

# CHAIN REACTION

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## CONTESTING THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT, POLITICS, JUSTICE

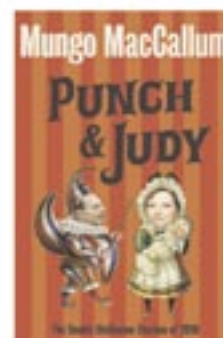
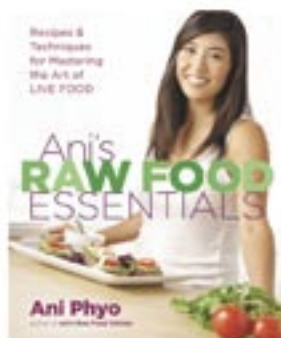
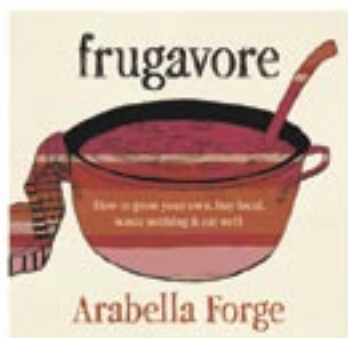


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undermine it."*

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Climate Camp, Muswellbrook, NSW, December 2010.  
Photo by Tessa Dowdell.

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# EARTH NEWS

## **Rising Tide 7 in court**

On September 26th 2010, Rising Tide facilitated the complete shut-down of the world's biggest coal port in Newcastle for seven hours. A couple of hours later a vibrant community action occurred when 32 people walked onto the coal piles and were arrested. Thirty-five people were released without charge and nine were charged with entering and remaining on enclosed lands. Port Waratah Coal Services pursued seven activists for \$525,000 under the victims compensation act. This is an act which was designed for victims of violent crime - not multinational corporations seeking money from political protesters.

On March 3, Magistrate Elaine Truscott dismissed the victims compensation claim. Rising Tide said they were relieved that the claim was rejected but expressed concern that the decision was based on insufficient evidence rather than being rejected as an abuse of NSW victims compensation laws.

More information: [www.risingtide.org.au](http://www.risingtide.org.au)  
email: [risingtide@risingtide.org.au](mailto:risingtide@risingtide.org.au)  
web: [risingtide7.wordpress.com](http://risingtide7.wordpress.com), and

## **Honduras – rights under siege by palm expansion**

Honduras Supreme Court passed a resolution in January stating that decree 18-2008 is unconstitutional. The decree, by the coup-deposed President Zelaya, legalised land titles of small farmers occupying and working on idle land.

With its abolishment, violent evictions against 10,000 farmers are imminent. Rafael Alegria of Via Campesina called on human rights organisations to remain alert "because campesinos are not going to leave these lands." Invasion of palm plantations dates back to 1990 when the Agricultural Modernisation Law gave way to appropriation of land granted under 1962 Agrarian Reform. African Palm expanded from 40,000 hectares in the 1990s to 120,000 hectares now. The US Embassy claims 540,000 hectares are available. During 2010, campesinos were subject to killings and violent evictions from their makeshift homes. But they have been resisting, organising, and occupying land and highways. On December 15, children protested their parents' assassination in the Tumbador massacre the previous month.

## **Fortescue accused of dirty tactics**

The Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation, which represents the lands of the Hamersley Ranges in the WA Pilbara, has launched a website and newsletter in an effort to reveal the tactics that Fortescue Metals Group has engaged in to push through its mining of iron ore in Yindjibarndi country (Solomon Hub). Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation chief executive Michael Woodley has accused Fortescue of using dirty tactics to get around an impasse in negotiations by starting separate talks with claimants through the newly formed Wiru-Murra Aboriginal Corporation.

More information: <http://yindjibarndi.org.au>

## **Arms Trade Treaty**

Campaigners have called on governments meeting at the United Nations in March to ensure no weapons or munitions are sold to human rights abusers. The call came as delegates met in New York to resume negotiations on the Arms Trade Treaty, a legally binding treaty to regulate the global arms trade. There are currently no comprehensive, legally binding international rules governing the trade in conventional arms, and gaps and loopholes in regional and national controls allow guns, bullets, tanks, missiles and rockets to end up in conflict zones and in the hands of those who commit war crimes, grave human rights abuses and other systemic forms of armed violence. One person every minute dies as a result of armed violence according to the Control Arms Campaign, an international network of civil society groups.

## **Live animal exports under fire**

In December, the ABC's 7:30 Report aired new footage of appalling animal abuse, featuring Australian sheep exported to Kuwait. The footage, taken by welfare group Animals Australia, catalogues mistreatment ranging from sheep being dragged across gravel, animals being hauled around by their skin, prolonged slaughter and sheep packed three deep in stifling temperatures in closed car boots. Last year a Galaxy opinion poll commissioned by the World Society for the Protection of Animals found that 79% of Australians believe live sheep exports



Left: Eviction from makeshift homes in Honduras. Photo by Reuben Brand from WSPA. Right: Live animal handling in the Middle East.



are cruel, while 86% agree that the government should phase out live sheep exports if there's an alternative that saves Australian jobs. Several federal Labor MPs have called for a phase out of live animal exports but agriculture minister Joe Ludwig continues to support the trade, as does the Coalition.

### **Filming project on Mekamui/Bougainville**

Talks between pro-mining landowners and leaders of Mekamui/Bougainville were held late last year, leading to widespread media coverage of a possible re-opening of Panguna mine. This happened in 2007/2008 as well. A short documentary, 'Panguna Mine Dilemma', was produced then to counter the mining proposal. The documentary tells the story of those who suffered the negative legacies of mining and the civil war. A follow-up documentary is planned by Clive Porabou, Mekamui/Bougainville independent film maker and activist. Donations to support the documentary can be made to:

**Bank:** National Bank Australia  
**Account name:** IBIS (Independent Bougainville Information Service)  
**Branch:** Katoomba BSB: 082 656  
**Account number:** 167 204 232

More information:  
Clive Porabou: [osikaiang@mekamui.org](mailto:osikaiang@mekamui.org)

### **Climate Camp 2010**

From December 1-5, hundreds of people gathered on the shores of Lake Liddel in NSW to protest against a proposed new power station - Bayswater B. Five days of workshops and forums were held on climate change issues and solutions, the local impacts of coal, non-violent direct action, campaigning, music and entertainment.

The week came to a head when 135 people aged 17 to 88 occupied the coal rail line which feeds coal to Bayswater and Liddel power stations, whilst hundreds of people supported from outside the fence. In January, 73 people crammed into the Muswellbrook Local Court in the Hunter Valley to face trespass charges arising from the Climate Camp action. They were fined \$250 each, in the largest court appearance for a climate protest in Australian history.

More information: [www.climatecamp.org.au](http://www.climatecamp.org.au)



### **Peace walk in WA**

Footprints for Peace is calling on activists and organisations from Australia and around the world to join with them in Wiluna, Western Australia this August for a 10-week walk to Perth to tell the public, the government and industries to walk away from uranium mining. The walk from Wiluna to Perth is an opportunity for people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures to come together to walk the land, live in a community sharing collective and to educate ourselves and the public about the nuclear industry.

For more information visit  
[www.nuclearfreefuture.com](http://www.nuclearfreefuture.com) and [www.footprintsforpeace.net](http://www.footprintsforpeace.net).

For more information on uranium in WA visit:  
[www.ccwa.org.au/content/uranium-mines](http://www.ccwa.org.au/content/uranium-mines)

### **Coal mining and floods**

The Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management has been notified of 16 coal mines and four coal seam gas operations in the Fitzroy Basin that have released contaminated water outside of their Environmental Authority conditions since November 30. It is likely that others have released water outside of their conditions but have not notified the Department. There are 42 coal mines in the Fitzroy Basin. The companies can apply for Transitional Environmental Programs that allow them to release water outside of their conditions in extraordinary circumstances like the Queensland floods. Pollutants washing off coal mine sites regularly include salt, acid and heavy metals like selenium, arsenic

and boron. In 2008 the Fitzroy River flooded and the Ensham mine released 140,000 megalitres of polluted water into the catchment which still contains heavy metal pollutants like selenium in the sediments. There are at least a dozen new, large open cut coal mines planned for the Darling Downs in the Queensland section of the Murray Darling Basin at places like Acland, Felton and Chinchilla. This section of the Basin also experienced massive flooding in December-January and would also experience extra-legal contaminated water releases in the event of future flooding.

Meanwhile, the National Water Commission has called for a precautionary and more integrated approach to managing water related impacts of coal seam gas developments. The Commission warns that if not adequately managed and regulated, the industry risks significant, long-term and adverse impacts on surface and groundwater systems. Key risks stem from the large volumes of water being extracted, the depressurisation of coal seam aquifers, and the disposal of large volumes of treated waste water. The Commission's Position Statement is posted at [www.nwc.gov.au](http://www.nwc.gov.au).

The National Toxics Network has released a briefing paper on the use of fracking chemicals in the drilling and extraction of coal seam gas in Australia. NTN is calling on state and federal governments to introduce a moratorium on all drilling and fracking chemicals until they have been independently assessed by the federal regulator. The NTN investigation found that of 23 common fracking chemicals used in Australia, only two have been assessed by Australia's industrial chemicals regulator. The briefing paper is posted at [www.ntn.org.au](http://www.ntn.org.au).

# FOE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

*Friends of the Earth International is a federation of autonomous organisations from all over the world. Our members, in 77 countries, campaign on the most urgent environmental and social issues, while working towards sustainable societies. [www.foei.org](http://www.foei.org)*

*You can sign up for 'Voices', the bimonthly email newsletter of FoE International, at: [www.foei.org/en/get-involved/voices](http://www.foei.org/en/get-involved/voices)*

*FoE's web radio station broadcasts the voices of the affected people we work with and the campaigners fighting on their behalf. Listen online (in a choice of five languages) at: [www.radiomundoreal.fm](http://www.radiomundoreal.fm)*

*Check out the FoE International online shop at: [www.foei.org/en/get-involved/shop](http://www.foei.org/en/get-involved/shop) for calendars, t-shirts, greeting cards, subscriptions to FoE publications, and more.*

## **Cracks widen in biotech industry myths**

Governments are being forced to protect farmers and citizens from genetically modified crops to combat biotech corporations' stranglehold over farmers, and health scares from escalating pesticide use, according to a new report by FoE International.

In South America, the Brazilian government has launched a GM-free soy programme to help farmers access non-GM soy seeds. In Argentina new research has revealed that the herbicide Glyphosate, used on the majority of GM crops grown worldwide, could have severe negative impacts on human health. This has led to bans on spraying of the herbicide near people's homes. In Uruguay, local areas are declaring themselves GM-free.

FoE International Food Sovereignty coordinator Martin Drago said that after 10 years of GM crops, "The havoc wreaked across South America shows that this technology is not compatible with sustainable farming. It is a wake up call for the rest of the world to move towards more ecological methods of farming."

*The report is posted at: <http://tiny.cc/90o9v>*



*FoE's 'corporate demon' in Cancun. Photo by Sheila Menon / Marco Cadena*

## **Justice not done at Cancun climate talks**

A team of almost 40 FoE campaigners attended the UN climate negotiations at Cancun in December, to participate in collaborative efforts to promote climate justice whilst stopping the US's Copenhagen Accord proposal replacing the current legally-binding framework that mandates emissions reductions commitments by industrialised countries.

After two weeks of negotiations, the climate talks concluded, but with a weak package that leaves the world further away from a just and strong agreement on tackling dangerous climate change. Despite setting up a Green Climate Fund and recognising that current emission targets are not enough and have to be scaled up, real substance to prevent catastrophic climate change is missing. Key provisions are still in doubt - the future legal framework is unclear, deep emission cuts for rich industrialised countries are missing. Other provisions are problematic - it brings in the pledge and review system from Copenhagen, the World Bank has a role in managing climate finance, and the push for markets and carbon trading is not acceptable.

*UN decisions from Cancun: [http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop\\_16/items/5571.php](http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_16/items/5571.php)  
FoE International press releases: [www.foei.org/en/media](http://www.foei.org/en/media)  
FoE International closing statement: <http://bit.ly/frmKiR>*

## **1000 Cancuns success!**

There was one promising and motivating outcome from Cancun: movements for climate justice, especially from the Global South, are louder than ever. The '1000 Cancuns' call put out by Via Campesina, FoE International and the World March of Women, met with a fervent response around the world. The aim of the call was to amplify the climate justice movement by organising thousands of protests and actions to reject false solutions.

Via Campesina's international caravans "For life and environmental and social justice" also brought thousands of people to Cancun to engage in mobilisations. They stayed at the Peasant and Indigenous Camp in Cancun, which was hosted by La Via Campesina and FoE International.

*Read about the international caravans at: <http://viacampesina.org/en>*

## **Remembering Ken Saro-Wiwa**

On the 15th anniversary of the murder of Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, remembrance activities were organised all over the world by FoE and others, who continue his legacy of defending territories, resisting corporate rule and state repression, and seeking justice for communities who suffer from the practices of companies like Shell. Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders were sentenced to death and executed



Above: Ken Saro-Wiwa. Right: Destroyed land in Ikot Ada Udo. Photo by Kadir van Lohuizen / NOOR.

on 10 November 1995 for speaking out against the impact of Shell and other oil companies in the Niger Delta. In Nigeria, events were planned in Benin City, Port Harcourt, Yenagoa and Lagos. Other countries commemorating the day included South Africa, Mozambique, the Philippines and the Netherlands.

More information on the Global Day of Remembrance is posted at: [www.rememberesist.org](http://www.rememberesist.org)

## Shell and British Petroleum sued

On December 2, the Dutch court in The Hague dismissed Shell's request to put the case on the Ikot Ada Udo oil spill in Nigeria on hold. The court rejected Shell's argument that a related court case in Nigeria should come to an end first. As court cases in Nigeria can linger for many years, FoE Netherlands / Milieudefensie and the inhabitants of Ikot Ada Udo welcomed this decision. A hearing in the court on all three cases is scheduled for 19 May 2011. FoE Netherlands sent a petition signed by over 30,000 Dutch citizens to Shell, asking them to stop flaring.

A group of environmentalists from several countries in the southern hemisphere filed a lawsuit against BP in Ecuador in February for environmental damages related to the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. They did so before the country's Constitutional Court by citing universal jurisdiction, and in reference to Article 71 of Ecuador's new constitution that grants rights to nature. Vandana Shiva, one of the plaintiffs, said: "It's about universal jurisdiction beyond the boundaries of Ecuador because Nature has rights everywhere, and that is why a global coalition were the first signatories

to say: we as citizens of the earth have a duty to protect Nature everywhere."

## Jatropha 'wonder crop' fails to deliver

The much-touted biofuel crop jatropha is neither a profitable nor a sustainable investment, according to a report released by FoE International on January 21. 'Jatropha: money doesn't grow on trees' warns investors away from jatropha – a shrub being increasingly planted for its oil-producing fruits and ability to survive in arid conditions. The report details growing evidence that the crop is failing to deliver on its promises while simultaneously failing to prevent climate change or contribute to social and economic development.

Jatropha is being promoted by investment companies as a profit-making panacea, providing a source of biofuel that can be grown on marginal land across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Investments in large-scale jatropha plantations are failing due to the crop's poor performance, with increasing evidence of low yields on poor quality soils, and even good soil.

The report is posted at: <http://tiny.cc/dksug>

## REDD realities

A FoE International report released for the Cancun talks shows dangerous forest projects are being established in tropical rainforest countries. 'REDD: the Realities in Black and White' reveals that new projects being readied in expectation of an agreement on 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries'

are set to do more harm than good. The case studies from FoE member groups around the world show that indigenous peoples and local communities are being marginalised in the development of these schemes.

Meanwhile corporations and major investors are intent on reaping huge financial rewards at the cost of local communities. Large transnational corporations including BP, Shell and energy companies are honing in on REDD as a new business opportunity.

The report is posted at: <http://tiny.cc/s70cf>

## Keep World Bank out of carbon markets

FoE International challenged World Bank President Robert Zoellick's Cancun announcement concerning the establishment of a multi-million dollar fund to promote the creation of carbon markets in developing countries. FoE joined social movements and civil society from around the world to demand that the World Bank stay out of climate finance, and signed on to an open letter to the governments meeting in Cancun calling on them to ensure that new and additional public resources for climate finance are made available and that a Global Climate Fund under the authority of the UNFCCC will be set up, with no role for the World Bank. However, the final result in Cancun saw the establishment of a global climate fund that does list the World Bank as trustee.

More information: [www.worldbankoutofclimate.org/?p=29](http://www.worldbankoutofclimate.org/?p=29) See also the statement by the Movement on Debt and Development opposing the UN's uncritical advocacy of private sector financing of climate programs: <http://tiny.cc/syaac>



# FOE AUSTRALIA NEWS

*Friends of the Earth Australia is a federation of independent local groups. You can join by contacting your local group - see the inside back cover of Chain Reaction for contact details or visit: [www.foe.org.au/groups](http://www.foe.org.au/groups).*

*There is a monthly FoE Australia email newsletter which - subscribe via the website [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au). To financially support our work, please visit: [www.foe.org.au/donate](http://www.foe.org.au/donate). To find us on social media, visit: [www.foe.org.au/news/2010/finding-us-on-social-media](http://www.foe.org.au/news/2010/finding-us-on-social-media)*

## **'Leave it in the Ground' ride against uranium**

Plans are in train to take a cycling trip across the beautiful South Australian desert from Port Augusta to Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, which is currently being explored for uranium by Marathon Resources under license from the South Australian government. The plan is to leave in mid-April.

Contact: Shani Burdon from FoE Adelaide:  
[shani.burdon@foe.org.au](mailto:shani.burdon@foe.org.au)

## **Yes 2 Renewables project**

As the dust settled on the Victorian state election in late 2010, FoE Melbourne was ramping up its Yes 2 Renewables project. Initially based on a website which sought to de-bunk some of the myths around renewable technology, it was rapidly consumed with the growing debate about wind energy. Since then, we have been working on a range of specific wind projects. With the new Coalition government announcing it would implement its very restrictive wind farm policy in early 2011, we have started to engage in the projects at immediate risk, attempting to generate public support for these. In addition, two very generous individual donors have allowed us to employ a wind energy campaigner for three months, with Ellen Roberts starting work in late February. This will greatly increase our ability to be effective.

More information:  
[yes2renewables.org](http://yes2renewables.org), contact Ellen Roberts  
[ellen.roberts@foe.org.au](mailto:ellen.roberts@foe.org.au)

## **In Our Nature - new FoE affiliate**

At the FoE Australia AGM held in SA in October, the network approved a new affiliate group called In Our Nature (ION). ION is a not-for-profit organisation that has the broad aim of working to help the developing world preserve the natural world. It is currently working on the Kitobo Colobus project, the focus of which is Kitobo forest located in southern Kenya.

This forest consists of around 160 acres of tropical rainforest created by underground water emanating from the melting snows of nearby Mt Kilimanjaro. The forest has a history of mismanagement, but members of the local community have stepped in to protect it from degradation. ION is working with the Kitobo community to support both the community's efforts to preserve the forest and the community itself.

Contact Julian Brown:  
[julian.brown20@yahoo.com](mailto:julian.brown20@yahoo.com).

## **Victoria's Coalition government**

Sadly, the new Coalition government in Victoria has already initiated a number of quite negative policies since it came to power in late-2010. The hurried attempt to put cattle back into the Alpine National Park has played out badly for the government, with endless negative media and opposition from scientists, traditional owners and environmental groups.

The government has not even bothered to release its environment policy and we are yet to see a climate change policy. This apparent lack of interest in these key issues hardly bodes well for good environmental outcomes for the state in coming years.

On the positive side, the Coalition has announced that it is its intention to 'phase-out' Melbourne's reliance on the north-south pipeline' and greatly reduce our dependence on the desalination plant. FoE has argued that substitution of other water sources for water from the plant and pipe was of lower cost and less social and environmental impact, so we are heartened to see these aspects of the Coalition's policy. The Coalition is promising major substitution of recycled water, rainwater and stormwater for Melbourne's potable water supplies.

More information: [www.melbourne.foe.org.au](http://www.melbourne.foe.org.au)

## **Urban Orchard DVD**

FoE Adelaide's new film 'An Urban Orchard' is now available on DVD. Focussing on the emergence of homegrown fruit and vegetable exchanges, the film follows the journeys of local gardeners and offers inspiration for other communities to build more just, sustainable and local food systems in their neighbourhoods.

Copies of the DVD are available for \$15 plus \$5 postage from: [www.adelaide.foe.org.au](http://www.adelaide.foe.org.au), or by contacting Joel Catchlove: [joel.catchlove@foe.org.au](mailto:joel.catchlove@foe.org.au), 0435 631 524.



## **Carbon Credits**

In December, the federal government released a consultation paper, draft methodology and a draft Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming) Bill, expected to be introduced into federal parliament in the first few months of 2011. The initiative will generate offsets or credits from activities such as reforestation, fire management, 'avoided deforestation', burning of stubble/crop residue, manure management, and 'sequestration' in agricultural soils to enable ongoing pollution.

Holly Greenaune from Friends of the Earth, Sydney, said: "At best, the scheme will not assist in efforts to reduce emissions to avoid runaway climate change. More likely, the scheme will allow an increase in pollution - by allocating carbon credits based on dubious land use practices, methodologies which encourage the



setting of exaggerated baselines, and the high likelihood of leakage. Offset schemes claiming to sequester carbon should not be confused with proven strategies for reversing environmental decline, building resilience and empowering rural communities.”

## Golf course construction 'postponed'

In December 2010, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) handed down a decision that refused a planning permit to Eastern Golf Course (EGC) to build a new course at Yering. The development was opposed by Friends of the Earth Melbourne, Healesville Environment Watch Inc and Bill Boerkamp.

VCAT refused the development because of lack of adequate evacuation routes in the event of 100 year floods. EGC will most likely amend its plans to incorporate new evacuation routes, most likely putting back the development several months. FoE was disappointed that the decision refused to deal with FoE's main argument, the Precautionary Principle. The site is located on a floodplain that has flooded five times in six months, 1 km upstream from the Yarra River offtake to Sugarloaf Reservoir, drinking water source for 1.5 million people. The course intends to use up to 28 pesticides on their tees, greens and fairways.

Meanwhile, a scientific study has detected 56 agricultural pesticides in surface water and sediment in the upper Yarra River, the source of water for 1.5 million Melbournians. “The results reveal that the upper Yarra catchment is arguably the most polluted waterway in Australia in terms of agricultural pesticides,” said Friends of the Earth campaigner Anthony Amis.

The report is posted at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1021/es103227q>

## South Melbourne Commons

In 2010, Friends of the Earth announced it was establishing a new community hub in South Melbourne, 'The South Melbourne Commons'. The Commons is home to several social enterprises that deliver a mix of valuable services for the local community. Everything we do at the Commons is underpinned by solid environmental and social guidelines and we aim to use the site to help educate people about how they can live more sustainably. Current projects and activities at the Commons include children's playgroups, garden and



Mound Spring, SA.

playground; regular Tai Chi and Qigong classes; Mothers Day activities every Friday; InterAction social projects; and 50 square meters of food gardens planted and being harvested. Work is progressing on a food co-operative and grocery store; community café; and more food gardens.

For more information check out the website [www.southmelbourne.vic.au](http://www.southmelbourne.vic.au), email: [ecomarket.melbourne@foe.org.au](mailto:ecomarket.melbourne@foe.org.au) or visit us 217–239A Montague St, South Melbourne, Victoria.

## 'Leave it in the Ground' ride against uranium

Plans are in train to take a cycling trip across the beautiful South Australian desert from Port Augusta to Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, which is currently being explored for uranium by Marathon Resources under license from the South Australian government. The plan is to leave in mid-April.

Contact: Shani Burdon from FoE Adelaide: [shani.burdon@foe.org.au](mailto:shani.burdon@foe.org.au)

## Radioactive Exposure Tour in May

You're invited to join Friends of the Earth on the annual Radioactive Exposure Tour from May 19-29. The tour travels from Melbourne to Adelaide then north to the South Australian outback. We'll hear first-hand accounts of the British nuclear bomb tests from Maralinga veterans and speak with Aboriginal Traditional Owners who have been impacted by the nuclear industry. The tour includes optional visits to the Olympic Dam and Beverley uranium mines. We'll watch sunset over Lake Eyre and see the Mound Springs - oases fed by the underlying Great Artesian Basin. We'll camp in the beautiful Gammon Ranges and visit the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. The costs are: concession \$450, waged \$750.

Contact: Kasey - [writewithya@gmail.com](mailto:writewithya@gmail.com) 0425 862834, Jessie - [jessie.boylan@gmail.com](mailto:jessie.boylan@gmail.com), 0457 777 504. Web [www.foe.org.au/anti-nuclear/issues/oz/radtour](http://www.foe.org.au/anti-nuclear/issues/oz/radtour)

## Nanotechnology campaign updates

FoE Nanotechnology campaigners Elena McMaster and Georgia Miller visited Dakar, Senegal in February to participate in the World Forum on Science and Democracy (SDWF) and the World Social Forum (WSF). Highlights included hearing Bolivian president Evo Morales speak during the opening festivities, joining the WSF march with the FoE Africa groups and participating in the Rio+20 workshop where FoE International chairperson Nnimmo Bassey joined activist and author

Naomi Klein and ETC Group director Pat Mooney to galvanise us all for the struggle to come at the Rio+20 Earth Summit in Brazil in 2012.

Back in Australia, FoE's Nanotechnology Project is launching an investigation into workplaces containing nanomaterials this year. The aim is to follow nanomaterials from manufacture to end use and waste disposal to find out which workers are at risk of exposure and how effective current workplace standards are.

Georgia Miller and Gyorgy Scrinis have contributed a chapter reviewing NGO activities on nanotechnology to the 'International Handbook on Regulating Nanotechnologies'.

The chapter is available for free download at: <http://nano.foe.org.au/ngos-and-nano-policy-debates-have-we-made-difference>  
FoE's Safe Sunscreen Guide and the 'Nanotechnology, Climate and Energy' report are posted at: [www.nano.foe.org.au](http://www.nano.foe.org.au). Email: [nano@foe.org.au](mailto:nano@foe.org.au)

### **FoE response to US-Australian 'war games'**

Friends of the Earth Brisbane has written a submission detailing the myriad of social and environmental problems with Talisman Sabre 'war games' planned for Queensland later this year. The report begins: "Talisman Sabre is part of a legacy of Western colonialism, economic exploitation and securing the environmental wealth of other nations for the US alliance. Talisman Sabre is designed to improve Australian military 'interoperability' with the US and prepares both countries for aggressive military and political posturing."

The FoE submission is posted: <http://tiny.cc/i92xi>. See also: [www.peaceconvergence.com](http://www.peaceconvergence.com)

### **Farewell to ACE activists**

FoE Melbourne has farewelled Cat Beaton, who was co-ordinator of FoE's Anti-nuclear & Clean Energy (ACE) collective, led the Nuclear Freeways campaign, and worked as the education director with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Cat, Roman and baby Marlin have moved to Darwin where Cat has taken up a job as the nuclear-free campaigner with the Environment Centre NT. We've also said goodbye to Kasey, Camillo, Purdy and Kite, who have moved to Newcastle, and to Yaelle Caspi, who has moved to Perth. Big thanks to all you mob - see some of you on the Radioactive Exposure Tour.



Mara Bonacci (pictured with Cam Walker) is moving on after over five years of hard labour with Friends of the Earth in the Melbourne office. Thanks Mara! Thanks also to Sarah Barber who has moved on from her job as bookshop coordinator with FoE Melbourne.



Kite on a Radioactive Exposure Tour.



A protest at mining magnate Clive Palmer's office to raise awareness about the threat to nature refuges from coal mining. Palmer's Waratah Coal is planning a \$7.5 billion open-cut coal mine in the Galilee Basin in Queensland.

More information: [www.sixdegrees.org.au](http://www.sixdegrees.org.au)



## EDITORIAL - Climate policy, climate movement

Rebecca Pearse

There's a game to play in climate politics, not the cynical one politicians and lobbyists engage in, but a process of positioning and repositioning ourselves with the shifting issues and political terrain. In other words, social movements need to move. The climate movement needs to move – to stay viable, relevant and thereby build power. And part of building power for climate justice means talking climate policy. To get taken seriously these days you need a dot-point list of policy asks, and a numbers-oriented report to convince. In a broader sense, you need to have a critique of the status quo and a vision for the future. The policy should flow from there.

But there's something missing from our policy debates – the question of mobilising a movement. If there's one thing that we might learn from the waning energy within the climate movement over 2009 and 2010, it's that policy making (even internal to the movement) is political, treacherous and downright demobilising if we're not careful. During the clamorous and confused national debate over emissions trading in Australia we stumbled through the amorphous terrain, no clearer on what we wanted than Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard or Tony Abbott.

Meanwhile, the questionable consensus arrived at in Cancún makes one thing clear – much ground needs to be made in order to inject justice into climate policy. It seems most of us have faltered a little in maintaining energy and hope enough to stay mobilised. Let's take a breath, talk climate policy and movement building before we step into another year of campaigning.

There are a few ways we might see social movements: as instruments for progressive policy outcomes, as social laboratories where critical ideas and visions for alternatives are produced, or as ends in themselves for those mobilised to take collective action. The first seems more measurable, we can assess the policy outcomes with relative clarity. The second is a bit harder, taking us into political and ideological territory. The third sounds circular – the means are important, but so are the ends.

This edition of Chain Reaction seeks to bring these three dimensions together. The articles centre on the theme of climate policy in the hope that we can generate solid critiques of the status quo, ideas for alternative policies, and social organisation that builds a better world. Each contribution figures its policy analysis in terms of movement for climate justice. Some of the questions we have posed include: How are we going to reign in big coal? Why won't carbon trading work, and how will we dismantle market schemes at a pace that outstrips its formation? What are the perils and possibilities of engaging with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change? Who benefits from carbon taxation, and if it is a good interim measure can we build a movement around it? What are the alternatives, how might they work in practice?

Of course, this means critiquing the existing political landscapes of corporate capture and carbon market madness. And it means reflecting critically on the current trajectories in the movement. This edition seeks to undo the assumptions that market mechanisms, growth-based and techno-solutions will deliver the ecological goods.

On the question of alternatives, we have asked our contributors to be bold, and look beyond what we think is politically possible. Instead the policy ideas serve as part provocation – they propose seemingly impossible ideas that might just work, if we make them happen. The transformatory ideas for a safe, just climate future will not come from anywhere but here in the movement. Let's demand the impossible, and build power for climate justice.

*Rebecca Pearse is co-editor of this edition of Chain Reaction along with Holly Greenaune. Rebecca and Holly are members of Friends of the Earth, Sydney.*



**“ We’ve been stuck for decades in a media and policy vacuum of neoliberal market mechanisms and a contest over complex science. Real solutions, community voices, or the elephant in the room – our coal exports – are locked out. ”**



## **The climate movement – Ideas for renewal**

*Holly Creenaune unpacks the status quo of climate politics. She argues for the importance of reflection and debate over strategies for social change and for renewed investment in movement building.*

**T**he piecemeal programs for climate change mitigation that existed in Australia have unravelled in a matter of weeks. In the wake of the devastating Queensland floods, the federal government gutted – for the second time – funding to energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives. Meanwhile Queensland Premier Anna Bligh is back at work approving new fossil fuel projects – going so far as to publicly thank the companies for future royalties as the state rebuilds. The New South Wales government just emptied the Climate Change Fund to pay for meagre rebates on soaring electricity bills – surrendering public climate action funds to coal-fired power generators while forging ahead with energy privatisation.

What is left? A federal government plan for a weak interim carbon price leading to emissions trading scheme riddled with loopholes and cheap carbon credits. Big polluters – having spent \$22 million to scrap the mining tax, tens of millions more to win loopholes and handouts in the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (and ousting a Prime Minister in the process) – are

now lining up to do it all over again. Prime Minister Gillard wants to deploy what she calls “one of the most powerful forces on earth – the genius of the free market”, and declares other climate programs and policies as “no longer necessary” with a carbon price. It feels like Groundhog Day in Australian climate politics.

Bad policy aside, it’s the debate – or lack of it – that is the real problem. The public cannot participate in a discussion about a perfect price or the market that could work magic: the debate is inaccessible, ignores concerns about justice, and is not relevant to our daily lives. We’ve been stuck for decades in a media and policy vacuum of neoliberal market mechanisms and a contest over complex science. Real solutions, community voices, or the elephant in the room – our coal exports – are locked out. It suits government and industry to keep the debate on this limited terrain – but we desperately need to build a message and a movement that can reject false solutions like carbon trading, halt privatisation of energy infrastructure, and put forward new ideas.

In all this, the climate movement has been largely inaudible. Sure, a few environment organisations put out a media release, a link to an online petition was circulated; but no meaningful or even visible backlash was mobilised. It begs the question, what is our movement strategy? As emissions trading schemes repeatedly fail across the world – with many collapsing entirely – the Greens party, big NGOs and portions of the grassroots are working to install a carbon price and build the architecture of an emissions trading scheme in Australia. The umbrella body Climate Action Network Australia has four key demands in their current strategy: peaking Australia’s emissions; a limit and price on pollution; no new conventional coal fired power stations; and an increase in renewable energy. It is staggeringly unambitious – even allowing new coal-fired power stations,



Murray at the Climate Action Camp. Photo by Falk Hermenau.



Right: FoE climate activist Shaun Murray at the Climate Action Camp, Muswellbrook. Photo by Falk Hermenau. Above: Rising Tide Protest at Bayswater Power Station, NSW. [www.risingtide.org.au](http://www.risingtide.org.au)

plenty of gas, a stack of new coal mines, and offsets to spare. Year after year, peak environment groups are negotiating ever-weakening targets and markets from Canberra to Cancun, with little communication and collaboration with grassroots groups and communities at the coalface. They have a striking fixation on endorsing, establishing and expanding international and domestic carbon markets; while grassroots activists are trying to get on with the job of challenging fossil fuel extraction, community education, and building support for renewable energy.

## Reflection, debate, and ideas for renewal

Late in 2010, an encouraging dialogue opened in the United States climate movement, beginning with an open letter ([1sky.org/openletter](http://1sky.org/openletter)) from board members of the organisation 1Sky, including Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org and author of more than a dozen books. 1Sky reflected critically on the failures of the climate movement to deliver legislative changes in the American Congress. They felt that at each step in the federal policy debate, the movement “seemed ready to give more away” to industrial polluters. “Time and again”, they wrote, “our political leaders were assured that ‘we’ (meaning the environmental community as a whole) would take what we could get – even when it became increasingly unlikely that it would represent even an incremental step in the right direction.”

The 1Sky Board identified that “a longstanding and damaging underinvestment in grassroots organising severely crippled our ability to move policy forward” and called for greater on-the-ground organising efforts: “our legacy must be a strong and enduring grassroots movement”. They invited responses,

reflections and new ideas. A coalition of grassroots organisations, representing racial justice, indigenous rights, economic justice, youth and environmental justice communities responded with a powerful vision for a climate justice movement. They articulated their organising strategy to build power from the bottom up (<http://tiny.cc/0cq5y>):

1. Investing in grassroots action at frontline struggles to win the victories that build our power, improve our communities and stop the corporations causing climate disruption;
2. Prioritising local organising to build the resilient communities, economic alternatives, and political infrastructure that we need to weather the climate crisis; and,
3. Supporting solidarity with grassroots movements around the world, to link our struggles, and to craft policies and structures we need internationally to support solutions determined locally.

The groups defined ‘frontline’ communities as those that recognise how they are directly affected by the root causes, the impacts, and the false solutions to the ecological crisis; and connect their work on climate change to other struggles such as opposing economic exploitation and environmental racism.

In the US and here, the movement’s tunnel vision of emissions reduction targets reinforces a frame of ‘carbon fundamentalism’ that North American groups argue hides the root causes of climate change. It also opens the door for false and dangerous ‘solutions’ such as ‘clean coal’, nuclear, and carbon markets riddled with offsets. Further, the focus on targets backs the Australian climate movement into a corner defending the fine print of climate science – witness the media circus around the whirlwind tour of Lord Monckton last year. When we focus our advocacy and organising on pushing for a 20% reduction by this

date, 50% by that date, and bicker over however-many parts per million, we limit ourselves to this terrain. When we talk in obscure terms about science and targets, we use language that has little meaning in our lives and that few people understand. The climate debate needs to be more accessible, popularised and broadened well beyond elite actors.

## **Support for communities on the frontlines of the coal industry expansion**

With the movement's focus on international and domestic carbon pricing and targets, we've seriously neglected investing in supporting and building community organising in coal communities. Dozens of new coal mines are on the books in NSW; dozens more in Queensland. Existing mines are set to expand along with new export infrastructure, new power stations, and an emergent coal seam gas industry.

Rising Tide North America recently reflected, "While mainstream groups spend millions failing to pass even the most meagre and inadequate climate legislation, frontline communities around the world are actively stemming the tide of new fossil fuel infrastructure." This rings true in Australia. Even farmers and wealthy landholders have had enough of big coal's bulldozers – they're now building community groups, networking, mobilising, and blockading the world's biggest mining companies.

This should be the primary strategy of the climate movement – to support and escalate frontline struggles against the fossil fuel industry. Yet climate and environment organisations are stuck colluding with political elites and big polluters, missing huge opportunities to connect the complex problems posed by climate scientists to local impacts of the fossil fuel industry on health, water, food sovereignty and economic justice. It is on such terrain we can more effectively engage people in struggles for climate justice. It is here where we can erode the social license of the coal industry – in its heartland. This will require resources for skill sharing and training programs to boost organising in coal communities; funding face-to-face strategy sessions; and prioritising the creation of long-term coalitions and alliances.

## **Investing in community organising and mobilising**

The climate movement has long held broad public support for action – we all but refuse to take serious steps to mobilise it. There are plenty of questions to ask here: how are people connected to the climate movement? What involves new people in grassroots organising? How can we deepen and sustain their engagement? Who is not being reached who could be part of the movement? What is stopping them from joining? What can we do to remove some of these barriers? Arguably, professionalised environment organisations hinder more than they help. There are far more (poorly paid) street canvassers reciting a script to collect our credit card details than there are community organisers knocking on doors, running workshops, supporting community and workplace organising for climate justice.

This limits the practice of organising to acquiring credit card details of new 'supporters' or enabling a swift press of a button to send a politician an email. The community outreach and education programs that do exist are patronising and inadequate. The Australian Conservation Foundation's GreenHome workshops, for example, offer the "latest ideas and solutions for energy savings in the house". These programs don't aim to bring new people into a grassroots climate movement, nor foster much-needed skills in community organising. They aren't building power in our communities, but instead are distracting us from more meaningful efforts.

***“ The primary strategy of the climate movement should be to support and escalate frontline struggles against the fossil fuel industry. ”***

Despite this, the grassroots movement has grown. Rising Tide Newcastle has kick-started community debate and organising through mass direct actions at the world's largest coal port. The Australian Student Environment Network run impressive training programs developing skills in new activists; empowering people to take an active and equal part in the movement. Climate Action Newtown spearheaded the creation of an inclusive and dynamic campaign for 100% renewable energy in Australia. The Six Degrees collective in Brisbane undertook a 'listening tour' to hear the concerns of rural coal communities to drive their urban solidarity work. Grassroots activists drove the first Community Climate Summit – bringing hundreds of community groups together to network, strategise, and build skills to organise themselves for collective action. These efforts build the power of communities to fight back against fossil fuel extraction and to put into practice real solutions.

The climate movement – particularly big green groups – has a crippling fetish with elite policy strategies: pushing a complex carbon pricing and trading scheme, attempting to secure feeble election commitments, and wasting vast resources on winning space in commercial media. These practices eclipse the strategy of gradually building a base of power over time – of truly investing in change from below. In the coming years, we need to open space to ask questions, to discuss, and debate. We need to explore and resource new programs to build community organising. And, quite simply, we need to find the time to have necessary conversations about how social change happens and work out how we will build the long-term strength and diversity of the climate movement.

*Holly Creenaune is a member of the Friends of the Earth Sydney Collective. [holly.creenaune@foe.org.au](mailto:holly.creenaune@foe.org.au)*



# Australia's precious place in the coal industry's world

Guy Pearse

Australia holds a precious place in the coal industry's world – and our coal exports are this country's biggest contribution to climate change by far. The more I watch our coal export emissions grow, the more absurd it seems to me that they are not considered 'our problem'. Australia now exports over 270 million tonnes of coal annually which equates to around 730 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. That's about one-fifth more greenhouse pollution than is currently emitted within Australia's borders.

The two million tonnes of coal we export weekly produce roughly the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub> as a million Australian households do yearly. And coal exports are set to double over the next 10-15 years with enthusiastic bipartisan political support. On average, this involves increasing coal exports by another million tonnes every fortnight – the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent of adding nearly 50,000 cars every single day. We often hear about China building a new coal fired power station every week or so, but few of us realise Australian coal exports effectively add a new coal fired power station or steel mill somewhere in the world every three or four weeks.

That statistic is worth dwelling on for a moment, especially with climate campaigners fired up to oppose plans for a dozen new coal fired power stations within Australia. Those projects may be 'on the books' but all have to run the gauntlet of strong environmental campaigns against them, and ultimately some sort of carbon tax or price, so very few will be built over the next decade. Yet, over the next year, against almost no public opposition, more than a dozen new coal-fuelled facilities will most definitely be built on the back of Australian coal exports. The domestic emission reduction programs to which campaigners devote much attention are similarly dwarfed by coal exports. For example, if the federal government adopted a 25% emissions reduction target for 2020, implemented an emissions trading scheme to get there, and tightly limited the use of cheap imported carbon credits so that Australia made its emission cuts rather than outsourcing them, domestic emissions could fall by up to 249 million tonnes annually by 2020. Sounds impressive – until you realise that the emissions saved are wiped out by the addition of just two new coal mines in Central Queensland.

Even as television advertisements running nationally remind us that our coal exports are indeed 'something big', many seem to think a domestic carbon price and a 'no new coal fired power' campaign hurts the coal industry and coal addicted governments. Do they notice governments getting by expanding existing coal

***“ We often hear about China building a new coal fired power station every week or so, but few of us realise Australian coal exports effectively add a new coal fired power station or steel mill somewhere in the world every three or four weeks. ”***

fired power stations and refurbishing mothballed ones, their coal export royalty revenue hardly affected? Do they realise that the coal industry's main game is exporting to developing nations, that the industry views sluggish domestic demand here and in other developed country markets as a fact of life? Do they really believe that stalling a few projects currently on the books 'hits them where it hurts'?

There's so much wool over so many eyes, so many convenient excuses to ignore coal exports. There's the accounting argument – that the international community has agreed that emissions should count where they occur. So, responsibility lies with the country burning the fossil fuels, not the country supplying them. Next comes the argument that coal isn't a big contributor to climate change – only one-quarter of global emissions. We're told Australia is a relatively small coal producer - accounting for just 5.6% of global production. Then there's the line that our coal exports are essential for steelmaking, as if the comparable CO<sub>2</sub> from that process are magically benign for the climate. We're assured that carbon capture and storage and other 'clean coal' technologies will come to the rescue. And, anyway, we're told: if we didn't export the coal we do, someone else would. Last but not least, we're told the coal industry is our economic backbone - that messing with it is to 'taking the back of the axe to the Australian economy' as the climate change minister puts it. Lump all these arguments together and you have a seemingly unassailable case that interfering with the coal rush is economic vandalism with no environmental benefit. A depressingly broad cross-section of Australia has bought into this logic – including most 'big brand' environment groups. Some with limited resources consider coal export emissions too big, and a few of the excuses plausible enough to leave it in the 'too hard

basket'. Until now, for those with an interest in keeping coal exports off the table in the debate, the list of excuses has been a sweet recipe for success. But, as coal export emissions spiral, becoming more conspicuous internationally, they'll come out of the too-hard basket.

Having already decided on the path of doubling coal exports, it will take enormous political will to get back to the 'fork in the road' in order to take an alternative path. The Australian coal industry cannot be closed down overnight, but we can as a nation decide now how to prepare for coal phase-down over a 10-15 year timeframe, in the very likely event that coal emissions can't be captured and stored safely on scale or on time. That sort of transition timeline gives coal addicted governments, and investors who have dived into coal knowing the risks, fair notice. It gives industries and communities in Australia, and coal export customers, time to prepare. As politically charged as that course would be, it's realistic, affordable, and when compared with the current plan to allow our coal export emissions to double in size without any Plan B, it's clearly in the national interest.

An Australian coal phase-down wouldn't magically stop China, India and the US continuing to use lots of coal. They wouldn't suddenly follow our lead, and other countries may well try to increase coal output to take advantage of the space left by Australia in the international trade. So, coal-based electricity and steel production wouldn't vanish overnight, any more than developing countries would keep going without electricity. If Australia exited coal, therefore, it wouldn't prevent economic development, let alone condemn millions of people in the developing world to poverty, as some would have us believe. That said, we shouldn't underestimate the impact domestically, or the ripple effects around the world, from what would be anything but a futile gesture. Rather than waiting for an international climate agreement that may never arrive to constrain coal global demand, we would be placing a very significant constraint on supply. The loss of half a billion tonnes of anticipated annual export supply would increase the traded coal price and make investment in coal a riskier proposition. Most significantly though, by making coal less affordable and available, Australia can help change the equation for countries deciding right now on the extent to which their industrialisation will be coal-based or something different.

Without all that Australian coal on the international market helping to keep it relatively cheap, China and India would be unable to import enough cheap coal to stay on their current course – in electricity production, steel manufacturing and all of the associated industries. The magnitude of economic development in these countries would hardly be affected by Australia's action, but many more coal-based investments would be less competitive against cleaner alternatives than they are today. That's why I refer to Australia's precious place in the coal industry's world – it's the jewel in King Coal's crown, and coal phase down by Australia could be the biggest blow the industry has ever experienced. The industry, of course, banks on us leaving this sort of scenario in the 'unthinkable' basket –

## King Coal

*Australia is the undisputed king of the global seaborne coal trade, providing just under 30% of the world's exports, including more than half of coking coal exports. But we're more important than that suggests, because our companies are at the heart of coal mining in the other big coal exporting nations.*

*Indonesia, for example, is our nearest rival as a coal trader, and Australian companies mine at least one third of their exports. It's a similar story in other fast-growing export nations like Mongolia and Mozambique.*

*Even excluding companies that many people consider Australian – like Rio Tinto and Xstrata, Australian firms will within the next five years be mining close to 350 million tonnes of coal annually in other countries – more than we currently export.*

*So when the industry says 'If Australia didn't export coal someone else would', what they really mean is that 'If Aussies couldn't mine coal here, Aussies would go off and mine someone else's coal.'*



Newcastle coal port



Extensive coal mining in the NSW Hunter Valley. Photo by Lee Rhiannon.

**“ If campaigning against Australia’s biggest contribution to climate change is ‘too hard’ now, how much harder will it be when the coal industry is twice its current size? ”**

believing as the Institute of Public Affairs puts it that replacing coal with renewables involves “returning the nation to some nineteenth century pastoralist past and hoping that we will all prosper in such an economy”.

When we stop swallowing that sort of nonsense, the really exciting thing is that Australia can deal with its biggest contribution to climate change and its domestic emissions without wrecking the economy. When you look at the consequences of phasing down coal – which by extension means replacing all coal fired power stations in Australia with mostly renewable alternatives – it’s hard not to conclude we can transform the economy for the better. Staged over a 10 year period, even if we assume the worst – with almost no coal industry left and half of the most coal-dependent industry gone – by 2020 Australia’s GDP is nearly a third larger than today. Our export basket would recover from the loss of coal and other coal-dependent commodities – partly because the removal of coal reduces our exchange rate and makes other export industries more competitive.

I don’t mean to suggest that coal phase down doesn’t cause economic and political pain – or that it’s not a very big deal for regional communities and people whose livelihoods are tied to coal’s fortunes. Clearly it is. But the question for communities, families and governments now hooked up to coal is this: how much harder will the transition be if in 10 years time, in the face of climate change, the world won’t turn a blind eye, and our coal industry is twice its current size? Right now we export relatively little coal to China and India - how much harder would coal phase down be politically, diplomatically, and strategically for Australia in 10 years time when we export a lot? (In 2008-09 Australia exported 25 million tonnes (mt) of coal to China and 24.7 mt to India – 49.7 mt combined which

was 18.8% of the 263.4 mt of coal exported that year according to the Australian Coal Association. Our exports account for less than 1.25% of the combined coal use of China and India.)

Climate campaigners face a similar question: if campaigning against Australia’s biggest contribution to climate change is ‘too hard’ now, how much harder will it be when the coal industry is twice its current size? If coal phase down dramatically cuts our carbon footprint abroad and makes our domestic efforts count, if it transforms the economy for the better, if it’s affordable, and has a positive environmental benefit internationally right as the world is on the brink of leaving any chance of a safe climate behind - then surely that’s something for which Australians concerned about climate change ought to be campaigning.

*Guy Pearse is a Research Fellow at the Global Change Institute, University of Queensland, and the author of ‘High and Dry: John Howard, climate change and the selling of Australia’s future’. This article is extracted from a speech at the Camp for Climate Action in December 2010 in the NSW Hunter Valley. The full speech with references is available at [www.guypearse.com](http://www.guypearse.com)*



## Frontline communities fighting coal seam gas in Queensland

*Drew Hutton*

The Six Degrees collective of Friends of the Earth, Brisbane has been campaigning against open cut coal mining on agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas for over two years and, more recently, calling for a moratorium on coal seam gas development.

From the start, we argued that only an alliance between rural action groups and predominantly urban-based environmental campaigners would achieve these objectives. Subsequent events have borne this out. However, it hasn't always been easy. There are long-standing animosities between farmers and environmentalists especially as a legacy of the campaign against broad scale land clearing in the early 2000s.

In the last nine months the mood in the bush has changed from a mix of resentment, resignation and impotent fury to one of greater optimism and combativeness. We have seen an alliance form between farmers and other rural groups and environmentalists. We had a large rally of 500 farmers at Cecil Plains in May 2010, a protest of many different rural action groups at the Roma Community Cabinet in July, a rally of farmers and environmentalists organised by Friends of the Earth outside Parliament House in August, a blockade of Queensland Gas Corporation activities on the Tara rural residential estate, and the formation of over a dozen action groups on the Darling Downs and South Burnett with membership of well over 1000 people.

We have also seen the unravelling of the state government's plans for the most radical transformation of the Queensland landscape since the expansion of the pastoral frontier in the early days of European settlement, caused by Bligh government's failure to understand the potential impact of the massive expansion of open cut coal mining in the populous and fertile south of Queensland and the introduction of a whole new industry – coal seam gas.

One example of the monstrous extent of this transformation is its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. The current frenzy of coal and coal seam gas extraction in Australia is best exemplified in Queensland. Of the 69 new or greatly expanded coal mines being proposed, 30 are in this state. Added to this are the emissions created by extracting, compressing, piping

**“Of 69 new or greatly expanded coal mines being proposed, 30 are in Queensland. ”**



**Friends of the Earth invites you to join the  
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Flooded coal seam gas evaporation ponds. Photo by Drew Hutton.

**“The state government is likely to introduce Strategic Cropping Land legislation that prevents, at best, only one coal mine out of the 20 or so proposed for the Surat Basin.”**

and liquefying coal seam gas and clearing vegetation for coal seam gas projects.

Back-of-an-envelope calculations suggest this new extractive activity will add over 50 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent from purely domestic sources (in other words, before any product goes into a power station or steel mill). This would be an increase of more than 30% for Queensland’s already substantial greenhouse gas pollution of 190 million tonnes per year. In addition is the threat to the Great Artesian Basin from depressurising the Walloon Coal Measures and threats to human health from gas wells too close to dwellings.

### **Playing catch-up: The Queensland government’s response**

As public opinion is swinging markedly in favour of the green/farmer alliance, the government is attempting to play catch-up. Their strategy has involved:

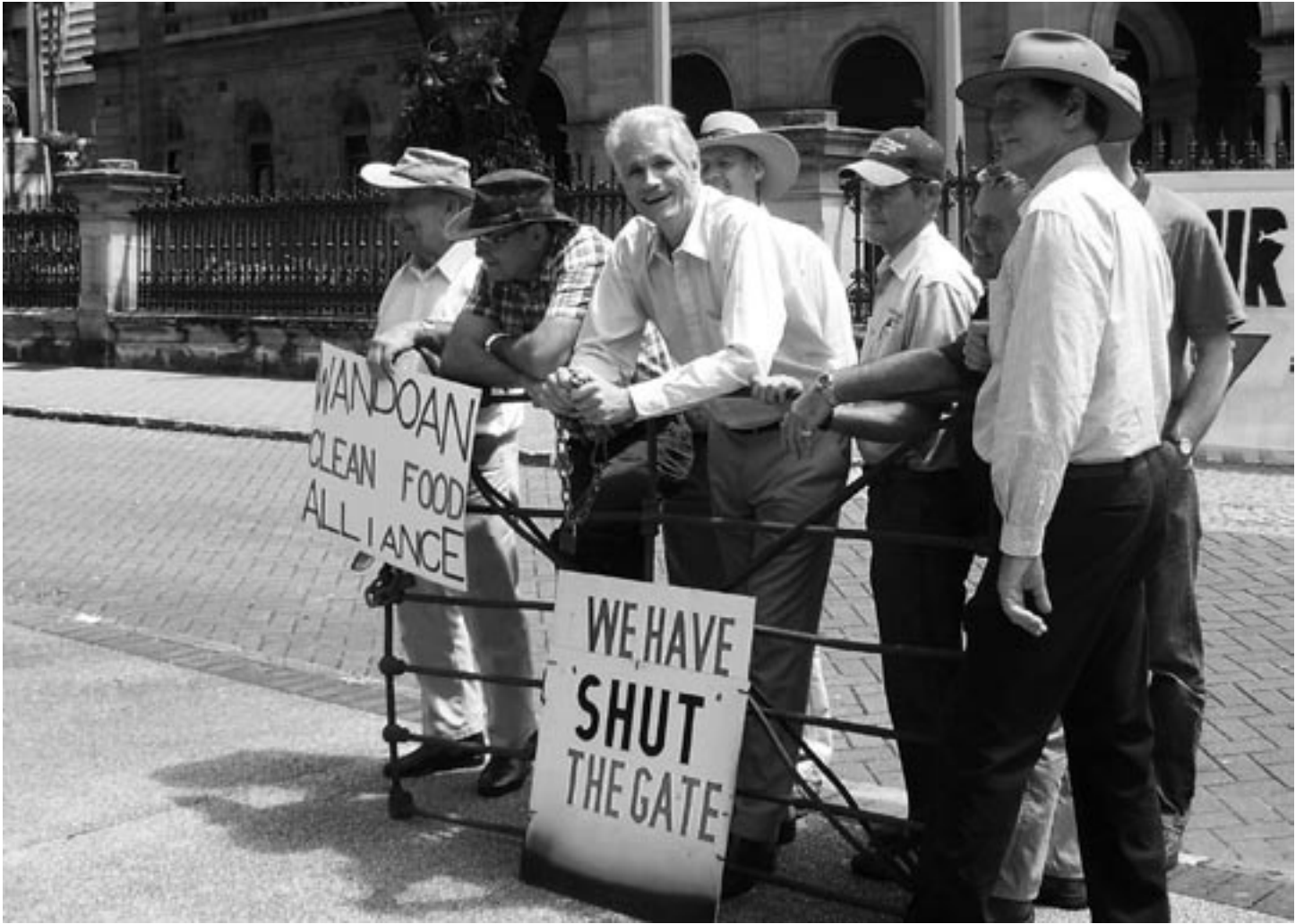
- Releasing a policy framework paper as a prelude to legislation protecting the “best of the best” strategic cropping land from open cut coal mining;
- Introducing guidelines, amendments to legislation and policies to improve landowner rights, consultation and communication with landowners and residents and accountability by the gas companies; and
- Beefing up the regulatory regime and enforcement mechanisms to bring an end to many of the cowboy practices being employed by some gas companies.

The state government’s ‘Protecting Queensland’s strategic cropping land policy framework’ is a good start, but very limited in scope. It lacks detail and contains the possibility of

leaving a patchwork effect with some paddocks off-limits and neighbouring land available for mining. Worst of all, it lacks a complete package encompassing land surface, buffer zones, aquifer recharge areas and underground water. The framework will still allow open cut coal mining and coal seam gas mining on all good agricultural land that does not qualify as “the best of the best”. On latest indications, the state government is likely to introduce Strategic Cropping Land legislation that prevents, at best, only one coal mine out of the 20 or so proposed for the Surat Basin.

Secondly, recent moves by the state government to improve landowner rights in relation to mining companies and improving consultation mechanisms is weighed entirely in favour of mining companies. Landowners are now required to negotiate access with the companies. If after 20 days no agreement is possible, the company can take the landowner to compulsory mediation. If no agreement occurs following a further 20 days, the mining company can take the landowner to the Land Court. As soon as the matter goes to the Land Court, the company can legally access the property and any obstruction can be punished with a maximum \$50,000 fine.

The third attempt by the state government to justify their continued support for mining in agricultural areas is the most ludicrous. They claim a rigorous regulatory regime will ensure the public interest is protected and that mining companies adhere to strict environmental standards. But the state government cannot show one open cut coal mine in Queensland that has been rehabilitated to anything like its original condition. Certainly, the goal of restoring good agricultural land to its original productivity is a pipe dream if we look at mines like Collinsville, Goonyella, and Oaky Creek – mines that will continue to have off-site impacts for perhaps centuries to come.



Action outside Queensland Parliament. Photo by Drew Hutton.

## Community action - locking the gate

Following state and federal government approvals for three major coal seam gas projects and some massive new coal mines on good agricultural land, the movement adopted a campaign and formed the national Lock the Gate Alliance – a non-violent, non-cooperation campaign against mining companies. We are calling on all landowners to refuse access to coal and coal seam gas mining companies – in other words, to commit civil disobedience. The non-violent direct actions at Tara in August 2010 were the opening salvos in a battle that will echo across the country – New South Wales and Western Australia are looking at increasing coal seam gas activity, and Victoria and South Australia will share the same experience in the near future.

If the current cooperation between environmentalists and rural Queenslanders is to become more than a temporary strategic alliance, there will need to be engagement at more than a campaigning level. Key values for environmentalists are such things as biodiversity protection and ecosystem maintenance. Other goals like food security, resource protection and farm productivity are important but slightly lower down the list. Nevertheless, we believe the overwhelming majority

of environmentalists would much prefer to see farmers as the main land managers in the bush rather than miners. The environmental advances of the past few decades have largely passed mining executives by, except for the desire to hire enough people who can use the appropriate language and spin the appropriate green-friendly message. Farmers, on the other hand, have a solid record of environmental achievements, especially in the last couple of decades, and it is this record that gives hope for a productive dialogue and, we believe, should force the environment movement to review some of its policies.

*Drew Hutton is a member of the Six Degrees collective at Friends of the Earth, Brisbane.*



# The Global Tactics of King Coal

*Falk Hermenau and Eleanor Smith*



*Campaigning for a referendum to stop new open cut coal mines in Brandenburg.*

**I**t is easy to see a campaign against the coal industry as just one of the many fronts the climate movement must fight on. After all, we are trying to transition our energy system to renewables; reduce our domestic and industrial energy use; ensure false and dangerous solutions to climate change are not adopted; convince the rest of the community that climate change is real; and dispel the constant stream of myths promoted by climate change deniers.

But two million tonnes of coal are exported from our shores weekly. This produces roughly the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub> as a million Australian households do yearly. And our coal industry is still expanding at an astounding rate. The campaign to stop the expansion of coal mining is the most critical contribution Australians can make to reduce global atmospheric greenhouse gas levels, yet it is so often a side-note for community campaigners and environment organisations. This article explores the lessons Australian climate campaigners can learn from the situation in Germany with a focus on Brandenburg, the region surrounding Berlin in Germany.

Germany is often cited as one of the nations leading the way to a renewable energy future: they have a highly environmentally conscious population; a suite of world-leading environmental policies; and were a strong and early adopter of renewable energy. Despite this, the coal industry still has a strong foothold in terms of electricity production and also holding sway with the political elite. Despite the rapid uptake of renewable energy, 30 new coal-fired power stations are planned to be built in Germany in the next 10 years. Five of them have already been stopped by strong local and national environmental campaigns. One of the remaining proposals is in Brandenburg.

**“ There is a critical lesson here for Australia: even if campaigns for domestic renewable energy are successful, the coal industry will likely continue unabated. ”**

Renewable energy currently supplies almost 20% of Germany's domestic electricity demand; in Brandenburg the figure is 35% and increasing. But Brandenburg continues to mine brown coal, and the industry is expanding. Currently around 40 million tonnes of coal are mined and burned each year.

There is a critical lesson here for Australia: even if campaigns for domestic renewable energy are successful, the coal industry will likely continue unabated.

## Myths and marketing sustain big coal

Like Australia, Brandenburg has a long history of coal mining, but there are local, regional and national community campaigns against all new coal projects. Community efforts face three major arguments from the coal industry:

1. Big coal provides jobs, services and income to the region;
2. We cannot get by without coal for base load power; and
3. Carbon capture and storage technologies will ensure the industry's long-term future.

These arguments ring hollow from Brandenburg to the Bowen Basin. In 1990 – the year of the reunification of Germany – the coal industry employed around 80,000 people in East Germany. Today this number has dropped down to less than 8000. Jobs in renewable energy double that of coal in Brandenburg. But there is an entrenched and lasting public impression that the coal industry is vital for local economic survival.

***“Jobs in renewable energy double that of coal in Brandenburg. But there is an entrenched and lasting public impression that the coal industry is vital for local economic survival.”***



Australians witnessed the extent the coal industry will go to defend its turf during the debate on the mining tax last year. Mining companies – big and small – joined forces, pouring tens of millions into a campaign to stop the tax. But the coal industry also wages a subtler, more insidious and unwavering campaign in mining communities – a campaign designed to ensure they are seen as indispensable, and a future without big coal unimaginable.

Vattenfall, the Swedish government-owned company responsible for the majority of coal mining and power stations in Brandenburg, buys off the local community with a contribution estimated to be 5% of their annual profit. They use marketing and sponsorship deals and target sport clubs, theatres, kindergartens, schools and universities. It's all part of reminding the community, at every turn, that they cannot get by without them. Like in many rural Australian coal communities, speaking out against the coal industry is considered taboo, because the idea that coal companies are the 'partners of the region' (a Vattenfall slogan) is broadly believed.



Coal mine in Brandenburg.



*Coal mine in Brandenburg.*

## Community mobilisations for change

In Brandenburg, the usual suspects – activists that are highly committed to the cause – continue to draw attention to the huge impacts coal mining has on environments and communities. While they don't have the million dollar budgets of the coal industry public relations machine, they do have a moral high ground and decades of scientific research on their side.

From October 2008 until February 2009 the people of Brandenburg had the opportunity to put pressure on authorities to stop new open cut coal mines in the region through a petition asking for a referendum on the issue. (German law allows any concerned community group to call a moratorium if they can get 20,000 people to go to their local council office and support the cause during a given four month period). The effort failed, largely because of a massive marketing campaign Vattenfall ran against the coalition of groups calling for the referendum. However, the tactic did force the issue onto the public agenda and took a step forward for the movement.

The experience of Brandenburg shows that despite a thriving renewable energy industry, the ingrained coal industry also continues to grow. Globally, those of us concerned about climate change cannot delude ourselves into thinking that installing solar panels or even campaigning for more favourable renewable energy policy will alone bring about the end of the coal industry. We need to continue and strengthen our work to remove the coal industry's social license to operate, especially in Australia where the vast majority of our coal is exported overseas.

In Australia, there are many vocal campaigns against coal extraction, exports, and power stations: Rising Tide Newcastle, Six Degrees in Brisbane, Switch off Hazelwood in Victoria, and Greenpeace are some of the organisations that are taking action on climate change through tackling big coal. Many local community groups around the country are campaigning against new coal mines, ports or power stations and the negative impacts of existing coal developments on their health and in their regions. With huge new coal seam gas developments planned for large swathes of Queensland and NSW, many more local groups have joined the call to move away from fossil fuel extraction in Australia.

These efforts are relatively small compared to the size of the industry and the scale of its planned expansion, and their messages and mobilisations have not yet won popular support. Campaigners in coal communities and in climate action groups know the impacts of the coal industry, how to debunk the arguments against them, and the scale of the problem – now we need to build the strategy, support and international solidarity to begin to topple big coal.



# Pricing carbon: theory, practice, politics

Rebecca Pearce

The discourse around climate policy borders on incoherent these days. Likely and unlikely characters are calling for a 'carbon price' of some variety, but are rather unclear about what form of pricing mechanism they want. Carbon tax or cap-and-trade? The two policies are distinct techniques for greenhouse gas emissions mitigation that should be debated. That is, beyond the Multi Party Climate Change Committee established by the federal government, public deliberation over the merits and limitations claimed for either of these forms of regulation is lacking. A debate over ideal types will only get us so far. An analysis of how the negotiation over a carbon price will play out in national politics over 2011 must get underway. This is a summary of the theory, practice and politics of 'pricing carbon'.

## Carbon taxation: The idea is to hit people where it hurts

The theory of environmental taxes preceded that of emissions trading. Arthur Cecil Pigou (1877-1959) is known as the father of environmental taxation. His work involved reflections on the costs of production and consumption not accounted for in the actions of private market actors.<sup>1</sup> This grounded the notion of market externalities which underpins ecological economics today. Pigou's conclusions concerning policy were to advise a range of regulatory measures including bounties and taxes on environmentally polluting behaviour. This stands in contrast to Ronald Coase, John H. Dales and Thomas Crocker who developed the theory of externalities in the 1960s and 1970s toward tradeable rights to polluting.

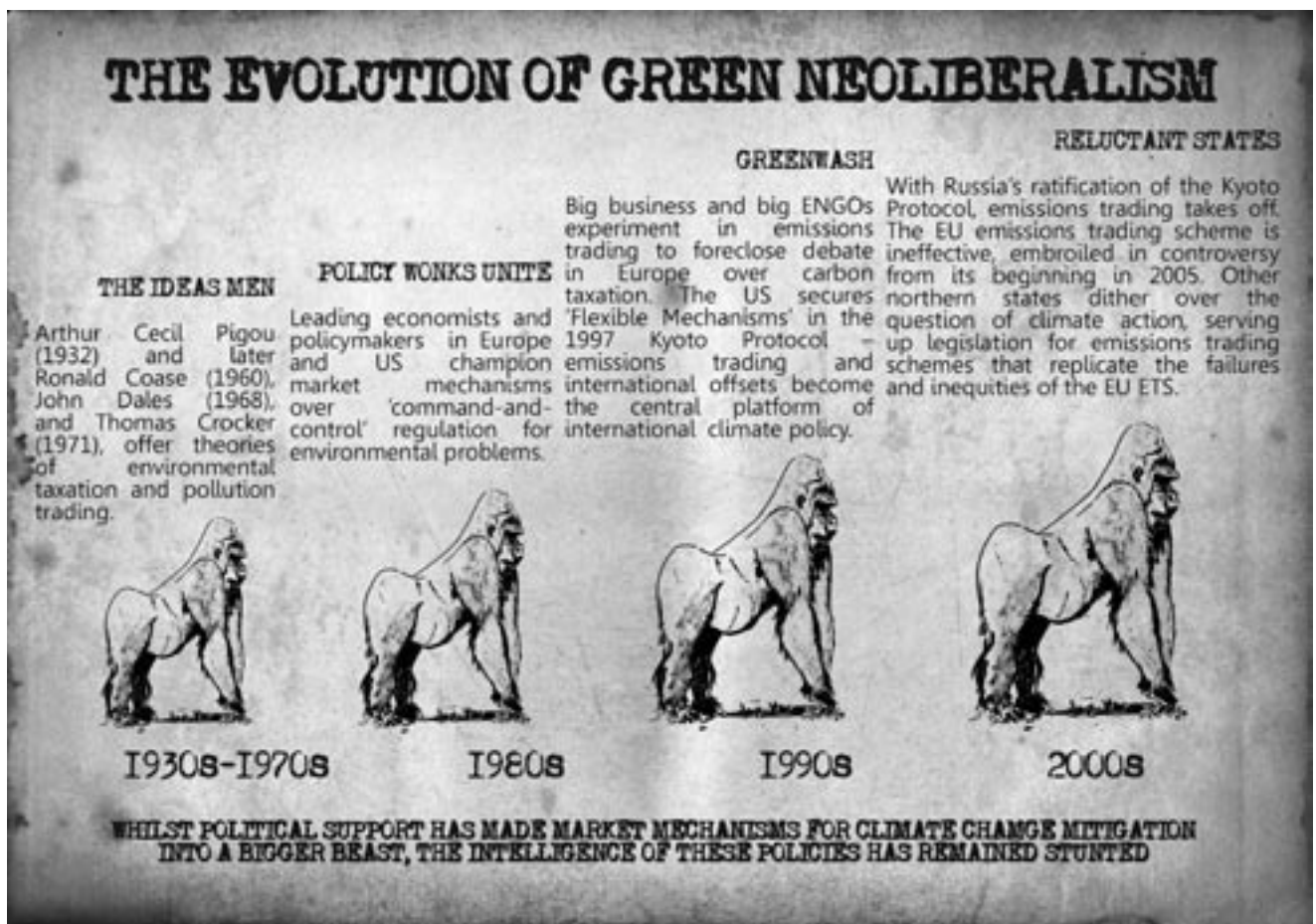
Environmental taxation policy is based on the assumption that price signals encourage environmentally friendly behaviour. The idea is to impose some of the costs of polluting behaviour on individuals and thereby reduce the level at which they undertake emissions-intensive consumption. In its favour, carbon taxation is a much simpler policy mechanism, requiring less complex bureaucratic structures than cap-and-trade schemes. And, unlike emissions trading, a carbon tax does not create a new category of tradeable assets or impose a national or regional cap on emissions. The price signal alone is used to encourage reductions in emissions. In this case, the higher prices of carbon-intensive goods and services will prompt industry and consumers to act differently.

Many economists see carbon taxation as a less effective market mechanism than emissions trading schemes because getting the price 'right' to achieve concrete emissions reductions is difficult to realise. If the price is too low, people will just pay more and continue emitting. Re-pricing carbon emissions over time is likely to be necessary in order to make sure the price is sufficiently punitive to produce the required shift from carbon dependence. This of course means flexibility in the legislation is needed and a government willing to re-configure the tax if it turns out to be inadequate.

Going back to the theory of consumer behaviour behind market mechanisms: there's a problem with carbon taxation in that the 'choice' to consume carbon-light goods is connected to a range of counter-veiling factors. Another way to consider this is that there are things we need, that we won't stop buying. Consider the inelastic demand for electricity and continued government subsidies for the energy and transport that filter through to the fossil fuel industry. A carbon price, without reform of the electricity sector in particular, is insufficient. Existence of viable alternatives is necessary for both carbon taxation and trading.

In practice, carbon taxes are variable in their ecological effects. They have been used in Northern Europe from the early 1990s (e.g. Sweden, Norway and Denmark), and remain in play even under the EU ETS. The worst performer, Norway, has seen a 43% increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as well as rising energy intensity. Of these countries, only Denmark delivered significant per capita greenhouse emissions reductions (15% lower in 2006 than in 1990) through a complex of factors including the direction of tax revenues to energy efficiency and renewable energy, the parallel reduction of taxation on natural gas providing a clear alternative for transition away from coal, and more generally the absence of an indigenous coal industry.<sup>2</sup>

As a tax on consumption, a carbon tax is socially regressive – it raises revenues disproportionately from those least able to pay. Carbon taxation has often accompanied reduction in income taxes, that is, using revenue raised through carbon taxation to fund income tax cuts. This was the case in Denmark.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, carbon taxation has appealed to the conservative think tank the Centre for Independent Studies. In its view, carbon taxation might be sold to business and the public like the GST in the 1980s, alongside promises of other tax cuts.<sup>4</sup> To address the question of raising revenues



in an equitable way, it is preferable to use progressive taxes, such as income tax, a tax on coal exports or on Super Profits! Across Scandinavia, carbon taxation has been installed at a higher rate for households compared to industries subject to the scheme. Compensatory measures to increase welfare payments or to reduce income tax for low-income earners are often inadequate.

Finally, on the topic of revenues, there is a curious sense in which installing environmental taxes generates an incentive on the part of the government to reproduce behaviour it is taxing. Over time the revenue stream generated from a carbon tax will be relied upon by the state, potentially prompting it to set the carbon price at a level optimum for generating funds rather than achieving the environmental goal.

### The politics of climate policy

The implied, but far from open discussion of a carbon tax in Australia has arisen from the dust of two failures on the political process: internationally, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations in Copenhagen and Cancun in 2010 and 2011 respectively have left the prospects for international commitment to emissions trading in limbo. The national debate has likewise become inert, though not without heated contention. The reluctance to commit to climate mitigation policy by the federal government has been so strong that even a watered down Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme – punctured with loopholes and compensation for the worst polluters – wasn't successful.

**“Installing environmental taxes generates an incentive on the part of the government to reproduce behaviour it is taxing.”**

Now, we're in a funny situation. Tony Abbott's entry into the debate has confused the matter of environmental regulation. He has stolen the movement's language and presented a piecemeal and confusing Direct Action plan consisting mainly of state subsidies for land-use change. Perhaps seeking a political space outside the trenchant anti-tax rhetoric, the language of the Labor Party and Greens moving into 2011 has shifted to negotiating a 'carbon price', sometimes recognised as an 'interim' carbon price established in anticipation of negotiating a full emissions trading scheme, likely to become more pressing if a post-Kyoto framework is delivered.

A fixed price for one or two years was in fact proposed by Garnaut and included in the government's legislation. It seems that the trajectory of the potential future climate policy is as it always has been: a meandering path toward emissions trading, despite the altered vernacular. I will be thrilled to realise this is not the case. And perhaps an open discussion about carbon taxation rather than the terms 'carbon price' will go some way to breaking the deadlock. However, more signs are pointing to emissions trading than taxation in the federal government deliberations.



UN climate conference, Cancun, Mexico, 2010.

The irony in all of this is that for all the talk of the market's 'genius' (to use Prime Minister Gillard's term) we are still debating the prospect of state action on climate. In this neoliberal era, states are particularly recalcitrant entities keen only to hear familiar mantras.

### So what should we do in the face of a paltry choice?

A shrewd union organiser recently commented to me that any form of federal climate policy will have a narrowing effect on the climate debate, i.e. both cap-and-trade and taxation schemes will serve to foreclose the political space for alternatives. There is then, a difficult set of issues to consider.

Does the movement press for carbon taxation, seeking to steer the growing interest in emissions trading away to an arguably less complicated, though still likely inequitable alternative? Or, do we take up the difficult task of dismissing the current options on the table and call for concerted, just action on climate by the state? The latter of course begs further questions still of the relationship between strategies of state reform and struggle for climate justice from below.

It seems to me that there is an imperative to shift climate politics beyond the current over-zealous commitment to market mechanisms. The challenge then is in realising a political vision and strategy that generates meaningful links

**“There is an imperative to shift climate politics beyond the current over-zealous commitment to market mechanisms.”**

between climate policy and a commitment to redistributive justice.<sup>5</sup> This of course is no mean feat. If you're up for the challenge, send me your thoughts.

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# Fraud and scams in the EU Emissions Trading System

*Tamra Gilbertson*

**A**s new cap and trade markets emerge on the global horizon, the world looks to the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) for insight and lessons learned. This form of free-market environmentalism is presented as the 'only game in town' for those seeking action on climate change.

With a host of problems since the inception of the EU ETS six years ago, it is time to ask whether an emissions trading system is fundamentally flawed and, if so, what is to be expected if these costly mistakes are repeated on a larger scale?

The EU ETS is the largest existing carbon market in the world, valued at €88.7 billion in 2009.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to put a 'cap' on greenhouse gas emissions but evidence mounts against the scheme with many loopholes allowing for a carbon market with no real cap which awards profits to the biggest polluters.

The market consists of trading through spot, futures and options contracts, exchanging 6.3 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-e in 2009. It trades 'carbon permits' called European Union Allowances (EUAs), which are allocated according to National Allocation Plans, which are in turn subject to European Commission approval.

The EU ETS covers approximately 11,000 power stations, factories and refineries in 30 countries which include the 27 EU member states, plus Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein. These account for almost half of the EU's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, covering most of the largest static emissions sources, including power and heat generation, oil refineries, iron and steel, pulp and paper, cement, lime and glass production.

In the first phase of the scheme, from 2005-2007, emissions permits were over-allocated to these industries, largely as a result of intense corporate lobbying. When the first emissions data were released in April 2006, they showed that 4% more permits were handed out than the actual level of emissions within the EU. In other words, the 'cap' did not cap anything, nor was it just the first year of the scheme that was over-allocated. By the end of the first phase, emitters had been allowed to emit 130 million tonnes more CO<sub>2</sub> than they actually did before the scheme was established - a surplus of 2.1%. The price of carbon permits collapsed as a result and never recovered. From a peak of around €30, the price slid below €10 in April 2006, and below €1 in 2007.

A further major criticism leveled at the first phase of the EU ETS is that it generated huge profits for power producers, helping them to make large unearned financial gains as a result of flaws in the rules rather than any proactive measures

**“ By the end of the first phase of the EU ETS, emitters had been allowed to emit 130 million tonnes more CO<sub>2</sub> than they actually did before the scheme was established - a surplus of 2.1%. ”**

taken to reduce emissions through structural changes. An inquiry by the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee found that "it is widely accepted that UK power generators are likely to make substantial windfall profits from the EU ETS amounting to £500 million a year or more."<sup>2</sup>

These profits were mainly enjoyed by energy companies based on how they account for the costs of the EU ETS. The costs that are indirectly passed on to consumers through an increase in wholesale energy prices do not reflect what carbon credits actually cost, but rather what the companies assume they could cost. This leaves considerable scope for overestimates.

The same fundamental problems of over-allocated permits and windfall profits for polluters are occurring in the second phase of the EU scheme, which runs from 2008-2012. Research by market analysts Point Carbon, for example, has calculated that the likely profits made by power companies in phase two could be between €23 billion and €71 billion (and between €6 and €15 billion for UK power producers alone).

This is already storing up problems for the third phase of the EU ETS too. The main reason why the price of EUA permits in phase two has not collapsed to zero is that it is now possible to "bank" them – in other words, to hold onto surplus permits for use in the third phase of the scheme, which will run from 2013 to 2020.

Carbon offsets are another fundamental problem with carbon trading. The EU ETS is the biggest buyer of credits issued through the UN-backed Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). By using offsets to meet emissions reductions targets, the purpose of capping emissions becomes obsolete. Companies can simply buy credits to pollute from so-called emissions reduction projects in the South, thereby eliminating the need to reduce pollution at source and, as extensive research has shown, exacerbate social and environmental problems for communities in the South.<sup>3</sup>



**“ The EU ETS is a concrete example on how the use of market-based solutions to address climate change is delaying real change towards a carbon-free future while allowing business as usual to continue. ”**

### Other forms of fraud

In addition to over-allocation, windfall profits and the more fundamental problems with the EU ETS, other scandals have taken centre stage recently. In 2010, reports of more sophisticated forms of corruption have demonstrated that when ‘buying’ and ‘selling’ a sham commodity, the possibilities for fraud are endless.

‘Carousel fraud’, which was widespread in 2010, involves claiming value-added tax (VAT) refunds from international carbon trades. The traders import the “goods” or allowances tax-free from markets in other countries and sell them on to domestic buyers, charging the VAT which was never passed on to the treasuries. The result is a quick and difficult-to-trace profit. Part of the problem is that trading in the ETS happens over several different registries making transactions and ‘authentic’ allowances difficult to verify. The European investigation continues, at the time of writing, with a suspected €5 billion carbon trading tax cost, across at least 11 countries.

New EU regulations have tightened up VAT regulation, making this form of fraud more difficult. However, registries are lax and inconsistent across EU states. When the allowances enter the registries, their authenticity is nearly impossible to determine.

More fundamentally, many registries neglect to carry out any checks on the applicants that seek to open a trading account. The Danish registry, for example, failed to administer checks over the course of two years and was found to be filled with fraudulent companies and false names. Over 90% of the account holders in the Danish system were deleted last year.

### When recycling is bad

The CDM has also been subject to global scrutiny not only for its failure to reduce emissions but also the authenticity of projects based on additionality fraud. Within the CDM, credit recycling, also referred to as double counting, can occur in several ways. Until recently, it was largely seen within companies selling the same credits on both the voluntary and CDM markets. In



Protest outside UN climate change meeting in Bangkok, 2009. Photo by Larry Lohmann.

other words, instead of expiring already ‘used’ credits, they were sold again but on another market.

In 2007, the chemical corporation Rhodia and cement company Lafarge were accused of using credits from the CDM to meet voluntary corporate targets and later sold them at a profit to be counted again elsewhere. The companies can use credits from the CDM to meet mandatory targets under the EU ETS and also use them to meet voluntary reductions elsewhere. In addition, other companies claim reductions as well.<sup>4</sup>

Last year, another type of credit recycling scandal broke. This time the recycling involved swapping allowances for credits – a legal loophole between the two markets. The Hungarian government swapped Assigned Amount Units (AAUs) for Certified Emission Reductions (CER) from the CDM which companies had already used under the EU ETS to cover their emissions, then later sold the CERs on for more money. (AAUs are a tradeable carbon credit unit recognised within the Kyoto Protocol.)

Hungary has a surplus of AAUs due to its ‘hot air’ allowances which do not fetch a high price nor will they have worth post-2012. Hungary sold on two million retired offset credits knowing they would fetch a higher price than the AAUs.<sup>5</sup> As a

result, French and Nordic exchanges were forced to close trading when the offset credits (CERs) were found to be resold, forcing the spot price of the credits to collapse from €12 a tonne of carbon to less than €1.<sup>6</sup>

Offsets are rife with corruption from the ground up, from the projects to the companies that implement them all the way to double counting on the market. Offsets enable companies and governments in the North to continue polluting while exacerbating harmful development in the South.

## Gone Phishing

Other fraud in the market includes the creation of fake registries. The wide-spread 'phishing attacks' were prompted by e-mails to thousands of firms around the globe, including New Zealand, Norway and Australia, with the hardest hit countries being Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain. The attack closed down registries in at least 13 countries while fraudulent transactions were conducted. The scam involved emails promoting the fake registry and prompted users to log on to their website and reveal user identification codes to carbon trading registries. The 'phishers' would then use this information to carry out transactions in the registries. It is estimated that over €3 million were netted in phishing scams in February 2010.<sup>7</sup>

## Hacking on the 'Spot'

Possibly the most costly scandal has been hacking into computer systems and selling the allowances on the 'spot' market – the trade for permits in return for cash payments, which is estimated to account for 10-25% of the total market. Spot trading allows permits to be sold for cash. The spot market increased 450% over 2008 which totalled 1.4 billion tonnes in 2008. Spot volumes in the first half of 2009 increased 75-fold from 2008.<sup>8</sup>

Stolen permits from a Czech firm in January 2011 prompted spot trading to close for nearly two weeks. The hackers found a way to sell over €7 million in emissions permits from Blackstone Global Ventures.

In Greece, hackers got into the server system of the University of Patras, using it as a Trojan horse and then stole €4 million in credits from the cement company Halyps. Some of the hackers were based in Romania and were later prevented by authorities from selling up to €28 million worth of additional credits.<sup>9</sup>

In theory, there is as much control over selling a carbon permit for cash as for purchasing a shipment of coal. However, in the case of virtual goods like carbon permits, these are not mere 'permission slips' for polluters, rather, they represent money – traded and sold by banks and firms – which can be used to 'meet' emissions targets, banked for future use or sold on at a different price.

European countries have called for a central register to control the CO2 certificate trades earlier than the 2013 planned date. However, the proposed central registry would link to emerging markets in other OECD countries. The market is rife with loopholes and ways to sidestep responsibilities. Global

linking would increase, rather than reduce, the complexity and potential for fraudulent trading, because it would involve exchanges of permits that are subjected to different financial and environmental rules.

## Conclusion

The EU ETS is a concrete example on how the use of market-based solutions to address climate change is delaying real change towards a carbon-free future while allowing business as usual to continue. Trading a virtual commodity on a market is a dangerous and costly distraction from the real task of reducing greenhouse gas emissions at source and keeping fossil fuels in the ground. Expanding the market into a centrally traded registry is not going to eliminate fraud and hacking in the long term because the aim is to link to other global systems which could arguably lead to increased infiltration, and no computer system is unhackable.

Proponents claim the problems with the EU ETS are simply teething troubles and will be worked out in time. However, before these problems are addressed supporters continue to push ahead with plans for expansion on a global market, despite evidence that the EU ETS has not delivered. Perhaps the bigger scam is that the EU ETS has unequivocally failed to reduce emissions yet countries intend to replicate this failure.

Carbon trading systems are now seen as the 'only game in town', distracting from the hard truth that free-market environmentalism has not proven effective. Six years on, the EU ETS has not reduced emissions in the North or created real lasting changes to address the climate crisis.

*Tamra Gilbertson is one of the founders of Carbon Trade Watch ([www.carbontradewatch.org](http://www.carbontradewatch.org)) and co-author of 'Carbon Trading: How it works and why it fails'.*

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# Framing the Borders: The Rhetoric of a Sustainable Population

*Joseph Jennings and the Friends of the Earth Sydney Collective*

In recent years, calls for population control policies have come to the fore in discussions about how best to tackle climate change. It is troubling to consider the risks associated with calling for population control from within the climate movement. Such demands can justify the undermining of women's reproductive rights and fuel racist migration and border control agendas.

We have seen this playing out in federal politics. One of the first actions of Prime Minister Gillard was to utilise the rhetoric of 'sustainability' as a rationale for dumping Rudd's 'Big Australia' policy. Gillard attempted to appeal to the Left with the rhetoric of sustainability, while placating the Right with promises of reduced immigration and suggestions of tougher border control policies. The federal government recently opened the consultation process for its Sustainable Population Strategy ([www.environment.gov.au/sustainability/population](http://www.environment.gov.au/sustainability/population)), publishing three Advisory Panel Reports to guide the consultation process. These reports outline arguments around Australia's population and indicate possible government policy. Importantly, they advocate a number of approaches that indicate a worrying direction for federal government policy. However, there's nothing new here – the reports clearly reflect old, recurring political rhetoric.

## **New faces, same agenda: The historical and current political context**

Arguments about the need to reduce population or minimise population growth have been around at least since Thomas Malthus wrote 'An essay on the principle of population' in 1798. Malthus argued that poverty would be alleviated if people, particularly the poor, could apply moral restraint to minimise population growth.

In Australia, concerns about population size and makeup began with restrictions on non-Anglo-Saxon immigration (the White Australia policy) but the first mention of environmental concerns was raised in the 1970s when Paul and Anne Ehrlich's book 'Population Bomb' promoted a link between environmentalism and population, asserting that population growth was outpacing food supplies. The issue resurfaced in the 1990s with a number of government inquiries on population and immigration, incorporating environmental grounds such

**“ We cannot demand population control, or any action in the name of climate change, that does not provide space for traditional owners to make decisions about their lives, lands and waters. ”**

as 'carrying capacity'. Howard's 1996 cuts to immigration, Pauline Hanson's entry to public life, and the new politics of immigration that took aim at refugees soon followed. Population rhetoric continues to resurface – last year it became central to the federal election campaign. The rhetoric often focused on restricting refugee intake and was generally used by major parties to cover up the failure of the state to take a role in planning infrastructure for areas of urban growth.

Much of the rhetoric did not focus on the environment, but effectively blamed migrants for infrastructure degradation that resulted from years of disinvestment in infrastructure and essential services. In other arenas, working class women were blamed for infrastructure strain – it was often alleged that women were more likely to have children because of a selfish desire for the 'Baby Bonus'.

## **The problems with population control:**

### *Population control will not solve climate change*

A compelling reason to rethink calls for population control is the fact that population size, growth and movement is not the cause of climate change. Climate change is a complex global issue driven by over-consumption, unbridled economic growth and our dependence on fossil fuels, especially coal. Restricting the flow of people into Australia does not address any of these global root causes of climate change.

**“ Blaming climate change on population growth helps to make way for the re-emergence and intensification of top-down population policies, which are deeply disrespectful of women. ”**

### *We can't blame migrants for Australia's over-consumption*

Many conservation and climate groups who call for a sustainable population rely on the fact argument that when migrants come to Australia they often adopt Australia's carbon-intensive lifestyles, which increases domestic emissions. However, restricting the movement of people into Australia does nothing to stop curb unsustainable levels of consumption by Australians.

More importantly, it is unjust and presumptive to argue that people of a certain cultural background must be forced to live in poverty so that the wealthy in Australia can maintain their way of life. This is particularly so given that the wealthy peoples of the 'first world' are largely responsible for climate change and the global inequality that many in the 'third world' experience.

Some advocates of environmentally-motivated immigration cuts call for a slight increase in refugee intake whilst diminishing 'business migration'. They argue that this balances compassionate and environmental concerns. However, such an approach fails to acknowledge the narrow definition of refugees in international law and the broader impact of such policies for Australia internationally.

Migrant workers can be conveniently dehumanised by labels such as 'skilled migrants' or 'business migrants' but are often the most desperately disadvantaged people in the global economy. They sacrifice everything to be placed at the mercy of industrial

relations systems that are often unable to protect their hard-won rights. But migration, with just support, can grant them the opportunity to access rights and privileges that are otherwise withheld. These workers are joined by the millions who are currently being or will soon be displaced by climate change. Furthermore, we cannot overlook the fact that Australia is a colonised nation. We cannot demand population control, or any action in the name of climate change, that does not provide space for traditional owners to make decisions about their lives, lands and waters.

### *Demands for population control are feeding racist border control agendas*

A side effect of the focus on population, sometimes intentional and other times accidental, is the use of the environmental concerns to push racist agendas. At times, right-wing groups have used arguments about environmental issues to benefit anti-immigration agendas (such as in July 2009, when the Australia First Party announced that it would contest the federal election on an anti-immigration platform for the benefit for the environment and social cohesion). Although such groups may pay lip service to arguments about sustainability, their aim is to persecute people from different cultural backgrounds. When we, as a movement, talk about limiting population growth, we feed these racist agendas.

<b>Weasel Words</b>	
<b>Populationist Weasel Words</b>	<b>Plain English Meaning</b>
<i>Carrying capacity</i>	<i>The number of people who can live in Australia while we maintain global inequity.</i>
<i>Resource base</i>	<i>Australia's scarce resources which should only be accessible to people of certain class and cultural backgrounds.</i>
<i>Business migrants</i>	<i>All migrants, but particularly those backed by Un-Australian big business.</i>
<i>Social coherence</i>	<i>Hegemony</i>
<i>Our way of life</i>	<i>Anglo-Christian capitalistic hegemony</i>
<i>Urbanisation</i>	<i>A process driven by greedy migrants. It has nothing to do with disinvestment in essential services for rural communities.</i>
<i>Employment opportunities</i>	<i>A finite resource that is stolen from us by migrants. Migrants do not create new jobs. Nonetheless, they simultaneously power the skills shortage by creating demand for goods and services.</i>
<i>People</i>	<i>The cause of climate change and a costly roadblock lying in the way of rampant capitalism. We must keep as many people poor as possible so they don't consume as much as us.</i>



## *Population control policies may open the door for sexist policies*

Blaming climate change on population growth helps to make way for the re-emergence and intensification of top-down population policies, which are deeply disrespectful of women, particularly women of colour and their children.

Just one example of this is the PopOffsets project, launched by the UK-based Optimum Population Trust. The project enables predominantly white people in minority (rich) nations to continue to over-consume whilst absolving their climate conscience by paying an organisation to ensure predominantly non-white women from the majority world access to family planning centres for the purpose of having fewer children. This project effectively pushes the responsibility of solving climate change onto women in the majority world and makes women into an object of control – all in the name of climate change.

## **What can be done to counter population rhetoric?**

The social movement against climate change is relatively new and is certainly not lost to population control rhetoric. At the first national grassroots Climate Summit in 2009, the following resolution was rejected by a massive majority:

*“Given the strains already evident on the global biosphere, climate action groups call for targets and policy changes for ecologically sustainable population levels, set in line with the ability of the natural system and our finite resources to supply the necessities of life.”*

Above all, it is vital that people with a concern for social justice and human rights become involved in the climate movement, that the movement grasps the importance of grassroots power and democratisation. The rhetoric used to support population control is ultimately quite shallow and generally does not survive meaningful criticism. Moreover, it is a distraction from addressing the real solutions to climate change, such as our dependency on fossil fuels.

Individuals and groups who work for equity and justice are able to challenge these arguments and help build a global climate justice movement. This movement can confront the root causes of environmental destruction and work towards ways to share our resources equitably and collectively so that our world is safe for all people, no matter where they live.

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# Chaos at the Cancun Climate Conference

Anne Petermann

**“ Once upon a time at these climate talks, organisations and Indigenous peoples’ groups roamed freely. They could wander around at will - even into the plenary, where the high level ministers were negotiating the fate of the planet. ”**

**G**lobal Justice Ecology Project co-director/strategist Orin Langelle (on assignment for Z Magazine) and I arrived in Cancun last November for the UN Climate Conference to a hotel infested with Mexican federales. “You’ve GOT to be kidding me,” was our immediate reaction. We dodged their chaotically parked armored vehicles and jeeps to enter the hotel, where we found hordes of uniformed officers armed with automatic weapons everywhere we went. The breakfast room, the poolside, the beach, the bar. Walking out of our room (which was surrounded on both sides federales) I literally bumped into one.

Most of them were mere youths who, judging by the way they carelessly swung their weapons around, had not had sufficient gun safety courses. Orin nearly collided with the barrel of one at breakfast one morning - its owner had it lying casually across his lap as he ate as though the deadly weapon was a sleeping cat.

Absurd? Yes. But not nearly as absurd as the events that unfolded at the Moon Palace - home to the UN Climate Conference (COP16) - over the next two weeks.

Once upon a time at these climate talks, organisations and Indigenous peoples’ groups roamed freely. They could wander around at will - even into the plenary, where the high level ministers were negotiating the fate of the planet. No more. The open range is now fenced off. What precipitated such a radical change? The overreaction of those in power to that strange and wondrous thing known as protest.

The UN Climate Secretariat and their security enforcers view protest as a bull views a red cape. They go blind with rage, lashing out at whomever is in their line of sight. When hundreds of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Indigenous peoples and Party delegates marched out of the UN Climate Conference at the Bella Center in Copenhagen in December 2009, the Secretariat responded by stripping every participant of their right to participate in the talks. But before the protest even started, entire delegations of Friends of the Earth and other groups that had committed the sin of unpermitted symbolic protest earlier in the conference were barred outright from entering the Bella Center.

Since then, the UN Climate Secretariat has been scheming and conniving how to control these rogue factions and cut off any protest before it can begin. At the interim UN climate meeting

in Bonn that I attended last May, they had a special meeting to discuss ‘observer’ participation in the climate COPs. As a spectacular indication of the absurdity to come, when Friends of the Earth prepared an intervention (a short statement) for this meeting to emphasise the importance of observer participation to the UN Climate Conferences, they were prohibited from reading it ...So in Cancun, the UN Climate Secretariat contrived an elaborate set of demobilisation tactics to curtail any potential unruliness. In addition to the highly visible force of federales, the Secretariat devised a complex obstacle course for conference participants.

Anyone not rich enough to stay on the luxurious, exclusive grounds of the Moon Palace resort and (highly toxic) golf course - in other words, developing country parties, most NGOs, Indigenous Peoples and social movements - was treated to a daily bus ride from their hotel to the Cancun Messe (no, seriously, that’s what they called it) that lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours, depending on how badly the federales had bottlenecked the highway. Once in the Messe, we had to go through a security check point and a metal detector, pass through a building and emerge from the other side to wait for a second bus to take us on another 20-25 minute ride to the Moon Palace. Then in the evening, the process was reversed.

The Moon Palace itself was split into three sections - the Maya building, which housed the plenary session and the actual negotiations, the Azteca Building, where those not permitted into the negotiations (that is, most of the NGOs, Indigenous peoples’ groups and all of the media) were allowed to use computers and watch the proceedings on a big screen. The media were given their own building which was yet another 10-minute ride from Maya and Azteca. As you might imagine, it was virtually empty, as most of the media based themselves out of the Azteca to be closer to the action.

Justice Ecology Project hosted a press conference that turned into a spontaneous march. Our press conference was scheduled on the day that La Via Campesina (LVC) had called for the “1,000 Cancuns” global actions on climate, one of which was to be a mass march in Cancun itself. Pablo Solon, Bolivia’s charismatic Ambassador to the UN, was supposed to be one of the speakers at the press conference but got tied up and could not get there. Activists from Youth 4 Climate Justice requested



Occupation of the Moon Palace.

**“The UN Climate Secretariat contrived an elaborate set of demobilisation tactics to curtail any potential unruliness. In addition to the highly visible force of federales, the Secretariat devised a complex obstacle course for conference participants.”**

to speak after yet again being denied an official permit to protest, and later turned the press conference into a spontaneous march. If they would not be given permission to protest then they would do so without. Democracy is a messy thing. The youth delegates marched out the press conference room chanting “No REDD, no REDD!” The rest of us joined them but stopped on the front steps of the building when Pablo Solon suddenly joined the group. In the midst of a media feeding frenzy, he proclaimed Bolivia’s solidarity with the LVC march happening in the streets. Behind him people held banners from the press conference.

Following Solon’s speech, Tom Goldtooth, the high-profile executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, and one of the most vocal Indigenous opponents of the highly controversial Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) scheme, spoke passionately to the crowd. When he was done, the youth delegates resumed their chanting and marched toward the Maya building where the negotiations were occurring.

Then UN security moved in. They had to contain this anarchic outbreak before it spread through the halls and infected the delegates. The three youths, deemed to be the leaders of the unrest, had their badges confiscated and were loaded onto a security bus to be removed from the premises. Other observers, not understanding the nature of this bus (it looking like all of the other buses), got on believing it would take them back to the Messe where they could then take yet another bus to join the LVC march. This included three people accredited to participate by Global Justice Ecology Project.

The UN also stripped Tom Goldtooth of his accreditation badge for the terrible crime of giving a powerful interview to a hungry media. Another of our delegates was de-badged for filming and live-streaming video of the spontaneous protest onto the web. Another lost his badge merely for getting on the wrong bus, others for the outrageous act of holding up banners. Alarmed and outraged, representatives from Friends of the Earth International, the Institute for Policy Studies, and I took the bus over to the Moon Palace to meet with NGO liaisons Warren and

Magoumi. The encounter was immensely frustrating.

We staunchly defended Tom Goldtooth and his right to speak publicly to the media. We also defended the right of our delegate to film the protest. I also spoke up in defense of the three de-badged youth leaders, explaining that this was their first climate conference and they should have been given a warning (as was the norm in Copenhagen) that if they continued the protest, they would lose their accreditation. In one ear and out the other ... Magoumi responded that the youth delegation leader should have informed them of the rules, and besides, she pointed out, if someone committed murder, would they get a warning that if they did it again they would get arrested? (Really, that was her response!) Our retort that chanting and marching could hardly be equated with murder was waved off by Magoumi as though we were a swarm of gnats.

In the end, Tom got his badge back after pressure was put on the UNFCCC by country delegations. But he lost one whole day of access to the talks. Several of the other delegates never got their badges back. Security had deemed them “part of the protest,” and there was no opportunity for appeal. For Global Justice Ecology Project, the repressive actions of the Climate COP had to be answered with action. We were prepared to put our organisational accreditation on the line. Someone had to stand up for the right of people to participate in decisions regarding their future.

Six of our delegation (including our Board member Hiroshi) were joined by four more youth delegates plus representatives from Focus on the Global South and BiofuelWatch to occupy the lobby of the Maya building. We locked arms in a line, blocking access to the negotiating rooms. All but three of us wore gags that read “UNFCCC”. Those of us without gags shouted slogans such as, “The UN is silencing Indigenous Peoples!” and “The UN is silencing the voices of youth!” - in both English and Spanish.

Warren and Magoumi were on the scene in a flash and I heard them directly behind me trying to get me to turn my attention to them. When I continued yelling slogans, she changed tactics and walked directly in front of me. “Anne, come on, let’s take this outside. We have a place where you can do this all day long if you



want to.” I have to admit to being slightly rattled by having to do my shouting directly over Magoumi’s head, but fortunately, she is quite short. The scene had become another feast for the media, but after about 10 minutes I could sense them tiring of the same old shots, so it was time to move. As soon as we made a motion toward the door (arms still locked), security was on us in a flash and used pain compliance tactics on the two people who bookended our interlocked line - including our 73 year old Board member Hiroshi. Surprise surprise, once we got outside we were not escorted to their designated “protest pit” where permitted protests were allowed to occur, as Magoumi had promised, but rather forced onto a waiting bus and hustled off the premises.

Jazzed with adrenaline, we all felt pretty damned good about what we had just done and the coverage we got - even when the UN security guard on the bus pointed out that if we had done that protest in Germany we would have been arrested. “You’re lucky this is Mexico,” he sneered. Indeed I have been threatened with arrest by German police for holding up paper signs protesting genetically engineered trees outside of a UN Convention on Biological Diversity meeting in Bonn. German police have even less sense of humour than UN security. Nonetheless, those of us on the bus felt elated for taking action - for standing up for the voices of the voiceless.

I have not yet heard from Magoumi or Warren if Global Justice Ecology Project has lost its accreditation to participate in future UN Climate COPs. Or if any of us will be allowed to enter its premises in the future. But those conferences are such energy-sucking, mind-numbing and frustrating that if we are not allowed back in, I can’t say I will have any regrets. Next year’s climate COP will take place in Durban, South Africa, where the UN will face off with the social movements who, against all odds, brought down Apartheid. Now THAT will be something ...

*Orin’s photo essay from the Moon Palace occupation is posted at <http://tiny.cc/ob22m>*

*Anne Petermann is the Executive Director of the Global Justice Ecology Project. <[www.globaljusticeecology.org](http://www.globaljusticeecology.org)>*



Top: Global Justice Ecology Project Board Member Hiroshi Kanno is manhandled by UN Security during the occupation of the Moon Palace. Bottom: GFCMexican RoboCop poses for photos in Cancun. All Photo’s by Langelle/GJEP-GFC



# Indonesian activists speak out against Australia's forest carbon offset schemes

Julia Dehm

**“ We call REDD ‘Ruining Ecological Dignity of Developing Countries’, based on our experience on the ground of how REDD has been implemented. ”**

The idea of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) in developing countries, and trading the ‘saved’ carbon dioxide as an ‘offset’ on carbon markets has gained international political and financial support since it was first proposed by Papua New Guinea and Puerto Rico in 2005. The 2010 United Nations Climate Conference confirmed REDD+ as a key international climate mitigation strategy with \$4.5 billion now committed to kick-start REDD programmes.

The breadth of political and financial support has raised serious alarm bells for social movements asking three fundamental questions about REDD:

- Will it reduce deforestation and assist in tropical forest and biodiversity protection?
- Will it reduce international greenhouse gas emissions?
- Is it just?

Current trends in REDD design and implementation compel an answer in the negative to all three questions. Thus, climate justice and Indigenous rights organisations have been united with a common message: ‘Rights before REDD’ and ‘No REDD!’

In November 2010, Friends of the Earth Australia hosted three Indonesian activists on a speaking tour to share their experiences about the social and environmental consequences of REDD projects and policy in Indonesia: Teguh Surya, campaigns director of WALHI (Friends of the Earth Indonesia), Arie Rompas, the executive director of WALHI in Central Kalimantan, and Pak Muliadi, the secretary general of Aliansi Rakyat Pengelola Gambut (ARPAG), a 7000 strong collective of peasant groups, fisherfolks, rattan handcrafters and rubber collectors from 52 villages in Central Kalimantan. They travelled to Melbourne and Sydney to speak at public forums, NGO roundtables and climate justice workshops; and to Canberra to lobby ministers and public servants about the Kalimantan Forest Carbon Partnership (KFCP), a REDD+ ‘demonstration activity’ funded by the Australian government from the aid budget.

Pak Muliadi forcefully and eloquently gave voice to the concerns of the Dayak communities of Central Kalimantan whose land and livelihoods will be affected by the KFCP. The rights of the Indigenous Dayak people over their land and resources are not recognised by the Indonesian government, and have been progressively encroached upon by mining, logging and

plantation activities, disastrous large-scale development projects such as the Soeharto-era Mega Rice project which drained one million hectares of peatland, and coercive conservation projects which ban traditional livelihood practices in protected areas.

In a 2009 statement ARPAG said: “Today our peatland is facing a new kind of threat by being designated as a carbon sink ... This project will take our land to offset carbon emissions of Northern countries who themselves are reluctant to reduce their fossil fuel consumption.” This threat is extremely serious as REDD schemes will cordon off land and create property rights to carbon embedded in trees and soil to be traded internationally, which risks eroding further the precarious hold Indigenous communities have to their land.

The Indonesian government’s 2009 REDD regulations do not recognise the rights of forest communities or apply international human rights norms such as requiring the free, prior, informed consent of communities for any projects taking place on their lands. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination found these regulations to be discriminatory and urged Indonesia to “review its [REDD] laws ... as well as the way they are interpreted and implemented in practice, to ensure they respect the rights of indigenous peoples to possess, develop, control and use their communal lands.” Despite this, the regulations have not been changed.

The threats to land and livelihood faced by the Dayak people from REDD projects, and the related internal community divisions such schemes create, is unfortunately not unique or isolated. Their stories echo accounts and concerns being raised by forest communities around the world. The Indigenous Environment Network has slammed REDD as a ‘global land grab’ and ‘co2lonialism’. In a Canberra meeting, Teguh Surya said, “We call REDD ‘Ruining Ecological Dignity of Developing Countries’, based on our experience of how REDD has already been implemented on the ground.”

The UNFCCC agreement on REDD from Cancun ‘notes’ but does not require countries to enforce the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples. In particularly weak language, the Cancun agreement asks that certain social and environmental safeguards are ‘promoted and supported’. Given that there are no mechanisms for monitoring, verifying or enforcing these social safeguards, NGOs have slammed such sentiments as farcical.



UN climate conference in Cancun, December 2010. Photo by Ian McKenzie.

## Inspiring stories

Yet, Pak Muliadi also shared inspiring stories of grassroots community efforts to protect the local environment and rehabilitate the peatland ecosystem. Since 1999 the community has replanted 50,000 hectares of endemic trees, rehabilitated 13,000 hectares of rattan forest and 5000 hectares of rubber forest, rehabilitated fish ponds, redeveloped traditional paddy fields and revitalised the customary forest system; as well as educating the local community and entering into dialogue with local and provincial governments and NGOs about the future of the area.

Despite this impressive history of community environmental organising, the international NGOs who have been engaged by AusAID and the Department of Climate Change to implement the KFCP project – Care International, Wetlands International and Borneo Orangutan Survival – have never directly consulted ARPAG and have conducted their ‘community engagement’ in a patronising way that undermines rather than supports local community initiatives. No information has been provided to local peoples about how the KFCP might affect their rights and livelihoods – essential preconditions for any process of genuinely seeking free, prior informed community consent.

Pak Muliadi told Canberra academics and public servants: “Some of the disturbing issues are the lack of clarity regarding the status of our land in the presence of all of these externally imposed projects; the lack of recognition and value placed on the activities that our community has undertaken in response to climate change; and the lack of assurance as to whether we can still have continuous access to the 120,000 hectares that have

been earmarked for the REDD project. We don’t know if we can go in, or whether we are banned from the project area.”

One Australian government powerpoint presentation to the community contained a slide which contained the crude equation: an image of trees as equal to a wad of cash. Muliadi articulated how problematic such messages are: “We are shown a diagram that says you have forests, you measure CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and then you get money. They say it is very easy for you to get money through REDD. Because of REDD, the world is ready to pay. When you have forests, you will have money. When your forest is burned, the money will fly away. The message coming from this presentation has serious impacts on our lives as Dayak people, because in our society we are used to the spirit of caring and sharing. In our meetings, everyone contributes. Nobody will go and demand payment.”

WALHI’s campaign director Teguh Surya elaborated on the environmental and climate shortcomings of Indonesia’s REDD programme. In the international arena, the Indonesian government has embraced the idea of receiving international funds in return for reducing its alarming rate of deforestation (1.18 million hectares were cleared in 2004-5), and at the UN Copenhagen meeting committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 26%, primarily through reductions in deforestation. The government estimates that it could stand to earn US\$2.5–5 billion per year from selling forest carbon offset credits, assuming a carbon price of US\$ 7–20 per tonne CO<sub>2</sub>.

However, the Indonesian government’s public support for REDD is at odds with its plans to expand the palm oil industry and pulpwood plantation industries – the two primary drivers of deforestation in Indonesia – by 20 million and 9 million



*An activist evicted from the UN climate conference in Cancun, December 2010. Photo by Ian McKenzie.*

hectares respectively, which will inevitably involve conversion of forests to industrial tree plantations. Worryingly, Indonesian policy documents envision international REDD funds may actually ‘assist’ and ‘facilitate’ plans to expand these destructive industries.

The government flagged the idea of receiving international funds for such plantations that they characterise as reforestation of degraded land. The risk that REDD monies could go to support monocrop plantations is real, as the Cancun climate agreements fail to define ‘forest’ in a way that distinguishes natural forests from plantations. The key message of all the Indonesian activists was that Australia must take urgent climate action domestically. They called for a total rejection of carbon offsets, as purchasing such credits enables corporations, government and individuals in the North to continue polluting and avoiding necessary emission reductions. For example, Federal Treasury predicts Australia will be offsetting up to half of its total emissions by 2050, allowing for ongoing use of coal and other fossil fuels.

Teguh asked of workshop participants: “As taxpayers of Australia, do you really want to see public money being used to facilitate and drive deforestation and land conflicts in Indonesia? It is very important Australians ask this question of AusAid and the Australian government. REDD is being used to offset the obligations of industrialised countries and to absolve their responsibilities to reduce emissions domestically.”

## Accounting problems

In addition, the Indonesian activists warned of serious methodological and accounting problems associated with the REDD programme. If REDD offset credits do not represent real, verifiable and measurable emission reductions, forest carbon offset scheme risk increasing overall greenhouse gas emissions. For example, it is impossible to guarantee forests protected pursuant to REDD will be protected permanently, given threats such as fire, drought or illegal logging. Similarly, there is an inability

to prevent what is called ‘leakage’ – the risk that if demand for forest products remains unchanged, protecting Indonesia’s forests will simply displace the deforestation to another country. The Indonesian activists continually reminded decision makers that there are many actions Australia can take domestically to protect Indonesia’s forests; primarily reducing demand for timber, pulp and palm oil products which are the key drivers of Indonesian deforestation, and putting a regulatory system in place to prevent illegally logged timber from Indonesian entering the Australian market.

Australian government policy is attempting to use the false solution of forest carbon offsets as a panacea in the notable absence of a real climate policy. It is severely flawed from the perspective of forest protection and greenhouse gas reduction and is profoundly unjust, as it marginalises further Indonesia’s already politically and economically marginalised Indigenous communities. The Friends of the Earth Australia speaking tour helped strengthen the solidarity between Indonesian and Australian climate justice activists to work towards genuine solutions: halting Australian fossil fuel mining, a moratorium on the logging of Indonesian forests and recognition of the land rights of the Dayak people and other Indigenous peoples.

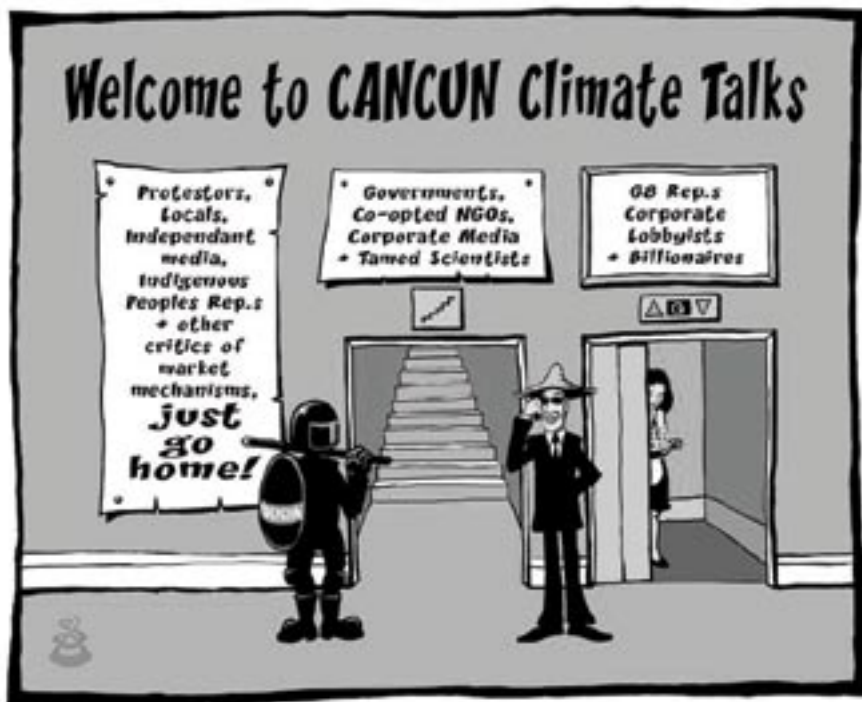
Teguh compellingly argued: “In terms of forest protection in Indonesia, we need to look places like Jambi in Sumatra and Central Kalimantan – forests that have been protected and managed quite well by the community for thousands of years.

If people are truly interested in protecting forests in Indonesia, they just have to look at what has already helped Indonesia protect those forests, and recognise the customary role and rights of Indigenous peoples. Their self-interest is in the protection of the forests, to ensure a clean natural environment so they can sustain their livelihood. This is a clear area where we can learn how to protect forests in Indonesia.”

*Julia Dehm is a member of Friends of the Earth, Melbourne*

# Climate Fallacies at Cancun

Ali Tonak



**“Climate change has usurped all of the underlying reasons for human misery connected in one way or another to nature and this has only made it more difficult to identify and resist them.”**

offensive via treaties such as NAFTA and Plan Puebla Panama. Owing largely to a deep historical tradition of resistance – indigenous and other – there are hundreds of locally based environmental struggles throughout Mexico fighting against the pollution and robbery of local ecosystems and industrial expansion. Despite the diversity of ecological destruction and the communities that have historically resisted it, what happened in the months leading up to the climate summit in Mexico

was a drive on the part of each of these struggles to connect their issue, in one form or another, with that of the climate. This drive reflected a developing trend within the international climate justice movement to rebrand all environmental struggles in terms of climate change.

Protesting at the Climate Summit of the World's Mayors, those resisting the construction of a superhighway slicing through one of the few remaining ecological reserves in Mexico City suddenly found themselves against the highway not because of its displacement of poor neighbourhoods and destruction of undeveloped natural space in order to provide transportation corridors to the rich, but because of the loss of carbon capturing trees and increase in car traffic and thus emissions.

This was also the case for other struggles organised under the National Assembly of the Environmentally Harmed, ranging from those opposed to dams to those against mines. Even the largest farmer organisation in the world, Via Campesina, claimed that “Farmers are cooling the planet.” And so they all travelled to Cancun to counterpose their real solutions to climate change against the false solutions offered by the summit. But what was lacking was a deeper interrogation of the role of the summit, its politics and those purportedly countering it.

What if we had seen a different kind of mobilisation in which these struggles were not towing the climate line in order to assert their relevance to the COP process? What if they actively rejected the summit and its transference of all things environmental into CO2 and degrees Celsius? The spectrum of radical, local and environmental movements that converged on Cancun could have provided the opportunity to forge a more holistic understanding of ecology by not only critiquing the summit

In a CounterPunch article in January 2010 I argued, along with Tim Simons, that the mobilisations organised in Copenhagen during the UN Conference of the Parties (‘COP15’) largely failed due to an unfortunate acceptance of “the financialisation of nature and the indirect reliance on markets and monetary solutions as catalysts for structural change, the obfuscation of internal class antagonisms within states of the Global South in favor of simplistic North-South dichotomies, and the pacification of militant action resulting from an alliance forged with transnational NGOs and reformist environmental groups who have been given minimal access to the halls of power in exchange for their successful policing of the movement.”

A year has passed and with it another UN Conference of the Parties on the climate. COP16 took place in December 2010 at the Mexican resort city of Cancun. Owing to its placement in Mexico rather than Denmark, the summit was an opportunity for participants of the protests to break out of some of the constraining aspects of climate politics. In the following, I will attempt to illustrate how this opportunity was missed as well as one of the central contradictions of the climate movement witnessed in Cancun.

## Ecological devastation in Mexico

The people of Mexico have seen their ecosystems plundered by transnational capital, often originating from its northern neighbour and protected by the Mexican army and police. This has only intensified in recent decades with the neoliberal





Protest at Cancun, December 2010.

as a false solution but also by a total rejection of climate as the overarching environmental issue. (To the movement's credit, in Cancun, the consensus on the street was that the summit was a bankrupt process. This was a breath of fresh air after Copenhagen where so much effort was poured into an 'inside-outside' strategy.) Despite these recent public relations efforts, Mexican social movements confronting eco-devastation are fundamentally grounded in struggles for local land and territory with a clear focus on the marginalised and exploited. In many ways Emiliano Zapata's hundred year-old battle cry of 'Land and Freedom' still rings true for those who are fighting environmental destruction in Mexico and see the revolution as one unfulfilled. Struggles for the environment are grounded in notions of community autonomy and resistance to the state and pose a strong challenge to hegemonic politics through land reclamations, sabotage and community assemblies. These struggles continue to show us that to be effective in the ecological realm we must fight on social terrain, constructing new (or remembering lost) social relations and attacking the current dominant ones while defending what little territory we have and reclaiming more at an faster pace.

### Explaining away social inequalities

In this era of climate change, we hear that climate as an issue provides the glue for a new movement of movements much like globalisation was said to do during the late 1990s. Because weather systems connect us all, climate change can also connect social movements to each other. But the climate as an issue to organise around is full of dangerous pitfalls and is proving to be a strategically unwise platform for those who are fighting for a world free of ecological devastation.

The social effects of extreme weather events such as the frequent floods in Mexico are felt the strongest in the poorest rural and urban populations due to the uneven distribution of wealth, infrastructure and living standards. In our new age of everything climate, the Mexican state has an easy way to deflect anger and social discontent. It isn't government corruption that has caused the deforestation of Tlahuitoltepec in Oaxaca, leading to 80% of this municipality to be buried under mud slides this past September. It isn't the lack of sewage systems in Valle del Cholco on the eastern outskirts of Mexico City that is responsible for the filth that floods their streets after heavy rain. The blame is to be found in the changing climate as President Calderon put it in the run-up to the COP16. At an energy efficiency summit in September, Calderon stated that the climate emergencies Mexico has faced since 2007 included floods in Tabasco, the mudslide mentioned above, and the swine flu epidemic. Calderon joined the ranks of climate heroes when he put in the strongest terms that: "The truth is that there is global warming, there is climate change and there is terrible damage to the population. I am indignant and it bothers me that there are still people who are in doubt of this phenomena."

But this is not only a rhetorical misdirection on part of those in power since the same logic can be seen amongst the left. Whether it is counting-off the number of climate change victims by NGOs within the COP16 summit or well-respected authors uncritically repeating that "climate change is already responsible for 150,000 deaths annually," increasingly we hear that people are dying because of climate change. When populations are forced to migrate due to soil depletion and die during the journey, have they been killed by climate change or by militarised border regimes? When powerful hurricanes spread chaos and destruction in urban areas such as New Orleans, do the poor die because of climate

change or because of institutional racism and structural violence that places little value on their lives? Climate change has usurped all of the underlying reasons for human misery connected in one way or another to nature and this has only made it more difficult to identify and resist them.

### **A central contradiction of the movement**

A central contradiction of the climate movement is its uneasy alliance with the so-called pink tide in South America. Amongst those riding this tide, Bolivian President Evo Morales does have a certain resemblance to a rock star, with his off-the-cuff remarks on masculinity and his ball kicking (pun intended) during soccer games. But it would behoove us to approach him critically rather than starry-eyed. Unfortunately this was not what we saw at the Via Campesina Evo Fest during the closing day of the alternative forum when the president himself came to woo the crowds.

The climate movement would do well to rethink its position vis-à-vis extractivist socialist governments, especially when the movements who helped bring these governments to power are currently finding themselves in opposition to them. When Evo Morales convened the People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth last April as an alternative to the COP there was an alternative conference to the alternative. Mesa 18 gathered the voices that took a critical position to the Bolivian government (at the risk of being labeled agents of the US). In the Final Declaration of Mesa 18 they proclaimed: "We renounce imperialism, transnationals and the so called progressive Latin American governments that implement mega energy and infrastructure projects under the [Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America] in any of Latin American territories – particularly in indigenous territories and protected areas – which are designed by banks, business men and private builders with a neoliberal and exploitative vision." Unfortunately the sentiment of Mesa 18 was not echoed in Cancun.

Only two weeks after the Cancun summit this contradiction manifested itself in an explosive manner as social movements in Bolivia took to the streets during massive strikes to pressure Morales to re-instate the fuel subsidies he had just rescinded. With this action Morales had effectively increased the price of gasoline by 73%. The gasolinazo was fought, sometimes by violent street protests, and Morales had to cave in and re-implement the subsidy program. In this instance where does the climate movement find itself? On the side of struggling Bolivian people or the Morales government? This question is further complicated when one considers that this popular struggle in Bolivia was one over access to affordable fossil fuels.

### **It's true: you don't need a weatherman**

In February 2011, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation reported that food commodity prices had reached their highest levels since they began keeping track in 1990. Amongst other reasons cited as triggering this increase was the weather. Although finance capitalism is often regarded by many as natural a force as the weather, it has been amply shown that the former has been the primary generator of food shortages by way of wild

***“When populations are forced to migrate due to soil depletion and die during the journey, have they been killed by climate change or by militarised border regimes? ”***



*Bolivian President Evo Morales in Cancun. Photo by Ian McKenzie.*

speculation, not erratic climate. In the fight for a world where the only determining factor for starvation is indeed the weather we cannot afford to confuse the two.

This is not to overlook that industrial capitalism eliminates any possibility of ecological harmony humanity might aspire to have with nature including the climate. Its enmity comes in the form of direct biopolitical attacks upon bodies (human and non-human) as well as by poisoning ecosystems on levels that range from the genetic to climactic. The destructive accumulation of capital manifests itself beyond economics and accumulates in the form of DDT, GMOs and greenhouse gases amongst hundreds of other examples.

It is important to confront the UN COP process because of the power it has to implement incredibly dangerous schemas such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, which throws forests further into to market logic and facilitates the continuation of industrial pollution.

Not only, as it was argued in Cancun, because it is a false solution to climate change but because it is the perfect example of how climate change is being used for a fresh round of green accumulation. But in doing so we should remember that the real struggle to stop the destruction of the planet will not be waged in the UN halls of power littered by politicians and their power-broker NGOs but in the struggle of the under-classes of the world against the concentration of wealth and the institutions such as the COP that have been set up to maintain it.

# What Does it Mean to Take Direct Action for Climate?

Ariel Salleh

**“Direct action may mean top down state regulation designed to counter the ‘indirect action’ of market processes.”**

For the New Left and counter-culture of the 1960s, direct action meant a hands-on grassroots challenge to the status quo. Direct action groups used non-violent civil disobedience to achieve political ends. The key feature of direct action was personal responsibility and engagement – and the exercise of power was from the ‘ground up’. This was implied in the title of the old Australian socialist newspaper *Direct Action*. But after three decades of neoliberalism, things have changed.

Today, direct action may mean top down state regulation designed to counter the ‘indirect action’ of market processes. In the last issue of *Chain Reaction*, James Goodman and Stuart Rosewarne of the Climate Action Research Network use the term for proposed government interventions to build a low carbon economy. These include progressive taxes to facilitate the introduction of renewables and government incentives to change land use patterns through reforestation and organic agriculture.

The authors frame this call for direct action by the state inside an overarching goal: ‘... we need to direct the economy and society to regenerative sufficiency, away from the productivist exploitation of natural resources (in particular fossil fuels)’. But in Australia right now there is a serious gap between the ‘we’ of citizens who want this transformation and the government ‘we’ who is asked to take ‘direct action’.

In a capitalist or market-based society, entrepreneurs exploit natural resources in order to manufacture commodities for sale at a profit. Accumulated profit is re-invested in further nature consumption and leads to further profit. Economists describe this escalating cycle of accumulation as growth. Neoliberal governments, including federal Labor in Australia, are obliged to obey World Bank and World Trade Organisation mandates not to interfere with this growth – generated by supposedly ‘free markets and free trade’.

For this reason, when it comes to protecting the environment, such governments find themselves ‘tied up’ by the principle of ‘open competition’. In this context, the argument for regulative climate measures by Goodman and Rosewarne is politically radical. Moreover, they go on to say: ‘New norms of development are required to shift to forms of regenerative growth, growth that enhances ecology rather than exploiting and diminishing it’ [my italics].

## Can economic growth enhance ecological growth?

Can economic growth enhance ecological growth? It is important not to confuse economic growth with growth of an ecological kind. Too often, public discourse on climate change slip-slides from the language of economics to the language of ecology, without appreciating that where production is geared to accumulation, the two kinds of growth are antithetical.

Mainstream perspectives on climate change from Stern to Garnaut continually promote ‘economic’ solutions for ‘ecological’ problems. But it is misguided to assume that imputing a dollar value to units of CO<sub>2</sub> and manipulating these figures through taxes, trading, and even derivatives, can affect environmental functions in any way.

The regeneration of biospheric relations involves the maintenance of complex material interconnections between solar energy, soil, water, vegetation, and air. The earthly environment with its atmospheric climate is a web of functional transactions – and ultimately, the summer floods in Queensland and Victoria can be traced to human disruptions of this web. The retreat of these waters will influence groundwater, soil mineralisation, and plant colonies – whose interaction in turn, will determine future climate patterns. Governments need to adopt this ‘principle of reciprocity’ as the first premise of their reconstruction effort.

Looking back over the history of humanity–nature relations, hydrologists Juraj Kohutiar and Michal Kravcik from the People and Water NGO in Slovakia describe the activities that have destabilised global climate patterns like this: “... it is deforestation, industrial agriculture, and urbanisation that determine climate by draining land, so that more solar energy re-enters the atmosphere as sensible heat, rather than latent heat of evaporation. Human made ‘hot plates’ lead to irregular precipitation and other climate destabilisation effects, but these can be mitigated through rainwater conservation and re-vegetation.”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the rise of urban consumer lifestyles, the industrial division of labour, bureaucratic governments, and abstract forms of scientific expertise, disconnect people from direct sensuous understanding of how nature works and how their own bodies



*Climate Camp, Muswellbrook, NSW, December 2010. Photo by Falk Hermenau.*

are a material part of it. Few understand that water evaporation is the single most important cause of energy movement and temperature control in the biosphere. Holding on to water is essential to recovery of the global climate.

Typically and sadly, a day or so after the recent Victorian floods, ABC Radio played the voice of a farmer saying that ‘as soon as the water drops enough, we’ll be able to bring the machines on to the property to pump the rest away’. The irony will not be lost on those who can link dessicated soils, unhinged climates, and raging floods, on the one hand, with the human fetish for carbon emitting machines, on the other.

### **Keeping water and carbon cycles in sync**

Holding water is not only essential to the recovery of climate, it is equally essential to the recovery of soil fertility. The farmer who would pump water off his land is not only ‘mining carbon’ – but effectively burning money. Human interference with landscape vegetation causes erosion and pollutes streams. The loss of fertile carbon matter to the sea is entropic, collapsing the energy transformations by which climate is regulated.

According to the eminent limnologist Wilhelm Ripl from the Technical University of Berlin: “Under natural conditions order is created by interactions between water, temperature, chemical gradients, ground surface, and organisms. However, in the ‘developed’ landscape, order is replaced by randomness ... dissipative structures balance terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, returning short water cycles to the atmosphere. This ecosystem integrity benefits food production as well as climate.”<sup>2</sup>

Australian farmer Peter Andrews agrees, and in his view, good farming is about keeping the earth’s water and carbon

cycles in sync. Together with landscape manager Duane Norris, he points out that: “Early settlement of the continent by people with European cultural assumptions disrupted established interactions of water, soil, and plants resulting in lost fertility. Moreover, agricultural practices such as clearing, burning, ploughing, draining, and irrigation, have implications for global warming. Soils hold twice as much carbon as the atmosphere, and three times as much as vegetation. But carbon in exposed soil oxidises releasing CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere.”<sup>3</sup>

These pioneers of Natural Sequence Farming techniques suggest that farmers on the oldest, driest continent on earth, are well placed to become agents in the mitigation of unstable climate patterns. The key is planting, restoration of Australia’s unique hydrological systems, and groundwater recharge. If these practices were widely adopted, communities in the threatened Murray River Basin might have a vibrant future.

### **Why the single-issue focus on carbon?**

The international climate debate has been colonised by a reductionist, single-issue focus on carbon. This is not surprising because it is fairly easy to measure emissions, and therefore, for economists to attach a price to them. But as noted, the carbon cycle and the water cycle are actually intertwined, so the question arises – what is the material referent of this notional price?

Equally, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are interconnected with environmental imposts such as run-off from paved urban areas or toxic chemical releases from factories. Agro-industrial meat production results not only in methane emissions, but exorbitant water use, vegetation loss, and soil compaction. Cash crop development projects from rosebuds to biofuels – ideas exported by the EU or US to the

'Two Thirds World' – clear fell tree cover, dry out land, and set regional warming in train, by breaking down local evaporation–precipitation cycles. If water in its multiple phases – gas, liquid, and solid – is invaluable to both climate stabilisation and soil fertility, the mediation of groundwater, soil, and atmospheric conditions is managed by another 'invaluable' which is vegetation.

Czech plant physiologist Jan Pokorný explains the micro-physics of this: "Ecosystems use solar energy for self-organisation and cool themselves by exporting entropy to the atmosphere as heat. These energy transformations are achieved through evapotranspiration, with plants as 'heat valves' ... While global warming is commonly attributed to atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, the research shows water vapour has a concentration two orders of magnitude higher than other greenhouse gases. It is critical that landscape management protects the hydrological cycle with its capacity for dissipation of incoming solar energy."<sup>4</sup>

For a proactively regulating federal Labor government, this analysis of nature's functional complexity, and the need to protect and enhance it as Australia's primary asset, suggests a rationale for the creation of new 'green jobs' – that is to say, 'real' green jobs. Mining and manufacture for the sale of renewables do not involve green jobs because these activities dis-integrate the metabolic web of water-soil-plant transfers that hold an environment together.

Conversely, in Europe, the People and Water NGO is modelling real green jobs by restoring local water (and carbon) cycles through catchment rehabilitation programs. This provides training and employment, eco-sufficient community development, cultural identity, and self-worth for those who have been economically marginalised by industrial production and the accumulation society.

Could there be scope in Australia for something like this – a bipartisan, hands-on, 'direct action' response to climate change? Some time ago, the leader of the Liberal Opposition Tony Abbott called for 'a green corps'. Surely this must appeal right across the blue-red-green political spectrum? Nature is after all, the basis of material survival for all classes; an intact ecosystem is the real economic bottom line. Yet if Abbott was prepared to steal a leaf from Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps, neither ecologists nor economists are talking to the public about the potential of post-flood reconstruction. Asked for a media comment on the governments proposed flood levy, Professor Warwick McKibben from the ANU did not envisage social, economic, and ecological benefits accruing from the 'free gift' of rainwater; rather, it was just 'an economic slow down coming from mother nature'.<sup>5</sup>

And so to a further meaning of 'direct action': maybe the deepest and most radical sense of the word exists in overcoming the humanity versus nature split that 'we' westerners, carry inside ourselves. The dominant global culture is built on a profound dissociation from its material core, and this lack of integration shows up in the gap between ecological and economic reason.

Economics is ill-equipped for dealing with long evolved dissipative structures in the interplay of sunshine, water, soil, and plants. Humans taught to think of themselves as 'over and above nature' look right past its complex regulative orders; capacities that make ecosystems active agents in climate control. It is



Climate Camp, Muswellbrook, NSW, December 2010. Photo by Tessa Dowdell.

not easy to speak of nature as an 'independent variable' in the equations of physics or the economic models that echo them.

The climate crisis calls 'us' to discover and address the root source of human dissociation from nature – and that invites not only hands-on direct action, but self-searching in relation to our own taken for granted reliance on an irrational and destructive economic system. Strong sustainability will mean empowering local communities and the natural flows that nurture them.

While business-as-usual promotes the climate crisis as a chance to sell more 'stuff' ([www.storyofstuff.com](http://www.storyofstuff.com)), including carbon derivatives, many climate justice advocates see the crisis as a chance for people to reconnect their humanity with nature by inventing ways of living eco-sufficiently.

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# In search of Utopia

*Fed up with city life, climate activists Isabelle Fremeaux and John Jordan set out across Europe in search of Utopian communities. This is what they found.*

The future is not what it used to be. Our Utopian imagination has atrophied in the stifling atmosphere of apocalyptic predictions: a climate catastrophe, energy shortages, mass extinctions, economic meltdowns, resource wars and intensifying social injustice.

It's a lot easier to imagine the world ending than changing for the better. But it is exactly when Utopia becomes unimaginable that it is most needed. Not as an escapist Neverland, nor as a universal system or perfect future, but as the constant wrench in the gut that reminds us that we do not have to accept the crumbs of the present.

We had had enough of our lives in London: a couple in a flat, constantly staring at computer screens, always hooked into the internet, never using our hands to make things, rarely touching living systems, consuming too much energy, and working too hard. Despite being activists in the direct action ecological justice movements, we felt there was a chasm between our words and our deeds. Our protests had always been models of non-hierarchical, ecological life – reclaim the streets parties, the rebel clown army, summit mobilisations, and so on – but they were just temporary, cracks in capitalism that closed up as soon as we returned home.

We wanted to find a way to change our lives radically, despite capitalism. So three years ago we set off on a journey, seven months on the road visiting 11 Utopian communities across Europe. We wanted to taste other ways of loving and eating, producing and sharing things, deciding together and rebelling, ones that lasted longer than sparks in the dark.

Out of this trip would come inspiration for our dream of setting up our own Utopian community, and a film-book to share the experience with others. Combining travel-writings with a DVD, the book would be a travelogue, analysing the communities, their practices and their histories, whilst the attached film, shot during the journey, would take the form of a poetic road movie in the tradition of Utopian literature, set in an imagined post-capitalist future.

## Halting the suicide machine

When we set off in the summer of 2007, the world was in a very different shape than today. Our first outline of the project said



Top: Marinaleda. Bottom: Dancing in Christiania. Photos by Isabelle Fremeaux and John Jordan.

that the film would explore 'a fictional era following a global economic and ecological collapse'. That fictional era became frighteningly real as our journey bracketed the first winds of the financial hurricane.

Our first night was spent dodging the police to illegally build a week-long eco-village, the Camp for Climate Action, on the edges of Heathrow airport. Despite the camp's temporary nature, the Climate Camp movement redefined the Utopian spirit for us. It was both the creation of a deeply democratic and ecological community, and the launch pad for direct actions that aimed to halt the suicide machine, in this case the building of a third runway. It was essential for us to start our journey in a space that combined creation and resistance. They are the entwined threads of radical change, and we have to bring them back together after two centuries ravaged by the split between those who want to create an alternative society and those fighting the existing one.

By the time the circus tents, wind turbines and field kitchens had been packed away, news filtered through that the sub-prime mortgage bubble had begun to burst in the US. A week later, at the Landmatters permaculture co-operative on the top of a Devon hill, where life is lived by following nature's patterns, we stayed in off-grid benders with wi-fi but no running water. By building cheap low-eco-footprint housing on their own agricultural land, Landmatters had challenged British planning law, proving that living off the land need not just be the domain of the rich or large-scale industrial farmers.

The choppy channel and a long drive across Spain brought us to an anarchist school, self-managed as a non-hierarchical

**“ Our protests had always been models of non-hierarchical, ecological life – reclaim the streets parties, the rebel clown army, summit mobilisations, and so on – but they were just temporary, cracks in capitalism that closed up as soon as we returned home. ”**

community of children and adults, where even the 18-month-olds participated in decision-making assemblies. Managing every aspect, from cooking to curriculum, the children taught us how freedom and responsibility are dependent on each other. The myth of individualistic ‘freedom’ melted away when we saw seven-year-olds resolve conflicts in the playground by holding consensus-based meetings. These children understood and responded to the needs of each other whilst being absolutely aware of their own free wills and desires. This was education for empathy, learning to know the other as much as the self, the kind of education desperately needed as we enter a period of collapse, where blaming ‘the other’ becomes the norm and authoritarianism rises.

Moving south through parched and dusty landscapes, we reached the frying pan of Andalusia, where the precarious agricultural day workers of Marinaleda reminded us that progress is made through disobedience. Jobless, landless and with nothing to lose, in the 1980s they had evicted the priest and police from their village of 3000 souls. Since then they had used direct action and sabotage to expropriate 12,000 hectares from the local duke, built several co-operative factories, organised a self-built housing system for \$20 a month and set up a TV station, surfing illegally on Discovery Channel’s wavelength. Within a generation, the village had gone from being one of the most desolate places in Europe to one of its most radical. The town hall motto ‘Marinaleda – A Utopia towards peace’ had become a lot more than an empty municipal slogan.

### **No keys, no mortgage, lots of time**

Autumn approached, and we turned east just as the shocking scale of the sub-prime debts began to reverberate through the financial system. For a month, we savoured the freedom of life without mortgages, passing through two stupendous squats. At Can Masdeu, around a crumbling old leper colony on the verdant hills that overlook Barcelona, activists had opened the overgrown terraces to dozens of elderly gardeners from the working-class districts of the city. Fresh food now flowed from the gardens and unexpected friendships were nurtured. Further

east, nestled in the valleys of France’s Cévennes, was La Vieille Vallette, an entire hamlet squatted and peppered with gothic gargoyles and sprouting medieval towers, built with the punk energy of its resident arti-culteurs (a merger of farmer and artist), proud to own no house keys.

Sharing lives with people with virtually no money but plenty of time and space to experiment with and create alternative forms of everyday life, we pondered the culture of private home ownership that was pushed during the 1930s. The theory was that if workers were indebted to a mortgage, they were less likely to go on strike. At a time of crisis, not unlike the one we find ourselves in now, the prison of debt was the perfect plan for keeping the status quo. Whether it’s the economy or our ecology, the limitless obscenity of capitalism demands impossible rates of return on the resources that it exploits, amassing debts that can never be repaid.

We could have just as easily traced out our trip with a map of ecological collapse. As we crossed through the coastal cities of the Southern Mediterranean, we heard that the recession of the Arctic sea-ice was more violent than ever. The instalments of the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change fourth assessment report were gradually released as our van pumped its carbon into the atmosphere. They read like the plot of a dystopian sci-fi novel – almost everything frozen on Earth was melting, deserts were spreading, seas acidifying, hurricanes intensifying.

We headed for the mountains, via an organic farm, Cravirola, where private property had been abolished. Then on to Longo Mai, the grandmother of post-1968 communities, where one night we promised each other that we never wanted to live anywhere where we could not see the stars. With its own 24-hour radio station, flocks of sheep, free wine, herbalists, bakery, three regular political journals and decades of international activist organising, this place was just one node in an archipelago of eight other Longo Mai communities spread across Europe. It gave us hope that radical collective living could last on a large networked scale.

But those that worked the land there spoke of droughts and of the difficulties of farming now it was becoming impossible to



*Can Masdeu, a squat near Barcelona, where fresh food flows and unexpected friendships are nurtured. Photo by Isabelle Fremeaux and John Jordan*

predict seasons anymore. It was a clear reminder that we haven't got much time to waste and that the question is no longer simply how we overcome capitalism, but how we simultaneously survive civilisation's decline and build resilience.

### **Putting the 'coeur' back into courage**

The snow began to fall as we drove closer to the edge of Europe. By the time we arrived in the frozen shells of Serbia's bankrupt factories, the cracks in the capitalist system had spread. The blood flow, credit, was drying up. Whether it's the economy or our ecology, the limitless obscenity of capitalism demands impossible rates of return on the resources that it exploits, amassing debts that can never be repaid. 'Overshoot and overspend' is the inevitable mantra of civilization.

But in Zrenjanin, Serbia's industrial heartland, we saw people daring to take back what was rightfully theirs, refusing privatisation and job cuts. In two of the town's factories, workers had occupied their own workplace. It had all begun when workers at Jugoremedija, a local pharmaceutical factory, won a three-year-long strike, reclaimed their plant from its corrupt new owners and managed it themselves with considerable commercial success. The example of such a complex process being owned and run by its workers inspired others to refuse privatisation in the name of 'transition to democracy' and follow suit.

When crisis enters the psyche of a culture, a crossroads of possibilities appears. One way involves being paralysed by fear, the other being moved by courage. With its roots in the French word 'coeur', courage means literally being in touch with one's heart. If all we change are the outer structures of society, the danger is that old patterns of power will return. Our emotional landscapes need transforming as much as our ways of life.

It was at ZEGG, in the shell of an ex-Stasi base in the depths of deprived eastern Germany, that we experienced how even our most entrenched emotional structures can be transformed. Conflicts over money, power or sex (often all three simultaneously) have destroyed numerous utopian communities. The founders of ZEGG believed that humanity could never live in peace whilst we continue to fear our erotic selves. Through techniques that built radical forms of trust and transparency, lasting 30 years amongst 100 people, they have practised 'free love', conquering jealousy and believing that the expression of greatest love is to enable her or his beloved to be as free as possible.

Our minds blown, our bodies tired of travelling, we rested at our final destination for a month, but it was hardly enough time to open up the complexities of Christiania, the squatted and self-managed 'Freetown', set up 40 years ago in sprawling barracks nested amongst lakes, a stone's throw from Copenhagen's city centre. Apart from the desire to run their own society with their own rules and reject private property, the only thing that seemed to unite the 1000 Christianites was a desire to live somewhere where everyone was different. It was a perfect conclusion to our journey: the understanding that Utopia is the right to choose your own Utopia; that the problem has been singular solutions, blueprints and abstract ideologies; that what we need at this key moment of history is a previously unimaginable multitude of radical creative solutions.

Ten days after we returned to London, the financial house of cards tumbled. According to the Financial Times, it was to be "the day that the dream of global free-market capitalism died". A stream of mega-bailouts, trillions of dollars, began flowing from taxpayers to bankers. In the end they chose to save the financial system not the climate, at the expense of the poor and the planet. We couldn't help wonder what decisions would have



Marinalda Hall, Spain. Image source: <http://pathsthroughutopia.wordpress.com/page/2/>

been taken if the world's economies had been run like that of Christiania, by consensus democracy.

### The subversive power of happiness

Such utopian experiences are where we should turn for inspiration. The future belongs to them, because they are already living it. They are not demanding change but creating it directly. Whilst never perfect and often difficult, they are the laboratories that are remaking our world from its edges. Places where we can experience lives that re-orientate our culture away from the features of collapsing empires that archaeologist Ronald Wright describes as 'sticking to entrenched beliefs and practices, robbing the future to pay the present, spending the last reserves of natural capital on a reckless binge of excessive wealth and glory'.

Happiness has always been dangerous to capitalism, and perhaps we won't move on until we realise that Utopia is not 'no place', but 'this place'. We have to open time and space to rehearse these other ways of being and doing, producing and relating, governing and feeling, and the more of us who do it the more likely we are to contaminate the wider social sphere. Christianity rose up from tiny groups working at the edges of the Roman Empire. Capitalism evolved from feudalism in a similar way. Post-capitalism will do exactly the same.

But even if the future turns out to be a dystopian nightmare, simply trying to live in the present differently and building rebel friendships will be worth it. Satisfying our own material and personal needs is in itself an act of resistance, as Charles F. Kettering, director of General Motors Research Laboratories, made clear when he wrote an article on the eve of the 1929 stock market crash entitled 'Keep the Consumer Dissatisfied'. In it he argued that the key to economic prosperity was the

**“What we need at this key moment of history is a previously unimaginable multitude of radical creative solutions.”**

organised creation of dissatisfaction. If everyone had exactly what they wanted, they would never buy anything new.

Happiness has always been dangerous to capitalism, and perhaps we won't move on until we realise that Utopia is not something out there. It is not 'no place', but 'this place'. It is about belonging now, here, and here now. It is about being so thoroughly in the present that the future belongs to us. It is what Ernst Bloch called the 'Utopian Moment': the split second before anything is done, where everything is possible ... Why wait?

*The film-book 'Paths Through Utopias' will be published by Editions Zones in France in February 2011. It will be toured around Europe with a pedal-powered cinema in 2011. [www.utopias.eu](http://www.utopias.eu)*

*This article was originally published in the New Internationalist magazine, December 2010, [www.newint.org](http://www.newint.org)*

# The Transition: Getting to a Sustainable and Just World

## *The Transition: Getting to a Sustainable and Just World*

*Ted Trainer*

2010, Envirobook, 330 pages. \$30

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## *Ted Trainer summarises the basic points of his latest book:*

Most current discussions of global problems, solutions and strategies are mistaken. The problems (environment destruction, resource depletion, Third World poverty and underdevelopment, armed conflict, social breakdown and a falling quality of life) are far bigger than most people realise, and they cannot be solved by technical advance within a society whose basic structures and values creates them.

We are entering an era of intense and insoluble resource scarcity. We must develop ways of living well on much lower rates of resource use. The basic cause of the predicament is far too much producing and consuming going on. We are far beyond sustainable levels of resource consumption, 'living standards' and of GDP. Rich world rates can't be kept up for long and could never be extended to all the world's people. Yet our supreme goal is economic growth, i.e., increasing production and consumption without limit!

The global economy is massively unjust. It delivers most of the world's resources to the few in rich countries, and gears Third World productive capacity to rich-world super-markets, not to meeting the needs of the world's poor billions. Rich countries must move down to living on their fair share of global wealth. These faults cannot be fixed within or by a society driven by growth, market forces, production for profit, or affluence. These are the causes of the global sustainability and justice problems. Consumer society cannot be reformed to make it sustainable or just; it must be largely replaced by a society with fundamentally different structures.

The alternative has to be THE SIMPLER WAY, a society

based on non-affluent lifestyles within mostly small and highly self-sufficient local economies under local participatory control and not driven by market forces or the profit motive, and with no economic growth. There must be an enormous cultural change, away from competitive, individualistic acquisitiveness.

The book details the reasons why this Simpler Way vision is workable and attractive, promising a higher quality of life than most people in rich countries have at present. What then is the most effective transition strategy? The book argues that most strategies, including green and red-left as well as conventional strategies, are mistaken.

The essential aim is not to fight against consumer-capitalist society, but to build the alternative to it. This revolution cannot be achieved from the top, either by governments, green parties or proletarian revolutions. This can only be a grass-roots transition led by ordinary people working out how they can cooperatively make their local communities viable as the global economy increasingly fails to provide. The Eco-village and Transition Towns movements have begun the general shift.

Local self-sufficiency initiatives such as community gardens and Permaculture must be informed by the awareness that reforms to consumer-capitalist society cannot achieve a sustainable and just society. Nothing of lasting significance will be achieved unless it is clearly understood that our efforts in these local initiatives are the first steps to the eventual replacement of the present society by one which is not driven by market forces, profit, competition, growth or affluence.

This awareness is far from sufficiently evident in present green initiatives. The most important contribution activists can make is to join community gardens, Transition Towns movements etc. in order to help to develop this wider and radical global vision within participants.

The last chapter offers a practical strategy that can be implemented in existing suburbs, towns and neighbourhoods. The book is addressed mainly to activists, hoping that it will help green people to apply their scarce energies to the most effective purposes.

It should also be of interest to a wide range of students of social theory as it deals at length with crucial issues to do with social cohesion and change, sustainability, Marxism, Anarchism, economics, government, education, Third World development, globalisation, settlement design, limits to growth, values, global peace and justice, and the nature of the good society.



# Sequestered

## *Sequestered*

*Max Overton and Jim Darley*

*2010, 200pp*

*E-book, available for US\$4.95 (PayPal or credit card)*

*from [www.sequesteredbooks.com](http://www.sequesteredbooks.com)*

## *Max Overton and Jim Darley from Townsville outline their novel 'Sequestered':*

Sequestered is a gripping suspense novel based on current issues; it is reality-based and not science fiction. We chose to present the truth about the sequestration scheme as a novel because a scientific paper detailing the scheme would be lost in rhetoric generated by the coal industry and its tame scientists.

Consider how wonderful the geo-sequestration of CO<sub>2</sub> would be: the process requires about one third more coal and would delay the phasing out of coal for many years. Researchers developing sequestration receive funds contributed by the coal industry and especially billions by governments, but recently there has been little publicity about sequestration. Perhaps the costs are climbing, but hopefully governments have at last learned that CO<sub>2</sub>, contrary to 'sequestration publicity', is not harmless, but in those vast quantities and at high pressures and temperatures found deep underground, it is extremely dangerous.

Unlike oil or gas, supercritical CO<sub>2</sub> cleans minor passages in rock layers and is certain to leak. This makes the whole exercise futile and could endanger lives in low lying areas, since CO<sub>2</sub> is heavier than air. The chance of a blowout is another matter: we consider the chance of a blowout as 'high'. If the chance of a blowout was one in a billion, would you permit building a geo-sequestration site – if you know that the power and destruction from one cubic kilometre of supercritical CO<sub>2</sub> on release is much greater than the largest hydrogen bomb tested? A medium coal fired power station would produce one cubic kilometre of CO<sub>2</sub> during its working life (equal to 50 billion large CO<sub>2</sub> cylinders!). The enthusiasm within the industry is unabated, so at an industry meeting a few months ago a plan to eventually sequester at least 10 cubic kilometres was unveiled.

Environmentalists have been called luddites and worse: what can be said about sequestration proponents? Many must have known all along that the danger is huge, but it was a convenient way to stop the phasing out of coal and thereby also slowing the development of alternatives for about 10 years. Appended to the book are a few pages of plain, but scientifically sound explanations of 'global warming', greenhouse gases, the role of CO<sub>2</sub>, and carbon geo-sequestration.

*Contact: Jim Darley at [pst@proscitech.com](mailto:pst@proscitech.com), [jim@sequesteredbooks.com](mailto:jim@sequesteredbooks.com)*



*A sample chapter is posted at [www.sequesteredbooks.com](http://www.sequesteredbooks.com)*

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### Katoomba-Leura Climate Action Now

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### Mukwano Australia

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### Ride Planet Earth

<http://rideplanetearth.org>

### Sustainable Energy Now (WA) Perth

[www.sen.asn.au](http://www.sen.asn.au) <[contact@sen.asn.au](mailto:contact@sen.asn.au)>

### Tulele Peisa (PNG)

'Sailing the waves on our own'.  
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# Lock the Gate

## National Action

### Tara, Queensland

**When:** 29 April - 4 May

**Where:** Tara Showgrounds  
(300km west of Brisbane)

**What:** 4 days of  
workshops, forums and  
direct action.

Join farmers and environmentalists from across Australia for a four-day event with workshops and direct action at Tara in Queensland. Local organisers, the Western Downs Alliance, are fighting plans for a huge gas field on the Tara rural residential estates, home to more than 2,000 people.

Come along to build Australia-wide community action against the emerging toxic coal seam gas industry. Stand up for clean water, good farmland & healthy communities.

[www.lockthegate.org.au](http://www.lockthegate.org.au)

