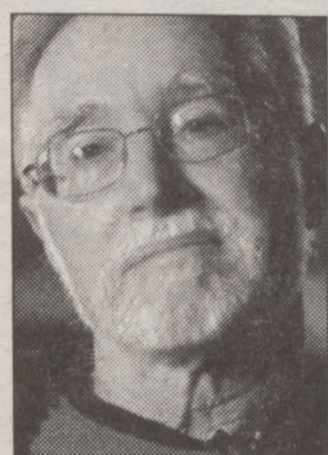


Radicals and reformers: Part 1: Climate change

BY ROBIN HAHNEL
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

There is a difference between radicals and reformers. Radicals believe we need fundamental "system change" because as long as the system is left in place it will prove impossible to solve important problems. Absent system change, radicals believe solutions can only be partial and remain vulnerable to rollback.



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Reformers, on the other hand, believe problems can be solved adequately without system change. Reformers are also more skeptical that system change can be achieved or will prove as desirable as radicals imagine. But radicals and reformers are bound together for at least three reasons.

1. A cursory glance at history reveals that many people move from one camp to the other during their lifetimes. Many a youthful radical, frustrated when system change proves elusive, continues to fight for reforms within the system. And many who first became active in a reform campaign has been radicalized when the system proves not to be amenable to

reform.

2. Reformers, of course, work in progressive movements and campaigns to win reforms. But radicals must also work in reform movements and campaigns for a very simple reason: Those who are ready for system change are still too few, and only by joining reform efforts can radicals hope to interact with enough people to eventually build popular support for system change.

3. Radicals and reformers often deliver a "one-two punch" that is more powerful than either could deliver alone. Not only do more far reaching demands reinforce convictions among the rank and file that what they are asking for is only what is right and reasonable, the threat of radical demands also induces defenders of the status quo to yield to more moderate demands for reform. The willingness of radicals to engage in more disruptive tactics than reformers can also increase the bargaining leverage of the reform movement. On the other hand, when not part of a larger movement of people whose demands are less far reaching and tactics are less confrontational, radicals will reach few with their message and be easily

repressed.

In short, radicals and reformers need one another. So even when their relationship ceases to be a "marriage of love," it must remain a "marriage that works." In the remainder of this column I offer an example of how we all lose when radicals unnecessarily undermine reformers in the movement to prevent climate change. In columns to follow I explore how reformers sometimes undermine radicals to the detriment of both, and finally, how we all win when radicals and reformers play nicely together.

Radicals believe the global market system is the primary cause of incipient climate change, and only when this system based on competition and greed is replaced by a new system based on equitable cooperation will it prove possible to adequately protect the natural environment. Indeed, I have been making this argument in one form or another for over three decades myself. However, some leaders of the climate justice movement have gone further to argue that because the market system is the problem carbon markets cannot be part of a solution, and some have gone so far as to celebrate the collapse of the United Nations sponsored Kyoto framework on grounds that it was never more than a "pretend solution." These climate justice radicals are dead wrong and do serious damage to prospects of averting climate change.

It is unrealistic to believe global capitalism can be replaced by eco-socialism in the next few years. But if we are to prevent climate change before it is too late we must achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the here and now. To do this we need an international treaty that places mandatory caps on national emissions. Moreover, if caps are to be fair, then richer countries, which bear greater "responsibility" for cumulative carbon emissions and have greater "capability" to solve the climate problem, must be assigned tighter, or lower caps. However — and this is what many climate justice activists fail to understand — if national emissions are capped fairly then (1) carbon trading significantly reduces the global cost of emission reductions and thereby lowers political resistance to necessary reductions, and (2) carbon trading generates a large flow of payments from more developed to less developed countries. Which means the climate treaty negotiated

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in Japan in 1997 known as the Kyoto Protocol put the world on the right track, and it was a huge setback when the Kyoto framework was abandoned at the climate meetings in Copenhagen in December 2009 and replaced by a vague agreement to discuss voluntary emission targets.

Make no mistake about it, the US delegation, headed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Obama himself, bears primary responsibility for scuttling the Kyoto framework in Copenhagen. However, the US demolition squad got a surprising assist when radicals in the climate justice movement denounced "cap and trade" and "carbon markets" as "false solutions" in street protests outside the meetings. In short, while climate reformers were fighting desperately to "fix" the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen, some radicals in the climate justice movement witlessly aided and abetted those maneuvering to "nix" it.

When we cannot wait for system change to address climate change, it is tragic when climate justice radicals cheer the demise of a treaty which placed mandatory emission reductions on the countries which are most responsible for causing climate change and can best afford to bear the costs of averting climate change simply because it permitted carbon trading — trading which worked to the benefit of lesser developed countries!

What would workers think of anti-capitalists who denounce unions fighting for wage increases for their members as purveyors of "pretend solutions" because wage slavery is the problem, and therefore wage reform cannot be part of a solution?

By 2009, many reform leaders knew what was wrong with Kyoto and how to fix it. Kyoto assigned the advanced economies mandatory caps while temporarily exempting lesser developed countries from mandatory caps. In 1997, this "rough first cut" was agreed to on a provisional basis on grounds that the advanced economies needed to lead the way. But this created two problems: (1) There are large differences in "responsibility" and "capability" among lesser developed countries. So to treat them all equally, as Kyoto did, was unfair. (2) Because it is difficult to estimate how much a project will reduce emissions above and beyond what would have occurred in any case, mistakes will inevitably be made in certifying emission reduction credits for sale in international carbon markets. And if a

project that is awarded more credits than it deserves is located in a country without a cap on its national emissions, the sale of the "bogus credits" undermines the global emission reduction target and thereby weakens efforts to avert climate change. But one change can solve both problems! Set caps on emissions in all countries according to a continuous index of differential responsibility and capability.

This simple change would make a post-Kyoto treaty more fair, provide powerful incentives for national governments to award only as many emission reduction credits as projects truly deserve, and most importantly, prevent sales of any bogus credits from reducing global emissions reductions below the target set by the treaty. Instead of denouncing cap and trade and carbon markets, climate justice activists should have been fighting alongside reformers in Copenhagen to protect the Kyoto framework from its enemies and fix its flaws by replacing the outdated annex-1 non-annex-1 categories with a more accurate index measuring national responsibility and capability on a continuum known as the Greenhouse Development Rights Framework "responsibility and capacity indicator." Based on readily available data, this indicator requires high-income countries to reduce emissions significantly right away, middle-income countries to reduce emissions only after achieving a higher level of per capita income, and allows low income countries to raise emissions for decades while they struggle to achieve a minimal level of economic development.

Moreover, by solving the problem of how to cap emissions in all countries fairly, this indicator makes it possible to leave the difficult job of awarding emission reduction credits to national governments — freeing the international treaty organization to concentrate on the far easier job of measuring actual national annual emissions — and it protects the global emission cap from being punctured by any bogus carbon trading that does occur.

Had radicals joined reformers in Copenhagen fighting to fix rather than nix Kyoto they would not only have found themselves on the side of the angels instead of the devils, they would have found a receptive rather than a hostile audience among the rank and file concerned about climate change for the message that only system change will eliminate what is causing climate change and thereby make victories secure. Instead, some climate justice radicals unnecessarily alienated those they hope to attract. Climate justice radicals who made this blunder need to make serious amends to climate reform leaders as well as the movement rank and file if we are to patch up working relations so we can all move forward together.

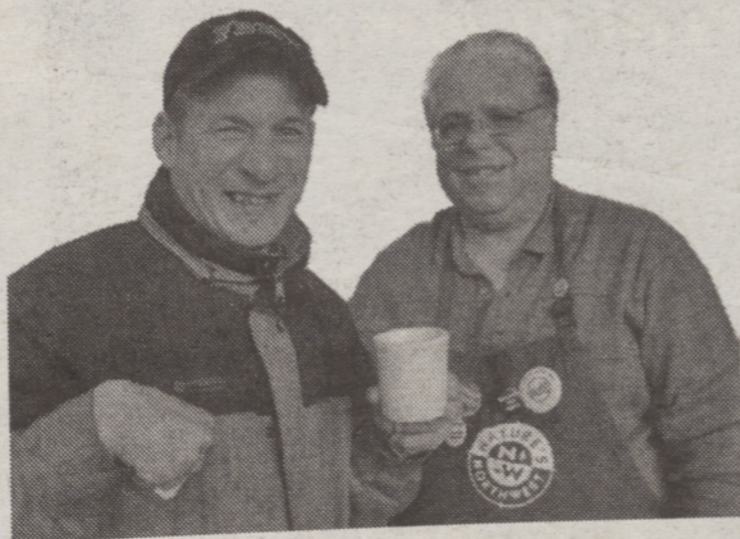
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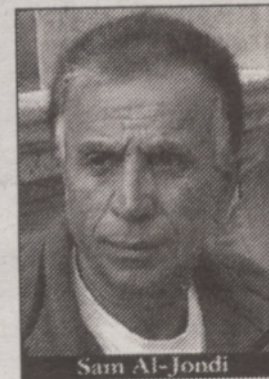
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