

# The Social Ecology of Carbon

GLOBAL WARMING ABC'S - A LOOK INTO THE NEOLIBER AL EMBR ACE OF GLOBAL WARMING'S LANGUAGE



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THIS IS A SHORT A-Z THAT FUNCTIONS AS A TOOL FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS. IT TRACES A MOLECULE OF CARBON BETWEEN DIFFERENT PORTS, OVER FOUR CENTURIES VIA SOCIAL STRUGGLES AND RESISTANCE TO THE ENCLOSURE OF COMMON LAND AND RESOURCES. IT WONDERS IF CAPITAL CAN PROFIT FROM CLIMATE CHANGE, AND IF SO WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT.

AS WILL BARNES ASKS IN CAPITAL CLIMES, FEATURED IN MUTE'S ITS NOT EASY BEING GREEN' THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS TEXT, "THE REAL QUESTION IS WHETHER CAPITAL, AT UNIMAGINABLE HUMAN COST, WILL SET THE TERMS ON WHICH THIS CHANGE IS CONFRONTED, OR WHETHER WE SHALL."



# A IS FOR......AVONMOUTH

THE SHIP ARRIVES IN AVONMOUTH, near Bristol in the UK, a journey of nearly 5000 nautical miles transporting a commodity (coal) that already exists in these islands, within the hills across the bay in Wales and further North. This process contributes to what the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) calls 'anthropogenic warming' although it wasn't 'humans' or 'us' per se who allocated the capital or created the decisions that lead to this situation. To all intents and purposes 'we' do not exist. 'We' are not either the state nor the market. The agent responsible for climate change is an economic system, composed of a set of social relationships within which 'we' do exist.

For it was a social relationship that led to the installation of 3 3MW Wind Turbines in the port of Avonmouth. The uncomfortable statistic of 15 million tonnes of CO2 discharged into the atmosphere from burning this coal, facilitated by wind turbines saving 15 thousand tonnes of CO2 can cause something like cognitive dissonance amongst us. It is a less comfortable position to think like this though, than to celebrate unconditionally the installation of the turbines, and to imagine it as a cultural catalyst for passing individual motorists travelling along the M5. That the agency of these motorists is equated with that of the key economic decision makers, composed of corporations and states (Capital) is maybe an indication of the depth of the problems, and conversely the strength of emergent solutions. i

See 'Richards Bay', 'Miners', 'Liverpool Dockers'

# B IS FOR.....BIOFUEL

IN THE UK, APRIL 15TH 2008 a regulation was passed into law whereby all consumption of petrol must contain 2.5% biofuel, rising to 5% after two years. On the surface, this is an 'ecological' decision to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, supported by celebrities and politicians, however when implemented within global capitalism is here and now resulting in deaths, both from starvation and from violence during land appropriation. Speculators are profiting from the rise in demand for combased ethanol, pushing the cost of food beyond the reach of much of the poor in the global south.ii

See: 'Diggers', 'Planet of Slums'

# C IS FOR......CAPITAL ACCUMULATION



# D IS FOR......DIGGERS

MEDIAEVAL PRIVATISATION HAD BEGUN IN EARNEST, and swaths of the population were being forced out of the countryside, the common land 'enclosed', and the necessary labour created for capital accumulation in the industries of the North of England.

The Diggers were a gang of 17th Century agrarian communists, sick of low wages and rising food prices. They squatted a piece of common land in St Georges Hill in Surrey in 1649 and declared that:

"WE...HAVE BEGUN AND GIVE CONSENT TO DIG UP,
MANURE AND SOW CORN UPON THE COMMON, AND WASTE
GROUND, CALLED BARESHANKE BELONGING TO THE
INHABITANTS OF WELLINBORROW," iii

Their experiment in collective ownership, the active process of 'commoning', ended after a year, the rebellion crushed by the state and private interests. To 'sow Corn upon

the commons' illuminated the internal dynamics of the dominant system both then and now. The ancient rights of the commons can point us forward towards a completely different relationship, that of 'use values' not 'exchange values'.

See 'Biofuels', 'Capital Accumulation'

# E IS FOR.....ENERGY POLICY

ENERGY POLICY CAN BE SPECIFICALLY LINKED to the needs of capital accumulation.

For example, the British National Oil Corporation created in 1976 had overall power to purchase 51% of all oil produced in the North Sea and from 1982 would have had powers to impose depletion controls over private oil companies like those in Norway. Had these powers been used, the UK would still have comparable reserves of oil and gas. All were privatised, and the oil flowed at breakneck pace, used as a tool to break the power of OPEC in the 1980s. From the 1990s the big oil companies from the US and UK used their income from the North Sea to invest in more 'productive' fields now available in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. iv

In the Niger Delta, bright lights burn in the sky. These lights illuminate with a different sort of power. The orange glow is a 'waste' gas, a 'by-product' of oil accumulation. It is burnt, facilities to harness this gas (enough to provide Nigeria with its entire electricity needs), 'too expensive'. Instead this externality of Capital, a molecule released into the public commons of the atmosphere, is in its own way contributing to the reduction of complexity and diversity of life on Earth, what was was once organic becoming the inorganic.

So then, this is a structural issue, one of power, and it is a history that should inform the current debates about 'peak oil' as much as any geological limits.

See 'Miners', 'Capital Accumulation'

# F IS FOR.....FEAR

THE FEAR THAT IS GENERATED BY CLIMATE CHANGE and ecosystemic collapse is positive in one way by giving us a time-scale in which to act.

Fear at the same time can lead to acceptance of the politics of emergency. The feeling that the world is going to end shortly can result in 'There is no time to be critical – we must act NOW!' and 'Something – Anything must be done!'. Even if that 'something' could result in the worsening of conditions for the majority alongside no structural changes meaning business as usual for the elites.

See 'Questions', 'Offsetting', 'Avonmouth', You Fly: They Die!'

# GISFOR......GLOBAL CUSTOMER.....METERING STRATEGIES

#### THE LONDON BUSINESS CONFERENCES WEBSITE

(http://www.london-business-conferences.co.uk/register/default.asp) has a interesting set of workshops. Notice the joining up of measures reducing carbon emissions, increasing nuclear power, and border controls/I.D politics:

ENABLING NEW NUCLEAR BUILD | CARBON FOOTPRINT CONSUMER RESEARCH | EMISSIONS TRADING AVIATION 2007 | SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL PRODUCTS | GLOBAL CUSTOMER METERING STRATEGIES | NUCLEAR STRATEGIES | DATA SHARING | IDENTITY INFRASTRUCTURE | SMART METERING | BORDER CONTROL 2 | GLOBAL LEAKTECH

See 'Biofuels', 'Hedgefund'

# H IS FOR.....HEDGEFUND

THE PROBLEMS OF USING TOOLS OF THE MARKET to solve problems caused by the very same markets is highlighted below:

"A YEAR AGO, CITIGROUP'S PETER ATHERTON CONFESSED IN A POWER POINT THAT THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EMISSIONS TRADING SYSTEM (ETS) HAD "DONE NOTHING TO CURB EMISSIONS" AND ACTED AS "A HIGHLY REGRESSIVE TAX FALLING MOSTLY ON POOR PEOPLE." ON WHETHER POLICY GOALS WERE

ACHIEVED, HE ADMITTED: "PRICES UP, EMISSIONS UP, PROFITS UP...SO, NOT REALLY. WHO WINS AND LOSES? ALL GENERATION-BASED UTILITIES -- WINNERS. COAL AND NUCLEAR-BASED GENERATORS -- BIGGEST WINNERS. HEDGE FUNDS AND ENERGY TRADERS -- EVEN BIGGER WINNERS. LOSERS... AHEM... CONSUMERS!" \*\* 0\*\*

See '(apital Accumulation', 'Offsetting'

## I IS FOR.....IMMORALITY

AT THE CORE OF CAPITAL is dynamic technology based growth, one that depends upon the replacement of labour with energy intensive processes for the express purpose of extracting more value. This capital takes the form of profits for owners but also crucially finance for which to reinvest to facilitate more growth. Businesses which don't follow this model will die, consumed by their competitors. This process John Bellamy Foster calls the 'higher immorality' compared to the 'immorality' of consumption – specifically consumption underpinned by systems of mass marketing, wasteful overproduction, profligate supply chains and intentional product obsolescence – explored further in the text 'The Treadmill of Production / Global Ecology and the Common Good' by John Bellamy Foster. vi

See 'Planet of Slums', 'Energy Policy'

# JIS FOR.....JUST TRANSITION

ENCOURAGINGLY THERE ARE SIGNS of a cross fertilisation as environmental campaigners resisting the new coal age in the UK are forming alliances with local communities and workers affected by the mines. At a recent action at Europe's biggest opencast coal mine at Ffos-y-fran in South Wales, activists linked up with local communities using the tools of the Just Transition movement, who look to 'forge alliances between 'frontline' workers and 'fenceline' communities in areas where heavy industry operates'.vii

See 'Liverpool Dockers', 'Questions'

# K IS FOR.....KATRINA

IN THE CONTEXT OF DISASTER CAPITALISM, deeper interventions can be made that challenge and respond to adaption policies of Capital by taking defensive, but positive actions, valuable in and of themselves. The Common Ground Collective' set up in the chaos left by the State emergency services in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, providing supplies and solidarity to the people most affected by this climate related disaster, is but one example. viii

# LISFOR....LIVERPOOL DOCKERS

IN 1997 FIGHTING AGAINST THE ENCLOSING OF PORTS,

privatisation and subsequent attacks on working conditions, 500 Liverpool dockers were sacked. Innovative coalitions formed both with ecological anti-capitalist direct action group Reclaim the Streets (RTS). There were days of action, combining international solidarity between port workers and pleasure based street parties and occupations. Ultimately it was unsuccessful, but for many this coalition contains seeds of current and future crossovers between ecology, work, hydrocarbon resources: in short the realms of the social.

The issue here is that the enclosure of the ports and the imposition of neoliberal economics is about increasing the flows of capital in, out and between states. At the same time as this, acceleration of both technology and the intensity of work requires that the one factor that can consciously challenge these flows - human labour - is attacked. The Liverpool dockers had previously prevented the import of 3,000 tonnes of highly toxic waste, one of the factors leading to the reciprocal arrangement with RTSix. Other dockers groups benefited from the lessons of their struggle, and on Mayday this year the The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down 29 ports in the US in protest against the Iraq War. This is, according to the ILWU, the first time an American union has decided to undertake industrial action against a U.S. war, and some 25 000 dockworkers stayed home. This was built around a solidarity with both Iraqi port and oil workers unions, with links made condemning the imposition of laws privatising the Iraqi oil industry. \*Around the same time South African Transport Union members refused to handle a shipment of arms destined for Zimbabwe from China.

So when we talk about the elements of international trade, about the senselessness of

transporting cargo thousands of miles and the pollution that this entails, we should also include two other elements – often left out of these discourses – workers and capitalists.xi

See 'Questions'

# M IS FOR......MINERS

DETERMINED TO DESTROY THE UNIONS IN 1984, highly provocative pit dosures and privatisations were announced, undermining previous agreements. The strike lasted for one year, during which time villages were occupied by police, MI6 and MI5 were active within the National Union for Miners and the working class themselves were described as 'The Enemy within' xii A whole new area of 'new enclosures' were implemented - between 1984 and 1990 the UK's energy sources were privatised. Obviously the use of coal is something that needs to be phased out, or at least put on hold until the proposed technological developments are shown to function rather than exist as a fantasy on which to expand production regardless. The relevance of the miners struggle is that the mines were closed and communities destroyed solely for the purpose of maintaining or increasing the rate of private profit. Indigenous supplies were substituted for cheaper imports with all the horrors of poor wages and precarious conditions in the mines abroad alongside the extra freight-based transport emissions. This was coupled with a policy of increasing the development of UK based 'open-cast' mines to replace the deep shaft mines closed during the struggles, often located in the very same communities affected by pit closures. These open cast mines benefit from the processes of substituting technology for labour, and what labour is left is casualised and easier to exploit.xiii

Contrast this to the 'Free mines' of the Forest of Dean, Southwest UK. A recent event organised by Bristol Radical History group led participants 150 years into the past, detailing the story of Warren James, a forest dweller who applied the collective principles of 'commoning' to hydrocarbon resources located within the forest. He helped organise the Forest Riots of 1831, resisting the enclosures of the forest using the principles of commoners rights enshrined in the Forest Charter. He warned against surrendering any of the rights around which they had organised:

# "REMEMBER, FREE MINERS, YEA PONDER IT WELL, THEY'LL SUCK OUT THE EGG IF THEY ONCE PRICK THE SHELL!" xiv

There are still free mines operating today which supply local communities with coal extracted at a sustainable rate. Whether it is sustainable to burn it is another question. What if when asking this question we prefix it with "...if we challenge all the unnecessary over production and waste inherent within contemporary capitalism...". Similarly can we decouple the use of energy from its value to capitalism? Incredibly the 13th Century Forest Charter may well have a role to play in these questions. As US based historian Peter Linebaugh says "(it).. holds a constitutional key to the future of humanity insofar as it provides protections for the whole earth's commons, particularly its hydrocarbon energy resources, whether these take the form of wood, coal, or petroleum. The key is turned by the women of the planet in Chiapas, Nigeria, India (to name a few places) who have taken the lead in the process of re-commoning what has been privatized and profiteered."

See 'Avonmouth', 'Energy Policy'

### N IS FOR......NITRATES

BACK AT AVONMOUTH DOCKS, Terra Nitrogen receives a shipment of petroleum-based nitrates for use in intensive agriculture. The history of modern agribusiness has led not only to the release of CO2 into the atmosphere, but also to land degradation, soil depletion, run-offs effecting the water system and inhumane systems of animal husbandry. This process of capital accumulation has been described as causing a metabolic rift' xv, one whereby the organic cycles of ecological systems are disrupted and degraded, creating a rift which affects the ability of the components of this system to continue or reproduce, 'simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker' xvi

See Diggers', Biofuels'

# O IS FOR.....OFFSETTING

A MARKET HAS BEEN CREATED SURROUNDING THE VERY AIR

WE BREATH. Carbon Dioxide - probably the most demonised of molecules in circulation today - is the enemy, and therefore must be neutralised. Before this can happen it must first become a commodity and in a rational but horrific development be used as a reference point for a cost/benefit analysis of human lives.xvii

Offsetting could be seen as a tactic of profiting from the disorientation surrounding climate change. When applied to guilty individuals it contains the promise of personal salvation and subsequent redemption through market exchange. Furthermore this religious scenario contains a current flowing from Malthus and the politics of scarcity.

See 'Global Customer Metering Strategies'

# PISFOR.....PLANET OF SLUMS

TALK OF 'LIMITS TO GROWTH' AND 'OVER CONSUMPTION' when viewed from third world could appear to be a sick joke. In Mike Davis' 'Planet of Slums' the horrific consequences of decades of structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF and World Bank have led to a worsening of conditions for the majority world. The growth of urban slums is unprecedented, for the first time in the history of earth more people living in the city than the countryside.

See 'Underdevelopment'

It is apocalypse.

# Q IS FOR.....QUESTIONS

THE FIRST QUESTION IS HOW TO AVOID THEORETICAL

PARALYSIS. The second might be what signposts for movement do we need to construct. By placing ecology as one concern amongst many all of the time - can we build links (in permaculture language) by acting as 'dynamic accumulators'?

See 'Fear'

# R IS FOR......RICHARDS BAY

PORT IN SOUTH AFRICA, where domestic users of electricity have been hit by

price increases, disconnections and rationing plans, whilst industrial users (mining, manufacturing and commercial) of which 25 companies consume 40% of electricity supplies, receive long term fixed low prices and compensation for any blackouts. \*viii. A cost benefit analysis was performed, and the market made its choice. See 'Avonmouth'

S IS FOR.....SOCIAL MOBILITY

SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE UK is worse than 10 years ago. The top 10% earn as much as the bottom 50% combined. xix

See 'Immorality'

# T IS FOR.....THEOLOGY

THE 'CARBON-HATED' PROJECT involved an installation of street signs representing different ideological positions on Climate Change. The signs linked via URL to a survey, using the format of the Carbon Footprint, with the aim being to investigate if any of our approaches to the environment have become more like a religious tradition. see http://www.stuffit.org

# U IS FOR .....UNDER DEVELOPMENT

"SO WHEN YOU HEAR SOMEONE SAY, "THE WORLD'S FOOD SUPPLY IS GOING TO RUN OUT IN SUCH AND SUCH A YEAR", WELL, EXCUSE ME! FORTY THOUSAND CHILDREN DIE EACH DAY FROM THE EFFECTS OF MALNUTRITION. OR PERHAPS I SHOULD SAY - FROM THE CAUSES OF MALNUTRITION. FOR THESE SOULS IT'S ALREADY TOO LATE. AND THERE ARE MILLIONS - THE PRECARIAT - FOR WHOM CATASTROPHE IS LOOMING. THIS ISN'T THE FUTURE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. IT'S TONIGHT.

In other words, if we look at the landscape of modernity, we should be talking catastrophe. Of course we should. It's been one long catastrophe. But we should refuse to do so in Malthusian terms, blaming the state of affairs on overpopulation and poverty and we should be aware that catastrophism and apocalypse talk are especially congenial to fundamentalists." xx

See 'Planet of Slums'

# V IS FOR......VICTORIAN

THE DANGER IS THAT GREEN DISCOURSE COULD BE USED TO JUSTIFY anti migrant policies and shut down the debate over No-Borders or freedom of movement and third world underdevelopment.

The ghost of Malthus lurking as people turn inwards, strengthening nation states and border regimes, and attacks on the working class through 'green' taxes, rhetoric focusing solely on 'over-consumption' duplicating earlier Victorian morality tales with all the 'nasty brutish and short' overtones and the naturalisation of economic systems it contains. In short the creation of a neoliberal ecology.

See 'Immorality', You Fly: They Die!'

# W IS FOR......WAGES

THE VALUE OF WAGES HAS GONE DOWN, the cost of living has risen, meaning that families offset the cost of living using debt. \*\*x\*i\* With the cost of basic necessities rising, the impact of the housing and debt bubble on working class families could make calls for 'austerity' and 'limits to consumption' without questioning the higher immorality within energy politics could appear to be a sick joke. See 'Social Mobility'

## X IS FOR.....XCHANGE VALUES

'CARBON XCHANGE' IS A NEW PROJECT exploring carbon offsetting, use and xchange values. Users select a tree from public land, measure, document and upload

details to project website (http://www.stuffit.org). They can then 'sell' the carbon rights to this tree to others, or offset the carbon 'savings' from their own footprint. The project asks the question is this privatisation or commoning?

# Y IS FOR......YOU FLY: THEY DIE!

AN ANALYSIS BASED ON POLITICS OF EMERGENCY can ignore the structural issues behind the causes of climate change (rather than just the effects in isolation) and advocating this kind of market based solution you end up in a place where everybody is equally to blame, meaning no one is responsible. Strategies devised from this place can end up necessarily limited in the solutions they offer. So in the case of flights the demand is for more tax on 'non-essential travel' which could easily translate into travel only for those that can afford it and for business. Which essentially applies a cost / benefit analysis to flying and income, and decides that those who have enough money have the right to pollute. See 'Social Mobility'

## Z IS FOR.....ZYGOLOGY

THE SCIENCE OF JOINING THINGS TOGETHER

see:

'It Not Easy Being Green' - Mute

Variant Magazine number 28 - 'The Oil Issue'

'Shift #1' - Magazine for Debate and Analysis

'Ecology of Freedom' - Murray Bookchin

'No Blood For Oil! Energy, Class Struggle and War, 1998 - 2005' - George Caffentzis

Turbulence collective - Various writings

'The Vulnerable Planet' - John Bellamy Foster

Just Transition - Frontline Workers and Fenceline Communities | United For Justice Transition Towns Network

'The Price of Fire - Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia' - Benjamin Dangl

#### **NOTES**

- i. 'UK DOCK TURNS TO WIND POWER: MOTORISTS LOOK ON': http://www.treehugger.com/files/2007/08/uk\_dock\_turns\_to\_wind\_power.php
- ii. 'BIOFUELS GANG KILLS FOR GREEN PROFITS': http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us\_and\_americas/article1875709.ece
- iii. GENERAL DIGGERS HISTORY: http://www.tlio.org.uk/history/index.html & MODERN LAND RIGHTS ISSUE IN THE UK: http://libcom.org/news/article.php/land-ownership-right-roam-uk-10032006
- iv. 'COLD DEATH BY NEOLIBERALISM THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FUEL POVERTY' BY JON FOSTER, available in Varient Magazine number 28 'The Oil Issue'
- v. "FROM FALSE TO REAL SOLUTIONS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE": http://www.monthlyreview.org/mrzine/bondo60108.html
- vi. 'GLOBAL ECOLOGY AND THE COMMON GOOD': http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1&2/foster.html
- vii. SEE BOTH DIRECT ACTION REPORT AT:
  http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/04/395619.html?c=on AND JUST
  TRANSITION WEBSITE: http://www.jtalliance.org/
- viii. COMMON GROUND COLLECTIVE: SOLIDARITY NOT CHARITY. IT WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE FIRST WEEK AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA FLOODED NEW ORLEANS. IT WAS THE FIRST ORGANIZATION TO OPEN UP A MEDICAL CLINIC IN ALGIERS, AND PROVIDE IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE (FOOD, WATER, SUPPLIES) TO THE THOUSANDS OF LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS UNABLE TO EVACUATE: http://www.commongroundrelief.org/

# x. 'MAY DAY MESSAGE FROM THE PORT WORKERS IN IRAQ TO WEST COAST DOCK WORKERS IN THE U.S.':

http://www.uslaboragainstwar.org/article.php?id=15827

xi. 'LIVERPOOL DOCKERS AND THE GLOBALISATION OF CLASS STRUGGLE': http://www.labournet.net/docks2/9708/canliv1.htm

XII. 'THE ENEMY WITHIN: THATCHER'S SECRET WAR AGAINST THE MINERS' BY SEUMAS MILNE

xiii. 'NO OPEN CAST MINES!': http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no7/23-32.html

xiv. 'PICNIC IN THE FOREST': http://www.brh.org.uk/dwtf2008/picnic.html

XV. 'ECOLOGY OF DESTRUCTION' BY JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER

XVI. 'CAPITAL VOL i' - K MARX

xvii. 'AN EXCHANGE OF SOULS':

http://www.monbiot.com/archives/2008/02/19/an-exchange-of-souls/

xviii. AFRICA FILES: "SOUTH AFRICA: ESKOM'S WAR ON THE POOR": http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp? ID=17343

xix. 'UK INCOME INEQUALITIES': http://www.poverty.org.uk/04/index.shtml

xx. 'FEAST AND FAMINE: A CONVERSATION WITH IAIN BOAL ON SCARCITY AND CATASTROPHE' BY IAIN BOAL & DAVID MARTINEZ': http://www.word-power.co.uk/viewPlatform.php?id=36

xxi. 'THE HOUSEHOLD DEBT BUBBLE' BY JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER: http://www.monthlyreview.org/0506jbf.htm

THIS A-Z IS A REMIX OF AN EXTENDED TEXT. FOR THIS AND MORE WORK INCLUDING VIDEO,
TEXT, STICKERS, STREET SURVEYS, RESEARCH AND PROPOSALS LOOKING AT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CAPITAL STEALS OUR ECOLOGY SEE
HTTP://WWW.STUFFIT.ORG/

