

Fight capitalism's destructive impact on nature

A collection of writings on
contemporary Australian
environmental issues

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Introduction: Fight capitalism's destructive impact on nature

The contradiction between human needs and the environment, whilst predating capitalism by many centuries, nevertheless expanded and intensified under the profit-driven system of capitalism which developed at a time of great technological advances.

Scientists speak without exaggeration of an impending climate catastrophe. Soil is degraded, air and water are polluted and the great oxygen factories of the world – the forests and woodlands – are closed by clearing and logging at an alarming rate.

Neither Marx nor Engels were environmentalists in the modern sense of the term. Like many, they recognised that human labour power and intelligence had moved the relationship between humanity and nature from a lower stage to a higher stage. Nature formerly had exercised mastery and control over humanity. Flood, drought, fire, volcanic activity, earthquakes and climatic fluctuations caused not only fear and a certain fatalistic attitude toward death, but also gave rise to religions of animism and a multiplicity of gods in whom various natural powers were vested. In time, human labour and intelligence weakened nature's mastery: fire-stick farming, river and coastal fish traps, cultivation of seeds and tubers, improvements in building construction, and then farming and irrigation reversed the relationship. The accumulation of quantitative measures in human ability to develop independently of nature led to a qualitative leap. Humanity spoke of its own conquest of and control over nature. Religions tended to lose their animistic elements and were put to the service of social control and the legitimation of the social structures of emerging class societies.

Marx and Engels sensed that capitalism would explode the dialectical relationship between humanity and nature. Marx declared that labour power and nature were the "original sources of all wealth" and that the process of capital accumulation required the "sapping" or exploitation of both (Capital Vol 1). Engels warned that humans should not "flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places, it has quite

different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first” (Dialectics of Nature).

In the great wave of enthusiasm to build socialism and display its superiority over capitalism, Communists too often boasted that the development of productive forces under socialism would enhance the capacity of humans to utilise nature for their own purposes, to control it, conquer it and establish mastery over it.

Such an approach was and is wrong. A balance is required between humanity and nature. It cannot be achieved under the profit-driven capitalist system, but it can be and must be under socialism where human need takes precedence but will be expressed in terms of the degree to which humans can nurture, protect and sustain the natural environment. Indeed, only a healthy and balanced natural environment can sustain human needs over the medium to longer term.

This collection of articles brings together some recent attempts by our Party to comment constructively on current environmental issues. The particular content will no doubt date, but we hope that readers will see value in the analytical approach by which Marxism argues against capitalism’s destructive impact on nature. It proposes alternatives that respect people’s well-intentioned attempts to contribute to social change through changes in behaviour, diet, shopping, community gardening etc., but prioritises and encourages First Nations, community and union struggles against the system of private ownership of the means of production for private profit. It specifically seeks to encourage the organised working class to lend its weight and its leadership potential to these struggles.

We are confident that an independent and socialist Australia, where the people hold power and determine the requirements of their own society, can avoid the mistake of approaching nature as something to be “conquered” and used irrationally.

Indeed, only an independent and socialist Australia will make possible the restoration of a genuine balance between the needs of humanity and nature.

Adani – coal mining and climate struggles

The current struggle around the proposed Adani Coal mine in the Galilee basin of Central Queensland is taking place in a complex social and economic situation.

The recently released State of the Regions Report shows that 20,000 jobs have been lost in the Bowen Basin since the contraction of the coal mining industry – in a region in which 35% of all employment is in coal mining, and in which there are high unemployment levels of 7% to 12% in central Queensland regional areas.

Polls indicate that the widespread disillusionment with the fall in living standards in these regions – the cutting edge of the crisis in capital – is leading to an electoral embrace of One Nation in the coming State elections.

The Carmichael mine, owned by the Adani Group, is planned to be the largest coal mine in Australia, and one of the largest in the world. It will comprise both underground and open cut mining operations and produce thermal coal – suitable for use in coal fired power stations, but not high enough quality for use in steel production. At present approximately half of Australia's coal exports are of thermal coal, and half are of coking or metallurgical coal.

The key role of this mine in future coal exports from Australia, and the potential damage to the Great Barrier Reef from export shipping, has led to a focus by the environment and climate movement around Australia on organising struggle to stop the mine from being constructed.

The struggle has taken many forms. Legal battles by environment groups and Aboriginal traditional owners have continued for the past 3 years. A widespread campaign to pressure banks to refuse funding for the project has been gathering momentum and had some significant victories. Struggles around government financial support for the project have had some significant victories also.

At a local level, community meetings are being held in many towns and cities. A film highlighting the issues called “Guarding the Galilee” has been screened at communities across Queensland. Large organisations such as the

Australian Conservation Foundation, and Internet campaigner Getup have put significant resources into a grass roots campaign. The depth and breadth of the campaign to date suggest that it may well turn into another “Franklin River campaign”.

Long historical experience shows us that major social struggles are won when workers take up the issue. Up until now, unions in Qld have not been prominent in this struggle around Adani. However Queensland workers through their trade unions have a long tradition of acting on progressive social causes. The first “green bans” in Australia were carried out by Qld. Unions when they banned oil exploration on the Great Barrier Reef in 1970, leading the way for a major environmental victory in that campaign.

Given the significance of coal mining to many Qld regional communities, the issue of the Adani mine is one that workers will address in a careful and measured way. A recent Congress of the Qld Council of Unions, with reps present from most unions in Qld, unanimously passed a motion to establish a sustainable jobs summit by the end of 2017. Such a course of action shows that trade unions in Qld are willing to act independently, both to protect jobs, and also to campaign for environmentally sustainable practices.

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Nick G. Tuesday, July 25, 2017

Stop finance capital’s unacceptable trade in water rights!

Last night’s ABC *Four Corners* program revealed that billions of dollars in tax payers’ money, poured into rescuing the rivers and streams of the Murray-Darling Basin to save it from environmental collapse, had instead benefitted a handful of wealthy cotton growers.

Aided by corrupt officials in the NSW Department of Water, cotton growers are stealing water from the Barwon River and Darling Rivers to create massive shallow dams from which to irrigate vast tracts of land on which cotton is grown.

Imperialist finance capital buys up our water

As valuable as the program was in exposing these rorts, it really only scratched the surface of problems related to Australian freshwater supplies. And those problems do not exist in isolation. They are part of a global theft

of public commons by giant multinational financial corporations which have forced their way into a deliberately constructed private water market that allows them to speculate with their surplus capital.

The seizure of freshwater supplies contained in rivers and the Great Artesian Basin by finance capital investors, miners and gas extraction companies mirrors the wave of privatisations and corporatisations of city and state water utilities that occurred in the mid-1990s. The major beneficiaries of the latter included French companies Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux and Vivendi, Thames Water and Lend Lease.

Water trading followed a June 1995 decision to establish the Murray-Darling Cap to put a limit on the amount of water that could be taken out of the Murray-Darling river catchments. Ostensibly a response to concerns about environmental flows, the Cap came with a new system that allowed irrigators to trade their entitlements to waters taken from the Murray-Darling, and also to trade annual allocations taken under those entitlements.

Investment funds with active interests in water emerged after 2007, when investors no longer had to own land in the Murray Darling Basin to be eligible to buy and sell its water rights.

Water was no longer a common good, that is, a resource deemed to be under the ownership of all Australian citizens and available for their use and enjoyment, but a private commodity, “blue gold” as it was quickly dubbed by corporate investors. And it was no longer a simple commodity, but a financial instrument which could be held, in the case of entitlements, as a security against mortgages.

Whilst making this fundamental change to ownership and control of freshwater supply, the federal government chose not to maintain any register of foreign capital purchasing Australian water rights. Very belatedly, a register will be introduced in December of this year.

Despite the lack of clarity around who owns our water, several major players have been identified.

By 2010 the major players in our water market, then valued at \$30 billion included:

- \$20 million worth of entitlements bought by the US-owned Summit Global

Management through an Australian subsidiary;

- An estimated \$130 million worth of water bought by Olam International of Singapore in a deal involving the purchase of almond groves in northern Victoria;
- More than \$30 million worth of rights in western NSW held by Tandou which has substantial British and US ownership.

(It is worth noting that Summit's assets were sold in 2015 to noted enemies of the Australian working class in the Aware Water investment group, owned by former ports bosses Chris Corrigan and Peter Scanlon. Corrigan, who tried to smash the Maritime Union of Australia is also tied to the Webster Group, one of two corporations currently owning 70% of the Barwon River's water.)

It was estimated that by 2010, 8.1% of Australian freshwater was owned by foreign capital. By 2013, that figure had risen by 60% to 13.7%. No doubt the figure will be higher again when the registry data is released next year.

There are currently two investment funds serving to channel local and foreign capital into the water market. One is BlueSky Alternative Investments which incorporates private equity, hedge fund and venture capital divisions and whose major shareholders are JP Morgan Nominees Australia Ltd and HSBC Custody Nominees (Australia) Ltd.

The other is a private fund, Kilter Investments. Financial analyst Alan Kohler reported how in 2015 he "spoke yesterday with Cullen Gunn who runs a wholesale water investment fund (for "sophisticated" high net worth investors and big super funds only) called Kilter. He says water is a "great asset class". "It's like commercial property except there's no problem with impairment or messy tenants. The yield is sold, about 5-8 per cent and if someone doesn't pay you just take the asset back, instead of having to apply to have a tenant evicted."

"Also, it's clear to me that climate change means there is going to be less water in future, so the economic value of it will increase."

The Australian Constitution – an obstacle to a national approach to water management

As we have stated elsewhere, the Australian Constitution was a weak three-way compromise between the British, the colonial elites in the separate colonies, and the proponents of a central government. It does not provide for

control of Australian freshwater by the Australian government. Rather, that control is vested in the States.

As a consequence of our ineffective and outdated Constitution, our two major freshwater systems rely on the cooperation and goodwill of the state and federal governments. Hence there are the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee. The former holds powers referred to it by State Ministers; the latter advises Ministers on behalf of various stakeholder groups.

This is an unacceptable arrangement. There should be single national authorities with exclusive powers over both Basins.

In the case of the Great Artesian Basin, there are divergent views on its sustainability. Some view it as a renewable supply, refreshed by rains falling in north-eastern Queensland. But another view sees it as a plutonic source of water derived from steam generated by vulcanism deep in the earth over millions of years and hence essentially not renewable.

As per the Constitution, three separate states and the Northern Territory are in charge of their own Great Artesian Basin waters. SA allows Olympic Dam to extract up to 42 million litres per day.

The Queensland government has given Adani open slather on Great Artesian Basin waters. It has no limit on what it can extract but merely needs to monitor and report the amount of water it extracts with a permit that runs until 2077.

Gas producer Santos plans to drill 850 coal seam gas wells through the Great Artesian Basin.

The Achilles heel of the current cooperative arrangements between the states and the federal government over the two Basins is that individual players can walk away at any stage as indeed was mooted by NSW Department of Primary Industry and Water Deputy Director Gavin Hanlon.

In a confidential phone discussion with irrigator lobbyists, a tape of which was played on the Four Corners program, Hanlon raises the Plan B “walk away” option, much to the delight of the lobbyist. When one realises that the value of the NSW water market is equal to the entire value of Australia’s wool exports, the potential for corrupt relations between senior public

servants and traders of water entitlements and allocations becomes immediately apparent.

What can be done?

In the short term and within the current Constitution's limited provisions, the federal Government must regulate the water market to ensure equity and access, control increases in the price of water, restrict the entry of foreign capital to the market, and secure water for environmental flows all the way to and through the mouth of the Murray.

In the longer term, water must be protected as a public trust, as a common good, within a new anti-imperialist and republican Constitution. Private ownership of our freshwater supplies must be abolished and the assets of foreign investors confiscated without compensation. The two Basins must be administered by a national public authority created to ensure fair water allocation and a healthy freshwater ecosystem.

Only an independent and socialist Australia can implement these changes.

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Ned K. October 10, 2017

Indigenous and Copley communities oppose Leigh Creek coal seam gas profit-making venture

A meeting of the Copley Community, Aroona Council and Adnyamathanha Camp Law Mob met in early October to plan actions, including court action, to stop what they describe as the "dirty, filthy business" of underground in-situ coal gasification going ahead in the Leigh Creek area where they live.

Following the closure of the coal mine at Leigh Creek by multinational Alinta when the Port Augusta coal-fired power station closed, another company Leigh Creek Energy wants to embark on an "in-situ gasification" project which converts coal to a synthesised gas by burning it underground and bringing to the surface for baseload electricity and ammonium nitrate products.

The company project involves capital investment from yet another Hong Kong based energy company, called China New Energy. This company has several coal mining and power station ventures in mainland China and a dubious environmental record.

The Leigh Creek Energy project is opportunist profiteering, exploiting the policy of the federal government which allows gas exploration companies like SANTOS to export enormous amounts of gas creating an artificial gas shortage in Australia and high electricity prices.

Friends of the Earth describe the in-situ gasification process as "an experimental mining technology with a track record of failure, polluting the air, groundwater and soil." It involves injecting air or oxygen into coal seams and extracting 'synthetic gas' through wells drilled in the coal seam and a concoction of toxic chemicals to make this polluting process work.

This is history repeating itself, another disaster about to happen but avoidable with people power!

A similar venture at Chinchilla in Queensland was shut down thanks to the efforts of people power resulting in the Queensland state government Minister describing the coal seam gas project there as "the biggest pollution event probably in Queensland's history"!

With rising unemployment in South Australia as anywhere from 3,000 to 4,000 jobs disappear this month due to the close down of the vehicle industry in Australia, and an SA state election in March next year, politicians will be looking for any "growth" projects as something to sell and support to win a few votes.

Dangerous times for the people and the environment, particularly those around Leigh Creek as enormous pressure will be put on them to see this polluting project go ahead.

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Nick G.

Sunday, January 21, 2018

Oppose the Leigh Creek UCG proposal!

The South Australian Labor Government, facing a March 2018 election, has just announced a public consultation on a proposal for an Underground Coal Gasification (UCG) project in Leigh Creek, Adnyamathanha Land.

The proposal suits the pro-mining stance of State Treasurer Tom Koutsantonis, a vocal supporter of the defeated Marathon Resources uranium mine in the Arkaroola Wilderness sanctuary, also on Adnyamathanha Land, and of the defeated nuclear waste dump.

Weatherill, from the so-called “Left” faction in the State ALP is quite adept at doing deals to keep the ALP Right on side.

What is UCG?

UCG is a process whereby coal seams are pumped with oxygen and set alight, deep underground, to release flammable gases which are captured and sold to energy users. It differs from “fracking”, the Coal Seam Gas process, which uses pressurised water to crack open rock deposits in order to release gas trapped in coal seams. In UCG, the gas does not exist, but must be produced by the coal burning process.

The process is not new. The method was discovered by a British chemist and welcomed by Lenin, in 1913, as a means of reducing electricity costs, eliminating hard and unhygienic mining labour and, under socialism, of making “it possible immediately to shorten the working day for all from 8 hours to, say, 7 hours and even less”. The British dropped the idea, but it was pioneered by the great Soviet chemist Dimitry Mendeleev, with Stalin’s support. In the early 1930s, a UCG plant was operating in the Donetsk Basin but the method was never entirely successful and was eventually abandoned as too costly compared to extraction of natural gas.

The process of burning coal underground for gas is difficult to control and produces many by-products which are highly toxic. The gas contains carbon monoxide, benzene, toluene and other substances that are potentially toxic or carcinogenic. Gas processing, handling and transport in pipelines poses further risks to people and the environment. UCG is a fossil fuel technology

and its advocacy flies in the face of the good work undertaken by the SA Labor government in support of renewable energy technologies.

Banned in Queensland

A 2004 CSIRO study concluded that “UCG as specified was not ideal as a low Greenhouse gas emission technology”, although it was “cleaner” than CSG extraction. It also found that “that the impact on water availability in the area will be noticeable, but not excessive” and that “Surface subsidence due to UCG is predicted to be relatively minor, with the maximum value being less than 0.5m.”

The CSIRO study was based around a scenario of a nominal 400MWe electricity generation plant based on UCG in the eastern Surat Basin in Queensland. The green light was given to proceed with the project, and two others in Queensland, yet they were disasters.

Major contamination of groundwater and soil caused by Linc Energy’s UCG trial project near Chinchilla, was described by the Queensland's Environment Minister as “the biggest pollution event probably in Queensland's history...certainly the biggest pollution investigation and prosecution in Queensland's history”. This disaster resulted in a decision in April 2016 by the Queensland Government to ban UCG. Moratoriums are also in place in Scotland and Wales in the UK.

Opposing the Leigh Creek project

Leigh Creek Energy has been pushing the UCG project, trying to win over the State Government and the Adnyamathanha people. It gave a presentation to the Adnyamathanha last October, which led to fears by the community that areas of special significance could be damaged. Adnyamathanha elder Enice Marsh said the community wrote to the State Government just before Christmas to express its opposition but had received no response.

"We tried to write to them to ask for an independent survey on the land, to state the land of Leigh Creek and the coal fields are significant Aboriginal sites," she said.

"A lot of my people say it's their home, they're going to be faced with a huge, dangerous situation.

"The land has been used and abused for so long and it is now time to lay the land to rest and recover."

Communities must get organised

In the tradition of the best weasel words, Koutsantonis denies any decision has been made on the project.

"This project has not yet been approved and will not proceed unless approved," he said.

But we've seen the State Government flying kites like this in the past. Every kite is the same – unless it has been hauled down by community opposition, it keeps right on flying. And one-way, top-down community consultations were not allowed to stop the desalination plant nor the so-called "regulator" over the Finnis River at Clayton in 2009 on Ngarrindjeri Land.

Only a spirited campaign by unions and community organisations in an alliance with the traditional Adnyamathanha owners will prevent approval being given to this environmentally and socially damaging project.

That campaign must promote the unity of humanity and Nature and fight and oppose the ideology of seeking human victories over Nature in the pursuit of private profit. As Engels said in the *Dialectics of Nature*, for "each such victory, nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first."

The activists of the working class must draw on the wisdom of First Nations peoples and use Nature sustainably and harmoniously. UCG does neither.

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Nick G.

Monday, March 12, 2018

Biodiversity: Birds of a feather...flock together!

The preservation of biological diversity is a matter of extreme significance for the future of planet Earth. As such, it must have the absolute commitment of socialists and other progressive people.

Biodiversity is the condition for the existence of life on Earth. The connectedness of all things creates a chain reaction of loss when any one element is removed from the living environment.

In the past, this point was not sufficiently understood by Communists. Mistakes were made in the development of socialism in those countries where the people had assumed state power.

A mechanical and one-sided view whereby Nature was to be “conquered” by the unleashing of the forces of production under socialism led to irreparable damage in some countries. The dialectics of the relationship between people and the environment was poorly understood.

It may surprise some to know that Stalin is getting belated recognition in bourgeois circles for his leadership in reafforestation, water conservancy and attempts to control climate warming (see Stephen Brain’s *Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalinist Environmentalism, 1905-1953*).

Marxist-Leninists have the ability to learn from their own mistakes and appreciate what Marx and Engels wrote about the dialectical unity between humanity and nature. Engels warned us not to “flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory, nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first.”

Marx expressed the view that only in a classless communist society will the “humanization of nature” and the “naturalization of humans” come to their relative completion.

Birds - and why we love them

For a great many people – especially those living in urban concentrations of population – the bird is the one point of daily contact with natural wildlife. A New Holland Honeyeater in a backyard bird bath, a Magpie glimpsed from the window of a train on the way to work - birds connect us to Nature.

The use of canaries in underground coal mines to detect poisonous gases is known to most. Today, birds play the same role for the planet as a whole. The extinction or threatened extinction of a bird species is cause for immediate environmental concern. The loss of a species could result in unchecked spread of weeds whose seeds are no longer eaten, and explosions in insect numbers once the prey of the birds. Birds have a role to play in the pollination of a great many plants. The plants themselves support other life forms. It is all related.

Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film notwithstanding, birds are regarded with affection and fascination. Perhaps it is the freedom of most species to fly: something humans are still reliant on mechanical or other supports to achieve. Migratory birds are held in special awe: each year millions of them fly from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern and back again. One tiny bird was tracked in 2008 flying 11,680 kilometres from Alaska to New Zealand in just nine days. And some of us drive, rather than walk, to the local shop! (The energy requirement for this flight is equivalent to that of a human running at 70 kilometres an hour, continuously, for more than seven days. Along the way, these birds burn up huge stores of fat—more than 50 percent of their body weight—that they gain before they set off, and they even shrink their digestive organs.)

It is no wonder then that so many Australians are protective of our birdlife. Nor is it any wonder that more often than not, birds and their human defenders face off against the forces of private profit and their allies in state and federal governments.

Bayswater Wetlands saved by community action

Take the case of the Bayswater wetlands in Western Australia. The local council spent over \$3 million to rejuvenate the Eric Singleton Bird Sanctuary in 2015-16. They put in nutrient stripping areas, planted 170,000 native plants, and were attracting wildlife back into the area. The sanctuary would prevent almost 40 tonnes of sediment and rubbish, 1.3 tonnes of nitrogen and 200 kilograms of phosphorus from entering the Swan River each year.

However, land abutting the sanctuary, which was privately owned, was approved for subdivisions involving 27 houses and 33 apartments by the WA Planning Commission in 2016. On July 12, without warning, the developers moved in their bulldozers and started knocking down 100-year old stands of Melaleuca trees.

The residents gathered in protest, organised email petitions to the WA government and organised a rally outside the offices of the WA Planning Minister. On July 29, the Minister announced a temporary halt to the bulldozing. A nine-month campaign against the developers followed, during which documents released under Freedom of Information showed planning approvals were issued and clearing begun based on half-complete environmental reports.

Victory came in October 2017 when Bayswater Council purchased the disputed area of land, saying in a press release that they had removed “the threat posed by private development.”

Carnaby’s Black Cockatoo

Carnaby’s Black Cockatoo is not seen outside south-western Western Australia, although it has cousins interstate such as the Glossy Black Cockatoo and the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo. Their numbers around Perth have more than halved in recent years and are declining at a rate of about ten percent per annum.

Large-scale clearing for agriculture in the Western Australian Wheatbelt has removed or fragmented much of the bird’s original breeding habitat, and ongoing clearing for urban development on the Swan Coastal Plain is greatly reducing the extent of its feeding habitat. The birds also suffer when old nesting hollows are removed, often for firewood. These hollows can take decades to form and, due to clearing, there is now considerable competition for the limited hollows that remain.

To adjust to the destruction of their traditional habitat, the Carnaby’s took to feeding in the Gngangara-Yanchep-Pinjar pine plantation, a commercial plantation of non-native species. In 2002, the WA government entered into a logging deal with Wesbeam, a manufacturer of Laminated Veneer Lumber (LVL) used in flooring, joists, timber beams and other products. The decision was made not to replace the logged plantation timber, partly to reduce the demand on water from the Gngangara Mound — which is located

under the plantations — which provides approximately 30 per cent of Perth's drinking water each year.

A massive campaign developed to save the Black Cockatoos. Petitions with 20,000 signatures were delivered to politicians; the World Wildlife Fund called for pine harvesting to be stopped until there is agreement on how to properly address habitat loss for Carnaby's cockatoos. Appeals to federal Environment Minister Josh Frydenburg to intervene fell on deaf ears. At the time of writing, the campaign to save the Carnaby's is ongoing.

Tassie's Swift Parrots

The critically endangered Swift Parrot has two enemies: logging companies destroying their habitat, and introduced sugar gliders that get into their nests and eat their young. The latter are being controlled by the construction of 100 solar-panelled gated nest boxes to protect the parrots from hungry sugar gliders. Money for the boxes - \$40,000 - was raised within hours of the release of a crowd-funding appeal.

Controlling logging is a more difficult matter as anyone familiar with Tasmanian politics can attest.

As part of the 2013 forestry peace deal a moratorium was placed on the logging of 356,000 hectares of native forest, including more than 12,000 hectares of Critically Endangered Swift Parrot habitat. The beneficiaries were to be the rebranded government-owned forestry company, Sustainable Timber Tasmania and a private company Reliance Forest Fibre. Sustainable Timber Tasmania commenced on 1 July 2017. A few months later it was announced that 29,000 hectares of hardwood forest plantations were to be sold for \$60.7 million to Reliance Forest Fibre with a 99-year lease on the land.

Reliance Forest Fibre is a new enterprise owned by investment funds advised by Global Forest Partners (GFP) LP. Global Forest Partners is an international forest investment advisory firm with approximately 700,000 ha of timberland across the globe under management, valued at around \$3.7 billion. It was only registered in July 2017, with ASIC documents showing its holding company Global Forest Partners LP has links offshore. The Greens revealed further that the parent company “is based in a tax haven in the Cayman Islands” – just the sort of people to be concerned about the survival of an obscure little parrot!

In March 2017, the Tasmanian government introduced legislation to reverse the moratorium agreed in the 2013 peace deal. A huge outcry arose. The voice of protest was loud and clear: Tasmanians did not want the Swift Parrot to become extinct on their watch. Eventually, on June 21, the Upper House rejected the legislation. It was a victory, but it was immediately followed by the Sustainable Timber deal with Global Forest Partners, leading a Birdlife Australia spokesperson to declare that “While we’re pleased to see this bill defeated, the fight is far from over. To safeguard the future of Swifties, we must protect all remaining critical habitat, especially breeding habitat.”

Bristlebirds win a reprieve

The Eastern Bristlebird is Endangered in New South Wales, where it occurs in two disjunct populations: one inhabits the northern ranges and coast, with the other further south in the Illawarra and South Coast. An important part of its habitat is at Jervis Bay, a Commonwealth-administered Territory south of Sydney.

Bird-lovers were dismayed to discover early in 2017 that an 11-hectare patch of prime shrubby heathland adjacent to the Jervis Bay National Park was to be auctioned off in May. Forming part of the Jervis Bay Key Biodiversity Area, it had been estimated that the immediate area supports 10 per cent of the region’s population of Bristlebirds.

BirdLife Shoalhaven and community activists lobbied the NSW State Government for the land to be withdrawn from sale, recommending that it be incorporated into the adjacent national park—and they were successful. The government purchased the parcel of land to expand the national park, thus preserving an important piece of the jigsaw that is necessary to protect the declining population of Bristlebirds.

Toondah Harbour: Labor’s gift to the Walker Corporation

Toondah Harbour in Queensland’s Moreton Bay, just north of Brisbane, is an area protected under the internationally recognised Ramsar Convention to protect wetlands. It is the feeding ground for a number of wading birds including the critically endangered Far Eastern Curlew and the Great Knot. The Ramsar Agreement, signed by Australia, prohibits the reclamation of any part of a Ramsar site unless for “urgent national interests” (clause 2.5 Ramsar Agreement).

The proposal to dredge and "reclaim" protected wetlands for a high-rise development and private marina by Australia's largest private, diversified property development company, the Walker Corporation, began under the Newman Government. Labor was expected to dump the proposal, but instead expanded the number of proposed units from 800 to 3,600.

The Walker Corporation has been a major donor to both Liberal and Labor over many years. That's how business gets done when you are big and powerful. Last year, Walker gave \$200,000 to the federal Liberal Party and \$23,000 in three separate instalments to the Queensland Labor Party. Walker Group/Corp paid ZERO income tax over the last three corporate tax years on total earnings over \$1 billion, including \$477 million last year. It also has a poor environmental history, with a number of offences committed.

The Labor backflip has astounded traditional Labor supporters. Callen Sorensen – Karklis, a Quandamooka Noonucle salt water person, a loyal union member and Labor Party activist, wrote to Premier Anna Palaszczuk on 21 October 2017, saying "Sadly I resigned from the party this October because I believe until the QLD branch of the party works out its moral compass on issues like Adani and Toondah I cannot remain active as a member." This is not an isolated view amongst Labor rank-and-file.

Defending the area's birdlife, community activists are united in the belief that publicly-owned foreshore land and protected Moreton Bay wetlands should not be handed over to a property developer to generate private profit.

Adani – enemy of our birds

The Queensland Labor and federal Coalition governments are also lining up behind the proposed Adani coalmine. As if there were not reason enough to oppose this project, the mine will destroy habitat crucial to the survival of the Endangered Southern Black-throated Finch.

In a damning report submitted to Federal Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg on July 14, 2017, the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team—charged with safeguarding this Endangered species—describes a fundamentally flawed offset plan that will have grave consequences for the future of this bird.

"Adani's Carmichael mine will destroy a large part of the best remaining habitat for the Black-throated Finch, in an area that is home to a significant

proportion of the largest known population,” said Dr Tony Grice, Chair of the Black-throated Finch Recovery Team.

“Losing this rich habitat would be a major blow to the chances of this bird surviving.”

There continues to be an ongoing campaign to save this finch.

Helena and Aurora Ranges battle

Another area where bird enthusiasts and mining interests have been in conflict is the Helena and Aurora Ranges to the west of Perth. Volunteer-led bird surveys of the area have revealed that 111 species of birds occur there, making it the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the Great Western Woodlands, an unbroken stretch of woodland much larger than England. The ranges are remnants of a landscape dating back more than 2.6 billion years, making them one of the most ancient landforms on earth.

In September 2017, the Australian Geographic magazine noted that “In recent years the Helena Aurora Range has also been the target of mining companies hoping to extract iron ore from the region. So far, the EPA has blocked all proposed mining projects.”

Jenita Enevoldsen, WA State Director of The Wilderness Society said that “This is the second time the EPA has recommended against these two proposed mines, within two years. With around 40 years of scientific recommendations for permanent protection and 1,500 community submissions rejecting the proposed mines, the future protection of the range needs to be secured.”

A victorious outcome was reached last December when the State government announced that it would uphold the EPA’s recommendations. BirdLife Australia said it was “delighted by the announcement that the ancient landscape, home to unique biodiversity, will be protected from mining and that investigations are underway to recognise the magnificent natural values by declaring the area a Class A Nature Reserve.... This outcome is the result of the sustained work over many years by many people, including Traditional Owners, scientists and naturalists, current and former members of Parliament, local residents, artists, and conservation and recreation groups.”

Abbott’s Booby under threat

Meanwhile mining interests are threatening two birds on Christmas Island. Abbott's Booby is thought to be one of the most ancient seabirds. Its ancestors lived among dinosaurs over 60 million years ago! Abbott's Boobies can travel up to 400 kilometres to surrounding feeding grounds, but always return home to Christmas Island to breed in the rainforest canopy. The Christmas Island Frigatebird is well-known for its extraordinary wingspan and ornamental red throat which males inflate and drum to entice females to breed. Like the Abbott's Booby, Christmas Island Frigatebirds depend on the rainforest canopy to nest and raise their young.

Clearing of forests for phosphate mining threatens both birds. The ecosystem cannot recover from phosphate mining. After the rainforest is cleared, the soil is dug up and exported, leaving vast barren scars in the landscape. Over 25% of the island has already been cleared for mining activities. To make matters worse, mining facilitates the spread of invasive species into the remaining pristine rainforest.

At the time of writing this remains an ongoing campaign issue.

International cooperation essential for migratory birds' survival.

The millions of migratory birds that make Australia and New Zealand home for part of each year cannot survive unless the nations through which they migrate cooperate to preserve habitat areas. Various coastal regions in Australia are now under protection. A number of wetlands are Ramsar-protected. The Coorong in South Australia is one such area. However, the Coorong is dependent on water flows from the Murray-Darling river system and no amount of Ramsar-accreditation will save it if corporate water theft continues in the upper reaches of the rivers.

A good example of community cooperation is the Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary National Park encompassing the coastal lands of the Adelaide Plains. Over 3 years more than 30,000 people have been consulted about, and have contributed to, a management plan for the sanctuary. Leadership has come from the traditional owners, the Kurna, who have given the sanctuary the name Winaityinaityi Pangkara (pronounced Wee-nay-chi-nay-chi pan-ker-a) that in Kurna means 'country belonging to all birds'.

Many of the birds coming to the sanctuary are from Siberia, Korea and China. Aggressive development in Eastern Asia – reclamation of coastal

tidal flats in particular – has dramatically reduced bird numbers. Around 70% of the intertidal mudflats in this region have disappeared and much of the remaining 30% is under threat. If the current trajectory continues, the Yellow Sea will become a global epicentre for extinction.

In January 2018, the Chinese government, responding to international and domestic concerns for the future of migratory birds, announced the following four measures:

First, the government plans to “nationalise reclaimed land with no structures built on it and will halt reclamation projects that have yet to be opened and are against national policies.”

Second, all structures built on illegally reclaimed land and that have “seriously damaged the marine environment” will be demolished.

Third, “the central government will stop approving property development plans based on land reclamation and will prohibit all reclamation activities unless they pertain to national key infrastructure, public welfare or national defence”.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly in terms of the future of China’s east coast, “local authorities will no longer have the power to approve reclamation projects”.

The Australian Government is aware of its obligations, but puts the interests of investors and corporations above all else. It had had planned to redirect 70 gegalitres of water — water that had been earmarked for environmental flows to maintain the health of the river system — and make it available to irrigators in New South Wales and Queensland instead. This would have dramatically reduced the habitat quality of the Macquarie Marshes for waterbirds, including the Endangered Australasian Bittern. Intense lobbying of Senators saw a disallowance motion passed that blocked the Government’s threat to birdlife in and around the Marshes.

Twitchers R Us

Once the butt of jokes in English comedy, the avid birdwatcher or “twitcher” is no longer the eccentric oddball, but a conscious defender of the natural environment. Certainly, leading birdwatching organisations such as BirdLife Australia command enormous support and have vast volunteer armies ready to organise against property developers and mining giants. However, they

are not firmly embedded in the working class and tend to favour parliamentary forms of redress for their grievances.

Communists should not be indifferent to bird and other wildlife protection. We must show that we are serious about protecting biological diversity against the exploitation and destruction of profit-motivated harmful practices. We should try to raise the consciousness of those fighting for biological diversity to a consciously anti-capitalist and pro-socialist level.

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Nick G. Friday, May 4, 2018

No cuts to biodiversity staff!

The federal government will cut its biodiversity and conservation staff by more than 60, or around one third of its total.

Professor David Lindenmayer, an ecologist from the Australian National University, described the cuts as "an absolute calamity for the Australian environment and for the conservation of Australia's ecosystems and threatened species".

The move is a calculated insult to the thousands of Australians who recently participated in March for Science protests. As a Spirit of Eureka leaflet distributed at these rallies pointed out: "...the attack on science throughout the Western world is continuing unabated. Massive political interference is rife against scientists and science whose conclusions might reduce multinationals' profits."

Biodiversity staff coordinate the listings of threatened species and their recovery plans, devise Australia's national biodiversity strategy, and coordinate action around the country against invasive species and other biosecurity threats.

Biologist and author Tim Low regards invasive species as the major threat to Australia's environment and has argued that free trade agreements will only exacerbate the problem. In his 1999 book "Feral Future" he warned: "...free trade, the high ideal we are all asked to embrace, is a sure-fire recipe for a pest-infested world. The more we move goods around the globe, the more pests we move with them...companies will exploit free trade treaties to overturn environmental legislation".

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Australia became a signatory to the international Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992. It remains a signatory. Australia's reputation for adherence to the protocols and requirements of international treaties and conventions, however, is in tatters. The provisions of the International Labour Organisation, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Refugee Convention are just some of the better-known examples of government hypocrisy in action.

The Biological Diversity Convention, if really followed by Australia, would see an expansion, not only of government biodiversity staff, but also of its quarantine staff. It defines biological diversity as "the variability among living organisms from all sources, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems." It requires signatories to "regulate and manage biological resources important for the conservation of biological diversity" and to "adopt measures relating to the use of biological resources to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on biological diversity".

How can that possibly be done by cutting by one-third the already inadequate numbers of government employees tasked with those responsibilities?

How can it be done when current monitoring and management is so grossly inadequate that researchers at the Threatened Species Recovery Hub in the Federal Government's National Environmental Science Program found about a third of Australia's 548 threatened species and 70 per cent of its threatened ecological communities were not being monitored at all?

How can it be done when we have no completed understanding of what constitutes our biological diversity? "Best estimates suggest that a majority—around 70%—of Australian and New Zealand species remain undiscovered, un-named and un-documented" states a report released only a fortnight ago

by the Australian Academy of Science and New Zealand’s Royal Society Te Apārangī. It proposes a ten-year plan for expanding the work and the workforce associated with taxonomy and biosystematics, the two sciences underpinning research into biodiversity.

Yet the government, in its rush to cut staff and leave management to “operators in the field”, in other words, to private sector initiatives, is driving us further away from our treaty obligations, from our scientific community, and from the huge numbers of Australians who volunteer their own time and effort to protect the environment and its species.

No cuts to biodiversity staff!

Honour own international obligations!

Support, enhance and expand the scientific exploration of our biodiversity!

Fight for an independent Australia in which evidence-based science research is respected and not attacked by governments serving US big business!

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Nick G. Wednesday, May 9, 2018

Labor goes to water with Murray-Darling Basin sell-out

Conservationists have accused the Labor Party of selling out the interests of a healthy Murray-Darling river system. The party has withdrawn its support for a Greens motion to disallow a reduction in the amount of water to be kept in the Southern Basin of the rivers for their environmental health.

The federal Labor back-flip follows the release of an [Issues Paper](#) by the South Australian Labor-appointed Royal Commissioner into the Murray-Darling Basin that has questioned the legality of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan (MDBP). Labor claims its change of mind was partly prompted by the need to rescue the Plan from recalcitrant states – particularly NSW and Victoria - that had threatened to withdraw from the MDBP unless the reductions went through.

Referring to the Water Act on which the Basin Plan is based, the Royal Commissioner states that the Plan erred in not basing its calculations on the amount of water required for environmental purposes only. Instead it had included social and economic factors which should only have been applied once a base level had been established.

Environmental scientists had calculated that a recovery target within the range of 3000 – 7600GL was needed to establish an environmentally sustainable level of take (ESLT). Instead, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has set the ESLT at 2750GL, substantially below the minimum amount required for the river system’s health.

The MDBA’s failure to comply with the law in setting the initial ESLT led the Royal Commissioner to state, in paragraph 61 of the Issues Paper, that “there is a real risk that all or part of the Basin Plan is unlawful”.

The Australia Institute has further attacked the legality of the adjustment to the ESLT on the basis that it has unlawfully included projected water savings measures that are anticipated, but not yet realised, and that may in fact never be realised. It has [referred its objections](#) to the Royal Commission.

What’s at stake?

What is at stake is an immediate reduction of 605GL from the already inadequate and unlawful figure of 2750GL. These 605GL are the proposed savings to the river system of 36 projects, not one of whose business cases has been made public. The theory is that if 605GL can be returned to the rivers by these measures, then the rivers don’t need the full ESLT of 2750GL. There is no guarantee that these 605GL will eventuate, but if they did, they should be used to supplement the inadequate ESLT rather than further reducing it.

This is not about letting good rainwater drain out to sea, as the cotton growers and other big corporate irrigators claim. It is about ensuring Broken Hill’s water supply, ensuring the Menindee Lakes and Macquarie Marshes remain viable as part of our inland biodiversity (essential for birdlife and the Golden Perch fish species), that there is water available for pastoralists along the rivers (their take is minimal compared to cotton growers and other big irrigators), and that the internationally protected Coorong is kept alive.

A broad alliance fights for the rivers

A broad alliance has emerged to fight for the rivers. It includes the Greens, various conservationist organisations, the national Birdlife Australia, First Nations peoples, pastoralists and many, many ordinary citizens.

It was the Greens that took an earlier and successful disallowance motion, pertaining to the Northern Basin, to the Senate in February. On that occasion, Labor voted for the rivers and supported the Greens.

The Australian Conservation Foundation has criticised the passage of the reduction in the Southern Basin ESLT, saying that “The cuts to the river’s water are premature and reckless, and puts at risk the health of floodplains, wetlands and wildlife that call the basin home, and the communities that rely on a healthy river to thrive.” It demanded “an end to the industry-dominated and one-sided approach from the Turnbull Government and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to the management of the river system.”

Tolarno station pastoralist Robert McBride and his daughter Kate have campaigned strongly, including effective use of social media, for the rivers. Striking Tolarno shearers attacked scabs at nearby Moorara station on August 26, 1894 and burnt the paddle steamer Rodney (above), loaded with scab wool, to the water line. The Rodney was one of a number of paddle steamers navigating a then healthy Darling River carrying heavy loads of wool bales to Goolwa at the mouth of the Murray. They would be unable to do so today. Near Menindee, the Darling is a fetid gutter of green algae. It is so low passing Tolarno that Robert McBride, a relative of former Liberal Party President and Menzies Minister Sir Philip McBride, is able to appear to be walking on water in a recent photo.



First Nations peoples have won some rights to buy back water for Indigenous economic and cultural purposes in the deal struck between Labor and the Federal government. Leaving aside the irony of Indigenous peoples having to buy back waters stolen from them during colonisation, the recognition of Indigenous rights to water is important. The Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, peak body for 22 First Nations in the Southern Basin area has welcomed this but also decried the reduction in the ESLT, describing it as “a backward step for the iconic ecosystems of the Murray-Darling Basin.”



On May 5 traffic in Dubbo’s Macquarie Street came to a stop when more than 60 locals took to the streets with placards and banners supporting a healthy river system. “Communities in the Murray-Darling basin are outraged at the perilous health of our rivers, marshes and lakes, and the impacts for all of the life that relies on them,” said rally organiser Mel Gray. Indigenous elders, Aunties Narelle Boys and Coral Peckham spoke about the healthy river that once existed.

Cotton and corporates – enemies of our rivers

Unlike corporates, cotton is socially useful. However, it should be grown in an appropriate environment, and the arid and semi-arid regions through which the Murray-Darling river systems run is clearly inappropriate. The water requirements of cotton are killing our rivers and killing the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

Since the corporate-led demise of water as a common good, and its subsequent transformation into a marketable commodity, huge corporations including overseas hedge funds and private equity firms have entered the market and have bought up big. The more water stolen from the ESLT – from the environment – the more there is available for speculative purchases by finance capital.

Together, cotton and corporates are enemies of our great national icon, the Murray-Darling river system. The alliances that have emerged to fight for the rivers are the future independent and socialist Australia in embryo. Its future development is contingent on growing working class involvement in and leadership of the broader environmental movement.

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Nick G. 20 May 2018

“Hands across the sands” rallies target multinationals.

Thousands of Australians from seventeen coastal communities have joined hands across the sands to protest offshore drilling and offshore seismic testing for oil and gas.

The annual “hands across the sands” movement began eight years ago in the USA following BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Australian focus is on the Great Australian Bight where first BP (in association with Norwegian state-owned Statoil) and then US Chevron sought exploration licences. An alliance of Indigenous Australians, conservationists, tourism operators and commercial fishers campaigned strongly and forced BP and Chevron to abandon their plans. However, Statoil purchased the abandoned licences and is the new target of the movement.

What is wrong with deepwater drilling and seismic testing?

Deepwater drilling is a potentially dangerous process and oil spills have a devastating effect on marine and coastal environments. But it is the seismic testing that explores for oil and gas deposits below the seabed that really concerns environmentalists.

Seismic airguns are towed behind ships and shoot loud blasts of compressed air through the water and miles into the seabed, which reflect back information about buried oil and gas deposits. These blasts are repeated every ten seconds, 24 hours a day, for days and weeks at a time. Airguns are so loud that they disturb, injure or kill marine life. Impacts include temporary and permanent hearing loss, abandonment of habitat, disruption of mating and feeding, and even beach strandings and death.

A broad alliance

When a Liberal State Minister for Resources opposes seismic testing, you know there is broad opposition to the practice. Earlier this year, NSW Minister Don Harwin explicitly voiced his opposition to seismic drilling off Newcastle, arguing the federal guidelines that governed its approval were more lenient than state laws. The exploration licences were held by Asset Energy, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Perth-based Advent Energy whose board of directors has ties to a number of multinational energy corporations.

When a rural Mayor opposes seismic testing, you know there is broad opposition to the practice. Kangaroo Island Mayor Peter Clements campaigned against BP and Chevron, and travelled to Norway last week to attend the Statoil AGM and address shareholders on the dangers posed by their company to the Great Australian Bight. He had with him a letter from Bight Indigenous leader Sue Coleman-Haseldine, who visited Norway late last year as part of the group that won the Nobel Peace Prize, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

“We write on behalf of people around the world that are fighting to protect their Country, livelihoods, and water from dangerous oil drilling and climate change,” Ms Coleman-Haseldine writes in the letter signed by locals from the Bight area.

“Consent to drill the Bight has been neither sought, nor given. Together, we ask that Statoil abandon their plans to pursue risky deepwater oil drilling in the Great Australian Bight, and around the globe.

“We call on Statoil to instead invest in our country in clean and renewable energy. Statoil must respect the Indigenous custodians of the land and sea from who you wish to extract oil and gas.”

When Indigenous leaders, leaders of local government, fishing and tourism industry leaders and surfies stand shoulder-to-shoulder outside the annual conference the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association

(APPEA), you know you have a broad alliance in defence of the environment. Ms Coleman-Haseldine, a proud Kokatha-Mula elder from Ceduna, joined the protest outside the APPEA conference in Adelaide on Tuesday of last week, as did Keith Parkes, the mayor of Alexandrina Council encompassing the Southern Fleurieu Peninsula and Murray Mouth. His Council has passed a motion opposing oil drilling in the Bight. “We are concerned about the risks posed by drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight and the impact on our community should the worst happen and a spill occurs,” he said.

Semaphore sends a signal

Semaphore is an iconic Adelaide beach-side suburb, host to the equally iconic Semaphore Workers Club. On May 19, some 3-400 people gathered for the “join hands across the sands” event. Indigenous elder of the West Coast Mirning People (the Whale People) Uncle Bunna Lawrie sang us into the event with a bracket of numbers that included “Jeedara”, his song about the White Whale. It begins with his eerily beautiful mimicry of whale calls which he said he hoped his brothers in the sea could hear.

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young recalled her meeting earlier in the week with Statoil reps at the APPEA conference. She said they were clearly unsettled by and fearful of their loss of a “social license” (public approval) for exploration and drilling in the Bight.

Wilderness Society South Australia director Peter Owen said that Statoil was so concerned about its image that it had rebadged itself as Equinor, removing the ugly “oil” word from its name. The name change had taken place at last week’s AGM. Statoil held its name for 46 years during which time it emerged as the largest operator in Norway, where it is 67% owned by the Norwegian Government. The move also indicates a company shift away from fossil fuels and towards a renewable energy future.

“A name with ‘oil’ as a component would increasingly be a disadvantage,” said Eldar Saetre, Statoil’s chief executive. “None of our competitors has that. It served us really well for 50 years, I don’t think it will be the best name for the next 50 years.”

Stand up, Bight back!

“Stand up, bight back!”, a placard carried at the APPEA Conference, expresses both the determination of the alliance against seismic testing and the influence of the methods of the organised working class. Regrettably,

only one union had a visible presence at Semaphore: an Australian Education Union's Environment Action Group banner carried by SA Branch vice-President Dash Taylor Johnson and his son.

The chief causes of the global environmental catastrophe are to be found in the capitalist system of profits-before-people. Working people everywhere bear the brunt of its consequences. Militantly, purposefully, locally and globally they must confront the power of imperialist capital and destroy that power so as to save the world and create a real unity of humanity and nature.

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Louisa L.

5 July 2018

Lies, lies, lies and fracking

Smoking is good for you! Asbestos is a wonder product! Ah, there's lies, lies and more lies, when corporate profits are at stake.

Corporations have always rustled up 'experts' and 'research' to back their dirty and dangerous practises. These days that behaviour is on steroids. From education to mining, economics to history, corporate millions ensure friendly think tanks, 'researchers' and university institutes get all the funds and publicity they need.

Surprise, surprise they discover projects guaranteeing maximum profits are best for everyone. They combine this dubious research with threats, before divide and conquer slithers from their bag of corporate tricks. Fracking corporations use the lot.

Facts are facts

Gas companies are trying to swallow one region at a time. "In Queensland, producing gasfields already cover more than 30,000 square kilometres of the country region," writes Guardian Australia's Lisa Cox.

Those in the Narrabri CSG field understand that the precious Pilliga forest is the start of further expansion. 850 wells on 425 well pads over 95,000 hectares is just the beginning. Six more fields (collectively the size of

Tasmania) are planned, but activists say local opposition is well above 95 per cent, a figure backed by local councils.

Figures from Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association-sponsored research from CSIRO in 2014 reckoned only six per cent opposed fracking in Queensland. More recent figures from CSIRO cited 30.5 per cent opposition with 27 per cent ‘tolerating’ fracking in the Narrabri field region.

Facts remain facts, but industry funded research is hardly arms’ length, especially when CSIRO funding and jobs have been savaged in areas which made findings inconvenient to polluting industries.

Unlike conventional mining, coal seam and shale gas mining have short operational periods. Then it’s on to the next field. Intense industrialisation of pristine areas happens quickly and spreads over massive areas.

Drew Hutton, former President of Lock the Gate Alliance, recounts the changing moods of visits by fracking representatives. First, they come smiling and smarmy with biscuits to share. If that fails, a new rep arrives with a tougher message. “We can take you to court you know. And we’ve got fourteen QCs on hand if we do. How many QC’s have you got?”

First Nations have experienced this ‘negotiating’ style for many decades.

Marlene Hodder has worked with the Aboriginal Peoples of Central Australia at Utopia, Yuendumu, the APY lands, as well as with the town camp mob at Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs. It’s almost 50 years since she first started working with Kurnai People in East Gippsland.

She says, “First Nations are never given the full picture and information on the risks and potential for damage to land and environment. People are kept in poverty and development of their land, in particular mining, is presented as the only possible avenue for employment or opportunity for a way out of dire circumstances.”

It’s no surprise some, including First Nations’ groups, have been convinced to accept unconventional gas production in both the Pilliga and the NT, causing great distress to others who continue to fight.

Some senior NT Law Women and Men are concerned that the Central Land Council (CLC) is speaking to one clan or family at a time and that others have been locked out of meetings.

Rupert's empire up to no good

Across Australia Murdoch's media empire endlessly attacks and tries to divide First Nations Peoples, and to sever them from their support base elsewhere in the country.

Others, like shock jock Alan Jones, who vigorously opposed fracking on farming land, suggested at one NSW rally that the Northern Territory was desperate for fracking. This was not well received.

Murdoch's empire is overwhelmingly pro-mining, though it steps back very occasionally when opposition is too strong. It provides a huge public platform for First Nations individuals prepared to push its agenda.

In 2014, the Murdoch owned NT News publicised a CLC document aimed at Traditional Custodians which said "...most chemicals used in fracking are 'commonly used in the house' and that a different to the type of fracking would occur in the Northern Territory than NSW and Queensland" (where its destructive results are well documented).

"The CLC document uses a graphic to show 99.5 per cent of the material used in hydraulic fracturing is water and sand, with just 0.5 per cent of additives – including guar gum (used in making ice cream), acetic acid (a concentration in vinegar), sodium chloride (used in table salt) and sodium hypochlorite (used in bleach)," the NT News stated.

Both statements have a germ of truth, but they're capable of causing huge damage if taken at face value. It's not just what's used in the processes, but what's created along with the gas.

Unconventional mining produces many thousands of tonnes of noxious gases, with over 250 toxic chemicals from flares.

The horizontal drilling of shale and oil deposits proposed on NT Aboriginal lands is even more dangerous than coal seam fracking, where massive quantities of salt and waste water left behind are highly toxic.

Salt and vinegar combined, even in tiny quantities, for example, are a highly effective herbicide. But we're talking 100 tonnes of salt waste a day. And try drinking bleach or watering it on your vegies.

Santos poisoned its own plantation crop watered by its waste water in eastern Australia.

None of this appeared in Murdoch's NT News article.

The dirty reality

Australia's production of coal seam and other unconventional gas has risen exponentially since 1995. In fracking zones giant flares, perhaps 200 metres from homes, with 200 heavy vehicles per well, operate day and night with a ceaseless jet engine roar.

Total fire ban day? Shut off the flame? Hell no...though the last Pilliga bushfire burnt 16,000 hectares in three hours.

Add floodlit well sites. Forget dark skies for Australia's leading astronomical observatory near Coonabarabran, just as the PM is touting space exploration.

Those opposed to fracking are standing strong together.

Self-described farmer's wife and co-producer of the brilliant documentary 'Sacrifice Zone', Anne Kennedy says fighting and time will defeat CSG, as pressure on banks to refuse funding gains ground. CSG is high cost and its projects are already in trouble, she states.

First Nations have often been on the receiving end of capitalism's most brutal activities, including mining. Fracking is creating strong and determined allies among those who once saw themselves as having little common ground.

Despite immense wealth, threats, lies and efforts to divide and conquer, multinational corporations are more widely than ever seen as a malign force. First Nations know from bitter experience that corporations never take no for an answer. Laws, including native title, are made to suit them. They come back with demands again and again. Australia is better off without them and their dirty system.

John C.

Sunday, July 15, 2018

Australia's big four banks fuel climate change

To the vast majority of the population, the link between the burning of fossil fuels and the alarming change in our planet's climate is a no brainer. So much so that people's action is creating an impediment to the otherwise unfettered expansion of the fossil fuel industry.

Nonetheless, the investment into new fossil fuel projects continues. These types of projects are expensive, which require the supply of large amounts of capital. For them to go ahead, the companies involved must borrow this capital. Of course this is where the banks come in by lending the capital to the fossil fuel industry.

It goes without saying that if the banks cease to lend money to the fossil fuel industry, this environmentally disastrous activity will go into decline.

Back in 2015 the Paris climate agreement was signed which vowed to keep the increase in global temperature to less than 2°C above the pre-industrial temperature. Almost 200 countries signed this agreement and many companies around the world, including Australia's big four banks were supportive of its goals.

To the banks, it is a good look in the eye of the public to appear to be behind an issue that is near to the hearts of the people.

For example, back in 2017 the momentum behind the peoples' anti-Adani coal mine actions made Westpac have a re-think about lending money to Adani - it refused to lend it money. Similarly, 17 banks around the world have also refused to lend Adani money. This campaign by the Australian people to pressure the four big Australian banks not to lend money to the Adani project commenced in late 2014. By 2015 NAB indicated that it would not be lending money to Adani. Now all four big banks have made such statements.

Whilst this one example is a great victory, and appears to be a step in the right direction, Australia's big four banks continue to lend large amounts of

money to other new fossil fuel projects and for the expansion of existing ones. This includes coal, oil and gas projects.

Many of these are outside of Australia, so we do not get to hear too much about them, but they are extremely significant in terms of making the goal of the Paris climate change agreement unattainable.

Fortunately, an entity known as “Market Forces”, which is an affiliate of Friends of The Earth Australia has carried out some good quality research into the role of the big four Australian banks in providing investment capital to these projects.

This research indicates that since late 2015, the big four have actually increased their level of lending to the fossil fuel sector.

The capital they have lent to projects which expand fossil fuel production is \$3.89 billion. The breakdown for each bank is just over \$1.3 billion each by ANZ and CBA followed by Westpac and NAB each lending over \$500 million. These new projects will add another 4.9 billion tonnes of CO₂ emission load to the planet over their lifetime. To put this into perspective, this is equivalent to cancelling out Australia’s 2021 – 2030 emissions reduction target by over five times.

Many of these new projects relate to gas. Gas is often passed off as being a “clean” fuel in order to justify the expansion of its use. This is a furphy because the chemistry is the same - the combustion of one molecule of carbon in the form of gas (hydrocarbon) still produces one molecule of CO₂.

In the same period, the total capital lent by the big four banks to the fossil fuel industry covering all aspects of the sector’s activities is some \$21 billion. Again, ANZ and CBA lead in this dirty activity by lending over \$7 billion each followed by Westpac and NAB each lending about \$3 billion.

As these figures illustrate, not only are the big four banks instrumental in the expansion of new fossil fuel projects, they play a vital role in propping up the existing fossil fuel sector.

By contrast, in the same period they lent only \$6.1 billion to renewable energy projects.

Clearly, Australia’s big four banks are in shameful violation of their stated commitment to the goals of the Paris climate agreement. In fact, they have placed the achievement of the crucial cap of less than 2°C increase in global temperature in jeopardy, endangering the future of our species.

This is all in addition to the banks’ other shameful and abhorrent financial operations recently exposed by the Banking Royal Commission, which, let’s face it, only scratches the surface. So, the big banks have a lot to answer for.

Peoples’ action has put a bit of a brake on the banks’ lending practices to the fossil fuel industry - these peoples’ actions are invaluable and must continue - however, under the system of capitalism the irreparable damage to the environment cannot be halted or reversed.

Only by nationalising the banks and eventually serving the people under a system of socialism can the activities of the banks be channelled towards the effort of restoring the unity between humankind and nature in a sustainable manner.

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Louisa L.

Tuesday, July 17, 2018

The deeper reality of fracking

‘We have to ventilate our homes so they don’t explode’

Gamilaraay man Raymond ‘Bubbly’ Weatherall is at the Redfern Community Centre. On this Friday night in early June, rain smashes down outside as he recounts how his countryman Nathan Leslie threatened to arrest police, who’d come to arrest him for trespassing on his own land.

Weatherall’s audience has just watched the outstanding documentary ‘Sacrifice Zone’ on anti-fracking struggles against the Santos Narrabri Gas Project in north western NSW.

They’ve seen Leslie on screen. His bearing shows someone to be reckoned with, because he stands in the Law. The battle is “bigger than me,” says Leslie. “Our Ancestors are always watching.”

The police backed off and left, Bubbly gleefully tells the audience.

Struggle spreads

Huge struggles up to 2015 reduced the percentage of NSW open for fracking from 60 per cent to 5 per cent till, as the documentary states, “all that is left is Santos land.” Work has begun on Gomeroi land in the Pilliga.

The battle is Australia-wide. Only Victoria, which has banned it, Tasmania and the ACT are currently unaffected. According to *Guardian Australia*'s Michael Evershed, “The vast majority of land in both the NT and South Australia is covered by either current tenements for petroleum exploration and development, or applications for exploration and development,” leaving them vulnerable to shale gas mining.

When the ALP mis-government recently approved 51 per cent of NT for shale gas mining and fracking it became clear that Aboriginal lands are being particularly targeted.

Before the go-ahead, NT First Nations' youth group, Seed, stated, “Over 60 community members from across 13 regions came together on Larrakia country in Darwin, 18-20 November 2017, to yarn about how to stand together and stop fracking from destroying the NT.

“Never before have this many Aboriginal community members been brought together on the issue of fracking.

“People came together from every corner of the Territory”

This spearhead of powerful opposition ensured 135 requirements were promised, but the fight is not over by a long shot.

For our children

Shale and coal seam gas mining creates huge amounts of poisoned waste water and can contaminate rivers up to 1000km away.

Borrooloola's McArthur River has already been poisoned by mining giant Glencore using conventional mining.

A statement from Elder Nancy McDinny, Yanuwa & Garrawa from Borroloola reads, “Those four rivers on Garawa country; we’re going to fight for that water for our children and ban fracking.”

“We want this land to be strong and healthy for our children so they can go out bush hunting and fishing in the clean environment. Our water has to be clean and healthy for everyone to drink,” she says.

To the east, the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) covers an area the size of Queensland, straddling four states. Once contaminated, underground resources like GAB which communities rely on into the future, damage can’t be undone.

‘We let this go without so much as a whimper in our country’

Lisa Cox writes in *Guardian Australia*, “Alliances have been formed across groups that have traditionally been at odds – the environment movement, Indigenous groups and conservative regional and farming communities.”

Drew Hutton, former President of the Lock the Gate Alliance, says, “The only thing stopping them is this magnificent fortitude.”

When corporations came knocking in the US coal seam gas belt, communities believed the hype. US farmer, John Fenton says, “We let this go without so much as a whimper in our country. We can’t drink the water out of the wells any more. We have to ventilate our homes so they don’t explode... Our property is worth nothing now.”

In Queensland, producing gas fields already cover more than 30,000 square kilometres. The results are laid bare; industrialisation of rural and remote areas by an insidious, deceitful and destructive industry. Those affected have begged Australia to listen and learn.

Struggle reveals the bloodless icy heart of capitalism; that only profits matter. The interests of the people and those of giant corporations are diametrically opposed. Those on the front line of struggle will never look at capitalism in the same way again. Many begin to sense that this antagonistic and irreconcilable contradiction needs a final resolution.

‘Sacrifice Zone’ is free to view at <https://vimeo.com/257444267>

Nick G.

Friday, August 10, 2018

The fraud of funding the Great Barrier Reef Foundation



The federal government’s controversial \$444 million grant to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF) has rocked scientific and environmental circles..

Like peeling an onion, the further we strip away the layers surrounding this scandal, the more the tears will fill our eyes – tears of anger and disbelief.

The outer layer comprises the so-called “captain’s call”, the supposed thought bubble in the head of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull that led to the massive allocation of funds to a body that had not sought it, bypassing any tendering process or due diligence requirements.

The largest-ever non-profit grant in Australia political history went to an organisation with a staff of 6 people accustomed to an annual budget of \$8 million.

The Foundation’s managing director Anna Marsden claimed that the grant was a “complete surprise”. It really beggars belief that Turnbull would “surprise” the Foundation with this massive grant. However, its Board is stacked with Business Council figures and other corporate identities. Any one of them could have initiated a private conversation with Turnbull or his minister Frydenberg without formal paperwork being completed. The ruling class is quite adept at discussing its tactics in this way. The process may have

lacked finesse but probably reflects a government desperate to stave off international criticism of the damage to the reef by bank-rolling a safe outfit stacked with fossil fuel identities.

Rewarded for climate change non-activism

Peeling off a bit more of the skin, we find the Foundation paying lip-service to the impact of climate change on the reef but avoiding activism around the issue. Michael Myer of the Myer retail family, a former Board member of the Foundation said the Government was "greenwashing" by using the GBRF "to be seen to be doing something for the reef" but via an organisation that would not be "unduly politicising it around climate change".

This is certainly the impression the GBRF's website gives: "Our focus in the short term is on boosting the resilience of the Reef to allow it to bounce back from major challenges as a result of a changing climate and declining water quality. We're buying the Reef time while the world works to meet the conditions of the Paris Agreement.

"Our long term focus is on discovering new ways to restore reefs, helping them recover faster and rebuild to ensure their continuing survival."

Like one of those cartoon stereotypes of a victim (the Great Barrier Reef) strapped to a conveyor belt, legs open and heading for a rotating saw (climate change), a totally incompetent and irrelevant bystander (the GBRF) stands alongside, clutching a bag full of money and reassuring the victim, "Relax, we're here to help you be resilient and to bounce back..."

The Foundation's "corporate direction"

The previously quoted Michael Myer was a financial supporter of the GBRF and a member of its board for two years until 2002, when he quit in part over concerns about its "corporate" direction and the growing involvement of figures from the fossil fuels industry.

The GBRF has eleven research partners including the federal and Queensland governments, BHP, Boeing, Lendlease and Rio Tinto. It has fifteen Foundation partners, mostly from the very big end of town including giant commercial law firm Allens Linklaters, Deloitte, KPMG, Pricewaterhousecoopers (PwC), US advertising giant Leo Burnett, Google and the National Australia Bank (NAB).

A PwC company Strategy& is also a Foundation partner and says on its website:

A key outcome of the firm's pro-bono support for the non-profit Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF) is the new relationship with Government and key agencies at work on the Reef. Additionally, we've championed a more business-focused approach to the setting of the annual Reef Research Agenda. As the Foundation's reach continues to grow, so too does the significance and value of this landmark body of strategic work."

So, these are the two areas of corporate partnership, and there is no shyness about focussing the GBRF's research around the interests and methods of business.

The next layer is the Chairman's Panel. This is a 56-person group of corporate Presidents, CEOs and Managing Directors able to visit the reef, learn about efforts to protect it, and "lend their personal and organisational expertise to the science we support." That is, not just any science, but the science we support. The science that is about reef resilience, not climate change activism.

Among the luminaries on the Chairman's panel are electricity and gas giant AGL, packaging giant AMCOR, rail freighter Aurizon, energy and resource sector services provider Ausenco, BHP, Boral, US oil and gas giant ConocoPhillips, Downer Group (infrastructure and mining, and owner of the notorious Spotless), US giant GE, construction, property and infrastructure company Lendlease, Orica (supplier of explosives and cyanides to the mining industry), the largest coal company in the world Peabody Energy, WorleyParsons (provides project delivery and consulting services to the resources and energy sectors) as well as a host of major banks and insurance companies).

The Chairman and the Board

The Chairman of the Chairman's Panel and of the GBRF itself is Dr John Schubert, Chairman of Garvan Institute of Medical Research and a Member of the Business Council of Australia.

He commenced his career with Esso Australia as a professional engineer holding various positions in Australia and overseas. In 1983 he was appointed to the board of Esso Australia; in 1985 John became Esso's Deputy Managing Director and in 1988 Chairman and Managing Director.

He has also held the positions of Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Pioneer International Limited (1993-2000) during the time that Pioneer had ownership of AMPOL (later sharing its ownership with Shell) and at the time in Dec 1999 that Pioneer was taken over by the British giant

Hanson. He was President of the Business Council of Australia (2001 - 2003).

He was previously Chairman of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Worley Parsons Limited, and Director of BHP Billiton Limited, Qantas Airways (during its furious attack on workers' rights in 2011) and Hanson plc.

Just the sort of person to advocate climate change activism – NOT!

BHP is represented on the Board by Chief External Affairs Officer Geoff Healy. Lendlease has Steve McCann. Managing Director Anna Marsden has a corporate leadership background.

The scientific community is represented through Russell Reichelt, Chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, who has a PhD in marine science, and Prof. Ove Hoegh-Guldberg a biologist who is the inaugural Director of the Global Change Institute at the University of Queensland. There is also John Gunn, a marine scientist with over 35 years' experience conducting, leading, translating and communicating science, focussed on conservation and sustainable use of marine ecosystems and resources.

That's three scientists out of six members so far. Let's keep peeling back the layers and see who else is on the Board.

Firstly, there is Grant King. King has extensive background in fossil fuels. He was Managing Director of Origin Energy Limited from February 2000 until his retirement in October 2016. He was formerly General Manager, AGL Gas Companies where he held a number of management positions over a 17-year period.

King was elected President of the Business Council of Australia in November 2016. In addition to his role at the Business Council, he is the Chairman of the Melanoma Institute of Australia, a Director of the Origin Foundation and is a member of the University of NSW Foundation. He also holds a position as Professor of Energy Engineering in the School of Photovoltaic and Renewable Energy Engineering at the University of NSW and runs his own advisory business, GK Advisory Pty Ltd.

He is former Chairman of Contact Energy Limited, Oil Company of Australia and the Energy Supply Association of Australia (esaa). He is a former Director of Envestra Limited and the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association Limited (APPEA).

Next is former Queensland University Vice-Chancellor Paul Greenfield, a chemical engineer. Greenfield resigned from his position at the University on 13 January 2012 in the aftermath of what was known as the UQ admissions scandal. The scandal related to an "irregularity" in the enrolment of a student in the medicine course who was a "close relative" of his. It was subsequently revealed that the "close relative" was in fact his daughter, Charlotte Greenfield, who was offered a place in the medicine course despite not having met the entry requirements and being ranked below 343 other applicants who were not admitted.

Then there is Michael Cameron who comes with a background in finance capital. Cameron was appointed CEO & Managing Director of insurance giant Suncorp in October 2015. He was a non-executive director from April 2012 to September 2015. He was previously CEO & Managing Director of The GPT Group (2009 – 2015), Chief Financial Officer at St George Bank from mid-2007 until the sale to Westpac Banking Corporation in 2008, Group Chief Financial Officer of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, then Group Executive of their Retail Bank Division. He also spent 10 years with Lendlease in a number of senior positions, including Chief Financial Officer at MLC Limited. He is Chairman of the Financial Sector Advisory Council.

Maureen Dougherty, president of Boeing Australia, New Zealand and South Pacific is next. She has experience in armaments, having previously served as vice president and program manager for the KC-46 Tanker, the Airborne Early Warning & Control (AEW&C) surveillance aircraft, and the F-22 fighter programs. She is chairperson of the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia and a board director of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney. She is also a member of the Business Council of Australia.

Another with a background in finance capital is Stephen Fitzgerald. He was Chairman of Goldman Sachs, Australia and New Zealand, having joined the firm in 1992 and is promoting the spurious concept of social investment bonds.

Amanda McCluskey also has a background in finance capital and in taking a business focus to climate change. McCluskey is the Head of Sustainable Funds Group and Chair of Stewart Investors where she is responsible for leading and supporting the investment strategy and research process. Prior to this, Amanda was Head of Responsible Investment at Colonial First State Global Asset Management and also gained fund management experience at Portfolio Partners and BT Financial Group. She was the founding Deputy Chair of the Investor Group on Climate Change, was on the board of the

National Climate change Adaptation Research Facility and the Climate Change and Business Centre.

Another with combined links to finance capital, fossil fuels and the Business Council of Australia is Steve Sargent. Sargent joined the Foundation Board in March 2015. He is a Non-executive Director of Origin Energy Ltd, Chairman of the Origin Foundation. Steve is also Chairman of OFX Group Ltd (since November 2016) and is a Deputy Chairman and Lead Non-executive Director of Nanosonics Ltd.

Over recent years Sargent has been a Non-executive Director of Veda Group Limited (2015–2016) and Bond University Ltd (2010–2016). He was also a member of the Australian Treasurer’s Financial Sector Advisory Council, President of the American Chamber of Commerce and a Director on the Board of the Business Council of Australia.

Sargent’s most recent executive role was President and Chief Executive Officer of GE Mining, GE’s global mining technology and services business. Prior to this he was responsible for all of GE’s operations (Aviation, Healthcare, GE Capital, Transportation, Power & Water, Energy Management) across Australia and New Zealand, GE’s third largest country in the world. He joined GE Capital in 1993 in New York City and held a number of global leadership positions with the company, spanning the US, Europe and Asia.

Finance capital and fossil fuels are also in the background of Philip Strachan. Strachan joined the Foundation Board in March 2015. He is a Non-executive Director of Origin Energy Ltd, Chairman of the Origin Foundation. Steve is also Chairman of OFX Group Ltd (since November 2016) and is a Deputy Chairman and Lead Non-executive Director of Nanosonics Ltd.

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Last, but not least is Olivia Wirth. Wirth came to prominence in 2011 when Qantas boss Alan Joyce stood down all Qantas employees, grounding the entire fleet in a bitter attack on workers' rights and conditions. Wirth was his outspoken and provocative spokesperson. She later married Australian Workers Union head Paul Howes in a society wedding attended by Labor leaders Gillard and Shorten. Wirth is a former political adviser to former Liberal Treasurer Joe Hockey.

Investment banker Stephen Roberts was also on the GBRF's Board until recently. Roberts was Citigroup's former country head and has been a director of the GBRF since 2015 at which time he was allegedly involved in a criminal cartel with the head of Deutsche Bank during a \$2.5 billion deal to raise capital for the ANZ Bank. Deutsche Bank is also on the Chairman's Panel of the GBRF.

Not counting Roberts, that is three scientists on a Board of 15, all of the others sharing links to finance capital and fossil fuels.

Not represented are First Nations people and genuine activists for environmental protection and against climate change: Wilderness Society, Australian Conservation Foundation, Greenpeace, Sea Shepherd and others.

Giving \$444 million of taxpayer's money to this shandy gang of corporate creeps to masquerade as champions of our Great Barrier Reef is bad enough. What makes it worse – another layer that needs to be peeled off – is that some of these corporate giants are amongst the greatest tax minimisers and tax non-payers in Australia.

Take our money – pay no tax

BHP had an Australian income of \$1.3 bn in 2015-6. It paid no tax. Lendlease had an income of \$7.9 bn for the same financial year and paid no tax. Qantas paid no tax on \$15.7 bn. PwC paid no tax on \$463 million. AMCOR paid no tax on an income of \$3.5 bn. Ausenco paid no tax on \$115 million. ConocoPhillips had an income of \$1.4 bn and paid no tax. GE's various entities paid no tax on \$800 million. JP Morgan paid no tax on \$663 million. Peabody paid no tax on \$2.8 bn. Shell paid no tax on \$4.2 bn. WorleyParsons paid no tax on \$11.4 bn. Others paid minimal tax and the figures are much the same for the other two financial years for which we have data (2013-4 and 2014-5). At least WorleyParsons had the decency in 2014-5 to cough up \$20,000 on an income of \$1.8 bn!

Had some of these companies paid tax on their Australian earnings, a government committed to independent scientific research (ie not just the “science we support”) would not have needed to slash funding to the CSIRO or sack one third of its biodiversity staff.

That government is not the current Australian government. Our government is anti-science and pro-corporations. It bankrolls tax-avoiding multinationals to offer “resilience” to a dying national treasure. It is palliative care, soothing the reef’s dying pillow so as to not disturb the essential operations of a profit-driven system.

We should be incensed at the fraud that comprises the funding of the GBRF.

This is our money.

It should be taken back and made available to those who are committed to the fight against climate change, and against fossil fuels.

Ultimately, only an independent and socialist Australia will restore the balance between humanity and nature and put an end to farces such as offering “resilience” to a dying reef.

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Duncan B.

Wednesday, September 5, 2018

Drought and climate change

The eastern half of Australia is in the grip of severe drought. New South Wales is 100% in drought, with 20% of the state in severe drought. In July less than 10 mm of rain fell in the West, North West and Central regions. The drought is claimed to be worse than the drought of 1902.

Queensland is entering its seventh year of drought with 60% of the state in drought. In Victoria the Mallee and East Gippsland are also suffering from drought, with some areas receiving the lowest rainfall on record. Dry conditions in South Australia and Western Australia are also causing concern.

Livestock farmers are paying record prices for hay to feed their livestock. Many are selling all their stock in order to survive. Crop farmers face the

prospect of a year with no income as crops fail. Soil erosion is becoming a problem in some areas because of the extremely dry conditions.

Climate change deniers including Liberal and National Party politicians are quick to claim that climate change has nothing to do with drought. It is true that Australia is an extremely dry continent, and that droughts are regular events in Australia. The question we need to ask is “Are droughts getting worse and can they be attributed to climate change?”

While it is difficult to attribute any one particular weather event to global climate change caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gasses, the fact that this is occurring as a broad global trend is now unequivocal, and is very likely caused by humanity. For many key parameters, the climate system is already moving beyond the patterns of natural variability within which our society and economy have thrived, including global surface mean temperature, sea-level rise, ocean acidification and extreme climatic events. This century we can expect temperature rises of between 1.8 and 4.0 deg C and sea level rises 0.5-1.4m above 1990 levels. (1)

Since 1950, most of southern Australia has experienced substantial rainfall declines with below average falls across the south-west since 1970, and south-eastern Australia since 1997. From the 1970s, late autumn and early winter rainfall has decreased by 15% in south-east Australia, and Western Australia’s south-west region has experienced a 15% decline in cool season rainfall. This year’s rainfall over southern Australia is the second lowest on record.

A group of scientists at Melbourne University reconstructed 800 years of seasonal rainfall patterns across the Australian continent. They conclude that parts of northern Australia are wetter than ever before, and that major droughts of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are likely without precedent over the past 400 years (2)

We are seeing an increase in the intensity and frequency of hot days and heatwaves in Australia, exacerbating drought conditions. On the other hand we are also seeing increasing intensity in tropical cyclones and damaging heavy rainfall events in northern Australia.

Only the climate change deniers refuse to see that there is a problem. The question is “What do we do about it?”

What Can Farmers Do?

Farmers need to reject the climate change deniers in the ranks of the Liberal and National Parties, as well as those in their own farmer organisations. They need to get behind groups such as Farmers For Climate Action (www.farmersforclimateaction.org.au). This group is calling for immediate action on climate change. They seek to introduce climate-smart farming practices and more research and development to allow farmers to adapt to changing climatic conditions.

FFCA advocates moving Australia's energy system away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy. They are active in the "Stop Adani Alliance." They have been campaigning against the Queensland Government's proposed grant of an unlimited free 60-year water licence to Adani. They are also campaigning against the Government's compulsory acquisition of farmland for Adani's railway.

Other groups such as "Lock the Gate" are active against coal seam gas mining and fracking. They too need all the support that farmers and all Australians who care for the environment can give them.

- (1) G Horton et al, "Drought, drying and climate change: Emerging health issues for ageing Australians in rural areas." *Australian Journal of Ageing*, Vol 29, No 1, March 2010.
- (2) M. Freund et al, "Recent Australian Droughts May Be The Worst in 800 years." *The Conversation*, 2 May, 2018.

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Nick G. 1 December 2018

Students show the way on climate change

"The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigour and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at eight or nine in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. The world belongs to you." - Mao Zedong, 1957

How true these words strike today as thousands of school children across the country courageously walked out in protest against government inaction on climate change.

Prime Minister Scott (“Scummo”) Morrison was outraged, lecturing students about “not turning their schools into parliaments”. “What we want is more learning and less activism,” he said.

This is the same clown that once brandished a lump of coal in parliament to show his support for coal mining and his indifference to the effects of climate change.

His Resources Minister Matt Canavan was no less belligerent, saying he wanted children in school learning about how to build mines, do geology and how to drill for oil and gas, "which is one of the most remarkable science exploits in the world".

“The best thing you'll learn about going to a protest is how to join the dole queue. Because that's what your future life will look like, up in a line asking for a handout, not actually taking charge for your life and getting a real job.”

With morons like this in the Coalition government’s Cabinet, it is no wonder that one group of schoolgirls in Melbourne won applause with a placard that read “I’ve seen smarter cabinets at IKEA!”

Striking students condemned the statement by Adani that it would self-fund its proposed Queensland coal mine and begin operations there by Christmas. They also pointed to the UN’s 2018 Emissions Gap Report released two days earlier which included Australia in a list of countries not on track to hit emissions goals set by the Paris Climate Agreement.

So long as the energy, passion and determination of the young to take charge of their lives and their future is never lost, there will always be hope for a better world. The young always inherit the revolution and it is with their energy and vitality that its success will be guaranteed.

The CPA (M-L) stands in complete solidarity with all the striking students.

THE WORLD BELONGS TO THEM!

Nick G.

Thursday, December 6, 2018

For the environment and against the profit economy

To coincide with the 24th World Climate Conference (COP24) from 3 to 12 December 2018 in Katowice (Poland), December 8 has been designated an international environmental day of struggle by the International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organisations (ICOR).

Militant protests and activities will occur in Katowice led by ICOR.

Australia is smack in the middle of a far-advanced and accelerated transition to a global environmental catastrophe.

Claims by the federal government that we are on track to meet the emissions targets of the Paris Climate Agreement are simply lies fed to keep the Australian public quiet by a prime minister who once thought it funny to brandish a lump of coal in parliament to prove that it had no kryptonite-like destructive powers.

On October 11 of this year, the “emissions-on-track” claim was overwhelmingly rejected by leading climate researchers.

The latest government data shows Australia's greenhouse emissions are at their highest level since 2011. And the World Climate Conference has been told that global emissions are set to reach a record high.

Griffith University emeritus professor Ian Lowe says the numbers don't bode well for Australia.

"They're very concerning. It's clear that we're not making the progress that was envisaged in the Paris agreement in 2015," Prof Lowe told ABC radio last week.

"It's clear that nations around the world aren't doing enough to slow down climate change."

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the 20 warmest years on record have been in the past 22 years, with the top four in the past four years. Other tell-tale signs of climate change, including sea level

rise, ocean heat and acidification and sea-ice and glacier melt continue, whilst extreme weather left a trail of devastation on all continents.

Adani fuels anger



With more than 138 fires burning in Queensland, Adani threw caution to the wind and announced that it would self-fund its proposed Carmichael coal mine, having failed to secure bank capital for the project. The burning of fossil fuels such as coal is a major contributing factor to the increasing frequency and severity of bushfires from Australia to Greece to California, yet the two major parliamentary political parties remain loyal to the market and prepared to let new coal mines go ahead.

Just the day before the Adani announcement, Queensland Greens Senator Larissa Waters introduced a Bill to prevent new coal mines in light of their vast contribution to climate change, but every single other Queensland Senator voted against her motion.



“The major parties are listening to their fossil fuel donors instead of the people right now,” she said, issuing a call for support for a Greens campaign against coal mining.

Adani is happy to keep the coal fires burning while whole parts of Queensland are ablaze. It beggars belief that the Federal Government decided the project did not need a full environmental impact assessment despite Adani requiring 12.5 billion litres of water from a river in drought-stricken Queensland.

Anti-mining group Lock the Gate Alliance described the move as "appalling and dangerous".

"This is another special deal for Adani that puts our water resources at risk during a terrible drought and hangs Queensland graziers and communities out to dry," spokesperson for Lock the Gate Alliance Carmel Flint said.

Putting the Bight on marine life

Independent oil spill modelling commissioned by the Wilderness Society over three years ago showed that an oil spill in the Great Australian Bight could be catastrophic for our marine life, fisheries, coastal industries and beaches. BP and Chevron withdrew their drilling plans after a mass campaign, but Norway's Equinor, which professes to be "socially responsible" is pushing on.

This is despite Equinor's own leaked oil spill modelling shows that a disaster in the Bight could be even worse than previously thought.

Under Equinor's "worse case" modelling, an oil spill from its proposed drilling site in the Great Australian Bight could spread to beaches over 2500 kilometres away.

That means Bondi, Bells Beach and Tasmania's World Heritage Area would all be in the firing line.

Not only don't we need Big Oil blasting the marine environment and sea floor with massive sound waves designed to penetrate thousands of metres under the ground, even less do we need them extracting climate-destroying fossil fuels for their own profit.

Biodiversity crisis

We have previously condemned the federal government for cutting its biodiversity and conservation staff by more than 60, or around one third of its total.

Australia has a terrible record for species extinction. In July of this year, the International Union for Conservation of Nature identified Australia as the fourth-worst country in the world for species extinction. It identified the number of extinct animal species in Australia at 40, with 106 also listed as critically endangered.

Environmentalists recently renewed calls for stronger nature protection laws, noting that populations of our threatened birds have decreased by half, on average, since 1985. Habitat loss, together with climate change and introduction of pest species are contributing to the loss.

Shorebirds face the greatest danger. Many fly 6-7000 kilometres each year from the northern hemisphere to wetlands in Australia and New Zealand, and

then back again. Among the areas here whose real or projected demise is making things worse are the Coorong and Lower Lakes (suffering through reduced water flows from the Murray-Darling Basin) and Toondah Harbour in Queensland (under threat of “development”).

The then Minister for Environment and Energy Josh Frydenberg exercised his political discretion to progress approvals for the destructive Toondah Harbour mega-development in south-east Queensland. Josh Frydenberg was advised by his department on multiple occasions the Toondah Harbour apartment and marina proposal should be rejected outright because of the damage it would do to an internationally protected wetland. Frydenberg instead progressed the application from big property developer, the Walker Foundation.

Walker Corporation gave \$225,000 to the Federal Liberal Party and \$23,000 to the Queensland ALP in 2015-16 – the year the initial development proposal was submitted for national assessment.

Humane Society International Australia Chief Executive Officer, Erica Martin, said that in ignoring his department’s advice, Frydenberg had opened the door to removing international protections for the sake of development.

The development, if approved, will permanently destroy foraging habitat for a number of critically endangered species, including the Eastern Curlew, a migratory shorebird. It comprises 42 hectares of the Moreton Bay Ramsar-protected wetland. Toondah Harbour’s tidal flats are internationally significant for more than 50,000 water birds including 30 migratory species, loggerhead turtles and dolphins.

By way of contrast, the much-demonised Democratic People’s Republic of Korea registered sanctuaries for migratory bird species in Mundok County of south Phyongan Province and Rason City on the list of wetlands of international importance (Ramsar List) and acceded to the Ramsar Convention adopted in 1971.

Nearly 20,000 far-eastern curlews which are threatened with extinction worldwide make a stopover in the area. Therefore, the area was recognized to be of great international protective value.

While Australian scientists and environmentalists are calling for stronger Australian biodiversity laws, the DPRK adopted the Nature Reserve Law of

the DPRK in November 2009 to provide a legal guarantee for further protection of its biodiversity.

Active resistance is urgently needed!

More examples could easily be given of the growing environmental catastrophe and of parliamentarians'' taunting refusal to act on it.

Australia-wide active resistance is urgently required against the attacks of the imperialist rulers of the world and their corporations upon humanity and nature and for saving the natural environment from the profit economy.

Our most important conclusion is that the environmental movement has to become a society changing force.

For a social system that will work with nature to combat global warming, protect biodiversity and return control of water to the people, fight for national independence and socialism!

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Nick G. 18 January 2019

Government "generosity" a barrier to reef protection

The Australian National Audit Office report on the \$444 million grant from the federal government to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation ignores the most important aspects of this uncharacteristic generosity.

It has confined itself to an examination of process and has ignored the political purposes of the grant.

Even on the question of process it has two bob each way: it concluded all ministerial decisions around the grant were informed by departmental advice, and most of that advice was sufficiently detailed and complied with commonwealth rules; at the same time, it criticised the government for not imposing "clear and specific objectives for the funding."

At the time the grant was made, we looked at the corporate interests involved with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, noting the obvious presence of major fossil fuel and finance capital chief executives, and the so-called “research” priorities of the Foundation which downplayed the need for action on climate change and instead promoted the Reef’s resilience and capacity for regrowth and repair.

The current Minister for the Environment, Melissa Price, defended the government from criticisms in the ANAO report, saying how “immensely proud” she was that the government had provided funding to “protect the Great Barrier Reef”. It had done no such thing. It had actually provided hundreds of millions of dollars to protect the fossil fuel industry, which had come under local and international scrutiny for its contributions to the global warming that was causing coral bleaching and coral dieback. Its generosity was not to a small, science-based charity, but to a propaganda machine for fossil fuel environmental vandals.

What is quite evident from the Department of the Environment’s response to the ANAO report is that the government will not only cast aside the ANAO’s criticisms of process, but will use the same approach in other areas of controversial policies, areas where corporate interests stand in direct conflict with community needs and views. It said “the partnership serves as an innovative model that could be adopted to address other policy priorities for Australia.”

Our detailed analysis of corporate involvement in the Great Barrier Reef Foundation has stood the test of time and provides a real context, missing from the sanitised ANAO report, of the political purposes behind this grant.

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Nick G. 4 February 2020

On the Royal Commission into the Murray Darling Basin

In 2017, the ABC exposed serious water theft, particularly in the northern part of the Murray Darling Basin.

In response, the then Labor SA government established a Royal Commission to follow-up the allegations.

The Commission’s terms of reference gave it the authority to investigate matters relating to environmental flows through the Murray Darling Basin and to the role within that of the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA).

The Commission’s 700-plus page report was made publicly available several days ago.

If you want to see what a page with a bad case of the measles looks like, take a red highlighter pen to the Key Findings section (pages 52-70) and look for words like “unlawful”, “maladministration”, “indefensible”, “catastrophic”, “negligence”, “incomprehensible”, “nonsensical”, “secrecy” and “unacceptable”.

In a nutshell, the Commission found that the MDBA had ignored the federal Waters Act requirement for a scientifically based determination of the quantity of water required to restore the environmental health of Australia’s major waterway. The MDBA unlawfully incorporated economic and social factors into its assessment, resulting in a water recovery figure of 2750 Gigalitres (GL) when it should have been within the range of 3980 GL to 6980 GL.

The current parlous state of the Baarka (Darling) River with its lack of water flow and millions of dead and dying fish is a tragic confirmation of the MDBA’s refusal to base water recovery figures on environmental needs, as required by the Act.

Unfortunately, the Commission, as thorough and focussed as it has been, did not have the power within its terms of reference to investigate Constitutional obstacles to the sustainable management of Australian waters, to analyse the effect of the transition of water from a “common good” to a tradeable commodity in a private water market, nor to include waters other than those of the MDBA in its purview.

These are matters which those now advocating a federal Royal Commission into the Murray Darling Basin should demand.

The Australian Constitution – unfit for purpose

The SA Royal Commissioner did make passing reference to the Australian Constitution. He pointed out that the MBDA came into existence as a consequence of the federal Waters Act 2007. This was the first time that a national government, 106 years after Federation, had enacted legislation on the nation’s waters.

From its very beginnings, the Australian Constitution, as a weak three-way compromise between the British, the colonial elites and the new central government, was unfit for purpose. The new Australian government had very little power other than defence and foreign policy (there is a list in Part 5 Sect 51), and those were largely determined by Britain until the ratification by the Australian Parliament of the British Statute of Westminster (1931) under conditions of war in 1942.

Not only is water not listed as an Australian Government responsibility, the federal Parliament is unceremoniously told to butt out of State rights to determine water usage in Chapter IV (Finance and Trade): “Sect. 100: Nor abridge right to use water: The Commonwealth shall not, by any law or regulation of trade or commerce, abridge the right of a State or of the residents therein to the reasonable use of the waters of rivers for conservation or irrigation.”

The federal Water Act only exists because Australia’s international treaty obligations (eg the RAMSAR Convention on wetlands, the Biodiversity Convention, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership on migratory birds and the Climate Change Convention) enable the Australian government to have some say in how water is managed to achieve our external affairs requirements.

Under Australia’s model of cooperative federalism, any national agreement between the Australian and state and territory governments requires the voluntary assent of each of the parties to the agreement. Hence the very real threats that can be made by state governments to pull out of the MDBA.

An anti-imperialist Australia, having won real independence, would scrap the existing Constitution and write a new one giving the central government, led by the working class, exclusive authority over the many areas, including water and environmental management, that the current Australian government is excluded from or required to share, “cooperatively”, with the states.

Water...for sale or rent

The end of the era in which water was regarded as a “common good” (1901-1980) is part of a global theft of public commons by giant multinational financial corporations which have forced their way into a deliberately constructed private water market that allows them to speculate with their surplus capital.

The seizure of freshwater supplies contained in rivers and the Great Artesian Basin by finance capital investors, miners and gas extraction companies mirrors the wave of privatisations and corporatisations of city and state water utilities that occurred in the mid-1990s. The major beneficiaries of the latter included French companies Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux and Vivendi, Thames Water and Lend Lease.

Water trading followed a June 1995 decision to establish the Murray-Darling Cap to put a limit on the amount of water that could be taken out of the Murray-Darling river catchments. Ostensibly a response to concerns about environmental flows, the Cap came with a new system that allowed irrigators to trade their entitlements to waters taken from the Murray-Darling, and also to trade annual allocations taken under those entitlements.

Investment funds with active interests in water emerged after 2007, when investors no longer had to own land in the Murray Darling Basin to be eligible to buy and sell its water rights.

Water was no longer a common good, that is, a resource deemed to be under the ownership of all Australian citizens and available for their use and enjoyment, but a private commodity, “blue gold” as it was quickly dubbed by corporate investors.

Whilst making this fundamental change to ownership and control of freshwater supply, the federal government initially chose not to maintain any register of foreign capital purchasing Australian water rights. Very belatedly, foreign purchasers of Australian water rights had to register their purchases by November 2017; the data has not yet been released.

Despite the lack of clarity around who owns our water, several major players have been identified.

By 2010 the major players in our water market, then valued at \$30 billion included:

- \$20 million worth of entitlements bought by the US-owned Summit Global Management through an Australian subsidiary;
- An estimated \$130 million worth of water bought by Olam International of Singapore in a deal involving the purchase of almond groves in northern Victoria;
- More than \$30 million worth of rights in western NSW held by Tandou which has substantial British and US ownership.

(It is worth noting that Summit's assets were sold in 2015 to noted enemies of the Australian working class in the Aware Water investment group, owned by former ports bosses Chris Corrigan and Peter Scanlon. Corrigan, who tried to smash the Maritime Union of Australia is also tied to the Webster Group, one of two corporations currently owning 70% of the Barwon River's water.)

It was estimated that by 2010, 8.1% of Australian freshwater was owned by foreign capital. By 2013, that figure had risen by 60% to 13.7%. No doubt the figure will be higher again when the registry data is eventually released.

There are currently two investment funds serving to channel local and foreign capital into the water market. One is BlueSky Alternative Investments which incorporates private equity, hedge fund and venture capital divisions and whose major shareholders are JP Morgan Nominees Australia Ltd and HSBC Custody Nominees (Australia) Ltd.

The other is a private fund, Kilter Investments. Financial analyst Alan Kohler reported how in 2015 he "spoke yesterday with Cullen Gunn who runs a wholesale water investment fund (for "sophisticated" high net worth investors and big super funds only) called Kilter. He says water is a "great asset class". "It's like commercial property except there's no problem with impairment or messy tenants. The yield is sold, about 5-8 per cent and if someone doesn't pay you just take the asset back, instead of having to apply to have a tenant evicted."

"Also, it's clear to me that climate change means there is going to be less water in future, so the economic value of it will increase."

It is imperative that any federal Royal Commission into Australian waters includes an assessment of the negative impacts on environmental water management of the commodification of water and its trade in the private water market.

In any case, an independent Australia led by the working class will stop the commodification of water, close down the private water market and restore water's status as a "common good".

All waters are environmental

All Australian waters are part of the nation's ecology and required for the health of its biodiversity and environment. Whether it's the Adelaide River in the NT or the River Torrens in Adelaide, they are all rivers of national significance and should be managed by a single national water authority embracing First Nations representation.

The Great Artesian Basin (GAB) covers a larger area than the Murray Darling Basin, yet is often overlooked in discussions of water resources. Unlike the surface rivers, the GAB is a victim of “out of sight, out of mind”. What was once a large basin of ground water with bubbling mound springs supporting Aboriginal communities in South Australia has now been massively depleted. The mound springs have been stolen from Aboriginal peoples by being run dry through excess extraction of water, initially for pastoral properties and now for mining.

BHP’s Olympic Dam mine at Roxby Downs in South Australia is permitted to extract up to 42 million litres of water daily from the Great Artesian Basin under the Roxby Downs (Indenture Ratification) Act 1982. The underground copper and uranium mine commenced operations in 1988 and is expected to continue operating until approximately 2060.

Like the MDBA, there is a Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee. The former holds powers referred to it by State Ministers; the latter advises Ministers on behalf of various stakeholder groups.

This is an unacceptable arrangement. There should be single national authorities with exclusive powers over both Basins.

In the case of the Great Artesian Basin, there are divergent views on its sustainability. Some view it as a renewable supply, refreshed by rains falling in north-eastern Queensland. But another view sees it as a plutonic source of water derived from steam generated by vulcanism deep in the earth over millions of years and hence essentially not renewable.

As per the Constitution, three separate states and the Northern Territory are in charge of their own Great Artesian Basin waters. SA, the victim in the Murray Darling Basin, allows Olympic Dam to extract up to 42 million litres per day.

The Queensland government has given Adani open slather on Great Artesian Basin waters. It has no limit on what it can extract but merely needs to monitor and report the amount of water it extracts with a permit that runs until 2077.

Gas producer Santos plans to drill 850 coal seam gas wells through the Great Artesian Basin.

Catastrophic climate change

Capitalist governments have allowed climate change to reach a catastrophic point of “no return”.

Global temperatures are rising, increasing rates of evaporation. What goes up must come down. It does. Torrentially and destructively.

Bush fires increase in intensity and over a longer “bushfire season”.

The Great Barrier Reef continues to die and species are threatened with extinction.

We don’t even know the extent of our biodiversity, yet the federal government sacks its own biodiversity researchers.

On the same day that the MDBA Royal Commissioner roasted the South Australian Environment Minister for selling out to eastern states governments, his head of department blithely announced that the SA Environment Department is henceforth to operate as an “economic development agency” with “less staff and smaller budgets...including potential reduction or ceasing of functions”.

This all adds urgently to the need to seize the matchbox from the arsonists, to end the system that makes profit sacred, to place power in the hands of the people.

The working class is no longer fighting just for its emancipation from an exploitative system. It is fighting for its survival and for a habitable planet.

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Nick G. 5 March 2019

Indigenous Australians lead water protest

Last Sunday, hundreds of people gathered in Walgett to mourn the death of the Namoi River.

It was one of a series of protests held that day under the auspices of the Northern Aboriginal Land Council (NALC). Hundreds more gathered in Menindee, Wilcannia, Bourke, Dareton, Dubbo, Tilpa, Brewarrina, and Wentworth, blocking bridges and marching down roads.



The Walgett protest was organized by the Walgett Local Aboriginal Land Council (WLALC) to advocate for change regarding the water situation in the western, north western and central regions of NSW.

Described as a “perennial river” on Wikipedia, the Namoi is in fact bone dry at Walgett. A memorial service for the river, with a eulogy delivered by Northern Aboriginal Land Council Chairperson Roy Ah-See, was held on the parched and cracked grey bed of the Namoi.

“This river was born in Creation...so it has sustained many many generations of our people,” said Ah-See. “We celebrate the life of a river that has given us life, and should never have run dry.”

George Fernando, a Walgett elder, criticized the big commercial cotton-growers around Wee Waa who take water from the river for their crops. “These cotton blokes,” he said, referring to the water, “have got it up there. I don’t know what they’re gonna do with the water. The other water, from the mines they’re sending down to us, it’s no good. It’s black water.”

Anne Dennis, deputy chair of the NALC, blasted the “total mismanagement” of the water. “Local people need to be involved,” she said, adding that the “Government must stop water trading.”

Kelli Randell, CEO of the WALC, said “We have inherent rights, values and interests in water. The physical and spiritual health of our country, including water, reflects the spiritual and physical health of our people.

“Urgent action is demanded to address the current and unfolding crisis of water shortages in New South Wales.

“Our communities have run out of water. It is at critically low levels. Available water is putrid and unhealthy.

“The lack of access to clean water is leading to preventable diseases and a significant impact on mental health.

“Access to clean water is a basic human right....We need water!”

Randell was not exaggerating the desperate plight of people at Walgett. The north-west NSW town has been on level five water restrictions for months and suffered a blow mid-January when its bore water supply was knocked out of action for a day.

Orange resident Maree Glohe responded by collecting bottled water from Orange supermarkets – 500 slabs each containing 24 bottles – and drove to the Walgett township and the local mission and “reservation” delivering supplies.

It was a welcome gesture and a sign of how people support each other in tough times, but everyone knows that it cannot be a permanent solution.

The WLALC are demanding:

- The establishment of a Commonwealth Royal Commission into the management of the Murray Darling Basin
- A State Level inquiry to address the mismanagement of water and our river systems in NSW
- A suspension of trading in the Barwon Darling River System
- Aboriginal involvement, through the Land Council network, in all decisions about water management and planning.

Interestingly, a chant set up at the end of the Walgett memorial service, “What do we want? Royal Commission!” hadn’t got very far before someone changed it to “What do we want? Barnaby Joyce in jail!” to great cheers and applause.

Indigenous Australians are quite rightfully leading the way in defence of Country and the environment.

Whether its to stop Adani, restore the Namoi, Barwon, Baarka and other rivers to health, prevent South Australia from becoming a nuclear waste dump or protecting the Great Barrier Reef and the Great Australian Bight – to name a few - Indigenous voices are providing leadership and guidance.

The common enemies of all Australians - the giant overseas and local corporations with the addiction to “growth” and profits – will not divert us from all standing united for the values we cherish.

People and their environment before profits!

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Ned K. 27 May 2019

Queensland Workers and a Sustainable Economy Without Coal

Working people in Queensland have copped a lot of abuse, denigration and blame in some press reports on the federal election wash up. Most of this is about their supposed dependence on coal and by implication unwillingness or inability to move away from coal production.

However, this is wrong on several fronts.

Firstly, unemployment levels in Queensland are more to do with the anarchy of a capitalist market economy than whether there is coal mining or no coal mining.

Secondly, the Queensland working class has over many years developed a very diverse economy which demonstrates their capacity to embrace renewable energy projects and new environmentally sustainable industries to make coal mining irrelevant to a sustainable future for their families.

Thirdly, it is the poor leadership of successive governments of both Liberal/National Coalition and Labor that have clung to coal mining and provided no alternatives to coal mining communities.

To see what could have already been implemented in Queensland to decrease dependency of whole communities on coal production, it is worth reading the

article in the link below from NZ Coal Action Network. It explains a lot about coal's role in steel making and what is possible and realistic in the short to medium term regarding alternatives to coal production for steel making.

The article says that in 2011, world steel production required 12% of the world's coal that was mined. So even if the use of coking coal to make steel in Australia continued for a considerable time, the end of production of thermal coal by the closure of coal fired power stations in Australia and the banning of export of thermal coal from Australia would be a huge step forward and possible.

The employment lost from thermal coal mining in Australia (mainly Qld and northern NSW) could be countered by increased employment in the four growth industries in Australia expected in the next decade. These are according to federal government research: health care & social assistance; construction; education and training; and professional, scientific and technical services.

Also, as the Coal Action Network paper in the link below explains, there are already alternative ways of making steel without the use of coking coal which will reduce the pollution levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere and create alternative employment. According to government statistics, there were 37,800 people employed in coal mining in 2014 and I suspect the figure is declining due to technology changes such as driverless vehicles and fewer coal mines.

98% of metallurgical coal (coking coal) is exported from Australia. Only 2% used for steel making in Australia!

45% of Queensland's coal reserves are metallurgical coal. In 2017, 172.2 million tonnes of coking coal was exported, valued at \$24.7 billion. (The Morning Bulletin 6/4/18).

In Queensland, where coal mining is a big export earner for governments, there are many alternative industries.

In mining alone, Queensland is a big producer of other minerals such as bauxite, copper, zinc, lead, silver and gold. Mining overall in Queensland though, in 2017-18, is capital intensive and directly employed just 2.5% (61,000 people) of the state's total workforce of 2,496,133 people.

Agriculture in Queensland is diverse with vegetable, crops, fruit, nuts as well as the more widely known beef and sugar. It employs 63,000 people.

Tourism and education directly employ 137,500 people and provide a holiday destination to many Australians as well as overseas visitors.

Education and training contribute 5.2% to the economy of the state.

Health care and social assistance is the state's largest employer with 350,000 people and increasing.

Construction employs 239,000 in engineering construction, non-residential and residential and contains the skills to build renewable energy projects to replace the coal industry.

Retail, Financial Services and Professional Services contribute nearly 500,000 jobs.

Manufacturing, especially food and beverages, is diverse and employs 132,295 people, many of whom have transferrable skills for new renewable energy based and sustainable manufacturing such as public transport vehicles and renewable energy components such as solar panels and wind farms.

In the immediate future, Queensland workers involved in coking coal production for steel for use in Australia should continue working while their demands for alternative employment opportunities in the industries mentioned above, and in alternatives to coal for production of steel, are developed. They should be actively supported to promote their demands for support while alternatives to coal are developed.

This will of necessity mean struggling against the vested interests of imperialist finance capital.

Only in an independent Australia with the state in control of decisive industries can decisions be made in the interests of the majority of people in the whole country.

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Nick G. 5 June 2019

Develop a program of reassurance to win workers from coal

Many Queensland workers will rightfully feel gutted and betrayed by yesterday's (June 4, 2019) admission in the *Australian* that the Adani coal mine, should it proceed to full-scale production, will only generate around 800 jobs.

This contrasts sharply with the hubris of Adani CEO Jeyakumar “JJ” Janakaraj who said, back in April 2016, that the mine would create 10,000 local jobs and provide crucial work opportunities for small- and medium-sized businesses.

This was before Adani was forced into a humiliating downsize operation following its failure to attract funding from banks. It said that the \$16.5 bn project would now be a much smaller project costing less than \$2 bn which it would self-fund. Many doubt its capacity to self-fund.

Yesterday’s press report also stated that the company would not use driverless trucks or other autonomous operations. “JJ” Janakaraj had let the cat out of the bag in his 2016 interview in which he stated: “We will be utilizing at least 45, 400-tonne driverless trucks. All the vehicles will be capable of automation. When we ramp up the mine, everything will be autonomous from mine to port. In our eyes, this is the mine of the future.”

Yesterday’s denial was a sop to the mining section of the CFMEU and to certain politicians still toadying to Adani. It was a totally preposterous statement since capitalists always adopt that technology which enables them to have more surplus value created from fewer workers. Sooner or later, Adani will have to adopt autonomous operations.

Iron ore miner Rio Tinto has adopted autonomous operations in the Pilbara, and the coal industry on the eastern seaboard is doing likewise. Breathing down Adani’s neck are the likes of the Stanwell Corporation-run Meandu coal mine in Queensland and the Whitehaven Coal’s Maules Creek mine in New South Wales where Hitachi Construction Machinery has been promoting and using its Autonomous Haulage Systems (AHS) driverless trucks.

According to a report on australianmining.com.au “Hitachi believes Australian mining will be almost entirely autonomous by 2030, with integrated operations centres, autonomous vehicles, AHS, drone image analysis, and other analytics-focused technologies dominating the landscape.”

Hitachi general manager Eric Green said “discussions about automation in the east coast coal sector have definitely increased over the past 18 months“.

Adani without driverless trucks, trains and other operational capacity is as likely as walking down Collins St and hearing the clack-clack-clack of Remingtons, and the shuffling of carbon paper from some left-over typing pool.

In any case, Adani has already placed orders for AHS vehicles from Komatsu's Illinois (USA) plant.

Spanish government re-elected on anti-coal, pro-coal miner policy

Instead of alienating workers conned into thinking that Adani would be a jobs paradise, steps must be taken to develop their confidence in a coal-free future.

In late April's Spanish general election, the social-democratic Socialist Party increased its vote and was able to again form a coalition government with PODEMOS by promoting a so-called Green New Deal. The Green New Deal was popularised in the US by Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The Green New Deal committed the Spanish government to slash greenhouse emissions to 90% of 1990 levels by 2050, ban fracking and end subsidies for fossil fuels.

The districts with the largest vote for the Green New Deal were coal mining districts. The previous October, the government agreed with unions and the industry that €220m (\$A400m) will be injected into mining regions over the next decade, boosting retirement schemes and retraining. Early retirement will be offered to miners over 48, with environmental restoration work in pit communities and re-skilling schemes for cutting-edge green industries for those ineligible for retirement.

This gave coal miners the assurance that phasing out their industry would not harm their standard of living or alternative job prospects. It didn't divide workers as, for example, happened in Queensland where the Maritime Union opposes Adani while the mining section of the CFMEU supports it.

Of course, it is easier identifying a few thousand miners employed in currently operational coal mines. It is much more difficult offering retraining and other assurances to workers yet to be employed by a miner whose project is still on the drawing board.

A plan for winning over workers and communities in Australian coal mining areas will have to be different from that adopted in Spain.

However, the effort must be made by unions, environmentalists, climate miners and their communities - to identify those elements of a package to reassure workers that there can be a transition from coal to sustainable and renewable sources of energy.

A program of struggle must be developed which can unite workers against politicians and the big multinational mining corporations. It must have a sufficiently clear focus of reliance on mass struggle so as not to be diverted into a parliamentary dead-end.

It must complement broader aims of an independent and socialist Australia.

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John S. 22 November 2019

Climate Change? Change the System!

(Written as Australia was burning.)

The world faces an environmental emergency.

The dire environmental dangers, include:

- rapidly declining biodiversity
- depletion of non-renewable resources
- global warming
- the acidification and plasticisation of the world's oceans
- destruction of the world's forests, and the desertification of vast areas
- melting of the polar ice caps and rising sea levels
- extreme weather conditions leading to devastating bushfires, storms and disruptions to food production and agriculture.

Our current capitalist system is the major cause of the environmental crisis:

- Capitalism is based on the constant drive for maximum profit.
- The system digs up, knocks down, produces and discards whatever resources make a profit, regardless of the consequences.
- The capitalist system cannot plan economic or ecological policies or welfare because the whole system is based on the rush of capital to wherever profit can be made. This inevitably leads to over-production, booms followed by crises, and resource depletion.
- Any environmental planning and technologies are dependent on whether they are profitable, not whether they serve the interests of the people and benefit society as a whole. Environmental inventions are often bought up by

big companies and suppressed because they would undermine the profitability of existing products.

- Rampant consumerism, whimsical fashions, and throwaway products with built-in obsolescence create constantly renewing and expanding markets.
- Corporations then rot any environmental protections to make profit. The Kyoto Protocol created a trade in CO2 emissions, supposedly to encourage CO2 reductions. This trade in pollution rights has expanded into another speculative industry as corporations sell their pollution rights, transfer their polluting industries to third world countries with lower or no pollution restrictions (e.g. the European paper industry, and coal-fired power stations). There are now over 10,000 registered traders in pollution certificates in Europe alone.

“The insatiable need for capital to expand has led to over-production that over-tills the land, over-grazes the pastures, over-fishes the rivers and seas, and pours fatal amounts of chemicals and wastes into ground, air, and water, causing irreparable damage to the earth.” (Pao-yu Ching)

And the parliamentary political system merely upholds this corrupt dangerous economic system:

- Politicians bend to the overwhelming power of big business, for example, when the Federal Labor government caved into the mining lobby and abandoned the mining super profits tax, and the Federal Liberal and Queensland Labor governments (spot the difference!) backed the Adani coal mine.
- The current Federal government has failed to challenge the banks over their despicable practices.
- Politicians curry favour with the capitalist media and shock-jocks, and resort to media grabs and throwaway lines in their constant game of point scoring and rivalry to get the top jobs, rather than produce strategies to really address our economic and environmental crises.
- The growing popular political pressure by people around the world on governments and corporations only results in half-hearted measures at best to protect our endangered planet. And often there is complete denial and inaction.

The capitalist system cannot and will not seriously address or solve the looming environmental disaster.

It must be replaced. Urgently

A Better Alternative: Socialism.

Socialism is not a few new policies patched onto the existing capitalist system. Fundamental change is required – a completely new and different system. A socialist system requires anti-imperialist independence with the assets of the big foreign multinationals taken over by the Australian people.

- A real socialist system would involve public ownership and control of the key sectors of the economy – finance, manufacturing, mining, construction, infrastructures, environmental management, big agriculture, communications, vital common resources such as water and power, and public services, such as education, health and housing. The state would own these big resources, and they would be managed by a combination of state and democratic worker control. They would be organised and run for the common good; the benefits shared among the people, not privately seized as under capitalism.
- This publicly-owned system would plan and develop production and distribution according to the needs of the society and the environment, because the driving force and motivation would be people's welfare and environmental sustainability, not profit.
- New political structures and institutions would be thoroughly and genuinely democratic, with guaranteed representation and active participation of all progressive sections of the population. Representatives would be elected without the manipulation of money or the capitalist media, and people could recall and replace their representatives whenever they saw fit.
- Workplaces and communities would also be managed by directly- elected representatives and bodies.
- The socialist institutions will need to be completely new creations, built from the ground up by the people, replacing all the old capitalist society institutions, which served to prop up the old regime. These institutions would include government and administration, police and armed forces, constitutions and law courts.
- The new socialist society would set about creating and supporting new socially-positive cultures to develop and support people's health and welfare.
- Socialist society would be internationalist – it would respect the rights and welfare of other peoples and countries, and, as the world steadily turns socialist, usher in a peaceful, environmentally-sustainable world, free of war, bullying and exploitation.
- Only these broad outlines of a socialist system are possible, as the exact forms and policies would be democratically determined by each people in

and for their own country. We believe for Australia that independence and socialism are mutually dependent. We can't have one without the other.

The race to save the planet is a race against time, and a race against capitalism.

We can only save the world by building a better world.

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Louisa L.

7 January 2020

When hell descends and midday becomes night, we need to think clearly.

Bushfire crisis Part 1

“Take shelter. It is too late to leave.” How many have received that terrifying text over recent months?

By early October, when an elderly couple died near Drake, 34 fires were already burning in NSW, some for over a month.

Death claimed another in the horrific night of November 8, at tiny Johns River, just south of Port Macquarie.

But that was not the start of the region's fires. Residents have breathed toxic smoke since July 18, when an underground peat fire began. Attempts to extinguish it have failed.

That month, the Federal government cut 35% from the budget of the NSW branch of Fire and Rescue.

Outside Laurieton Services Club evacuation centre, I watched the fire that engulfed Johns River. Emotions ran high, and three times that night I heard that "Greenies" were to blame.



(Above: As Johns River burned on November 8)

This was just before politicians like Barnaby Joyce began dropping bombshells, blaming two other fire victims that night for their own deaths.

When others lay blame elsewhere, it was suddenly NOT okay to speak about causes until the fires were out... whenever that may be.

Meanwhile the business of climate science denial and blame continued.

Volunteer Fire Fighters Association?

Isolating and attacking the RFS and its leaders became urgent for corporations that cause climate change, after it became widely known that 22 former fire chiefs had warned government about the impact of climate change in the approaching season.

Neither the prime minister nor Minister Angus Taylor bothered to reply to their letters sent in April and September.

The NSW Volunteer Fire Fighters Association (VFFA) presents itself as “an independent volunteer organisation representing the views and issues that affect volunteer rural fire fighters in NSW.”

It began in 2004 with an attack on “the then State Government, RFS and National Parks and Wildlife Service,” which, it stated, “would not take an interest in our concerns into fire safety matters.”

It cleverly positions itself to divide and conquer. As a prominently displayed supporter comment on Facebook says, “Always best to hear both sides of a story. One side, total volunteers. The other, paid staff and then volunteers.”

But the association's real brief is climate change denial, plus constant complaints about lack of control burns. It's no coincidence that it's modelled on and has the same name as a group in the US.

Stepney Fire, which unites both volunteer and paid firefighters in Monro, Connecticut states, "The Volunteer Fire Fighters Association is actually a political action committee based in Milwaukee, WI and has nothing to do with local firefighters."

Here, the VFFA constantly reposts Murdoch empire venom, including a *Daily Telegraph* attack on RFS fundraising, revisiting the issue a number of times.

Multiply this propaganda by millions of groups, sites, posts, and conversations, it's clear why previously rational and progressive people, who care for underdogs, can be convinced to demonise environmentalists.

When emotions run high

Amid the extraordinary collective heroism and generosity of everyday people, deliberately fostered divisions are deeper than this writer can remember. They cut through families, communities and workplaces.

Working class leaders of the past, who looked beyond trade union compromise and parliamentary politics, frequently used a strategy based on the united front theories of Georgi Dimitrov and Mao Zedong.

Its heart lay in this paraphrase, ‘unite all who can be united, win over the middle ground, neutralise those who can't be won over and isolate the diehards.’

The ruling class is now using the formulation that once united the people against it. Unrelenting lies and half-truths are increasingly demonising

environmentalists and socialists, demoralising and neutralising those who were once active alongside them, winning over those who don't understand issues deeply.

It has vast technological power coupled with deep psychological analysis of individuals and groups. Its preparation is thorough. In Australia, the US is the dominant imperialist power. It controls decisive sectors of our economy, our military and various forms of media.

Disasters can be good battlegrounds for the ruling class, because when emotions run, high thinking is compromised. The Nazis showed the potential of huge lies, coupled with perceived enemies in a brew of devastating economic crisis and high emotion.

Thinking clearly, standing strong

Bertold Brecht escaped the Nazis and later outwitted the US anti-communist witch hunts. He was socialism's Shakespeare, the most brilliant playwright and theatre practitioner of the modern era.

His plays are emotionally powerful, but he always cut short that emotion. He knew that to defeat the powerful ruling class people needed to think and analyse clearly.

We can't win over everyone infected by ruling class lies and ideology, no matter how much we care for them. That's idealism and a waste of precious energy.

But we can neutralise their political activity, by helping to build a movement that empowers those who are currently intimidated by ruling class strength. Emotion can move them to action.

The people can silence the deluded boasts of those under ruling class sway. United and strong, we must target, not our friends, nor our families, nor our neighbours, but the imperialist ruling class.

That class has exposed its raw power to increasing numbers, and people are already mobilising, led by the young. That is the way forward. Imperialism is destroying the world. It's had its day.

The choice is simple, independence and socialism, or barbarism.

Climate change: Beware green swans with fat tails!

Sometimes human language fails to find adequate expressions to accurately and scientifically describe phenomena beyond our lived experience.

At the two extremes of matter in motion, where observations require extremely precise mathematical calculation, scientists fall back on metaphor and poetry to describe phenomena. Particle physicists attribute to a range of sub-atomic particles known as quarks the properties of “charm”, “colour” and “flavour”. Astrophysicists have given us “white dwarfs”, “black holes” and more.

In *Capital* Marx revealed in painstaking detail the economic laws of motion of modern society derived from his analysis of the production, distribution and exchange of commodities and embedded in the various circuits of capital. Bourgeois economists have spent 150 years distorting and denying Marxist political economy. Part of that distortion and denial is the creation of terms which capture surface appearances while obscuring the underlying laws. They develop their own language in the process, for example, “naked shorts” and “dead cat bounces” in the share markets and “deep pools” in the murky world of under-the-counter derivatives.

Fat Tails

The economic and financial crisis of 2007-8 shocked and scared the economic observers of the ruling class. Instead of using scientifically correct Marxist terminology, they gave us “fat tails” and “black swans” (see below) amongst others. A fat tail describes an aberration in the bourgeois belief that the economy (profits and losses on the stock market in particular) follows a fairly predictable rise and fall over time. A horizontal graph will therefore have movement above and below the line within an understood range. Investors try to “read” this movement to buy and sell shares at the most advantageous moments.

However, the law of uneven development does not allow such “normality”. Crises of overproduction (including overproduction of speculative capital, of capital with fictitious values unrelated to the production of commodities)

conspire to disrupt the imaginary normality of capitalist activity. A fat tail is therefore a major spike either above or below the normal range of rises and falls on our horizontal graph line. Fat tails on the “loss” side of the horizontal axis are the stuff of financial nightmares. They are, however, required for a periodic destruction of over-inflated values within the circuits of capital.

Black Swans

2007-8 was such a major nightmare that finance capitalists awoke to the use of a new term: “black swan”. Black swan events were said, post-2007 when the term was coined, to have three characteristics: (i) they are unexpected and rare, thereby lying outside the realm of regular expectations; (ii) their impacts are wide-ranging or extreme; (iii) they can only be explained after the fact. The existence of black swans was based on the proven inability of central banks (such as Australia’s Reserve Bank) to predict and control through regulation and supervision, the desired state of financial stability.

Green Swans

The more perceptive analysts of finance capital are now acknowledging that climate change, as a consequence of the search by fossil fuel corporations for endless and expanded accumulation of capital, is looming as a threat to the capitalist classes of the world as a whole. One such analyst is the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the central banker to the world’s central banks (eg the Reserve Bank in Australia). The BIS has credibility – in their June 2007 Report they warned of an impending crash. The Great Financial Crisis followed. Now the BIS has just released a paper called “Green Swans”. A green swan event is one arising from global climate change and is qualitatively more dangerous than a black swan event. The authors of the paper argue that green swans are different to black swans in three regards:

1. “there is certainty about the need for ambitious actions despite prevailing uncertainty regarding the timing and nature of impacts of climate change.”
2. “climate catastrophes are even more serious than most systemic financial crises: they could pose an existential threat to humanity, as increasingly emphasized by climate scientists”
3. “the complexity related to climate change is of a higher order than for black swans: the complex chain reactions and cascade effects associated with both physical and transition risks could generate fundamentally unpredictable environmental, geopolitical, social and economic dynamics.”

The BIS is yet to convince itself that the system, post-2007, has returned to anything like the textbook equilibrium of bourgeois economics. It is honest enough to admit that it doesn't really understand what is going on, that a new black swan event could be hidden under the near-zero, or even in some countries, minus interest rates, or the unusual phenomenon of bond and share values going up at the same time. It has no idea of the severity of a crisis in which a black swan is crossed with a green swan beyond already conceding that green swans "pose an existential threat to humanity".

Morrison and Trump isolated on climate change

In a major repudiation of the climate change inactivity of leaders such as Scott Morrison and Donald Trump, the authors warn that central banks must not wait for changes in government policy if they are to deliver financial stability and, more broadly, to avoid threats to the existence of capitalism.

They say that central banks must be more proactive, withstand any "sociopolitical backlashes" and lead public opinion away from fossil fuel reliance and in the direction of mobilising "capital for green and low-carbon investments in the broader context of environmentally sustainable development". The risk of not doing so is that a green swan systemic financial crisis will blow up and central banks will have to "intervene as 'climate rescuers of last resort' and buy large sets of devalued assets, to save the financial system once more." Those devalued assets would include coal mines and coal- and gas-fired power stations, as well as the financial institutions exposed to or dependent on fossil fuel corporations.

The spectre of green swans with fat tails is seriously beginning to haunt finance capital. It is having to concede that saving the system may require sacrificing fossil fuel industries, although in the first place they argue for carbon pricing and various other regulatory measures.

For climate's sake, capitalism must go!

Capitalism has long disrupted the essential unity of humanity and nature, and that disruption is nearing breaking point. It is a catastrophe waiting to happen. We can no longer endure a system which has to expand, at the cost of people and their planet, to exist. None of the amusing gobbledygook behind which the bourgeoisie attempts to conceal scientific socialist examination of capitalism will save this system. If we want to avoid the catastrophe and restore balance to the relationship between people and nature, we must reject and abandon capitalism.

Nick G.

16 February 2020

Kimba Fights Nuclear Waste Dump



The central Eyre Peninsula farming town of Kimba has “won” the dubious honour of having been selected as the site for an Australian nuclear waste dump.

Symbolically perhaps, visitors to the town 461 kms northwest of Adelaide are greeted by an 8-metre tall Big Galah, a garrulous and somewhat random bird that has become synonymous with a fool in Aussie vernacular.

The dump is primarily for low-level waste (paper, plastic, gloves, cloths and filters which contain small amounts of radioactivity commonly associated with nuclear medicine) but it will also store, for the time being, intermediate level waste (typically more highly radioactive and consisting primarily of used reactor core components and resins and filters used to purify reactor water systems).

The proposal and subsequent decision have divided the town and its adjacent community and angered the traditional owners, the Barngarla First Peoples.

There is an element of “payback” in the selection of an SA site for a national low- and intermediate-level nuclear waste dump: in 1998, the Howard government proposed that a site be selected from within an area including the Woomera Prohibited Area, but a campaign by about a dozen senior Anangu women, the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta, lasting seven years, not only saw the federal government abandon its plans, but saw the State Liberal government break ranks with its federal counterpart and introduce legislation against an SA nuclear dump.

This time, a large number of places around the country were listed for consideration, but it was whittled down to just three: one, near Hawker in the Flinders Ranges, and two near Kimba (“half-way across Australia”) in the central Eyre Peninsula.

First Peoples very quickly took the lead in the fight against the waste dump proposals. The Barngarla from the Kimba area and the Adnyamathanha from the Flinders Ranges brought on board a wide range of allies in the No Dump Alliance. Protest were organised and a range of other activities undertaken.

The federal government saw the need to throw money at the communities concerned - \$4 million for Hawker and \$2 million for Kimba for “social and economic development” while the communities were being “consulted”. The money was good. Various items of much-needed maintenance and infrastructure were undertaken and a further \$31 million was pledged to whichever community supported the nuclear dump. These were bribes, pure and simple.

The so-called “community consultation” culminated in a vote. It was “for” or “against” the dump. Kimba went first and the ballot was carried with 62% in favour; Hawker voted against it with a 52% margin. The proposed Hawker site was withdrawn and one of the Kimba sites selected.

However, the Kimba vote was suspect from the outset.

In the first place, the Federal Court upheld a decision by the Kimba Council that the Barngala should not be allowed to vote. Most live in the larger regional cities of Port Augusta and Port Lincoln, and the Council said they would be difficult to identify. Federal Court Judge White agreed.

An enlargement of the franchise for the purpose of the ballot would have required a number of subjective judgments about the extent of the

enlargement and raised issues concerning the proper identification of those within the expanded franchise,” the judge said.

The Barngarla had had to wait twenty years to win their native title over Barngarla land. That decision was handed down in 2018 and politicians fell over themselves to congratulate the community. We wonder whether the Council meeting that decided to disenfranchise this community began with an Acknowledgement of Country. The word “hypocrisy” is written in white letters on Black land

To add insult to injury, the Council decision to confine the ballot to Kimba ratepayers and near neighbours of the Napandee farm, 23 kms south-west of Kimba, chosen for the site has allowed non-resident speculators to have a vote despite their not living anywhere near the site.

And there are a few such people. There had been a proposal for a magnetite (iron ore) mine at Wilcherry Hill, 40 kms north of Kimba. When this project was announced and approval given in 2011, the owners said they expected to employ 160 workers and promised not to use a “fly-in fly-out” workforce. They announced plans for a modular mining village to accommodate 80 people, whilst an Adelaide University study found that the existing housing stock in Kimba would not be sufficient to handle the population increase. “Once existing housing stock has been filled,” the report said, “then construction of new houses along with physical infrastructures such as roads, footpaths etc. will be required.”

The value of house blocks in Kimba soared as investors sought to make a killing. However, the mine operators lost interest in iron ore and decided to look for gold instead; the mining village was never built; and the flood of newcomers to the town evaporated. The value of vacant blocks of land plummeted and speculators faced sizeable losses. The Napandee nuclear waste dump promises to employ 45 people, so absentee landowners had a slight bit of candle-light at the end of their investment tunnel and thus had an incentive, and Council endorsement as rate-payers, to vote for the dump.

Meanwhile, the Barngarla showed just how specious was the Council argument that they were too difficult to identify and had no right to vote as native title holders. After being excluded from the Kimba Council ballot, the Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC) engaged the Australian Election Company, an independent ballot agent, to conduct a confidential postal ballot of BDAC members regarding the national radioactive waste dump.

Of 209 eligible voters (all of whom are Barngarla native title holders), 83 cast valid “No” votes. Zero “Yes” votes were returned.

This unanimous “No” vote demonstrated that there is absolutely no support at all within the Barngarla community for the nuclear waste dump.

The Barngarla vote is significant in other ways. The rate-payer and near-neighbour vote (Kimba’s community of 1300 people was reduced to 800 for the ballot) was carried by 70 votes. Had the Barngarla been enfranchised, their vote combined with the rest of the community’s would have been similar to Hawker’s – a no vote by a small majority, but enough to put the kybosh on the dump.

In any case, the Act governing site selection requires “broad community support” for any proposed dump. The Act does not quantify “broad”, but former Minister Canavan said on several occasions that it should be around 65%. The Kimba “yes” vote was 61.58%.

A mischievous new Resources Minister Keith Pitt is now trying to muddy the waters by claiming that Barngarla native title has been “extinguished”. It is a lie that has been picked up by lazy non-investigative journalists in the capitalist press content to regurgitate Ministerial press releases as “fact”. This “fake news” is fake because the extinguishment related to the Napandee farm site only and took place after the vote. The government’s Radioactive Waste Management Task Force said in a submission to a Senate Enquiry into the Site Selection Process in 2018 that “If the Minister declares land nominated under the Act as the site selected for the Facility, the Commonwealth may acquire the land or extinguish or affect existing rights and interests.”

There is a lot more to this story. The Napandee site is just 2 kms from the extensive Pinkawillinie Conservation Park, a 130,000 hectares or 1307 sq kms native bush zone between Kimba and Wudinna, home to many state listed flora and fauna. The nearby farmland is used for broad-acre cropping and with above-ground storage, in drums, of low-level and intermediate-level nuclear waste, the possibility of bushfires, especially after this year’s catastrophic fire season, cannot be eliminated.

Transportation of low-level and intermediate-level nuclear waste is still prohibited by SA legislation following a more inclusive definition of waste inserted in the original Nuclear Waste Storage Facility (Prohibition) Act 2000. The federal government is relying on Commonwealth law taking precedence over State law to get its way.

A broad front of organisations (No Dump Alliance, the Barngarla traditional owners, the No Radioactive Waste on Agricultural Land in Kimba or SA committee, the Greens and local ALP member Eddie Hughes, the two Centre Alliance SA Senators, the Conservation Council, Friends of the Earth, the Wilderness Society and others) will not let this matter rest.

To those politicians who say that a dump is needed somewhere, so it may as well be at remote Kimba, we say that the lawns outside the federal parliament would be an ideal site for an 8-metre Big Waste Drum and above-ground dump. Canberra is also a remote location – from Kimba at least.

The flawed Kimba decision is an injustice that needs to be righted.

People power will win out in the end!

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Louisa L.

16 February 2020

First People’s Cultural Burning vs. Climate Change Deniers

How does a climate change denialist group aligned with US counterparts and the Shooters Party become “A Proud Supporter_of Indigenous Burning Practices”?

The so-called Volunteer Firefighters Association (VFFA) has for years promoted climate change denialist and scientist David Packham. Packham developed and promotes ‘aerial ignition burns’ to reduce fuel load, literally firebombing areas from the air.

Packham is a Murdoch media regular with Sky, *Herald Sun*, *The Australian*, plus spots on the ABC, SBS and numerous online sites. In 2013, some of his work was reviewed in Quadrant by a likeminded fire activist from WA, where Packham’s method was most used. Quadrant, with CIA links going back decades, has published several Packham articles.

He is also a key stakeholder in Firestick Estate Inc. The name appropriates a First Peoples’ term, “firestick”, to promote the opposite_to the gentle, labour-intensive cultural burning practices of First Peoples.

Knowledge Holders

Firesticks Alliance builds on the burning practice of late Kuku Thaypan Elders, Dr George and Dr Musgrave. A leading Firesticks practitioner, Victor Stephensen, criticises aerial ignition, which he describes as “flying in and dropping bombs”.

Even the less extreme “hazard reduction burns” used by both the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) come in for criticism by Stephensen. Fire scientists also point out the limitations of such burns.

Stephensen speaks of past “fire knowledge holders” needed at every cultural burn. “That’s where we need to be again. We need these knowledge holders working with the mainstream and with the rural fire service,” he says.

Learning goes both ways. Uncle Vic Sharmen, a Shoalhaven elder and former NPWS chief ranger with a degree in environmental science, says cultural burning is enriched by connection to western science. He clearly didn’t mean the climate change denialism of David Packham. Like many of us, Victor Stephensen worries each time summer approaches.

But this year, unlike previous ones, had an impossibly narrow window for burning - given the lack of cultural burning for 230 years - because climate change made it hotter and drier, as 22 former fire chiefs stated. This has been canvassed in numerous places, but last December an ABC Fact Check, entitled *Are hazard reduction burns effective in reducing bushfires? The answer is complicated*, comprehensively cut through the muck and lies.

Captive

This brings us back to our original question. Why are climate change denialists and minimisers allegedly supporting “Indigenous burning practices”?

Divide and conquer remains a key colonialist and imperialist strategy.

“*The Biggest Estate on Earth*” by Bill Gammage, brought to a wider audience the fire management tools that many First Peoples already understood – and in some places still practised – as their heritage. This audience eventually included far right climate denialists and minimisers, intent particularly on opening national parks to corporate exploitation. A tiny handful of First Peoples are captive to the most aggressive section of U.S imperialism.

An attack from this source recently targeted the Aboriginality of Bruce Pascoe, who built on Gammage's work in his bestseller *Dark Emu*. Pascoe is no climate change denier or friend of corporations.

The timing - just before flooding rains were predicted to extinguish most fires and wider analysis of causes increased - was no accident. Nor was its amplification across the media.

As the cultural burning story took hold, it aimed to undermine Pascoe's ability to intervene against the avalanche of simplistic distortion surrounding its practice.

Murdoch's mantra against "morons"

Several other captives are would-be parliamentarians, prominently and repeatedly featured in Murdoch publications and broadcasts. Despite this massive promotion, they failed to gain seats in the landslide Coalition federal election victory. Although they have some supporters, overwhelmingly First Peoples organised against them.

Add to this mix a dying fossil fuel industry determined to dress up its deathly image with First Peoples' credibility. Climate change deniers seized on Gammage's work.

Last November "Indigenous burning practices can help fight the bushfires" - by one of those receiving the Murdoch star treatment - appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* and was recycled by the VFFA.

This media personality minimises climate change, the possible role for renewable energy, and Australia's contribution to emissions.

He chants Murdoch's mantra against 'Greenies and Lefties' - an 'elite' who "carp on about climate change" (*Daily Telegraph* 8/8/19).

He suggests nuclear energy as an instant fix, unlike what he describes as the prohibitively "long term goal" of renewables.

Andrew Bolt - suddenly a new-born embracer of human made climate change - loves to quote this man's support for Adani and the coal seam gas industry, which like nuclear energy - 'our' man alleges - is "safe". Any "moron" (Bolt's descriptor) opposing those industries is practising "Green Sabotage".

Just add 900 gas wells

Well, these “morons” and “saboteurs” include plenty of First Peoples. For years they’ve fought nuclear waste dumps on Country, most notably at Muckaty in the NT. And an anti-fracking backlash is building in the Northern Territory, led by First Peoples.

Even as the bushfires were burning, PM Scummo, with support from NSW Premier Berejiklian, was announcing that \$2 billion in joint government grants may come to Santos’s plan to build 900 coal seam gas wells in the Pilliga on Gamilaraay land.

Gamilaraay men, Nathan Leslie and Paul Spearim, locked on in protest against fracking on their Country, as did a group of young farmers. The brilliant doco, *Sacrifice Zone*, details the extraordinary strength and breadth of anti-fracking forces in the proposed Narrabri gas field, as well as its dangers – including bushfires.



Above: Gamilaraay man and anti-fracking activist, Nathan Leslie, speaking at a 2018 forum

Coal seam gas is highly flammable. Try typing “fracking well fires” into a search engine, click “images”, and take your pick of the shocking array of fires and stories.

Bolt’s “morons” know the Gosper Mountain mega blaze ignited two fires in coal seams near Lithgow this fire season. And they know much more.

According to the U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration there were 285 “significant incidents” involving the gas industry in the U.S. in 2018 – many of them fires and explosions.

A sovereign right

Cultural burning is a sovereign right for First Peoples, like learning or re-learning Language. These growing movements link young with elders in an unbreakable bond. Both come from Lore which comes from Country.

This respectful relationship is a world away from the simplistic slogans of fuel load reduction as the be all and end all, of climate denial, of logging and hard hooved stock in national parks, of more dams and all the other Murdoch shock jock mumbo jumbo. No doubt such enemies of the people will seek to co-opt or profit from them.

Cultural burning is immensely powerful for First Peoples and for the future of what we now call Australia. It’s no quick fix. It can only be fully exercised when First Peoples have economic control over their Countries and their lives. Its effective practice relies on land rights. Colonialism and imperialism will never allow this. Their systems have proved it since the invasion began in 1788.

First Peoples and the working class lead the struggles to rid this continent and its islands from the brutal vestiges of colonialism and from the jackboot of U.S. imperialism.

Explosive wildfire does not discriminate as it destroys. First Peoples and Australian working people, rural and city dwellers alike, are affected by the bushfires.

Unity is the only way forward.

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Nick G. 25 February 2020

Big Oil loses another round in Bight fight

In a stunning victory for community organisations in South Australia, Norwegian giant Equinor today announced it had scrapped plans to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight.

The announcement, allegedly made on “commercial grounds”, comes just two months after the toothless regulator National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) granted Equinor approval for exploratory drilling in the Bight.

Equinor becomes the fourth big oil company to be forced from the pristine waters of the Bight. The US Chevron Corporation went, the British BP went (Equinor took over their leases), Australian Kaorron Gas went (they have shifted their activities to Peru and Brazil) and now Norway’s Equinor has gone.

Wilderness Society SA Director Peter Owen said “People power is showing that business and government can’t keep going on this same path—not when it comes to the climate crisis and not when it comes to nature protection.”

He praised the community organisations, Traditional Owners, and 20 local government councils representing 600,000 South Australians for taking action against oil exploration in the Bight. “Hands Across the Sands” beach rallies, surfing protests and Sea Shepherd’s Operation Jeedara, involving its flagship M/V Steve Irwin, were important components as was the visit by Owen and Mirning elder and whale songman Bunna Lawrie, to the Equinor AGM in May 2019.



While the departure of Equinor from exploration leases EPP 39 and 40 removes a major threat to the Bight, there are still exploration tenement holders including Canada’s Bight Petroleum (EPP 41 and 42), the US Murphy Oil Corporation (EPP 43) and Santos in partnership with Japanese JX Nippon Oil and Gas on the Western Australian side of the Bight.

Our Party Program states: *“The only two sources of wealth are human labour power and nature. Capitalism attacks, devalues and destroys both. In the early stages of the 21st century, the damage to the environment as a result of capitalist plunder has reached potentially catastrophic proportions for humanity and the planet. Over ninety percent of the world’s climate scientists agree that human induced climate change and global warming are approaching the point of no return.”*

To that end we have called for transitioning from fossil fuels to renewables and phasing out the export of resources that contribute to global warming.

We will continue to support the fight for the Bight until the last of the tenement holders has gone.

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Jed J. 19 March 2020

Capitalism and Climate Change

Some people and societies have an investment in denying climate change. These include companies and societies that profit from extracting fossil fuels and selling them at a profit.

They have the backing of some media outlets such as News Corp to fool the population into believing that not only are people not responsible for climate change but that there isn’t any crisis at all. They claim that the changes to weather patterns are simply the result of natural causes.

In the recent devastating bush fires that ravaged parts of Australia the climate change deniers went so far as to deflect blame by suggesting that the bush fires were the result of lack of back burning or that arsonists were responsible.

They ignore the facts that science has made clear. Namely that climate change is a threat to our survival and that, since human behaviour is a major cause of it, we should make every effort to change the way we treat the environment.

The myth of endless resources

How then do the events such as unprecedented bush fires happen? They happen because the world economy is capitalist and the capitalist world view allow basically for only one kind of value - how much a product can be exchanged for.

This one-eyed view of the world also leads to the assumption that it is possible for the planet to cope with an endless consumption of products.

This view is clearly at odds with facts about the planet. Among the key premises which underpin the capitalist world view is that the earth's resources are limitless. That there is an endless supply of fossil fuels, an endless supply of water, clean air, arable land, soil and animals for consumption at their disposal and that there is no limit to the amount of greenhouse gases the planet can absorb.

This idea of endless resources is a myth. The planet – its living and non-living things, ecological systems and atmosphere – is not limitless in the amount of raw materials that are available.

For capitalism everything is a potential commodity

Moreover, there is a limit to the planet's ability to deal with waste disposal most of which is the result capitalism's unrestrained manufacture of products that we do not really need and which often have an inbuilt short life span.

At the heart of capitalism is the idea that the value of everything lies in its potential to be made into a commodity and that everything is a potential commodity. That is, that its value lies in its potential to be exchanged in the pursuit of profits.

This includes basic needs such water and energy which were once provided for by governments. However, since they have been privatised the costs have

sky rocketed as they have become sources of profit for their new capitalist owners.

This core idea of capitalism that the value of everything lies in its potential to be made into a commodity even extends to the provision of health care and education which were – after long struggle by the people – once seen as rights. Now they are regarded as commodities and opportunities for private providers to make a profit.

Let climate scientists not governments decide!

The consequences for the planet and all that is on it, including people, are pollution, disease, deforestation, the extinction of species and climate change.

The myth of endless resources is false. The planet, its living and non living things, ecological systems and atmosphere is not a limitless store of raw materials nor is it capable of dealing with limitless amounts of waste disposal.

Unless capitalism is replaced by an economic system based on science and which takes into account the needs of the environment and all living creatures whose lives depend on it then the situation can only get worse.

Climate scientists not governments should be responsible for setting environmental protection guidelines for any proposed development to ensure that the guidelines are not influenced by vested interests.

Time is running out. There is no way the planet can continue forever to recuperate from the damage capitalist practices inflict on it.

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Nick G. 23 April 2020

Our planet, our future, and our fight to defend them!

Several weeks ago, scientists revealed that the Great Barrier Reef was experiencing a widespread coral bleaching event.

It is the third such event in five years, has struck all three regions of the world's largest coral reef system and is more widespread than ever, according to scientists from James Cook University in Queensland.

The damage to the reef is a direct consequence of both global warming and the run-off from land of pollutants.

Ocean temperatures across most of the reef were 0.5 to 1.5 degrees above the March average, but in southern sections that had escaped previous bleaching events ocean temperatures were 2 to 3 degrees Celsius above average.

Water quality has deteriorated because of sediments, nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, and pesticides coming from the land and associated particularly with intensive farming practices.

The destruction of the Reef is a direct result of the failure of capitalism to acknowledge and deal with global warming.

Under pressure from the people to take action to save the Reef, the Turnbull government in 2018 donated \$444 million to a fossil fuel front organisation, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, which had not even asked for it! The Foundation diverts concerns about global warming into false hope of the Reef's "resilience" and "recovery".

The primary legislative basis for government action on the environment is the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act). It is full of loopholes and has been no safeguard against the Reef's bleaching, against major natural disasters like the 2019-20 bushfires, or any one of a number of threats to wildlife.

The Act has been the subject of a public review that ended this month. Fossil fuel lobbyists and property developers amongst other capitalist interests have seen the review as an opportunity to "get rid of green tape". They want to water down the already ineffectual protections under the Act.

Tied in with this is the fear from the renewable energy sector that "governments and powerful business lobby groups may use the Covid-19 crisis as an opportunity to water down environmental controls, with the fossil fuel industry most likely to take advantage."

This is precisely the scenario outlined by US author Naomi Klein in her 2007

post-Hurricane Katrina study “The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism”. In a recent interview, she said:

The “shock doctrine” is the political strategy of using large-scale crises to push through policies that systematically deepen inequality, enrich elites, and undercut everyone else. In moments of crisis, people tend to focus on the daily emergencies of surviving that crisis, whatever it is, and tend to put too much trust in those in power. We take our eyes off the ball a little bit in moments of crisis.

We can see the beginnings of an all-round attack, not just on environmental protections, but on every aspect of our way of life in Prime Minister Morrison’s statement last week that the economic crisis engendered by the virus lockdown meant “the policy frameworks that we had prior to the election will need to be reconsidered”, and that meant “policy measures that are going to have to be very pro-growth, that are going to enable businesses to employ people, that will enable businesses to invest and businesses to move forward”.

This means that the receptiveness of the government to pre-pandemic calls to water down “green tape” will become an open slather assault on anything that stands in the way of “growth” and “investment”.

Our Party program has a strong position on environmental crisis and climate change, including the statement that “Biodiversity matters to the working class”.

Consistent with our Program, we have made our own submission to the Review of the EPBC Act.

It is our planet, our future, and it will be our actions that count.

Let no-one stand in the way of our right to act.

.....

The environment: while we weren't looking....

While the nation's attention is fixed on the Covid-19 pandemic, matters of great environmental significance are being conveniently overlooked.

Just a week ago, the government gagged debate in the House of Representatives on its Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Streamlining Environmental Approvals) Bill 2020.

The Bill is part of its attack on so-called "green tape" which its mining and agri-business backers accuse of delaying project approvals and requiring duplication of efforts under both federal and state regulations.

To make life easier for the big monopolies and corporations, the government wants to devolve the power to make decisions about national environmental issues to the States and Territories.

The States and Territories, in their competition to attract investment and create jobs, are often the weak link in environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

In our submission to this year's Review of the EPBC Act, we wrote:

If regulation is resulting in uncertainty and delays for industry, then the answer is to make the regulations more, rather than less, proscriptive so that the boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable impacts on the environment and biodiversity are clearer from the start. Confusion arises from competing federal and state/territory responsibilities for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

We also called for a stronger Commonwealth role rather than devolution of power to the states:

Our Constitutional model of "cooperative federalism" is anything but cooperative. It was a failed model even before the ink was dry on the signatures of those who adopted it. Its weak compromises have never served the Australian people. They continue to frustrate what many

Australians want to achieve through legislation such as the EPBC Act. We are proponents of a stronger, not a weaker, Commonwealth role, but the problems inherited from our Constitution will continue to bedevil and frustrate such outcomes until we finally win genuine anti-imperialist national independence and socialism and craft a new Constitution that is fit for the purpose of the Australian people exercising power.

Water theft continues

Another issue the government has failed to address is the continuing theft of water from the Murray-Darling Basin. The Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists has just released a report showing that 20% of waters that should have entered the river system during 2012-2019 just “disappeared”.

The main reason is almost certainly up-river water theft by big agri-businesses, including unmetered floodplain water harvesting (see photo above). Following a 2017 Four Corners investigation, several of the water thieves have been successfully prosecuted, but the practice is wide-spread and has now been quantified for the first time: more than 2 trillion litres of water — enough to fill Sydney Harbour four and a half times.

According to the ANU’s Jamie Pittock, a co-author of the report, ““It means that there are all sorts of things that Australians value that won’t be sustained ... like more water for towns ... the floodplains, growing grass for sheep and cattle, in terms of biodiversity being conserved, waterbirds, red gum forests and conserving our fish.”

Meanwhile, the government has announced the end of the water buyback scheme which, although rorted by one of its own ministers, aimed to put environmental flows back into the river system. The move has been condemned by the Greens, the Wentworth Group and other scientists for depriving the government of its most effective means of retrieving water.

Robert McBride of Tolarno Station on the Barka (Darling) River, said in a Face Book post: “With no respect of nature, First Nations and every honest irrigators and farmers in Australia, the puppets in government have betrayed us all.” He condemned the “degree of greed and corruption killing all our futures”.

Scientists afraid to speak out

Not all environmental scientists have the authority and independence of the Wentworth Group. Many are constrained by their employers from openly

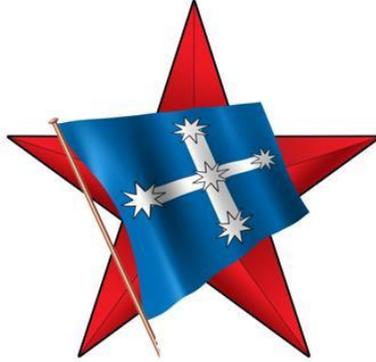
reporting on things such as threats to biodiversity. Some universities dependent on funds from mining have put pressure on their own scientists. Details can be found in today's online media outlet *The Conversation* in a piece titled "Research reveals shocking detail on how Australia's environmental scientists are being silenced".

Program for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation

Our Party program notes that "The only two sources of wealth are human labour power and nature. Capitalism attacks, devalues and destroys both. In the early stages of the 21st century, the damage to the environment as a result of capitalist plunder has reached potentially catastrophic proportions for humanity and the planet."

The Party and the working class must exercise leadership in protecting the environment and ensure that a socialist society works not to "conquer" nature, but to co-exist with it, restoring the balance between humanity and nature.

General Program of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)



Adopted at the 15th Congress, June 2019

The general program of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) sets out the Party's ideological standpoint, basic aims, analysis and revolutionary strategy.

1. Our Party

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) strives to be the revolutionary party of the Australian working class.

The Party arises from the struggles of the Australian people, and aims to embody the needs and hopes of the working class. It is guided by Marxism-Leninism, the scientific theory of the revolutionary proletariat. Using this theory, it endeavours to examine Australia and world reality. Its aim is to fundamentally change that reality through a socialist revolution in accordance with the material conditions and existing contradictions of society as revealed by scientific Marxist analysis.

The Party exists to assist the working class to lead the Australian people in their day to day struggles and toward revolution. Only the united masses can overthrow the imperialist ruling class. Only they can create a system which serves the people.

2. Marxist Philosophy and Ideology

Marxist philosophy shows that the material world is primary. Ideas and consciousness are the reflection of this objective reality. But everyone's thinking is shaped by their material conditions, their actions and the class to which they belong. In time this general outlook on life becomes a system of thinking, an ideology, which in turn influences their actions. A person's position in the class relations of production generally shapes their class consciousness and ideological outlook.

However, no matter what an individual worker or group of workers may think, the real interests of the working class are only served by the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. This includes the important theoretical and practical contributions of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong. Because we are all affected by capitalist ideas, most workers are not yet fully aware of this.

Marxism is a guide to action, based on practice. It recognises all things in nature and society are constantly changing, coming into being and passing away. It recognises that contradiction (unity and struggle between opposites) is present in the process of development of all things. As Marxists, we seek to understand the contradictions in Australia and the world and use that knowledge to resolve problems in society. This approach is fundamental to Marxist philosophy, which is called dialectical materialism. This philosophy openly stands at the service of the working class. It emphasises that theory grows out of practice and in turn helps guide and shape practice.

3. Colonisation and First People's Self-Determination

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) recognises that Australia is built on the violent dispossession, oppression, and exploitation of First Peoples by British colonialism. For 150 years after 1788, a guerrilla war raged in every new area where settlement was attempted. Resistance, both then and now, takes many forms.

For tens of thousands of years, First Peoples lived according to their Law. This Law and their custom, values, belief and practices have underpinned their survival and continue to do so in the face of attacks by multinational corporations.

The tap root of invasion is based on four principles, asserted to this day. It says to First Peoples:

“You are not who you say you are.”

“You don’t belong here.”

“This is not your land.”

“You must be like us.”

For First Peoples, decolonisation reaffirms who they are and where they belong. It places them in their Country. It affirms their identity. Living within a settler colonial system, we share in the fruits of colonial dispossession, we too need to decolonise our minds and actions. Our Party strives to respectfully listen to and work with the First Peoples of this continent and its islands. They have much to teach us. They are the Peoples who have suffered most from colonialism, past and present. Just as the working class is an indispensable ally in their struggles for decolonisation, First Peoples are indispensable allies of the working class in the fight for a society free of oppression and exploitation.

We acknowledge that First Peoples have never ceded sovereignty over their lands, and that colonial oppression and attempted dispossession everywhere occurred through force and violence, or the threat of force and violence. Resistance to that force and violence is the inalienable right of First Peoples.

Sovereignty comes out of their Law and is held in their Country. It is the heart of First Peoples’ struggles.

Sovereignty means First Peoples’ control over their affairs.

We support the right of First Peoples to actively assert their sovereignty, choosing their own strategies, tactics and demands.

4. Capitalism

Australia is a capitalist society characterised by production for profit.

Profit is derived from the unique quality of human labour power to produce value. Workers’ labour power is a commodity purchased on the market by capitalists. In exchange workers receive a wage sufficient to cover the cost of maintenance of the worker and their family. Set to work in a process of

production, the worker's labour power produces more value than the worker receives as payment for working. This extra value, which the worker produces but is not paid for, is called surplus value and is the source of profit when the commodity is sold. Capitalists can exploit us without stealing from us. How is that possible? In a simplified model, Marx assumes capitalists pay us in full for all the costs we meet in reproducing the only commodity that our class has left to sell them. That commodity is our capacity to add value.

Surplus value was identified by Marx in his massive three-volume study "Capital". By investigating numerous real-life situations, he showed that the way in which a worker receives a wage conceals his/her exploitation. A worker appears to get a wage for a whole day's work. In fact, only a part of the day's work is paid for – enough to cover the worker's basic needs. The worker spends the remaining hours of the work day adding value to the commodities being produced without pay. The wage may be \$100 per day. If the worker creates that much value in half a day and then adds another \$100 in value during the other half of the day, then that second amount is a surplus value and the worker is not paid for it. Thus, Marx exploded the myth that there could ever be a "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" so long as capitalism existed. The nature of capitalist exploitation, made invisible by the method of seeming to pay a wage for a whole day's work, was revealed in the discovery of surplus value. There is no such thing as "a fair wage" under capitalism. Even if workers are paid high wages, they are still exploited by the capitalists who obtain profit from the surplus value that these workers produce.

Another feature of capitalism that became more obvious as it grew and developed was that production is socialised. This means many different workers in society are involved in the production of any one particular product or service. On the other hand, the benefits and profits of that production do not go to the workers, but to the numerically small but powerful capitalist class which privately owns the means of production. This contradiction between socialised production and the private ownership of the means of production is the fundamental contradiction in capitalism.

Another major contradiction is between highly organised workplaces designed to increase productivity, and the anarchic, unplanned and competitive nature of the market in which those commodities are sold.

These and other contradictions within the system of capitalist production lead

to the inevitable cycles of boom and bust, overproduction and periodical crises that characterise capitalism.

The extraordinary advances of technology over the recent period does not alter fundamental social laws. On the contrary, it sharpens those fundamental laws.

These economic and social conditions and contradictions of capitalism impel people to resist, organise and create conditions which give rise to the revolutionary Communist Party of the working class.

The Communist Party strives to guide the working class in its revolutionary and historical role to end capitalist exploitation and establish socialism. This can only be done by depriving capitalists of the right to private ownership of the means of production.

5. Socialism and Communism

Under socialism, the major means of production and major industries will be socially owned. This includes the big factories, mines, corporate farms, construction projects, plus the banks and other financial corporations which fund them. This social ownership is the foundation upon which the new system of socialism will rest. Surplus value will belong to the whole of society. Planning will end over-production, crises and market anarchy. Workers will replace capitalists as the ruling class. These are the goals of socialism which we seek to achieve through a revolution in Australia led by the working class.

The period of socialism will continue for a long time. It will be a transitional society between capitalism and our ultimate goal – the classless and stateless society of communism.

After the revolution classes will still exist. Class struggle will continue during the entire period of socialism. So, a new revolutionary state apparatus run by and for the working class is necessary. It will prevent the former exploiting class and foreign imperialists from destroying the newly-established socialist system. It will prevent a new bourgeois class from arising. The working class state will resist all attempts at counter-revolution and sabotage. It will resist any armed attacks or the promotion of capitalist ideas that undermine the achievements of socialism or encourage the reinstatement of capitalist relations of production.

The Marxist term describing this socialist period is the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. It is not a dictatorship over the broad ranks of the people; rather, it is a dictatorship by them over the hostile class forces. Power, once gained by the working class, must be defended and maintained. Just as the bourgeoisie used coercive state power to keep the workers from revolutionary agitation, so the workers must use a coercive state power to keep the overthrown capitalist ruling class from counter-revolutionary agitation.

This coercive state apparatus will not be required when communism is eventually achieved.

6. Imperialism

We live in the era of imperialism. Imperialism is the stage of capitalism when monopolies and finance capital (i.e. bank and industrial capital merged) dominate; when the export of capital rather than the export of commodities is most important; when the world’s resources, markets, government assets, and territories have been divided among big banks, financial institutions and multinational corporations and when there are no longer any new territories to be seized without imperialist conflict.

The Australian people have achieved an important measure of formal independence; however, it is still limited. The US replaced Britain as the dominant imperialism in Australia after World War Two. The nation as a whole is trapped in a very powerful net of economic, political, military, diplomatic and cultural dependency. It is dominated by imperialism, primarily US imperialism. Australians must break free of capitalism and imperialism to gain genuine and lasting independence.

Imperialism concentrates the nation’s wealth in the hands of a small number of monopolies, most of them foreign. They are driven by fierce capitalist competition to maximise profit. As a result, millions of ordinary Australians suffer intensified exploitation, growing debt and insecurity, greater costs of living, and increased repression and discrimination. Australia’s natural wealth and heritage are looted for monopoly profit. Massive amounts of profit are shifted out of the country. The resulting struggles against this foreign imperialist domination at the heart of Australian capitalism are objectively struggles toward Australian independence and socialism, although the participants in many cases may not realise it.

Imperialism drags Australia into the vortex of rivalry between different imperialist powers and groupings. While US imperialism is currently the strongest global power, there are growing contradictions between it and other imperialisms, including European, Russian and Chinese. These contradictions and rivalries create constant international instability and wars of aggression. Imperialist expansionism and rivalry amongst the imperialist powers is the root cause of local and regional conflicts and wars, and the growing threat of a third World War.

Internationally, people's movements for peace, independence and opposition to US military bases and US wars of aggression, are growing stronger.

The US-Australia military "alliance" embodies the dominance of US imperialism over Australia and its subservient ruling class. The US-Australia military alliance ties Australia into US global imperialist agendas and wars of aggression. It locks Australia into the US military-industrial complex. The Party works in the people's movement opposing imperialist military domination of Australia and fights with the people to end the US military alliance. It struggles for genuine independence from any big power domination and control of Australia.

7. Our Revolutionary Strategy

The revolutionary strategy of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) is the continuing struggle for socialism through anti-imperialist revolution. This strategy in the struggle for socialism is based in the concrete conditions of Australian domination by imperialism. The present struggle to end capitalism and advance to socialism in Australia is the struggle for revolutionary independence from US imperialism, which currently dominates and controls the Australian nation state. This struggle can only be won through the organisation and mobilisation of a powerful anti-imperialist people's movement led by the working class. Through this struggle the foundations for socialism, and the eventual move towards communism, are laid.

Success in this anti-imperialist independence struggle will see the assets of the foreign imperialists and their local collaborators, which constitute the core of Australian capitalism, seized and pressed into service for the benefit of the majority of Australia's working class and the people. The expropriation of these assets imparts a predominately socialist character to

this stage, and it can only be achieved under working class leadership exercised through new revolutionary working class organs of state power. This anti-imperialist struggle of Australia's socialist revolution will empower the working people through the establishment and expansion of people's own democratic mass organisations and structures based on participatory democracy.

The deepening of the socialist revolution and its extension to all economic sectors in which private capital operates constitutes the achievement of socialism. Independence and socialism are mutually dependent throughout the continuing revolutionary socialist strategy.

8. Australia's Revolution and Internationalism

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) views the struggle for revolution in Australia as part of the international struggle against imperialism and for socialism.

The Party supports the broad masses of people around the world fighting back against imperialism which exploits and keeps the people oppressed. We learn from and support the right of all nations to self-determination, and the efforts to build revolutionary working class movements in countries around the world.

The Party recognises that the best way to assist the international working class and the oppressed people of the world is to overthrow imperialism and establish socialism by building a strong anti-imperialist and revolutionary movement here in Australia. This is the key task we set ourselves to fulfil our internationalist responsibility.

No country exists in isolation from other countries. An independent, socialist Australia led by the working class will determine the need for and nature of economic, political and cultural relations with other countries based on respect for national sovereignty and mutual benefit.

9. State and Revolution

To maintain and protect the colonial dispossession of First Peoples and the imperialist domination of Australia, a powerful state machine has emerged. It consists of the bureaucracy, parliaments, police, courts, gaols, armed forces, and intelligence agencies. It creates illusions that it stands independently over

Australian society. In reality, it exists to uphold ruling class interests and capitalist relations of production. Parliamentary “democracy”, with its limited formal rights, operates within this context. No matter how “democratic” the state may appear, in the final analysis, it is always the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

While such rights have positive aspects, the central feature of the capitalist state is its repressive, violent and deceptive character. Without it, the capitalist ruling class could not maintain its power. Australia’s ruling class uses the mass media, education system, culture, etc., to push a system of ideas which disguises imperialist domination and exploitation. It presents the current system as inevitable.

Capitalist class rule compels the erosion of democratic rights and more open repression, particularly in periods of deep economic difficulties, social unrest and working class resistance. There is always a danger that Australia’s ruling class will dump its democratic mask and rule through systematic, open, ruthless violence - fascism.

In the face of this likely ruthless and violent suppression by the capitalist state machine, the people must be prepared for all means of struggle. The imperialist ruling class and its local collaborators will never voluntarily give up their power to exploit the working class and oppress the people. History shows that the working class must organise and be prepared to defend itself against the armed force of the capitalist state.

The Party must be able to function under any circumstances and continue its work through rapid changes of conditions. Full attention must be paid to the hostile activities of the state.

10. Methods of Party Work

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) places great importance on mass work. This means immersing ourselves among the masses. It means listening to and learning from the people. It means active involvement in people’s struggles. Only by having deep connections with the people and their struggles is it possible to understand and respect their level of political consciousness, how they think and feel. Only mass work allows us to fully understand concrete conditions.

Communists bring their experiences and lessons from people’s struggles to

the Party. Collectively, the Communist Party applies the tools of Marxism-Leninism in its examination of numerous struggles and people's concrete experiences and level of consciousness. This assists the Party to assess the overall objective conditions and develop strategies and tactics that advance the interests of working people. When correctly carried out, mass work allows us to gain the trust and respect of the people and consult with them. In turn, it allows us to provide leadership to the people and their struggles, and step-by-step raise revolutionary consciousness among them. Mass work is central to all social investigation and class analysis of objective conditions by the Party. This is a key task for charting the revolutionary road to an independent and socialist Australia.

Mass work and social investigation are the bedrock of the Party's ideology, political work and organisation. It is the method through which the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) continues to develop revolutionary theory and practice in Australian conditions.

11. Building unity of the people

The ruling class works systematically and with great skill to divide the progressive and revolutionary forces of the people. Our Party seeks to inspire unity in all sections of society against imperialism and its Australian collaborators.

The working class movement was born simultaneously in cities and rural areas before Australia was declared a nation. Many workers still live in rural and regional areas which lack many services available in major cities. Basics like food and fuel are more expensive.

Remote areas are home to significant numbers of First Peoples living in Country, and despite demonstrated better outcomes in health and education than those in some regional towns, they have been systematically driven into regional towns to make exploitation of mineral or gas resources from their lands available to multinational resource companies.

Working farmers are important allies of the working class, but too often capitalist domination has meant that their livelihoods have been sacrificed to provide cheap food to cities through the major supermarket chains. Like workers, they labour increasingly long hours. They are squeezed by high overheads and low prices for products and by the rise of corporate-owned industrial-scale farms.

Small business people and subcontractors are squeezed by imperialism and are beset with regulations, costs and insecure income streams. Many, like subcontractors, are simply workers in disguise to whom corporations outsource costs and risks.

These are just some of the groups which the ruling class seek to win to their side. But the long-term real interests of the people are diametrically opposed to those of the ruling class.

Currently, unity in struggle is transitory and often based around important single issues, including that between First Peoples and farmers opposed to fracking on their lands. The Party actively organises to create the widest possible and most deeply rooted people's movement against the ruling class.

12. Women and capitalism

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) fights alongside working women in the struggles for economic and social equality, respect and an end to the violence, abuse and exploitation of women.

We are inspired and pay our respects to the courageous First Peoples women in their long and resolute struggles for sovereignty of their communities, land and culture. We firmly support their fight against colonial oppression and dispossession.

We vigorously uphold equality and respect for women in the Party and in the people's struggles. We do not tolerate any form of discrimination, sexism and gender inequality, abuse and violence against women.

The exploitation and oppression of women came into being with the emergence of private property and the division of society into two main classes thousands of years ago. The patriarchy of present class society predates capitalism and goes back to slavery and feudalism. The development of the capitalist economy is based on private ownership of the means of production that reduces everything to a commodity to be bought and sold. The patriarchy of capitalist economy and society generally cast women as inferior with fewer rights and the private property of men with whom they enter a marriage or partnership relationship. Domestic violence against women and children flows from this patriarchal ideology.

Capitalism exploits and oppresses working women at work and in social relations. The capitalist class as a whole exploits and benefits from paid and unpaid family work done mostly by women at home. Without this work, the labour power of current and new generations of workers necessary for the survival of capitalism could not be created or maintained. Capitalism relies on the continuing dominance of men for the double exploitation and oppression of women.

For the overwhelming majority of working women exploitation at work is multiplied by the added responsibility as main carers of families, children, the elderly, the sick and family members with disabilities – with a pittance or no state support. Capitalist relations of production create a culture that commercialises and commodifies women as objects and possessions for sexual gratification and exploitation for profit.

Many of the inequities and injustices of capitalism are visited more frequently and more intensively upon women of the working class than on men. Economic and social inequality, abuse and violence against women and children flows from the exploitative capitalist system and its culture.

In over 120 years of struggle since achieving the right to vote in Australia, women have achieved some important social and legislative improvements. But the continuing exploitation, discrimination, abuse and the burdens and stresses facing working women at work and at home are largely unchanged.

Capitalism has entrusted a small handful of privileged women, alongside the much larger number of privileged men, to wield the powers of capital and imperialism against the oppressed and exploited.

The oppression, inequality, discrimination and abuse of women are embedded in the class exploitation of capitalism and imperialism.

The double exploitation, inequality, abuse and violence against women cannot be eradicated under capitalism. Socialism will create the necessary conditions for women to achieve their full potential, economic independence, equality and respect in all sectors of society. In a socialist system, working women will be empowered to run the society as equals to men for the benefit of all working people.

13. Youth

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) readily acknowledges the country's youth as a crucial element in the struggle for socialism and against imperialist hegemony. The Party recognises the vast potential of the country's youth as a powerful engine of social progress.

We must aim to be a guiding force in the education and mobilisation of the youth as agents of revolutionary change, promoting comprehensive examination of Australian conditions, literacy in class analysis, and working among the country's youth in service of these ends.

As the rights of workers are made subject to increasing violation, funds to vital social services are cut, and the prospect of affordable housing declines in a market dominated by multinational development firms, the possibility of secure employment, comfortable retirement and "the Australian dream" of home ownership fade from view for many of the country's youth. Meanwhile, environmental catastrophe and global war loom menacingly on the horizon. Capitalism offers a meagre lot to a generation already disillusioned by its numerous pitfalls of cyclical crises, unemployment, mounting debt and the horrors of imperialist war, with many turning to damaging behaviours, to self-harm and suicide, or succumbing to the lure of reactionary ideology. These problems are not exclusive to young people but particularly impact on this age group. As conditions under capitalism deteriorate and social safeguards are eroded, young people will be more at risk than ever before and will be more open to embracing the revolutionary cause.

The Party seeks to learn from young people, especially those young First Peoples who are embracing and asserting their collective culture and language to build strength and resilience in the face of attacks. Young First Peoples suffer the most extreme attacks by the state, and carry the trauma of inter-generational disenfranchisement.

The Party has a significant role in tracing the origins of these extensive social problems to their foundations in the material conditions of Australian society, in concentrating the scattered and unsystematic ideas of the masses and integrating them into a cohesive Marxist analysis so as to provide clear direction to the struggles of the youth and working people.

Such an analysis is also critical in that it serves to counter and repel the

harmful lies and incessant scapegoating touted by far-right fanatics and agents of reaction who seek to divide the working class.

The Party must aspire to channel the innate revolutionary fervour of the youth toward the establishment of the preconditions for the construction of a socialist society, toward the construction of a society which promises a life free of the ills of capitalism and wage-slavery, a life of co-operative perseverance toward the common good of all, infinitely more fulfilling and abundant than that which has gone before.

14. Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis

The only two sources of wealth are human labour power and nature. Capitalism attacks, devalues and destroys both. In the early stages of the 21st century, the damage to the environment as a result of capitalist plunder has reached potentially catastrophic proportions for humanity and the planet. Over ninety percent of the world's climate scientists agree that human induced climate change and global warming are approaching the point of no return.

Fighting climate change is important to the working class. Renewable energy must replace fossil fuels, and sooner rather than later. Water must be a common good and not a tradeable commodity. Pollution and waste must be reduced and eliminated. The dangers in uranium mining and the problem of nuclear waste make nuclear energy unviable.

Biodiversity matters to the working class. The planet is facing an alarming rate of species extinctions. Habitats of other species must be rehabilitated and expanded. Research into the biology of other species must be ramped up in order to create programs for the restoration of their numbers.

The united struggle of the people can force short term advances under capitalism to reduce pollution, move to renewable energy and protect the environment.

However, capitalism and its current form imperialism have given rise to the irreversible destruction of the environment and global warming in particular. Imperialism is based on growth at all costs and puts profits before the needs of people and the environment. It must be overthrown and a socialist society established. Only this will make it possible for humans to be able to live in an environment that is sustainable long-term.

The Party and the working class must exercise leadership in protecting the environment and ensure that a socialist society works not to “conquer” nature, but to co-exist with it, restoring the balance between humanity and nature.

The First Peoples of this continent and its islands survived at least 60,000 years prior to invasion. They have the answers to restoring balance and must be listened to.

15. Membership

Diversity of the working class is a great strength. The Party welcomes that diversity in its own ranks. It fights for a society where mutual respect exists between all races and genders, where racism and gender inequalities are not tolerated, where gender identities and sexual preferences are respected. The Party upholds these standards amongst its membership.

Members of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) undertake disciplined and ongoing study of Marxism with the aim of developing revolutionary theory and practice in Australian conditions.

Members of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) accept a lifetime commitment to the welfare of the working class and the great cause of communism. They struggle to remould themselves without ego or individualism. They aim to serve the people and will put the people’s interests before their own.

Capitalism has only two sources of profit.

One is human labour power.

The other is nature.

Capitalism exploits and exhausts both its relentless drive to accumulate capital in the form of profit.

The Communist movement has long opposed the exploitation of the working class and other working people.

Only in recent years has it really turned its attention to opposing the exploitation of nature.

This collection of articles in this book brings together some recent attempts by our Party to comment constructively on current environmental issues.

These are written within the context of our belief that only an independent and socialist Australia will make possible the restoration of a genuine balance between the needs of humanity and nature.

