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A Plan to Save the Planet

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A Plan to Save the Planet

#Education #Migration #Natural Resources

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Preface

Sacha Llorenti

Four and a half million people died infected by COVID-19. This global tragedy is the prism through which we must analyse how and in whose interest the ruling system on the planet works.

In the span of a few months, the pandemic compacted political, economic, and social phenomena, the consequences of which would take years to manifest in other circumstances.

Some of the issues that were clearly magnified through the lens of the pandemic are job insecurity, deficits in health systems, inequality, North-South relations, the United Nations' failure to coordinate a collective effort, the use of unilateral coercive measures as a weapon to control and punish many peoples, global economic vulnerability, and the role of the state.

The multidimensional and existential nature of the crises faced by humankind and by life on the planet compels us to create and strengthen all possible opportunities to gather towards collectively building a common, intersectional, and inclusive horizon that enables us to reclaim our social and political initiative.

In this context, the Executive Secretariat of ALBA-TCP along with Instituto Simón Bolívar for Peace and Solidarity Among Peoples and Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research decided to hold a meeting of research institutes with the purpose of carrying out the challenging and urgent task of designing *A Plan to Save the Planet*.

After several working sessions, we now have a systematic set of proposals before us that will allow us to change the course towards which the capitalist system is leading our species and all living creatures on our planet.

This document has already taken on its own life and belongs to all the people and collectives willing to improve it and turn it into an instrument to fight against imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism.

Introduction

Carlos Ron and Vijay Prashad

Over the course of this pandemic, awareness has grown about the fragility of human society. Many parts of the world crumbled before COVID-19 while the fact of climate change introduced us to the reality that several species of plant and animal had gone extinct. Between annihilation and extinction stands the fate of the planet.

Sacha Llorenti, the Executive Secretary of ALBA-TCP, assembled a group of research institutes to draft *A Plan to Save the Planet*. This plan was to be written from a people-centred perspective against the profit-centred approach of many international institutions (such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Economic Forum). This document emerges out of that charge.

What is ALBA-TCP?

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America or ALBA was born in 2004 in Havana, Cuba, when a joint declaration and implementation agreement were signed by Commanders Hugo Chávez Frías and Fidel Castro Ruz. In April 2006, Bolivia joined the Alliance, complementing its principles, and the Peoples' Trade Treaty (TCP in Spanish) was incorporated, which proposes trade based on complementarity, solidarity, and cooperation.

ALBA-TCP is an inter-state body of nine states that promotes the twin goals of sovereignty from external domination and integration for internal advancement. Some of these methods for integration include the development of a common regional currency to reconcile inter-regional trade (the sucre), the creation of regional energy firms to advance social goals (PetroCaribe and PetroSur), and the establishment of a television network to democratise the global communications system (TeleSur). ALBA-TCP is one of a set of regional dynamics that promotes both sovereignty and integration, including the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

What is the Research Institute Network?

To develop *A Plan to Save the Planet*, ALBA-TCP worked with two research institutes: the Simón Bolívar Institute for Peace and Solidarity Among Peoples and the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. Our two institutes gathered together other research institutes with whom we have worked over the years and established a working network toward the construction of this document. This network is an informal gathering which has been strengthened by our common work and which will lead to more collective projects in the future. If other research institutes are interested in joining this network, please write to plan@thetricontinental.org.

What is A Plan to Save the Planet?

In 1974, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution called the New International Economic Order (NIEO) that was developed by the Non-Aligned Movement, the G-77, and the UN Conference on Trade and Development. That resolution was based on ‘equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest, and cooperation among all states, irrespective of their economic and social systems, which shall correct inequalities and redress existing injustices, make it possible to eliminate the widening gap between the developed and developing countries, and ensure steadily accelerating economic and social development and peace and justice for present and future generations’. There is nothing to be updated in these sentiments.

The weakening of the Third World Project, the demise of the USSR and the communist state system in Eastern Europe, and the collapse of social democracy in the advanced capitalist countries meant that the NIEO – and its entire agenda of development – were set aside. In their place arose the austerity and security (war) agenda of neoliberalism. The establishment of the South Commission under the leadership of Julius Nyerere between 1987 and 1990 was an attempt to resurrect the NIEO, but its final document, *The Challenge to the South*, was not given the serious attention that it required. *A Plan to Save the Planet* is drafted in the tradition of the NIEO (1974) and of *The Challenge of the South* (1990).

A Plan to Save the Planet is a provisional text, a draft built out of the analyses and demands of our people’s movements and governments. It asks to be read and discussed, to be criticised and developed further. This is a first draft of many drafts to come. Please contact us at plan@thetricontinental.org with your criticisms and your suggestions, since this is a living document. This document will eventually advance through our movements and our institutions, building toward a resolution at the United Nations to save the planet.

A Plan to Save the Planet

Insecurities of various kinds grip the planet. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has produced the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. This downturn is not reflected in stock prices or in the earnings reports of the major multinational corporations, but in the data on unemployment and inequality, in rising hunger rates, and in rising feelings of desolation and anger. It is estimated that hundreds of millions of people will be pushed into absolute poverty by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is only one data point in an avalanche of bad news for those who are watching the slide of too many countries into catastrophic debt and despair. An

emergency global programme must be undertaken to prevent this result. It is crucial that countries put aside narrow nationalist concerns and engage in a common, cooperative response to this crisis.

Three apartheid – of money, medicine, and food – govern the immediate situation in the world:

Money Apartheid. The external debt of developing countries is higher than \$11 trillion, with projections that debt servicing payments will amount to nearly \$4 trillion by the end of 2021. In 2020, sixty-four countries spent more on debt servicing than on health care. There was modest talk about debt service suspension, with some small assistance from various multilateral agencies. This talk of debt suspension comes alongside the International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy for states to borrow more money since interest rates are low. Rather than lend more, why not simply cancel the total external debt and – at the same time – incorporate the at least \$37 trillion that sits in illicit tax havens? The word that is often used to define debt cancellation is ‘forgiveness’. However, there is nothing to forgive since this debt is a consequence of a long history of colonial theft, imperialist expropriation, and plunder. Richer countries are able to borrow at low to zero rates of interest, while the developing world is charged usurious rates and has odious debts to pay off with precious funds that should be going toward breaking the chain of COVID-19 infection.

Medical Apartheid. The World Health Organisation’s Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that the world is on the brink of a ‘catastrophic moral failure’. He was referring to vaccine nationalism and vaccine hoarding. States in the North Atlantic (Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and many European states) have shrugged aside the call from India and South Africa to suspend intellectual property rules regarding the vaccine. These Northern states have underfunded the COVAX project, which, as a result, is at a high risk of failure, with growing expectations that many people in developing countries will not see a vaccine before 2023. Meanwhile, Northern states have hoarded vaccines: Canada alone built up reserves of five vaccines per Canadian, drawing some of these vaccines from the COVAX. Ghebreyesus calls this ‘vaccine apartheid’.

Food Apartheid. World hunger, which had declined from 2005 to 2014, has begun to rise since then, with China – which eradicated extreme poverty in 2020 – as a major exception to this global trend. World hunger is now at 2010 levels. The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)’s 2021 report, *The State of Food Insecurity and Nutrition in the World*, notes that ‘nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) did not have access to adequate food in 2020 – an increase of almost 320 million people in just one year’. Hunger is intolerable. The UN’s World Food Programme projects that the number of those who are hungry could double before the pandemic is contained ‘unless swift action is taken’.

What is the cause of these three apartheid? The control that a handful of companies and governments exercise over the global economy:

1. Control over science and technology
2. Control over financial systems
3. Control over access to resources
4. Control over weaponry
5. Control over communications

We, a network of research institutions that have been looking closely at the long-term crises of neoliberal austerity, induced debt regimes, and maldevelopment, have produced a set of policies toward a new world order. Our plan – drawing from the lineage of the NIEO – puts forward a vision for the present and the immediate future centred on twelve key themes: democracy and the world order, the environment, finance, health, housing, food, education, work, care, women, culture, and the digital world. This is the skeleton of a much fuller plan that we will produce in the year ahead.

Democracy and the World Order

1. Affirm the importance of the United Nations Charter (1945).
2. Insist that member states of the United Nations adhere to the Charter, including to its specific requirements around the use of sanctions and force (Chapters VI and VII).
3. Reconsider the monopoly power exercised by the UN Security Council over decisions that impact a large section of the multilateral system; engage the UN General Assembly in a serious dialogue over democracy inside the global order.
4. Insist that multilateral bodies – such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) – formulate policies in accord with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); forbid any policy that increases poverty, hunger, homelessness, and illiteracy.
5. Affirm the centrality of the multilateral system over the key areas of security, trade policy, and financial regulations, recognising that regional bodies such as NATO and parochial institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have supplanted the United Nations and its agencies (such as the UN Conference on Trade and Development) in the formulation of these policies.
6. Formulate policies to strengthen regional mechanisms and deepen the integration of developing countries.
7. Prevent the use of the security paradigm – notably, counterterrorism and counternarcotics – to address the world's social challenges.
8. Cap spending on arms and on militarism; ensure that space is demilitarised.
9. Convert the resources spent on arms production to fund socially beneficial production.
10. Ensure that all rights are available to all peoples, not just those who are citizens of a state; these rights must apply to all hitherto marginalised communities such as women, indigenous peoples, people of colour, migrants, undocumented people, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, oppressed castes, and the impoverished.

The Environment

1. Based on the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development formula of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, compel the developed countries who bear the historic responsibility for causing the climate catastrophe to rapidly cut their carbon emissions to stop global temperatures rising above the critical threshold of 1.5 °C.
2. Demand that developed countries reduce average per capita carbon emissions to a maximum of 2.3 tonnes by 2030, which is what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assesses is the necessary global average to limit global warming to 1.5 °C.
3. Ensure that developed countries in the Global North provide climate compensation for the loss and damages caused by their carbon emissions and robustly fund public infrastructure to replace reliance upon carbon-based energy.
4. Deliver on the promises of the Paris Climate Change Agreement that developed countries provide \$100 billion per year to address the needs of developing countries. These needs include adaptation and resilience to the real and disastrous impact of climate change, which is already being borne by developing countries (particularly low-lying countries and small island states).
5. Transfer technology and finance to developing countries for mitigation and adaptation away from carbon-based energy systems.
6. Demand that the developed countries responsible for polluting the waters, soil, and air with toxic and hazardous wastes – including nuclear waste – bear the costs of clean-up and cease to produce and use toxic waste.
7. Under a coherent, revised definition adjusted to the immediate urgencies of developing countries, elaborate a transition programme towards a paradigm capable of mitigating and adapting carbon-based energy systems. This should be combined with rational financing channels for developing countries, include the direct involvement of developing countries, and be adjusted according to the scale of needs and willingness to coordinate financing. This roadmap towards a concerted paradigm with the major countries would, in any case, need to provide the raw material for any energy transition in the near future.

Finance

1. Renegotiate all odious external debts of developing countries.
2. Begin discussions about reparations for colonial plunder, including for enslavement.
3. Seize assets held in illicit tax havens.
4. Adopt ceilings on the interest rates that commercial and multilateral lenders charge developing countries.
5. Discourage the profit shifting activities of multinational corporations and adopt a unitary approach to tax the share of global profits generated by subsidiaries of multinational corporations.
6. Implement taxes on wealth and inheritance.
7. Implement higher rates of taxation on income, such as capital gains, made through financial speculation by all non-bank corporate entities.
8. Democratise the banking system by expanding the role and size of public banking and by implementing more regulation and transparency for private banking.

9. Enforce ceilings as a percentage of liabilities on speculative banking activity by commercial banks.
10. Regulate interest rates that banks charge for specific goods, such as for housing loans.
11. Set capital controls to prevent capital flight.
12. Create people-centred alternatives to IMF and World Bank-led finance for development programmes.
13. Encourage the creation of regional trade reconciliation mechanisms.
14. Implement tight regulations for pension funds so that the savings of the people are not used recklessly for financial speculation; encourage the creation of public sector pension funds.

Health

1. Advance the cause of a people's vaccine for COVID-19 and for future diseases.
2. Remove patent controls on essential medicines and facilitate the transfer of both medical science and technology to developing countries.
3. De-commodify, develop, and increase investment in robust public health systems.
4. Develop the public sector's pharmaceutical production, particularly in developing countries.
5. Form a United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Health Threats.
6. Support and strengthen the role health workers' unions play at the workplace and in the economy.
7. Ensure that people from underprivileged backgrounds and rural areas are trained as doctors.
8. Broaden medical solidarity, including through the World Health Organisation and health platforms associated with regional bodies.
9. Mobilise campaigns and actions that protect and expand reproductive and sexual rights.
10. Levy a health tax on large corporations that produce beverages and foods that are widely recognised by international health organisations to be harmful to children and to public health in general (such as those that lead to obesity or other chronic diseases).
11. Curb the promotional activities and advertising expenditures of pharmaceutical corporations.
12. Build a network of accessible, publicly funded diagnostic centres and strictly regulate the prescription and prices of diagnostic tests.
13. Provide psychological therapy as part of public health systems.

Housing

1. Ensure the construction of sufficient housing, with an emphasis on developing diverse neighbourhoods with a mix of residential and commercial zones.
2. Place rent controls on rental housing units.
3. Repurpose vacant properties into community centres or housing units.
4. Build and repurpose housing developments that are linked to public transportation systems to reduce the necessity for private transportation such as cars.
5. Require all buildings above 2,000 metres to have green roofs or solar panels.
6. Develop new housing units with innovative materials which demonstrate thermal resistance.

Food

1. Enhance national and regional food systems.
2. Review and repeal bilateral and multilateral agreements that prohibit or penalise public food systems and public food purchases.
3. Ensure that developed countries which use international trade mechanisms to prevent developing countries from subsidising agriculture are prohibited from pursuing hypocritical policies such as subsidising their own agribusinesses; apply WTO rules to facilitate development and not to subordinate developing countries.
4. Redistribute land, recognising it as a common resource of the people; limit the size of landownership and place ceilings on household and corporate landholdings.
5. Develop publicly funded, sustainable irrigation and related infrastructure to aid farmers to cultivate in increasingly extreme weather conditions.
6. Build public distribution systems, with particular focus on eliminating hunger.
7. Enhance public support for farmers in developing countries to ensure that agricultural work provides decent incomes to farmers and farm workers.
8. Develop credit systems for farmers to sustain farming and avoid draining income from the farms.
9. Enhance the cooperative sector's food production and encourage popular participation in food production and distribution systems.
10. Provide cheap credit, subsidised inputs, free technical assistance, and land for the establishment of cooperative farms and markets.
11. Develop publicly funded transportation networks, including storage facilities, to ensure that small farms can get their produce to markets.
12. Ensure that healthy food is made available to public schools and crèches.
13. Build technical and scientific capacity for sustainable and ecological agriculture.
14. Remove patents on seeds and promote legal frameworks to protect native seeds against commodification by agribusinesses.

Education

1. De-commodify education, which includes strengthening public education and preventing the privatisation of education.
2. Promote the role of teachers in the management of educational institutions.
3. Ensure that underprivileged sectors of society are trained to become teachers.
4. Bridge the electricity and the digital divides.
5. Build publicly financed and publicly controlled high-speed broadband internet systems.
6. Ensure that all school children have access to all the elements of the educational process, including extra-curricular activities.
7. Develop channels through which students participate in decision-making processes in all forms of higher education.
8. Make education a lifelong experience, allowing people at every stage of life to enjoy the practice of learning in various kinds of institutions. This will foster the value that education is not only about building a career, but about building a society that supports the continuing growth and development of the mind and of the community.

9. Subsidise higher education and vocational courses for workers of all ages in areas related to their occupation.
10. Make education, including higher education, available to all in their spoken languages; ensure that governments take responsibility for providing educational materials in the spoken languages in their country through translations and other means.
11. Establish management educational institutes that cater to the needs of cooperatives in industrial, agricultural, and service sectors.

Work

1. Demand that governments take responsibility for ensuring that their labour laws adhere to the fundamental Conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), especially Conventions 87 and 98 on the rights to organise and to collective bargaining.
2. Enhance the level of social goods – such as public health, public education, and public leisure – to lessen the pressure on wages.
3. Encourage the principle of equal wages for equal work.
4. Strengthen the culture of trade unionism and promote collective bargaining to restrain the inherent imbalance of power in the workplace, give workers a democratic voice, and avoid individuals feeling isolated and burdened with the task of improving their workplaces on their own.
5. Ensure that all those who work – including those in the informal and gig economy – are covered by basic workplace protections.
6. Focus on the redistribution of working time through the process of collective bargaining, providing sufficient working hours for all at a living wage rate.
7. Ensure that every worker has the right to healthy and safe working conditions; make governments responsible for ensuring that safety standards are suitably monitored and enforced.
8. Create publicly financed employment centres to assist the unemployed in seeking employment; these centres can be rooted, for example, in a network of the union of the unemployed.
9. Provide robust, publicly financed systems of social welfare with no means testing and no work requirements.
10. Guarantee adequate pensions to all citizens of retirement age.
11. Ensure that the state provides adequate compensation and pensions for those injured or disabled during work, particularly for unorganised, precarious, and self-employed workers.
12. Ensure that governments promote workers' cooperatives, contribute to the initial capital of such cooperatives, and ensure credit and reasonable prices.
13. Develop countries' infrastructures in collaboration with such cooperatives, public research and technological institutes, and banks; ensure that a significant portion of the government's infrastructure spending is allocated to such cooperatives.
14. Build a cheap and adequate public transport network (bus, rail, and metro) in cities to save workers' time and finances spent in transport.
15. Build a network of government-supported cooperative food outlets in cities and cater to unorganised, precarious, and migrant workers.

Care

1. Enhance social protection systems, including child and elder care programmes.
2. Build a system of publicly financed and neighbourhood-run crèches for children; create publicly financed and neighbourhood-run facilities for after-school childcare that provide meals to children.
3. Build a system of publicly financed neighbourhood-run facilities for the social life and care of the elderly.
4. Ensure that workers at crèches and facilities for the elderly receive decent salaries, training, and control over their workplace.

Women and LGBTQ+ People

1. Nominate leaders of working-class women's organisations to influential bodies that shape policy.
2. Support women's organisations and networks, including workers' organisations, community organisations, and self-help groups.
3. Recognise and count informal women workers as well as unpaid domestic work and household care work in national accounts. This must include women workers in hidden or invisible sectors.
4. Establish policies of paid parental leave.
5. Lessen the increasing care burden on women; ensure that financial support packages consider the unrecognised and unpaid care work most often carried out by women, such as childcare provision.
6. Provide immediate cash relief, food relief, and social protection measures to women workers; ensure that female-headed households receive as much aid as male-headed households; and ensure that LGBTQ+ people are provided with equal access to social programmes and subsidies.
7. Recognise the specific needs of women health care workers, many of whom are not treated as workers but as volunteers; ensure that they receive adequate compensation and proper equipment.
8. Provide credit to women's cooperatives.
9. Create programmes to encourage the sharing of social reproductive labour in the home.
10. Establish systems that eliminate violence against women and LGBTQ+ people; implement plans to root out patriarchal violence and ensure that economic policies do not inadvertently ignore the problem of patriarchal violence.
11. Ensure that all people have equal access to social programmes and services – such as the right to safe, secure housing and healthy food – regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other marginalised identities.

Culture

1. Promote the ideas of the UNESCO Constitution of 1945, particularly the idea that the wide

diffusion of culture and education is indispensable to human dignity and to world peace.

2. Extend public support to cultural institutions that uphold the values of dignity, equality, and decency.
3. Encourage cultural activities that are not reduced to mindless consumerism.
4. Foster cultural and artistic initiatives against discrimination of all forms (such as racism, casteism, misogyny, transphobia, etc.).
5. Endorse cultural activities that depict ecological harmony and fight against the ravaging of the earth's resources for private profit.
6. Stimulate the traditional arts of the people and prevent their commodification and distortion by cruel cultural nationalism.
7. Defend the right of artists and intellectuals to honest expression of speech.

The Digital World

1. Fight to extend the digital global commons by building public access to publicly regulated and controlled space on the internet.
2. Adhere to the 2016 UN Resolution, which defines internet access as a human right.
3. Nationalise telecommunications infrastructure and guarantee internet access and digital literacy to all sectors of society.
4. Protect all public and personal data from being exploited by transnational corporations; build participatory systems for computational analysis and for the control and use of big data for public purposes.
5. Promote and fund free hardware and software development with a focus on providing solutions to public problems.

Network of Research Institutes:

The Network of Research Institutes is a collective brought together by ALBA-TCP, Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, and Instituto Simón Bolívar for Peace and Solidarity Among People. The text above is part of a process initiated by this group.

- América Latina en movimiento, ALAI (Quito, Ecuador)
- Centre for Research on the Congo (Kinshasa, DR Congo)
- Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial (CIEM) (Cuba)
- Centro de Investigaciones de Política Internacional (CIPI) (Cuba)
- Centro per la Riforma dello Stato (Roma, Italy)
- Chris Hani Institute (South Africa)
- Consultation and Research Institute (Beirut, Lebanon)

- Dominica Association of Industry & Commerce (Roseau, Dominica)
- Dominica State College (Roseau, Dominica)
- Foundation for Education in Social Transformation and Progress (Kenya)
- The Centre for International Gramscian Studies (GramsciLab), University of Cagliari (Italy)
- Instituto Simón Bolívar for Peace and Solidarity Among Peoples (Venezuela)
- Internationale Forschungsstelle DDR (Berlin, Germany)
- Institute of Employment Rights (London, UK)
- Marx Memorial Library (London, UK)
- Instituto Internacional de Investigación ‘Andrés Bello’ (Bolivia)
- Instituto Patria (Argentina)
- Instituto Patria Grande (Bolivia)
- Instituto Samuel Robinson (Venezuela)
- Observatorio del Sur Global, Argentina
- Research Group of the Popular Education Initiative (Accra, Ghana)
- Sam Moyo African Institute of Agrarian Studies (Harare, Zimbabwe)
- Society for Social and Economic Research (Delhi, India)
- Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research
 - Instituto Tricontinental de Investigación Social (Argentina)
 - Instituto Tricontinental de Pesquisa Social (Brazil)
 - Tricontinental Research Services (India)
 - Tricontinental South Africa
- University of the West Indies Open Campus (Roseau, Dominica)
- Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society Research Institute (Vadakara, Kerala)

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