

## SOCIAL CHANGE/CLIMATE CHANGE - JAMES GOODMAN

At the April seminar James Goodman spoke on Social Change/Climate Change. On the International front governments are driven by moral imperative to avert climate change. However some of their actions interfere with this objective. For example the Victorian Govt subsidises the use of coal.

The presence of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been massively increased by the industrial revolution. (There has been a recent increase in cataclysmic events.) Historically the USA and Europe are far ahead of other nations in responsibility for this rise in carbon dioxide although China now produces more. Who is to take responsibility, and how much responsibility each is to take has caused increasing division. But also some attempts at a response.

The general impact of climate change will fall disproportionately on the poor nations, those less able to cope. There are the melting glaciers in the Himalayas and rising sea levels around the world. Because in poor countries people live on marginal land they will be effected by these.

Climate Justice is only concerned with the human species. Fighting climate change does offer the opportunity for human solidarity by combining science and justice to produce reductions in emissions in a just way. Some countries and peoples are more responsible than others are and some are more able to adapt. In Australia 80% of electricity production is from coal whereas in most other countries it is about 50%.

UN Climate Policy differentiates responsibilities for causing climate change and for actions to cure it. There were emission reduction obligations for the 37 high emitting industrial countries. By 2004 54% of emissions were caused by developing countries, largely due to increased emissions by China and India. The increases in these countries have the greatest impact on their own citizens. Because of the worldwide effects of the emissions there is the need for recognition of the mutual interdependence in solving the problem. In line with this, there has been a remarkable growth of social movements around the world to contest the attempt by rich countries to avoid their responsibilities.

Australia's Climate Policy is aimed at a Carbon Policy Reduction Scheme (CPRS). This scheme would cap the number of permits and reduce the total year by year. But it would be possible to access unlimited overseas permits, which means they would be able to continue producing the same level of emissions in Australia as long as they were purchasing offsets overseas. (In Australia 1000 companies produce 70% of the emissions.) The Carbon Price Mechanism (CPM - Carbon Tax) is the same as the CPRS in that it is permit based. For the first three years the permit price will be fixed. There is expected to be compensation given or free permits issued. Whether the CPM will be effective in reducing emissions will depend on whether as price goes up

demand will drop. But the price paid is not necessarily all important - in a growth economy income can be much more important because even though a price increase may increase efficiency this will not lead to reduced emissions. The International experience shows that the net effect of carbon taxes is minimal unless, like Denmark, all revenues are spent on renewables.

Like all indirect taxes the carbon tax is socially unjust. It is levied at the same rate on everyone irrespective of income, and transfer payments or income tax breaks never keep pace with the increase in taxes, so in the end it gives climate policy a poor reputation.

There needs to be a 100% cut in emissions by 2050. There needs to be a complete phase out of fossil fuel production. There will need to be direct regulation to accomplish this.