Climate Change: Crisis and Challenge
How our movements can achieve both global justice and ecological balance

By Orin Langelle and Anne Petermann

There is no better example of the interconnection of the root causes of social injustice, ecological destruction and economic domination than climate change. Climate change may well be humanity's greatest challenge. It is a crisis that must be rapidly addressed if catastrophe is to be averted.

Already the impacts are being felt by millions in the world’s most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Climate change is at once a social and environmental justice issue, an ecological issue and an issue of economic and political domination. As such, it must be addressed through broad and visionary alliances.

To successfully address the climate crisis, we must also identify and address the deep root causes that link it to the myriad other crises we face—economic crises, militarism and war, as well as the intertwined crises of food, water and biodiversity loss. These crises are unified by their common roots in an economic system that encourages banks and corporations to ignore ethical and moral considerations and gamble with the Earth, peoples’ lives and our collective futures in the service of higher profits.

Successfully addressing climate change will require a fundamental restructuring of our society that, if thoughtfully done, can lay a new foundation that will simultaneously help us achieve both global justice and ecological balance.

What will the solutions to the climate crisis look like? They will be found in a model that is the opposite of the dominant economic model of incessant and unsustainable growth, oppression and injustice.

Solutions to climate change will not be controlled by corporations. There is no single “silver bullet” solution. Solutions will be small in scale, locally controlled, decentralized, bioregionally appropriate and socially just. Thousands of such solutions already exist. Opening space for dialogue in communities around the world to uncover, promote and launch these real solutions is key.

Climate justice must become a core part of all of our work. This will require broad alliances with diverse peoples and movements around the world, and it will require the fundamental transformation of society to one that is based on principles of justice and ecology.

Global warming = global war
Gross overproduction and overconsumption by and for industrialized countries has resulted in a severely...
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shrinking resource base, as evidenced by pandemic ecological crises, the estimated loss of more than 300 species per day and climate change itself. The intensification of the impacts from climate change are further depleting resources such as water and soils.

In February 2004, a Pentagon report on global warming was leaked to the press. It predicted that abrupt climate change could bring the planet to the edge of anarchy as countries develop a nuclear threat to defend and secure dwindling food, water and energy supplies. The report went on to say that the threat to global security vastly eclipses that of terrorism.

"To me the question of the environment is more ominous than that of peace and war," said Hans Blix, the former UN weapons inspector, in a 2003 interview. "I'm more worried about global warming than I am of any major military conflict."

Wars for resources are nothing new. In 1980, Jimmy Carter pronounced the Carter Doctrine declaring that the US would take any actions necessary to ensure an uninterrupted supply of oil from the Middle East. Twenty years later that doctrine still rang true, as a 2000 report by the World Bank found that countries that produce oil are 40 times more likely to be involved in violent conflict.

The World Bank itself is one of the primary engines of global warming, despite the fact that at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the Bank was entrusted with promoting and developing renewable energies. According to the Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, since the Rio Earth Summit the World Bank has spent well over $30 billion on fossil fuel exploitation (17 times what it spent on renewables). In contrast to the World Bank's "mission" to help address poverty, over 80% of World Bank-funded fossil fuels are exported to G8 countries (the eight richest countries in the world).

The opportunism and irrationality of the climate capitalists cannot be underestimated. With the specter of climate catastrophe looming, oil companies are extracting oil from the tar sands in Alberta, Canada—a process that requires a massive and incredibly toxic strip mining process and includes the destruction of a tract of boreal forest the size of Florida. Extracting the oil from the tar sands is extremely energy intensive and puts out nearly three times the carbon emissions of conventional oil extraction. Not only are tar sands companies ignoring the fact that climate change means we need to be moving away from fossil fuels, not looking for new deposits; they are wantonly destroying vast stretches of intact native forests—which are considered critically important climate stabilizers and one of the keys of the planet eventually recovering from climate change.

Similarly, at the same time that scientists and Arctic peoples are raising increasingly urgent alarms about the melting of the Arctic regions due to global warming, oil companies are competing to claim the vast oil reserves that lie beneath the melting Arctic, while at the same time... continue on page three
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celebrating that enough ice has melted to allow the opening of the Northwest Passage as a new trade route. There is no consideration paid even to the existing generation, much less future generations.

Global climate justice movement

The movement for climate justice grows out of the grassroots and community-based environmental justice movement. Climate change, though often regarded as strictly an environmental issue, has at its core important social justice concerns. Indigenous and rural peoples, women, people of color and the poor are already on the front lines of the climate struggle.

According to the UN’s Environment and Peace Foundation, by 2005 there were already over 20 million environmental refugees—more than those from war and political repression combined. In 2007 Christian Aid suggested that nearly a billion people could be permanently displaced by 2050: 250 million by climate change-induced phenomena such as droughts, floods and hurricanes, and 645 million by dams and other development projects.

Some of the same people being threatened by impacts of climate change are also being threatened by proposed “solutions” to climate change. Because in many regions of the world indigenous peoples have been careful stewards of their ancestral lands, these biodiverse and rich lands are now coveted by the World Bank, corporations and governments. Massive land grabs are taking place to privatize vast expanses of land where legal ownership is unclear or has not been established. These lands are prized for the rich resources they contain, for the development of agrofuel feedstocks or monoculture tree plantations and for the important role they can play in offsetting carbon emissions.

Contrary to this environmental protection—human exclusion colonial model, however, one of the steps toward truly addressing climate change must be
to give indigenous peoples autonomy and full control over their ancestral lands.

One challenge for the international climate change movement is one of the steps toward addressing climate change must be truly addressing climate change must be one of the steps toward international climate negotiations to take real, substantial, effective and just action to address global warming. Ensuring that these negotiations proceed from a climate justice, rather than a corporate capitalist perspective, however, will be a tall order indeed.

Mass action on climate change

The movement against climate change in the United States plays a pivotal role in the global effort to avoid climate catastrophe. This is because the US is historically responsible for the lion’s share of global greenhouse gas emissions; the US military is the largest single emitter of carbon on the planet; the US and the World Bank dominate the discussion of what to do about global warming; and the historic role of the US in climate negotiations has been to obstruct forward progress.

In much the same way that the 1999 Seattle protests bolstered the position of underdog countries in the WTO negotiations, ultimately derailing them, a US mobilization in support of countries fighting for real action on climate change at the international level could help neutralize the obstructive role of the US and its allies by demonstrating that even US citizens are demanding action.

While raising the militancy of the movement toward international climate negotiations is a crucial component of forward motion on climate change, we must also learn from social movements around the world that are already taking direct action on issues related to climate change. Indigenous peoples in Brazil are taking back their ancestral lands, cutting the non-native and invasive eucalyptus plantations and re-establishing villages.

Social movements based on small island nations in the Pacific are struggling for the very survival of their peoples. The climate movement must project these voices and stand in solidarity with them.

Let’s be clear: we cannot buy our way out of this problem. The myriad solutions to global warming will come not from the top down, but from communities identifying bioregionally appropriate and truly sustainable solutions that are both decentralized and recognize the importance of local control and bioregional distinctions. You can join this process and stand with the growing legions of people around the world who are joining forces to find real and just solutions to the climate crisis.

Emergildo Criollo is a leader of the indigenous Cofan people of Ecuador. Last year he traveled to the US to visit Gulf Coast communities impacted by the oil industry and to present 350,000 letters demanding cleanup in Ecuador to Chevron’s new CEO.

Orin Langelle is the Co-Director & Strategist and Anne Petermann is the Executive Director of the Global Justice Ecology Project, a former RESIST grantee. Visit www.globaljusticeecology.org to learn more. This article is excerpted from a GJEP booklet. Read the full article at www.resistinc.org/climate.
Confronting the Nuclear Industry
New Mexico community groups and tribes respond to global problems

By Janet Greenwald

As we receive dire reports from our friends in Japan and watch the levels of radiation in our rain and drinking water creep up, many progressive-thinking people feel frustrated that the Obama administration still considers nuclear power a necessary part of the "mix" of energy sources for our future—and the nuclear bomb a necessary part of our weapons reparatory. Neither should be part of our future.

At a recent dinner held by Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping (CARD), steering committee member Mark Doppke summarized the work of Arjun Makhijani on the subject of nuclear power. Mark held the audience rapt as he described the great physicists’ plan for moving forward toward the goal of replacing fossil fuels and nuclear power with existing renewable energy technology.

Though New Mexico does not have a commercial nuclear power plant, it does house a research reactor at Sandia National Laboratories, located in the heart of Albuquerque. Our state holds the source of both nuclear fuel and nuclear bombs: uranium-rich lands, primarily located in or near tribal lands. Pits are made for nuclear bombs in New Mexico at Los Alamos National Laboratories. Plutonium-laden wastes are a contamination problem at Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories and are disposed of at the Waste Isolation Plant. New Mexico is also the site of a uranium enrichment plant in Eunice.

There is no phase of nuclear bomb and nuclear power development—from mining, manufacturing and testing to disposal—that does not pollute our environment. CARD’s focus is protecting the environment and health of all New Mexicans from radioactive contamination.

Contamination continues

Though some cursory efforts have been made to remediate the effects of uranium mining on indigenous communities, the clay spread over the tailings (a waste byproduct of uranium mining) is soon washed off by the rain. The runoff from the tailings continues to contaminate drinking water, agricultural land, grazing animals and wild game.

The tribes whose lands are affected by uranium mining, though once divided over the issue of jobs, now stand firmly allied against further uranium mining on their lands. Their battle, however, to keep uranium mining off nearby lands that impact their drinking water and air quality has been more difficult.

A victory along these lines occurred recently when Mount Taylor was designated as a culturally significant location due to its sacredness to many tribes. This court designation gives the tribes the right to consult with the state concerning future uranium mining in that area. Today this battle continues in the courts, as the designation was recently overturned and then appealed.

Unlike in Native communities, there is no consensus among the people in the rest of the state: "jobs" is the key word, especially in these rough economic times. Young people, among the most vulnerable to health problems related to radiation exposure, are often targeted as future nuclear workers.

CARD presenters Marlene Quintana, Chelsea Collonge and Romilly Tsinhnahjinnie, young people in their 20s, have been tackling the lack of information concerning radiation exposure given to students by making health-oriented presentations on nuclear issues in the Albuquerque public schools.

Several years ago, CARD founded, along with one of our sister groups, Citizen Action, two closely associated groups: Aguaes Vida Action Team (AVAT) and Protect our Air, Water and Soil (PAWS). AVAT deals with the drinking water coming from the Rio Grande. Last year, working with local groups—Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety and Amigos Bravos among them—the New Mexico Environment Department and the national Institute for Energy and Environmental Research, AVAT and its allies achieved a victory when they were able to institute state testing of the upper Rio Grande for long-lived alpha-emitting radiation to a standard ten times that of the outdated national EPA standards for drinking water. With the help of the New Mexico Environment Department, other community groups, churches and a neighborhood association, PAWS stopped both

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RESIST Newsletter, May-June 2011
Welcoming Ravi Khanna to RESIST

All of us at RESIST were delighted to welcome Ravi Khanna as a Board member in 2009; we were even happier to usher him into the role of RESIST's Development Director in February of this year.

Ravi brings a broad history of activism, fundraising and nonprofit work to this job. He first got to know RESIST when he worked as the director of the Peace Development Fund in the early 1990s. Later he broadened his funding experience when he worked with the Haymarket People's Fund and served on the Board of Grassroots International.

Ravi served most recently as the Administrative Director for PHENOM, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts, where he fought for affordable and quality public higher education for all Massachusetts residents.

Ravi grew up in India and cut his teeth in activism there in the early 70s, taking to the streets to protest the repressive suspension of the constitution under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

He moved to the US in 1977 at the age of 23, and two years later he was organizing again, this time in response to the Three Mile Island nuclear accident. Since then, Ravi has been active on a host of national and international issues including Central American solidarity and anti-apartheid work, support for Palestinian rights, international labor, and antiracism and imperialism. He produced documentaries on the plight of the internally displaced in Colombia, child labor in India and water privatization in Bolivia.

Ravi is the father of five children and the grandfather of two.

"After over 30 years of organizing work, I've learned it's not always about winning," said Ravi in a recent interview. "It's about building a movement—and passing it on to the next generation."

He's excited about coming to RESIST and getting to know our many supporters as he settles into his job here.

RESIST would also like to extend thanks to Melissa Carino, a Board member who stepped in to work as RESIST's Interim Development Director during our hiring process over the winter. Thank you, Melissa, and welcome, Ravi!

— Christy Pardew

Confronting the Nuclear Industry

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open air burning and open air detonation at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque.

In recent years, CARD has been able to make new contacts and renew old friendships along the main transportation corridor for radioactive waste in New Mexico. On this route, trucks head for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), the deep geological repository for radioactive waste located near Carlsbad, New Mexico.

This route passes through many small communities, some of which, reliant on volunteer fire departments as first responders, have received no emergency training in the case of an accident. Others are subject to WIPP trucks stopping by their village stores, gas stations and restaurants. There are no studies showing how repeated exposure to the amounts of radiation coming from the trucks could impact pregnant women and children.

More heading our way

The federal government has placed New Mexico at the top of the list for Greater-Than-Class-C waste disposal. This commercial radioactive waste is mostly from nuclear power plants, not including fuel rods. If New Mexico is chosen for disposal of this waste, the regulations concerning our nuclear dumps would have to be changed to include commercial waste—leaving no legal barrier to the disposing of high-level spent fuel rods.

Recently, public hearings were held on Greater-Than-Class-C waste disposal. Along with CARD, several groups, including the Southwestern Research and Information Center, Nuclear Watch New Mexico, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, Citizen Action, Honor Our Pueblo Existence and the national young peoples' group Think Outside the Bomb, worked collaboratively to stop commercial nuclear waste from being stored here by alerting the public and encouraging participation. Powerful testimony against the waste disposal filled the hearings.

"I know a whole family that was devastated by working at and living down gradient from Sandia National Labs. Only members under the age of 30 are still alive," testified antinuclear organizer Chelsea Collonge. "Students are not given information about the possible health effects of being a nuclear worker."

Leona Morgan, a young Diné (Navajo) community activist, testified as well.

"My nation is struggling with the health impacts of past uranium mining," she testified before the crowded room. "New Mexico has more than its share of nuclear projects. Siting more nuclear projects here is a clear case of environmental racism."

How we will win

A sunny day in April was Earth Day at La Montañita Coop in Albuquerque. Their annual Earth Day celebrations draw thousands of people. Our group sat at a table on this beautiful, breezy day and talked to people about signing a postcard to encourage the local Water Utility Authority to be more open about what is in our drinking water and to sign postcards to each of our federal representatives asking them to stop construction of a new multibillion dollar building for atomic bomb production at Los Alamos National Laboratories.

I enjoyed hours of music and dancing and then, at the end of the celebration, a prayer for Mother Earth. I noticed that the prayer circle included many young people, and my feeling as I watched them was that the success of our work and that of so many others depends on the growth of this kind of consciousness. There is no "away from us" when it comes to mining for, producing and dumping toxins. There is only our home, our sacred Mother Earth, and the pressing question of whether or not we can learn to protect her and her children.

Janet Greenwald is a co-coordinator at Citizens Against Radioactive Dumping (CARD), a RESIST grantee and statewide organization which fights to protect the environment and all New Mexicans from radioactive contamination.

RESIST Newsletter, May-June 2011
Framing the Climate Justice Story
Let's refocus on core problems: fossil fuel addiction & the need for systemic change

By Patrick Reinsborough

As movements around the planet mobilize to counter the effects of climate destabilization on their communities, cultures and ecosystems, a framing battle of global significance is underway.

In the climate fight, as with so many other struggles, the heart of the framing battle is naming the problem, since how we define the problem determines what solutions are possible. To varying degrees, governments and multinational corporations around the world have acknowledged the crisis and claim they are working to address it. However, they present the climate crisis through a reductionist lens as merely a problem of too much carbon in the atmosphere—while ignoring the underlying issues of justice, equity and humanity's relationship with the Earth.

This framing allows exploitation of the crisis to justify escalating the very policies and practices that have pushed the planet to the brink. Essentially the world's richest countries and companies are co-opting environmental rhetoric to put a PR-friendly “green” face on the same old politics of unlimited economic growth, resource thefts and corporate exploitation.

Meanwhile the “official” climate movement has been dominated by a loyal opposition of largely northern, policy and access-oriented NGOs who, although (mostly) well intentioned, have failed to reframe the debate or address the root causes of the crisis.

But increasingly, as more global movements begin to unite under the banner of climate justice, there is a different story to tell. The terms of the debate are being reframed from seeing the climate crisis as an isolated issue, to understanding the disruption of the climate as merely the most visible symptom of a much larger problem: our global system of growth-addicted, fossil fuel-driven, corporate capitalism that is undermining all the life support systems of the planet.

When this deeper framing of the problem is accepted it becomes clear that we will never restabilize the climate without addressing the roots of the problem. This means acknowledging the Global North’s historic responsibility for the problem (“climate debt”) as the first step towards fundamental shifts to our economy, political systems and cultural assumptions. This is why one of the overarching and unifying messages coming out of global movements fighting for a just response to the climate crisis is “system change NOT climate change.”

As people's movements around the world ramp up their organizing there are a number of dangerous frames—control myths—that must be challenged.

Control Myth #1: Only the market can save us

In this case, a global carbon market effectively privatizes the atmosphere, justifies massive land grabs and further commodification of forests, soils and grasslands. Two hundred years of ideology have bestowed the “invisible hand” of the market with debate-shaping qualities of alleged efficiency, fairness and power. This is a familiar narrative to many of our movements fighting privatization and displacement, but we still need better, shared strategies to reframe the myth of the market.

Control Myth #2: Technology will save us

Hand in hand with the story of the all-powerful market is the obsession with techno-fixes, which masquerade as solutions but just distract us from making the fundamental changes that are needed. The assumption that some benign “experts” will provide new technology to solve the problem justifies continuing unsustainable policies while removing people's agency. More and more climate techno-fixes are being proposed: from overt lies like “clean coal” to terrifyingly disruptive, untested new technologies like synthetic biology and geoengineering.

Control Myth #3: Only governments can save us

The debate has been overly focused on global and national policy while...
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social movements and community-based responses are left out of the frame. Many mainstream environmentalists have even argued that any global emission reduction agreement (regardless of how weak or unfair) is better than no deal. Variations of this narrative have been used (particularly by the US) to evade historic responsibility and blame China, India and other developing economies for blocking an international deal. Certainly a global agreement is important, but the reality of the scale of the climate crisis is that we need transformative action in all sectors of society.

Given the wide-ranging implications of the debate, climate is an essential arena for our movements to develop more holistic narratives and shared frames that mutually reinforce efforts across different sectors and struggles. At the heart of this framing battle is the emerging climate justice movement led by frontline impacted communities, indigenous movements and environmental justice organizers.

Climate justice framing challenges the control myths above (and many more) by refocusing the issue on the core problems of fossil fuel addiction, the ongoing legacy of historic inequities and the need for systemic change. At the center of the evolving narrative is the role of community-based solutions in stewarding a just transition towards a society that is both sustainable and just.

With the historic adoption of the Cochabamba People’s Agreement on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in April 2010 there is now a powerful new narrative emerging that unites ecology, justice and social movement action. This platform offers a potent counterpoint to the corporate-driven, false solutions of the United Nations process. Most importantly it offers an invitation to organizers everywhere to connect their issues with this multifaceted struggle to transform our world. In the words of one of the key slogans uniting movements in the lead-up to the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference meeting and beyond: “Grassroots organizing cools the planet!”

Patrick Reinsborough has been involved in campaigns for peace, the environment and social justice for nearly 20 years. He co-founded the smartMeme strategy & training project in 2002 and provides grassroots partners with support on strategy, messaging and capacity building. This article originally appeared on the smartMeme blog at www.smartMeme.org.

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RESIST awards grants six times a year to groups throughout the United States engaged in organizing for social, economic and environmental justice. Below we list a few grant recipients from our most recent allocation cycle in April of 2011, the second cycle with our new maximum grant award of $4,000. For more information, visit the RESIST website at www.resistinc.org or contact these groups directly.

**Southside Together Organizing for Power**
6146 S. Kenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60637. www.stopchicago.org

A community organization, STOP builds the power of residents on Chicago’s Southside to impact the forces and decisions that affect their lives. STOP uses organizing, popular education and leadership development to stop displacement, address human rights violations in the Juvenile Detention Center and maintain community mental health services.

RESIST’s grant of $4,000 will help STOP build power with those most affected by gentrification, displacement, criminalization of youth and health cuts.

**Pride at Work San Francisco**
1800 Market St, Box 31, San Francisco, California 94102. www.sfprideatwork.org

San Francisco Pride at Work is an organization of queers for economic and social justice. They are the LGBTQ arm of the labor movement, actively campaigning to protect workers’ rights to organize and defending queer justice in the workplace. SF Pride at Work participates in coalitions to resist attacks on immigrant communities, and they have also instigated groundbreaking protests for transgender rights.

A $4,000 “Hell Yes!” grant from RESIST will help SF Pride at Work continue to stand up for the rights of all workers, tenants, immigrants and queers in the spirit of the union movement’s historic motto, “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

**Fort Hood Support Network**
PO Box 16174, Austin, Texas 78761 www.underthehoodcafe.org

In the spirit of anti-Vietnam War coffeehouses, the Fort Hood Support Network started the Under the Hood Cafe in 2009.

The cafe is a place for soldiers to gather, relax and speak freely about the wars and the military. Support services for soldiers include referrals for counseling, legal advice and information on GI rights.

RESIST’s “Hell Yes!” grant of $4,000 to the Fort Hood Support Network will allow the Network to continue organizing to end the wars and supporting active duty soldiers through Under the Hood.

**Crawford Stewardship Project**
PO Box 284, Gays Mills, Wis 54631 www.crawfordstewardshipproject.org

Farmers and residents of Crawford County, Wisconsin came together to form the Crawford Stewardship Project in 2007. The organization works to protect the environment and people of rural Crawford County from threats such as those posed by concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and to promote sustainable land use, local control of natural resources and environmental justice.

RESIST’s grant of $4,000 will allow CSP to continue to build a strong base to sustain rural communities in Wisconsin.