



THE ANVIL



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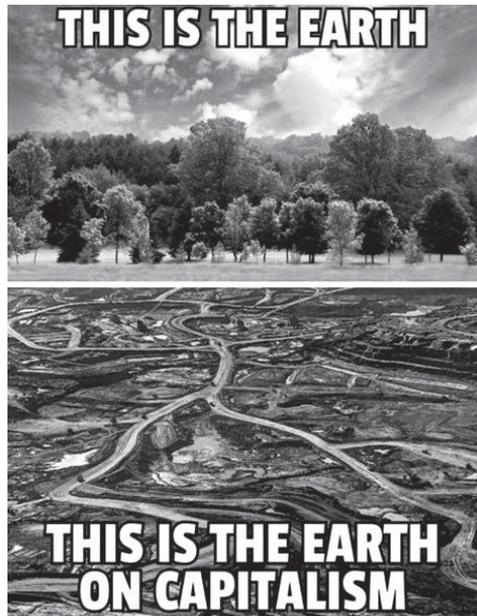
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AFTER THE FIRES

The disastrous bushfires in eastern Australia are now out, but not before over 18.7 million hectares were burnt and 34 people killed. Sydney, Australia's largest city, was blanketed in smoke for over a month, while numerous other cities and towns suffered similar conditions. And, despite recent rain, most areas are still susceptible – the bushfire season lasts until March at least and one dry month could start things up again almost anywhere except along the coast.

Political debate around the bushfires has been out of the Government's control for months. They lost it when Scott Morrison was found to be on a secret holiday to Hawaii at the time two volunteer firefighters were killed, but it probably only dawned on Morrison how badly things were going for him when he tried a PR appearance in a town recently hit by fire and couldn't find anyone willing to shake his hand.

For quite some time, there has been a large majority in Australia in favour of treating climate change seriously and taking effective action, but their strength of conviction was lacking. Other issues took precedence and public concern



Credit: IWW Environmental Unionism Caucus

wasn't enough to drive the denialists from their dominant position in the Government. All this has now changed.

Opinion polls confirm what public debate has suggested. The environment is now the biggest issue in the public mind in Australia and the demand for action is growing.

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WHY CLASS STRUGGLE?

It's not uncommon for contemporary Anarchists to say "class struggle is outmoded and isn't how to make a revolution these days" or "the working class is so sexist and racist that we have to turn to radical struggles outside the workplace to get anywhere". The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group disagrees. We think these views are based on a mistaken idea of who the working class are and a lack of understanding of who has the power in our society.

The Working Class

The capitalist media have a sociological view of class. Their perspective is that the working class is composed of people in blue collar occupations, or people on low incomes. Often, they draw an even worse picture – they portray the working class as a group of straight white men in blue overalls. This suits the interests of the middle class liberals who conceive of themselves as the bearers of social progress and also the reactionary Right who have the same picture of working class people as the liberals, but claim to be on the side of the workers.

But class is not about social stratification. It's about how society is organised economically. If you work for a wage or a salary, you don't have the right to hire or fire and you don't exercise the power of the State like a police officer or a magistrate, you're working class. More broadly, you are working class if you have nothing to sell but your labour and you don't exercise the power of the capitalist class. Class is a matter of what side your

bread is buttered on.

Looked at this way, at least 80% of people in Australia are working class. And, far from being composed purely of straight white males, the working class is multi-racial, multi-cultural and gender diverse. Almost all migrant communities in Australia, particularly those recently arrived, are overwhelmingly working class. Many people popularly regarded as middle class are, in fact, working class. Teachers and nurses, for example, are working class – something proven by the fact that they have joined unions in droves and gone on strike for their rights.

The middle class, by contrast, is composed of two groups, both being the meat in the sandwich between the working class and the capitalists.

The first group of the middle class is made up of self-employed people who run their own business and work beside any employees they have; the second is middle managers who have the power to hire and fire their subordinates but don't exercise significant power inside their organisation. Altogether, the middle class is a pretty small group, especially when you remove sham contractors who are only technically self employed in order that their bosses can get around labour laws. It should also be noted that, historically, the most politically conservative sector of the workforce is composed of self-employed people in blue collar occupations – people who aren't workers but are often regarded as such by the capitalist media.

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The Government has had to change its position. It has silenced open deniers and has taken to stating frequently that climate change is real and needs to be stopped. Its defence now revolves around saying that its existing policies are adequate to meet the challenge. This is a lie as much as denial is, but it has the virtue of being just plausible enough that supporters of the Government can pretend to believe it.

Beyond the Government's official position, things have moved. Sections of the Liberal Party want to take more serious action. The National Party is having a civil war: one faction thinks the defence of coal needs to be done aggressively, while the other thinks that's too risky. Meanwhile, Labor has announced a commitment to zero net emissions by 2050 and the Greens have a new leader who is communicating their existing policies more assertively.

None of this, of course, amounts to a solution. To the extent that the Liberals' new stance is not just PR cover for the same old same old, it's too little, too late. Labor is fundamentally handicapped by the craven capitulation to pressure that's in its DNA. And the Greens suffer under the delusion that a just and sustainable capitalism is possible.

What needs to be done

Right now we have improved prospects of translating propaganda into action. The next global School Strike for Climate needs to be many times bigger than last September's and it needs to have the social weight of the unions. The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group advocates that workers form rank and file groups in their unions to push for turning the School Strike into a workers' strike for

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a Just Transition to a zero carbon society. In these rank and file groups, Anarchists will argue that the capitalist class is so invested in its sunk costs in fossil fuels that any realistic transition requires the abolition of capitalism. It's possible to imagine a capitalism based on renewable energy, but the existing capitalist class will fight tooth and nail to protect their investments.

Only the power of the working class can beat the capitalists who would see the world burn before surrendering their fortunes. To prevent catastrophic climate change, we need a revolution. Bringing the unions into the School Strike for Climate movement is a necessary step on that road.

STRIKE FOR A SAFE CLIMATE

WHY CLASS STRUGGLE?

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The Power of the Workplace

Anarchist Communists advocate a class struggle perspective because the power of the capitalists derives from their control of production in each workplace. The most effective way to defeat the capitalists is for workers to organise to take the means of production off the bosses and wield its power themselves.

Of course this doesn't mean that forms of oppression outside the workplace are unimportant. We recognise that Australia is built on stolen land and that the Aboriginal people have never ceded their sovereignty. We recognise that racism, sexism, Islamophobia and homophobia are forms of oppression which can be

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more intense than that suffered by workers in the workplace. These forms of oppression are the product of class society. Various forms of struggle can reduce those oppressions, but they cannot be eliminated without abolishing capitalism – and that requires the workers taking the workplace away from the capitalists.

This also doesn't mean that Anarchist Communists idolise workers as people whose opinions and actions are always left wing. We are well aware that reactionary politics has its dirty grip on wide sections of society, including the working class. If that wasn't so we would have had the revolution a century ago. Instead, the consciousness of workers is contradictory. It will be when they are struggling for their own interests that they will come to see that racism, sexism and all other forms of special oppression are not only morally wrong but also a practical impediment to their victory. Class struggle drives workers to the left.

The Way Forward

The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group advocates that Anarchists should orient their strategies to the workplace.

Other areas of struggle are also vital. People can and should struggle against oppression wherever they find it and struggle outside the workplace can win reforms and radicalise people. But unless we take the workplaces off the capitalists we'll never beat them. Our victories will be partial and reversible. Our struggles outside the workplace should also be directed towards building a force that can take its politics inside it. Only the multi-racial, multicultural and gender diverse working class can rid the world of capitalism.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

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What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a social philosophy based upon the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity. It is the political dimension of a free society.

What is Communism?

Communism is the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need". It is the economic dimension of a free society.

What is the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group?

The MACG is an organisation of class struggle revolutionary anarchists who share political positions, articulated in theory, strategy and tactics.

We aim to encourage struggle by the working class for its own interests and, within that struggle, we aim to advance Anarchist ideas as its necessary philosophical basis.

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