



End Ecocidal Capitalism or Exterminate Life on Planet Earth: A South African Contribution to Ecosocialist Strategy

Vishwas Satgar

Introduction

Globalised carbon capitalism is like a snake eating its own tail, self-inflicting wounds. This is not new in the history of capitalism. Between 1870 and 1914, capitalism was also plagued by a general crisis, contributing to imperial conflict and the First World War (which claimed the lives of ten million people). Rosa Luxemburg wrote her classic *Accumulation of Capital*, published a year before the war, in this context. She observed:

The more ruthlessly capital sets about the destruction of non-capitalist strata at home and in the outside world, the more it lowers the standard of living for the workers as a whole, the greater also is the change in the day-to-day history of capital. It becomes a string of political and social disasters and convulsions, and under these conditions, punctuated by periodic economic catastrophes and crises, accumulation can go on no longer. But even before this natural economic impasse of capital's own creating is properly reached it becomes a necessity for the international working class to revolt against capital.¹



Cape sugarbird (*Promerops cafer*). By Mhairi L. McFarlane, Chown, SL, Sinclair, BJ, Leinaas, HP, Gaston, KJ, "Hemispheric Asymmetries in Biodiversity—A Serious Matter for Ecology." *PLoS Biol* 2/11/2004: e406. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0020406, CC BY 2.5, [Link](#).

¹ ↪ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1951), 466–67.

From a Marxist ecological perspective, the catastrophes Luxemburg refers to here, resulting from the destruction of natural economies and non-capitalist strata, can be seen as referring not only to the economic convulsion brought on by capital, but also to its ecocidal logic. This is associated with enclosures in the centers and peripheries, large-scale destruction of human and nonhuman life, and expropriation resulting in ecocide. War is merely one form and moment of extending this logic of deep systemic crisis. In such conjunctures, strategic working-class and anti-oppression politics must come to the fore in order to leverage the crisis against capitalism. However, this kind of conscious strategic politics is not always given or inevitable; sometimes, the crisis of capitalism is also the crisis of the historical social forces meant to resist it.

Today, capitalism is facing the fourth general crisis (roughly from 2007 to the present) in its history. This is a crisis of socioeconomic and ecological production on a world scale. It is a product of the restructuring of the global political economy through the neoliberal class project (starting around 1980), its implementation and lock-ins through structural adjustment and austerity, punctuated by currency collapses, ballooning private and public debt, overheating of housing markets, economic collapses, and widespread precarity. Neoliberal logic intensified surplus value extraction through the

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contraction of welfare regimes, deindustrialization, precarious labor market regimes, and a global labor arbitrage based on low unit-labor cost manufacturing in China and much of the Global South, promoting universal commodification including nature itself. In this context, global rivalries have been intensifying between a declining U.S. hegemon and geopolitical

contenders, with the recent proxy war in Ukraine between the United States/NATO and Russia portending the intensification of militarised geopolitical competition. Despite the ideological varieties of neoliberalism, in different national and regional contexts, the current realities we live is its world-making essence.

In the four decades of its existence, neoliberalism has also accentuated deep systemic crisis tendencies, emanating from production/reproduction, nature/society, and economy/state divides. These have propelled monopoly-finance capital into a phase of authoritarian neoliberalism: thin market democracies entrenching the power of transnationalising propertied classes from the United States and Brazil to South Africa and India. A global ecofascist project, plunging the world into chaos and accentuating the ecocidal logic of global carbon capitalism, has arrived, threatening everything.²

In this context, democratic ecosocialist strategy has to proceed from the urgent premise that we must end ecocidal capitalism or face the end of life on Earth. This imperative is what distinguishes the fourth general crisis of capitalism from all previous crises. It is a poly-crisis, or multilevel total crisis, that cannot be managed with shallow reformism and technological fixes, at least not if human and nonhuman life are to survive. Moreover, democratic ecosocialist strategy has to come to terms with the complex global political field it has to contest, particularly the underlying conditions generating and maintaining an ecofascist class project. Along with this are the self-induced disruptions of global carbon capitalism, plus the spaces this provides for strategic advance and agential challenges, enabling a counter-hegemonic project on national and global scales.

² ↪ Vishwas Satgar, "The Rise of Eco-fascism," in *Destroying Democracy: Neoliberal Capitalism and the Rise of Authoritarian Politics*, ed. Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021), 25–48.

To explicate these areas of strategic analysis, first we must situate the victory of carbon capital's lock-in of fossil fuels, which has been deeply embedded in global climate politics, providing a crucial element of ecofascist class politics. Second, we must analyse how the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) ensured the continuity of

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the ecofascist project. Third, contemporary global carbon capitalism has unraveled as a challenge and limit to the advance of the ecofascist project.³ Fourth, insights into democratic ecosocialist strategy and the climate justice project in South Africa can serve as examples of how to respond to the larger ecofascist conjuncture. The politics of defending the commons and advancing

democratic systemic reforms must be highlighted to accelerate and deepen a just transition. Finally, I conclude with challenges to planetize the movement to end ecocidal capitalism and defeat the ecofascist class project.

Carbon Capital's Victory and the Lock-in of Fossil Fuels

The increasing use of oil, coal, and gas is exacerbating the climate ecological rift and creating a global gas chamber capable of wiping out human and nonhuman life. Despite this dangerous prospect, the U.S. hegemon, the largest historical carbon emitter, and the UN multilateral processes have not put the work on track to solve the climate crisis. With almost three decades of climate science, multilateral negotiations, and everyday climate shocks—together with a 1.1°C temperature increase since before the Industrial Revolution—fossil fuels still dominate the global political economy. In 2021, the International Energy Agency declared that no new oil, coal, and gas investments could take place if net zero is to be reached by 2050. However, so far, carbon-addicted states and corporations have not been adhering to this. At the same time, we have to ask: Why did the United States, the United Nations, climate change conferences, and the International Energy Agency not declare this in the 1990s or early 2000s? The simple answer is that carbon capital won and entrenched the use of fossil fuels, despite the scientific urgency of reducing carbon emissions and the worsening climate crisis.

Three crucial political-economic conditions gave rise to this. First, there is the power of the carbon capitalist lobby in the Beltway in Washington DC. Since James Hansen drew attention to the urgencies in climate science in 1988, Exxon, together with the American Petroleum Institute, National Association of Manufacturers, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and

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thirteen other industry associations went on the offensive.⁴ The Global Climate Coalition unleashed a public relations exercise that gridlocked the Beltway and sowed confusion in the U.S. public and among global ruling classes. Climate science denialism, discrediting climate science and scientists, strategic lobbying, and dishonest marketing all went into overdrive, even affecting the UN climate change negotiations. The UN

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, despite insisting on reducing carbon emissions, failed to place sufficient emphasis on the rapid phaseout of fossil fuels in the global economy, allowing the idea of carbon credits, technological schemes with respect to carbon capture and sequestration, and negative carbon emissions to subvert the process.

³ ↩ . In this article, I use *democratic ecosocialist forces* and *climate justice forces*

⁴ ↩ Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth: The Decade We Could Have Stopped Climate Change* (New York: Picador, 2019), 182–83.

Meanwhile, the U.S. public was kept in the dark about the urgent findings of climate science, with the captured political leadership in Washington overtly supporting fossil fuel interests. The Global Climate Coalition, for example, declared that it had won and was disbanded by 2002. Contemporary resistance to complex hydrocarbon extraction has been occurring in this context of the perpetuation of business-as-usual fossil fuel production. “Blockadia” and even divestment have been unable to stop the fossil fuel juggernaut.

Second, given that the United States has been dominated by carbon capital, which is closely tied to ruling financial interests, it has failed to provide decisive leadership in the UN multilateral processes, from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Climate Agreement. U.S. presidents have consistently maintained that the “American way of life is not up for negotiation” and there can be no binding regulatory commitments, despite the deadly consequences of carbon emissions. This failure of imperial leadership emboldened a call for “catch-up carbon development” in the Global South and ensured fossil fuel spigots remained open over the past twenty years to meet the needs of China, India, and other G20 countries. At the same time, the billions for a just transition promised to countries that did not cause the climate crisis have not materialised. This has ensured that countries in the Global South, including fossil fuel resource economies, have remained trapped in resource extraction. The winner in this context has been carbon capital.

Third, despite the fanfare, backslapping, and public relations projection of a great success, after the Paris Climate Agreement was put in place, a ruling-class ecofascist project has congealed and is shaping climate politics. This is made up of two dominant ideological currents: (1) Center-right neoliberals who hide behind the failed UN climate negotiation process and now the Paris Climate Agreement. Their rhetoric is all about market-led just transitions, technological fixes (carbon capture and storage, a not-always-green push for hydrogen, electric vehicles, and geoengineering), and finance (carbon offsets, trading, and taxes). Yet, in practice, these leaders and their countries have not been shining examples of decarbonisation—quite the opposite. The use of fossil fuels and climate modernisation is the name of the game, with the assumption of a linear and gradual process of change by 2050. They claim that the climate emergency can be managed from above and are sending mixed signals to the people to placate concerns, while actually trying to manage elite risk. (2) Hard-right neoliberals have accepted globalised accumulation and embraced exclusionary and racist nationalisms, and are ambivalent about climate science and its urgent messages. Where there has been a rejection of climate science, racist neo-Malthusian attitudes have emerged to buttress carceral border regimes.

COP26 and the Continuity of the Ecofascist Project

The COP26 climate negotiations in November 2021 happened in the context of COVID-19 ravaging our societies, a

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powerful expression of the revenge of nature. In many ways, it serves as a prelude to the greater pain awaiting our societies as the climate crisis worsens. Despite this, world leaders and carbon ruling classes came up short in their commitments. According to Columbia University’s Center on Global Energy Policy, after assessing nationally determined commitments, the world was only on track to cut emissions by 9 percent by

2030, far short of the necessary cutting of emissions by about half.⁵ Only fourteen countries have signed the net-zero goal into law. It would seem as if will and commitment is faltering at a policy-implementation level. The Joe Biden

⁵ ↪ James Glynn et al., “[Tallying Updated NDCs to Gauge Emissions Reductions in 2030 and Progress Toward Net Zero](#),” Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University SIPA, March 16, 2022.

administration, while promising a “renewable energy revolution,” has released massive amounts of petroleum from U.S. reserves and has placed pressure on fracking businesses to meet supply-side shortfalls. U.S. coal use is also on the rise. This has been induced by high oil prices and the bans imposed on Russia in response to the Ukraine War. According to the U.S. government itself, U.S. crude production is anticipated to climb to new heights under Biden.⁶ Other examples of ongoing carbon criminality include Justin Trudeau’s administration in Canada, which is delaying delivery of a promised cap on emissions from the fossil fuel sector, insisting there is no need to curb production.⁷ In South Africa, the Cyril Ramaphosa regime, one of the most carbon-intensive economies even in the BRICS countries, is still obsessed with a coal-heavy energy mix (at least up until 2030) and is currently pursuing off-shore oil and gas extraction, gas-based Karpowerships (to meet supply-side challenges), nuclear power, and fracking. Center-right neoliberals are becoming indistinguishable from hard-right neoliberals, as ecofascism marches on.

Despite all the fanfare at COP26 about finance capital pulling the plug on fossil fuel investments, this is far from what is happening in reality. Despite its declared intentions, the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, which includes the Net Zero Banking Alliance launched in April 2021, has funded huge transactions that go against the net-zero target, with dire implications for carbon lock-ins for coming decades. This includes \$10 billion to Saudi Aramco (Citi, JPMorgan Chase) and \$1.5 billion to Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. (Citi) in May 2021; \$12.5 billion to QatarEnergy (Citi, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Goldman Sachs) in June 2021; and \$10 billion to ExxonMobil (Citi, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Morgan Stanley) in August 2021.⁸ In the thirteenth annual report Banking on Climate Chaos, the following critical observation is made:

In the six years since the Paris Agreement was adopted, the world’s 60 largest private banks financed fossil fuels with USD \$4.6 trillion, with \$742 billion in 2021 alone. 2021 fossil fuel financing numbers remained above 2016 levels, when the Paris Agreement was signed. Of particular significance is the revelation that the 60 banks profiled in the report funneled \$185.5 billion just last year into the 100 companies doing the most to expand the fossil fuel sector.⁹

Maturing Contradictions and Capitalism’s Systemic Disruptions

The current debate among the global capitalist intelligentsia revolves around the end of globalisation and the

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fragmentation of the neoliberal economic order. Dani Rodrik in 2016 was already cautioning ruling classes “not to fret” about deglobalisation, as what was required was an adjustment from deep globalisation. A more moderated globalisation, the argument went, was on the table, with imbalances being adjusted and greater government responsibility coming to the fore.¹⁰ Since then, various important

developments have emerged to challenge liberalised trading systems. Donald Trump’s big push to decouple the U.S. economy from China, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chains (including vaccine apartheid), Brexit,

⁶ ↪ See Derek Brower, “[Big Oil Has Nothing to Complain About Under Joe Biden](#),” *Financial Times*, April 1, 2022.

⁷ ↪ Joe Lo, Cloé Farand, and Isabelle Gerretsen, “[Canadian Government Ducks Fight with Oil and Gas Industry](#),” *Climate Home News*, March 31, 2022.

⁸ ↪ “[Bankers Lie About Fossil Fuel Finance](#),” *Climate and Capitalism*, March 31, 2022.

⁹ ↪ “[Banking on Climate Chaos](#),” in *Fossil Fuel Finance Report 2022* (Rainforest Action Network, BankTrack, Indigenous Environmental Network, Oil Change International, Reclaim Finance, Sierra Club, and Urgewald, 2022).

¹⁰ ↪ Dani Rodrik, “[There Is No Need to Fret about Deglobalisation](#),” *Financial Times*, October 4, 2016.

ongoing technological rivalry between the United States and China, and the Russian offensive in Ukraine have contributed to upending all illusions about energy dependence. All the assumptions of open intellectual property and free-market trading systems have been shattered as governments rethink degrees of integration, globalisation, and how to manage systemic risk. The space this opens for exiting imperial disciplining and accelerating deep just transitions cannot be underestimated.

Nevertheless, the remaking of global trading systems is merely the surface expression of the deeper systemic crisis tendencies shaping and limiting the globalised logic of the ecofascist class project. Financialised inequality and structural unemployment, further entrenching class, race, and gender divides in society, are exacerbating the crisis of social reproduction in households and beyond. According to recent reports on executive pay packages, the trend of concentrating wealth at the top has continued, despite the suffering inflicted by COVID-19 on societies, with 280 of the 500 S&P companies that have reported figures this year highlighting that the median pay for CEOs in the largest capitalised firms on U.S. stock exchanges has jumped to a record \$14.2 million for 2021, up from \$13.5 million in 2020.¹¹ Moreover, the median CEO to worker pay ratio has shot up to 245 for 2021 from 192 for 2020, an extremely large year-over-year increase. Women globally are in the lowest paid work, with 75 percent of women in developing regions in the informal economy, and about 600 million in the most insecure and precarious forms of work. Women do twice as much unpaid care work (with annual estimates at \$10.8 trillion) and work longer days than men on average (when both paid and unpaid work is counted).¹² In South Africa, structural unemployment has been above 20 percent since the 1970s. Today, its highly globalised and financialised economy has an unemployment rate of 35.3 percent and the highest Gini coefficient (63) in the world, with 71 percent of the wealth owned by 10 percent of the population. In this context, inviable societies and the failure of trickle-down economics are also engendering new forms of resistance to tackle class, race, and gender oppression. These forms of resistance can either be captured by exclusionary nationalisms or can be mobilised in a transformative direction.

The ecological rifts of capitalism are manifold. Biological disasters such as COVID-19 are certainly going to increase as natural habitats are destroyed. Biological warfare (involving laboratories experimenting with dangerous pathogens) and climate change will contribute to the proliferation of more pathogens, while ecofascist anti-science positions create more vulnerable populations. The enabling conditions for more zoonotic diseases are ripe. This means more disruptions, and these pandemic threats make it essential for public health systems to be strengthened and repurposed to also face

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the challenges of the worsening climate crisis. Water peak is another major ecological rift being exacerbated by wasteful water use (agriculture accounts for 70 percent of global water withdrawals, including the use of irrigation systems), pollution from mining, mismanagement of water commons, and climate impacts on the hydrological cycle through floods and droughts (currently such

catastrophes have tripled from 97 per annum during the 1980s to an annual average of 309 between 2010 and 2019).¹³ According to one estimate, water scarcity could impact global gross domestic product by up to 14 percent in 2050, with the Middle East being one of the most affected regions. In this context, tighter water regulations on use and re-use, as well as democratic planning and management of the water commons, will be necessary to limit the power of corporations to appropriate and wastefully utilise scarce water resources.

¹¹ ↩ [“US Executives Reap Record Pay as Historic Income Gap with Staff Widens,”](#) *Financial Times*, April 3, 2022.

¹² ↩ [“Why the Majority of the World’s Poor Are Women,”](#) Oxfam, accessed May 27, 2022.

¹³ ↩ Li Yuan, [“Scientists Warn of Widespread Drought in the 21st Century,”](#) *Phys.org*, January 28, 2022.

The climate ecological rift is the most dangerous and intersects with other systemic crisis tendencies. As more coal, oil, and gas are extracted, global heating and ultimately more intense climate extremes (droughts, cold waves, floods, heatwaves, cyclones/hurricanes, and tornadoes) register as shocks. Scientific attribution is clear on this planetary shift. In 2021, the United States experienced twenty separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters (ranging from a cold

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wave event, wildfires, floods, tornadoes, tropical cyclones, and severe weather events), totalling about \$145 billion (slightly cheaper than climate shocks in 2005 and 2017).¹⁴ Madagascar, on top of a major drought in 2021 that left one million people in food stress, had to deal with four tropical cyclones (Emnati, Dumako, Batsirai, and Ana) in early 2022,

which destroyed about 90 percent of agricultural crops in some areas, affecting many people.¹⁵ These shocks are examples of climate injustices perpetuated by the ongoing emissions from using and burning fossil fuels. The most recent report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group III on Mitigation underlines the importance of urgently phasing out fossil fuels, including preventing new investments over the next three years.¹⁶ Yet, from the preceding analysis on ecofascism, carbon investments and lock-ins continue.

The liberal democracies, as thin market democracies entrenching the sovereignty of capital, are in deep systemic crisis. It is more than legitimacy crises; it is about degeneration into authoritarian and neofascist politics.¹⁷ The U.S. military-industrial-security complex is now driving an agenda for a New Cold War with Russia and China, while the U.S. public has no say over this plutocratic foreign and national security direction. Biden has also increased U.S. military spending to \$800 billion, unleashing further emissions on the world given the high carbon footprint of the U.S. military, from point emissions in producing military technologies to waging warfare. The Russian offensive and the U.S. proxy war in Ukraine not only intensify this spiral, but also reinforces a global food shock (largely due to climate impacts on globalised value chains) that began in 2021, which has been amplified by supply-side constraints in wheat, fertiliser, and cooking oil. The spike in food prices is also compounded by the spike in global oil prices. China has its own financialised over-accumulation challenges such as its huge housing bubble bursting (the Evergrande problem). Volatility in its stock exchanges and being ensnared increasingly into global rivalries with the United States all add up to a possible conflict that can lead to mutual economic destruction, given how interlocked China and the United States are in economic terms (trade, debt, investment).¹⁸ The convergence of antiwar (including anti-nuclear, anti-chemical, and anti-biological weapons), climate justice, and food sovereignty forces in this moment is crucial.

We must situate the struggles for socioeconomic and socioecological survival in South Africa and subsequent decades in this context of global political, economic, and environmental instability.

The South African Climate Justice Project

In April 2022, South Africa experienced a flash flood primarily located in the province of Kwazulu-Natal (KZN), killing close to five hundred people, destroying nearly four thousand homes, displacing more than forty thousand people, and

¹⁴ ↪ Adam B. Smith, "[2021 U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters in Historical Context](#)," Climate.gov, January 24, 2022.

¹⁵ ↪ "[Extreme Weather and Climate Events Heighten Humanitarian Needs in Madagascar and Around the World](#)," ReliefWeb, February 25, 2022.

¹⁶ ↪ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change (Geneva: Working Group III, IPCC, 2022).

¹⁷ ↪ Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar, *Destroying Democracy: Neoliberal Capitalism and the Rise of Authoritarian Politics* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021).

¹⁸ ↪ Graham Allison, Nathalie Kiersznowski, and Charlotte Fitzek, "[The Great Economic Rivalry: China vs the U.S.](#)," Belfer Center, March 23, 2022.

affecting over six thousand schools. The cost of the damage is estimated at R17 billion. This flash flood comes on the heels of the worst drought in the history of the country (from 2014 to 2021), tornadoes, flash flooding (including in 2017, 2019, and late 2021 in KZN), landslides, and wildfires. The African National Congress government has not learned any lessons from these climate extremes and has not placed South Africa on a trajectory toward a deep just transition. Instead, it has had a discursive approach to climate policy and multilateral negotiations for almost three decades, while continuing to support and expand a carbon-based minerals-energy complex. As the twelfth-highest carbon emitter in the world and with its intensive use of coal since the late nineteenth century, South Africa should have been trailblazing in terms of systemic adaptation and decarbonisation.

In 2018, when the United Nations issued its 1.5°C report, the initial core of organisations that make up the Climate Justice Charter (CJC) movement, over sixty organisations including trade unions, called on the South African president

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and parliament to convene an emergency sitting of parliament to deliberate on the science and climate policy implications of the report, given that South Africa is heating at twice the global average, which, if this were to continue to increase in linear fashion, would place it at a 3°C increase with a global 1.5°C

overshoot.¹⁹ The government ignored this call to place the country on a climate emergency footing to deal with climate-induced weather extremes. Subsequent calls made during South Africa's drought and in engagements with South Africa's parliament for mainstreaming a climate emergency response were also ignored.²⁰ In this context, the CJC movement has charged the president, his cabinet, the premier of KZN, the mayor of eThekweni (Durban), and the deputy chairperson of the Climate Commission with culpable homicide for the loss of lives during the recent flooding. This refers to illegal and negligent action. This move by the CJC movement is an unprecedented attempt to secure climate justice utilising criminal law and has received extensive media coverage in the South African context.

The CJC movement has to be located within the making of global climate justice politics. There have been two cycles of climate justice resistance (from 2004 to 2015, then from 2015 to 2020). The second cycle of resistance spawned 1°C movements such as #NODAPL, Extinction Rebellion, Sunrise Movement, #FridaysForFuture, Indigenous peoples' resistance to the destruction of the Amazon, and the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC). The SAFSC emerged during the worst drought in the history of South Africa. It mobilised with drought-impacted communities against high food prices and hunger. These basic needs of communities became the basis to link the climate crisis and injustice. In 2015, the SAFSC convened a hunger tribunal with trade unions, faith-based communities, and the South African Human Rights Commission and picketed outside the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.²¹ In 2016, it hosted drought speak outs with drought-affected communities, built a campaign around #FoodPricesMustFall, and led a bread march through the streets of Johannesburg.²² In 2018, it developed a Peoples' Food Sovereignty Act, which it took to South Africa's parliament and seven government departments demanding adoption.²³ All these concerns about climate extremes, a heating country, and the need for systemic transformation were ignored by the African National Congress state.

¹⁹ ↩ ["Open Letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa: Demand for Emergency Parliamentary Sitting on UN 1.5°C Report,"](#) South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, October 23, 2018.

²⁰ ↩ See [media releases](#) of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign.

²¹ ↩ ["Memorandum of Demands to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange \(JSE\),"](#) South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, October 23, 2018.

²² ↩ ["Press Release: Statement from the National Coordinating Committee Meeting,"](#) South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, March 16, 2018.

²³ ↩ ["National Peoples Drought Speak Out and Bread March Memorandum,"](#) May 16, 2016; ["Press Release: The ANC Government Is the National Disaster in the Water Crisis,"](#) South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, February 12, 2018.

By 2019, the SAFSC began working actively on a CJC process for South Africa. It convened dialogues with drought-affected communities, media, trade unions, social and environmental justice organisations, climate scientists, youth, and children; activists were invited to write articles; conference platforms were created; and eventually a draft of the CJC was published online for public comment for the first half of 2020. It was finally launched by South Africa's leading ecosocialist feminists on August 28, 2020.

Today, the CJC movement is endorsed by 261 organisations and is still growing.²⁴ The CJC was handed over to South Africa's parliament on October 16, 2020, World Food Day, with the demand that it be adopted as per section 234 of the South African Constitution, which provides for such charters. While this has not been conceded yet, the CJC is now a rallying point across progressive civil society, providing greater ideological coherence and a pluri-vision for what a democratic ecosocialist South Africa could look like. This is not a blueprint but an aspirational framework, a signpost, of where the country should go if we are to

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survive a climate-driven world.

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In the light of the continuity of the ecofascist project globally and in South Africa, the CJC movement has entered a new strategic phase of campaigning.²⁶ In its strategic perspective document titled What Next For the Climate Justice Charter Movement?, the CJC movement advances the following crucial aspects of a transformative political orientation:

- (1) A theory of change entered on defending the commons and advancing deep transformation through democratic systemic reforms as part of accelerating and deepening the just transition. Democratic systemic reforms represent a constitutive form of power from below and can be calibrated as weak, strong, and transformative based on political contingencies and the relations of forces. The politics of democratic systemic reforms will come to the fore in the context of pushing for the rapid phase out of fossil fuels; advancing decarbonisation in communities, workplaces, and sectors; developing democratic plans to address climate risks; and advancing transformative regeneration in the context of climate shocks and state failure.

²⁴ ↪ "Endorse," Climate Justice Charter Movement.

²⁵ ↪ Vishwas Satgar, "Marx, the Commons and Democratic Eco-socialism," in *Marx Matters*, ed. David Fassenfest (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 181–97.

²⁶ ↪ "What Next for the CJCM?," Climate Justice Charter Movement.

- (2) Strategic transformation through a climate justice political project and developing policy content for an accelerated and deep just transition from below. Currently, the CJC movement is busy developing the systemic alternatives in the charter into policies for South Africa's deep just transition. The first policy on a universal basic income has been developed based on an intensive universal basic income/grant campaign (the #UBIGNOW campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic) and in-depth economic modelling. Policies on the water commons, rights of nature, zero waste, socially owned renewable energy, and food sovereignty will be developed this year through public engagements.²⁷ In addition, the CJC movement is working on a macroeconomic Climate Justice Deal for the country. This has involved collaborations with various heterodox economists.
- (3) Crucial programmatic and tactical priorities. Currently, the CJC movement has an umbrella campaign "to accelerate and deepen the just transition," and through this platform is building convergences and solidaristic actions, including working with communities leading food sovereignty pathway building, frontline organisations standing up to off-shore oil and gas extraction, organisations campaigning against nuclear power, developing a peoples just transition planning tool (which will inform a campaign for the rapid phase out of fossil fuels), working with communities facing water crises, and building a legal network for climate justice. The CJC movement in South Africa is not about importing or downloading a template for its struggle and strategic politics. It is building on and going beyond traditions of mass politics prevalent in the South African context. In coming months, the CJC movement will take the leap to become a formal mass-based member-driven organisation of movements, community organisations, and individuals grounded in local organising. It will also be debating and clarifying how to ensure that South Africa's 2024 national elections are climate justice elections.

Challenges to Planetise the Movement to End Ecocidal Capitalism

The CJC movement, like climate justice forces in other parts of the world, is attempting to scale up and intensify a third cycle of climate justice resistance (2020 until the present), but it faces certain common challenges. These include:

- *Going beyond single issue, symbolic, and apocalyptic climate politics.* The climate crisis is multifaceted and cannot be overcome in a piecemeal manner. Neither can it be overcome by mere performative denunciation, shaming, and endless critique. Symbolic climate politics has reached its limits. We are running out of time and climate justice forces have to present concrete answers to accelerate and deepen the just transition. They have to assail power structures, contest power, and lead from above and from below with concrete answers. We are now in the era of climate elections. This does not mean narrow electoralism or endless bottom-up building. Working strategically with this complexity is the only antidote to the other extreme of apocalyptic climate politics that debilitates transformative praxis with its doomsday discourses and paralysis talk. The world needs inspirational examples and political tipping point interventions that democratically leapfrog societies beyond carbon capitalism.
- *Climate justice activism has to be about transpolitics,* ensuring workers go beyond narrow economic demands, feminists beyond women's oppression, and environmentalists beyond specific environmental problems. Bridges have to be built, convergences cemented, and a common programmatic solidarity has to be engendered as part of tackling the dangerous climate contradiction while addressing class exploitation and multiple oppressions. We all have to be intersectional as well as anticapitalist.
- *Climate justice politics has to go beyond crowd politics,* theatre outside climate summits, and national "cloning" of international trends. Though transnational solidarities are important, this is no substitute for national movement building, which has to take center stage in the third cycle of resistance. Powerful national movements

²⁷ ↪ "Policies," Climate Justice Charter Movement.

have to be supported, encouraged, and institutionalised systematically. There are no shortcuts given the scale and pace of transformation, and the urgency of calling for accelerated and deep just transitions now. Such movements have to build capacities to create new ecological societies, advance climate justice projects, and through democratic systemic reforms start realising the making of democratic ecofeminist-socialist societies now.

- Finally, *climate justice forces have to rally and actively support the building of a climate justice bloc of governments, workers, peoples, and movements*. More active solidarities have to be built that cut across the Global South and North to ensure climate pariahs can be undermined from within and from outside. Most importantly, such a bloc has to accelerate the realisation of a global deep just transition and the making of a new planetary climate emergency institutional architecture for a world entering permanent crisis and uncertainty.

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❖ **About Jus Semper:** The Jus Semper Global Alliance aims to contribute to achieving a sustainable ethos of social justice in the world, where all communities live in truly democratic environments that provide full enjoyment of human rights and sustainable living standards in accordance with human dignity. To accomplish this, it contributes to the liberalisation of the democratic institutions of society that have been captured by the owners of the market. With that purpose, it is devoted to research and analysis to provoke the awareness and critical thinking to generate ideas for a transformative vision to materialise the truly democratic and sustainable paradigm of People and Planet and NOT of the market.



❖ **About the author: Vishwas Satgar** is an associate professor of international relations, editor of the Democratic Marxism book series, and principal investigator of the Emancipatory Futures Studies in the Anthropocene project at Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa. He is a veteran activist and co-founder of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign and Climate Justice Charter Movement.

❖ **About this paper:** This paper was originally published in English by Monthly Review in July 2022.

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Portal on the net: <https://www.jussemper.org/>
e-mail: informa@jussemper.org