What does climate justice mean in Europe?

Climate Justice Alliance, 2010

A discussion paper

This discussion paper was drafted by a working group at the CJA meeting in Amsterdam in February 2010. Its purpose is to collectively explore the concept of climate justice in the context of Europe. Through providing this discussion paper as both incomplete and unending, we hope it will be useful as a tool in linking the diverse struggles throughout Europe and elsewhere, and strengthen the collective movement towards our visions of the future.

In choosing Europe as the terrain of this discussion, we are not separating ourselves from those struggling elsewhere in the world. On the contrary, through asking what the basis of climate justice is in on our own doorstep, and discovering how we go about implementing it, we are fighting for a better world for all.

The abject failure of governments to provide a political solution to the climate crisis in Copenhagen was unsurprising to those who, from the outset, understood the UN as an institution whose interests lie in extending the legitimacy of global capitalism and the nation–state. Those who placed their hope in the COP15, due either to naivety or necessity, left with a sense of disbelief. More and more are now coming to the realisation that it is social movements, not governments, that have the power to make the necessary changes to solve the climate crisis.

Linking with social struggle

The solutions to systematic repression, exploitation, and the climate crisis are the same. Climate Justice means linking all struggles together that reject neoliberal markets and working towards a world that puts autonomous decision making power in the hands of the communities. We look towards a society which recognises our historical responsibilities and seeks to protect the global commons, both in terms of the climate and life itself.

Solidarity

From the shanty towns of the Americas to the precariats of Europe, the global south is all of those, whether resisting or not, who suffer the impacts of the relationships of capital and domination. It is important to recognise that the marginalised in the geographic south are also the front

line of the struggle for climate justice. Solidarity is the realisation of the common struggle. It is realising that the geography which divides us is insignificant compared to the strength of the values that hold us together – our shared affirmation of life and liberty in the face of exploitation and oppression. Solidarity means fighting for our own autonomy at the same time as we struggle against corporations and the relationships of capital that exploit people everywhere.

The EU

Europe, including the EU, is historically responsible for climate change and social and environmental exploitation world wide. The EU as a political institution serves only to extend the interests of the wealthy and the powerful. Its Lisbon Agenda, and the more recent 2020 Agenda, looks to increase the dominance of European based corporations and extend the rule of capital into every sphere of our lives. Its pursuit of the Emissions Trading Scheme has pioneered a system that serves only to profit from our ecological crises, its Bologna process turns our universities into 'sausage factories', whilst the EU trade strategy looks to control access to natural resources and cheap labour for European corporations, continuing its historical legacy of colonialism through different methods. Overcoming institutions that override the autonomy of communities through tying us to capitalist growth is essential if we are to move towards an ecologically and socially just world.

Food and Agriculture

Climate Justice is closely linked to breaking the circle of industrialised agricultural production perpetuated through WTO and European policies. Speculation on food as an industrial commodity and the domination of long unsustainable production chains by international capital threatens the biosphere and the lives of billions of people. This attack on food sovereignty and the planet must be met with a social struggle for food production defined by the needs and rights of local communities. This means redefining, re-localising and re-appropriating the control of our food and agricultural systems through engaging and acting in solidarity with existing struggles.

Military

In Europe, as elsewhere, the military-industrial complex is one of the key actors in maintaining business as usual in the current dominant economic political system. Under the false promise of ensuring 'security' and in the 'war against terror', huge and ever increasing budgets are being spent on military and policing infrastructure. Often military ventures are thinly

veiled attempts at securing access to foreign resources and ensuring vast profits for the arms industry. The real security threat we face cannot be addressed by armed force and social control. Social exclusion, poverty, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem collapse, and increasingly scarce resources leading to an escalation in conflicts and resource wars, are posing a far bigger threat than the ghost of terror, or any other imaginary foe created to mask the social conflicts that exists within and between our societies. The struggle for climate justice is about highlighting another concept of sustainable 'human security', which a military and policing force will never be able to guarantee. In practice by resisting changes in our global systems, the military and police apparatus is endangering security, not increasing it.

Migration

Climate change is exacerbating factors which force people to migrate; lack of access to land or livelihood, failing agriculture, conflict and lack of access to water. The tiny proportion of those displaced who attempt the expensive and dangerous journey, are met with militarised border controls if they reach 'Fortress Europe.' Labelled 'illegals,' they are denied basic human rights and struggle to live in dignity, whilst providing a neat scapegoat for a range of social problems. The historical development of capital accumulation, colonialism and carbon emissions, means that Europe has a unique responsibility to act in solidarity with those who are displaced. In our free market system only those with certain papers such as an EU passport and capital and commodities are free to move around the world. Those seeking a better life or moving to survive are increasingly denied this option. As well as fighting for the conditions for people to be able to stay in their homes and communities, we must also defend the principle of freedom of movement for all as one key aspect of climate justice.

Energy

The need for constant economic growth also means an ever increasing thirst for energy. While there is sufficient energy in Europe we see that despite producing more and more energy, due to inefficiency and inequality, millions of people in Europe do not have access to affordable energy and are unable to heat their homes. Moreover our energy policy within Europe directly results in huge amounts of dangerous waste (nuclear and other), and vast levels of emissions which are rapidly destabilising the global climate. We must ensure that everyone in Europe has access to sufficient levels of energy which is produced in a way that does not damage or endanger people or the environment. We need to radically transform our ways of producing, distributing and consuming

energy. This means leaving fossil fuels in the ground, democratising means of production and changing our attitudes to energy consumption. Energy resources should be in the control of communities that use them, and this means challenging the power and ownership of energy companies.

Production and consumption

Europe has some of the highest concentrations of wealth in the world and consumes enormous amounts of resources, yet there are stark inequalities. Production and consumption should be based on values other than profit; this means changing the way we structure our social, economic and political relationships, and ensuring democratic control of the means of production. This will require expropriation and conversion not only of climate damaging companies and industries, but all spheres of life that operate according to the logic of capital. We need to challenge individualism in society and stop allowing ourselves to be defined as consumers, a de-humanising and restrictive identity. Social values must be based on human needs and not on ever increasing consumption, economic growth and competition.

Climate Justice in Europe

Climate justice means recognising that the capitalist growth paradigm, which leads to over extraction, overproduction and overconsumption stands in deep contrast to the biophysical limits of the planet and the struggle for social justice. The historical legacy of European expansion/colonialism is a root cause of the current geopolitical inequalities, in which the global North is consuming the global South. Climate justice means addressing the inequalities that exist between and within countries, and replacing the economic and political systems that uphold them. The status quo is maintained through unequal exchange via unjust trade policies and unequal access to technological capacity. On a global level Europe is a centre of capital accumulation and thus socio-ecological exploitation of the South, however, internally in Europe there are huge inequalities in terms of race, gender and class. These are crucial issues that need to be addressed in the struggle for climate justice on a European level.

We hope that this discussion paper has helped to explore the concept of climate justice in the context of Europe, and we invite your comments to further this discussion. Fundamentally, we believe that we cannot prevent further global warming without addressing the way our societies are organised – the fight for climate justice and the fight for social justice are one and the same.

email: info@climate-justice-action.org (please put 'CJ in Europe discussion paper' in the subject line), this discussion paper will also be posted on the CJA website: http://www.climate-justice-action.org. We welcome offers of translation.