Fighting for the Future

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INTRODUCTION

The issues are clear: either we advance to a society geared to meet human needs and to live sustainably with the environment or we allow corporate profits to continue to dominate and see humanity and our planet destroyed. We are at a crossroads – people and environment before profit or profit before people and our planet.

The need for a sustainable environment is overpowering. The struggle over environmental issues within the capitalist system is crucial for the future of human beings and the planet. Unless environmental damage and climate change are brought under control, global catastrophe will result from a collapse of the planet's ecosystem.

The insatiable drive for profits by capitalism is leading to irreversible and catastrophic climate change. Capitalist governments – and the giant corporations they work for – are refusing to act on the desperate warnings of the great majority of the world's leading scientists to avert the climate crisis.

This threat arises from the drive for profit at all costs by a tiny rich elite and the giant corporations that now own or control most of the world's wealth.

We have 10 years to make drastic changes. The latest Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change report gives us until 2030 to make radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, and until 2050 to reduce these emissions to zero if we are to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

A popular movement for change is growing around the world. It aims to dismantle the destructive policies that have led us to this uniquely perilous moment of human history, and to move toward a world system that gives priority to human rights and needs, not the prerogatives of capital.

However, the forces that are responsible for the crisis we face today are working to make sure that the capitalist system which creates their profits will endure. And they are powerful – by 2017, 71 of the world's largest 100 economies were corporations, and only 29 were national governments.

The stakes in the bitter class war that is taking shape are immense and arise from the nature of capitalism. Capitalism is an unsustainable system. The scientific and technological progress which has occurred under capitalism is directed towards profiting from the exploitation of humankind and nature. This has been the major contributor to the development of the current environmental crisis.

Humanity now possesses the knowledge and resources to provide food and clothing for everyone but capitalism prevents the realization of the potential it has

created. The anarchy of capitalist production means that technological advances produce job losses rather than prosperity and that plentiful food is accompanied by starvation. Humanity's growing knowledge of the natural world is paralleled by environmental destruction.

Disaster is certainly possible, but we must not give in to despair. If we fight, we may lose; if we don't fight, we will definitely lose and humanity will lose its future.

It is time to radically re-think the way we live and function as a society. As the planetary crisis accelerates, we must confront the reality that what we do now will forever alter the course of humanity and all life on Earth.

Now more than ever we must fight for a better system. Our lives are more important than their profits.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The science is clear. Humans cannot continue to violate the fundamental laws of nature or ignore the basic science with impunity. As oceans rise and temperatures soar, ecosystems will continue to collapse. As resources diminish, social unrest and civilisation collapse are likely. We are facing a catastrophic and possibly terminal breakdown of the relationship between human society and the natural world on which we depend.

Global warming is an outcome of a capitalist productive system based on fossil fuels for its energy. It emits vast amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, yet counts these costs to the environment and humanity as 'external' to its profit driven industry. Those apologists for capital who strongly deny the seriousness of the emerging situation, or claim it will correct itself through market mechanisms, show they do not grasp the nature of the catastrophe into which a system based on unrestrained profit driven growth is driving humanity.

In 2010, global CO2 emissions were 33.1 billion tonnes. In 2019, global CO2 emissions were 36.8 billion tonnes. In the last ten years, despite all the talk of renewable energy and sustainable development, global carbon emissions rose by 11.1 per cent.

Even if every country on the planet were to go carbon neutral today, the residual effect of historic emissions will still take us to 1.5°C degrees of global warming by around 2030. Unless we radically cut fossil fuel use by this date we will go over the carbon 425-450 parts per million (ppm) climate cliff and lose control of the planet's and humanity's future.

The fires that ravaged Australia in 2020 provide a taste of the destruction we face if we do not rapidly change course. Vast areas of the planet, including many densely populated coastal areas, will become uninhabitable. Hundreds of millions of people will be displaced. Entire cities and countries will collapse. Human civilization will not survive.

Communities already face extreme weather events like hurricanes, floods, droughts, forest fires, heat waves and rising sea levels that threaten the homes, lives and livelihoods of millions of people. The poorest and most vulnerable will be hardest hit as sea levels rise, storms intensify and droughts and unpredictable weather patterns rob farmers of their livelihoods. Arctic peat is burning and ice is melting at rates far beyond even the most radical scientific predictions. The Greenland ice cap is being lost, forests are damaged, the polar permafrost is thawing, a great ocean current is slowing, tropical corals are being lost, and the ice sheets in East and West Antarctica are collapsing. The Amazon is burning at an alarming rate.

Humanity faces soaring temperatures, choking oceans, dying rivers, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, disappearing wetlands, bleaching coral reefs, putrefying air, multiplying freak weather events, the unravelling of entire ecosystems. Coastal communities are exposed to tropical cyclones, extreme sea levels and flooding,

marine heatwaves, sea ice loss, permafrost thaw, acidification, loss of oxygen and salinity. Some 70 per cent of the people at risk of yearly floods and permanent

inundation are in eight Asian countries: China, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and Japan.

Over the next three decades, hundreds of millions of people worldwide may lose their homes as entire cities sink under rising seas. As many as 150 million people are currently living on land that will be below the high tide by 2050.

Climate change is only one aspect of the problem. Everywhere we look, the natural systems that maintain our planet are rapidly deteriorating.

In the past 50 years as much as 60 per cent of the world's mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians have been killed off and one million plant and animal species are under threat of extinction. Half the world's coral reefs and half the world's tropical forests have been destroyed. Capitalism has polluted the oceans, shrunk the Arctic and Antarctic summer ice, caused droughts, heatwaves, desertification, fires, floodings and storms, along with water and food shortages, on an unprecedented scale.

The production of plastic has risen 20-fold since 1964 and is expected to double again in the next 20 years and quadruple by 2050. Only around 5 per cent of plastic ends up being recycled. If current trends continue, by 2050 there will be more plastic in the world's oceans than fish.

The multinational mining companies which extract oil, gas and coal and destroy forests and fishing resources for agri-business, will continue to pillage the Earth as hard and as fast as they can, so long as they can prevent anyone stopping them. They are protected by governments and laws, which are backed up by force – the police and military. Around the world environmental damage goes ahead – in the name of economic progress – and protestors are ignored and dealt with by the law or armed guards.

The present environmental crisis has been described by some as a "common crisis", so serious that it transcends politics, is affecting all equally, and demands the submerging of class struggle in the interests of the "common good".

The crisis is indeed common to all who live on earth, but it does not affect all equally. Those who are aware of the dangers and oppose them do not yet have the power to take control of the situation. Those whose actions have contributed most to the problem represent the dominant section of capital, and they show little inclination to change their present course towards disaster. In fact they have engaged in an extensive campaign to conceal their responsibility for the climate emergency from the peoples of the world. The response of the governments of the most developed countries to the climate crisis shows greater interest in safeguarding corporate profits than the environment.

Australia must achieve drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in a short time. If Cuba can achieve a 40 per cent cut in emissions in three years, then a similar effort can work in Australia, if the people determine to force the pace of change.

CASE STUDY

A gas led recovery

Under the cover of the global pandemic, Prime Minister Scott Morrison set up the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission. Of the 15 commissioners and working group members, seven have strong links to the fossil fuel industry, and particularly the gas industry. The Commission is advised by Andrew Liveris, a board member of world's biggest greenhouse-gas emitter, Saudi Aramco, and a former Trump adviser.

Morrison announced on 15 September $50 million in public money for handouts for gas companies. The government is trying to force through controversial new fracking projects against the wishes of traditional owners, farmers and local communities who have made it clear they do not want fracking, with its significant risks to their land and water.

If fully unleashed, Australia's gas resources could be responsible for up to three times the annual carbon emissions of the entire world. Compared to the world's largest corporate polluters, unleashing Australia's gas resources would emit more than double the historical emissions of Chevron, Exxon, BHP and Rio Tinto put together.

The Prime Minister proposes to structure energy industry and infrastructure policy around the interests of the government's big fossil fuel donors – Santos, Origin, Woodside. This is corruption with the major corporate donors writing policy they will directly benefit from.

The government will build a gas-fired power plant to cover an alleged shortfall in energy capacity after the Liddell coal-fired plant in New South Wales closes. The plant would be more than five times bigger than any identified shortfall in NSW.

The government proposes to spend taxpayer money building emissions-intensive power plants when renewables and battery storage would do the job.

CASE STUDY

Climate casualties

Climate change has caused 150,000 deaths each year and this may double in the next decade, and it has contributed to 5 million human illnesses every year. Left unchecked, climate change casualties could climb into the millions.

Climate change is a risk multiplier, increasing our vulnerability to a range

of health threats. For infectious diseases such as COVID-19, air pollution creates another risk. This new virus causes a respiratory illness and exposure to air pollution worsens our vulnerability. Particles of air pollution act as transport for pathogens, contributing to the spread of viruses and infectious disease across large distances.

The huge bushfires in early 2020 caused extensive smoke pollution. This exposed more than half of the Australian population to health harm for many weeks and led to the deaths of more than 400 people.

We must cut emissions and change our relationship with the environment if we are to prevent the emergence of new pandemics. The corporations and governments that are resisting these changes are guilty of crimes against humanity.

CASE STUDY

Our world on fire

We all watched on in horror as the fires savaged our country, releasing more carbon dioxide in a single bushfire season than the country emits in an entire year. An arc of destruction tore through our native forests; from

the subtropical rainforests of Queensland, through the temperate forests of southern New South Wales and eastern Victoria, all the way across to the coastal bushland of South Australia.

A terrifying amount of Australia's World Heritage areas were burnt – at least 80 per cent of the Blue Mountains protected area and 53 per cent of the ancient Gondwana rainforests network. These are the last of such precious places which have clung on since the age of dinosaurs.

Australia was already facing an extinction crisis, leading the world in mammal extinctions. Now scientists estimate that close to half a billion native animals have been killed by the fires and fear that some species of animals and plants may have been wiped out completely. This does not include frogs, insects or other invertebrates. The fires have had a devastating effect on species such as koalas, brush-tailed rock wallabies, the Kangaroo Island dunnart, and the kangaroo, whose very survival may now have been pushed to the brink.

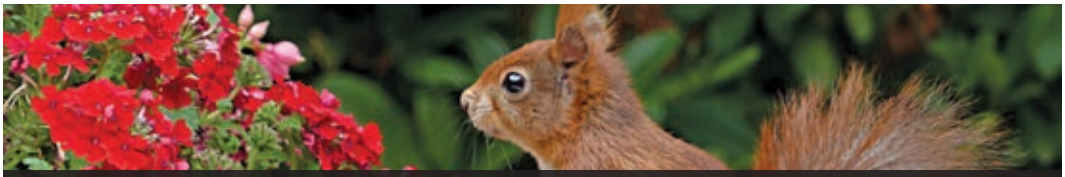
These fires release even more carbon into the atmosphere, which leads to faster global heating.

The 2019-2020 fire season has seen about 350 million tonnes of carbon being pumped into the atmosphere. In 2019, Australia's net greenhouse gas emissions from industry, transport, energy production and so on, were 560 million tonnes. Emissions from bushfires are not included in this measure. The bushfire season has contributed an additional 62 per cent to Australia's annual emissions.

Massive fires were not isolated to Australia in 2019. There were fires in the Amazon and widespread fires throughout Africa, Europe, the US, and Asia.

The most worrying fires were in the Arctic. The 2019 fires in Siberia, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland were unprecedented in scale. Fires in this region also affected areas of permafrost.

The total amount of greenhouse gases in the Arctic permafrost is close to double the amount that humans have emitted into the atmosphere since the beginning of industrialisation. But now the Arctic permafrost has become a net emitter of greenhouse gases, as opposed to a net sink. This means that emissions of carbon, methane, nitrous oxide, and other harmful gases from the Arctic permafrost have now reached the point where they are no longer absorbed by subarctic forests.



PANDEMIC OF HUNGER

Those living in the global south are already suffering and dying from the effects of global warming, for which the wealthy industrialised nations bear most of the responsibility. The richest 0.54 per cent or 42 million people are responsible for more emissions than the poorest half of the global population, or 3.8 billion people. These elites are sacrificing the poorest on the planet first.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, the head of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) warned that 2020 could see “the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II.”

Those in greatest danger are in 10 countries affected by conflict, economic crisis and climate change. They are Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Nigeria and Haiti. Drought and the worst locust infestation for decades (triggered by climate change) have already caused food shortages in South Asia and the Horn of Africa, where 12 million people are facing food insecurity.

The WFP warned that “unless swift action is taken”, by the end of the year we “will see more than a quarter of a billion people suffering acute hunger… We could be facing multiple famines of biblical proportions within a short few months.”

The WFP warns that, “millions of civilians living in conflict-scarred nations, including many women and children, face being pushed to the brink of starvation, with the spectre of famine a very real and dangerous possibility.”

In many parts of the earth, but particularly in those parts which are ecologically fragile – in the former colonies where inappropriate agricultural systems have been used – environmental damage from deforestation, fertilisers, pesticides and inappropriate irrigation practices, and over-grazing driven by poverty has already permanently destroyed something like 11 million hectares of land. Another 1.5 billion hectares are seriously degraded, and recovery is likely to be prohibitively expensive.

As temperatures rise, crop production in Third World countries – already marginally sufficient for needs – could fall by 2060 by 9 to 11 per cent, driving grain prices beyond the reach of hundreds of millions of people. Entire regions of Africa and Asia will face desertification, and many of Europe and North America's traditional crops will fail.

This humanitarian crisis is not fundamentally caused by conflict or lack of food but by a pervasive socio-economic order that is inherently unjust and cruel, benefiting those that have, punishing and abusing those that are vulnerable and have not.

The natural environment is sacrificed and exploited for profit.

Covid-19 highlights the need for change and presented an opportunity. A new awareness is emerging that we need a different socio-economic system if we are to survive.

NOTHING SPOILS THE PLANET LIKE WAR

A sustainable future will not be achieved without also achieving peace – and there will be no peace without achieving sustainability. This truth makes the need to talk about peace and disarmament crucially significant in any discussion about the climate crisis.

As the environmental crisis intensifies, floods, fires, famines, droughts and mass migrations can become even more catastrophic if governments respond the way they do currently by inserting armed conflict into the situation.

As war contributes to climate change, so does climate change contribute to war. The incidence of fire, flooding, drought, insect plagues and storms is climbing and this will cause falls in agricultural production across the globe. Scarcity of resources, the basic necessities of food and water in particular, is destabilising and likely to generate conflict.

The privileged position of the rich nations and the ongoing poverty of much of the world's population is perpetuated by a system of exploitation that is underpinned by force. The poor countries, that provide much of the world's wealth, will suffer the worst consequences of climate change. If they challenge the power behind the inequality, military conflict may result.

War fighting, preparations for war, the manufacture of weapons and military facilities are highly polluting, highly damaging to the environment and a major contributor to climate change. The overall environmental cost of waging war is huge.

Since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the US military is estimated to have emitted a staggering 1.2 billion tons of carbon into the atmosphere. For comparison, the entire annual carbon emissions of the United Kingdom are roughly 360 million tons.

The Pentagon is estimated to consume an average of 340,000 barrels (14 million gallons) of oil every day. This is greater than the total national consumption of Sweden or Switzerland.

Military pollution is particularly poisonous. Fighter jets, destroyers, tanks and other weapons systems emit highly toxic, carbon-intensive emissions, not to mention the toxins released from the detonation of bombs including the forever-poison depleted uranium munitions.

In addition to causing war, the fossil fuel industry also relies on militarised state violence to uphold its operations around the globe. Those who fight to protect

their lands from extractive industries and infrastructure are often branded as "eco-terrorists" and met with state-military or paramilitary violence.

Indigenous peoples are disproportionately subject to this violence. While Indigenous people make up about 5% of the world's population, they account for about a quarter of those murdered for defending land and the environment.

For decades, US military intervention in the Middle East has been justified by the need to preserve access to the region's oil reserves. The war machine burns oil to capture oil to burn oil to capture oil….

Nuclear

75 years after the obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nations continue to arm themselves with roughly 14,000 nuclear weapons, preparing for a nuclear war that will destroy most life on earth.

Nuclear weapons are unthinkably dangerous to every living being on earth, whether they are detonated by accident or on purpose. They are extremely expensive, stealing resources needed for health, housing and many other human needs, and using them would be suicidal.

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists has its Doomsday Clock currently set at two minutes to midnight. Yet the Australian Government continues to refuse to sign the United Nations treaty outlawing nuclear weapons.

Australia

Australia is ranked 13th with 1.4% of global military spending for just 0.3% of the global population, and has an annual defence budget of $40 billion. The military is the largest user of fossil fuels in Australia. The government spends about $3.5 billion on environmental protection and $40 billion annually on the military.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) manages seven million acres, 25,000 buildings and 72 bases. The ADF ignited a bushfire from its live fire training at the Kokoda Barracks Field Training Area in Queensland. The Kokoda Barracks are contaminated by heavy metals and hydrocarbons.

From June 2019 to February 2020, over 18 million hectares burned, tens of thousands of people were evacuated, thousands of homes were destroyed, millions of animals were killed and 33 people died in the worst bush fires on record. Yet the government refused when the Australian National Aerial Firefighting Centre asked Canberra to buy more water bombers.

Two years ago, the Australian government announced a plan to spend $200 billion over the next decade to modernise its defence capability. But it stopped making payments to the United Nations Green Climate Fund and blocked progress at the most recent UN climate summit. Moreover, the Climate Change

Performance Index ranked Australia last out of 57 countries for its weak climate policies and lack of progress on emissions reduction.

The military and big corporations are not just in climate change denial – they are in control and plan to keep it that way as the climate deteriorates. They have been killing and polluting to ensure their access to the toxic resources which are responsible for the climate crisis.

Progressive journalist Murtaza Hussain wrote in September 2019 that “it took this perfect symmetry between industrial warfare and industrial exploitation of the earth to bring about the unspeakable emergency we now face.”

CASE STUDY

War games

Every second year the US and Australian military hold war games called Talisman Sabre in Queensland in areas of high environmental significance, some of which are world heritage areas and natural heritage listed sites. These areas are habitat to many migratory birds and threatened species such as dugongs and humpback whales.

Potential environmental impacts include effects on air quality, harm to marine animals, fire, noise pollution, waste disposal and spills and erosion from amphibian craft landings and weapon target zones.

Talisman Sabre takes place in Shoalwater Bay which is home to the largest dugong population in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park World Heritage Area. This sanctuary is considered crucial to the stabilisation and recovery of local dugong numbers.

The region also supports nesting sites for green turtles and endangered loggerhead turtles, and is used by 26 species of dolphins and whales including the endangered Blue Whale. Humpback whales are known to use the area for breeding.

Threats from the Talisman Sabre war games include nuclear powered vessels, potentially carrying nuclear weapons and almost certainly carrying depleted uranium munitions, perchlorate, a highly toxic chemical and a key ingredient in live ammunitions, white phosphorus, a highly reactive and toxic chemical with the potential to have long term impacts on all environments, in particular inshore seagrass beds (critical dugong and turtle feeding grounds) and mangroves (critical fish breeding grounds and shore protection), and red phosphorus, a highly reactive and toxic chemical used in marine markers for sea mines. The US Navy also disposes of domestic waste (including paper and plastic) overboard into Australian coastal waters.

CASE STUDY

Impacts of war

The environmental havoc wreaked by the war in Iraq is appalling. Not only did the war lead to a spike in carbon dioxide emissions through US military activity, it resulted in the widespread poisoning of the Iraqi environment through the use of toxic munitions and so-called burn pits on military bases. The environment has become so toxic in some places that it has led to elevated rates of cancer, as well as crippling birth defects – terrible individual punishments inflicted on innocent future generations. Much of this impact can be blamed on the use of depleted uranium munitions by US forces. Despite vowing to cease their use, the military continued to use the toxic munitions during its most recent bombing campaign in Syria.

In Afghanistan, wildlife and habitats have disappeared. The past 30 years of war has stripped the country of its trees, including precious native pistachio woodlands. Illegal logging by US-backed warlords and wood harvesting by refugees caused more than one-third of Afghanistan's forests to vanish between 1990 and 2007. Drought, desertification and species loss have resulted. The number of migratory birds passing through Afghanistan has fallen by 85 per cent.

Gangjeong village is the site of the controversial naval base built by the South Korean government and Samsung C&T Corp on the southern part of Jeju Island, the 'island of world peace'. The waters along the coastline are within a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and are protected by international law. The once unique coral populations and surrounding biodiversity has suffered irreparable damage due to constant leakages of fuel, heavy metals and other contaminants. Reduced and changing current patterns around the base have led to the demise of coral populations near the seawalls. The waters off the Gangjeong coastline once represented a major habitat of the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin but this has been disrupted due to the passage of warships in and out of the base.

During the Rwandan and Congolese civil wars almost three-quarters of a million people lived in camps on the edge of Virunga national park. Around 1,000 tonnes of wood was removed from the park every day for two years in order to build shelters, feed cooking fires and create charcoal for sale. By the time the conflict ended 105 sq km of forest had been damaged and 35 sq km stripped bare. Virunga park is home to critically endangered mountain gorillas as well as chimpanzees, elephants and other charismatic megafauna.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

Capitalism is fundamentally incompatible with the maintenance of a viable ecosystem. The evidence is clear. There can be no green capitalism. Sustainable development under capitalism is an impossibility.

For capitalists, everything is a commodity. Every crisis is an opportunity to make a profit, to cut costs, to beat or eat the competition, to expand. The role of capitalist governments is to bail out the corporations 'in need', to keep a firm hand on the unemployed and the dispossessed, and to save capitalism through this crisis, and the next crisis and the one after that.

Influential global leaders including political, corporate, media and financial leaders have deliberately refused to accept the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change. Driven by short-term incentives, they have placed humanity in extreme jeopardy.

Many of Australia's leaders are particularly culpable, having done everything possible over the last three decades to prevent the development of serious climate change policy and to protect the fossil fuel industry.

Because of its reliance on constant expansion, capitalism can only ever result in the increased degradation of the natural world. To think that we can tackle the climate emergency within capitalism is absurd. The basic, defining imperative of capitalism is economic growth, which necessitates the further destruction of nature.

The environmental crisis is created by a ruling class and by its rapacious exploitation of earth's common resources for its private ends. Ignoring present warnings, it continues to aggravate the crisis by a callous and reckless disregard for the predictable consequences of its activities.

Its power to act in this way is defended by the policies of governments which facilitate the interests of the ruling class, even to the extent of concealing the gravity of the global crisis from electors to whom they are responsible and answerable. This is frequently done behind declarations that environmental protection measures will not be allowed to adversely affect the economic interests of the country – meaning, of course, the economic interests of the ruling class.

Through the narrative of "green" capitalism, corporations and the market are portrayed as the best means of responding to the climate crisis. In this corporate imagination, "green" products and services, increased "eco-efficiency", and the ingenuity and technological mastery of business entrepreneurship will save us from catastrophe. Such fantasies fit well within neoliberalism, the dominant

economic and political system of our time. Alternatives such as state regulation and mandatory restrictions on fossil fuel use are claimed to be counterproductive and even harmful. We are told there is no alternative to the market.

The wealth of the capitalist ruling class of today is so immense that even the threat posed by climate change does not shake them into action. According to Oxfam, the combined wealth of the world's 2,153 billionaires exceeds that of the poorest 4.6 billion people, who make up 60 percent of the global population. Catastrophic events like the Australian bush fires are unlikely to faze them – in contrast to the mass of ordinary people impacted by the fires, they can easily buy their way to safety.

The ruling class lack of concern for the environment is reinforced by the competitive nature of the system. Each individual capitalist must keep costs low and profits high to stay ahead of their rivals. The main way they do this is by keeping workers' wages down. But if they can save money by not dealing with the environmental costs of their operations, they will do that too.

The capitalist class gains immense savings from treating environmental destruction as an "externality" that they can pass on to society. The International Monetary Fund calculated that global subsidies to fossil fuel companies amount to US$5.2 trillion a year, approximately 6.4 percent of world GDP.

The technologies they invest in – fracking, hybrid cars, genetically modified food – are designed to maintain or expand consumption levels, not reduce them. They will not redirect the trillions of dollars from the military and corporations toward saving us from environmental catastrophe. They will not end government subsidies for the fossil fuel and extraction industries.

Capitalism created the looming environmental catastrophe. It cannot play a role in its solution.

CASE STUDY

Fidel Castro
1992 EARTH SUMMIT
TOMORROW WILL BE TOO LATE

An important biological species is in danger of disappearing due to the fast and progressive destruction of its natural living conditions: humanity.

We have become aware of this problem when it is almost too late to stop it.

It is necessary to point out that consumer societies are fundamentally responsible for the brutal destruction of the environment. They arose from the old colonial powers and from imperialist policies which in turn engendered the backwardness and poverty which today afflicts the vast majority of mankind.

With only 20 percent of the world's population, these societies consume two-thirds of the metals and three-fourths of the energy produced in the world. They have poisoned the seas and rivers, polluted the air, weakened and punctured the ozone layer, saturated the atmosphere with gases which are changing weather conditions with a catastrophic effect we are already beginning to experience.

The forests are disappearing. The deserts are expanding. Every year billons of tons of fertile soil end up in the sea. Numerous species are becoming extinct. Population pressures and poverty trigger frenzied efforts to survive even when it is at the expense of the environment. It is not possible to blame the Third World countries for this. Yesterday, they were colonies; today, they are nations exploited and pillaged by an unjust international economic order.

The solution cannot be to prevent the development of those who need it most. The reality is that anything that nowadays contributes to underdevelopment and poverty constitutes a flagrant violation of ecology. Tens of millions of men, women, and children die every year in the Third World as a result of this, more than in each of the two world wars. Unequal terms of trade, protectionism, and the foreign debt assault the ecology and promote the destruction of the environment.

If we want to save mankind from this self-destruction, we have to better distribute the wealth and technologies available in the world. Less luxury and less waste by a few countries is needed so there is less poverty and less hunger on a large part of the Earth. We do not need any more transferring to the Third World of lifestyles and consumption habits that ruin the environment.

Let human life become more rational. Let us implement a just international economic order. Let us use all the science necessary for pollution-free, sustained development. Let us pay the ecological debt, and not the foreign debt. Let hunger disappear, and not mankind.

Now that the alleged threat of communism has disappeared and there are no longer any more excuses for cold wars, arms races, and military spending, what is blocking the immediate use of these resources to promote

the development of the Third World and fight the threat of the ecological destruction of the planet?

Let selfishness end. Let hegemonies end. Let insensitivity, irresponsibility, and deceit end.

Tomorrow it will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago.

THERE IS HOPE

A new movement to save the planet is growing in numbers and strength around the world. In many places it is dominated by young people – the very men and women who will have to live in the collapsing world we face. Slogans for “system change” and signs that denounce capitalism have become increasingly popular.

This movement is vocal and inspiring and gives us hope that we don’t have to accept a fate that would mean the end of everything.

The movement has not come out of nowhere. In Australia, attitude surveys during the 1990s showed a slow but steady rise in anti-capitalism sentiments, such as hostility to big business, suspicion of the established parties and concern for the environment

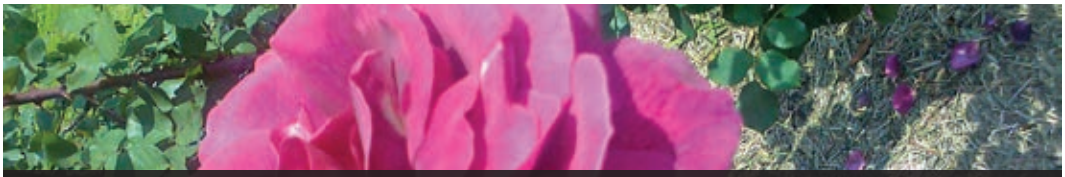
No matter how terrible the prospect before us, we should not and must not give in to pessimism or despair. The new movement is broad and complex but it is moving in the direction of revolution against capitalism.

The capitalist ruling class is trying to control this dynamic new climate movement that is demanding action to reverse the growing climate crisis which threatens every living thing on this planet.

There have been large marches of hundreds of thousands of people demanding the phasing out of greenhouse gases – but the huge energy corporations continue to dominate the political agenda.

Influential climate science sceptics, politicians and business leaders have fought to control Australia's response to the climate crisis. They shared a fear that dealing with climate change would undermine their profits and the economic system from which they derived their wealth and power.

So the new revolutionary movement must be prepared for the huge political and economic struggle that is needed to turn things around.



FIGHTING FOR IMMEDIATE REFORMS

Millions of people around the world are already facing migration, sickness, starvation and death as a result of climate change and these consequences will increase in frequency, severity, and scale almost every year.

Fighting for immediate reforms will not solve the fundamental structural problem we face but they can delay major crises and give us time to get prepared for consequences we cannot avoid. They can buy us a breathing space in which to get reforms implemented and to change the way our society is organised.

Early action is essential. The most immediate task is to wind back our use of coal, gas and oil and to develop renewable energy sources. New coal mines should be banned.

The energy industry – coal, oil, gas, production and distribution of electricity – is too important to be left under the control of multinationals and local capitalists. It needs to be brought under public ownership. Under public ownership not only can profits be re-invested in alternative energy development, but proper planning can be carried out for the phasing out of coal production with full consideration of the involved workers.

Trade unions should have a major role in programs to phase out coal mining and the existing coal-fired power stations. Such programs must include government support for rural and regional communities with the development of new renewable energy sources, and the retraining of workers currently involved in coal mining to work in new sustainable industries.

The Australian Government must end its $47 billion a year subsidy to the fossil fuel industry and direct post-COVID-19 stimulus funding to renewable energy.

The climate and labour movements face a big challenge to stop the federal and state governments from using the COVID-19 crisis as cover for expanding public subsidies to the toxic fossil fuel industry. Campaigns focused on large-scale public investment in renewable-energy-based projects are going to be critical.

People must be bailed out, not corporations. Workers who are losing their jobs should be the focus of all stimulus packages, not corporations. Where bailouts are sought, public ownership should be prioritised. Direct payments to workers must take priority over payments to corporations.

All developed nations must reduce their total fossil fuel use by 75 per cent by 2025 and then continue reducing fossil fuel use to net zero carbon emissions by 2035.

All developing nations must maintain their total fossil fuel emission levels as they are at the beginning of 2019 and not allow them to go any higher. Then by 2045, all developing nations must also be at net zero carbon emissions. This means they will have to reduce their fossil fuel use about six per cent a year starting now.

This is only fair. The developed nations created their wealth by producing most of the carbon emissions in the atmosphere today, thus causing almost all of the current global warming extinction emergency.

Wind, solar and storage technologies are by far the cheapest low carbon options. Solar plus storage is cheaper than coal, and getting cheaper. The cost of batteries is falling rapidly. Without the current subsidies solar PV and wind are cheaper than with gas, coal and nuclear. The cost of solar and wind is about $50 a megawatt hour, half that of gas and coal's $100 a megawatt hour. Nuclear is priced between $250 and $330 a megawatt hour.

Nine nuclear armed states spent roughly $73 billion on their nuclear arsenals last year. That’s $138,699 per minute!

Nuclear power must be rejected. The mining, treatment, transport and disposal of uranium’s waste products constitute unacceptable environmental and health risks. All uranium mines in Australia should be shut down and contracts for the export of uranium cancelled. The use of nuclear products should be confined to medical purposes and should remain in public hands.

We already have the technology we need to get to net-zero. But the power of the fossil fuel corporations means governments have not had the political will to take the required action.

However, we could and must cut emissions significantly. This can be done on the land by revegetation and forestation, in electricity generation by increasing renewables and phasing out coal, in transport by introducing vehicle emission standards and shifting to non-carbon vehicles, and in construction by updating standards for buildings and appliances.

None of these changes are unrealistic. Many of these regulations have already been implemented in places like the European Union.

We can win some gains without overthrowing capitalism – but finally we do have to overthrow capitalism. Around the world people are responding to the new conditions with new ideas about changing the system so we can save humanity and our wonderful planet.

CASE STUDY

Beyond zero emissions

The world needs to start the transition to a 'net zero' carbon emissions economy immediately and to urgently make very deep cuts in emissions, if average global warming is to have any chance of remaining below the 2°C.

Immediate large scale investment in low-carbon technologies and energy efficient systems is not only urgent and necessary from the environmental point of view but can be linked with recovery from the global economic downturn.

In Australia, Beyond Zero Emissions, in partnership with the University of Melbourne, have come up with a solution – the Zero Carbon Australia 2020 Stationary Energy Plan.

This plan shows that it is technically possible to reach 100 per cent renewable energy for Australia within a decade and the technology to achieve this transition is commercially available now.

Australia has one of the best solar resources in the world – solar thermal power in the ZCA plan will supply 60 per cent of Australia's electricity.

Wind will supply 40 per cent of Australia's electricity in the ZCA plan. This is comparable to Denmark's 50 per cent by 2025 goal, and Spain's 25 per cent by 2020. In another comparison, China's wind energy industry has been growing by 100 per cent per year for the last four years.

The plan sets out detailed resource and labour requirements. A transition to 100 per cent renewable energy will create around four times more permanent jobs than currently exist in the domestic fossil fuel sector.

The ZCA Plan will generate an investment of $370 billion over ten years – a stimulus to the Australian economy that is equivalent to three per cent of our GDP over ten years.

The investment required for the transition is affordable at $8 per household per week.

CASE STUDY

Green New Deal

The Green New Deal (GND) is essentially a shift to renewable energy, which entails a massive jobs program in the clean energy sector and mass investment in public transit and other public works.

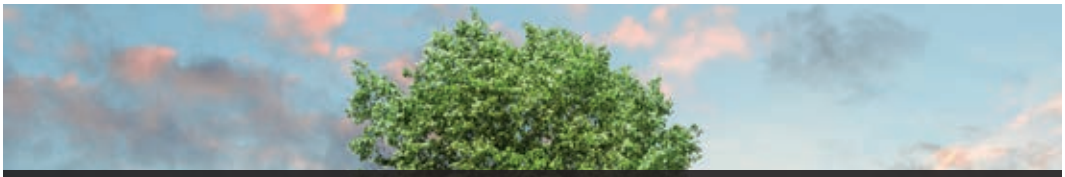
A GND will require as much as $9 trillion of investment over the next 30 years, or as much as $300 billion per year. But that's not a cost as much as a capital investment, since it will be recouped by future sales of electricity, electric vehicles, electric public transport fares, and other income.

A GND would produce enormous savings, millions of jobs, and other benefits, including healthier air. A GND would require many green-collar workers: Solar photovoltaic (PV) installers, wind turbine construction workers, electric car and bus production line workers, etc.

A GND must also have a large number of experts in science, technology, engineering, and maths to solve some highly complex and technical problems like large-scale battery storage, more efficient solar panels, zero emission airplane fuels, etc.

These are basic policies that do not demand an end to the capitalist system and are in fact promoted as programs to stimulate further economic growth; they do not demand an end to war and they do not demand redistribution of wealth to combat global inequality created by climate change.

The lack of systemic and structural change within this "green new deal" or these greenwashed, capitalist policies mean they do not address the core issue: capitalism. The desire for growth and profit above all else is the sole cause of climate change, and anything less than the complete overthrow of this system will fail to save us.



WORKERS' RIGHTS

We have to remember that many workers in this country are having a really rough time. Even as the costs of housing and education and health care have soared, and the incomes of the super-rich have hit the stratosphere, real wages for workers have declined and many newer jobs are just part-time and extremely precarious.

No worker must be worse off as a result of environmental protection. We have to demand that every program for cleaning up the environment must include a guarantee of jobs and retraining for workers who are displaced.

Workers whose jobs are at risk from measures to protect the environment must be offered employment in environmentally friendly occupations and new green industries without loss of wages or any conditions and with full involvement of workers and their unions.

It is reasonable for workers to want to keep their jobs but that does not mean they do not care about the environment. Workers are not immune to fires, floods and new diseases and they want their children to have decent futures.

Substantial transition to renewables is perfectly possible now. We have the science and we can do the planning. The resources could be available if government switched the subsidies it is providing to mining and the tax cuts to big business to renewable projects.

Steps needed to ensure that the transition to a sustainable energy sector does not disadvantage workers include examining the regional employment and equity implications of shifts from fossil fuel use to renewable sources and establishing appropriate regional structural adjustment and industry re-orientation programs.

Conversion to a more sustainable economy will bring a healthier economy as well as a healthier environment. Changes necessary for more sustainable production would require more workers, not fewer. Some of the "technologically advanced" but environmentally destructive methods in both mining and logging have been developed specifically because they use fewer workers.

The Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Council of Trade Unions 2008 report, 'Green Gold Rush', estimates that more than 800,000 new green jobs can be created in 15 years. Only a portion of these jobs could be the basis of a viable alternative to the current disastrous situation.

Based on an analysis of 30 green industries globally, the report says Australia should focus on six sectors: renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable water industries, biomaterials, green buildings and waste recycling.

As the impact of climate change is addressed, there will be new jobs and types of work in some industries. In some cases there will be entirely new technologies for existing jobs. In others, there will be new work activities related to reducing energy intensity and therefore reducing emissions.

However, If the wages and conditions of the new jobs are worse than those in the old industries being replaced, workers and trade unions will not support environmental transformation of the economy. And they would be right. Green jobs must be decent well-paid jobs, not just any job. Workers must be confident that protecting the environment is in their interests and the interests of their children and future generations.

Working class support for fundamental change to our current failing capitalist system is essential. Work is central to people's identity and social relationships. Work and workplaces fundamentally shape our lives and contemporary society.

Workers' key role in producing society's wealth means that their actions can shake the system to its core. At times workers have taken collective action to achieve incredible things. The fact that we live in societies with doses of humanity and justice is a credit to their efforts.

If we intend to throw capitalism out and build a civilised alternative for the people, this change must be based on the strength of the class whose labour makes the system run. But this must be what has come to be called a just transition – a process that involves worker and community participation in the planning and implementation of change and retraining. A just transition places workers and their local communities and environmental and social needs at the centre of political economic processes.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Indigenous knowledge and practical experience have an important role to play in the development and implementation of future policy if humanity is to have a chance of survival.

The inclusion of indigenous peoples in environmental management presents an important opportunity to learn from generations of careful observation while simultaneously reinforcing the right of indigenous peoples to own and control the use of their traditional lands.

For over at least 50 000 years Aboriginal people flourished in Australia using their detailed knowledge of the land and its plants and animals. Traditional fire management practices stimulated new growth for animal species and increased the abundance of bush medicine and bush tucker plants.

Scientific and Indigenous knowledge and practice must complement each other in the effort to save our planet from environmental disaster and, if we succeed, to help us develop a new society that can sustain both humanity and the environment on which we all depend.

Global biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate, with approximately one million species currently at risk of extinction. However, biodiversity is declining at a significantly slower rate on lands governed by indigenous peoples. Today indigenous lands account for less than 22 per cent of the world's land area, but they are home to approximately 80 per cent of the world's biodiversity.

Indigenous knowledge can unveil valuable information about the intricacies of environmental systems. By learning from the traditional understanding and practices of indigenous peoples, scientists can advance their understanding of natural systems.

REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

Dealing with the threats of climate change requires a move to produce for need rather than profit. This cannot be brought about under a capitalist system. Anything less than revolutionary change only serves the capitalist class.

Any form of capitalism is fundamentally incapable of overcoming the climate crisis as its very nature is dependent on constant growth and expansion of markets, demand for profits, and exploitation of nature's resources.

It is impossible to reverse the momentum towards environmental disaster without economic planning. The dictates of the profit motive and imperialist competition to corner resources and secure markets prevent any rational planning for the good of common humanity.

A planned economy which has eliminated the private profit motive has the maximum potential for solving environmental problems.

Socialist production is not a slave to capitalist market economics and its vicious frenetic cycle of competition, advertising, consumerism and waste. It aims to satisfy human needs, not over-produce commodities, many of which have little

relevance to real needs and lead to gross over-use of energy.

In a socialist system publicly owned and controlled enterprises would become the dominant form of ownership in our economy. This would not exclude some forms of private ownership continuing to exist with strict limits on private profit making. The aim of public ownership is to ensure that production is responsive to the needs and desires of the general population and that goods and services are distributed equitably.

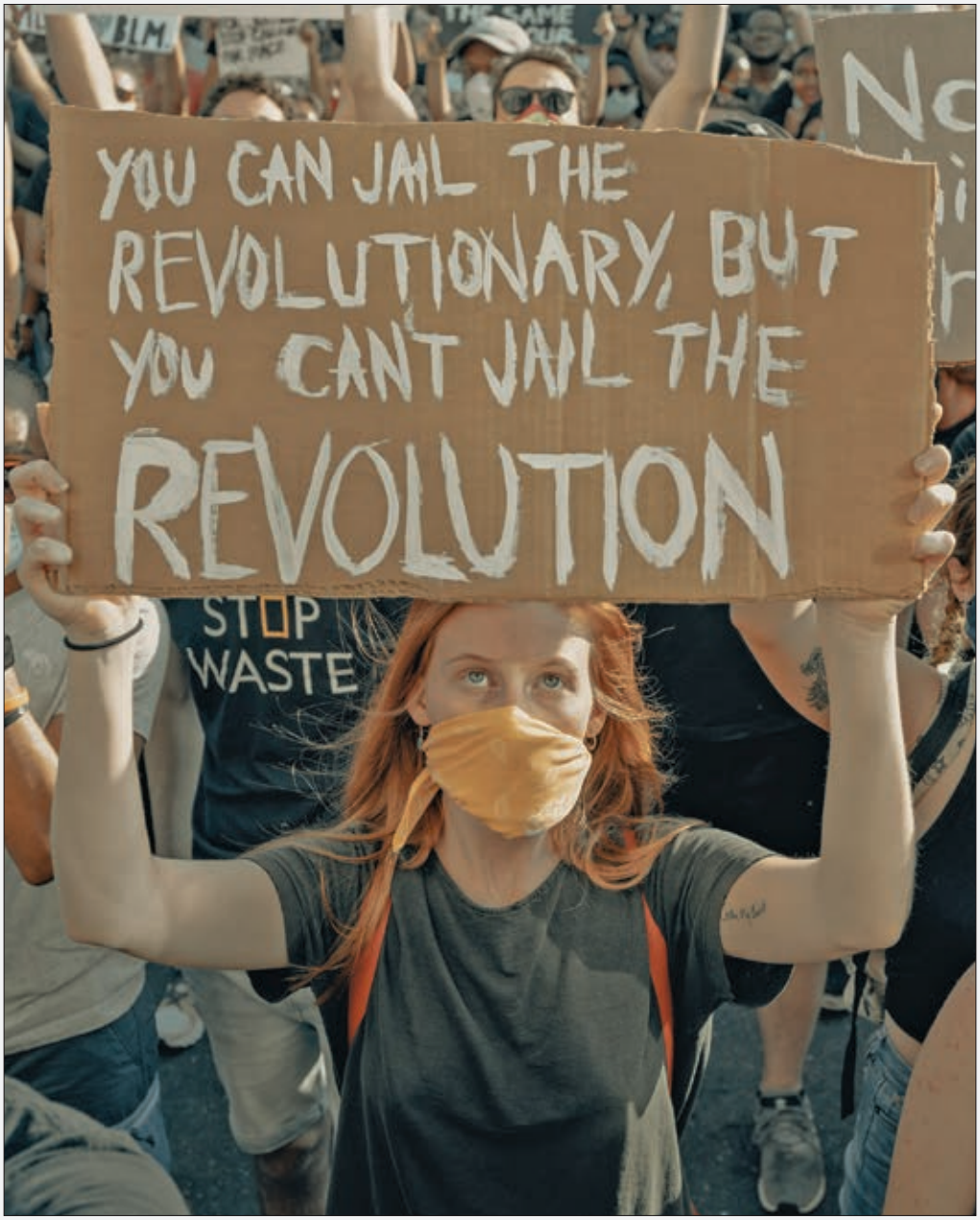
For socialism to work, the working people must be intimately involved in helping to run the country and industry. Workers would be involved in management and in decision making at all levels.

A major task for a socialist government would be to educate everyone in an attitude and lifestyle which respects and protects the environment. Protection of the environment calls for scientific knowledge, constant vigilance and public awareness together with democratic involvement and accountability.

In the 20th Century a number of states showed that it was possible to build a new society in which the working class became the ruling class. The means of production were turned into public property, the exploitation of working people by capital was abolished and fundamental steps were taken to end racial and gender discrimination. Unemployment was reduced or eliminated, illiteracy was eradicated and free education made available to all. Extensive public health and social security services were created and national identity and culture promoted.

CASE STUDY

Cuba



Cuba is the world's most sustainable economy. Socialist Cuba's planning has produced stunning results because it focuses on human needs, not profit. Cuba is the only country in the world that rates higher than 0.8

(high) on the United Nations Human Development Index, and lower than 1.8 (sustainability) on the ecological footprint (measure of demand on the biosphere).

The island nation has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent compared to 1990 levels. It not only uses less energy, but has decentralised its supply grid. Cuba has 0.2 per cent of the world's population but now produces only 0.1 per cent of CO2 emissions.

Cuba equals the United States in literacy and life expectancy, but Cubans' energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions are on average about an eighth of those of the U.S.

Since the collapse of the USSR, shortages, revised use of resources and more rational priorities under socialist planning have produced stunning results. Large scale production of organic produce has been a welcome by-product of the revised use of limited resources in Cuba.

While the country continues to battle a decades-long US-led economic blockade it still manages to have full employment and its people access world-class services.

Cuba simultaneously addresses its food and environment issues by encouraging the broadest participation by the mass of its people in driving and achieving these objectives themselves as community programs. Communist youth and committees for defence of the revolution are active in mobilising communities in city, town and country.

This, along with other features of Cuban society, such as high quality, free and universal health and education systems, a vibrant culture and fulfilment of its role as a world citizen by providing doctors and teachers to other poor countries, shows the progressive and humane nature of socialist development even where it has had to withstand the embargoes and constant enmity of its neighbour, the world's mightiest empire.

SOCIALISM IN AUSTRALIA

The resources and technology needed to provide every human with the necessities of life are already available. Socialism is simply the way to use them rationally.

Socialism is a rationally organised society in which wealth is used for the betterment of all. It is about putting an end to want, to wars and to ongoing crisis, to ending a world where the top one per cent wallow in luxury while the rest of humanity struggle to survive.

Oscar Wilde wrote: “Socialism ... by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition.”

When people are given the opportunity to challenge their oppression and exploitation, they display enormous ingenuity and humanity. The world they can create would be one where everyone’s basic needs are met, where work is meaningful and where lives are valued. A world free from inequality and oppression and where the best of people’s abilities are used for the common good.

We cannot predict exactly what socialism in Australia will look like but certain things are clear.

A publicly owned and democratically planned economy will bring the big corporations, which control around 80 per cent of the Australian economy, into public hands and under working-class control.

The wealth of the companies that make billions in profits, like Telstra, the big banks, the major supermarket chains, and huge energy and mining companies like BHP, would be used to invest in jobs, homes and services.

The funds are there but they are hoarded by a super rich minority. Socialism will change that by putting the wealth the people create into the hands of the people.

A society based on maximising the collective good, rather than amassing profits, will mobilise research and technology to convert to sustainable practices and start to repair the environment.

The economy, including transport and most industry, will be powered entirely by renewable energy, generated by a mixture of public utilities and local micro-grids. Coal-fired power stations and petrol-driven cars will be eliminated.

All education from primary to tertiary, and all health care will be free. Public housing would be universally available. Public transport would be expanded.

Food production will be more sustainable, enabling Australia to feed a growing population, while increasing exports to the rest of the world. Water resources will be managed more efficiently and with less damaging impacts on natural ecosystems.

The working week will be shortened with no loss of pay and unemployment will be eliminated. The minimum wage will be raised to cover the real costs of living. For those who can't or won't find work, a basic income will be provided.

Instead of creating job losses and forcing people into poverty, automation will mean the working week could be shortened without sacrificing jobs. Robots taking our jobs will no longer be a doomsday threat but a welcome development that provides more leisure time and frees up more resources to be put towards scientific, philosophical, cultural and artistic breakthroughs.

Jack Mundey, speaking as secretary of the BLF, said: "Yes, we want to build. However, we prefer to build urgently required hospitals, schools, other public utilities, high-quality flats, units and houses, provided they are designed with adequate concern for the environment, than to build ugly unimaginative architecturally bankrupt blocks of concrete and glass offices … Though we want all our members employed, we will not just become robots directed by developer-builders who value the dollar at the expense of the environment. More and more, we are going to determine which buildings we will build."

CONCLUSION

Capitalism has been described as a war against the Earth.

It has created the environmental crisis, cannot solve it and has failed both people and the planet. We must re-think the way we live and function as a society. A social revolution is needed to carry out a massive re-organisation of the global economy.

In times of crisis, impossible ideas can become possible. The coronavirus crisis can be a catalyst. It is vital to fight for the kind of transformative change that can curb the worst effects of the environmental crisis and set society on a genuinely people-centred, democratic and just path.

We possess the philosophical, scientific and technical knowledge we need to build a just, democratic and sustainable social order which functions in the interests of the survival and flourishing of humanity and the environment.

We face a ruling class with a single-minded fixation on profit and power. We face a constellation of powerful institutions and corporate power. The task ahead is monumental. Our actions must be truly historical in their sweep and consequences or we will lose the future. Humanity can opt for the preservation of capitalism or the preservation of a habitable environment.

Our challenge is to build a movement powerful enough to overthrow the existing destructive order and begin the task of building socialism.

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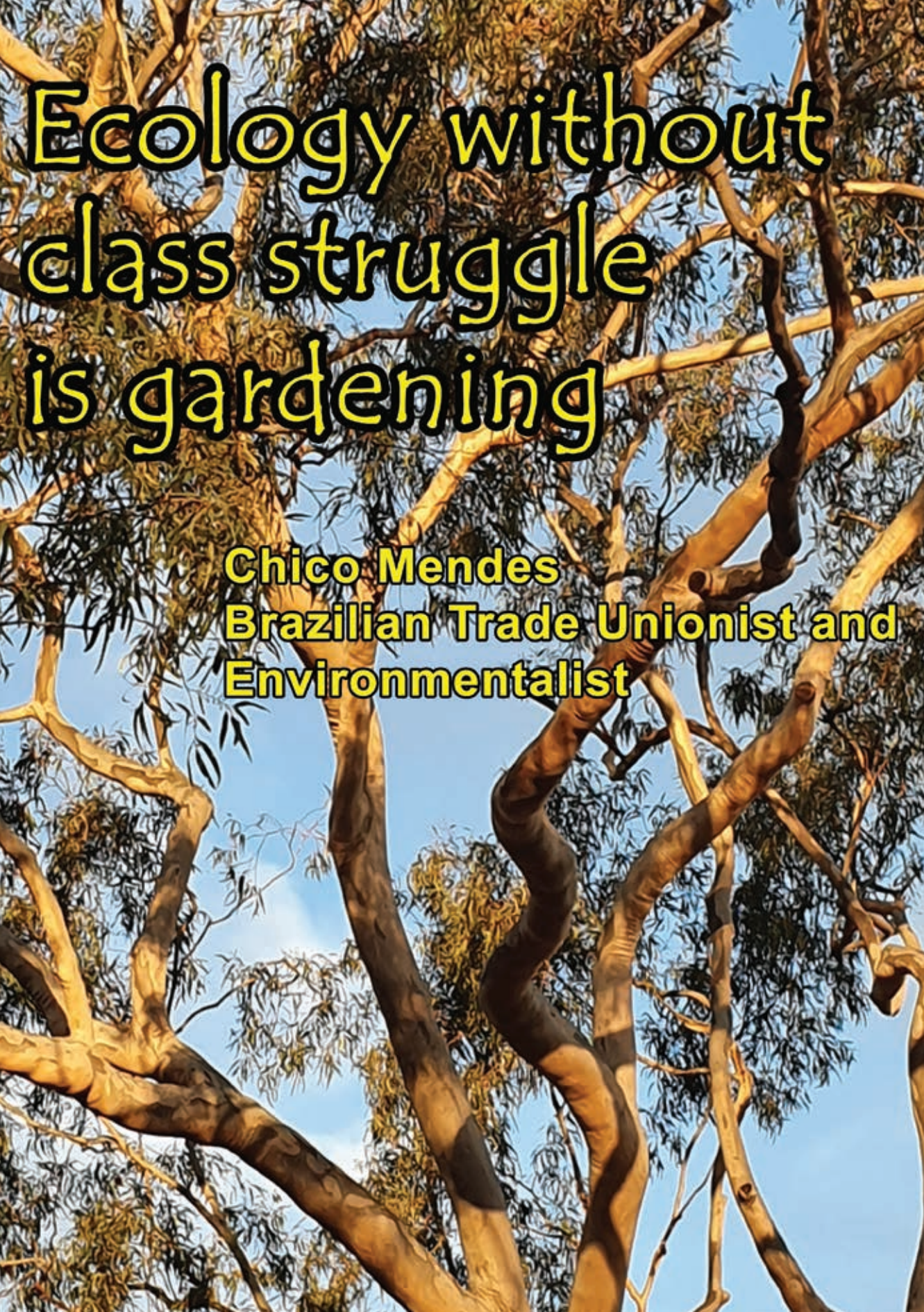
Ecology without class struggle is gardening
Chico Mendes
Brazilian Trade Unionist and Environmentalist