

Ecology, the Environment, Climate Change

LALIT sees the natural universe, whether it be the air above us, the sea around us, or the earth we walk upon and all that lives upon it, and even outer space, as being our collective heritage as human beings. We are part of it, and also the guardians of it. This natural universe, our mother earth, is now endangered.

Our planet is already suffering irreversible damage, damage so serious as to threaten the very existence of the totality of human civilization in all its varied forms. We humans have the minds to know this.

The threat is posed by our own human-made forms of agricultural and industrial “development”. This is serious because it is our way of survival that has become this destructiveness.

The main damage has been done in the past 250 years. Increasingly serious damage is being done. And yet most of us are oblivious to it, and once we know, we are “helpless”. We sit and watch a potential melt-down of a nuclear plant in Japan, as the capitalists who run it admit their own helplessness.

The private ownership and control by a tiny minority of unaccountable bosses over all our natural resources and over nature itself, has permitted them to do as they please in their quest for private gain. This is the philosophy by which they have lived.

The rest of us human beings, creatures of nature, have been cut off from control over our own labour power and what it produces. This fracture, combined with the fracture between the city and the country, has led to the reckless ransacking of the earth. In particular, our forms of energy production, industrial agriculture and transport, are now a threat to our continued social existence on the earth. Climate change provoked by the greenhouse emissions from fossil-fuels is now proven. Yet, even timid attempts by nation states to limit the damage being done, like the Kyoto Agreement, are systematically sabotaged by powerful multinational corporations that control nation states and governments.

So this brings us to the crying need for collective and internationalist strategies. It is the working people, as a class, the youth taken as a whole, women who have always had to care for the environment, who will, together with the best elements of the environmentalist movement, be in the forefront of the struggle to get back control of what we do on this earth. We need this control so that we can assure the care and nurture of our planet. This means wresting control over production-for-private-greed from the minority that does as it pleases. This means challenging the State that provides this minority with the wherewithall to maintain its banditry. This means a socialist revolution.

It is, of course, totally useless to rely on the private company bosses to stop ransacking and polluting the earth. They will at best just pretend. It is also totally useless to rely on heavily financed “do-gooders” and other NGOs that the capitalists often control and who turn the environment into a single-issue campaign, fractured from the social forces that must be mobilized in order to be able to bring about the kind of change necessary to save the planet.

Since LALIT’s *Program on Ecology and the Environment* of October 2003 (available in Kreol language version), there has been the huge contribution made by John Bellamy Foster in his work, *Marx’s Ecology*. He has “given us back” a materialist and more political approach to the question of ecology. So, LALIT has now, since 2009, been doing the long-term work of re-integrating this “new” way of looking at the relationship between nature and human society into our overall analysis. We use the contradictory expressions “giving back” and “new” because the ideas that were so very much part of the basic philosophy of Marxism before the distortions of the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, disappeared from the political front for some 70 years, leaving the surviving Marxist ecologists all alone in the field of science. The activists were not “green” and the “Greens” were often anti-Marxist, interpreting “marxism” as the Stalinists did, in the sense of seeing humankind as “mastering” nature. Anyone who questioned industrialization was seen as obstructing the Soviet Union’s catching up with US capitalism’s industrialization.

John Bellamy Foster has gone back to the materialist roots of Marxist philosophy, and to the way in which ecology is central to all Marx’s thinking.

In LALIT, we are often critical of many of the currents in ecology, sometimes because they miss key elements to the problems, and other times because they fall gaily into all the traps set by capitalists.

In Mauritius we have criticized those who take sides blindly in intra-capitalist fights, while thinking they are protecting the environment. There were ecologists who were openly and proudly financed by sugar estates and hotel bosses in order to oppose the Gamma-Coventa project for burning rubbish and generating energy, which impinged on their tourism project for *Integrated Resorts Schemes*. An advisor to the Government *Maurice Ile Durable* (Sustainable Mauritius Program), M. Jean Pierre Hardy replies to the question “*Who finances these environmentalists?*” by “*And, so what!*” (*L’Express*, 2 June 2009). This lack of integrity brings discredit to the environmentalists, and the discrediting weakens any point they may have made. They are, in the same vein, against *some* coal-burning plants, and fail even to see others!

And look at the trouble that the “*single issue*” environmentalists have got themselves into over the *Marine Protected Area* in Chagos. They have all fallen right into the British State’s colonial trap, and made fools of themselves relative to the polluting nuclear military base there. See our letter to Greenpeace, who fell into the trap, below.

We are also critical of those who pretend that environmental catastrophe, and even climate change, can rely only on “micro-actions”, that is to say each of us travelling less, becoming vegetarians, composting. Clearly all these are very fine things to do, but they will not suffice to get us out of the fix that the capitalist system has got us into.

We are also critical of the sections of the ecology movement that are happy to rely on “values” without any analysis of the social forces that underpin reality. Some people are benefitting from the ransacking, and they are the minority that take decisions. In LALIT, by contrast, we are mobilizing to build up power in the hands of the dispossessed masses of working people, so that, together, on the basis of a shared program, we can challenge the havoc that the capitalist class and the imperialists are wreaking. And it is urgent. Today global warming is threatening climate change, which could, in turn, cause social collapse. Fossil-fuels are the main cause. So it is urgent to find clean, renewable energy for industry, for households, for agriculture, and for transportation. Today, the dangers of nuclear energy have been exposed by the difficulty of controlling the Fukushima plant in Japan after the tsunami of 2011.

Given that humans do not only live in nature but that we are, ourselves, natural creatures, and that it is nature that allows us to survive on the planet, it is quite normal that we want human society to once again establish a long-term harmony with the rest of the natural world. It is normal for us to demand that the sea, the land, the air and outer space all once again become our common property, democratically controlled.

What John Bellamy Foster has brought back into politics are the two fractures that Marx saw having happened between nature and humans.

First, humans have, over the past 250 years, become fractured from part of our own nature. Whereas for most of our 100,000 years of existence on the planet, we have lived with elementary tools and in harmony with the natural world and the rest of life that has existed for 4 billion years or so. Until some 5,000 years ago when in many places on the earth, we broke into social classes, with the development of agriculture, whether animal-rearing or planting, this harmony existed. Still, we affected nature little more than, say, otters. However, in the last 250 years, increasingly a huge proportion of human beings have seen ourselves estranged from our own labour power. It is no longer ours. So, part of us (our work, our hands, our minds) has become a commodity for sale, and someone else decides what to do with it. And given that our labour power is part of our being, what has happened is that one third of our lives have been fractured from us. We sell them to another class of person, the employers, the owners of capital, who decide. This happened at the same time as the development of huge machines, thousands of them, that we work on, that pollute the world, and that we do not control. We listen to orders. Our labour power is alienated from us. Our nature is thus fractured. A tiny group of capitalists can then use this alienated labour for the pillage of the planet, the removal of the stock of carbon from under the ground and under the sea, and burning it into the atmosphere. The fracture in our natures has led to a dictatorship of a tiny class of people out to “maximize their private profit”. That is their only aim. They say it. Pollution is not a care in their world. Even when the whole

system depends so thoroughly on fossil-fuels that we head blindly to our doom, as a society, their aim remains unchanged: make profit for themselves.

So, that is the first fracture: between human beings and our own labour power. This needs to be repaired, and the way to do it is to do away with class society.

The second fracture is between humans beings and what we metabolize and how. Marx called it the “metabolic fracture”. Throughout most of our 100,000 years of history, humans metabolized things nearby. We ate and drank what was nearby and returned our stools and urine nearby. We lived in relatively small groups, in villages or smaller units. Where agriculture developed, peasants farmed on the spot, and everything was composted back into the earth. The cycle of nature was maintained. Domestic animals were in the same cycle. But two huge changes took place 250 years ago on a world-wide scale. First, cities and countryside got separated. Cities ate up things from the countryside, and caused “rubbish” and “sewerage” in the cities, while depleting the earth in the countryside. This is a long-term threat to the planet. It has to be addressed collectively. And secondly production is so huge-scale now under capitalism that the pillage is too vast to be sustained without harming the very mother earth we live off. In particular, the mining of all the fossil-fuels under the ground and under the sea-bed and burning them is a threat to the planet. This is also a metabolic fracture, in that humans – through our huge machines – are transforming natural substances irreparably, including, for the past fifty years, by nuclear fission. Causing pollution and contamination. Causing global warming, too. Top soil, water, biological diversity are all essential to our survival. Our climate needs to be nurtured. However, the metabolic fracture threatens them.

All this means the Government program of *Maurice Ile Durable* is too little too late. It is like all the NGOs that have no social motor. MID is a program that implies submission before the capitalist class, that class that has caused the fracture in nature, that does the polluting.

LALIT’s program, in contrast, has a natural motor: the working class, which is the largest class, the productive class, and the class with the interest and the capacity to overturn this capitalist rule that has brought the destruction in the first place. Then the fractures will have been repaired: both the alienation of our natural labour power and the metabolic fracture that does not return to the earth’s own system its natural balance.

Open Letter From Lalit To Leaders Of Greenpeace

Dear Leaders of Greenpeace,

We understand that your organization has taken a position in favour of the British Government’s outrageous plan to create a “Marine Park” on territory which is not its own, thus tricking ill-informed people into supporting the British State on rather vague grounds of “the environment”, while they are in fact banishing the people who lived there and flaunting the Charter of the UN.

We write in order to request you to re-think your position on what would in fact be the British Government’s perfidious imposition of a planned Marine Protected Area on part of Mauritius in order to mask the fact that it colonizes the land illegally. Britain colonizes the Chagos under the name of “British Indian Ocean Territory”. This colony is, as far as we know, recognized by no government in the world, except the USA, which has a huge military base on it. The Seychelles Government took the British to task, and took those of its islands in BIOT back, so blatant was the theft. The Mauritian Government has so far unfortunately been much more servile to its ex-colonizer.

The British government’s plan for a Marine Protected Area is a very weak, grotesquely transparent ruse designed to perpetuate the banning of the people of Mauritius and Chagos from part of their own country. And the UK has the cheek to do this, while at one and the same time, perpetuating a polluting nuclear base on Diego Garcia, part of this same stolen territory. The timing of their plan is also very humiliating for all those who have fallen into the trap: there is a European Human Rights Court which may soon hand down a judgment in favour of the right to return for Chagossians. Clearly the British Government is preparing a fall-back plan; if they lose the case, then there will be another “reason” for denying the banished people their right of return; another reason for keeping Mauritius from staking its claim under international law.

Surely the point is for environmentalists to get this nuclear base on Diego Garcia, at the very heart of the Chagos, closed down? Not to ignore its existence. Surely the point is for all concerned people to help complete the decolonization of Mauritius and the Chagos? Not to help in a British cover-up its crimes? After decolonization, the people whose land and sea it is can decide on how to protect and nurture it best, how to affect a clean-up of the base once it was closed down, and how to re-generate it into the beautiful atoll it once was. And we would hope for ideas and support from Greenpeace, amongst other environmentalists, as to how best to do this.

The British State and the USA not only collaborated in the forcible removal of all the people of the entire Chagos, tricking them first, denying them passage back after medical visits to Mauritius main island, gassing their dogs as a warning, then finally starving them off the islands; the British State and the USA not only illegally plotted so as to dismember a country and hide this from the United Nations Decolonization Committee, as has been amply made public in the Judgments in the Court Case brought by the Chagossians, but have also set up a huge immensely polluting military base, one of the biggest in the world, a nuclearized base, right there in the same place that the UK now pretends to want to turn into a Marine Protected Area. The USA has even carried out illegal renditions for torture on and around Diego Garcia; after denying this for years, the Mr. Jack Straw finally admitted it in the British Parliament. So, Greenpeace should perhaps bear in mind that these illegal acts do, in time, get exposed and condemned by people.

Greenpeace should dissociate itself from this entire international plot. It is an old plot whose first shady days have gradually been exposed to the public by years and years of active struggle on the part of Mauritian political parties, associations, trade unions and the people displaced from Chagos, with their women at the helm of the demonstrations. Our women members were amongst those arrested by the Police in 1981 at peaceful demonstration in Port Louis. And though the illegal colonization and the nuclear base have both continued, the conspiracy to remove all the people, and for the UK to steal the islands, and for the US to become receiver of stolen goods, have been exposed in public in the British Courts and in international meetings against US military bases. So, being part of the tail-end of this long-term conspiracy will bring shame on organizations like Greenpeace. That individuals fall into this trap is understandable. But for organizations, we are afraid it will be very damaging to your reputation.

In the past, Greenpeace has known about Diego Garcia. We would very much like to remind you that in October, 1998, LALIT sent one of our members to have a formal meeting with your organization at your headquarters in Amsterdam. The *Rann nu Diego* Committee, a common front of some 10 organizations in Mauritius including one of the two main Chagossian groups, the Chagos Refugees Group, endorsed LALIT's request for a Greenpeace action on Diego Garcia to oppose the nuclear base there. One of our members, Ms. Lindsey Collen, thus had a formal meeting at your headquarters with Ms. Stephanie Mills, who she found to be a very capable, dedicated Australian campaign worker for your organization. Following this meeting, and following the dossier which we submitted formally at the same time, Greenpeace informed us by e-mail that you had organized for one of your vessels (in a window of opportunity) to take a group of people for an action on Diego Garcia in or around March, 1999, in protest against the military base, its nuclearization, the forcible removals, and the continued colonization of part of Mauritius. We were already discussing how many people, preparing for a campaign to get support from peace and environment organizations world-wide, and thinking up the kind of media plan necessary. LALIT immediately set in motion a very broad campaign for "background support", which we got from a series of organizations literally all over the world in order to back up the planned action as soon as it would be able to become public. Response from all over the world was very good. The issue was coming up at the right moment. The only thing that prevented the vessel from actually doing this visit, which would have been truly historic, and which would have been one of Greenpeace's greatest sources of pride as you looked back on your history, was thwarted, we were informed, when the vessel to be used got "iced in" during a trip to the Antarctica in early 1999, and would, by the time it got out of the ice, be too late, as it was already booked for another action afterwards.

Later, in January, 2004, in the outskirts of the WSF meeting in Mumbai, there was a second attempt, this time to ask Greenpeace if you could lead a planned Flotilla to Chagos and Diego Garcia, given that the Chagossians had won a Court Case for the right to return (since overturned - in part by Decree in the UK, and in part by a Privy Council appeal judgment last year). This time it was a joint request from the Chagos Refugees Group and LALIT. Greenpeace were unable to do this, but your leaders at the time were aware of the issues involved.

We mention your past links with the Diego Garcia issue because we believe that your position on the Marine Protected Area which the UK is planning is erroneous. The UK is clearly trying to use the "environment

issue” as a desperate attempt to continue its continued colonization of part of Mauritius. Greenpeace should not allow itself to be used this way.

At present our organization is spearheading a campaign to call on the Mauritian Government to do two things:

- *Request the UN General Assembly to pass a motion for the ICJ at the Hague to give an opinion as to whose territory the Chagos is (the UK accepted compulsory arbitration except from cases put in by Commonwealth Countries, and when the Mauritian Government some 7 years ago threatened to leave the Commonwealth in order to put a binding case, Tony Blair just sent new instructions to his UN ambassador to change the exception to include ex-Commonwealth members. This shows the kind of lengths the UK State will go to.*
- *Request the UN International Atomic Energy Agency to do inspections of Diego Garcia for nuclear materials, given the coming into operation in 2009 of the Pelindaba Treaty for a Nuclear Weapons Free Africa.*

We would very much appreciate it if Greenpeace could consider supporting these two demands. Both would certainly help the environment of the Chagos, as they both involve exposing then closing the nuclear military base. Just as the UK Government is now being exposed for entering illegally into the Iraq War, and Bush and Blair risk charges as war criminals, so in the future, the UK and USA may be publicly exposed as illegal occupiers, as war mongers on Chagos, and as polluters of the Indian Ocean with truly filthy military base. Because that is what they are.

Yours sincerely,

Ram Seegobin, for LALIT, Mauritius, 8 February, 2010.

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