



## CLIMATE JUSTICE

*To solve the climate crisis we have to tackle poverty*

**T**HE CLIMATE CRISIS is fundamentally a crisis of injustice. As such it cannot be understood, let alone mitigated, apart from the poverty and inequality that are its backdrop.

In a way, we already know this. The “equity question” was taking the stage (for example, the discussion about “green jobs”) even before President Obama’s inaugural, wherein he told us that “the world has changed, and we must change with it,” and, “we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world’s resources without regard to effect.”

But climate justice—particularly international climate justice—will not come easy, and it cannot fall to Obama alone to explain why. This is a job for the climate movements, and in the U.S. particularly they’ve made little progress in raising critical questions of American global responsibility. Even the environmental justice movement, a clear voice for solidarity, has avoided the radioactive core of the problem: the tangible international obligations that the American people must accept before any real climate mobilization can become possible.

There’s still time, but not much. If anything is certain, it’s that this coming year, as the climate negotiations finally get

serious, can’t just be a year of tactics and pragmatism. The December showdown in Copenhagen, even if it succeeds in mapping the way forward, will only be a stop on the road. We’ve got to use it to deepen the conversation about justice and solidarity.

The divides are terrible and deep, even more so internationally than here at home. The economic divides, in particular, are wider and more desperate. And insofar as these divides—North vs. South, rich vs. poor, developed vs. underdeveloped—are the roots of the climate impasse, so too are they the grounds upon which the battle to break it must be fought.

What is needed is an emergency global mobilization. And to do its proper part in such a mobilization, the U.S. must shoulder its fair share of the costs. It must do so, moreover, even as it strains with equal vigor on the domestic front. The hope, of course, is that all this effort can be composed into a green New Deal that snowballs into a great transition that not only stabilizes the climate but lifts up the poor, too. And a great hope it is, but not one that can stop at our shorelines. There is only one atmosphere, and it is globally that the battle to stabilize the climate will be won or lost.

Any true climate mobilization must solve the problem of developmental justice. It must open ways forward for the poor, and this despite the fact that greenhouse-gas concentrations are already far too high, leaving almost no “atmospheric space” to support the energy and food production, water purification, reimagined cities and settlements, transportation, and health services that will be needed if the poor are to have an honest chance at decent lives. Be clear here—if the poor, clustered in the world’s developing regions, don’t see better futures flowing from an international climate accord, then while it may be negotiated and even ratified, it will not stand.

So who pays? The answer must be “the rich,” or at least “the unpoor,” which is to say that the climate transition will not be cheap, and those who have the capacity to pay must do so. This must be true regardless of whether those who can pay live in rich countries like the U.S. or developing countries like China. Such an arrangement won’t be easy to contrive, but it has to be our goal. Nothing else will work. 

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