

Trade Unions and the Environment



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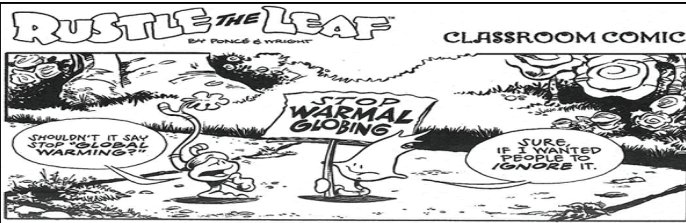
As global warming intensifies and the degradation of the ozone layer continues, the issue of sustainable development becomes a concern of not only governmental and environmental groups but also the concern of Civil Society. Since the new millennium, the Caribbean has experienced an extraordinary increase in hurricane activity. In recent years the effects of this intensification has proven catastrophic to regional sectors and has created further developmental challenges for Caribbean states. The concept of global warming is by no means unfamiliar to us due to advancements in information technology.

In recent years the issue of global warming has been the centre of much debate among various governmental and non-governmental groups within the region and the wider global sphere. The persistence of global warming has prompted a unique categorical distinction for Caribbean nations, one defined by natural disasters ranging from hurricanes to increased earthquake activity. Despite the large scale effect of global warming on the environment, the term and its underlying processes are still unfamiliar or misunderstood by individuals within the regional and international community. Within the regional labour force, the issue of global warming is believed to be a myth by many individuals in powerful places representing various public and private organizations. Therefore, workers are at times either misled or oblivious to the effect this phenomenon may have on their daily lives and the future of the region itself.

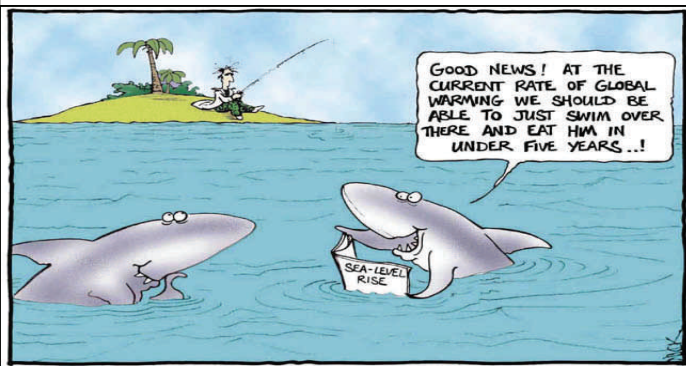


As such, it is the responsibility of regional trade unions to move beyond the periphery in advocating sustainable development and emerge as key players committed to sensitizing workers, employers and other members of the tripartite community about the perils that will arise from the persistence of this process. At a glance, the term global warming may simply refer to an abnormal increase in the temperature of the earth's atmosphere. However, when we examine the intricacies of the process, it becomes evident that global warming is a gradual process which threatens the very existence of mankind. As Caribbean states, the effects of global warming may cripple the productive capacity of regional nations by eroding the prime sectors that provide food, services and employment for regional societies. Peter Poschen from the Policy Coherence Group at the ILO explains that climate change may not only have an adverse effect on the economic and social development, but may simultaneously affect production and consumption patterns within Caribbean societies.

Furthermore if the process of global warming continues to accelerate at this pace, it is projected that the sea level will rise to 70 meters if measures are not taken to protect the natural environment. The 2007 Environment and Urbanization report reveals that 634 million people live within coastal areas within 30 feet of sea level globally. The report also revealed that two thirds of the world's cities with over five million people are located within low lying coastal areas. A 70- meter increase in the global sea level will be devastating to major coastal towns and cities within the region. At this point major cities

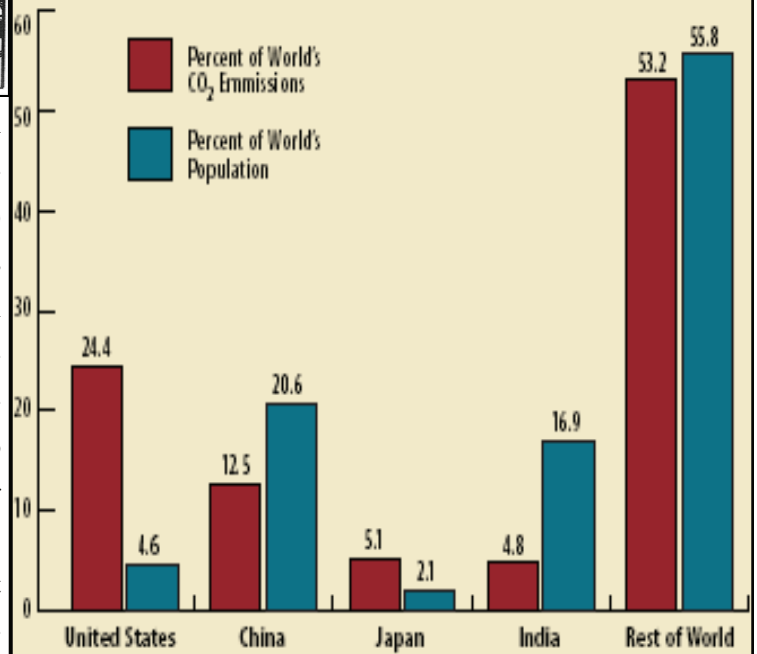


such as Bridgetown, Kingston, Nassau, Georgetown along with other major coastal cities will eventually submerge under water. However, while Small Island Developing States (SIDS) account for less than one percent of green house gas (gases serving to trap carbon dioxide in the atmosphere) emissions in the atmosphere we still have an integral role to play in preserving the environment. In recent times, it is evident where regional coast lines and forestry have been constantly eroded to facilitate investors interested in tourism, agriculture and other export sectors. While investment is a sinequanon to economic growth in any society, sustainable development should be at the forefront of national and regional agendas in order to preserve the social and natural environment. Therefore the trade union movement in the Caribbean needs to recognize that the degradation of the environment will have a ripple effect on employment and most importantly, the livelihood of workers. As such regional unions need to become vehicles seeking to mobilize and sensitize workers, employers and other groups within the tripartite community about the repercussions global warming may have on the future of the region. It is perceived that LDCs contribution to global warming is insignificant, however as we traverse the path to development, we need to ensure that we aspire to preserve the natural environment not only for ourselves but for future generations. The increase in hurricane activity throughout the region serves to remind us that development without regards for the natural environment may destroy civilization as we know it and ultimately lead to the demise of mankind.



Global Warming Facts

FOUR COUNTRIES ACCOUNT FOR ALMOST HALF OF GLOBAL CO₂ EMISSIONS



Source: Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center, U.S. Department of Energy as cited in World Development Indicators 2003, World Bank

- The rate of warming is increasing. The 20th century's last two decades were the hottest in 400 years and possibly the warmest for several millennia, according to a number of climate studies. And the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that 11 of the past 12 years are among the dozen warmest since 1850.
- Glaciers and mountain snows are rapidly melting—for example, [Montana's Glacier National Park](#) now has only 27 glaciers, versus 150 in 1910. In the Northern Hemisphere, thaws also come a week earlier in spring and freezes begin a week later.
- Coral reefs, which are highly sensitive to small changes in water temperature, suffered the [worst bleaching—or die-off in response to stress—ever recorded in 1998](#), with some areas seeing bleach rates of 70 percent. Experts expect these sorts of events to increase in frequency and intensity in the next 50 years as sea temperatures rise.
- An upsurge in the amount of extreme weather events, such as [wildfires](#), [heat waves](#), and [strong tropical storms](#), is also attributed in part to climate change by some experts.

Source: National Geographic Website.

NOTICES:

- The Certificate In Labour Studies Course offered by the Institute has been postponed to January 2009, registration is still on going.
- We will also be hosting our Introduction to Labour Studies Course in February 2009.