

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CARIBBEAN

The 2018 hurricanes Irma and Maria signal the emergence of a new climate regime in the Caribbean. At no point in the historical records dating back to the 1880s have two category five storms struck the eastern Caribbean in a single year. The Caribbean is seeing repeated and prolonged droughts, an increase in the number of very hot days, intense rainfall events causing repeated localised flooding, and rising sea levels.

Caribbean economies are built on industries and sectors that are extremely sensitive to climate variations, such as tourism and agriculture. The ferocity of Irma and Maria brought devastation of catastrophic proportions. Without global action, it is predicted that by the end of the current century the Caribbean region will warm a further 2-3°C over the 1°C already seen in the last century. Annual rainfall amounts will decrease by up to 40%, posing a significant challenge to already water stressed islands. Projections also show sea levels rising by 1-2 metres. There will be more of the strongest tropical Atlantic hurricanes. The region's climate will be altered beyond recognition.



1.5 °C to Stay Alive!

The Caribbean islands are minor emitters of greenhouse gases, but the future viability of the region depends on collective global action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is for this reason that the Caribbean and other small island and developing states have argued for a limit to global warming of 1.5°C.

The slogan "1.5 °C to Stay Alive!" was adopted by the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre. A world warmed by no more than 1.5°C is one in which existing Caribbean societies have a future. The emissions reductions that have been voluntarily agreed through the United Nations have been predicted to lead to warming of 2.7-3.7°C.

The failure of the efforts by the so-called "international community" to deal with climate

change can partly be attributed to the domination of the discussions by the old imperialist powers, those who, as the major historical and current polluters, are mainly responsible for the state the climate is in.

No Credibility

At the behest of the major polluters, the UN currently lacks a mechanism to hold countries to any commitments they make on climate change, which are only voluntary. In light of this, the credibility of the United Nations' led process for securing the future of the Caribbean is completely compromised.

The prospect of a US withdrawal from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) climate agreements, along with the decision to tear up existing carbon reduction plans, will help condemn Caribbean populations to 'climate-barbarism'.

The globally unequal distribution of wealth that leaves many Caribbean countries without the resources necessary to adequately respond to

climate change is a consequence of the legacies of imperialism, slavery and colonialism, combined with contemporary forms of neoliberal capitalism. Now, the same logic of unlimited economic growth and unchecked global inequality that are part of the cause of climate change are extended to the conditions accompanying proposed 'solutions'. Here the distribution of financial support depends on potential returns for wealthy investors. Financing is utilised as a chance to further extend the pursuit of the 'business opportunities' and potential investment, the latest form of neo-colonialism.



Solidarity not aid

We need international solidarity, not aid. The use of aid to manipulate vulnerable nations is particularly unjust given that these countries are not historically responsible for climate change. If we examine the conditions attached to the meagre funding that has been begrudgingly promised to vulnerable countries, we see how the interests of big-business are prioritised at the expense of Caribbean societies.

The UN approach to climate change has prevented discussion of alternative approaches, which might not be in the interests of global capitalism. The call for 1.5°C requires an end to highly resource-intensive models of capitalist development and their obsession with capital accumulation.

Alternative approaches

The industrialised countries have benefited significantly from the same processes that caused climate change and thus owe a considerable climate debt due in the form of reparations. Yet just as the beginning of man-made climate change coincided with the beginning of industrial capitalism, that self-same industrial capitalism was largely funded by the theft of the unpaid labour power of millions of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean. In this context, it is important to advance the claims made for reparations as redress for the global inequalities resulting from this expropriation of

wealth.

Atlantic slavery was an important component of the development and expansion of modern capitalism, both through the profits made from sugar and other tropical products as well as the supply of cheap raw materials such as cot-

ton to European and North American manufacturers. These profits went, directly or indirectly, to the manufacturers and other suppliers of the slave trade, to the shipping industry, to the construction of infrastructure such as canals and railways, but above all to the financial services industry.

Financial services

Most of today's large banks and insurance companies can be traced back directly to concerns that had their first growth as part of the slave economy. It would therefore seem reasonable that these modern firms should refund the unpaid wages from which their predecessors profited so handsomely forming the basis of their current prosperity. The descendant institutions of those who did not pay the slaves their wages might now be made to do so. Part of the claim for reparations is for the funding of measures to prevent global warming.

Poverty, famine and war

Climate change is a major contributor to poverty, famine and war, forcing whole populations to seek a new life in richer areas of the world with the hard, militarised borders, such as the Mediterranean and the Arizona desert, claiming thousands of lives every year. Much of this migration is caused by the detrimental effects of climate change, but as long as individual nation-states have control over extraction and emissions within their borders, it will be much more difficult to take the necessary steps to control global warming.

But with the planet being destroyed by climate change, the situation has become critical for us all, irrespective of nation, for, while climate change is global, the currently proposed solutions are bounded by state borders and limited

by the concept of private property. Because the climate is global, individual states alone cannot prevent environmental change. Yet, the 1992 Rio Conference stated "*States have the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and development policies*".

The last hundred years has seen a dramatic hardening of borders and restrictions on free movement of labour, while free movement of capital and "free trade" have become the norm worldwide, making it easy for corporations to move production to ever cheaper locations and to dump their pollution on the Third World. Corporations operate across borders while regulations and workers are contained by them. Oil and mineral extraction as well as pollution is done by corporations unbounded by borders and protected by "free trade", so the real control of the environment currently rests with those corporations. The structural violence of borders is not only to be seen in the victims of drowning in the Mediterranean or heat stroke in the Arizona desert. Borders and migration control will also concentrate the negative impact of climate change on more vulnerable places, one thinks immediately of the Bay of Bengal and the Caribbean, while at the same time containing the people most affected within these areas.

Climate Justice Movement

In contrast to the pessimistic picture portrayed above, the international climate justice movement offers an alternative model of 'development' in which responding to climate change is also about reorganising society in a more equitable fashion.

Climate-just futures, imply a radical restructuring of society and economy. A climate-just world would involve tackling forms of environmental harm, but it would also be about pursuing social justice in general.

So, how might pressure be applied from below in order to secure the necessary political action?

The One Million Climate Jobs report produced by the Campaign against Climate Change Trade Union Group and backed by eight British unions shows that we can create a million secure Government jobs in renewable energy, in increasing energy efficiency by insulating homes and public buildings free of charge, in hugely expanding cheap public transport to get people and freight onto cleaner forms of

transit, and in developing the "green skills" that we need through education and training. A million decently paid Government jobs could kick-start the economy. It is the alternative both to austerity and to Government inaction as the world slides towards climate catastrophe.

One Million Climate Jobs

The One Million Climate Jobs Campaign in South Africa is an alliance of labour, social movements and popular organisations that is campaigning for the creation of a million climate jobs as part of a collective approach to the crisis of unemployment and climate change. The Campaign was launched in 2011 and since then has been mobilising thousands of South Africans around real solutions to slowing down climate change, protecting the natural environment, improving the quality of life for all and moving towards a sustainable development path. Climate change will exacerbate inequality and poverty because it reduces access to food, water, energy and housing. Thus it is vital that social justice struggles around these issues incorporate struggles around climate change.

The resolution on Climate Change at the 2017 TUC Congress was a considerable step forward in committing the British trade unions to campaigning for a just solution to climate change, despite the disappointing failure to address either fracking or airport expansion. We support those unions who are continuing the campaign for:

- * **Energy democracy and a rapid transition from fossil fuels including a ban on all fracking**
- * **A halt to airport expansion**
- * **Promotion of alternative to short-haul flights, including publicly owned railways**
- * **A genuine commitment to reducing lethal air pollutants**
- * **A just transition employment strategy to climate jobs and well-paid, skilled, sustainable employment**
- * **Improved links between anti-war, refugee and climate campaign movements**
- * **Action against trade treaties that threaten climate justice**
- * **A Climate Justice Fund funded by wealthy nations and polluting companies.**

These are just three of the many initiatives world-wide that are promoting a just approach to preventing climate change. Given the threat to the region, it is vital that the Caribbean and its people plays its part in that movement.

Hurricane Maria: Puerto Rico's Not-So-Natural Disaster

On Wednesday 20 September 2017 the lives of Puerto Ricans on the island and abroad changed forever. Hurricane María hit Puerto Rico as a category four storm (sustained winds of 150mph), leaving the island in a state of emergency. Essential services such as power, potable water and communication services collapsed. Flooding did not discriminate between marginalized and affluent neighborhoods. But the natural disaster uncovered the soaring levels of inequality and the commodification of disaster-related recovery for Puerto Rican residents. Moreover, austerity programmes, a long-term lack of investment in infrastructure and the lack of decision-making power from Puerto Rico's elected officials magnified Hurricane Maria's socio-economic impact.

At a round-table event at UCL Institute of the Americas, 4 Puerto Rican academics discussed the disaster conditions, response and consequences of Puerto Rico's Not-So-Natural Disaster. You can listen to a podcast of the event at <http://bit.ly/2sWk6TM>

See also "Puerto Rico is a Colony" in Issue 10 of *Cutlass* - <http://bit.ly/2Fs5zS5>

Dominica: After the Storm - from **An Interview with Lennox Honychurch** in the *New York Review of Books* - <http://bit.ly/2on8BA0>



"I had been surrounded by coastal forest, but that was completely gone - I was looking across to houses, though now demolished, that I knew were there but that I had never seen from my place before. The landscape was completely transformed, returned to how it would have looked 200 years ago, when the island's coasts were all planted with sugarcane. You could see for miles. Except for the ground, of course, was covered not with sugar but with branches."

"The trees, nearly all of them, were snapped off halfway up their trunks. But what was even more striking was how they'd been stripped, by the branches tearing through the forest and ripping off the bark, the orchids, everything.

"To deny climate change," as the prime minister put it, *"is to deny a truth we've just lived."*

Profiting from Disaster in Barbuda from *Land Portal* - <http://bit.ly/2GLu5NJ>

Earlier this year, with the majority of Barbudans still displaced from the storm, an amendment to the island's communal land ownership law was pushed through the Senate of Antigua and Barbuda. If the amendment stands, a tradition of communal land rights that dates back to the abolition of slavery in 1834, and which has protected Barbuda as a rare beacon of sustainable development in the Caribbean, will be extinguished. But Barbudans are fighting back, challenging the amendment to the Barbuda Land Act. And the island's highest-profile investor, Robert De Niro, stands to benefit most if they fail.

At present, land in Barbuda is held in common: It can not be bought or sold, and though developers can lease land for 50 years, their projects need to win the consent of a majority of Barbudans. It was a rare example of participatory economic planning and successful land redistribution to freed slaves and their descendants.

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