Reporting Back from the 4th International Ecosocialist Encounters 2018: What Has Been Sown, What Has Been Harvested, What Remains?

*Reportando a partir dos IV Encontros Internacionais Ecossocialistas de 2018: o
que foi semeado, o que foi colhido, o que resta?*

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/eces/5853>

DOI: 10.4000/eces.5853

ISSN: 1647-0737

Publisher

Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra

Electronic reference

Sinan Eden, "Reporting Back from the 4th International Ecosocialist Encounters 2018: What Has Been Sown, What Has Been Harvested, What Remains?", *e-cadernos CES* [Online], 34 | 2020, Online since 09 July 2021, connection on 23 October 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/eces/5853> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/eces.5853>

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**REPORTING BACK FROM THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL ECOSOCIALIST ENCOUNTERS 2018:
WHAT HAS BEEN SOWN, WHAT HAS BEEN HARVESTED, WHAT REMAINS?**

Abstract: The 4th International Ecosocialist Encounters that took place in Lisbon in November 2018 joined hundreds of activists to debate the climate crisis and strategies to exit the crisis. This article summarises the preparation process and the major outcomes of the event. For the future and success of the climate justice movement, it identifies an acute need for articulating ideological considerations, political plans, strategies and tactics, beyond the typical frameworks of social movements.

Keywords: climate crisis, climate justice, ecosocialism, green capitalism, social movements.

**REPORTANDO A PARTIR DOS IV ENCONTROS INTERNACIONAIS ECOSOCIALISTAS DE 2018:
O QUE FOI SEMEADO, O QUE FOI COLHIDO, O QUE RESTA?**

Resumo: Os IV Encontros Internacionais Ecosocialistas que tiveram lugar em Lisboa em novembro de 2018 juntaram centenas de ativistas para debater a crise climática e as estratégias de saída da crise. Este artigo resume o processo preparatório e os resultados principais dos Encontros. Para o futuro e o sucesso do movimento pela justiça climática, o artigo identifica uma necessidade urgente de uma articulação entre as considerações ideológicas, os planos políticos, as estratégias e as táticas que vão para além dos enquadramentos típicos dos movimentos sociais.

Palavras-chave: capitalismo verde, crise climática, ecosocialismo, justiça climática, movimentos sociais.

THE BACKGROUND

§1. We live in a climate crisis. For decades now, many parts of the world have been living in a climate crisis. In recent years, the Global North finally started calling it the way it is: a crisis. Mass mobilisations have brought it into mainstream discourse, with governments and parliaments declaring a climate emergency.

Crisis is a very important concept in social history. It is the key dialectical element of capitalism, whereby the entire mode of production is reproduced at a higher level through its internal antagonisms. It is also a key element in politics, whereby all social priorities are redefined, and all the resources are mobilised in a certain direction.

Understanding crises is understanding the inner dynamics of history, and *that* is the first step towards deciding “What to Do”. For this reason, the fourth edition of the International Ecosocialist Encounters was largely dedicated to climate justice.

THE PROCESS

§2. The Encounters took place in Lisbon, Portugal, on 23-25 November 2018, and consisted in 19 panels with more than 60 speakers from 20 countries and 5 continents, together with a full parallel programme for children. Around 400 people participated in the Encounters.

The panels were organised according to five main topics:

- Political Economy of Food and Food Sovereignty
- Dismantling the Fallacy of Green Capitalism
- Labour in the Age of Climate Change
- Climate Justice and Energy Democracy
- Ecofeminisms

§3. We used various ways of documenting the panels. Before the encounters, we published descriptions of the panels with short biographies of the speakers in three languages (Portuguese, English, Spanish) to help participants choose between panels occurring in parallel (4th International Ecosocialist Encounters, 2018). At the beginning of the encounters, we interviewed the speakers about their contributions and prepared short videos to act as trailers for the panels.¹ During the panels we made sound recordings of all contributions in order to make a podcast of the encounters (Climáximo, 2019a). At the same time, reporters took notes and wrote short summaries of the panels (Climáximo, 2019b). All of these efforts produced a varied, succinct and accessible collection of documentation. This article will therefore refrain from indulging in the

¹ “IV Encontros Internacionais Ecosocialistas no Vimeo”. Accessed on 10.03.2020, at <https://vimeo.com/album/5601311>.

contents of individual panels, and instead focus on the preparation process and the outcomes of the Encounters.

§4. The preparations started in January 2018 and the entire process was organised exclusively by volunteers, while many partner organisations gave their support in various forms. An initial group of activists launched the call for the Encounters, inviting others to sign up. In a later stage, organisations were invited to join the preparations. Starting late summer 2018, open meetings were held to involve activists from all backgrounds. Comrade accommodation was provided for speakers, while participants had a collective accommodation option available. All interpreters were volunteers. The grassroots character of the organisational structure allowed for increased participation and reduced logistics. This way, the Encounters became encounters proper, rather than a conference. Teams were formed for interpretation, kitchen duty, comrade accommodation, media, reception and panel facilitation, all involving different degrees of engagement for a total of 100 volunteers who were also participants in the Encounters.

§5. This involvement generated a culture ripe for deliberate networking and strategy building, which resulted in the politicisation of the space beyond logistical tasks.

The days preceding the Encounters, unionists and activists met in the “Lisbon Just Transition Gathering” to share experiences of their struggles and to discuss possible convergence points between labour and ecological movements (Eden, 2018). In these meetings, the Portuguese Climate Jobs campaign built its one-year action plan, key elements for a green new deal for labour were discussed, and a joint declaration on COP-24 was agreed on (Empregos para o Clima, 2018).

Activists from different international organisations took part in the Encounters, with the majority of non-Portuguese participants coming from Spain and the rest of Europe. The organisation of the Encounters made good use of this fact, by proposing and facilitating meetings besides the panels. As an example, there was a presentation of the By 2020 We Rise Up campaign for organisations, and in the closing session the launching action of this campaign was announced. The first seeds were also sown for the platform 2020 Rebellión por el Clima, the Iberian sub-campaign of By 2020 We Rise Up, which later expanded to include many more collectives and associations, and ended up organising a massive wave of mobilisations in September-October 2019. At the time of writing, 2020 Rebellión por el Clima includes 23 organisations from the Iberian Peninsula.

Besides these international collaborations, Portuguese organisations and collectives also had a strategy meeting where they launched an action camp against fossil gas and for climate justice, Camp-in-Gás, to take place in July 2019. This action camp targeted the fossil gas drilling projects in Central Portugal. Camp-in-Gás united 16 organisations

for the cause and served as a training ground for civil disobedience protests for Portuguese activists. Another concurrence of note is the fact that Spanish activists from 2020 *Rebellión por el Clima* joined in the camp, as part of the preparation of their escalation plans.

Of course, the report above specifically highlights the strategic spaces that were deliberately created by the organisation itself and ignores other more organic networking that went on during breaks and social moments in the evenings. The main topics in the Encounters were prepared by distinct individual teams and these followed a logical or argumentative sequence, which guided the contents of the panels in each topic. This dialogue between those panels had already produced a convergence of the organisations that were involved in that topic either as organisers or as speakers.

THE CONTENT

§6. While one aspect that we valued in the Encounters was that of networking and organisation, another goal, in terms of public impact, was to open up a public discussion on the future *of civilisation* as well as the *future civilisation*.

§7. Our understanding is that capitalism is the root cause of the climate crisis. The climate crisis stems from and is fostered by the capitalist system, which focusses on profit maximisation, makes invisible all the aspects of life that are not assigned a commercial value and reproduces itself through climate chaos. The antagonism between a capitalist mode of production and the climate crisis is an essential political element for the climate justice movement. The justice element, on the other hand, is not a secondary optional addition to the equation. It is the ‘litmus paper’ to distinguish false solutions from real solutions.

§8. The major novelty that climate brings in to all the other social injustices is a deadline to win. In other words, climate is a problem concerning everyone not only because the entire planet is at stake but more importantly because the climate deadline is actually a deadline for *all* the struggles for social justice. This analysis was the background for all the panels in the Encounters.

§9. The climate crisis, with its urgency component, brings into view two handicaps of the environmentalisms until now.

Firstly, the radical social, economic and ecological transformation necessary to stop global warming rules out “inside the system” solutions. The only realistic paths point to US\$1.1 trillion in stranded assets in ten years, and it is technically impossible to go through this smoothly (Worth, 2014). Secondly, it gets clearer and clearer every day that the climate struggle cannot be won without winning “everything”. The solutions involve profoundly changing production, distribution and consumption at all levels; and this

implies confronting the largest corporations of the world (most of which are directly connected to fossil fuels). In other words, either we change everything about our societies – energy, transport, food, etc. – or climate change will change everything about our societies – e.g. droughts, storms, infrastructure failures, climate refugees (Klein, 2014). In short, it is becoming impossible to be an environmentalist without being anti-capitalist.

On the other side of the mirror, a symmetric image appears, with two handicaps for the anti-capitalists. Firstly, the eventual irreversibility of climate change acts as a wake-up call for all revolutionaries, setting a deadline to win the fight. Secondly, the revolution cannot be *any* revolution, it needs to directly address the climate crisis. The anti-capitalists must have concrete policy proposals that urgently address both climate and social injustices. To sum up, the climate crisis serves as a melting pot for environmentalists and anti-capitalists, making both into revolutionaries – exactly what we need in these times.

§10. This burning issue has not yet been problematised by either the climate movement or the Left. Through the Encounters we aimed at introducing this discussion to all activist circles while at the same time deepening our own understanding of the political urgency. In other words, the Encounters did not only provide the opportunity for organising and networking, but also served as a space for political training. In order to give the training a more permanent character, we used several methods of documentation to enable all activists to learn from all the panels. The choice of good quality, detailed and diverse documentation was an important political decision made by the organisers, firstly because we wanted to produce materials for the upcoming mass movement, which indeed rose up a couple of months after the Encounters, and secondly because there were three sessions in parallel throughout the Encounters, which constrained participation in at least two thirds of the panels for any of the venue's participants.

It was a fortunate confluence of circumstances that saw the Encounters take place at the end of 2018, right before a massive climate movement emerged, marking the year 2019 with unprecedented mobilisations.

THE NEED

§11. Lastly, the International Ecosocialist Encounters respond to an acute need for articulating ideological considerations, political plans, strategies and tactics (Eden, 2019).

§12. In general, social movements tend to consider these four layers in four different time scales: tactics feed into a strategy, the strategy carries the political plan, and the

political plan then has ideological impacts on the society as a whole. Each degree of abstraction implies longer periods of time (tactics are generally short-term whereas ideological transformations take place over much longer periods). This is not a valid analysis anymore. We need tactics that win and at the same time execute the transition to a new civilisation. Both (tactical victories and the civilisational transition) need to happen in the short term, dictated by the climate crisis.

Perhaps more importantly, the different layers (ideology, politics, strategy and tactics) are also considered to have increasing practical flexibility and decreasing analytical flexibility. Tactics are a democratised interpretation of the strategy, with its creative and spontaneous elements. Strategy is a democratised interpretation of the politics, and politics is the democratised interpretation of ideology (hence terms such as *realpolitik*). Each layer involves more people and implies less theoretical consolidation than the previous layer, thus giving more practical flexibility to the people on the ground. In turn, strategies are designed to include various possible tactics; political analyses encompass a wide range of strategies; and ideological considerations permit diverse political priorities depending on the situation.

§13. The above paragraph doesn't make any sense in today's conditions: the limited time frame collapses the four layers onto each other. A stronger connection between all the layers is now a requirement imposed by climate science. For instance, pre-figurative action at a global scale (tactics that showcase the future society we defend) is not just one among many types of action. Conversely, pre-figurative action cannot be a local prototype of some or other dream but needs to directly reflect the future political structures. Another implication is that anti-capitalist strategies are not sufficient anymore: we need a clearer ecosocialist programme that integrates our political vision *through* our strategies and *into* our tactics.

§14. Therefore, ecosocialism objectively ceased to be a theoretical conversation: it is about our strategies and tactics, and it is a conversation among people who put their bodies on the front-line. Indeed, it was by design and not by chance that the Encounters invited very few academic speakers and fomented an extensive activist participation.

§15. In conclusion, the International Ecosocialist Encounters project has the potential to serve as the kernel of the climate justice movement, where tactics meet strategies meet politics meet ideology.

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