

On the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009, I saw Graciela Chichilnisky, one of the founding architects of the carbon market, give a talk at the RSA. All climate change talks are charged with gloom and doom: the Kyoto Protocol is in peril - set to vanish in 2012 - it is not even near to achieving its targets. China and the US are on the verge of a new Cold War revolving around carbon emissions. And in spite of Obama's warm and welcome words of global cooperation, the world's biggest emitter of carbon has not even ratified the treaty. But there were green glimmers of optimism too - the possibility of carbon 'air' capture and solar power.

I knew very little of the Kyoto Protocol, only that it hasn't worked - as Mark Lynas, the chair of the talk pointed out, since the Kyoto Protocol was signed and agreed in 1997, carbon emissions dramatically increased from the very countries bound by the treaty. Earlier in the year, I briefly attended Climate Clamp: the anger was targeted at authority and their failures - the failure of the banks, the failure of capitalism, the failure of a market-based solution to climate change. So it was a bit startling to see the mastermind behind the carbon market in front of me, defending the very protocol that has been attacked from all camps by all political persuasions. Could Adam Smith's 'invisible' hand acquire a green hue?

But there are several things that I liked about Chichilnisky's talk:

a) International development and ecological sustainability go hand-in-hand. So far, Africa and South America have not been able to participate in reducing carbon emissions because they only produce around 3% of the world's CO<sub>2</sub>. As these continents do not produce enough carbon to reduce their emissions, they cannot be rewarded for reducing carbon under the protocol. Therefore most approved carbon offsetting projects or CDMs (clean development mechanisms) end up in China (because they are the biggest polluters of the developing world).

On Chichilnisky's new proposal, countries in Africa and South America can participate more fully in the Kyoto Protocol through 'air capture' - a very recent technology that can capture carbon from the air and stored in ethanol and concrete. This way, Africa can potentially reduce 20% of the world's carbon emissions while still only producing 3% of the world's emissions.

b) rebuking the population myth: as Chichilnisky acutely points out, only 20% of the world's population produce 60% of the world's emissions - and the countries of that 20% have the lowest and decreasing populations. So those who claim that mass population is the biggest obstacle to climate change just have to look at the unequal production of carbon.

I'm reading her book, 'The Kyoto Protocol' at the moment; its lucid, paced tone marks a striking difference from George Monbiot's *Heat*, a book that coruscates with rage. However, Chichilnisky's conclusions are even more frightening. Unlike Monbiot's book, which ends with rationed 'ice caps' and carbon-neutral lives, Chichilnisky implies that even this would not be enough. Stabilising carbon in the atmosphere is not sufficient: we must actively suck carbon out of the atmosphere. Chichilnisky's optimism hinges on the combination of air capture (to stabilise the emissions) and solar power (to source eternal and democratically dispensed sunshine). Renewables and even nuclear alone won't do.

But this is where I feel Chichilnisky's strengths are also her weaknesses: her appealing optimism stems predominantly from an over-dependence on technology: what if it turns out, like biofuels and carbon capture for coal, that air capture only promulgates the problem instead of solves it? What if solar panels cannot overhaul entire global, energy infrastructures? What if the Kyoto protocol falls apart and geopolitical conflicts destroy any hope of cooperation even things become technologically feasible?



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