

## Good sense on global warming

### Introduction

Good sense, for Antonio Gramsci, was the “healthy nucleus of common sense”.<sup>1</sup> This article tries to make sense of what Gramsci meant by good sense, and seeks to develop his understanding of good sense into *resources* we can use to stop runaway global warming in time. Although I conclude by briefly outlining the politics of good sense on global warming, the article is not primarily concerned with *how* we use good sense on global warming. Before using something, we must know what that something is. The something here is the potential we – as human beings, as most people, as working class people across the world – have *in our heads* to solve the climate crisis. I shall argue in the first most general part of the article that *good sense* is a *conception of necessity*, an *interest in truth*, and a *relational, emergent* morality amongst those who do *not* rule our planet. More concretely, the second part of the article will find good sense on global warming in the shape of *use value rationality* and *anti-capitalism*, in *climate justice* and in changing *livelihoods* prompted by climate change already under way.

This is not an article about what Antonio Gramsci said about global warming. I agree with John Bellamy Foster<sup>2</sup> who claims Gramsci did not connect his Marxism sufficiently to nature and physical realities. Some of the recent scholarship on the “ecological Gramsci”<sup>3</sup> is too anthropocentric, focused on human beings, and the way we “frame” nature.<sup>4</sup> The “philosophy of praxis” we need for the age of global warming, by contrast, needs to be much more in tune with nature, and the natural sciences themselves; “(R)evising slightly Marx’s principle of historical materialism, we can say human beings make their own history, not entirely under conditioning of their choosing but rather on the basis of natural-environmental and social conditions inherited from the past.”<sup>5</sup>

It is not all in our heads. Gramsci’s democratic understanding of popular consciousness remains very important, however, for anybody who wants to build a mass movement to stop

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<sup>1</sup> Gramsci, , 1971, p327

<sup>2</sup> Foster, Clark, and York, 2011, pp215–247; Foster, 1999, pvii

<sup>3</sup> Eg Ekers, Hart, Kipfer, Loftus, 2013

<sup>4</sup> Ytterstad, 2014

<sup>5</sup> Foster, Clark and York, 2011, p291

global warming. In his *Prison Notebooks*, he repeatedly insisted that everybody – not just a privileged few – was a philosopher and an intellectual, with the capacity to grasp “advanced science”.<sup>6</sup>

The resources of good sense on global warming, in other words, are consciousness resources of the many. They are not reserved to the few who have read the very eloquent writings by Marx and Engels themselves on nature, refined by contemporary ecological Marxists.<sup>7</sup> But Gramsci says different things about good sense. This is fine, because good sense really do consist of multiple resources. But I am dubious of some passages where Gramsci seems to equate good sense with Marxism, or with his particular take on Marxism, the “philosophy of praxis”.<sup>8</sup> Some interpreters of Gramsci even suggests that the role of Marxism is to “create “good sense” in place of “common sense””.<sup>9</sup> I disagree, and I will stick with the idea that good sense on global warming is a resource, that Marxists may or may not learn from, and develop further. As Stuart Hall put it: “The ‘good sense’ of the people exists, but it is just the beginning, not the end of politics. It doesn’t *guarantee* anything.”<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, as I have shown elsewhere<sup>11</sup>, Stuart Hall and most readers of Gramsci do not even try to answer what a good beginning good sense really is, for anybody who wants to change the world. That is what I intend to do, with examples and illustrations, in what follows.

Some of these examples and illustrations come from my experience of trying to build a popular climate movement in Norway. As deputy leader of Concerned Scientists Norway I have been involved in building two alliances. The broadest one, the Climate Election Alliance, was originally set up in 2011 by Grandparents Climate Action. By the time of the last General Election in Norway, more than 100 organizations had jointed the Election Alliance, including the biggest single union, the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees (NUMGE). Together with two other unions, most of the environmental organizations and even the Norwegian Church, NUMGE supported a short book I wrote last

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<sup>6</sup> Gramsci., 1971, pp9,323,347,424

<sup>7</sup> Foster, Clark, and York, 2011; Foster, 1999; Malm, 2007

<sup>8</sup> Coben, 2002, p269; Gramsci, 1971, pp345–346, 386–387, 423, 462

<sup>9</sup> Boggs, 1976, p71

<sup>10</sup> Hall, 1991, p125

<sup>11</sup> Ytterstad, 2012, pp25–26, 68–71

year, demanding 100 000 new climate jobs in offshore wind and in transport, while cooling down Norwegian oil.<sup>12</sup>

The other alliance emerged from the sponsors of that book. This year we were able to host a magnificent Conference called “Bridge to the Future – A Climate Solution from Below”. Attended by 350 people in the House of Literature in Oslo, it was also watched via streaming by more than 1000 people elsewhere in Norway.<sup>13</sup> Parts of that day, the hashtag climate jobs (#klimajobber14), a non-existent word in Norwegian public debate, traded as second only to Ukraine in Norway on twitter. I have written elsewhere on how the alliance experienced it: “To varying degrees of course, but nonetheless: it was a day we felt that almost impossible feeling of popular empowerment over the present and pending nightmare called global warming.”<sup>14</sup>

Tempting as it is, I am not going to explain success stories from Norway as a product of good sense on global warming. To detect and strengthen good sense is a question of art, not just of science. But having a scientific understanding of good sense as a resource helps, and it has at least given me some confidence to act upon the statement by climate author and activist Bill McKibben: “Climate change is the single biggest thing humans have ever done on this planet. The only thing that needs to be bigger is our movement to stop it”<sup>15</sup>.

### **Conception of necessity – the human being resource**

So what then, according to Gramsci, is good sense? Longstanding readers of this journal, like myself, will have seen this description of contradictory consciousness many times before:

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousnesses): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all

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<sup>12</sup> Ytterstad, 2013. The book was followed by a sequel on how to cool down Norwegian oil (Ryggvik, 2013), also financed by the NUMGE, together with the Norwegian Civil Service Union.

<sup>13</sup> Videos from the Conference, two of them in English, one of them a speech from Jonathan Neale, can be seen at our website <http://klimakonferanse2014.no/>

<sup>14</sup> Ytterstad, 2015

<sup>15</sup> McKibben won the last Sophie Prize in Norway, and this quote from McKibben was often used when he came to receive it, in 2013. [http://www.sofieprisen.no/Prize\\_Winners/2013/index.html](http://www.sofieprisen.no/Prize_Winners/2013/index.html)

of his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed<sup>16</sup> This quote is from a note called “Relation between science, religion and common sense,” and it is indeed one of the richest notes on good sense in the prison notebooks. But it is not in this passage, but a few pages earlier, that Gramsci explicitly attempts to define good sense as “a conception of necessity which gives a conscious direction to one’s activity”.<sup>17</sup>

There are differences between this definition of good sense and the consciousness “implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all of his fellow-workers”. The latter description suggests that good sense is something local that belongs to the working class.<sup>18</sup> Following Raymond Williams, Alf Nilsen proposes “that we consider the nature and origins of good sense as a *local rationality*.”<sup>19</sup> Such local rationality is often a very useful resource for combatting racism inside the workplace, for example.<sup>20</sup> It is not so useful in the case of global warming. Local experience can certainly help prompt working class engagement on global warming, as I will show when I discuss livelihood below. But to understand why people choose to fight against global warming, Gramsci’s actual definition of good sense, is much more relevant. Elsewhere, Gramsci elaborates on this definition. By necessity he means *perceived* necessity for most *people*, “necessity exists when there exists an effective and active *premiss*, consciousness of which in people’s minds has become operative, proposing concrete goals to the collective consciousness and constituting a complex of convictions and beliefs which act powerfully in the form of ‘popular beliefs’.”<sup>21</sup>

Such a conception of necessity on global warming has to do with the amount of greenhouse gases we can emit into the atmosphere. The perceived necessity on global warming is developing fast, and becoming ever more concrete for people. It used to be about how many parts of greenhouse gases per million (ppm) a livable atmosphere could endure. In 2006, the United Nations “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change” (IPCC) estimated the threshold for dangerous climate change at 450 ppm. Prompted by climate scientists like James Hansen, who in 2007 that 450 ppm was too risky, activists soon began to perceive this

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<sup>16</sup> Gramsci, 1971, p.333

<sup>17</sup> Gramsci, 1971, p. 327

<sup>18</sup> It also seems to suggest that good sense belongs to men, but I see such masculine connotations as a product of conventions of Gramsci’s time. When I cite “man” in this article, I mean human beings.

<sup>19</sup> Nilsen, 2009, p. 124

<sup>20</sup> Hall, 1996, p432

<sup>21</sup> Nilsen, 2009, pp.412-413

necessity more radically. Author and environmentalist Bill McKibben set up 350.org, insisting that the limit should be 350 ppm, *down 50 from where we are now*, and spends the first two terrifying chapters of his book *Eaarth* making sure that we know “in our bones” that “Eaarth is an uphill planet now”, and that “You have to work harder to get where you’re going”<sup>22</sup>. More recently, McKibben has helped clarify and popularize the idea of a *carbon budget*. To understand the threshold nowadays, you just have to “do the math”. We have 565 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide left to burn, if we are to have a reasonable chance to avoid runaway climate change. Stock markets, however, have already priced in 2795 gigatonnes worth of fossil fuel reserves. Investors have, in other words, already made a bet that the world will fail to curb emissions. Climate activists, by contrast, now know that “We’d have to keep 80 per cent of those reserves locked away underground..”<sup>23</sup> McKibben’s “Do the Math” article, originally a *Rolling Stone* article, was also published as a foreword to another book with some good sense on global warming, written by Mike Berners-Lee and Duncan Clark called *The Burning Question: We can’t burn half the world’s oil, coal and gas: so how do we quit?*

The conception of necessity is thus a resource that is not restricted to workers. It is simply part of human rationality. We are essentially better equipped to fathom, and hence potentially to stop, global warming than snails. No simplification of the climate sciences and no metaphor for the carbon cycle (eg. the bathtub cannot be filled with more water than goes out) will ever convince intelligent animals, like dolphins, of the perils ahead. You can free Willy, but you cannot make him into a philosopher. As Gramsci puts it: “Thought is proper to man as such, or at least to any man who is not a pathological cretin.”<sup>24</sup>

### **The interest in truth - the radical Enlightenment resource**

This human capacity to think, however, is also a historical achievement. Gramsci could not have displayed such faith in the good sense of the people without the heritage of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. This heritage is, contrary to what some postmodern readings of Gramsci imply<sup>25</sup>, a good thing. When the bourgeoisie was a

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<sup>22</sup> McKibben, 2010, p. 86

<sup>23</sup> Bill McKibben In Berners-Lee and Clark, 2013, p xv

<sup>24</sup> Gramsci, 1971, p347

<sup>25</sup> Eg Nun and Cartier, 1986

revolutionary class, its best thinkers were passionate about seeking the truth.<sup>26</sup> A whole range of thinkers on the environment were much more honest and radical 200 years ago. John Bellamy Foster has drawn our attention to the “Lauderdale Paradox”, after the eighth Earl of Lauderdale. “The common sense of mankind,” Lauderdale contended, “would revolt” at any proposal to augment private riches “by creating a scarcity of any commodity generally useful and necessary to man”.<sup>27</sup> This revolting state of affairs is now part and parcel of neoliberal hegemony in the shape of carbon trading.<sup>28</sup>

The conception of necessity, indeed *natural* necessity for emancipation, runs through Thomas Paine’s 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*, for example: “however our eyes may be dazzled with show, or our ears deceived by sound; however prejudice may warp our wills, or interest darken our understanding, the simple voice of nature and reason will say, 'tis right.” But the bourgeois versions of universal ideals were always incomplete, even hypocritical. Slavery was rampant in the US when The Declaration of Independence stated that we are created equals, that we should all have the right to pursue happiness, and that “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government”<sup>29</sup>.

Because of this hypocrisy the workers’ movement took up such ideals, tried to deepen them, well before Marx and Engels did so explicitly. Paul Blackledge shows that the demand for equality had a double meaning for the latter two. Part of it arose spontaneously by the bodily experience of “crying social inequalities”, but the other part consisted in the radicalization of the bourgeois universal demands. To Marx, Engels and Gramsci, arguments for universal, human freedom, did not thus simply break down into the bread and butter issues connected to social inequalities, typically fought over by trade unions. Rather the working class were seen “as *potential* agents, not only of their own liberation, but also of the universal liberation of humanity.”<sup>30</sup>

The conception of necessity is more rhetorical than real among politicians and capitalists today. Another resource of good sense, alluded to by Gramsci, largely explains why.

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<sup>26</sup> Harman, 1998, 2008

<sup>27</sup> Foster, Clark, and York, 2011, p55

<sup>28</sup> Lohman, 2011

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>

<sup>30</sup> Blackledge, 2012, pp52–53

Although many of our rulers understand the danger of global warming, the system they rule – or that rule them – put severe limits on their actions. Therefore, *they are not interested in all the truths about global warming*. Good sense, therefore, is *something that needs to be fought for*, not something we can passively await:

The philosophy of praxis does not aim at the peaceful resolution of existing contradictions in history and society but is rather the very theory of these contradictions. It is not the instrument of government of the dominant groups in order to gain the consent of and exercise hegemony over the subaltern classes; It is the expression of these subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who *have an interest in knowing all truths*.<sup>31</sup>

Three examples will suffice to show that the interest in knowing “all truths” about global warming, the second part of good sense in my reading of Gramsci, is not evenly distributed amongst human beings.

First, the deniers. They are a motley crew. Many who doubt or belittle the danger of global warming may just be ignorant of, or perhaps psychologically predisposed against, the warming and warning signs. But the “merchants of doubt”, especially in the US,<sup>32</sup> come from the fossil fuel industry or are extreme free marketers. Before the Norwegian Progress Party was elected into government, as – horror of horrors – they are now, their climate spokesperson tried to have their national congress vote that they did not believe in the science behind global warming. He has also went on record saying that CO2 is something the left has chosen as a substitute for Karl Marx, echoing the conservative and famous denier James Dellinpole, who calls Greens watermelons – red on the inside.<sup>33</sup> Moronic as this appears, there is a kernel of truth hidden in the free-marketers’ campaigns against natural scientists as communists in disguise. They deny global warming not because they have better scientific arguments, but because they realize or half-guess that in order to stop it, you would need massive government intervention into the economy. This intervention is not

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<sup>31</sup> Gramsci, In Thomas, 2009, p452

<sup>32</sup> Hoggan, 2009; Klein, 2011; Oreskes and Conway, 2010

<sup>33</sup> <http://jamesdellingpole.com/wordpress/james-books/watermelons/>

just a socialist argument<sup>34</sup>), but something famous environmentalists like Lester Brown<sup>35</sup> and leading American energy researchers also call for.<sup>36</sup>

This, of course, is anathema for neoliberalism. Hard core neoliberalism is therefore not at all interested in knowing “all truths” about global warming.

My second example concerns not only the current “blue-blue” Norwegian government, but the previous “red-green” one as well. Part state-owned, partly privatised Statoil have put substantial efforts into convincing the public that Norwegian oil and gas is the cleanest in the world, sustainable, and therefore climate friendly in its own right.<sup>37</sup> Former leader of the Norwegian Labour Party, now head of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg has been instrumental in pushing across this message. As Yngve Nilsen has shown, Stoltenberg has, for more than 20 years, been heavily and personally involved in ensuring that Norwegian climate change policy in the mid-nineties converged around the notion of “unilateral common implementation”. This means that Norway does not require the signature of international partners, but reserves the right to credit itself for what it defined as global mitigative measures: “Norwegian export of oil, gas, and gaspower (gasskraft) were defined as such measures, and Norwegian climate change policy consequently came to equal the facilitation of production and marketing of petroleum from the Norwegian continental shelf.”<sup>38</sup>.

More than 10 years after Nilsen’s important dissertation, this message holds sway: “Don’t mention the oil” is part and parcel of the hegemony of Norwegian climate change policy. When research<sup>39</sup> challenged this absurdity in the summer of 2013, demonstrating that a limit on Norwegian oil would indeed reduce world emissions, climate spokespersons from the Tory Party, the Progress Party *and* the Labour Party, quite simply said they did not “believe” it. Again, it is the lack of a real interest in knowing all truths, the lack of good sense, which best explains this other, more specific Norwegian stripe of denialism.

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<sup>34</sup> Neale, 2008

<sup>35</sup> Brown, 2009

<sup>36</sup> Jacobsen and Delucci, 2011

<sup>37</sup> Ihlen, 2007; Nilsen, 2001; Ryggvik, 2013; Skjærseth and Skodvin, 2003

<sup>38</sup> Nilsen, 2001, p195

<sup>39</sup> Fæhn, 2013



My third example, the most challenging one perhaps for revolutionary socialists, is how the unions in Norway have responded to the proposed campaign for climate jobs. Do the workers really want to “educate themselves”, and challenge the oil-industrial complex<sup>40</sup> underpinning Norwegian climate change policies? It is no coincidence, nor very surprising, that so far the unions most solidly behind the idea of a climate transition away from oil, organise workers in the public sector. There is less of a conflict between their immediate job interests and the long term universal interest in curbing emissions than in parts of the private sector. It is more difficult with the Industry and Energy Union, who organise members both in renewable industries *and* in fossil fuels. Their leader is concerned about the breakneck speed of Norwegian oil exploration at the moment, but refers to our call for climate jobs as a “desktop project.”<sup>41</sup> It is even more difficult with the largest private sector union within the Norwegian TUC, Fellesforbundet, with more of their members in and around the oil industry. The union has persuaded the TUC as a whole to be positive towards more oil drilling off the coast of northern Norway.

The various degrees of support in the unions for a worker-led transition to a low-carbon economy, speak of varying degrees of success by activists and environmentalists in winning the concrete arguments. But they also illustrate what an important new book launching the field of environmental labor studies<sup>42</sup> fleshes out more generally: there are both structural constraints and opportunities for good sense on environmental issues in trade unions. The international working class may objectively have “radical chains”, in the sense implied by Marx<sup>43</sup>. *If* they shook them off, they could pave the way for universal emancipation. But the interest in knowing all truths only exists as a potential resource within the actually existing trade union movement. Climate jobs in Norway at the moment is a little like the demand for an eight hour day, or even socialism, used to be: A good idea, but could it really work in practice?

### **The morality of good sense: evaluative realism**

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<sup>40</sup> Ryggvik, 2010, 2013

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.abcnyheter.no/penger/oekonomi/2013/10/06/norge-kan-ga-fra-oljenasjon-til-miljoenasjon-hvis-vi-vil>

<sup>42</sup> Räthzel and Uzzell, 2012

<sup>43</sup> Marx 2000, p.256

Locating an interest in truth at the core of common sense helps us to understand what is *good* in good sense, i.e. the obvious moral connotation of the word. If we look closer at the moral content of good sense we can see how Gramsci moves easily from “is” to “ought”.<sup>44</sup> The *Silent Spring* of Rachel Carson<sup>45</sup>, a spring where birds no longer sing, is a sorry state of affairs – and so it is speaking objectively, not as a birdwatcher. The extinction of the golden toad in Costa Rica, the loss of mist being the most immediate cause, is rightfully also, as Tim Flannery showed in his best seller, seen as a “warning”<sup>46</sup> of global warming. With the projected rates of extinctions detailed in Mark Lynas’s *Six Degrees*, global warming is an existential question - not in a philosophically elaborated but in a mundane self-evident sense. Confronted by the likelihood that up to half of the world species may die out if global warming exceeds two degrees in 2050,<sup>47</sup> we need only minimally paraphrase Thomas Paine; “the simple voice of nature and reason will say, 'tis not right.”

This is often more difficult for scientists, who tend to have an idea of objectivity which excludes norms and values. I often tell a story of Knut Alfsen, Director of Norwegian Climate change research centre CICERO to illustrate this point. He spoke at the Grandparents meeting in 2011 that kicked off the Climate Election Alliance, as did I. After his talk, which included terrifying graphs of projected warming trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of the grandparents, very worried from the sound of her voice, asked Alfsen what we could do to prevent all of this. His reply began by saying that in order to answer that question, he had to “switch hats” from a researcher to being a grandfather himself.

Now Alfsen, an economist and social scientist himself, was in this talk primarily relaying findings from the natural sciences, where hard facts are rightfully often separated from morality or politics. “Subatomic particles and natural selection are just facts, and that is all there is to say on the matter.”<sup>48</sup> Emissions of greenhouse gases, and the need to curb such emissions, by contrast, are both natural and social facts. Values and morals therefore creep into most lines of research relevant for global warming. The process of adaptation to more saline water in the Niger delta, for instance, has been shown to be highly ridden by class.

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<sup>44</sup> I write much more about this in my dissertation. See esp Ytterstad, 2012, pp45–47, 204–229

<sup>45</sup> Carson, 2000

<sup>46</sup> Flannery, 2005, pp114–122

<sup>47</sup> Lynas, 2007, p168

<sup>48</sup> Creaven, 2007, p16

Rich farmers can transport sand from the desert to their land, poor ones cannot, and are therefore forced to flee.<sup>49</sup>

Most people are like grandparents - not like scientists. Andrew Sayer has written a book with the excellent title *Why Things Matter to People*<sup>50</sup>, that explains why. Whereas social scientists prefer cold rational description, and tend to see values and morals as something that exist beyond reason, most people do not. In their practical reasoning, and in the ethical dimension of their everyday life, rationality and values, is and ought, tend to merge. That is part and parcel of their good sense, I would add. We do not need to switch hats, to care about global warming. Arguably, they incline towards what Sean Creaven calls evaluative realism. If our conception of necessity tells us that we cannot emit greenhouse gases beyond 450 or 350 ppm, that is in itself a fact that “provides us with moral obligations by force of logical necessity”.<sup>51</sup> Until the is of global warming leads to the ought of slashing emissions from oil, coal and gas, humanity, to repeat the ending of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine “will feel itself like a man who continues putting off some unpleasant business from day to day, yet knows it must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it over, and is continually haunted with the thoughts of its necessity.”<sup>52</sup>

Put differently, the strongest moral convictions come from our deepest held understanding of the facts.<sup>53</sup> Gramsci is onto this same point in his note on “Moral Science and Historical Materialism”:

The scientific base for a morality of historical materialism is to be looked for, in my opinion, in the affirmation that “society does not pose for itself tasks the conditions for whose resolution do not already exist. Where these conditions exist “the solution of the tasks *becomes* duty, “will” *becomes* free”. Morality would then become a search for the conditions necessary for the freedom of the will... and the demonstration that these conditions exist.<sup>54</sup>

Now how you interpret the good sense conception of necessity, specified further by “a search for the conditions necessary for the freedom of the will”, *depends on whose behalf*

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<sup>49</sup> Malm, 2012

<sup>50</sup> Sayer, 2011

<sup>51</sup> Creaven, 2007, p17

<sup>52</sup> Paine, 1997

<sup>53</sup> Collier, 2003 is also very good on this point.

<sup>54</sup> Gramsci 1971, pp409–410, 432

*you are acting*. In terms of climate change, you could argue – as our rulers do - that the necessary conditions for solving the task of cutting emissions of greenhouse gases already exist, in the shape of market mechanisms. Or you could issue governmental reports for offshore wind, where the idea that wind turbines could replace the oil rigs, is not even part of the “mandate”.

But when an environmental representative of NUMGE prepared a note for our book, on the potential for climate jobs in offshore wind, he found that 50 000 jobs was a completely realistic number. To have the world, including Norway, run on clean energy is realistic technically and economically – given sufficient state intervention. The problem is social and political.<sup>55</sup> When our leaders appeal to political realism, based on oil and market hegemony, we must respond with what I call natural realism in our book on climate jobs. The foreword to that book by James Hansen is also a good example of evaluative realism; facts prompts morals:

We have, as concerned scientists and citizens of planet Earth, a moral responsibility to widen the sense of what is practical and possible in climate change policy across the world. We cannot simply report the facts to our governments, and then hope for the best. It is now 25 years since I reported some of the early findings of global warming to the US Congress. It is safe to conclude that facts alone will not make them move. Social forces need to be mobilised who can make them do what they claim cannot “realistically” be done.<sup>56</sup>

### **Good sense as an emergent and relational resource**

James Hansen is very interesting. To have one of the most famous climate scientists in the world resign as Director of NASA to become an activist<sup>57</sup> is astonishing, and bespeaks the failure of the climate change politics of our rulers. His personal trajectory, and his comments above, illustrates how good sense, so to speak, becomes visible. In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci usually speaks of good sense as emergent, latent or embryonic. It is only through mass action that good sense becomes manifest: “the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests

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<sup>55</sup> Jacobsen & Delucci, 2011

<sup>56</sup> Ytterstad, 2013, pp11–12,21–27

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/science/james-e-hansen-retiring-from-nasa-to-fight-global-warming.html>

itself in action, but occasionally, and in flashes – when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality.”<sup>58</sup> This does not happen in “normal times”, says Gramsci, but as the translators of the English *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* point out in a footnote on the same page, in “the exceptional (and hence potentially revolutionary) moments in history in which a class or a group discovers its objective and subjective unity in action.”

This *emergent* dimension<sup>59</sup> often depends, in turn, on the *relational* dimension<sup>60</sup> of good sense. James Hansen makes no secret of the very bad relations that have developed between him and the US Congress over the years. Andrew Robinson<sup>61</sup> argues that the note entitled “subversive” in the *Prison Notebooks* is an example of good sense. Contained in the Italian word for subversive is a first, critical first phase of class consciousness against “officialdom”. Politically this consciousness can be mobilised by the right as well as on the left. However, as Gramsci goes on to write, “The lower classes, historically on the defensive, can only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations, via their consciousness of the identity and class limits of their enemy.”<sup>62</sup> Although global warming in the abstract concerns all living life, a “spirit of cleavage”<sup>63</sup> between those who rule and those who do not, is necessary to put good sense in motion. The blue-blue government we just elected in Norway is a horrible edition of bourgeois hegemony. Seven of its ministers come from the denialist, racist Progress Party. As I write these lines, it is opening a spirit of cleavage the climate movement will need to sharpen even further in the coming period.

### **Use value rationality and anti-capitalism**

The second part of this exposition of good sense on global warming is more concrete. All aspects of good sense must always be understood in particular contexts, but this is especially so for the relational and emergent resources of good sense briefly described above. The emergence of protest movements by definition happens in certain times and places. In this

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<sup>58</sup> Gramsci, 1971, p. 327

<sup>59</sup> Ytterstad and Russell, 2012; Ytterstad, 2012, pp50–52

<sup>60</sup> Ytterstad, 2012, pp47-50

<sup>61</sup> Robinson, 2005

<sup>62</sup> Gramsci, 1971, pp272–273

<sup>63</sup> Thomas, 2009, p438

section I will look at how use value rationality and anti-capitalism emerged as elements of good sense, and in the next one, I look at climate justice and livelihood.

Gramsci did not write that good sense was the healthy nucleus of common sense until late in his life in prison, in 1932.<sup>64</sup> His emphasis on truth though, is detectable in his much earlier political writings. In the midst of the emergence of the factory councils in Turin – June 1919 - he wrote that: “To tell the truth, to arrive together at the truth, is a communist and revolutionary act”<sup>65</sup>. In my dissertation I propose that Gramsci discovered good sense during this period of workers’ struggle<sup>66</sup>, and then wrote about what he learnt more abstractly in the *Prison Notebooks* many years later. Here, he writes of how the paper he edited, *L’Ordine Nuovo* discovered how the workers developed “certain kinds of new intellectualism” and tried to “determine its new concepts”<sup>67</sup> As workers began to run the factories themselves, their perception of the purposes of that production began to change. Through seeing the factory “as a producer of real objects and not of profit”, the worker gave “an external, political demonstration of the consciousness he has acquired”<sup>68</sup>

Put in the terms of Andrew Collier<sup>69</sup>, the truth that workers began to arrive at was a *use-value rationality* on the brink of replacing the exchange-value rationality that penetrates not just the economy but the entire social life of capitalism. Such exchange value rationality is also rampant in the politics of environmental issues and global warming.

Remember the slogans of the anti-capitalist movement? Our world, our health, our education, is not for sale. As Naomi Klein and social movement academics both have noted,<sup>70</sup> some of those sentiments hibernated after 9/11 and resurfaced in the climate justice movement. Indeed, it is not difficult to find use-value rationality and climate justice as both latent and emergent examples of good sense on global warming.

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<sup>64</sup> This was a crucial year, for the coming together of Gramsci’s philosophical “moments” according to Thomas 2009, ppxix, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Gramsci, 1977, p68

<sup>66</sup> Ytterstad, 2012, pp46–47

<sup>67</sup> Gramsci, 1971, pp9–10

<sup>68</sup> Gramsci, 1971, p202

<sup>69</sup> Collier, 2003, pp23–36

<sup>70</sup> Reitan, 2013; Ytterstad and Russell, 2012

One illustration of the first is the Norwegian biodiversity law, according to the Environmental Ministry amongst the most ambitious and far-reaching in the world. In its declaration of principles it lines up three fundamental ways we value nature. We have intrinsic value (egenverdi), use value (nytteverdi) and experiential value (opplevelsesverdi). All three sets of values can be subsumed under use value rationality because all of them primarily involved qualitative reasoning of the sort we would understand by practical sound judgment, which – incidentally – is also how English lexicons define good sense. Any interference in nature should negotiate between all these fundamentals, said the chief developer of the law at a seminar I attended a few years ago. But while the authorities (pretend to) negotiate these values, exchange value continues to be fundamental to the metabolic relationship between capitalism and the environment.

Indeed, it is easier to grasp the generality (and variety) in use value rationality by way of its negation through exchange value rationality.<sup>71</sup> Paul Burkett has shown how respondents behave in surveys made within the discipline of “contingent valuation analysis”, which is specifically aimed at setting a price on environmental goods, including those related to global warming. Burkett finds “common-sense resistance” against price setting across cultural divides<sup>72</sup>. Joan Martinez-Alier contends that a great many of today’s environmental conflicts are rooted in opposition to the commodity fetishism of capitalism “that sees only one way to value the world”<sup>73</sup> But this particular bit of anti-capitalism runs through environmental history. From the British poets responsible for the impulse called “back to the land” to Rachel Carsons *Silent Spring* in the US in the early sixties; from the “wilderness idea” to the deep ecology of Arne Næss; from the workers in Manchester in the 1840s to Chico Mendez and the rubber tappers in Amazonia in the 1980s<sup>74</sup>, there is opposition to a system that values everything in money, and ignores the intrinsic value of life, of human beings and of nature.

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<sup>71</sup> Foster, Clark and York, 2011, p39

<sup>72</sup> Burkett, 2009, p73

<sup>73</sup> Martinez-Alier, 2006, p274

<sup>74</sup> Guha (1999) brings out use-value rationality within environmental movements and thinkers very well.

I remember reading intricate discussions in this journal<sup>75</sup>, on whether Marx's theory of commodity fetishism was too perfect an explanation to be accepted. I perceived it as a very abstract thing that explained too much. How can you ever break free, if – as Raymond Williams put it so wonderfully – capitalism reduces us to consumers, “stomachs or furnaces ... being a very specialised variety of human being with no brain, no eyes, no senses, but who can gulp.”<sup>76</sup> But it becomes more plausible if we perceive commodification not as an abstract theoretical category, but as “the historical development of the tension between the requirements of money-making and monetary valuation on the one hand, and the needs of human beings, of sustainable human development on the other.”<sup>77</sup> Such a view might explain why “Our world is not for sale!” was such a potent message in Seattle 1999. It might explain the slogan “Our Climate is not your Business” outside venues of carbon trading. It might explain why Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo*<sup>78</sup> was the chief speaker at the opening rally of the “people’s assembly” at Copenhagen ten years later. Her concluding words, I take to express the opposition to exchange-value rationality on global warming rather eloquently: “Life may be coming to an end, because of too much obedience. We need a global mass movement. Think of it as the mother of all carbon offsets.”<sup>79</sup>

### **Climate justice and livelihood**

Use value rationality and anti-capitalism are fairly longstanding features of good sense, very relevant for the fight against global warming. The call for climate justice, by contrast, is of a more recent date. It illustrates more clearly the *emergent* dimension of good sense, and is also more regional and culturally specific, emanating primarily from the Global South towards the Global North. Formally it is enshrined in principle 7 of the 1992 Rio Declaration, which stated that, “In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, states have common but different responsibilities.” At the climate summits, some of the strongest moral appeals for radical global cuts in emissions have come from Small Island States such as the Maldives, who even brought in Mark Lynas as counselor to their negotiating team in Copenhagen. The conception of necessity has driven Maldivians to

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<sup>75</sup> Some of it was occasioned by Alex Callinicos's book *Marxism and Philosophy* (Callinicos, 1983). See <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/callinicos/1983/xx/binns.html> for a glimpse of that debate.

<sup>76</sup> Williams & Gable, 1989, p216

<sup>77</sup> <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2007/aguiar240407p.html>

<sup>78</sup> Klein, 2001

<sup>79</sup> Ytterstad and Russell, 2012; Ytterstad, 2010



less compromising positions with the scientific projections, insisting that “our countries will disappear into the sea” if the target is not set at 350 ppm, that is at 1.5 degrees global warming.<sup>80</sup> An even more radical climate justice perspective has emerged from Bolivia, echoing the important Cochabamba Conference in April 2010. Pointing not only to the historical debt of the Global North, but to the right for future atmospheric space for development, the demands of the climate justice activists in Cochabamba included a target to stabilise temperatures to 1 degree of warming and 300 ppm, a full rejection of carbon markets and a “Universal Declaration on the rights of Mother Earth to ensure harmony with nature”.<sup>81</sup>

The language of Mother Earth, Pachamama, reminds us of the importance played by indigenous communities and cosmologies in the development of the climate movement. Some of the more principled rejections of exchange value rationality comes precisely from some of the indigenous organizations present at such summits. Slogans against the green economy, because it was seen as a *greed* economy, were everywhere to be heard at the 50 000 strong demonstration against the sequel to the Rio Summit in 2012. “La Tierra no se Vende, La Tierra se Defiende!” (the Earth is not for Sale, the Earth is for defending!)<sup>82</sup> No wonder that quite a few authors highlight agency from the Global South, and indigenous communities in particular, when they look for alternatives to neoliberal hegemony.<sup>83</sup>

Yet environmental justice has a history in the Global North as well, among antiracist, (eco)feminists and among the poor in US cities.<sup>84</sup> Good sense is *relational*, not only between North and South, but between classes within countries as well.<sup>85</sup> And although some cosmologies may be better at expressing outrage in their good sense, the emergence of climate justice can be explained by more material factors. It is when global warming begins to be experienced and perceived as a human, social and political problem in its own right, that climate justice may come to appear as the healthy core of common sense rather than a

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<sup>80</sup> Alstadheim and Stoltenberg, 2010, pp. 29–30. Although, as Patrick Bond has documented (2012), outright bribery of the Maldives by Western countries, particularly the US, has contributed to stifle some of its good sense at international summits of late.

<sup>81</sup> Bond, 2012, p198

<sup>82</sup> Personal observation (20.6.2012) and translation.

<sup>83</sup> Carroll, 2010; Foster, 2009, pp52–53; Vetlesen, 2008

<sup>84</sup> Bond, 2012, p167; Guha, 1999

<sup>85</sup> Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Ytterstad, 2012, pp47–50

lofty ethical command. The class rage after hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, was well captured by the television series *Treme*.<sup>86</sup> J. Timmons Roberts suggests that a

high-water mark of the infant climate justice movement so far may have been when on October 28, 2002, thousands of activists marched for “climate justice” in the streets of Dehli, India, during the precom of the Kyoto treaty. In their Dehli Declaration, they affirmed that “climate change is a human rights issue -it affects our livelihoods, or health, our children and our natural resources”.<sup>87</sup>

This idea of livelihood, encapsulating both the natural and social conditions of a decent life, seems to me a promising way of anchoring, and perhaps globalising, environmental justice. At the heart of a host of environmental concerns, there is a profound experience of conflict. The other side has gone *too* far now. They have industrialised, polluted and emitted too much. They have chopped down too many trees, killed too many wild animals or meddled too much with the gene pool. It is the sensation that *some limit has been crossed that puts our livelihoods at risk*, which gives room for all the reflection and moral outrage, all the repentance and utopian visions, competing for good sense on global warming, and a host of other environmental issues as well.

Although Raymond Williams did not speak of good sense, livelihood was a concept he did develop in his ecological writings. This idea steers clear of two faultlines, “the received and dominant concept of the earth and its life forms as raw material for generalised production” on the one hand and on the other hand the idea of “an apparently unmediated nature”. Williams wants to avoid a contrast “between “nature” and “production”, and to seek the practical terms of the idea which should supersede both: the idea of “livelihood” within, and yet active within, a better understood physical world and all truly necessary physical processes.”<sup>88</sup> Livelihood is good sense for how we both depend on each other and on nature. When people speak of their livelihood, it is therefore a good place to look for good sense on global warming. Indeed, it is the rift in the metabolism between the ecosystems and modern capitalism<sup>89</sup> that makes so many people in so many places worry for their livelihoods.

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<sup>86</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treme\\_%28TV\\_series%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treme_%28TV_series%29)

<sup>87</sup> Roberts, 2007, p296

<sup>88</sup> Williams and Gable, 1989, p237

<sup>89</sup> The metabolic rift is the key Marxist insight on the relationship between humans and nature, according to Foster, Clark and York, 2011

## Summary and a few conclusions

As this article went to press, popular climate movements were on the rise again. Large protests in New York and across the world were expected in September 2014, against global warming and the abysmal state of climate change policies by our leaders. The burning need to cut emissions fast united many different people to put pressure on these leaders. I have called this “conception of necessity” the first resource of good sense on global warming, a resource every sane thinking person on this planet can have, and something President Obama and most leaders of this planet merely pretend they have. They pretend because in reality they are not so interested in the truths of global warming as they are in protecting business and national interests. Such an interest in truth, the second resource of good sense on global warming, is larger among the oppressed and among the best parts of the trade union movement. That is why it is so crucial to develop climate change solutions from below.

Facts alone seldom move scientists, but two facts are becoming clearer, and have started to move people, and “labour movement participation in global warming activism”.<sup>90</sup> Fact one: Emissions are going up, up, up. Fact two: They need to come down, down, down. One reason why people and trade unions are beginning to move is due to evaluative realism, the third part of the “healthy nucleus” of common sense in this article. The growth of protests, and in the case of Norway at least, of popular alliances, also illustrate the fourth and fifth resource, the relational and the emergent dimensions of good sense on global warming. Put simply, more people are getting angrier.

In the second part of this article, I have shown how movements themselves, working class movements and environmental movements, past and present, have developed good sense relevant for the fight against global warming. We have seen the spread of use value rationality and anti-capitalism, and the emergent feelings of climate (in)justice, prompted by climate change that is already destroying the livelihoods of people. None of these consciousness resources are conclusive of good sense on global warming. Indeed, the full meaning and potential of good sense on global warming will only disclose itself in future mass struggles.

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<sup>90</sup> [http://www.labornotes.org/2014/07/climate-campaign-tipping-point-unions-get-board?utm\\_source=TUED+master+list&utm\\_campaign=dc6dc7033f-Bulletin\\_16\\_6\\_24\\_2014&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_09ee976117-dc6dc7033f-78402117](http://www.labornotes.org/2014/07/climate-campaign-tipping-point-unions-get-board?utm_source=TUED+master+list&utm_campaign=dc6dc7033f-Bulletin_16_6_24_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_09ee976117-dc6dc7033f-78402117)

Finally, the most difficult question: What is the politics of good sense on global warming?

The short answer is, I fear, that there is none. Or perhaps better: good sense on global warming facilitates a great variety of political strategies precisely because it consists of multiple resources, and because good sense on global warming is developing – fast – by climate movements themselves. Autonomists may grab hold of one resource, and fight for the appropriate protest tactic accordingly. That is what seems to have happened with the radical wing of the climate justice movement.<sup>91</sup> Social democracy may incorporate snippets of another resource to renew and regreen itself and the capitalist hegemony it has come to terms with long ago.<sup>92</sup> That is what is happening now in my country.

A revolutionary Gramscian politics of good sense on global warming must, by contrast, be both all-embracing *and* interventionist in character.

It must be all-embracing because all the resources of good sense on global warming must be strengthened if we are to create truly great mass movements. We need to strengthen our understanding of the science, and seriously explore all the uncomfortable truths of global warming, not just the ones Al Gore told us about. We need to fight for climate jobs for workers in the rich North but we also have to build climate justice solidarity with people who have nothing in the Global South. One of the things I have learnt through the building of climate alliances in Norway is the need to tolerate, indeed encourage, all kinds of climate solutions from below.

Part of the interventionism, Leninism if you prefer, must be not just to strengthen each and every resource of good sense, but to bring them together, to the best of our capability. Lenin argued for expanding trade union consciousness, which tends to be local, into a socialist one, by being “tribunes of the people” reacting with moral outrage on behalf of all oppressed groups. In the age of global warming, we must take this even further, to include everything that breathes in our common biosphere, “*the premise of all that lives*”.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Lahn, 2013; Reitan, 2013

<sup>92</sup> Jens Stoltenberg is surprisingly candid about how Norwegian social democracy is about using capitalism to solve “the greatest challenge of our time”, in an interview book on Norwegian climate change policy he himself asked for (Alstadheim and Stoltenberg, 2010).

<sup>93</sup> Malm, 2007, p. 279

Jonathan Neale is, I think, onto the same interventionist approach when he writes that “In most cases we are talking to people who have green ideas in their heads about climate change and socialist ideas about economics. Our job is usually to bring the two sides of their heads together”.<sup>94</sup> A revolutionary Gramscian and Leninist perspective, is about trying to give coherence to the resources of good sense, in a way that opens the door to a different, working class led solution. In a revolution, this strategy may be as concrete as the demands of the Russian one, for land, bread and peace. As global warming runs apace, such concrete demands may arise as the appropriate ones again, especially if the wager on working class leadership turns out to pay off again in the fight against environmental destruction. The ecological Marxist Paul Burkett believes, as does the present author, that it will, seeing the working class as

the only systemically essential group that directly experiences the limitations of purely economic struggles over wages and working conditions as ways of achieving human development, given the increasingly communal and global character of environmental problems produced by capitalist production.<sup>95</sup>

If the global working class fights in earnest, for jobs, for the climate and for the planet, there is a chance that we can win a sustainable world. That is my bet, and the reason why my main focus as an activist in Norway is on the climate jobs solution. Meanwhile, the healthy consciousness resources I claim exist as part of the healthy core of common sense in this article, is my best stab at an inventory of things we need to pay attention to. At the very least, good sense on global warming should help power the optimism of the will that socialists need to have, when we join and build the climate movements wherever we are.

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<sup>94</sup> Neale, 2010

<sup>95</sup> (Burkett, 2009, p. 300)

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