

self-management and the environment

Steve Ryan looks at the relationship between the recession, workers' self-management, and climate change.

The recession is an important topic and is certainly preoccupying the minds of all from bosses through government to the Left. This has very much put the debate about climate change and peak oil out of the limelight.

No doubt bosses and governments will be pleased with this. Buried in the news recently have been a number of disturbing items as regards the speed at which the poles are warming and the fact that Labour have watered down their commitment to carbon reduction under pressure from big business. Worse that the average temperature is now looking to rise by 4 degrees in the next 20/30 years... oh, and oil runs out in 2020!

The response recently had been all about government, as evidenced by the "Green new deal", and the TUC call for "government action" on carbon reduction. In the meantime we are extolled to live "greener" lifestyles. Well-meaning though some of these calls may be, they will fail. Big business will never allow a reduction in profits, no matter what the cost to the planet. There are examples from Coca Cola to Heathrow. Government always bow to big business. Where ARE the green deal jobs Brown promised? They're not there because that would mean increased public spending. Capital has intervened again to protect profit.

So we should all give up and accept our fate? Well no. The forthcoming Trade Union Climate Change conference and the march on 28th March will be excellent opportunities to remind workers that there is a solution. That is a society based on workers' self management.

It is not a utopia. There has always been a green thread in the workers' movement. Read William Morris or Edward Carpenter for example. Marx had much to say on the subject (see John Bellamy Foster's works). More pertinently see Alan Roberts' work on *The self-managing environment*. This gives practical examples of how workers can positively influence environmental challenges, such as the "green bans" of the Australian Builders Laborers Federation-who refused to work on environmentally damaging projects-and Lucas Aerospace, where workers in a military aircraft plant put forward plans for doing socially useful work instead, including the development of solar panels and windfarms. All these were based around an understanding that workers have a direct say in what sort of environment they wish to live in.

This is doubly important today as climate change affects the poorest most. From New Orleans to Tewkesbury, it is the less well off who cannot afford insurance, have to live in vulnerable areas and are left stranded when there is a disaster. A self-managed society would enable society to plan a way through climate change and peak oil. Based on the needs of all and what was needed rather than what makes a profit. Plans around renewable energy would be based on need and practicality. Food production would be tied in with distribution. Resources would be owned collectively and distributed per need. There are examples of this from 1936 in Spain to Scottish islands today! Workers can start building the new world in the shell of the old. Community allotments, green bans, and protests over environmentally destructive projects such as at Heathrow can all be tied in with the recession... and the wider argument for a communist society!

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