

Fighting Climate Change

—What is to be done?



The Utopian publishes the following proposal from Jack Gerson, together with suggestions from Eric Chester and Jon M. about important measures /social reorganization to reduce the effects of climate change. We hope that this is the beginning of a much-needed conversation, and that others will contribute to this discussion.

Proposal from Jack:

I think that there are meaningful measures that can be done to reduce the effects of climate change. Here are measures that come immediately to mind. I am sure that others have other good ideas.

1. An end to the clear-cutting of forests. Unfortunately, Bolsonaro in Brazil seems to be ready to facilitate more destruction of the Amazon rain forest.
2. Massive planting of more trees -- double or more the existing growth.
3. Reorganization of where people live and work. (Or, alternatively, create the opportunity for people to reorganize where they live and work.) Massive increase in decent housing and services in urban areas, allowing people to live closer to their jobs and thus reducing the need to drive distances to work.

4. Massive increase in mass transit, similarly reducing dependence on gas burning vehicles.
5. Phase-out vehicles powered by internal combustion engines.
6. Decrease consumption of meat and dairy products over time.

I think that these measures will require considerable reorganizing of society. I am skeptical that capitalism will do what's needed until the situation becomes much graver. And it would very likely try to do so by top down, autarchic means. And even those will surely be too late to avert much suffering.

So I think that we need to both work for measures like those that I mentioned, and for the revolutionary reorganization of society.

Reply from Eric:

The earth is headed toward a catastrophic crisis within a very few decades and all that is on offer is business as usual.

I think that Jack has the beginning of a real program but it is too limited. Free mass transit, a banning of cars in cities, a planned development of housing around mass transit, a fast railroad system across the country and a ban on short-haul flights, an immediate end to fracking, immediately phasing out plastics and substantially reducing the production of cattle and pigs, a drastic reduction in the military budget and the shifting of scientists from building new bomb and weapons to developing methods of mitigating the oncoming disaster. Even with such a program we are due for a very rough period with hurricanes, droughts and volatile weather patterns.

The idea that capitalism can deal with climate change seems to me to be fantasy. The question then arises in the absence of a revolutionary movement to replace it what can we expect. For sure it will not be good.

Reply from Jon:

While I agree with Jack's 12/28 list of "meaningful measures to reduce climate change", I think that it is crucial to add something about the need for the radical dismantling and reorganizing of

industrial agriculture in this country and around the world. Industrial agriculture, if I am not misinformed, is currently responsible for about one third of the greenhouse gas emissions in this country -- or, at least, is easily the third largest contributor, behind energy and transport. That's not just from cows farting in confined animal feeding operations. In relying on modern industrial agriculture, as Vandana Shiva has said, we are basically eating oil. The machinery, the fertilizer and pesticides, the processing, storing and shipping, even the packaging of the products, are all oil-dependent and, therefore, heavily carbon-emitting. What is now being called regenerative agriculture seems to offer a more sustainable, and even a carbon sequestering, approach to food production. It is also much more conducive to small and moderate-sized operations which, it seems clear, are equally as productive as their agri-giant counterparts, and far less destructive of their soils and ecosystems.

And then there's the part about moving to a far less meat-based diet (especially less beef). It's not just the methane from the resulting farts that's the problem. The amount of water and grain—and therefore, oil—needed to produce meat (especially, but not only, beef) food calories is grotesquely extravagant given the current environmental trajectory. Michael Pollen's dictum ('Eat food, not too much, mostly plants') is on point, not only for human health, but also for the health of the climate.

Long statement -- forgive me! -- requesting the addition to Jack's list of "Rapid conversion of industrial agriculture away from reliance on fossil fuel inputs and ever-larger holdings, and toward small and moderate-sized farms moving toward sustainable farming practices"... or some such.
