

THE LONG MARCH FROM CANCÚN: STEPS TOWARD A GLOBAL UPRISING¹

Ronnie Cummins[©]

On a beautiful sunny morning, marching down the Avenida Tulúm, our five thousand strong brigade of climate change activists, armed with colorful flags, hats, signs, and banners, supercharged with lively music and drummers, are making our voices heard: "Cambie el sistema, no la clima" (Change the System, not the climate), "El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido" (The people united will never be defeated) and "Obama, Obama respete Cochabamba" (Obama, Obama, respect the Cochabamba Declaration--on the Rights of Mother Earth). One of two simultaneous street demonstrations this morning, we are heading toward the Moon Palace, 15 miles away, where hundreds of heavily armed riot police are lined up behind enormous steel barricades to prevent us from getting within earshot of the Palace, the official headquarters for the United Nation's COP 16 (Congress of the Parties 16) global climate summit.

With black military helicopters (courtesy of the USA) circling overhead, our message to the "business as usual" elite in the Palace is simple: get off your bureaucratic asses and do something. Stop allowing large corporations to use our common atmosphere as an open sewer. Stop cutting down our forests, spraying poisonous pesticides, killing our oceans, and destroying our living soils. Stand aside and let the world's 1.5 billion small farmers, ranchers, and indigenous communities cool off the planet with organic soil management and sustainable grazing and forestry practices. Tax the rich, nationalize the banks, and do whatever is necessary to pay for millions of Green Jobs and public works programs to rebuild our soils and our economic infrastructure. Stop the delaying tactics. Join hands with the global grassroots to retrofit our buildings, our utilities, and our transportation sectors and move away from fossil fuels, or get the hell out of our way.

In our dancing, chanting corps, a veritable rainbow of nationalities and constituencies, I recognize some of the climate warriors I've seen over the last few days at the alternative forums and workshops: Bolivian, Mexican, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, and Native American indigenous people; Mexican campesinos and campesinas (small farmers); Via Campesina members from Asia, North America, Latin America, and Africa; Korean peace advocates; Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Code Pink, and Global Exchange campaigners; the National Family Farm Coalition; anti-globalization militants, Klimaforum delegates; trade union leaders from Canada, the U.S., and Argentina; Council of Canadian activists; student organizers; and comrades from the Organic Consumers Association and Via Organica. The bitter consensus in workshops and plenary sessions over the past week is that we can't wait for Obama or the industrialized nations to take decisive action. Along with the growing list of governments ready to move forward to reverse global warming (Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bangladesh, South Africa, several EU nations, and the Island nations of the Pacific) we've got to take matters into our own hands, in our local communities and regions, and build a mass movement larger than any the world has ever seen. As Bill McKibben of 350.org said today on Democracy Now: http://www.democracynow.org/2010/12/7/bill_mckibben_clima...

"[The COP 16 Climate Summit meeting here in Cancun is] just like a family reunion aboard the Titanic We can't keep doing this. Until we can build some power outside of these arenas to actually push these guys, it's not about how well people are

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communicating or how great the policy papers are. It's on who has the power. And at the moment, that power rests in the hands of the fossil fuel industry and their allies in governments around the world. And until we build some independent outside movement power to push back, then we're going to get scraps from the table, at the very best."

So how do we take down the climate criminals, Big Oil, Big Coal, Big Agribusiness, Monsanto, and the Military-Industrial Complex? How do we build a fierce and formidable climate conservation corps that can radically alter the dynamics of the marketplace and our suicide economy? How can we mobilize grassroots forces, alternative technology, and progressive public officials to fundamentally change the laws and public policies that are driving us to the brink of disaster? How do we scale up our organic, sustainable, equitable, climate-friendly projects and communities past the "tipping point" so that we become the norm, not just the alternative? A full battle plan to Save Mother Earth and our climate and life-support systems requires more space than we have today. But here are several steps we need to take as we start our Long March.

Step One: Expand Our Analysis and Broaden Our Coalition

We need to educate a critical mass of the public about the real causes and consequences of global warming so as to inspire and mobilize a grassroots army of hundreds of millions of people armed with practical ideas and confidence. We need to connect the dots and supercharge the synergy between all of our burning issues and Movements (urban and rural Green Jobs for all; retrofitting the economy; stopping the wars for oil and strategic resources in Iraq and Afghanistan; healthy, climate-friendly organic food and farms; drastically reducing fossil fuel use; and environmental and economic justice). We need to break down the walls of the "my issue is more important than your issue" silos. We need to more clearly identify our adversaries and pinpoint their most vulnerable weaknesses: Big Oil; Big Coal; chemical, genetically modified (GM), and energy-intensive agribusiness and factory farms; transnational timber companies; the Military-Industrial Complex; as well as the financial institutions that fund this Earth and climate-raping Behemoth.

At the same time we need to clearly and comprehensively identify our allies: workers and apprentices who can retrofit our fossil fuel economy; organic and green-minded consumers and backyard gardeners; green businesses; environmental, justice, and peace activists; educators; students; churches and religious organizations; and a global army of 1.5 billion small farmers, ranchers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, and indigenous people. As a banner on the march says today "Campesinos y Campesinas Enfrian La Planeta." (Small farmers are cooling off the planet). We need to educate (and shout when necessary) that there is already 435 ppm (parts per million) of three major greenhouse gases polluting the atmosphere, heating up the earth, killing the oceans, melting the glaciers and polar icecaps, and destabilizing the climate. We need to name these gases over and over again-Carbon dioxide (CO₂); Methane (CH₄); and Nitrous oxide (N₂O); explain exactly where they come from; and then point out how we can drastically curtail and organically sequester these emissions utilizing organic farm and land management and rotational grazing.

Carbon Dioxide Pollution: 800 Gigaton Carbon Gorilla in the Atmosphere

CO₂ pollution (76% of all greenhouse gas pollution) comes from burning fossil fuels (in buildings, cars, industry, and most of all in our industrial food system) cutting down forests, draining wetlands, and destroying the soil and ocean's natural capacities to sequester billions of

tons of excess greenhouse gases. How do we reduce CO₂ emissions as rapidly as possible? Stop building coal plants, stop tar sands and gas shale production, stop deepwater oil exploration, increase energy efficiency, retrofit buildings, ban factory farms, and slap a carbon tax on fossil fuel use that makes the polluters pay. For a more in-depth discussion see: http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_20200.cfm

How can a global alliance of food (and fiber) consumers and food and fiber producers literally suck down a significant proportion (50 ppm) of the excess CO₂ that's already up in the atmosphere? Through organic and sustainable farming, grazing, and forest practices. Organic soil management on a significant proportion of the world's 12 billion acres of farm land and pasture/grazing land can sequester up to 7,000 pounds of CO₂ per acre per year and lock this excess carbon naturally in the soil, where it belongs. This Great Transition to organic farming and rotational grazing, coupled with the defense and restoration of the world's 10 billion acres of forests and wetlands, can buy us the precious time we need to retrofit our economies and make the Great Transition to alternative solar, wind, and geothermal energy.

Methane: Food Inc. and Waste Management's Climate Killer

Methane (CH₄) is a greenhouse gas that makes up approximately 14% of human-induced global warming. Per ton, released into the atmosphere, methane is 72 times more destructive than CO₂. The good news about methane is that if we stop releasing it into the atmosphere, the 65 ppm already up there will quickly dissipate, unlike carbon dioxide (which is more long-lasting) or nitrous oxide (which for all practical purposes is permanent). Where does methane pollution come from, and how can we get rid of it? Methane pollution mainly comes from factory farms and the overproduction and over consumption of non-organic, non-grass-fed, non-grass-finished meat and animal products; from throwing hundreds of millions of tons of rotting food, paper, and lawn wastes into our garbage cans and landfills, instead of composting them for use on farms, ranches, and gardens; destruction of wetlands for shrimp and fish farms, industrial agriculture, urban development or sprawl; and industrial, chemical-intensive rice farming.

How do we get rid of excess methane? We must build massive consumer awareness that it is a "climate crime" to buy or consume meat, animal products, or any food whatsoever that comes from a factory farm or feedlot. At the same time we must educate consumers that organically managed small farms and ranches are actually greenhouse gas sequestration centers, arguably our most important allies in cooling off the planet.

In addition to boycotting any and all of the products of Food Inc. we must create "Zero Waste" households, businesses, and municipalities, not just through voluntary action, but more importantly by passing laws requiring mandatory separation and composting of all food and yard wastes. One major city in the U.S. that has already done this is San Francisco. Mandatory separation and composting of food wastes not only drastically reduces methane emissions from garbage dumps or landfills; but also creates an enormous amount of compost which farmers, ranchers, gardeners, and landscapers can then use (along with the organic concentrated liquid form of compost called "compost tea"). This will create the preconditions to replace the 12 billion pounds of deadly nitrate fertilizers that are dumped on the U.S.'s already ravaged and eroded soils every year.

Nitrous Oxide: Taking Down the Global Chemical Fertilizer Corporations Before They Kill Us All

Human-induced releases of nitrous oxide (N₂O) make up 10% of all the greenhouse gases that are causing global warming. Excess nitrous oxide per ton in the atmosphere is 300 times more destructive than CO₂ and unfortunately, for the present and future generations, will remain there almost permanently. Two-thirds of all N₂O emissions arise from the use of nitrate fertilizers on Genetically Modified (GM) and chemical-intensive industrial farms. And of course the main crops of these fossil fuel-guzzling industrial farms are billions of tons of (pesticide and GMO-tainted) animal feed for use on factory farms or feedlots.

Nitrous oxide is extremely hazardous. It depletes the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere (thereby increasing skin cancer for humans). It increases ozone pollution levels at the ground level (fueling the current epidemic of asthma and respiratory diseases.) Poisonous nitrate fertilizers leaching into our rural wells and municipal drinking water supplies (where it combines into a super-toxic brew with pesticides) are a biological time bomb, a major cause of cancer, infertility, hormone disruption, and birth defects. Nitrate fertilizer runoff into our rivers and streams kills fish and marine life and is directly responsible for the hundreds of dead zones in our oceans, the most famous of which is the enormous dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

Perhaps most deadly of all, nitrate fertilizer kills our living soils and microorganisms, decreasing their ability to sequester (through plant photosynthesis) excess CO₂ in the soil. Even after six decades of industrial agriculture dumping hundreds of billions of pounds of chemical fertilizers on farmlands, our living soils still contain two to three times as much carbon as the atmosphere, with the practical capacity to clean and safely sequester at least 50 ppm of greenhouse gases over the next 40 years. In other words, our living soils can save us-but only if we can stop the widespread use of nitrate fertilizers, GMO crops, and pesticides and replace these deadly chemicals and mutant organisms with organic compost and compost tea, and cover crops--augmented by the biological power and fertility generated by carefully planned, high-density rotational grazing of animals.

The energy-intensive manufacturing of nitrate fertilizers requires the use of massive amounts of natural gas, a resource in short supply, that will increasingly be needed to take us through the transition from fossil fuels to alternative energy. We can no longer afford to waste natural gas in order to uphold the profits of Cargill, Monsanto, and Food Inc. So how do we get rid of nitrous oxide pollution? Similar to our phasing-out of methane emissions, we need a global boycott of factory farms, foods, and fibers derived from chemical pesticides, GMOs, and nitrate fertilizers. We need a million new organic, carbon-sequestering farms and ranches that feed the soil with organic compost, organic tea, animal manure, and cover crops instead of nitrate fertilizer. We need ten million more backyard and community gardens to feed ourselves locally and organically. We need mandatory composting laws so that all of our 100 billion plus tons of food and yard waste every year are transformed into organic compost and compost tea. We need to spread the word that corporate agribusiness, factory farms, and the chemical fertilizer industry are climate criminals. We either "sunset" them or they're going to sunset us.

Moving from Gloom and Doom to Green Solutions and Green Jobs

People are desperate and hungry for hope. People are desperate and hungry for jobs and a sense of meaning and mission. We in the Movement must consciously change the tone of our gloom and doom messages to emphasize the practical solutions and socio-economic benefits that we have to offer: green jobs, healthy food, climate stability, sustainability, peace, and a revitalized democracy. For the most part we don't need to invent new technologies. The tools and techniques and labor power we need are already here, although in many cases they exist only in embryonic form, in our local regions. Solar and wind technology, super-efficient and deep-

retrofitted homes and commercial buildings. Organic farms, ranches, restored riparian zones and wetlands and urban gardens. Urban mass transportation, ride share and carpool systems, bike and walking paths, farmers markets, urban greenhouses. Rooftop gardens. Organic gardening and cooking classes. Financial mechanisms like Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE), community credit unions, and "Slow Money" cooperatives. We can and must cool off the planet, but luckily we have pilot projects and "best practices" and climate-friendly laws and policies that we show people right now, from Main Street and our local organic farms or ranches to green buildings, composting toilets, and farmers markets in Manhattan.

We need, in short, a Green New Deal, comparable in scope to the New Deal of the 1930s that helped lift the U.S. out of economic depression. Since we don't have the political power right now to force Obama and the Congress to implement a massive Green Jobs and Climate Conservation Corps program at the federal level, let's go local instead. Let's build political power and a series of mini-Green New Deals at the city, county and state levels.

And as we move to phase-out fossil fuels and the fossil fuels industry, let's make sure that we take care of the workers and the blue-collar communities where these industries are located. For every job lost in the fossil fuel economy, in industrial agriculture, and the military industrial complex, we must create two jobs in the urban and rural organic and Green Jobs sector. When China, Europe, and the rest of the world eventually slap a carbon taxes on our exports, then maybe we'll see a carbon tax on greenhouse gas emissions here in the U.S. If we do implement a Carbon Tax that gradually but steadily raises the prices of fossil fuel energy, let's make sure that poor people and the middle class get reduced payroll taxes to make up the difference. Let the polluter pay. So let's roll up our sleeves and get to work in our local communities. Roll out pilot projects and "structural reform" campaigns that are (a) radical but winnable; (b) that have the potential to educate and mobilize large numbers of people; (c) that build new and broader coalitions; and (d) that slowly but steadily begin to build and expand our political power. Let's point out the problems, but also point out the organic and green solutions that are already taking root.