the National Development Plan, uses the language of a just transition but inflects it towards a green neoliberal approach, in which market mechanisms are used to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, promote technofixes (such as carbon capture and storage), incentivize energy efficiency in business, and support the expansion of fossil fuel extractivism by mining coal and shale gas.

So South Africa’s “so-called green developmental state ... is merely reproducing the minerals-energy complex as part of a new post-apartheid resource nationalism and green neoliberal capitalism” (Satgar, 2014: 148). In this approach the financialisation of nature is gaining momentum in the form of biodiversity and carbon offsets as neoliberal accumulation strategies.<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing, the Department of Environmental Affairs and the Treasury are finalising a hybrid approach to a carbon tax which is linked to a carbon offset scheme.<sup>4</sup> In a 2014 discussion between the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and two Treasury representatives, the latter admitted that such a scheme would have little impact as regards emissions reduction (Carbon tax seminar, Cosatu House, 12 November 2014).

### THE BLUE ECONOMY

Triumphalist claims are now being made about the potential of job creation and economic development in the “blue economy” as well as the green economy. Instead of increased protection of the oceans, which have absorbed about 30 per cent of the carbon emissions globally, leading to acidification, there is now talk of using the oceans to promote accumulation in the notion of a blue

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<sup>2</sup> The key document published in 2011 promoting the extreme version is the United National Environment Programme’s (UNEP) preparatory report for the Rio+20 conference, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication (UNEP, 2011b)*. A lengthy document (630 pages), it has been described as “a radically conservative vision” (Brockington, 2012). The three other influential documents are *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)* (UNEP, 2011z), the World Bank’s (2011) report on *Inclusive Green Growth*, and the European Union’s *Innovating for Sustainable Growth: A Bio-Economy for Europe* (European Commission, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> This practice involves offsetting or “compensating” for the loss of biodiversity caused by some developments by securing equivalent biodiversity elsewhere.

<sup>4</sup> The carbon offset part of the proposed tax gives larger, carbon-intensive companies the opportunity to contribute a good portion of their carbon tax liability into carbon offsets, also known as carbon credits. For example, if a company purchases offsets in a qualifying project such as reforestation or waste-to-energy, which would reduce carbon emissions by x amount, then this amount could be used to reduce or “offset” their own emissions and thus their liability for carbon taxes.

economy. Drilling for new sources of oil and gas is at the centre of this strategy, using ever more dangerous technologies such as fracking and deep-sea drilling. Fossil fuel companies have been awarded exploration rights stretching from Mozambican waters to Saldanah Bay in the Western Cape.<sup>5</sup>

#### LABOUR'S APPROACH TO A JUST TRANSITION

Since the 1990s the concept of a just transition has become part of global union environmentalism. Driven largely by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the influence of the labour movement is evident in the collaboration of the ITUC with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Environment Programme in promoting green jobs as central to a just transition (Rathzel and Uzzell, 2013). ITUC (2009: 14) describes a just transition as “a tool the trade union movement shares with the international community aimed at smoothing the shift towards a more sustainable society and providing hope for the capacity of a green economy to sustain decent jobs and livelihoods for all”. The ILO (2010) defines a just transition as “the conceptual framework in which the labour movement captures the complexities of the transition towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, highlighting public policy needs and aiming to maximize benefits and minimize hardships for workers and their communities in this transformation”.

However there is no consensus on the content of the concept and “very little has been achieved in terms of translating this concept into policies” (Dimitris and Felli, 2014: 4).

Two broad approaches to the notion of a just transition may be identified within the global labour movement. The minimalist position (of the ITUC and the ILO) emphasises shallow, reformist change which includes green jobs, social protection, retraining and consultation. The emphasis is defensive and shows a preoccupation with protecting the interests of vulnerable workers. An alternative notion views the climate crisis as a catalysing force for massive transformative change, an alternative development path and new ways of producing and consuming.

One example of this minimalist view that is sympathetic to labour argues that: a just transition requires three elements: sustainable industrial policy, robust social protection or “safety nets and wide-reaching and creative labour adjustment programs. ... [None of these] can be delivered by the supposedly free market. Only governments have the institutional strength and authority to stand up to irresponsible private interests, but through ideology and corruption have so far failed to do so (Kohler, 2014: 4).

From this perspective a just transition should be an “orderly” transition that “respects and protects today’s workers while creating new, decent work in sustainable industries for tomorrow” (Kohler, 2014: 4).

Very recently the South African labour movement has expressed its commitment to a *just* transition. However, there are very different understandings of the scale and nature of the changes involved.

In 2011 the Central Executive Committee of COSATU adopted a Climate Change Policy Framework of fifteen principles, which was endorsed by all twenty affiliates (COSATU, 2012). The most significant of these principles were:

- Capitalist accumulation is the underlying cause of excessive greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore global warming and climate change.
- A new low carbon development path is needed which addresses the need for decent jobs and the elimination of unemployment.

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<sup>5</sup> In May 2011 the Petroleum Agency of South Africa authorised seismic oil surveying by a Singapore-registered company, Silver Wave Energy, in water depths ranging from thirty metres to two kilometres. By comparison, BP’s Deepwater Horizon platform in the much calmer Gulf of Mexico drilled 1.5 km down to the seafloor surface (Bond, 2011).

- Food insecurity must be urgently addressed.
- Market mechanisms to reduce carbon emissions are rejected.
- Carbon trading is dismissed as a “manifestation of „green capitalism” which is aimed at making profits from climate change, not solving it” (COSATU, 2012: 52).
- A just transition towards a low carbon and climate-resilient society is required.

The explanatory note reads, “The just transition is a concept that COSATU has supported in the global engagements on climate change that have been led by the ITUC” (COSATU, 2012: 53). The basic demands that are emphasised are investment in environmentally friendly activities that create decent jobs, social protection, research and skills development. This implies conformity to the minimalist, reformist position; however, the note goes on to say, “As COSATU we need to ensure that the concept of a just transition is developed further to fully incorporate our commitment to a fundamentally transformed society” (COSATU, 2012: 53).

At the same time there are elements of support for the notion of a green economy rooted in the construction of green jobs. Evidence of COSATU’s support for the green economy is the signing of the Green Economy Accord in November 2011, which launched a “green partnership” and binds government, business and labour to creating thousands of jobs by building a green industrial base. It established four principles for the green economy: opportunity, innovation, responsibility and partnership (DED, 2011: 3). At the signing, COSATU’s then General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi said, “We have made a commitment through the NGP [New Growth Path] to create five million jobs in the next ten years. And this agreement on green jobs will make a very critical contribution to the realisation of that target” (quoted in DED, 2011: 5). This commits unions to help establish workplace committees to ensure efficient energy usage, and has “a rich potential to create more jobs and create a healthier world” (Vavi, 2012a). The emphasis was strongly on new green jobs; areas specified were the installation of one million solar water heating systems, promoting bio-fuels, promoting clean-coal activities, waste disposal and recycling, electrification of poor communities and promoting energy efficiency throughout the country.

However, labour has pointed to several problems in the current formulations of green jobs: many inflated claims are made which are not supported by empirical evidence, and insufficient attention has been paid to issues of quality and job losses, especially for the thousands of workers employed in energy-intensive jobs. At present green jobs (for example, in the privatised renewable energy programme) are driven more by the interests of the market rather than by social needs.

On these grounds the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has rejected green jobs as a component of a new green capitalism. In relation to the renewable energy sector, NUMSA spokespersons have pointed out that green jobs can be as indecent as other jobs. They can use cheap labour, exploit women and children, use labour brokers and be dangerous in terms of occupational health and safety. The likelihood of green jobs being increasingly incorporated into a green capitalism, driven by the expansion of markets and new technology, has promoted a more rigorous, alternative formulation of “climate jobs”.

Not only is there some ambiguity within COSATU, there are differences between the affiliated unions. NUMSA, representing thousands of workers in energy-intensive industries, emphasises “ecological imperatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions” but also stresses public ownership and democratic control (numerous speakers at the International Conference on Building a Socially-Owned Renewable Energy Sector, Johannesburg, February 2012). NUMSA argues that the shift to a low-carbon economy, and particularly the development of renewable energy, is being dominated by green capitalism. This means that a transition to a green low-carbon economy could mean a future dominated by nuclear and privatised renewable energy in which electricity is unaffordable for the mass of working people. According to NUMSA’s President, Cedric Gina (2011), “...the language of „just transition” needs a class analysis... It must always be clear that capitalism has caused the crisis of climate change that we see today. There is an urgent need to situate the question of climate change in a class struggle perspective”.

NUMSA (2011) believes a “just transition must be based in worker controlled, democratic social ownership of key means of production and means of subsistence... Without this... the just transition will become a capitalist concept, building up a capitalist „green economy“. NUMSA’s vision is of a socially owned renewable energy sector and other forms of community energy enterprises where the full rights for workers are respected.

A very different perspective informs the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), representing thousands of workers, including coal miners. This sector is obviously particularly sensitive to the threat of job losses in the move to a new energy regime, and some shop stewards have expressed faith in new technology to reduce carbon emissions, especially Carbon Capture and Storage. There are also different positions on the expansion of coal usage within the NUM.

At a workshop of the Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU), delegates expressed support for green economy projects and climate jobs in the poultry sector (Johannesburg, 24 October 2013). At the same workshop, strong agreement was expressed for a class understanding of a just transition to a green economy on the grounds that, as consumers, the working class would be badly affected by the rise in food prices resulting from climate change.

In a statement which clearly prioritises political over environmental considerations, Zwelinzima Vavi (2012b: 2), the former General Secretary of COSATU, has said “We will not support any form of capital accumulation that breeds inequalities – even if those forms of capital accumulation are green”. This hints at a more radical, transformative concept of the green economy as involving not just shallow change with new technology, green jobs, social protection, retraining and consultation, but an alternative growth path with new ways of producing and consuming. This approach is critical of how the just transition is frequently reduced to decarbonisation, to a set of technical issues centred on moving away from coal as our main source of energy, reducing carbon emissions and creating a new energy regime.

The ecological and economic restructuring implied by this alternative could win extensive trade union support globally. As Sweeney (2012: 13) writes,

Unions can be confident that the ecological case for the public ownership and democratic control of carbon- and pollution-intensive industries and services – beginning with power generation and energy-delivery systems – is cast iron. Given the impact of privatization on workers and communities, the social case is similarly strong. The goal should be to expand democratic control over major investment and production decisions and over financial institutions and transactions, while asserting a new set of social and economic conditions on private capital for the good of workers and the environment. This could drastically slow the rate of ecological damage, while establishing a platform for an even deeper restructuring of economic life over the long term.

#### **THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT’S RESPONSE TO A JUST TRANSITION**

During the rule of the apartheid regime, environmentalism operated effectively as a conservation strategy but neglected social needs. For many black South Africans dispossession was the other side of conservation as they were forcibly removed to create national parks and “protected areas” and in the process lost the land and livelihoods which often defined social identity (Walker, 2008). The notion of environmental justice represents an important shift away from this traditional authoritarian concept of environmentalism which was mainly concerned with the conservation of threatened plants, animals and wilderness areas, to include urban, health, labour and development issues (Cock, 1991).

The discourse of environmental justice rejects the market’s ability to bring about social or environmental sustainability. It puts the needs and rights of the poor, the excluded and the marginalised at the centre of its concerns, particularly in relation to the impacts of climate change. It represents a powerful challenge to the economic growth model, to the anodyne concept of sustainable development and to the increasing commodification and financialisation of nature

packaged as the green economy. This environmental justice approach emphasises food sovereignty, which challenges both corporate power and the abuse of the environment. It could be a building block in a just transition to eco-socialism.

#### **VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO THE NOTION OF A JUST TRANSITION – A BUILDING BLOCK FOR ECO-SOCIALISM**

New social formations are emerging in contemporary South Africa from grass-root networks which contain flashes of an embryonic vision of a post-carbon AND a post-capitalist society. Many of these formations are organising around concrete issues in the everyday experience of working people, especially rising food prices as part of the current food crisis.

#### **THE FOOD CRISIS**

There is a food crisis which is marked by the co-existence of hunger (half the population is officially classified as “food insecure”), waste (one-third of all food produced is thrown away), and extravagant over-consumption on the part of the elite. The recognition is spreading that the present food regime is unjust, unsustainable (because of its dependence on fossil fuels) and unsafe (with toxic pollution, especially from highly processed foods). This situation will worsen with the spread of mining and the impact of climate change.

COSATU has a history of addressing this issue. It is connecting with several collective initiatives – such as the Food Sovereignty Alliance,<sup>6</sup> various initiatives dominated by African working-class women (such as the Rural Women’s Assembly, Women on Farms, Biowatch, the Feminist Table), the Climate Jobs Campaign, and Earthlife’s Sustainable Energy and Livelihoods Project. At many forums it is recognised that a key driver of the food crisis is corporate dominance.

Corporations have been described as “psychopathic institutions” in the sense that they pursue profit with a callous disregard for the social and ecological impact of their actions, and show other psychopathic symptoms such as a reckless disregard for the safety of others, an inability to feel guilt and so on (Bakan, 2003). In the pursuit of growth and profit, corporations promote an anti-social institutional culture.<sup>7</sup> The foundational concept in these initiatives is that of food sovereignty which is a direct challenge to neoliberal capitalism.

Furthermore, working for food sovereignty means reshaping the relationship between human beings and nature through agro-ecology. Through their role in food production and administration of household consumption, women are leading the way in this. In several initiatives this is linked directly to a just transition. For example, at a “Women and Climate Jobs” workshop in August 2013 in Cape Town, it was stressed

that for women to support a transition to a low carbon economy and an anticapitalist economy they must start taking small but very important steps; these could include developing community-driven initiatives like community gardens to grow their own organic vegetables, and buying their own solar cookers to support the renewable energy initiative and decrease their dependency on the electricity produced from fossil fuels and support community tariff campaigns (AIDC, 2013).

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<sup>6</sup> Launched in March 2014 by an assembly of some sixty different organisations.

<sup>7</sup> Two examples of widespread psychopathic corporate practices regarding food are: (i) Price fixing. Dave Lewis former chair of the Competition Commission, believes that cartel activity should be criminalised under South African law: “People involved in price fixing should go to jail”, he said (quoted in *The Star*, 5 June 2009). Cartel activity around the bread price is particularly heinous given that bread is a staple food of the poor, particularly for those living in informal settlements without access to electricity. (ii) The adulteration of food – in this case chicken, a main source of protein for the working class. There is a widespread practice of “plumping” which involves injecting chicken with brine; this dilutes the nutrients and adds hidden salt. “Sodium from the brine will, over time, have devastating effects on consumers’ health”, according to the chief executive of the Association of Meat Importers, David Wolpert. According to him, “much of our local poultry is heavily injected with brine. In many cases this exceeds 40% of the chicken meat”. He calls this the “con of the decade: selling salt water as if it were chicken” (*The Star*, 8 December 2014).

Another example is the Earthlife Sustainable Energy and Livelihoods campaign driven by the Women in Energy and Climate Change Forum (WECCF) which consists of representatives from women's grassroots organisations. This project involves establishing different operational renewable energy technologies such as solar panels and biogas digesters, rainwater harvesting and agro-ecology as one component of food sovereignty. It is funded by the European Union (EU) which has a marketised approach to climate change. Their aim is explicitly to build the "resilience" of poor communities. At the same time, however, the project is engaging in post-carbon practices. Given that the basic cause of the climate crisis is the expansionist logic of capitalism, post-carbon is a pointer to post-capitalist alternatives. Furthermore, in interactions with the women involved in the WECCF, they are open to eco-feminist socialist thinking (without adopting the label to describe themselves).

According to Angus (2009), eco-socialism promises radical transformations in present patterns of food production and consumption through localised food sovereignty, as well as changes in production and consumption which are based on waste, competition and pollution, the energy system, and the transportation system.

### **A JUST TRANSITION TO AN ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PATH: WHAT WOULD A DEMOCRATIC ECO-SOCIALIST SOCIETY LOOK LIKE?**

As a body of ideas, eco-socialism is not monolithic – it embodies many different views about theory and practice. However, at the core of a democratic eco-socialism is the link between the principles of sustainability and justice. To illustrate: the key question about ecological sustainability is not only to protect limited resources but to ensure that resources are used for the benefit of all, not only the privileged few. For example, in South Africa 22 per cent of households lack access to energy, either due to the lack of infrastructure or to unaffordable pre-paid meters. Justice demands the provision of affordable energy for all. Linking justice and sustainability demands that energy takes the form of not only affordable but clean and safe energy, which means renewable energy.

At a general level eco-socialism involves reformulating the classical socialist project so that it also becomes a democratic and ecological project aimed at satisfying human needs and restoring a balance between humans and nature. "For ecosocialists, the market's profit logic, and the logic of bureaucratic authoritarianism within the late departed "actually existing socialism" are incompatible with the need to safeguard the natural environment" (Leibowitz, 2010: 4).

There is no blueprint for a democratic eco-socialism; such an alternative has to be built from the bottom up in a process of participation. However, several key core values – which contrast with the values of neoliberalism (such as materialism, a possessive individualism, economic growth and efficiency) – are being expressed in new social formations and could provide a kind of compass for a vision of an alternative order. These include:

- The satisfaction of needs. The aim of the struggle for socialism is, in the first instance, to replace a society based on profit by one based on satisfying the needs of people.
- The social ownership and control of productive resources.
- A new, more participatory form of democracy. In a parallel recognition that growth (now in the form of "green growth") is intrinsic to capitalism, there is a growing understanding that Western-style democracy legitimates capitalist inequalities. "Even more than dictatorships, Western-style democracies are ... the natural system of governance of neoliberal capitalism, for they promote rather than restrain the savage forces of capital accumulation that lead to ever greater levels of inequality and poverty. In fact liberal democratic systems are ideal for the economic elites, for they are programmed with periodic electoral exercises that promote the illusion of equality, thus granting the system an aura of legitimacy" (Bello, 2014: 5).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The democratic form is being eroded by widespread mistrust and what Klein (2014: 361) refers to as the "corporate-state-power nexus that underpins the extractive economy and ... which is leading a great many people to face up to the underlying democratic crisis that has allowed multinationals to be authors of the laws under which they operate, whether at the municipal, state/provincial, national or international level".

- A new narrative of relations with nature. Concern for nature was a fundamental part of Marx's thought. He wrote in Volume 3 of *Capital*, "Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth, they are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations..." (cited by Foster, 2009: 182). Thus, as Foster (2009: 181) points out, Marx "captured the essence of the contemporary notion of sustainable development..." However, this concept has been perverted and has failed to deliver its earlier promise. We have now reached the limits of nature as a safe source of raw materials for our economic activity and a sink for our waste products. Central to eco-socialism is an alternative conception of nature that emphasises respect, cooperation, sharing and an acknowledgment that humans exist as part of an ecological community.
- Rethinking economic growth and development (particularly extractivism). The recognition is growing that further economic growth could mean ecological catastrophe. As Maude Barlow (2004: 12) expresses it, "Let us be clear no amount of talk of green futures, green technology, green jobs and a green economy can undo the fact that most businesses and nation state leaders, as well as UN and World Bank officials, continue to promote growth as the only economic and development model for the world. Until the growth model is truly challenged, great damage to the earth's ecosystems will continue. The notion that economic growth inevitably means development and that job creation means poverty alleviation is clearly false.
- A confidence in human beings – in the capacity of both men and women to reason, to share, to learn from mistakes, to cooperate, to care for each other and, most importantly, a confidence in our capacity to work together to create a more just and equal world. This confidence in the human capacity is the basis for a commitment to principles such as participatory democracy, social justice and equality. It also implies social relationships that are marked by solidarity, meaning a commitment to collective empowerment rather than individual advancement. It is a strong contrast to the neoliberal ethic of intense, possessive individualism with "efficiency and sustainability understood in monetary terms" (Wainwright, 2014: 2). "Capitalism as a system thrives on the cultivation and celebration of the worst aspects of human behavior – selfishness and self-interest, greed and competition. Socialism celebrates sharing and solidarity" (Angus, 2009: 197).

#### WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO TO REACH A DEMOCRATIC ECO-SOCIALIST FUTURE?

There could be five immediate political tasks in promoting an eco-socialist agenda:

- (i) Reclaiming socialism. For many people socialism is discredited because of its history of authoritarianism, human rights abuses, the intolerance of dissent and environmental destruction. Reclaiming involves stress on a new kind of socialism that is ethical, democratic and ecological.
- (ii) Strengthening the linkages between the labour and environmental movements. Clearly workers and their organisations are an indispensable force for addressing the climate crisis through a just transition. "Environmentalists are workers and obviously potential allies in their efforts to advance workplace health and safety, and also to tackle environmental concerns of working class communities: for workers bear the brunt of environmental degradation and destruction, both in terms of health and quality of life issues" (Jakopovich, 2009: 75). This recognition is at the centre of what J.P. Nugent has conceptualised as an emerging "labour-environmentalism". This captures not only the formation of labour-environmental alliances, but "also the attempts by unions to develop environmental policies, ... to engage in internal member education and mobilization around environmental issues" (Nugent, 2011:59). In South Africa embryonic linkages between the labour and environmental movements are evident in increasing cooperation on policy issues and in two examples of joint action: the Climate Jobs Campaign and the recent campaign against increased electricity prices. In addition to extending transnational alliances between labour and environmental organisations, these initiatives could generate a powerful new form of solidarity from which to challenge neo-liberal capitalism in the form of the green economy.

- (iii) Focusing on concrete issues which resonate with people's everyday experience. For example, the food crisis could unite a broad range of social forces. As Susan George (2010: 111) writes, "Food stands squarely at the crossroads of the ecological, social and economic/financial crises and provides a graphic example of how they reinforce each other".
- (iv) Supporting the co-operative social forms involving relations of mutual sharing, support, reciprocity and cooperation. Food sovereignty projects, democratic trade unions, worker-run factories, cooperatives, land occupations. Community-owned energy, locally managed schools, and community-controlled media, for example, are the building blocks for an eco-socialist transition. They are demonstrating an alternative paradigm, a different relationship both between human beings and between human beings and nature - what Hilary Wainwright (2014) calls "power as transformative capacity".
- (v) Providing more occasions like workshops and seminars to bring us together to develop the outlines of a just transition to a democratic eco-socialist society and enhance our collective strength.

## CONCLUSION

The crucial question is: who is controlling the transition away from the fossil fuel regime and who will benefit? The fossil fuel industry is very powerful, and what the transition to a low-carbon economy involves "- in the EU as in other highly industrialized countries - is not green growth, but a drastic retrenchment or even a shutdown of many industries. ... [This] would demand, among others, a confrontation with the fossil fuel industries as the most important (but not the only) obstacle preventing a "just transition" towards a sustainable development paradigm" (Mahnkhof, 2014: 16).

However, an understanding of a just transition as simply limited to the goal of a low-carbon economy could mean the expansion of the present privatised renewable energy programme in which electricity becomes totally unaffordable for the mass of working people. "Renewable energy at the service of capital accumulation could result in even harsher patterns of displacement and appropriation of land than those brought about by other forms of energy" (Abrahamsky, 2012: 349). Without the social ownership and democratic control of production, exploitation will continue. The call of environmentalists for the reduction of consumption could mean the simplification of middle-class lifestyles, reducing waste, extravagance and ostentation, but deep-seated inequality would remain.

Perhaps "the deepest shadow that hangs over us ... is the internalized fatalism that holds there is no possible alternative to capital's world order" (Kelly and Malone, 2006: 116). For this reason we need a new imaginary, "an imagination which has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfilment" (Arundhati Roy, quoted by Klein, 2014: 291). David Harvey (2012: 225) writes, "While nothing is certain, it could be that where we are now is only the beginning of a prolonged shake-out in which the question of grand and far-reaching alternatives will gradually bubble up to the surface in one part of the world or another".

A transformative understanding of a just transition could contain the embryo of a very different order. For example:

- Production could be socially owned and democratically controlled.
- Health and education could be decommodified.
- The localisation of food production in the shift from carbon-intensive industrial agriculture to agro-ecology could promote not only cooperatives and more communal living, but also a more direct sense of connection to nature.
- The mass roll out of renewable energy could mean decentralised, socially owned energy with much greater potential for democratic control.

- The reduction of consumption could mean the simplification of middle-class lifestyles, with reduced waste, extravagance and ostentation.
- The shift to public transport could reduce the reliance on private motor cars as symbols of power and freedom.
- More sharing of resources in more collective social forms could erode the individualism which is a mark of neoliberal capitalism.
- The shift towards a more appreciative use of natural resources could reduce the alienation from nature of many urban inhabitants.
- The values of sharing, simplicity, solidarity and more mindful living could spread.

In the last century Rosa Luxemburg posed the future as a choice between socialism or barbarism. Now there is another choice to the one Luxemburg posed: the future is a choice between eco-socialism or ecological collapse.

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