

Marxism Today

Imperialism: the greatest threat to the environment

by *Duncan B.*

There can be no doubt that capitalism in its modern form of imperialism is the greatest threat to the environment of our planet. The need to secure a higher rate of profit is what drives imperialism to go to any lengths to achieve that aim, even to shortsightedly destroying the very planet we live on!

What else would you expect? The imperialist system represents capitalism at its most degenerate.

The recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico caused by BP's cost cutting and ignoring of safety procedures is the perfect example of this.

People around the world recognise the danger that imperialism poses to the environment.

On April 19-22 this year, over 35,000 people from more than 140 countries attended the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

The Conference was organised by the Bolivian Government in response to the failure of rich nations to come to agreement about action over climate change at the United Nations Climate Summit in Copenhagen last December.

The Conference adopted seventeen resolutions and a People's Agreement on tackling climate change. These will be taken to the next UN-organised international climate summit at Cancun in November this year.

Bolivian President Evo Morales addressed the Conference. According to Morales, "Humanity is faced with the dilemma of continuing down the path of capitalism and death or beginning the path towards harmony with nature and respect for life in order to save humanity."

Like Morales, the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez recognised that climate change was being driven by the imperatives of capitalism: "The climate crisis is much more than a climate crisis, it is a systemic crisis. It is the total crisis of the system, the capitalist model."

The only way to save humanity was through the building of socialism, Chavez claimed. "Out of this great crisis, capitalism must be buried and a new world born."

Contrast the stirring words of these revolutionary leaders with the spineless action of the Rudd/Gillard Labor Government in bowing to the biggest capitalist polluters and shelving even



Imperialism is wrecking the planet and must be stopped

their weak Emissions Trading Scheme to some future date.

Australia' environmental problems

Australia is facing many environmental problems - severe climatic changes, soil erosion and increased salinity of the soil, degradation of our waterways, excessive clearing of bushland, pollution of the air in major cities, threats from toxic waste dumps - the list goes on.

Much of the blame for the damage to the environment can be laid at the door of the imperialists.

Despite the weakness of the Federal government, ordinary Australians are not taking the damage to the environment lying down.

All around Australia, people are rising to defend the environment from the attacks of capitalism. Whether it is the fight by a few residents to save a piece of parkland or mass struggles against freeways, waste dumps or logging, these struggles draw together Australians from all walks of life and political experience.

Australia's indigenous people are facing pollution of their lands from mining activities such as the Ranger uranium mine, which is contaminating the World Heritage-listed wetlands in Kakadu National Park with millions of litres of radioactive water.

Marx and Engels on the fundamental relationship between humanity and nature

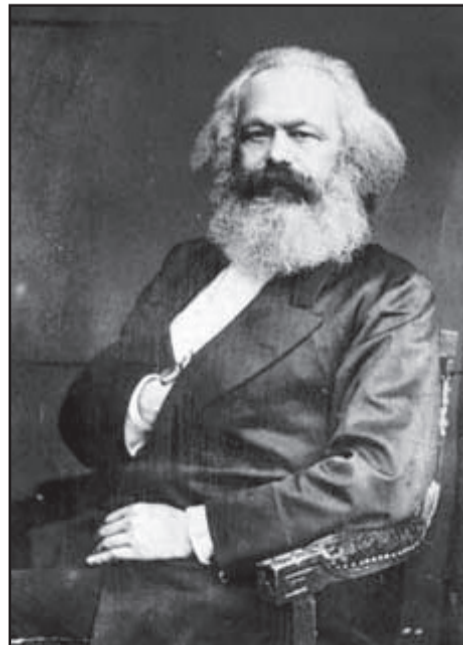
Environmental struggles are an important part of the overall struggle for national independence and socialism in Australia.

Communists must support all struggles to protect the environment. We

are inspired by the founders of Marxism, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, who wrote many years ago about the need to protect the environment.

In *Capital Volume 3*, Chapter 46, Marx spelt out a truth that almost two centuries of bourgeois property relations has tried to ignore or obscure, namely that: "From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*, [good heads of the family, that is, stewards] they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition."

Engels too, was well aware of the effects of human activities on the environment.



In *The Dialectics of Nature* Engels observed that environmental degradation had a long history. He recounted the example of early peoples whose forest clearances resulted in land degradation and the loss of soil moisture. The conclusion: "Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to know and correctly apply its laws. And, in fact, with every day that passes we are learning to understand these laws more correctly, and getting to know both the more immediate and the more remote consequences of our interference with the traditional course of nature."

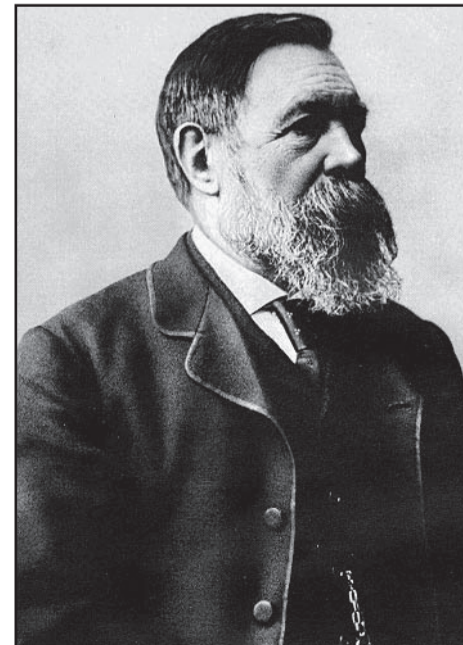
Anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle as the lynchpin of combating environmental degradation and climate change

As Engels pointed out, we have knowledge of the laws of science and an understanding of the consequences of our interference with nature.

What is needed is the will to change the situation.

The capitalists are unwilling to and cannot do anything which would harm their profits.

Only the people of the world united in anti-imperialist struggle can force the adoption of the measures needed to protect the earth's environment.



Marx and Engels both wrote about humanity's responsibility for nature