

Towards a Radical Ecology: an Anarchist Response to the Climate Crisis



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an Anarchist Response to the Climate Crisis

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These 2 texts were found at the **Red & Black Notes** site. The first article, *Towards a Radical Ecology: an Anarchist Response to the Climate Crisis* was written by T H Livingstone and James Sherriff. The author of the second article, *There is No Parliamentary Road to Climate Justice* is unknown.



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14. This section was not delivered in part because my co-presenter argued, reasonably, against the position, putting that we need to keep the reformist rhetoric of the Green New Deal separate from the need for a plan for the revolutionary reconstruction of society to address the climate crisis. I am not sure I agree, and would argue the discourse is still worth critically engaging with.
15. Recommended Reading: Lucy Parsons, Address to the founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1905.
<https://www.redblacknotes.com/2019/07/02/lucy-parsons-speech-to-the-founding-convention-of-the-iww/>
16. Recommended Reading: 'Our Program is the Anarchist Revolution!', Wayne Price, 2006.
<http://www.anarkismo.net/article/2725>
17. Recommended Reading: 'Building Power and Advancing for Reforms not Reformism', Thomas Giovanni, 2013.
<https://miamiautonomyandsolidarity.wordpress.com/2013/03/02/building-power-and-advancing-for-reforms-not-reformism/>
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10. Ocasio-Cortez: Green New Deal 'Leaves the Door Open' on Nuclear, Morning Consult, 6 June 2019.
<https://morningconsult.com/2019/05/06/ocasio-cortez-green-new-deal-leaves-door-open-nuclear/>
11. Recommended reading, 'A Green New Deal vs Revolutionary Eco-Socialism', Wayne Price, 4 Jan 2019.
<https://blackrosefed.org/green-new-deal-ecosocialism/>
12. AOC's rhetoric on Abolish ICE is strong, but her concrete policy propositions amount to "abolish and replace". See 'Abolishing ICE by funding it', Rosa Negra, 8 Jan 2019.
<https://blackrosefed.org/aoc-abolish-ice-vote/>
13. Check out the Rosa Negra Reader, 'Socialist Faces in High Places'.
<https://blackrosefed.org/socialist-faces-in-high-places-reader/>



It is no exaggeration to say that we are at a turning point in history.

Our collective response to the global crises we are now facing will determine our success in not only the next few years, but the next few decades – perhaps even the next century. The coronavirus pandemic has, of course, become the dominant issue of 2020, but the climate crisis has not halted or even slowed its progress behind the scenes. Bushfires sweep the globe as summers come and go, and the tipping points beyond which recovery will become impossible are cascading one-by-one. Time is running out.

But this is not just a time of existential dread – it is also a time which holds the possibility of deeply transformative change. This *could* be an era of abundance and prosperity, if only the fruits of our collective labour were shared equitably amongst all people; if communities had the freedom and autonomy to determine their own needs and wants; if workers the world over had the power to direct their energies towards genuinely productive and rewarding work, not the wasteful and demeaning work forced on them by the 'invisible hand of the market', or the blunt arm of the state.¹ It is this gap between *what is*, and *what could be*, that is the revolutionary potential of our time. The possibility of a truly socialist and harmonious society is now within reach, if only we had the will and the courage to seize it.

This article intends to set the stage for a discussion that needs to happen if we are to truly address the climate crisis. We must, as anarcho-communists, determine how our ideas of libertarian socialist revolution fit with the material and scientific conditions pressed upon us by climate change and the natural environment, without compromising our commitment to a full and positive freedom for all people. We must define and defend these ideas firstly as Leftists, to guard against the co-optation of radical climate action by 'green capitalism' or 'market-based solutions'. But as anarchists, we must also critique solutions which rely entirely on a swollen state bureaucracy, such as the Green New Deal, as these solutions deal with only part of the problem.

This is not a discussion to be taken lightly, and we do not put forward these ideas simply for the sake of argument. This is not an academic exercise, but an earnest response to a dire, tangible, and immediate threat. We also do not pretend to hold the solutions to this crisis ourselves – we only intend to start a discussion so that locally relevant and effective solutions may arise organically.

The Third Road: the Anarchist's Approach

Faced with the two basic approaches to climate change, green capitalism and a centralised state-delivered intervention, we anarchists ought to feel caught between a rock and a hard place. One of the fundamental tenets of anarchist thought is that any state, even those that are nominally 'socialist', exists as an inherently violent entity that alienates the individuals whom it is created to govern. The natural function of a state is to centralise and bureaucratise power within societies, which limits the autonomy of communities and individuals and stifles the localised innovation needed to respond to crises as they arise.

So we don't oppose state-led solutions just for the sake of it. The key flaw is that the state is utterly inept at solving the specific problems of each particular community in its jurisdiction, and so is inherently unable to respond to the localised dynamics of the climate crisis. This flaw is due primarily to the issues of centralisation and authoritarianism inherent to the institution of the state under both capitalist and socialist economies. Centralisation can be defined briefly, in the context of state governance, as the concentration of decision-making power and authority into a single institutional body, which then delegates this power down to other institutions. It's supposed merit is its ability to ensure uniformity of policy and action, and to enforce the agreed upon rules and conditions of the society or territory in which it governs.

In the example of climate action, this would mean the ability to enforce a uniform transition to renewable energy sources across whole nations. However, the reality of centralisation is that it removes the autonomy of communities and individuals and separates them from the political processes which govern their lives. Instead of communities and the individuals within them deciding on how they ought to manage their surrounding environments according to localised natural and human needs, a central body (e.g. the NSW Department of Planning, Industry, and

To overcome the social, political and economic systems that stand in our way, we have to build mass, directly democratic, participatory and grass roots organisation that spans the working class. As a class we have to build the confidence, capacity and awareness of our own strength and numbers.

To build this mass organisation, we have to make anarchist ideas the leading ideas in struggle. We have to win the arguments against authoritarianism, against reformism, against capitalism, and against all of the oppressive ideologies that sustain and buttress this system.

And we have to do all of this whilst fighting for climate action today.

In 1936, in the midst of the Civil War, the Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti was told by a journalist, that even if you win "you will be sitting on a pile of ruins". Durruti responded:

"We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a time. For, you must not forget, we can also build. It is we the workers who built these palaces and cities here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers, can build others to take their place. And better ones! We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth; there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute."

Buenaventura Durruti,
1936.

I just mentioned that the method of struggle we argue for is direct action. Direct action is a term much abused and misunderstood within both the environment movement and wider society in Australia.

The term “direct action” has its roots in the labour movement. Workers engage in direct action when they act for themselves, using their own power, rather than relying on this or that intermediary.

Direct action does not simply mean locking on, staging a sit in, and getting arrested (although it might).

Direct action occurs when workers themselves disrupt the continued operation of the capitalist firm or institution that is responsible for their complaint. Direct action is also collective act. An individual who goes on strike alone has simply quit their job.

This distinction is important. A lot of what gets called direct action in Australia amounts to little more than symbolic action, undertaken by small numbers of people, and directed at symbolic targets.¹⁸

Recovering the term “direct action” matters because, in the struggle for reforms now, direct action is powerful in ways that various forms of symbolic action or appeal to outside authorities will never be. But this is also important to the program for anarchist revolution, because it is only through collective, mass disruption of the operation of capital and the state that the working class will be able to overcome the existing social, political and economic order.



The task confronting us may seem immense, but the outlines of a way forward are clear.

We have to make and win the argument for a positive, working class, vision of climate justice, for everyone on planet earth.

There is no parliamentary road to this climate justice. The internal dynamic of capitalism necessarily generates massive and ongoing ecological destruction. Any attempt to overcome this will undermine the functioning of capitalism, and will encounter the massive and total resistance.

Environment) of technocratic officials is responsible. This presupposes that the community “doesn’t know any better” than the bureaucrats and creates unnecessary hierarchies of power that lead to wasteful and often harmful outcomes. In dealing with a crisis as complex and variable as climate change, the solutions that we implement need to be as flexible and as responsive as the problem itself. As such, relying on a centralised bureaucracy to solve ecological crises is both ineffective and undesirable.

In fact, when communities are fully empowered to make democratic decisions on issues which directly affect them, these communities are often far more sensible managers of the local environment, natural resources, and waste than centralised state departments. In her Nobel prize-winning book, *Governing the Commons*, Elinor Ostrom uses behavioural economics to prove this point, citing, among others, the example of a group of Turkish fishermen successfully instituting a sustainable fishing model developed and managed by themselves. This by no means denies the importance of scientific expertise or advice. Of course, for the community to adequately manage their local environment, knowledge is vital. What we advocate and what Ostrom shows, however, is that local people are best able to put this knowledge into practice. Similar to the argument that workers are best equipped to govern the conditions and management of their own workplace, local communities are best equipped to manage the environments on which they rely. Consider the fact that First Nations peoples around the world practised effective management of their local ecosystems without any external ‘experts’ or governing bodies for millenia – a fact which is widely recognised but not truly respected. Indeed, if we are committed to decolonisation as well as anti-capitalism, the ideas of decentralised governance and anti-hierarchical democracy are critical to our revolutionary movement.

Ecology as Radical Science

This critique of state-centralisation and bureaucratic power is a fundamental anarchist notion. However, the application of this critique to the issue of environmental degradation and climate change is built on the logic of *social ecology*, as pioneered by Murray Bookchin.

We propose that Bookchin’s framework provides a strong basis from which we can build a modern understanding of revolutionary eco-socialism. Essentially, this framework understands society, the economy, and the

environment not as separate issues, but as intertwined elements of a broader ecology that is dynamic and interdependent. The most effective management of any one of these spheres requires an understanding of the complexity and needs of the others, just as in the management of a natural ecosystem. This logic is inherently critical of the state – Bookchin writes that even states which are ‘radical’, ‘worker controlled’, and ‘democratic’ naturally function to entrench the interests of the bureaucratic elite who have been afforded the authority of said state. The only truly democratic forms of social and economic organisation are those whose power comes from the bottom up – the kinds of organisation which recognise the autonomy of the individual and their community, and that facilitate higher-order coordination where necessary, but remove the need for permanent institutions of top-down governance.

Bookchin notes that this way of thinking is what animates modern and historical anarchist revolutionary movements worldwide. In these movements, “control over the larger organisation lies always with the affinity groups rather than with the coordinating bodies, [and] all action, in turn, is based on voluntarism and self-discipline, not on coercion and command.” This form of organisation, collective action, and decision-making relies on the ecological notion of *spontaneity* – the spontaneity of individuals, of affinity groups, of organisations, and of communities – which is only possible in a movement based on freedom and decentralisation.

Spontaneity, in this sense, refers not simply to chaotic or erratic actions, but to the deeper belief in ‘spontaneous development’. That is, the belief that projects, plans, and other developments should be free to find their own equilibrium, achieved through the creativity of free, independent individuals and collectives, and mediated through the material and cultural conditions of their context. In this framework, spontaneity not only fosters the efficient and organic development of projects and movements, it also promotes the internal liberation of the revolutionary individual, who is empowered to take up direct action where they can, and to embrace the spontaneous development of the self within the context of the collective. Imagine the difference in outcome between a ‘mass’ which is directed from above, and a collective which has embraced and encouraged the creativity of each independent individual in its movement.

As the climate crisis is an ecological crisis, this means that we must embrace these concepts of anti-hierarchical decentralisation and developmental



Anarchism does not propose sitting and waiting for a revolution.

Anarchists do not abstain from the struggle for reforms within the current political and economic system.

The challenge for anarchists is to embrace the fight for reforms, without succumbing to the trap of reformism. ¹⁷ By reformism, anarchists mean the idea that we can achieve the changes we need in the world by gradual or incremental steps within the current system.

There are reforms to be won within capitalism. And we need the reforms that we can win. There are forms of climate action that we can compel the existing states of the world to concede. But there will always be a limit, capitalism will never concede a reform that would genuinely disrupt the drive for profit.

The struggle for reforms is the mechanism by which we begin to build the mass movements of the working class that will be necessary to overcome capitalism.

Within this fight, anarchists argue for directly democratic, grass roots and participatory structures, not only because these structures will be more effective today, but also because our class needs these structures tomorrow.

Anarchists argue for direct action today, not only because direct action is more effective, but also because we want to build the kind of mass movement that enables the mass of people to struggle for themselves tomorrow.

We fight struggles for various reforms not only because they are worthwhile, but also because it is in the struggle for reforms today that the working class learns the skills, and develops the consciousness of its own power and capacity, in order to fight for revolution tomorrow.



in rhetoric, would come a new ruling class, new rulers, new hierarchy, new domination and new exploitation.

In time, with a new state and a new ruling class, (once again trying to reap a surplus from the majority), a revolution by any minority will bring renewed ecological destruction.

To repeat, the anarchist revolution cannot be a revolution of anarchists, it must be a revolution of the working class, acting as itself, directly, and without intermediaries.

In order to act directly and for itself, the working class requires organisation.

The mass organisation of the working class cannot be a traditional political party, a command structure, or any form of centralised hierarchy.

No party, command structure or hierarchy will enable the working class to genuinely act for itself. Hierarchical organisations act in the interests of the individuals who control the hierarchy.

Mass organisation of the working class must be directly democratic, participatory, decentralised, and built from the grass roots. All positions of responsibility should be temporary, delegated, and re-callable.

The program of anarchism is therefore a program for mass, directly democratic, and combative working class organisation.

But mass organisation of the working class will not happen spontaneously. Anarchists must work to make anarchist ideas the leading ideas in struggle, or as it's sometimes expressed, to achieve a leadership of ideas.

We have to win the arguments for revolution, for working class mass democracy, and against authoritarian shortcuts of all kinds.

To do this, anarchists require specific political organisation. Alongside the project of mass organisation, we must also organise explicitly for our ideas.

Having said all this, I can see the obvious objection.

We are in the midst of a climate emergency, survival demands that we fight for climate action today.

I wholeheartedly agree. We have to fight today, and the way we fight will shape the possibilities open to us in the future.

spontaneity. Recognising that our climate crisis is multi-faceted is essential. Global warming means more erratic climates which leads to increased food scarcity, raised sea levels, increased population density, and more extreme weather events that threaten global supply lines. For Pacific Island communities, climate change looks like smaller land mass and greater exposure to storms. In Australia, regional communities suffer more frequent and intense fires, floods, and droughts, while asthmatics the country over suffer from bushfire smoke. For all, it will require a greater flexibility and responsiveness to local environmental dynamics, which is impossible under a globalised capitalist economy *and* under an economy guided by a bloated state bureaucracy.

Ecology describes a total and holistic harmony with the natural world which allows humans to flourish in their natural environments without exploiting or mismanaging them. It is not merely about saving one particular species from extinction or this particular forest from logging. An ecological response to the climate crisis would recognise that some regions may be more suited to hydroelectricity, while others may best be served by large solar arrays. Just considering the sheer complexity and diversity of natural environments and human societies across the world, it should be clear that ecology is a truly anarchist science.

Conclusion

The question of our time, then, is not how we should respond to the climate crisis, or the coronavirus crisis, or the current economic crisis. The real question is twofold: firstly, how can we take hold of the revolutionary potential of this moment to attack the root cause of each of these crises – capitalism, and all its oppressive and destructive effects; and secondly, how can we build in its place a system that will truly value and secure the freedom of every individual, community, and society around the world.

In dealing with the first question – the destruction of the old – we must recognise that the revolutionary dynamic of our time is one of intense potentiality. The gap between what we currently have, and the possibility of what we could have in terms of resource abundance, technological development, and individual freedom has widened to the point of breaking, and the possibility of a post-scarcity society is now irresistible. Anyone can see that our modern technology should be freeing us, not facilitating our further exploitation; anyone can tell that there is food

enough to go around, if only we had the freedom and the means to share it. We must recognise that the potential for change is no longer a dream but a *necessity*, and that if we do not seize on the energy and the hope that lies within this revolutionary potentiality, we will fail, and this system will collapse upon us.

On the second question – of building something new – we must always be working to interpret and explain the dynamics of the current era through the lens of the world we are seeking to create. As anarchists, our responses to the immediate issues facing us must be guided not just by the need to deal with the issues themselves, but by the greater goal of fundamental societal change, a goal grounded in the desire for human freedom, social justice, and material prosperity for all.

There is only one group that can muster the social force necessary to overcome this absolute and total resistance. The revolution against capitalism has to be a working class revolution.

I want to take a brief detour here to say one or two things about the idea of the working class.

First, when we say “working class” we are not referring to an identity. “Working class” refers to a position in relation to the capitalist mode of production.

Narrowly defined the working class includes all people who do not own a portion of the means of production, and who sell their ability to labour to capitalists in exchange for a wage.

More broadly defined, a reasonable definition of the working class also includes all unemployed workers, most students, and all people otherwise excluded from the labour force who do not have access to the means of production.

The working class is global, it is rural and urban, it is concentrated in the global south, it is by a narrow majority non-male, and it is overwhelmingly non-white.

In the Australian context, over twenty percent of the working class is tertiary educated, over twenty percent speak a language other than English, and twice as many are employed in healthcare than manufacturing. A sizeable majority of the organised working class (union members) in Australia is non male.

Anyone who claims that the working class is strictly white, male, English speaking and employed in ‘blue collar industry’ needs a reality check.

The working class are the overwhelming majority of society who have the least to gain from the continuation of capitalism.

The revolution that anarchists argue for is a revolution by the working class, acting for itself, without intermediaries.

It may seem like a contradiction, but one of the things anarchists are against is a revolution undertaken by the anarchists. We oppose the control of any political minority, even our own.

Any revolution of a minority will necessarily require creating and maintaining an apparatus of minority rule, in other words, it would require the creation of a state. With a state, no matter how revolutionary

The Anarchist Revolution

There is no parliamentary road to climate justice. There is no solution to the climate crisis within the limits of our present political and economic system. Capitalism necessarily generates ever increasing ecological destruction, and as such, capitalism must be abolished.

Our program for climate justice is the abolition of capitalism, and our program for the abolition of capitalism is the anarchist revolution.¹⁶

The word 'revolution' will doubtless cause many to scoff. On the surface, the political and economic situation in Australia couldn't appear less favourable to the revolutionary. The 'common sense' position is that capitalism is the only political and economic system that is possible, and that revolution is impossible.

But contrary to popular belief, Australia is not an island. Australia is just one state within a capitalist world-system, and contrary to what capitalists would like you to believe, revolutions have happened, do happen, and will continue to happen.

2019 has been a year of uprising, revolt and revolution. Mass uprisings have shaken the political order from Sudan to Chile, and from Hong Kong to Iraq. The real question is how far will any revolution go, and what are its prospects for success.

Unfortunately, no ruling class, no political and economic system, surrenders its existence willingly. A political revolution against this or that government can expect every person who benefits from the continuation of the government in question to resist their revolution with the means at their disposal.

But in political revolutions, at some point, counter-revolutionaries cut their losses, and seek an accommodation.

The revolution we propose will enjoy no such luxury. Anarchists do not simply want to overthrow one ruling class and replace them with another, we demand the abolition of the very existence of a ruling class.

In order to win a world worth living on, we have to muster the forces necessary to overcome the absolute and total resistance of all of the forces who benefit (or think they benefit) from the present political and economic system. There can be no compromise.

Recommended Reading:

- Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 1971, in particular, "Ecology and Revolutionary Thought"
- Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, 1990.

This article written by T H Livingstone and James Sherriff

This article is originally from Sydney Anarcho-Communists Bulletin #2.

<https://www.redblacknotes.com/sydney/>

Notes:

1. The invisible hand describes the unintended social benefits of an individual's self-interested actions, a concept that was first introduced by Adam Smith in 1759 in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in reference to income distribution.



There is No Parliamentary Road to Climate Justice

So far this summer, 27 people have been killed, 10 million hectares of bush, forest and national park have burned, and more than 1800 houses have been destroyed.¹ As of Saturday there were 130 fires still burning across Australia, more than 50 of those fires remained uncontained.

The destruction we are experiencing today is the predicted and predictable result of climate change. Fortunately, governments around the world have been taking action on climate since at least the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, and what action it has been!

As of November 2019, carbon concentration in the earth's atmosphere sits at 412 parts per million.² Global carbon emissions are due to hit 36.8 billion tonnes for 2019, a 62% increase since global climate negotiations began in 1990.³

In 2016, governments around the world signed the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. The commitments that the world's governments have made to reduce carbon emissions, if they met them, would lock in planetary heating of 3.3 degrees. Business as usual on planet earth today would generate carbon emissions to lock in 4.2 degrees of heating,⁴ and the resultant feedback loops as the world's permafrost melts and carbon sinks break down, sees us heading for a +5 degree world.⁵

In a four degree world, global food production would collapse, 2/3s of the glaciers that feed Asia's rivers would be lost, large parts of the equatorial region would become uninhabitable, and the vast majority of humanity



There is another way to understand and relate to the idea of Green New Deal.¹⁴

As a movement, it is not enough to say that dramatic action on climate is needed now.

We genuinely need to advance a more or less detailed plan for a just transition. We do need to map out what sufficient action on climate might look like, what it might consist of, and what it would mean.

We need a Green New Deal worth fighting for. For two decades the environment movement has made the argument that our world faces existential threats, and that urgent action is necessary. The opponents of climate action have parried this argument by projecting action on climate as a plan for privation and poverty. The refusal of mainstream environmentalism to even countenance an anti-capitalist position, and to instead focus on individual demands for self-sacrifice, has played into the hands of ecocide whilst diverting blame and attention from the economic and political system that is destroying the planet.

To win the argument for climate action we need a positive vision for the world in which climate justice has been won, and we need a plan for how it can be achieved.

But we should have no illusions that we can win such a plan within the confines of the existing political and economic system.¹⁵

We should instead be unashamedly making the case that a political and economic system that will not and cannot deliver a world worth living on, must be abolished.



capital will re-embrace these sorts of neo-liberal market solutions.

For capitalism, far better a cap-and-trade scheme that allows you to claim carbon credits for building palm oil plantations in Indonesia than to countenance mass publicly owned renewable energy.

Green New Deals

Of course, not everyone within the Greens embraces this vision of Green-neoliberalism, far from it.

As we gather here today there is a growing left to the environment movement which draws inspiration from the apparent rebirth of parliamentary socialism in Britain, the United States and parts of the European Union.

More people are demanding a response to the climate crisis which centres public investment in renewable energy and transport infrastructure as part of a package of policies towards a so-called just transition.

In the United States, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have broken with the neoliberal rhetoric of the rest of the Democratic Party and are promising to deliver a ten-year Green New Deal.

The campaigns of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Bernie Sanders in the United States have pushed against the limits of what is possible within the confines of existing political economic structures, but they cannot escape their logic.

For all the talk of socialism the Green New Deal of AOC and Sanders is a plan to save capitalism from its failure to act on climate. There is a reason AOC's Green New Deal is soft on both nuclear¹⁰ and fracking,¹¹ there is a reason she won't support abolition of ICE, or an end to migrant detention and deportation in practice.¹²

If by some miracle Sanders wins both the Democratic primary and the US Presidential election, a Sanders presidency would be forced to make ever more concessions to the reality of US politics.¹³

Well, he would make ever more concessions to reality or face the same problem as every principled socialist elected to high office before him, the unrelenting and total opposition of all of the forces that benefit from the existing state of affairs. Just ask Salvador Allende.

would be forced to live in those high latitude zones where conventional agriculture would remain viable.⁶

It's a good thing that the world's governments are so committed to effective climate action!



Capitalism

The destruction of our planet is no accident.

On planet earth today, a mere twenty firms are responsible for a third of all carbon emissions.⁷ Coal, gas and oil giants like Chevron, ExxonMobil and Royal Dutch Shell extract and burn fossil fuels that powers almost all economic activity on our planet.

The social, economic and political system that generated these firms, and drives this economic activity, has a name. The massive ecological destruction that we have witnessed and are witnessing has its origins and drivers within the capitalist mode of production.



Under capitalism, goods are produced so that they can be sold for a profit. Production occurs for profit.

Capitalist firms compete with each other to sell ever greater quantities of goods, in a race to reap ever greater profits.

If one firm is able to produce goods cheaper, it will sell them more cheaply in order to seize a greater share of the market, and reap a greater proportion of the available profit. To keep up, all firms must produce more, at greater scale, in order to sell at lower prices and greater volume.

Each and every year, capitalism must consume more than it did the previous year, in order to produce more, sell more, and reap greater

profits than the year before. We call this growth, and when capitalism is not growing it is in crisis. When capitalism is not growing, the pie available to capital is smaller, profit margins go negative, firms go bankrupt, and workers are driven into unemployment.

The climate crisis is the logical outcome of this system of capitalist production. "Capitalism tends to destroy its two sources of wealth: nature and human beings".⁸ Every capitalist firm is bound by the logic of produce as much as you can, as cheaply as you can, using the cheapest inputs available, or be replaced by those who will.



Parliamentary Roads?

The reality of the climate crisis demands action. To have a better than 50% chance of avoiding 1.5 degrees of global heating, we must achieve net zero emissions by approximately 2050.⁹

To achieve this all we need to do is quit coal, phase out all other fossil fuels in our energy systems, decarbonise transportation, and substantially reverse global deforestation.

Given the scale and urgency of the task confronting us, it is worth considering what are the various roads to climate justice on offer, and what are their various prospects of success.

The overwhelming majority of the environment movement is grounded in the assumption that there is some form of parliamentary road to climate justice, ie. a way to achieve necessary action on climate within the constraints imposed by our current politics and economic system.

The most obvious example are the Australian Greens.

I am going to paint a picture in broad brush strokes.

The assumption that underpins capital-G Green politics is that it is possible to elect politicians on an ecological and social justice platform, and that those politicians will then be able to use the power of the state to undertake necessary climate action.

Even if this Green political party is unable to win government, it should at least be able to occupy a position in the parliament where it can negotiate for worthwhile legislation addressing the climate crisis.

We have already seen the limits of Green politics in Australia.

A political party that needs to win elections within the current political system is constrained by the ideological and political boundaries of that system. The Greens strategy depends on getting elected now, and that compels them to adopt a political platform that is within the limits of political acceptability that exist now.

In 2010, when the Greens were able to form a de facto coalition with the Labour party, this meant a carbon cap-and-trade scheme (the so-called Carbon Tax) and moderate government investment in clean energy.

Plenty within the Greens and the wider environment movement still look back on this period and say, "well at least the carbon tax was better than nothing". Was it?

Carbon pollution cap-and-trade schemes involve the government establishing a "cap" on carbon emissions, and then establishing a market in which firms can buy and sell permits to pollute within that cap.

The same logic has long been applied to the management of Australia's river system. Permit systems turned water into a property right. Water rights worth billions are now traded on open markets, and any government that wants to return water to a river system is now forced to buy back these permits to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. Our rivers are drier than ever.

A carbon trading scheme turns pollution into a property right. Carbon markets enable speculators to make billions from this pollution, and if a government finally decides to further cut carbon pollution, polluters would have to be compensated for the loss of their property!

The Greens embraced a cap-and-trade carbon tax because they are bound by the logic of parliamentary politics. The Greens understood that a carbon tax would not have delivered sufficient action on climate, it may have contributed to locking in failure, but it was at the limits of what was politically possible within our existing political and economic system.

The carbon tax is not dead. The mainstream position of the Australian state is currently climate denial, but that won't hold. As the climate crisis continues to intensify, denialism will become increasingly untenable, and