

Extractivism for the «energy transition» :

A contradiction to be faced and resolved

How to reconcile the absolute right of local communities to reject mining projects affecting their rights and their environment, with the reality that human societies will continue to depend on a certain amount of (renewable) energies , even if it is clear that the needs for energy can and must be radically reduced ?

Our coalition must have a position on this problem. As a politically responsible international network, we cannot avoid the question : neither *by only demanding the end to fossil fuels*, when extractivism supposedly for the «energy transition» is multiplying environmental destructions ; nor *by restricting our political program to refusing all extractivist projects, including for materials of the transition*, while ignoring global realities and the needs of humanity.

During the last webinar, our comrade of the ONIC referred implicitly to the contradiction by putting forward the position of the Uwa saying that oil is the blood of the Pacha Mama which never be touched, but also by recognising that humanity wants to benefit from some objects of modern technology like mobile téléphones, while refusing others. (Similarly, the Zapatistas say no to TV, but the women say yes to washing machines!). Only refusing all extractivism by principle, is slightly hypocritical, as a minimum must and will be done. It is a position which can protect strong communities, but will simply shift the projects towards others less able to defend themselves. In reality, it is a position that has been called the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard!).

Having a credible solution for this contradiction is essential, because more or less consciously *all people of goodwill probably ask themselves this obvious question*. A clear answer to it is essential in order to motivate a truly effective global movement for radical change. Without it, we are not proposing a realistic alternative to the current regime.

Expose the false promises of the official project

To convince widely of the necessity of a radically alternative program, it is essential that our narrative and actions denounce *the program of the current regime, which - with the excuse of the energy «transition» - is to provide for the constant exponential growth vital to the functioning of capitalist economies*, by providing unlimited energy for the unlimited growth of superfluous and often destructive productions. (Arms, luxury cruises, the publicity industry, stupidly «intelligent» objects and other superfluous consumer high tech products - the list is almost endless !) 1

In reality this program does not plan to replace fossil fuels, but simply to additionally dispose of renewable energies. It is thus no accident that while solar energy is booming, more coal is being mined than ever in history, and no accident that 30 COPs have allowed concentrations of CO2 to increase every year. That is why official scenarios (even those of the IPCC) promising zero «net» emissions for 2050, rely on the hypothesis of the development of a mammoth and still inexistent industry of carbon capture, which would itself imply huge amounts of extractivism and pollution.

This scenario leaves no room for redistribution and social justice on a planetary level. On the contrary, it wholly depends on continuing violent colonial exploitation of the populations and parts of the world condemned to supply raw materials and become «environmental sacrifice zones».

The logic of an unrestrained capitalist market forces its leaders to either believe in this obviously unviable scénario, or to retreat into climate denial. Finally the most realistic capitalist is perhaps Mr. Musk, with his project to leave for Mars...

An alternative proposal

Briefly, we can bridge the contradiction with the position that :

- All communities have the absolute right to SAY NO to projects affecting their communities, be they renewable energy projects or extractivist projects for energy transition minerals.

- Those who wish to accept one must have complete control over the conditions in which they are done, and including what benefits they require for themselves. (Control over conditions, should of course also involve more general public policies, such as total bans on open pit mining, industrial mining in rivers and fracking, for example.)

Imposing such conditions would enormously increase the costs of extractive projects, which would have the very positive effect of raising prices and reducing demand for unnecessary uses, and incentivising more efficient use of ressources, recycling or their replacement with other materials. Thus the resistance of communities menaced by «transition» materials extractivism, can converge with the global climate movements demands for a *huge reduction* of energy consumption by the richer populations, the richest 10 % being responsible for half of climate changeemissions.¹

The good news is that all the materials for the energy transition, even for the official growth scenario, would necessitate less *than half* of current coal extraction, without speaking of the other ongoing mining of copper, nickel, etc. Also, its huge advantage is that most of the materials used for renewable energies can be recycled, whereas fossil fuel consumption of course must be endlessly renewed. For that reason extraction for the transition will decline after a peak around 2045. (2)

Importantly, the official scenario includes an unchecked increase in electric vehicles, which would account for *three quarters of all extraction*, notably including a huge proportion of

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<https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/worlds-richest-10-produce-half-carbon-emissions-while-poorest-35-billion-account>. Moreover, The top 1% of emitters globally had energy-related CO2 emissions more than 1 000 times greater than those of the bottom 1% !

<https://www.iea.org/commentaries/the-world-s-top-1-of-emitters-produce-over-1000-times-more-co2-than-the-bottom-1>

2 www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2542435123004117).

3 As in Gandhi's conception of the «village republic», in which «There is enough for each man's need, but not for each man's greed».

the copper, and practically all lithium and nickel. Simply replacing fossil fuel powered by electric vehicles should thus not be seen as «part of the solution», but as the principal menace to the environment of such an uncritical energy transition. Replacing them with public transport, electric bicycles, or car sharing should be a central demand of the climate movement.

The other two essential demands should be to prioritise retrofitting of buildings in order to decrease energy needs for heating, and much more and better recycling of materials.

Climate activists in the North underline this necessity of «degrowth» of rich countries (with the exception of the poor in rich countries suffering from energy scarcity), often talking more positively of «a society of sufficiency», a vision which rejoins the indigenous concept of «Buen vivir»⁽³⁾.

A practical proposal of the degrowth movement is that of «sustainable consumption corridors». To avoid imposing a single model of consumption, it could be allowed to vary between a minimal consumption assuring dignified living, and a maximum level. Such a policy would for instance eliminate the multiplication of air flights, limousines & SUVs, etc.

Reduction of energy and raw materials consumption would be attained not only by promoting energy efficiency, recycling and reducing scandalous inequalities, but more essentially by societal choices , for example as we have seen by replacing individual electric cars with public transport.

At a more fundamental level, public policies and credit privileging the activities of social relations and care, rather than of material production and consumption. Thus, the objectives of reducing climate change and preserving this living planet converge with our common struggles for more human communities and societies.