

Anarchist Political School

Environmental Crisis



**DESTROY
CAPITALISM
BEFORE IT
DESTROYS
THE PLANET**

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The Looming Catastrophe

At the intersection of imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism, the unfolding climate crisis threatens to destroy human societies as we presently understand them. Without a massive and rapid reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, large parts of the Earth will likely become uninhabitable by the end of this century.

Even if we stopped the burning of all fossil fuels today, a large degree of climate related destruction is already locked in. Two degrees of global warming will be catastrophic for tens of millions of people. At four degrees of warming, food systems would be dramatically degraded, the glaciers that provide fresh water to two billion people in Asia would disappear, coral reefs would be all but gone, ocean acidification would disrupt food chains on a massive scale, and desertification and drought would become the norm.

Indigenous people and workers in the Global South are the hardest hit by the effects of climate change. Many of these workers have already been forced to flee their homes and lands as a result of the effects of the climate crisis. Wars over water are already unfolding across Central Asia.

In response, governments have moved to enforce their borders ever more violently to keep climate refugees

out, and the far-right is attempting to seize the moment to build power. This is only going to get worse.

The future of humanity is at stake. There can be no socialism on a dead planet. If we wish to carry out a successful revolution, we must rapidly carry out a Just Transition. We need to decarbonise the world whilst ensuring that no-one is left behind in the process.

Discuss

Some argue that humanity itself is the disease. Therefore, to stop climate change we must reduce birth rates, if not reduce the global population itself. What do you think?

Exponential Growth

For most of human history, people saw no clear divide between themselves and nature. Many Indigenous peoples today still recognise the deep interconnectedness that we have with the animals, plants, and waterways around us.

As capitalism emerged, it promoted a new perspective of the world which replaced this more holistic view. Humans were seen to be above nature, with the former

needing to control and exploit the latter as a resource. This is how capitalists see the world.

Capitalists are continually driven to produce more, to consume ever greater quantities of the earth's resources, to destroy more, and to pollute more. If capitalist firms do not do these things, they will be replaced by firms that do.

As long as we live under capitalism, capitalists and governments will fight to maximise growth (i.e. profits), which means they will fight to maximise energy production and consumption. The more the economy grows, the faster and more extensive the transition to renewable energy needs to be.

For instance, compared to 2000, the world now produces an additional 8 billion megawatt hours of green energy annually. We also now consume an additional 48 billion megawatt hours of energy annually. In short, all of our attempts to produce more green energy over the past 20 or so years have been far outstripped by an increase in demand.

A transition to green energy, at current rates of growth, would also require a ridiculous increase in the mining of minerals and land clearing. Extraction and deforestation of this scale would force huge numbers of people off

their land and destroy countless ecosystems in the process.

Capitalism's insatiable demand for higher profits is at the heart of the climate crisis. The ideology of capitalism is that of the cancer cell: endless growth until the host is killed.

Discuss

Is it worthwhile to attempt to live sustainable lifestyles under capitalism (e.g. use public transport, eat a plant-based diet, shop local etc.)?

Current Strategies

Throughout Australian election cycles, the Labor Party presents itself as a climate saviour, whilst continuing to approve gas projects that would dwarf any emissions reductions its policies achieve.

On the left of Labor, reformists in the Greens argue for 'no new coal or gas'. As an immediate demand, this is hugely inadequate—most existing reserves have to stay in the ground to preserve a liveable climate. It also pits the climate movement against the jobs of workers in fossil fuel industries and communities reliant on them.

As a coal mine is worked out, it is often replaced by a nearby one, sometimes operated by the same company.

Billionaires like Bill Gates and Elon Musk have posed 'geoengineering' as a technological solution to the crisis. This would involve projects like 'dimming the sun' by injecting particles into the atmosphere to reflect light back into space in order to cool the planet.

The lure of the technological fix allows capitalists to continue their pollution and destruction of the environment, whilst still claiming that we can live on a healthy planet. This sort of geoengineering will inevitably wreak havoc on the Earth's ecosystems in highly unpredictable ways, potentially causing massive droughts and famines.

We would then be forced to seek ever more techno-fixes to alleviate the side effects of the previous intervention. No matter the form it takes, any kind of geoengineering will still leave capitalism's exponential growth untouched, allowing pollution and over-extraction to continue. At best, geoengineering is a band-aid fix to the crisis. At worst, it could do far more harm than good.

It's clear that we cannot rely on governments or capitalists to stop climate change. We need to take matters into our own hands.

Discuss

Should we consider nuclear power in the transition away from fossil fuels?

The Limits of Protest

Some look to the next generation and student movements as a solution to the climate crisis. Others believe that we just need to get enough people into the streets to smash things and chain ourselves onto targets.

Whilst the global wave of student protests in 2019 highlighted just how little was being done by the ruling class to address climate change, it was unable to win anything substantial from governments. Ultimately, this is because student protests do not hurt the ruling class where it matters—their profits—and can therefore be more or less ignored.

Alongside mass peaceful protests, more militant direct-action movements have emerged around the world. Their tactics normally consist of high-risk disruptions by small groups of activists, often with the intent of grabbing media attention. This includes throwing tins of soup onto Van Gogh paintings while wearing “Just Stop

Oil” t-shirts, or sabotaging petrol pumps and blocking coal trains to halt the flow of fossil fuels.

The issue is not that their disruptive tactics go too far. Instead, we think they don't cause anywhere near enough disruption. A network of small affinity groups can only cause minor and sporadic interruptions to the corporations destroying the planet. A community blockade (unsupported by workers at the blockaded site) lasts as long as it takes the police to break it up. Furthermore, the activists involved are targeted with massive penalties which far outweigh the impact of their actions.

We support these activists and students, because at least they're doing something, but this isn't how the movement will win. A better strategy is needed.

Discuss

When might a community blockade be an effective tactic in fighting climate change?

Case Study: Green Bans

In the 1970s, builders' labourers in Sydney and Melbourne developed a very different approach to environmental struggle. Over a period of decades,

communists within the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) had pushed their union to become increasingly militant.

Initially, they fought for classic union concerns like wages and working conditions. Joe Ferguson, a member of the BLF and the Communist Party of Australia, explains:

“We spoke about issues on the jobs, about the wet weather (there was no pay for wet weather in those days). We spoke about no amenities on the jobs (at that time you used to eat in the storeroom where all the cement and tools were kept).”

As the rank and file continued to organise and build their power, the BLF eventually turned its attention to taking control of city planning. Jack Munday, the secretary of the BLF, declared:

“Yes, we want to build. However, we prefer to build urgently required hospitals, schools, other public utilities, high-quality flats, units and houses, provided they are designed with adequate concern for the environment, than to build ugly unimaginative architecturally bankrupt blocks of concrete and glass offices. ...

Though we want all our members employed, we will not just become robots directed by developer-builders who

value the dollar at the expense of the environment. More and more, we are going to determine which buildings we will build.”

They did just that. In 1971, a local community group approached the BLF to save a beloved green space, Kelly’s Bush, which was scheduled to be developed into residential units. The union fully backed the residents. The builders’ labourers who were hired to develop the land, refused to destroy the green space and Kelly’s Bush was saved. This was the first **green ban**.

The BLF would go on to impose over 50 green bans, saving: numerous green spaces, public housing, Sydney’s Botanical Gardens (which was slated to become the Sydney Opera House car park), the Melbourne City Baths, the Queen Victoria Market and the Regent Theatre.

Time after time, communities approached the BLF to impose green bans on places of significance to them, and the workers in the BLF used their incredible industrial power to prevent their destruction.

Discuss

What might green bans look like in industries other than construction (e.g. manufacturing, education, transportation, healthcare, retail)?

Class Struggle Environmentalism

The people best placed to stop the capitalist death machine in its tracks are the people who keep it going on a day-to-day basis: the working class. When workers organise in the workplace to fight for their interests, they threaten the power of capital at its source. Once workers understand their power to fight, they can lift their heads and begin to question how their labour is used and for whose benefit.

The workers of the BLF had such incredible power because they were the ones building and tearing down everything. Once they decided to start building the things they wanted to build, there was little the ruling class could do. This is why they had to destroy the BLF; Bob Hawke deregistered the union in 1986.

When it comes to climate change, the workers who are necessary for fossil fuels to be produced, transported and consumed are the ones best placed to stop it.

Working class action to stop climate change would have very different dynamics from the current movement. Instead of small groups of martyrs for the cause, we'd see workers acting collectively and being protected from police retaliation by sheer strength of numbers.

The action would also avoid the familiar “jobs vs the environment” trap pushed by the capitalist media, because workers would be fighting for a Just Transition that they designed themselves. This program of class struggle is no fairy tale as the BLF’s green bans have already shown. Instead, it represents the only real path forward.

Discuss

How does the strategy of class struggle environmentalism differ from mutual aid driven approaches like starting community gardens or establishing communes?

A Just Transition

Cities need a massive expansion of public transport and improvement of facilities for active transport modes like walking and cycling. We also need to restructure our cities and repurpose them for genuine social needs.

Outside the cities, we need to transition away from unsustainable industries like mining, monoculture farming, and intensive forestry.

To achieve these objectives, it will take a substantial amount of coordination between workplaces and

industries—both rural and urban. We need to have strong unions capable of taking climate action across all sectors—not only in construction, but in manufacturing, agriculture, forestry, mining, energy and so on.

The fundamental need is for workplace groups to form, and to start discussing climate change and how it relates to their workplace and their employer. As they develop, they can formulate action plans that will vary according to their situation. Not every step that is necessary is suitable for solving at the level of the individual workplace. Depending on the circumstances, the work of rank-and-file workplace groups will vary. They should seek to be active in the unions, but they could be single-union or cross-union as necessary.

They must also work together with First Nations peoples, and where possible, implement Indigenous community-based methods of land management. The struggle for Indigenous sovereignty, decolonisation, and anti-imperialism is central in the fight for a Just Transition.

The production of a wide variety of goods and services needs to be increased, not decreased, if we are to abolish poverty from the face of the Earth. This is especially true in the Global South.

Through building workplace groups, we build the potential for workers to seize their workplaces from the bosses and directly transform the work we do from being destructive and extractive to being sustainable.

This process can be seen as taking the idea of green bans to the next level. It would be workers seizing proactive control over how their labour is used, instead of defensively reacting to the actions of the ruling class.

A commitment to ecological sustainability does not mean enforced poverty and even less so does it require a return to a hunter-gatherer society. Society can be run collectively, rather than by the bosses and governments of the world. We can work less, and produce to meet everyone's needs, rather than churn out whatever will bring profit on the market.

We can have more of the important things in life, without producing the enormous waste and environmental destruction that inevitably comes with capitalism's drive for profit.

Discuss

Imagine if a Just Transition were managed from the top-down by a 'communist' state or some other centralised body. What might happen?

