

Transform! Europe Seminar in Majorca, March 12 –13, 2010  
“Why the Crisis Seems to Favour the Right Rather than the Left in Europe”

## **Introduction: The climate and ecological crisis and the left** **Inger V. Johansen**

A couple of months after the COP15 in Copenhagen public interest in climate issues has subsided and expectations among the governments/decision-makers have been lowered with regard to what can be achieved at COP16 in Mexico at the end of the year. There is no legally binding agreement in sight. The EU prospect is not to increase the goal of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction by 2020 to 30% but to remain at 20% - both ridiculous figures in view of the enormity of the climate crisis. But the 20% is an indication of the total lack of responsibility of the political leaders of the EU, in a situation where a goal of 50% is really needed. In the US the situation is even worse, with a right-wing counter offensive preventing a deal on climate in the US Congress.

This kind of right wing opposition refusing to accept that accelerating global warming has human causes exists in the EU and in Denmark as well. But their influence is limited and does not threaten the possibility to set more radical goals. This is so as well in Denmark where for a few years some 4 years ago the Danish bourgeois right-wing government supported an institution working on the basis of these presumptions. It is not so any longer. The mishandling of the Climate Summit in Copenhagen by the Danish Prime Minister and Government and should not be seen as an expression of this.

The reality is that limiting global warming to less than 2 degrees C. is now virtually impossible. The prospect of a planetary ecological collapse is a very real one. The only development to lessen the dire prospects would have been if alternative climate actions in Copenhagen could have set a global climate movement in motion to be sufficiently strong – and with wide public support - to mount the necessary pressure on the governments. This is not the case. Otherwise there would not have been the profound lack of ambition of the bourgeois parties and the Social Democrats in the EU. The Social Democrats would need to break with the trend of EU policies.

It still remains to be seen what can be achieved by the initiatives of Evo Morales, who has invited for a Peoples' World Conference on Climate Change in Bolivia in the spring. If such a conference – or similar initiatives - could lead to the mobilization of a global climate grass roots movement – different and stronger than we saw the start of in Copenhagen – there would be room for a lot more confidence to be able to push for the necessary radical demands and goals which would as well benefit the perspectives of the radical left – and contribute to strengthen the radical left. In Copenhagen the demand was raised of “System change, not climate change”. There is clearly a radical insight in the climate movement to see the causes of climate change and the continuing undermining of sustainability as closely connected to the workings of the Capitalist system, i.e. an understanding very close to that of the radical left. The problem is that the movement is too weak.

If popular mobilization and the possibilities for radical change are insufficient, the most likely scenario is one in which raising popular awareness will depend on experiencing the harsh realities and calamities of climate change. But this will be far too late to intervene with necessary radical change.

What should be the role of the European left in this situation? Is it so that the best chance to mobilize a global climate movement will be in parts of the global South? I.e. in the part of the world where the effects of global warming are obvious and affecting the poorest and weakest of the world. This raises - on one hand - the

issue for the European left to strengthen the ties and cooperation with the radical left and climate and environmental movements of the South. First of all in Latin America, where the left is much stronger than in Europe and where there is a will even in some governments to play a decisive role.

On the other hand the European left will have to keep up the pressure on governments in the industrialized North for the necessary goals to counter climate change and at the same time try to increase popular support for policies to forward energy-saving, renewable energy, sustainability etc. This is not necessarily a task that will contribute to the strengthening of the left – but it is no less urgent.

In this connection the climate and ecological crisis should be seen as closely related to the other crises originating in the failures of the Capitalist system - first of all the economic crisis. At a time of economic crisis with fast-growing unemployment there is a popular focus on social measures. There is a better chance to mobilize working people in the industrialized countries of the North on policies and measures that will create jobs, improve living conditions etc.. These are in fact very easy to combine with for example public investment in energy-saving measures, green jobs etc.. With the attack on the public sector and its workers by the EU and the governments of EU members states, it should be stressed as well that the privatization of energy and other parts of the public sector means as well an undermining of efforts to create jobs by public investment and to regulate energy saving and achieve CO2 neutral energy supply.