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**Contested notions of the transition to a ‘green economy’: an alternative development path or a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’.**

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**Introduction**

The climate crisis is deepening. Despite 17 years of multinational negotiations there is no binding global agreement on the reduction of carbon emissions. In fact carbon emissions are rising which means climate change will intensify and have devastating impacts – particularly on the working class - in the form of rising food prices, water shortages, crop failures and so on. At the same time there is no agreement on what is involved in reducing carbon emissions and making the transition to a new energy regime. Much contestation focuses on the content of a ‘green economy’.

The central question this paper addresses is whether the labour movement will be seduced by the notion of a ‘green economy’ with its promise of ‘green growth’ and ‘green jobs’ or will it denounce it as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing“, the wolf being a form of green capitalism which will deepen inequality and promote the further commodification of nature.

The question pivots on an opportunity for labour: the opportunity to demonstrate that the climate crisis is caused by the expansionist logic of capitalism and to demand a *just* transition to a low carbon economy which involves deep, transformative change and an alternative development path.

For the last 3 years the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) has promoted a ‘moderate’ vision of a low-carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive ‘green economy’. Its latest formulation is far more extreme with an emphasis on providing capital with incentives to change by arguing that economic growth and profits could be even bigger with a green economy. This formulation which includes the ‘financialisation’ of ecosystem services, represents an attempt by capital to effect the last enclosure of the commons – that of Nature itself. It is ‘greenwash’, “a green-tinted regurgitation of a failed and unjust economic system” (Conant, 2011).

The extreme version of the ‘green economy’ is being actively promoted by the powerful forces Susan George has called ‘the Davos class’, an alliance of government leaders, philanthropists and corporate executives who form the “nomadic, powerful and interchangeable” global elite created by capitalist globalization” (George, 2010:7). The concept originated in the World Economic Forum, and is strongly supported by the European Commission. The EU Environmental Commissioner for the environment, Janez

Potocnik summed up the thinking when he said, “We need to move from protecting the environment from business to using business to protect the environment”. Or as Richard Branson expressed it at the Rio+20 conference, “our only option to stop climate change is for industry to make money from it”. ([http://www.spiegel-de/international/business/richard-branson-discusses-climate-change-business-opportunities-a-839985.htm](http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/richard-branson-discusses-climate-change-business-opportunities-a-839985.htm)). Other promoters include numerous transnational corporations, the G8 and institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organisation, the UNEP, the big private banks and UNRISD.

### **Defining the ‘green economy’**

Nowhere is the ‘green economy’ precisely defined. According to Paul Quintos, “this is deliberate. Because by keeping the definition open or vague enough, you can promote biofuels, or nuclear energy or carbon trading or financialization of natural resources, or geo-engineering etc. as green economy measures” (Quintos.2012).

The key documents published in 2011 promoting the extreme version are the UNEP’s preparatory report for the Rio+20 conference, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable development and Poverty Eradication* (2011). A lengthy document (630 pages) it has been described as “a radically conservative vision” (Brockington, 2012). The three other influential documents are *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)*, 2011, the World Bank’s report on *Inclusive Green Growth* (2012) and the European Union’s promotion of a *Bio-Economy*. (2012)

The key features of these documents are

### **Linking environmental sustainability with economic growth.**

The emphasis is on decoupling economic growth from environmental damage. The UNEP argues that it is a myth that “there is an inescapable trade off between environmental sustainability and economic progress. There is now substantial evidence that the greening of economies neither inhibits wealth creation nor employment opportunities. On the contrary, many green sectors provide significant opportunities for investment, growth and jobs” (UNEP,2011:6).

### **The promotion of marketisation**

In the UNEP view the fundamental cause of the current ecological crisis has been ‘the misallocation of capital.’ “During the last two decades, much capital was poured into property, fossil fuels and structured financial assets with embedded derivatives, but relatively little in comparison was invested in renewable energy, energy efficiency, public transportation, sustainable agriculture, ecosystem and biodiversity protection, and land and water conservation.” (UNEP,2012:)

These are presented as ‘market failures. Therefore, through providing “incentives based on the market’ it should “be possible to reorient capital investment in the direction of green investments and green innovations “ (Lander, 2011:6).

All four documents – with different emphases – maintain that markets are the solution to the climate crisis. TEEB argues that environmental destruction is based on market failure because environmental ‘costs’ have not been factored into the financial cost of final products. ([www.teebweb.org](http://www.teebweb.org)) The TEEB solution is to ensure that biodiversity and ecosystem functions (commercially dubbed ‘ecosystem services’) are assigned a financial value with a view to promoting efficiency and ensuring the real costs of environmental damage are recognised and met “( Hall and Zacune, 2012:8).

This is the most controversial component of the Green Economy promoted by the UNEP and TEEB termed ‘the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity’ which means green accounting of ‘ecosystem services’ and environmental impacts. The market based approach of the report assumes that “nature should be precisely measured and valued according to the ‘services’ it provides (cleaning water, capturing carbon and so on)”. In this way nature’s services can be costed, offset, and traded on markets, via credits, similar to carbon trading. “(Ashley, 2012:5). It means the expansion of the market into all aspects of the natural world.

Assigning economic values to nature in this way is what used to be termed ‘the externalization of environmental costs’. Some years ago this approach “seemed at the forefront of progressive thinking.. the cutting edge of environmental economics was about properly valuing resources that are often ignored and invisible.” But Leach points out, the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity “is going beyond resources to the processes involved, to ecosystem services (the capacity to absorb carbon for example) which should not be monetised.. Logically it might suggest that putting value on the ecosystem would help protect it but.. there is ‘an economy of repair’ meaning valuing resources in one place as a way of repairing damage done elsewhere. ,so emissions in one place can be offset somewhere else”. (Leach, 2012)  
<http://www.tni.org/interviews/solutions/-eu-crisis-learning-latin-america>. Accessed 22.6.202

This is an extreme elaboration of the widespread notion that nature is simply a store of resources for economic activity, termed an approach sometimes termed ‘resourcism’ (Oelschlaeger,1991:286). Furthermore the notion of selling nature in order to save it is not new. The phenomenon builds on a long and familiar history of dispossession of indigenous communities, and an ‘if it pays it stays’ approach to conservation. The origin of national parks in both the USA and SA illustrate this. (Cock, 2008) But this approach is going much further. The green economy is about business moving speculative ‘green’ trading schemes like carbon funds and biodiversity offsets to the centre of the financial services industry. So what is new is that this commodification of nature has combined with “a growing historical trend of financialisation of the economy – in other words the drawing into financial circulation of aspects of life that previously lay outside it. This has

fueled a market for 'green' commodities, "with all the greed and fraud we have seen in financial speculation recently." (Leach, 2012)

### **Nature is reduced to natural capital.**

In this process nature is reduced to 'natural capital', and a further source of profit. "The importance of 'natural capital' (soil, water, air, flora and fauna) and the ecosystem services resulting from them is stressed. "Ecosystem goods and services from natural capital are worth trillions of US dollars per year" according to the Natural Capital Declaration, a commitment by the finance sector for Rio +20.

([www.naturalcapitaldeclaration.org](http://www.naturalcapitaldeclaration.org). Accessed 19.6.2012) Similarly, Lord Fink, a British hedge fund manager has called on his fellow financiers to recognize that there was a 18 trillion US dollar business opportunity awaiting people who could realize the value of carbon locked in tropical forests.." (Cited by Brockington, 2012:417).

This approach strips nature of any aesthetic value or social value as a source of livelihoods. It follows that "now a forest is valued not just for its beauty or its importance to a community for livelihoods, but for its underground potential for carbon storage, its solar absorption, its soil and water as potential for biofuel production, its trees as a source of carbon credits, and its biodiversity as a source of global conservation funding, species offsetting or tourism revenue". (Leach, 2012)

### **The model for this financialisation of nature is Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD).**

Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation is an initiative of the UNFCCC which consists of isolating and measuring the capacity of forests to capture and store carbon dioxide in order to issue certificates for greenhouse gas emission reductions that can be commercialized and acquired by companies in developed countries that cannot meet their emission reduction commitments. REDD represents a precursor to a full blown Green Economy. It "is based on the superficially attractive principle that those responsible for deforestation will stop cutting trees down if systems can be devised by which they can make more money by leaving them standing (by trading forest carbon 'credits' for example).. it involves privatizing and leasing or selling off much of the world's forest resources. " (Hall and Zacune, 2012:10).

Originally REDD included forests and plantations but its scope has been expanded to include GMOs, trees, soils and agriculture." REDD is the pillar of the Green Economy REDD plus carbon credits, agrofuels and export crops are driving huge land grabs." ([www.cacim.net?http://www.openword.in](http://www.cacim.net?http://www.openword.in) accessed 20.6.2012)A new scheme developed by the World Bank called 'climate smart agriculture' is designed to introduce soils and agriculture into the carbon market as part of REDD. "Climate smart agriculture will put a dollar value on the carbon in dirt so it can be sold on the market and polluters can buy dirt offsets that will allow them to continue to pollute. Climate smart agriculture is a resource grab of monumental proportions.For those who can afford it – the finances, fund

managers, speculators and banks – markets in dirt will be a field day. “ (Rachel Smoller of BiofuelWatch,cited by Petermann and Langelle, 2012).

### **Bio-economics**

The European Commission is promoting bio-economics as a key component of the Rio+20 agenda for a green economy. The bio-economy is intended “to pave the way to a lower emission, resource efficient and competitive society that reconciles food security with the sustainable use of renewable resources for industrial purposes and environmental protection. “ (EC,2011:11) cited by Hall and Zacune, 2012:12) The aim is to create new products and markets. “Specifically the bio-economy approach aims to replace fossil fuels with biomass-based feedstocks, primarily sourced from crops, forests and the seas. Biotechnology, including nanotechnology and synthetic biology is also integral since this is the means by which substantial quantities of biomass( biological materials from living or recently living organisms) – which can include waste but also harvested biomass such as wood fibres, grass, bamboo, soybeans, corn or algae for example – may be converted into a diverse and comprehensive range of products including bio-plastics, new drugs and bio-energy.(Hall and Zacune, 2012:3).

### **Inclusive Green Growth**

The World Bank is promoting ‘a green growth framework’. The emphasis is on giving capital incentives to change. “Green growth is about making growth processes resource-efficient, cleaner and more resilient without necessarily slowing them” (Hallegatte,2011:3) “If the environment is considered as productive capital it makes sense to invest in it and environmental policies can be considered as investment” (Ibid).

Technology is crucial in this variant of ‘ecological modernization;.. It asserts that technology can ‘dematerialize’ economic growth from environmental damage. It “ involves the pricing of externalities like carbon dioxide and other pollutants. Once priced, the markets will work their their magic and the economy can keep growing indefinitely” (Sweeney., 2012:2).

### **Critiques of the green economy.**

A growing anti-capitalist discourse identifies the green economy as the driving notion in a green neo-liberal capitalism that is based on privatization, deregulation, free trade, unlimited growth, new technology and supposedly self-regulating markets.

### **The main points of contention are that:**

(i) The green economy is prescribing capitalism – the cause of the problem – as the solution. The cause of the ecological crisis is the expansionist logic of the capitalist system and not the ‘misallocation of capital’. It is a version of the old argument that capitalism can be reformed and made responsible and more profitable at the same time.

It follows that the green economy is not an alternative development path, but an attempt to avoid fundamental change; “ a sophisticated effort to demonstrate that it is possible to resolve .....the planet’s environmental crises without altering the existing power structures , nor the relations of domination and exploitation” (Lander, 2011:4). The clear implication is that there is no need to curb excessive consumption and waste, or to change global production and trade; with appropriate technology we can keep our economic and development models intact.

(ii)The unchanged commitment to economic growth in these reports means ecological catastrophe; without an end to economic growth, it is virtually impossible for meaningful climate stabilization to be achieved. All the major national governments are committed to infinite economic growth and none of them seems willing to consider any emission reduction policy that would undermine it. “Under the current trend the world is on track towards a long-term warming between 4 and 8 degrees centigrade. At this level of global warming, the world will be in an extreme green house state, destroying nearly all forms of life on the present earth.” (Li et al, 2010:10). As Maude Barlow expresses it, “Lets be clear, no amount of talk of green futures, green technology, green jobs and a green economy can undo the fact that most business and nation state leaders, as well as UN and world bank officials, continue to promote growth as the only economic and development model for the world. Until the growth model is truly challenged, great damage to the earth’s ecosystems will continue. “ (<http://www.canadians.org/rightsofnature>.)

(iii) The key component of the extreme version of the green economy, ‘marketisation’ is a ‘false solution’ to the climate crisis. According to a position paper from La Vie Campesina, “The green economy does not seek to reduce climate change or environmental deterioration., but to generalise the principle that those who have money can continue polluting. Up to now, they have used the farce of purchasing carbon bonds to continue emitting greenhouses gases. They are now inventing biodiversity bonds. These systems of buying environmental services are being used to take lands and territories away from indigenous peoples and peasants. The mechanisms are based on REDD. “The most ambitious plan, and the one that some governments identify as ‘the major challenge’” is to put a price on all the goods of nature (like water, biodiversity, the countryside, wildlife, seeds, rain etc) to then privatize them (arguing that conservation requires money) and charge us for their use. This..... is the final assault on nature and life...” Published in *Links. International Journal of Socialist Renewal*. (<http://links.org.au/node/2913>. Accessed 19.6.2012)

Given the collapse of the carbon market, Bond correctly warns that “the overarching danger of this approach is renewed official faith in market mechanisms. “ He cites Martinez-Allier , “Unsustainable development is not a market failure to be fixed but a market system failure”: expecting results from the market that it cannot deliver, like long-term thinking, environmental consciousness and social responsibility”(Bond, 2012:4).

(iv) The Green Economy is claimed to be the means of reaching the goal of ‘sustainable development’ but this is an empty notion which functions to calm our fears while providing a cover for continued neo-liberal capitalism.

The definition of ‘Sustainable development’ as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED, 1987) was the outcome of the Earth Summit that took place in Rio in 1992. It was an attempt to give new life to the concept of development, eliminate poverty and provide a balance between economic growth and environmental protection. It has failed dismally to do so and the concept has been much criticized for the vagueness that as enabled it to be incorporated into neo-liberal approaches. (Giddens, 2009; Bond, 2002; Sachs, 1999)

However, as Lander writes, “The concept of sustainable development was extraordinarily effective both politically and ideologically. It responded in terms that seemed to take into account the criticism of the development model, while in fact reinforcing it. It functioned like a tranquilliser in that created the illusion that effective measures were being taken in response to the diagnosed crisis. By not questioning the logic of capitalist accumulation and the model of industrial society as the fundamental causes of the destruction of the conditions that make life possible, it provided new legitimacy to neoliberal globalisation which began to present itself as sustainable despite its overwhelmingly devastating dynamic” (Lander, 2011:3).

(v) If the green economy is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” as Lander (2011) suggests, the wolf is green capitalism, but the sheep is the discourse of sustainability. The discourse of sustainability has been appropriated by neo-liberal capitalism. (Cock, 2010). Capital increasingly emphasizes the advantages sustainability offers, such as the creation of new products, expanding markets, cost savings and increased legitimacy and community goodwill.

(vi) The Reports reduce nature to ‘natural capital’, which means that our relationship to nature is further distorted. This is occurring at the moment when we have clearly reached the limits of nature as a source of raw materials for economic activity and a source for our waste products. As Naomi Klein writes, “The expansionist, extractive mindset, which has so long governed our relationship to nature, is what the climate crisis calls into question so fundamentally. The abundance of scientific research showing we have pushed nature beyond its limits does not just demand green products and market-based solutions; it demands a new civilizational paradigm, one grounded not in dominance over nature but in respect for natural cycles of renewal – and acutely sensitive to natural limits, including the limits of human intelligence”. (Klein, 2011:80)

In an interview the former Bolivian ambassador Pablo Solon maintained that “we have to end the anthropocentric era that put humans at the centre of all life and act realising that we are one part of this planet. We are living in a system, which has at its centre not humans but nature. We need to preserve the system to preserve ourselves. This means recognizing that as well as human rights, there are also rights of nature that we must

respect.. .we must create balance and harmony with nature”

[.Http://www.tni.org/interviews/solutions/-eu-crisis-learning-latin-america](http://www.tni.org/interviews/solutions/-eu-crisis-learning-latin-america)

Protecting nature should involve ecological, aesthetic and social values rather than marketisation in the form of assigning prices. Solon writes, “An underlying assumption is that only that which can be owned and profited from deserves stewardship. But the green economy goes beyond putting a price on the things we consume such as wood, fish or cattle. It also puts a price tag on ‘services’ like the pollination of plants by insects, the biodiversity of coral reefs or the capacity of forests to act as carbon sinks. .. the green economy privatizes and commercializes everything it can. “ (<http://www.canadians.org/rightsofnature/Bond> argues that the conceptual approach and strategy required is “to impose pollution-bans and prohibitive fines for ecological degradation” (Bond, 2012).

A strong critique of the market approach to ‘save’ nature by creating new opportunities for growth and profit, comes from the indigenous Andean perspective in which Nature is valued for itself, not simply as a resource for human profit. This is taken further in the Bolivian notion of “the rights of nature” and respect for Mother Earth. (See below)

(vii) A reliance on new technology is a mark of green capitalism and represents another ‘false solution’ The UNEP report proposes that governments cut environmentally damaging subsidies and use these funds to invest in new technologies. The types of controversial technologies that are promoted by various corporate actors, including biomass incineration, synthetic biology, geoengineering, nanotechnology, nuclear and GMS’s are not explicitly endorsed (in this report) but would fit with this approach. Already many corporations are seeking new extreme technological solutions’ to the climate crisis, “including nuclear energy, so –called ‘clean coal, fracking, ‘natural gas’, hydropower, biofuels, biomass, dangerous Carbon Capture and Storage experiments and engineering schemes such as Genetically Modified Trees to sequester carbon sulfates in the air to shut out the sun, iron filings in the sea to create algae blooms and large-scale solar reflection such as industrial –scale plastic wrap for deserts.”(Bond, 2012:4) Some of these technologies such as the geoengineering scheme promoted by Richard Bransen and Bill Gates for blocking sunlight have their own massive, unforeseen consequences.

(viii) Turning to biomass could threaten food security and further deforestation of indigenous forests.. It will dramatically increase pressure on natural resources including forests and land for food production. For instance, it has been estimated that demand for wood-based biomass could require over 300 million tones of wood by 2010. Already in parts of Africa (Mozambique, Congo, and Liberia ) energy companies and investors have begun acquiring land for tree plantations wholly or partly grown for biomass energy exports to Europe.

(ix) The Green Economy is “the green-tinted regurgitation of a failed and unjust economic system predicated on the expansion of the controversial REDD offset scheme to every square meter of the Earth – including oceans, soils, agriculture and biodiversity”. (Jeff Conant, Global Justice Ecology Project Communications Director.Press release 7.12.2011 Durban)

Every year since REDD was introduced into the climate mitigation package at the 2007 climate talks it has been hotly contested. It has been pushed by those who wish to use the world's forests as carbon offsets, (which enables them to continue pollution in the North) and protested by indigenous peoples and forest dependent communities who face potential forced relocation if their forest homelands are 'protected' under the REDD scheme. REDD payment to 'forest landholders' ignores indigenous peoples, peasants and others who cannot prove legal title to the land. The text permits logging and gives credits for wood products.

“Commodification, privatization and the financialization of whole eco-systems and specific functions of nature has just begun as exemplified by REDD. The Green economy will complete, consolidate and globalize this process. “ Instead the statement stresses, “Humans do not own nature: rather we are part of nature.” (‘Asian movements statement on the green economy’ alter-echos, 2012:2) ,

(x) The green economy presages both financial and ecological disaster. Solon writes, “The Green Economy is building on carbon trading and the forest-trading scheme known as REDD and want to expand it to all of nature's so-called ‘services’”. “ Worst of all, they will have derivatives for this which will create another speculation bubble like we saw with the US housing crisis but this time with nature. They are promoting this new market as a way to get out of the financial crisis and create new business to create profits.... It is going to lay the seeds for the next financial crisis when this fictional speculative bubble bursts but worst of all it will mess up the planet for the next decades”

[.Http://www.tni.org/interviews/solutions/-eu-crisis-learning-latin-america](http://www.tni.org/interviews/solutions/-eu-crisis-learning-latin-america)

## **Two paradigms**

Presenting these ten points of contention separately risks obscuring Solon's observation that Rio+20 involved a debate between 2 paradigms: Green capitalism versus the indigenous Andean paradigm of 'living well' ('buen vivir') as opposed to 'living better'. This is "... to be found in diversity and harmony with nature (as in the preamble of the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution) in a solidarity community of people who cooperate instead of compete, who do not prescribe individual and short-term pursuit of profit but rather want to form collective life sustainably and in the long term.” (Cited by Altwater, 2012). This is the different development path advocated by La Vie Campesina “that is based on the well being of all, that guarantees food for all, that protects and guarantees that the commons and natural resources are put to use to provide a good life for everyone and not to meet the needs of accumulation of a few.” (Position paper issued on 6.6.2012. Debate:cjn-south-africa@googlegroups.com

These criticisms were expressed forcefully strongly at the alternative people's summit in Rio.

## **The Rio+20 conference**

Due to this contestation, part of deep differences between developed and developing countries, in the final outcome document of the Rio+20 document, *The Future we Want*, the green economy is not fully endorsed but promoted as “one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development “. It “could provide options for policy making but should not be a rigid set of rules” (UN, 2012:9). However there are positive references such as “We acknowledge that green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication will enhance our ability to manage natural resources sustainably and with lower environmental impacts, increase resource efficiency and reduce waste.” (UN 2012:11) “We encourage each country to consider the implementation of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, in a manner that endeavours to drive *sustained*, (my emphasis) inclusive and equitable economic growth and job creation, particularly for women, youth and the poor. (UN,2012:11). The many references to growth and job creation in the 53 page document obviously have a powerful attraction for trade unionists.

## **The Trade Union Response**

### **Complicating factors**

Analysing responses of the labour movement both globally and locally to the notion of the green economy is complicated by several factors:

(i) Firstly, the notions of a shift to a green or low carbon economy are often used interchangeably, and are linked to the idea of a just transition.

For example, the gathering of trade union leaders in April 2011 in Madrid discussed a new development paradigm on the way to the Rio + 20 summit and beyond. The Spanish minister of the environment stressed that “the social and environmental agenda should be indissolubly joined in order for a just transition to be produced towards a new model of growth”. This ‘new model’ is understood to be the ‘green economy’ .”Support for green jobs and a green economy was expressed. For example, “ a green economy based on rights, sustainability principles and decent work can meet the challenge of our societies.... A just transition, such as the one unions are calling for, needs to be based on the transformation of all jobs into sustainable ones” said Ambet Yuson, the General Secretary of Building and Woodworkers International (BWI)

However some qualifications were expressed. For example, at this event, the secretary – general of the South African trade union federation COSATU ,said, “we will not support any form of capital accumulation that breeds inequalities – even if those forms of capital accumulation are green”. (Vavi,2011:2) .

(ii) There is some confusion about how the concept of the green economy has changed from the earlier, 'moderate' and later 2011 more extreme formulations. Even the 2011 UNEP elaboration of the concept includes some positive features such as the recommendations to :

- shift industries from brown to green, retrain workers for green jobs
- sustainable consumption and production, green procurement by business and government, and life-cycle design including recycling
- India's national rural employment guarantee for the rural poor
- Reducing food waste and improving distribution in poor countries.
- Urban public transport – taxes on cars in the city.
- Redefining values. We must “rethink and redefine traditional measures of wealth, prosperity and well-being, replacing the GDP with Indicators of Well-being.”

The emphasis on the marketisation of nature has become more extreme in the recent formulations by the Davos class. Formal responses from labour and civil society to the discourse of the green economy generally reflect understandings of earlier, more moderate formulations. Furthermore, the various 2011 and 2012 documents referred to above are lengthy, sometimes highly technical and have not been distributed widely. For example the latest UNEP report, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable development and Poverty Eradication*. (2011) is 630 pages long.

The primary attraction of the green economy notion for labour is the promise of Green jobs

### **Green jobs**

Green jobs are pivotal to global debates on the transition to what is variously termed 'a low carbon economy' or a 'green economy'. They are central to labour's response to the climate crisis and understandings of what reducing carbon emissions entails. Powerful international labour organizations such as sustainlabour are promoting green jobs within the context of the green economy. For example, “The Green economy presents an opportunity for the creation of new employment”. (sustainlabour, 2012:46)

The common element is the need for a transition to a new energy regime. However there is ambiguity on the meaning of this term. The simplest definition of green jobs is “those in existing and new sectors which use processes and produce goods and services aimed at alleviating environmental threats” (UNEP,2008).

There are other problems in the current formulation of green jobs. Many triumphalist claims are made which seem inflated and are not supported by empirical evidence. The ILO recently claimed that the transformation to a greener economy could generate 15 to 60 million additional jobs globally over the next two decades. (ILO,2012) “Tens of millions of jobs have already been created by this transformation, For example the renewable energy sector now employs close to 5 million workers” (ILO, 2012:8)

Secondly insufficient attention has been paid on the quality of green jobs (in terms of labour standards and wage levels.) Thirdly the debate on green jobs fails to pay sufficient attention to job losses and address the challenge of ensuring decent jobs for the thousands of workers presently employed in energy intensive jobs.

Fourthly jobs are seldom green in an absolute sense – a wind turbine for example represents a level of carbon embedded in the production of its metal parts. So there needs to be a careful analysis of the processes used as well as the goods and services produced.

However support for the notion of a green economy is increasing in the international labour movement, and is linked to another contested notion – the meaning of a *just* transition to a new energy regime.

### **The ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) approach**

The South African labour movement has been very influenced by the ITUC policies and strategies which endorse the green economy approach.

Sustainlabour, a labour movement think-tank strongly linked to the ITUC links the ‘Green Economy’ with a ‘Just Transition’. It believes it is important to engage and shape the green economy debate in ways that secures the interests of workers and ensures decent work. “It is clear that we must move towards a low carbon economy and the efficient use of natural resources, an economy that prioritises the use of renewable energy, that takes into account the lifecycle of products, that protects and restores ecosystems, that better distributes environmental costs and benefits. It is equally evident that for a green economy to be a real opportunity for ending injustices it must be in keeping with the wider framework of sustainable development.. that is, it must be consistent with the social and political aspects of sustainability, guaranteeing a Just Transition for all.”

“In Sustainlabour we believe that the green economy should

- aim to satisfy human needs: providing universal access to water, food, health, housing, education, transport, culture
- - be based on justice: be capable of distributing the costs and benefits fairly between and within countries
- - be inclusive: young people, women.. everyone must be part of it
- - be a real economy: do away with the speculative economy and the economic, financial and real estate bubbles;
- be based on the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda: full employment, guaranteed labour and trade union rights, social protection, dialogue and participation” (Cited by Ashely, 2012:10).

Sustainlabour was one of the organizers of the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and Environment, along with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) involved 396 delegates, representing 66 organisations from 56 countries in Rio on 11 – 13 June adopted a statement which recognized “that our current profit-driven production and consumption model, identified as the source of rising social inequalities and environmental degradation, must be replaced if a truly sustainable development is to be achieved.” It further demanded that ‘the Commons, natural and energy resources are brought and kept under public ownership, securing their public preservation and administration with social control’. “.. We embrace the cause of a socially-just transition towards a sustainable development model” and there is also a reference to a “rights –based transition”. Thus the labour movement must play “a decisive role in fighting for an alternative development model for our societies, grounded in people’s needs, on solidarity, on economic democracy and on a fair distribution of wealth. “ There is a commitment to forming “ a strong organised global movement”. ([http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/assemblyresolution\\_eng\\_tc\\_rev.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/assemblyresolution_eng_tc_rev.pdf) (accessed 19.6.2012) COSATU was present at this assembly and endorsed this statement despite its emphasis on the problematic concept of sustainable development.

### **The South African labour movement response**

To date the response of the South African labour movement to the climate crisis has been largely shaped by the unemployment crisis in the country. The priority is protecting jobs that could be threatened by the shift to a low carbon economy, as well as promoting new job creation including both ‘green’ and ‘climate jobs’. This is understandable given the context of social and economic crisis marked by increasing unemployment, casualisation and outsourcing in South Africa as well as the historical neglect of environmental issues by labour. (i)

### **The policy environment**

The shift to a new energy regime is particularly challenging for South Africa given the carbon intensive nature of our economy and the continued dominance of the ‘minerals-energy complex’. As the draft National Planning Commission Report states, “Millions of people are employed in energy-intensive industries and the mining sector is a major contributor to SA’s foreign exchange earnings. A judicious process of transition is therefore non-negotiable.” (NPC, 2011:183).

The South African government is committed to the green economy, understood as providing a new growth path and there is a stress on green growth and the creation of green jobs. At the same time there is a level of policy incoherence and the ‘green economy’ is often viewed as something separate, as an add on to the ‘real economy. Trollop and Tyler point to , “... the compartmentalisation of the ‘Green Economy’ as something separate and therefore different or additional to a mainstream future South African economy. The treatment of ‘Green industries’ as a separate sector enforces this perspective” (Trollop and Tyler, 2011:11). In addition the National Climate Response

White Paper refers to “promoting and expanding the green economic sectors”(DEA,2011:.6).

Similarly in the New Growth Path Framework presented by Minister Ebrahim Patel on 23 November 2010 the green economy is reduced to one sector Minister Ebrahim Patel stated, “As a first step, we will prioritise efforts to support employment creation in the following 7 key sectors: infrastructure, the agricultural value chain, the mining value chain, the green economy, manufacturing sectors, which are included in IPAP2 and tourism and certain high-level services..” He said, “The New Growth Path, targets 300,000 additional direct jobs by 2020 to green the economy..” (p.11).

In this policy environment various COSATU statements imply that a transition to a green economy is inevitable and plead for retraining and jobs in the process. (e.g. Cosatu President’s speech at Cop 17. Broadcast on SABC2 News 8.12.2011)

According to Vavi, “The trade unions have begun to play their role in promoting a new growth path and creating jobs. Labour and the other three Nedlac constituencies have entered into agreements with government departments and have signed the following accords, all of which will help us to play our full part in creating 5 million new jobs by 2020”:

1. The Basic Education Accord
2. The National Skills Accord
3. The Local Procurement Accord and
4. The Green Economy Accord signed on 7 November 2011 to coincide with COP17.

This Accord includes commitments to

- the roll out of one million solar water systems by 2014/15
- increasing investments in the Green Economy
- procurement of renewable energy
- - promotion of biofuels for vehicles
- launching clean coal initiatives
- promoting energy efficiency
- waste recycling
- electrification of poor communities
- employment development in the green economy through promotion of localization, youth employment, cooperatives and skills development

This commits unions to help establish workplace committees to ensure efficient usage and stop waste of energy, and has “ a rich potential to create more jobs and create a healthier world.” “ (Address by Vavi to the Nedlac Labour School 1.2.2012 Tshwane.

### **Cosatu policy**

COSATU had been debating their response to climate change before this. Following discussion at a workshop in Durban in July 2011 on climate change and attended by national office bearers, representatives of the 20 affiliated unions and 9 provincial

structures, a Climate Change Policy Framework was adopted by the Central Executive Committee which states:.

The central point is that COSATU recognises that the fundamental cause of the climate crisis is the expansionist logic of the capitalist system.

Fifteen principles were agreed on:

- \* Capitalist accumulation is the underlying cause of excessive greenhouse gas emissions,
- \* A new low carbon development path is needed which addresses the need for decent jobs and the elimination of unemployment
- \* Food security must be urgently addressed
- \* All South Africans have the right to energy
- \* All South Africans have the right to clean water
- \* We need a massive ramping up of public transport in South Africa
- \* The impacts of climate change on health must be understood and dealt with in the context of the demand for universal access to health
- \* We need a carbon budget for South Africa(iii)
- \* we need technological development, and technology transfers must not be fettered by intellectual property rights
- \* The South African government's position in the UNFCCC processes must properly represent the interests of the people.
- \* We reject market mechanisms to reduce carbon emissions
- \* Developed countries must pay for their climate debt and the Green Climate Fund must be accountable.
- \* A legally binding international agreement designed to limit temperature increases to 1.5 degrees is essential as part of the UNFCCC process
- \* African solidarity is imperative
- \* A Just Transition towards a low –carbon and climate –resilient society is required

In this COSATU policy framework on climate change endorsed by the Central Executive Committee in August 2011 the explanation of a just transition reads, “The evidence suggests that the transition to a low carbon economy will potentially create more jobs than it will lose. But we have to campaign for protection and support for workers whose jobs or livelihoods might be threatened by the transition. If we do not do that, then these workers will resist the transition. We also have to ensure that the development of new, green industries does not become an excuse for lowering wages and social benefits. New environmentally-friendly jobs provide an opportunity to redress many of the gender imbalances in employment and skills. The combination of these interventions is what we mean by a just transition.”

It goes on to say

“The Just Transition is a concept that COSATU has supported in the global engagements on climate change that have been led by the ITUC. The basic demands of a Just Transition are:

- \*Investment in environmentally friendly activities that create decent jobs that are paid at living wages, that meet standards of health and safety, that promote gender equity and that are secure
- \* The putting in place of comprehensive social protections (pensions, unemployment insurance etc) in order to protect the most vulnerable
- \*The conducting of research into the impacts of climate change on employment and livelihoods in order to better inform social policies
- \*Skills development and retraining for workers to ensure that they can be part of the new low-carbon development model.”

However the content of the *just* transition is contested. Members of the 21 COSATU affiliated unions have very different understandings of the scale and nature of the changes involved. These vary from demands for shallow, defensive change focused on protecting the sectors of the workforce most vulnerable to climate mitigation strategies, to deep transformative change involving very different forms of production and consumption in a socialist future.

Whereas the ITUC speaks of a ‘paradigm shift’, some activists of the Cosatu affiliate the South African Municipal workers Union(SAMWU), speak of ‘regime change’. SAMWU’s response to the National Climate Change Response Green Paper, February 2011, claimed that “Tackling greenhouse gas emissions is not just a technical or technological problem. It requires a fundamental economic and social transformation to substantially change current patterns of production and consumption.” Another Cosatu affiliate, the National Union of Metalworkers,(NUMSA) are arguing that the shift to a low carbon economy, and particularly the development of renewable energy, is being dominated by green capitalism. (Interview, NUMSA official Johannesburg 7.2. 2012)

Labour has frequently expressed its support for a component of all formulations of a green economy - green jobs. But there is also some contestation over the relation between addressing climate change and job creation. Shifting to a low carbon economy could create a significant number of jobs. For instance the Industrial Development Corporation and the Development Bank of SA argue that some 130,000 direct jobs could be created by SA’s renewable energy sector by 2025. (Creamer, 2011). However it is increasingly recognized that green jobs – meaning jobs dealing with environmental threats - could be as exploitative in terms of wages and working conditions as brown jobs. Furthermore, low wages, as well as outsourcing and casualisation mean that jobs do not necessarily mean increasing people’s economic ability to live a decent life or even access sufficient, safe and nutritious. Furthermore these jobs could simply be another source of profit for capital. So the view is gaining ground that the discourse of ‘green jobs’ is one component of a new green capitalism which is trying to avoid fundamental change through an emphasis on expanding markets and new technologies while keeping the existing institutions of power intact.

Given these problems, Cosatu is involved in a campaign for Climate Jobs meaning decent, people and publically –driven jobs that reduce the causes and impacts of climate change. This definition was hotly contested but reflects the concern – elaborated into both

policy and practice by NUMSA – that the shift to a low carbon economy should involve democratic control and public ownership. In the campaign literature climate jobs are based on three principles: ecological sustainability, social justice and state intervention. They are jobs that reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, build our capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change and produce and secure vital services which includes reducing wasteful over-consumption.

In a rather blurred distinction, these jobs in renewable energy, public transport, agro-ecology for example, are distinguished from green jobs which are defined as “any environmentally friendly jobs such as conservation, removing alien plants, cleaning polluted rivers, etc. These jobs do not necessarily have anything to do with cutting greenhouse gas emissions or building the resilience of communities to withstand the effects of climate change. With green jobs there is also a strong tendency by business to use the lure of ‘green jobs’ to greenwash their polluting ways. “(One Million Jobs Campaign Leaflet, 2011)

Cosatu president, Sdumo Dlamini has stressed that “We need a just transition which will not lead to job losses. We need a transition that will create jobs.” (Addressing a COP 17 public meeting in Durban, 7.12.2011).NALEDI researcher, Fundi Nzimande says COSATU wants “just transition strategies to a green economy in which there are as few job losses as possible.” She has referred to building “alliances with civil society” and emphasizes a class analysis, “We want to view climate change from a working class perspectives. We want to counter the big business point of view” (Interview, Durban 15.7.2011).

The largest COSATU affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) with 320,000 members and representing some 500,000 mineworkers is obviously particularly sensitive to job losses and some shop stewards have expressed faith in new technology such as Carbon Capture and Storage to reduce carbon emission.(iii)

NUM argues that coal must be declared a strategic resource and the coal industry nationalized. (Interview NUM representative NPC workshop, Transitioning to a low carbon economy. Johannesburg. 4.5.2012) NUM official Job Matsepe admits that “coal has to be scaled down” but their main strategy seems to be a reliance on clean coal technology and to attack nuclear as an alternative source of energy. They are concerned that the development of clean coal technology is being displaced by a focus on developing nuclear energy. Also a suspicion of a ‘northern environmentalism’ is sometimes expressed. For example, “all the countries that are telling us to abandon coal are getting high quality coal from us. Germany is getting high grade coal from us. In South Africa we are generating electricity from ash. The countries at COP 17 telling us to bury coal are benefitting from our exports. The suspicion is reinforced by a dualistic understanding articulated as “we have to make a choice between jobs and environmental issues. “ (Job Matsepe at the COSATU Energy Workshop. Johannesburg, 13.6.2012).

Responding to this comment a NUMSA official maintained that “labour must intervene on both sides of the transition to a low carbon economy – both in relation to coal now and

renewable energy in the future”. ..There should be public ownership and democratic control of both the fossil fuel sector and the renewable energy sector.(Dinga Sikwebu, COSATU Energy Workshop, Johannesburg 13.6.2012)

NUM and the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) illustrate two very different understandings of how to address climate change. The response of NUMSA one of the biggest unions representing almost 300,000 workers in energy intensive industries, is grounded in its commitment to socialism. It is resolutely anti-capitalist, describing itself as a “socialist union” which draws from the Marxist-leninist tradition and is skeptical of the ‘just transition’ approach as ‘empty rhetoric’. According to the NUMSA President, “..the language of ‘just transition’ needs a class analysis. We believe that a ‘just transition’ can become a disarming term for the working class if we are not careful. It must always be clear that capitalism has caused the crisis of climate change that we see today. There is an urgent need to situate the question of climate change in a class struggle perspective”. (Opening address by NUMSA President Cedric Gina to the Numsa International Seminar on Climate Change and Class Struggle 4.12.2011).

“Talk about a just transition often leaves out the two essential conditions, public ownership and democratic control. The talk about a just transition is often shallow because it does not talk about who will own the new energy sources. They must not be sites of capital accumulation. The same culprits who destroyed the environment are now the proponents of renewable energy. We prefer to talk about a managed transition. The concept of a just transition comes from the international trade union movement and the concept means very different things to different people. In a sense the concept has been captured by our opponents. We didn’t put strongly enough the question of public ownership and democratic control.” We are inspired by the slogan, “Socialism is the future, build it now”. This is what informs our transformative notion of a just transition. The insistence on public ownership and democratic control is a building block for socialism.” ( Dinga Skwebu, COSATU Energy Seminar. Johannesburg 13.6.2012)

NUMSA believes a “just transition must be based in worker controlled democratic social ownership of key means of production and means of subsistence... Without this struggle over ownership and the struggle for a socially owned renewable energy sector, just transition will become a capitalist concept, building up a capitalist “green economy”:(Statement from NUMSA Central Committee issued on 14.12.2011).

In 2011 NUMSA established a worker led Research and Development Group on renewable energies (and also on energy efficiency). This includes, amongst others, workers from factories that produce the new renewable energy infrastructure – solar panels, solar water heaters and small wind turbines. (Interview, Dinga Sikwebu, Numsa official. 7.2.2012).These will investigate the carbon emissions of various products and then work with groups in the community that use them. The aim is to build an evaluation of these products in relation to carbon emissions into their negotiating strategy.

NUMSA is critical of private sector driven introduction of renewable energy and has passed a resolution in favour of the social ownership of renewable energy as contributing to a wider process of advancing a working class agenda. (iv)

The NUMSA Central Committee meeting held in August 2011 in Johannesburg spoke of “(b) the twin dangers of being drawn into a ‘green capitalism’ project or adopting a maximalist/ultra-left position that sees no space for ‘climate reforms’; (c) being alert to the ..possibility that climate change can become a preserve of a ‘climate change elite’ within the labour movement; (d) the danger of COSATU being an appendage of either a “climate justice lobby’ or part of employers ‘green-washing’ initiatives; (e) the chances of being outpaced by employers on the issue of ‘green jobs’ (f) develop a revolutionary and class approach to climate change”. The Central Committee “endorses the call for the establishment of a socially-owned renewable energy sector.”) The socially-owned renewable energy sector would consist of two elements, the state or parastatal element and then the aspect of communities and cooperatives. “ (Discussion paper for February 2012 NUMSA International Conference on building a socially-owned renewable energy sector in South Africa)

“Without an urgent change of course aimed at ensuring that the globally expanding renewable energy sector contributes towards a shift in favour of the working class, we will rapidly move towards a capitalist driven expansion of the sector, with all the new forms of enclosure, violence and exploitation that such a transition is certain to entail.... NUMSA’s work is developing within the wider context of NUMSA’s struggles to socialize large sections of the South African economy in order to build socialism.”(Discussion paper for the workshop)

Clearly different Cosatu affiliates will react differently to climate change policies, especially those directly threatened with job loss. Understanding of the issue is uneven. A recent small scale survey of one COSATU affiliates shop stewards revealed that at least 10% of the respondents were unclear about the nature of climate change, and almost a quarter (23%) did not know what a ‘just transition’ meant. (Hlalele, 2012). A popular education booklet on climate change is in the process of production to address this.

Furthermore, it is unclear how much priority will be given to climate change in the context of the many issues and planned campaigns the labour movement in South Africa is addressing – issues such as labour brokers, corruption, the living wage campaign and so on. The discourse around climate change has also become extremely technical and specialized. Climate change is not on the trade union agenda in Africa and its place on the South African labour movement agenda is tenuous. As one unionist said, “We need to balance economic growth with environmental protection but there are two problems – many people are in denial about climate change and most people (especially since 2008) are only concerned with jobs and economic growth”. (Key informant from FEDUSA interview 26.3.2012)

COSATU describes itself as a force “deepening the national democratic revolution as a direct route to socialism, but there are differences within the federation in their responses to five issues:

- the substantive content of a ‘just’ transition
- the use of market mechanisms to reduce carbon emissions
- the efficacy of technologies such as clean coal and Carbon Capture and Storage
- whether it is possible to delink economic growth from carbon emissions and
- the scale of change necessary to address the climate crisis.

The secretary general of Cosatu has described the green economy as “ a progressive alternative’ but also refers positively to eco-socialism . In Vavi’s key note address to the COSATU International Policy Conference on 16.5.2012 there is a reference to how various global unions “are putting forward concrete progressive alternatives to the neo-liberal response to the international crisis such as “far reaching interventions to promote a green economy”. In this address there are also references to “develop institutions which build the power of international worker solidarity, to begin to reduce the power of corporations to divide and undermine workers.” Eco-socialism is mentioned as one “important rallying point around which the broad revolutionary front can be based”. “An eco-socialist project, which combines both the satisfaction of social needs and the respect and balance of our ecosystem. We have much to learn from the indigenous peoples of South America and their relationship to the land”.

The most hopeful scenario would be for this learning to be developed and articulated by local environmental activists and for it to percolate through the labour movement.

### **The response of environmental activists.**

At present there is no single, collective actor that constitutes an environmental movement locally or globally. In South Africa there is no coherent centre and no tidy margins; environmental initiatives are an inchoate sum of multiple, diverse and uncoordinated struggles and organisations. A fault line divides these initiatives into two main streams: those organized around the discourse of sustainable development and those around the discourse of environmental justice. Both streams are concerned with climate change but with very different understandings.

Provisional mapping of responses to climate change indicate a loose grouping round a few key nodes such as groundwork, the South Durban Environmental Alliance and Earthlife Africa, Johannesburg, now the lead organisation in South Africa of the international alliance Climate Justice Now. A key node in an alternative approach centers on the World Wildlife Fund,(WWF) an international NGO which supports both carbon trading and offsets such as REDD, and the role of the World Bank in mitigation funding in a reform agenda. The thrust is on reforming or greening the present form of ‘suicide capitalism.’ At COP17 the CEO of WWFSA appealed to “business to take the lead and show that a low carbon economy is feasible”. (Cited in *Business Day* 7.12.2011) Tasneem Essop, from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has stressed that

solutions to reduce emissions such as investment in renewable energy are good for both economic growth and job creation. The organization also supports carbon trading. This is in accord with a recent statement by the director general of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) who said the way to protect nature was “to harness the capacity of the markets through payment for biodiversity and ecosystem services.”

Some local environmental and social activist groups are discussing a draft People’s Charter for Africa. The document contains an alternative vision to the green economy being promoted by the ‘Davos class’, couched in similar form and language to the Freedom charter. It undertakes “to respect and defend the rights of all beings to fulfill their role within the community of life”; affirms that “earth is sacred: no person or legal entity has the right to pollute or degrade the soils, waters and atmosphere that sustain life”; “All will live well”; “Respect the rights of all other members of the natural communities to which we belong so that all can live well in harmony with one another.”; and place “life before property and profit.” (v)

The Rights to Nature approach is unlikely to gain traction in South Africa. While there is an indigenous African tradition of environmental protection (Cock, 2007) this does not have the same depth and intensity of the indigenous Andean traditions. Furthermore, it could generate contention between competing sets of rights; the rights enshrined in the post-apartheid constitution have been used to mobilize for access to water for example. Ascribing a separate set of rights to ‘nature’ could dilute the force of these rights.

However linkages between environmental and labour activists are deepening and this has potential.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper suggests that in both its moderate and extreme versions the green economy is a new formulation of a green neo-liberal capitalism based on expanding markets and new technology focused on using the ecological crisis as a site of accumulation. This is very clear in South African capital’s response to the ecological crisis generally and climate change specifically. The assumption is that the system can continue to expand by creating this new ‘green capitalism’, bringing the efficiency of the market to bear on nature and its reproduction. This is what Bond calls ‘climate –crisis capitalism’, namely, “turning a medium/long-term, system –threatening prospect into a short-term source of commodification, speculation and profit” (Bond, 2011:2). Underlying all capital’s strategies –is the broad process of commodification: the transformation of nature and all social relations into economic relations, subordinated to the logic of the market and the imperatives of profit.

Operating in a context of social and economic crisis, the South African labour movement is obviously preoccupied with jobs and somewhat ambivalent about the green economy. This could change as knowledge of the extreme formulation filters through the

movement. Differences within the labour movement on the meaning of a 'just transition' and a 'green economy' could deepen. But if the labour and environmental movements adopt the green economy as a developmental goal it will mean the "triumph of the Davos class and of neoliberal ideology" (George, 2010:202).

Therefore this is a moment of great danger but also of opportunity for labour. What defines this moment is that we are in the midst of a massive ideological assault – a campaign launched by the powerful of the world to persuade us that green capitalism, packaged as 'the green economy', can solve both the ecological and the economic crises. The danger is that environmentalists will be seduced by this notion into thinking that the Green economy will protect nature, and the labour movement will be seduced by the promise of green jobs.

Reducing carbon emissions represents an opportunity: to not only address the climate and unemployment crises in our society, but to demand the redistribution of power and resources; to challenge the conventional understanding of economic growth and to mobilize for an alternative development path. Such a path should include a redefinition of our relationship to nature, not in terms of rights, but building on Darwin's insight that we are all connected in an intricate web of life, all part of a single ecological community. WE have to do this because it is very clear that our political leaders lack the will or capacity to deal with the challenges of the ecological crisis.

"...our corporate and media elites, our weak-willed, banker-infiltrated governments and high-level international bureaucrats who together make up the Davos class have come together to plunge the world to the bottom of the bathtub." (George, 2010:269)

But forging linkages between the labour and environmental movements could generate a new kind of transnational solidarity, larger, deeper and more powerful than anything we have yet seen. Moving beyond solidarities based on interests or identities, Hyman emphasizes that 'the challenge is to reconceptualise solidarity in ways which encompass the local, the national, the European and the global.. For unions to survive and thrive, the principle of solidarity must not only be redefined and reinvented: workers on the ground must be active participants in this redefinition and reinvention' (Hyman, 2011:27). Most clearly in its warnings of the threat to human survival, the discourse of climate change could be contributing to such a process

### **Footnotes:**

(i) The labour movement has traditionally neglected environmental issues in South Africa for understandable reasons. (Cock, 2007)

(ii)The process of measuring carbon emissions and making targets for the future is what is known as having a 'carbon budget'. At present the only target for emissions reduction that we have is an overall national target. This has not yet been broken down per sector. We urgently need a carbon budget so that all sectors can work to targets and be held accountable.

(iii) Carbon Capture and Storage is a flagship programme in the government's national climate change Response white paper. An expensive and untested technology, it is being promoted by the coal industry as a justification for the construction of new coal-fired power stations, including two of the biggest in the world Kusile and Medupi, and to legitimize a continued reliance on fossil fuels.

(iv) NUMSA is opposed to how the development of South Africa's renewable energy sector will be led by Independent Power Producers. From the outset NUMSA "has rejected the notion of drawing Independent Power Producers into the generation and delivery of electricity to our people informed by the reality that private interest is about profit maximization at the expense of affordable electricity." It calls for "a publically-owned and community-controlled renewable energy sector made up of parastatals, cooperatives and municipal wind farms." (NUMSA Press Release 13.9.23011) In February 2012 NUMSA organised an international conference on building a socially-owned renewable energy sector in South Africa to develop a framework and concrete proposals for building such a sector in South Africa and to learn from other countries about the dangers that people face due to the expansion of the sector along non-socially owned lines, namely capitalist renewable energy development.

(v) This is a kind of African version of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, which was launched in 2010 at a people's congress in Bolivia that was attended by 35,000 delegates. At Rio +20 the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature distributed a petition asking governments around the world to support the declaration. This builds on how in recent years Bolivia and Ecuador have changed their constitutions to grant nature equal rights to humans.

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