the climate movement is dead.

LONG LIVE THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT

GREED WRECKED COPENHAGEN. NOW IT'S UP TO US ALL

www.risingtidenorthamerica.org
The sooner we realize that politicians and corporations will not solve the climate crisis, the sooner we can get to the real work of building a strong grassroots people's movement — our only hope for survival. In that regard, the failure in of the December 2009 UN climate meetings in Copenhagen may be a great opportunity. The inability of world leaders to cooperate rather than compete, to put a livable planet ahead of their own economic interests, is the death of their legitimacy.

When rich nations draft a secret agreement that commits our planet to warming another 3 degrees Celsius, we can feel the noose tightening. When Obama comes to the table with a pledge to cut emissions by 4 percent, we know this spells genocide for island nations. When civil society groups are banned from the climate talks, but corporate lobbyists are allowed to remain, it is obvious where the politician's loyalties lie.

It is not just the politicians and CEOs who are walking us down the gangplank. Many in the climate movement have grown all too cozy with the status quo. The "bold" action they call for will result in the privatization of the air, to be divided up by mega-polluters. Their demands for carbon neutrality seek to offset our problems onto poor countries while the rich keep burning and consuming. Their vision of a "clean energy future" would perpetuate the corporate control of our energy and of the Earth itself. Meanwhile hyper-consumerism, corporate power, war-mongering and global dominance by wealthy countries — the roots of the climate crisis — remain side issues skirted around as if they were not the central pillars of the high-carbon economy.

Those who still cling to the old climate movement have committed themselves to a sinking ship. Fortunately, just as the legitimacy of their approach is dying, a new movement is alive and kicking.

As world leaders jockeyed for their piece of the atmosphere in Copenhagen, hundreds of thousands were taking the streets worldwide fighting for real climate solutions. Hundreds of delegates braved police truncheons as they attempted to walk out of the UN climate talks to meet the thousands already assembled to create a people's climate assembly. In the United Kingdom, 200 activists occupied Trafalgar Square to set up a climate camp. In Australia, forty people blocked the world's largest coal export terminal. Canadian activists repeatedly occupied government offices. Subsistence farmers from around the world took the streets to demand community control of sustainable food systems.

The US saw a massive day of coordinated direct actions leading up to the COP15 talks on November 30, the 10 year anniversary of the protests that shutdown the WTO meetings in Seattle. Earth First! and Rising Tide blocked the shipment of the generator destined for the Cliffside Coal plant in NC. The Mobilization for Climate Justice shut down the San Francisco headquarters of Bank of America, while Seattle activists locked down inside Chase and Bank of America branches for their funding of fossil fuels. Activists in Chicago locked down in front of the Chicago Climate Exchange, the largest carbon trading institution in North America, shutting down part of the city's financial district. Protesters in Washington, DC took over K Street to confront corporate lobbyists. In New York City activists occupied the lobby of Natural Resource Defense Council to protest their cozy relationship with major polluters.

As it becomes increasingly clear our leaders will not protect us, people are taking matters into their own hands. Not only are they fighting back against the corporate assault on our planet, they are actively creating the solutions that will usher in a truly just and sustainable world.
DEATH

The corporate approach: green capitalism

The story told by the political and corporate establishment is that climate change is all our fault and that as individuals we are to blame for the current ecological meltdown. This story presumes that we have had some sort of agency over the socio-economic system, commonly known as free market capitalism, into which we were born, and conveniently absolves those that built and aggressively maintain it of any responsibility. The outcome of this logic, that individuals, not the existing system, are responsible has forwarded the idea that only atomized consumers can fight and stop climate change.

This individualist mindset diverts us from collective action that challenges the status quo in favor of consumer action, or better yet, “green capitalism.” Every carton of soy milk produced with wind power is a victory for the climate. Every new Prius is a blow against big oil. Corporate America has staged a massive coup on the public consciousness by making the question “What can I do?” synonymous with “what can I buy?” Wall Street is happy to accommodate some minor changes, as long as we still line up at their cash registers.

The reincarnation of capitalism into a clean, green, global warming-fighting-machine is a two-pronged assault on movements fighting for climate justice. First, green capitalism diverts us from fighting for deeper structural change. Instead of questioning car culture as a whole, we are told that all we need to do is buy cars with better gas mileage. Instead of questioning one of the largest drivers of overconsumption, we are to laud Wal-Mart for being the largest distributor of compact fluorescent lightbulbs. Never are we to think about the lands destroyed, the waters poisoned, the people displaced, the sweatshops built and the emissions created in the making of all this new “green” crap.

Make no mistake, we do need to change our ways of consumption and production, but the change that is necessary is a collective change of our society, not one of individualized purchasing habits. That is green capitalism’s second angle of attack. As long as we remain separated as individual consumers, “voting with our dollars,” we are not a threat to the system. It is when we come together for collective action that we are dangerous. Green capitalism denies us our collective power while maintaining our dependence on a fundamentally unsustainable society.

Carbon markets, the final frontier

Instead of recognizing climate change as the ultimate warning that our current systems of organization, energy use, production and consumption are not working; governments and corporations are seizing on climate change as an excuse to embark on yet another round of capital accumulation. The creation of carbon markets which justify further global inequality and resource grabs is the solution they give us.

Using the logic of cost effectiveness and creating a “win-win” situation, corporate America tells us to have faith in the markets, that our only option is to allow polluters to buy and sell their way to a better tomorrow through carbon trading. It is disturbing enough that cost effectiveness is given the same consideration as averting a climate meltdown. We might be able to choke down that bitter pill if carbon markets had any promise of actually reducing emissions, but they do not. Both the Kyoto Protocol and the European Union Emissions Trading System have utterly failed in that regard. To make matters worse some environmental groups are the loudest cheerleaders for carbon markets. Transforming the fundamental elements of life into economic commodities serves only to further concentrate power in the hands of corporate elites, while derailing real solutions to the climate crisis. A just climate future can never be left to the marketplace.

The NGO approach

“We believe that capitalism can work for the planet...
By combining corporate leadership with policy and product innovation, we convert today’s marketplace failures into tomorrow’s solutions for the planet.”

—Natural Resource Defense Council
"By working with WWF, you – and the climate – can benefit in a number of ways: reduce energy costs, prepare for new legislation, explore new business opportunities and markets." – World Wildlife Fund

The approach of mainstream climate groups is nearly as disastrous as the corporate approach. In fact the lines have been blurred between the two so much it is often hard to distinguish them. Gap Inc. director Robert Fisher sits on the board of the Natural Resources Defense Council; J.P. Morgan executive John Rosenwald and former managing director of Morgan Stanley Kirsten Feldman are trustees for Environmental Defense Fund. Before leaving his job Sierra Club executive director Carl Pope went so far as to publicly advocate for natural gas alongside CEO of Chesapeake Energy Aubrey McClendon.

These groups, ostensibly fighting on our behalf, have chosen to ally themselves with the very system that we must dismantle in order to avert climate chaos, showing a glaringly shallow analysis of the climate crisis. The fundamental message coming from mainstream groups is: All we have to do is switch our current society from carbon intensive fuels to low carbon fuel sources and implement energy efficiency measures. We don’t have to fundamentally change our lifestyles, or this economic system, we just need to change the energy inputs. Indeed huge corporations can even make money and grow their businesses while reducing emissions. It’s that easy.

**From solar power to corporate power**

"[The global elite] are committed to one thing and one thing only: the continued success and long-term stability of capitalism as a world system." – Van Jones reflecting on his experience at the World Economic Forum.

Mainstream environmental groups view corporations as allies in the fight against climate change. They publicly applaud companies for creating “carbon principles” and hiring Chief Environmental Officers. They enter into public partnerships with major polluters. The Energy Action Coalition’s 2009 Powershift Conference was even sponsored by The Walmart Foundation (youth more astute than the Powershift leadership fortunately defaced and removed the banner).

Demanding a “clean energy future” without dismantling corporate power is like putting lipstick on a corpse. Contrary to the claims of the mainstream, fighting climate change is not a profitable endeavor. To reduce emissions wrote in the global North must drastically reduce our consumption of energy and other resources. Corporate profit requires we do otherwise, and they will do everything in their power to maintain the status quo.

A corporate “clean energy future” will only maintain the structures of exploitation that are at the root of the climate crisis, disregarding the fact that it is our economic system of ever-expanding production and consumption of the Earth’s resources that has gotten us into this mess. The same corporate logic that blows up mountains for coal will cover poor Saharan countries in solar panels to power Europe’s cities. It will turn North Dakota into a wind colony for California. Left to its own devices, capitalism, regardless of its energy supply, will continue to devour the Earth’s remaining resources until we exceed the Earth’s carrying capacity. Infinite growth will ultimately wear out its welcome on a finite planet.

"Productivity and the growth of productivity must be the first economic consideration at all times, not the last." – William E. Simon, former US Secretary of Treasury

**The world is made of more than carbon**

Mainstream environmental groups fixate on reducing carbon emissions above all environmental and social issues, predictably paving the way for the onslaught of false solutions we find ourselves up against. This shallow line of thinking is what has given birth to the nuclear “renaissance”, offsetting, agrofuels, geo-engineering and other destructive technologies. Most major environmental groups have at their best remained silent on these issues, and at worst have been their chief advocates.
Are we really “rocking the political establishment” by inviting politicians like Nancy Pelosi to speak at our conferences or begging Obama to go to Copenhagen, knowing full well his “mandate” is so weak the rest of the world would laugh if the climate crisis were not so deadly serious? Are campaigns like “Powervote” building our movement, or the Democratic Party?

Look at what a self-described progressive president, with the largest Democratic majority in Congress in generation have gotten us: The war in Iraq continues. The war in Afghanistan is escalating. Healthcare reform is a giant handout to the private insurance industry. Deportation raids on immigrant communities continue. The War on Terror is bleeding into Pakistan and Yemen. Did we mention that Senate Democratic leaders have stated they won’t even try to bring climate change legislation to a vote in 2010?

We are supposed to drop grassroots campaigning every time there is an election to achieve this? A movement locked in orbit around election cycles is doomed to start from scratch every 2-4 years. Social movements should not be beholden to the pendulum swings of electoral politics and instead should focus on building a movement powerful enough to achieve the gains we need no matter who is in power.

Instead of building an opposition movement many NGOs have chosen to curry favor with politicians in exchange for a few crumbs of influence.

Far from challenging the political system these NGOs have by and large become an appendage of it.

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our shoulders to make the deep cuts needed and pay for the damages we have caused. Poor communities, indigenous peoples, subsistence farmers, and all those fighting for climate justice do not share the same interests or responsibilities as the global elite. Climate change will affect us all, but we are not all in this together.

**Politicians, the other false solution to climate change**

Large, primarily DC based environmental groups’ obsessions with electoral politics and lobbying has been detrimental to building grassroots movements for climate justice. Our political system has been corrupted beyond repair by corporate interests. There is hardly a politician in DC who is not in the pocket of one industry or another. When push comes to shove, politicians will side with their corporate donors, and it is those corporations who are killing the planet. Yet despite all evidence to the contrary, mainstream groups tell us if we just vote for the right candidate and keep writing our representatives, they will eventually listen.

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No, we’re not all in this together

Governments, NGOs, and corporations alike promote the idea that “we are all in this together” as if rich and poor share equal responsibility for the climate crisis and face equal consequences. It conveniently redistributes the blame from the rich, where it belongs, onto all people of the world. And it also promotes the notion that we will all suffer from climate change equally, which we know to not be true. This of course has allowed rich nations to conveniently deny their dominant role in perpetuating the climate crisis, while refusing to do anything until poor countries reduce their emissions.

The Global North is responsible for the lion’s share of historical emissions, and responsibility falls on “...in ’08, we volunteered for campaigns, filled polling booth lines, and rocked the political establishment.”

—Energy Action Coalition
The totality of the climate crisis is what makes it so utterly terrifying — yet also what gives us hope. Never has it been so clear that we cannot settle for half measures and petty reforms. If we do not stop burning fossil fuels and destroying ecosystems, much of humanity and millions of other species will perish. Politicians can offer 10 percent cuts here, a few a billion dollars there, but we all know these offers are our death sentences. Averting ecological meltdown demands uncompromising action.

The change we need will not come from those who seek to represent us: politicians, corporations, and top-down NGOs. We will only avert catastrophic climate change when people stand together and fight back. This means getting organized in our communities to directly disrupt the corporate assault on our planet as well as creating sustainable lifeways.

It is time to match our actions with the severity of the climate crisis. The climate movement needs to shift gears from what has been a largely symbolic movement to one that is directly disrupting destructive industries. Symbolic actions have and will continue to play an important role in getting our message out and shifting the terms of the debate. But we cannot win with a grassroots public relations campaign alone. The clock is ticking.

We can’t block a coal plant for a couple hours and hand ourselves over to the police once we are satisfied that the media has picked up the story. Our movement needs to judge its progress not by how many media hits our action got nor how many people read our blogs, but by how many power plants we’ve put out of business and how many people get their food from neighborhood gardens instead of grocery stores.

To achieve this we need a global movement of movements based around core principles of climate justice, building power from below, direct action and solidarity.

Death by a thousand cuts

“The degree to which you resist is the degree to which you are free.” — Utah Phillips

Too many climate groups fight climate change in the same way a traditional military approaches war, putting all their energy into combating centralized seats of power. We believe the opposite is necessary. We propose an asymmetrical assault on the fossil fuel industry. Stop focusing on the DC beltway and giant UN meetings. The most promising struggles are coming out of communities from Alberta to Appalachia who refuse to step down until their homes are free from dirty energy. While mainstream groups spend millions failing to pass even the most meager and inadequate climate legislation, frontline communities around the world are actively stemming the tide of new fossil fuel infrastructure.

One of our primary strategies to reduce emissions should be to support and escalate frontline struggles against the fossil fuel industry. Fights against fossil fuel extraction are particularly strategic. By disrupting the points of extraction we can prevent those fossil fuels from being burnt and increase the costs (both political and economic) of production, while protecting the carbon-absorbing ecosystems standing above them. The majority of fossil fuel extraction takes place in wilderness areas, indigenous peoples’ lands, and rural communities where people still depend on the land for at least a portion of their sustenance.

Stopping extraction helps maintain these low-carbon cultures by protecting healthy ecosystems that provide communities with food, water, medicine and shelter.
While our most immediate task is stopping new fossil fuel infrastructure, we must not lose sight of the fact that to reign in emissions, we must ultimately shut down all existing fossil fuel plants. We cannot remain simply an anti-coal movement only to become a de facto pro-natural gas movement. We cannot fight fossil fuels only to have them replaced by nuclear power and ethanol.

Our task is to make it too expensive, too difficult, and too controversial for the dirty energy industry to continue. Wherever they meet we will disrupt their meetings. Wherever they mine we will occupy their machines. Wherever their CEOs live there will be protests in their front yards. Wherever their offices are, their doors will be blocked. Whoever funds them will be given hell.

No war, no warming

A notable missing link within our climate movement, even in circles that are more concerned with social justice issues, is a connection with the anti-war movement.

Not only is the US military the biggest consumer of fossil fuels in the world, it is often the preferred tool to secure energy supplies for the US. The war in Iraq, military aid to Colombia, saber-rattling against Iran and Venezuela, the recent establishment of a military command post known as AFRICOM to oversee Western Africa’s oil reserves—the common thread through all of these military maneuvers is that these countries sit on large stocks of oil. We must resist these acts of aggression and conquest as strongly as we resist dirty energy projects in our own backyards.

Direct action, direct results

On November 28, 2008 a single activist breached the security of one of the most heavily guarded coal power plants in Britain, climbed two 10-foot electrified razor wire fences, and disabled a 500 MW turbine - enough to power an entire city. The unknown person left a calling card reading “no new coal” and left the same way they came. British papers say that for the four hours the plant was shut down, Britain’s climate change emissions were decreased by about 2 percent. This is a fine example of direct action going beyond symbolic gestures to actually reducing emissions.

“...and no amount of free trade, capital or technology will eliminate the roots of this crisis. You forget that the crisis has emanated from the way your society is structured - an edifice based on an unending desire for resources and a way of life that sees nature as an object of exploitation and extraction.”-National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers, India

No Borders: Immigration and climate justice

Climate change is creating and will continue to create massive displacements of peoples from their communities and countries. The US has already seen the large-scale displacement of people within its borders in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The response to human migration from governments is to build walls, militarize borders, and declare entire populations of people illegal.

The climate movement must stand in solidarity with peoples displaced by the impacts of rich nations’ emissions and false solutions. This means active opposition to racist anti-immigrant policies while joining in struggle and building solidarity with communities displaced by pollution and economic policies. We need to be especially vigilant in fighting right-wing attempts to push their racist agenda in the name of saving the environment.

Against Empire

In the shadows of these wars between nation states there are low-intensity conflicts and civil wars fought every day between people defending their communities and the forces of global capital exploiting them for energy extraction and other resources. While nearly every country under the thumb of the old European empires threw off the yoke of colonialism years ago, few have escaped the grip of economic imperialism. Free trade agreements, International Monetary Fund structural adjustments programs, World Bank loans and even development aid play a major role in ensuring that poor countries are “open for business” to rich countries and corporations. These days, economic policies are just as important as war (if not more so) in opening new corners of the world to exploitation by multinational corporations.
A clear example is the US-Peru free trade agreement passed last year. The agreement stipulated that in exchange for preferential trade treatment Peru must open up the Amazon to oil extraction. Upon implementation indigenous communities shut down much of the country's infrastructure in protest of their lands being sold to foreign oil companies. The Peruvian military killed over 100 protesters. In the end the Peruvian Congress reversed its decision to open up indigenous lands to oil drilling, but it remains to be seen how long this reversal will last.

Fighting these brutal economic policies is a necessary component of any movement which takes a holistic approach to climate justice. We can have real and lasting impacts protecting ecosystems, keeping fossil fuels in the ground, and defending subsistence cultures by cutting off global capital's access to those parts of the world that have thus far escaped it.

**Solidarity**

As one movement among many fighting for a just future, we must always remember that our struggles are connected. Poor families resisting evictions are fighting the same corporations responsible for funding fossil fuel extraction. Our struggle against liquefied natural gas terminals in the US is connected to the struggle of the Ogoni people for autonomy in the Niger Delta. Wherever possible we need to find common cause with other movements and extend our solidarity to them.

For those of us not living on the frontlines there are still many ways to support frontline struggles. Organizing fundraisers, educational events, and solidarity protests can make a world of difference for communities fighting on the frontlines by providing tangible support as well as breaking the isolation.

International human rights solidarity around fossil fuel exploitation – which is all but absent in the current climate movement – unites causes that should not be separated. We can learn from movements like the Students for a Free Tibet whose direct actions have targeted embassies, consulates, and prominent international gatherings. The last thing any government wants is their internal “problems” to unfold on the international stage. Often times a simple demonstration at an embassy can mean the difference between life and death for activists facing repression in other countries.

**U’wa vs. Occidental Petroleum**

In the late 90’s Occidental Petroleum (OXY) announced its intention to drill for oil on the U’wa tribe’s traditional land within Colombia. The U’wa consider oil to be the blood of Mother Earth and were militantly opposed to OXY’s attempt to exploit their lands. They gained international attention when the entire tribe threatened to commit mass suicide if the company continued its efforts.

An international solidarity campaign was soon launched to support the U’wa’s struggle. While the U’wa held off incursions into their territory with blockades, activists around the world used direct action against Fidelity Investments and other major OXY investors. In 2000, US activists disrupted over 100 of Al Gore’s presidential campaign appearances due to his inconvenient stock holdings and personal ties with OXY.

By 2002, with grassroots action showing no sign of letting up, OXY announced they were withdrawing all operations from U’wa territory. While the U’wa continue to prevent oil extraction on their reservation, oil companies still threaten parts of their traditional territory not recognized by the Colombian government. The climate movement has much to learn from the U’wa’s struggle and other international solidarity campaigns to defend the Earth.

"The same power that manifests itself as resource extraction in the countryside, manifests itself as racism, classism, and human exploitation in the city. The ecology movement must recognize that we are just one front in a long, proud, history of resistance." - Judi Bari
The way we fight is just as important as what we fight. The climate movement needs to be a movement that destroys power from above while building it from below. We need to take action in a way that empowers, inspires, and grows our movement.

**Climate Justice**

Most in the climate movement acknowledge that those least responsible for the climate crisis are the ones who are suffering from it the most. While many groups have raised the banner of climate justice, not all live up to it.

Climate justice has its roots in grassroots social movements from around the world. It is the recognition that the historical responsibility for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions lies with the industrialized countries of the global north. It is the understanding that peasants, indigenous peoples, fisher-folk, women, people of color and poor communities have been disproportionately affected by climate change, as well as by the fossil fuel industry and by false solutions to climate change, such as tree plantations, genetically modified organisms like crops, large scale hydro projects and agrofuels.

Climate justice recognizes that instead of market-based solutions, the sustainable practices of these peoples and communities offer the real solutions to climate change. Climate justice is the fundamental knowledge that climate change cannot be addressed through corporations and the market as these are the entities that caused the problem in the first place.

Climate justice must not be dumbed down into just another catch phrase for a photo-op, or watered down to mean nothing more than “do something for the climate”, nor can it be sponsored by carbon offset companies such as TckTckTck’s timeforcimatejustice.org.

Climate justice must be a guiding principle of the climate movement, which means that how we go about averting the climate crisis is just as important as stopping it. Climate justice demands that we go beyond vague calls for “bold legislation” and challenge the systemic root causes of this crisis.

**Take Back the Land**

In response to ongoing gentrification and the lack of affordable housing in Miami, a group called Take Back the Land (TBTL) occupied an abandoned lot that had been vacant for 8 years in order to provide housing for the city’s homeless. Rather than ask the city to build affordable housing, TBTL decided to take direct action and create housing themselves.

Once they secured the land, tents and wooden shacks went up to provide shelter. Within months Umoja Village housed over 50 people. Residents ran the Village, voting on what to build, how to distribute donations, move in new residents and planting a community garden. Umoja Village was able to hold off eviction for several months due to widespread community support, and the embarrassing position the city of Miami would be in for destroying poor peoples’ homes.

Just as Umoja Village was gearing up to celebrate it’s 6 month anniversary by building more permanent structures and digging a community well, a mysterious fire burnt the Village to the ground. Police used the opportunity to arrest several residents and proceeded to erect a barbed wire fence around the property.

Despite this setback TBTL continues its efforts to empower homeless and low-income residents to find housing. Their most recent campaign involves moving families into abandoned and foreclosed homes as well as helping people resist evictions.

**Organizing for community power**

Mainstream environmental groups have more often than not reduced the concept of community organizing to canvassing to raise money for their DC offices, signing petitions, and running shadow campaigns for the Democratic Party. These efforts do nothing to build power within our communities and serve to divert our movements from more meaningful efforts.

Effective community organizing builds the power of communities to fight back as well as implement sustainable solutions on their own terms. It breaks individuals out of their isolation and bring them together for collective action. Community organizing must provide people with the tools and skill sets to organize themselves.
A successful movement empowers people to take an active and equal part in the struggle by organizing in egalitarian ways. Many groups already operate in this manner by using consensus decision making and structuring themselves as a collective team where every participant’s voice is important and the goals of actions are to increase everyone’s skills and abilities as organizers.

Alongside our efforts in non-hierarchical organizing, we need to put serious effort into combating classism, racism, sexism, ageism and the many other forces of domination within our movement. Focusing on anti-oppression is difficult but essential to building a broad movement for climate justice.

Democratizing direct action

The professionalization (perceived or otherwise) of direct action skills is a real obstacle to building a vibrant direct action movement and is a great place for rapid change in our organizing culture.

Let’s be clear, you need not a masters degree from the Greenpeace (or Rising Tide) School of Civil Disobedience in order to organize effective and empowering direct actions! Sexy banner drops off Mt. Rushmore are no doubt impressive and have their place in our toolkit. But the money and technical skills required for such actions are largely out of reach for most of us who are ready and willing to take direct action.

Climate camps

One tactic that our movement should continue to utilize as we seek to build a culture of resistance is the Climate Camp (or Convergence) model. Climate Camps are radically different from the standard conference. They are a participant-created, temporary community that comes together to share skills and information, networks, strategize, and take action. These gatherings provide newcomers with valuable trainings, allow for the cross-pollination of a multitude of local struggles, and most importantly create the type of camaraderie and unity that foster a strong direct action oriented movement.

The climate camp tradition of ending each gathering with a direct action creates a unique opportunity for mass participation in creating empowering actions, breaking down the myth of “don’t try this at home.” Newcomers are able to participate at a level they might not feel comfortable with without the more experienced activists on hand. More experienced activists are able to pass their knowledge on to newer ones, allowing for these newcomers to bring their skills back to their communities.

There is an unfortunate notion that direct action is something that “those people do.” You do not need to be a superhero, or have years of training to engage in direct action. Direct action has and always will be a tool of grassroots movements. All you need is your body and the courage to stand up to those destroying our planet. We believe it is a responsibility of all groups engaged in direct action to share their skills and create opportunities to grow the movement. For every action Greenpeace spends fifty thousand dollars on, they might consider supporting fifty community activist groups with a thousand dollars to organize their own actions!

As grassroots activists, we need to ensure that our actions are open and inclusive to those not accustomed to direct action. Our actions should serve as training for less experienced activists, to give them the skills and experience to carry out such actions themselves in the future. Grassroots groups have successfully shut down power plants, blocked roads, and occupied offices on a budget ranging from zero to a few hundred dollars raised from benefit concerts and spaghetti dinners.

Disaster Response

On December 22, 2008, the rural community of Harriman, TN was buried under 1.1 billion gallons of fly ash sludge that broke loose from the nearby Kingston coal plant operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Houses were destroyed, drinking water poisoned, lives ruined. TVA reacted in typical fashion, denying the toxicity of the poisonous sludge, telling residents their water was safe to drink, and preventing journalists from entering the disaster zone.

Within days, activists with United Mountain Defense, aided by the broader Mountain Justice network, were on the ground to support the community of Harriman. Despite harassment and arrests by TVA police seeking to cover up the disaster, UMD was able to distribute clean drinking water, provide water tests, raise $15,000 to pay for medical tests, and help residents organize community meetings. Activists also focused on media, ensuring that the disaster received national attention, and organized protests at TVA’s headquarters.

More disasters from hurricanes to oil spills are inevitable. The climate movement should prepare itself for these “rapid response” situations and be ready to provide physical support and political solidarity to impacted communities.
Fighting is not enough. While we attack the roots causes of climate change, steadily chipping away at its foundations, we must also be planting the seeds of the new world in the cracks and fissures we create. The solutions to the climate crisis will come from people joining together and creating sustainable systems in their own communities. There is no silver bullet that will save us all. There is no one solution that can be imposed from afar by governments or charity groups to usher in this new world.

What works in the Sonoran Desert does not necessarily make sense for Appalachia. Every bioregion has the resources for our survival. It is how we choose to engage with our human and natural communities that will determine whether we can inhabit a livable planet or consume our way to our own demise.

Real solutions to the climate crisis are local in nature, easily reproducible on a community scale, democratically controlled and accessible to everyone, not just an eco-bourgeoisie that can afford a “green” lifestyle. What follows are a few of many, starting points for communities to begin the transition.

**Growing local food systems**

We can make significant cuts in emissions by localizing our food systems and implementing sustainable agricultural practices. According to Via Campesina, when the entire lifecycle of our globalized food system is taken into account it is responsible for between 44 and 57 percent of total greenhouse gas emissions. This makes food a very logical place to start. Small, diversified farms are capable of producing more calories per acre than large-scale monocultures. They are more resilient to climatic changes, and are far less energy and water intensive. When done correctly, organic agriculture actually sequesters significant amounts of carbon into the soil.

What is most promising about creating local and sustainable food systems is that the means are readily available to us. New expensive technologies are not required and the necessary skills are easy to learn and pass on. The main impediment to creating sustainable food systems is access to land, possibly the longest running source of conflict between rich and poor. Converting our lawns and the occasional abandoned lot to gardens is a good start but will only get us so far. Part of our work in growing local food systems is ensuring that communities have access to the land needed to grow food whether it be through land trusts or land occupations.

**Ecosystem Restoration**

Healthy ecosystems are essential to stabilizing the climate, maintaining biodiversity, clean drinking water, and many other things we take for granted. We can improve the well-being of our communities and help maintain the web of life by restoring the ecosystems we live in. This can be as easy as letting a field grow back to its natural state or as complex as removing a dam to restore the natural flow of a river. Planting native trees to stop erosion, restoring wetlands, propagating endangered plants, and ripping up concrete on abandoned lots are all low tech projects that we can implement in our communities to help the Earth in the slow process of healing.

**Transition Towns**

Transition Towns are a global movement of communities that are organizing themselves to create the transition from fossil fuels within their towns and cities. Transition Towns examine the needs of their community such as food, water, and transportation and implement ways to meet those needs in a sustainable manner. In some cases transition towns are an informal group of people working to make their communities more sustainable. In other cases local governments have committed themselves to being a transition town.

The Transition Town model of communities taking the initiative to implement holistic solutions to our ecological crisis, rather than waiting for others to do it for them, is one of many ways we can begin creating positive change.
Community controlled power production

What energy sources we use and how we use them is perhaps the most difficult question to answer. Even wind and solar require metals that are more often than not obtained through mining practices that are just as destructive as mountaintop removal coal mining. Large-scale energy grids are highly inefficient and keep us dependent on corporate and government power monopolies.

Community controlled power production, as defined by Scott Kellogg and Stacey Pettigrew of the Rhizome Collective, may be our best chance at producing energy in a clean and just manner:

“It is in the interest of sustainable communities to develop autonomous energy. Autonomous energy comes from sources where the means of extraction, development, maintenance, and disposal can be managed completely on the scale of a village-sized community, or by an equivalently sized neighborhood in a city. The energy source must be renewable and non-polluting in nature, decentralized in structure, and most importantly, give total control of its processes to the people who are using it.”

The End

A wealth of great shorter analysis on climate movement strategy can be found at these websites:
- climateactioncafe.wordpress.com
- turbulence.org.uk
- www.redpepper.org.uk/-Greenpepper
- thechangeagency.org

Books and longer pieces on movements and strategy:
Critical Currents no. 6: Contours of Climate Justice – Ideas for shaping new climate and energy politics
Stop Global Warming–Change the World By Jonathan Neale
Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina by Marina Sitrin
Globalize Liberation, How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World by David Solnit
Direct Action: An Ethnography by David Graeber

Books on sustainability:
Toolkit for Sustainable City Living, Kellogg & Pettigrew
Gaia’s Garden, Toby Hemenway
The New Organic Grower, Coleman

Rising Tide is an international all-volunteer grassroots network of groups and individuals who promote local, community-based solutions to the climate crisis and take direct action to confront the root causes of climate change. Rising Tide was born out of the conviction that corporate-friendly “solutions” to climate change will not save us and that most government efforts are half-measures at best. We organize through decentralized local groups that support one another through shared resources, ideas, fundraising and training.

The international Rising Tide network now spans countries on four continents. We know that whatever we achieve in our local struggles is amplified by the energy of the growing global movement for climate justice.

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RISING NORTH AMERICA
CONFRONTING THE ROOT CAUSES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

PO Box 3928
Oakland, CA 94609
contact@risingtidenorthamerica.org
www.risingtidenorthamerica.org
"If you know you must do something and you do not do it you are not free."

- David Pratt, South African imprisoned for resisting Apartheid