

The need to fight the systems that Trump represents, and build alternatives

EXPERT COMMENTARY

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Three kinds of responses are necessary to President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. First, to recognize that this is not a stand-alone, out-of-the-blue action. Despite whatever rhetoric may have been accompanied the agreement, the fact remains that before and after that, most countries have done little to deal with the horrific ecological problems humanity has created. Even if the United States continued to stand with the agreement, it is unlikely its government would have made the fundamental economic shifts necessary to stave off further ecological catastrophe without very substantial public mobilization within and outside its borders. And this goes for almost all other governments around the globe; left to themselves, they will not, for obvious reasons, tackle the negative forces of capitalism and other roots of the crises we face (including statism, patriarchy). The gross inadequacy of the Paris Agreement is itself indicative of this state of affairs.

There has been a welcome flurry of condemnations of Trump's announcement from political leaders, activists, and others. But if these pronouncements are to mean something beyond a bit of embarrassment for Trump (if he is capable of being embarrassed at all), they must translate into actions that will hurt some American business interests. These would include boycotts of American companies, carbon taxes on their products and services (such as airlines), legislation by the European Union and others to label such products as climate-unfriendly, and other such actions. Do a substantial number of other nations, and/or constituents within them who have some control over trade and exchange, have the guts to do this?

I doubt it, unless there is massive mobilization by citizens. Before and after Trump's election, the American public has shown it is willing to resist the president, the women's march on his swearing-in day being a particularly inspiring example. But for this kind of resistance to have effect, the kind of mobilizations shown during the various "occupy" or "square" actions across Europe and North America and the Arab region have to resurface, and be sustained.

Thousands of initiatives across the world are demonstrating alternative ways of living that are fundamentally different from the development and governance model that is now dominant. Some of these initiatives are a continuation or adaptation of ancient ways; in country after country indigenous people are re-asserting their territorial rights, self-determination, and worldviews. Some such efforts are newer and relevant to industrialized and urbanized situations. Real-life solutions to the climate and biodiversity and poverty and human rights crises are amid us, and we need to recognize, document, and link up with these efforts. (For a sample from India, see www.alternativesindia.org (<http://www.alternativesindia.org>); similar mapping is taking place in other countries.)

Thus far, many of these efforts have been scattered and unconnected, not making a critical mass strong enough to shake the status quo or present coherent, persuasive visions for a viable future. It is the creation of such a critical mass that mobilization must focus on as those who disagree with Trump's decision work to protest and resist the cynical plans of a tiny minority of humans that profit from the Earth and its inhabitants, of which the current president of the United States is only one potent symbol.

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