

Marxism Today

The Capitalist mode of production: a destructive rift for the planet's ecology and humanity!

by Max O

The current Carbon Tax controversy highlights the limits of capitalism's capacity to tackle the monumental issue of climate change. The Carbon Tax is not even a useful interim measure for turning around global warming.

The political promoters of the Carbon Tax, Labor and the Greens, are only deluding ordinary people, unsuccessfully it should be noted, that this will be the historic first step in dealing with climate change in Australia.

However, the biggest obstacle to effectively deal with global warming and climate change is the capitalist market system itself!

The major polluters, the coal and electricity corporations, have little interest in the change-over to renewable energy sources, for they can pass on the Carbon Tax as an extra cost to consumers.

Some of the climate initiatives from the Carbon Tax are positive, such as the closing down of dirty power stations (with huge subsidies to the power companies), energy efficiency programs, biodiversity protection and carbon farming ventures. However, these are too little too late. Capitalism is just not fast enough at tackling global warming!

Emissions Trading

Then, to compound the problem, the Carbon Tax will be replaced in 3 years time by an emissions market trading scheme (ETS).

Regardless of the greenhouse caps, there are no guarantees the ETS will even achieve the reductions of Labor's inadequately small 5% emissions target. In reality, the ETS is a licence to pollute and enables capitalism to pursue new opportunities to seek profits at the expense of the planet's damaged environment.

Inviting the coal and energy corporations to trade in carbon credits, and financial speculators to deal in derivatives in an ETS, is as bad as asking Dracula to run the blood bank!

The Australian parliamentary parties, whether they be Labor, Greens or Liberal will never compel the multinational corporations to change over to cleaner sources of energy by *regulation* – the

only effective method of dealing with the impending climate catastrophe.

Marx on the exploitation of nature

As Karl Marx pointed out, the exploitation of nature is as necessary to the profit system as the exploitation of the working class!

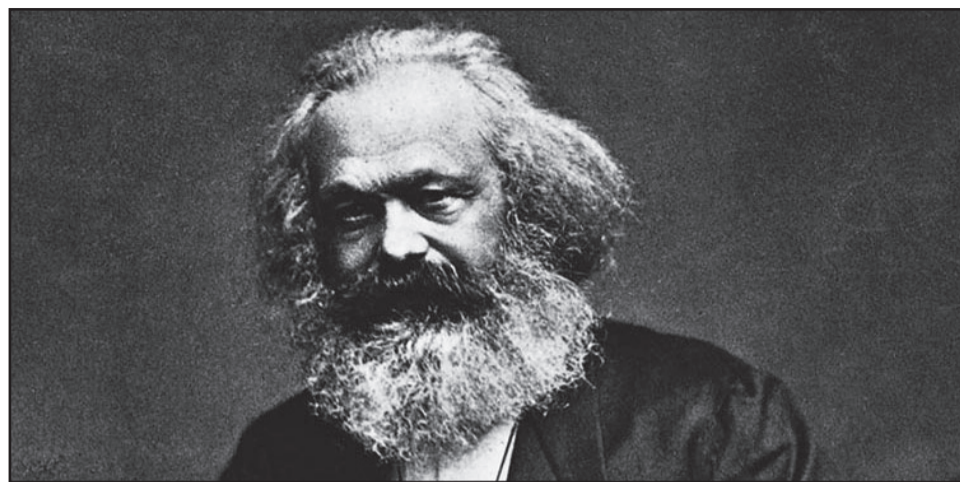
Close attention was paid by Marx to the German chemist Justus von Liebig's investigation into the crisis of soil fertility by capitalist agriculture. He offered the first convincing explanation of the role of soil nutrients – nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, for the growth of plants. Marx then provided an incisive analysis of its broader social and environmental implications.

He argued that capitalist agriculture produced a "metabolic rift" by its inevitable exhaustion of nutrients from the soil. The expansion of agriculture under capitalism saw new technologies introduced to achieve increasing production and profitable farming methods which, however, broke the soil's nutrient cycle. The consequence of this saw the redundant peasants forced out of the countryside into the swelling cities as factory fodder, creating the polluting metropolis we have now become so familiar with!

Capitalism's answer to the increasing soil infertility which it caused was to exploit the use of natural (guano) and then artificial nitrogen fertilizers, which only exacerbated the fertility problem in the long term!

No truer words were spoken than by Marx in *Capital*, Vol. 1 when he stated: "All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility... Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker."

What capitalist industrial and agricultural innovation had achieved is to alienate and separate both city and country, and then undermine the planet's ecology for the sole purpose of capital accumulation. It had broken the nutrient cycle! Agricultural production was taken away to the cities, robbing the vital



Karl Marx

nitrites and phosphates that in the past were returned to the soil, consequently degrading the land. Previously most of the pre-capitalist populations lived off the land in a self-sufficient manner, where a healthy mutual exchange between human populations and the environment existed, that maintained the nutrient cycle. Now that less people were needed to work on capitalist farms due to new technologies, they were forced out of the countryside, through processes such as in England with the "Enclosure Act", and concentrated into the cities, to be exploited in urban factories. The huge industrial and population expansion that concentrated in cities inevitably created accumulated waste and pollution that damaged the environment and the health of city populations.

Marx noted that recycling of organic wastes were of limited concern for capitalist societies. He remarked in *Capital*, Vol. 3 "In London... they can do nothing better with the excrement produced by 4.5 million people than pollute the Thames with it, at monstrous expense." Capitalism has left a legacy of polluted environments the world over that present populations now have to come to terms with and clean up.

Climate crisis is a crisis of capitalism

Currently, the crisis of the capitalist industrial and agricultural system has pushed carbon emissions to reach 450 parts per million, that will cause the planet to increase its temperature by 2 degrees or more. The dramatic rise in global warming will cause catastrophic environmental damage to the Earth by the middle of the 21st century. In fact, we are seeing environmental devastation happening now.

There can be seen a vicious cycle of development that occurs within the capitalist mode of production. The physical separation of people and animals from croplands resulted in the lack of nutrients being recycled. This created the need to use larger amounts of artificial nutrients.

The lack of nutrients on crop farms saw the obverse occur in cities, where these same nutrients accumulate in

urban areas and agri-business animal factory farms as waste. As a result of the vast distances involved, the accumulated nutrients are not restored to the major crop growing areas due to high financial and energy costs. A destructive rift takes place between production and the ecology that sustains life on this planet!

Sustainable socialism

According to John Bellamy Foster, a US Marxist, there are positive experiences of sustainable production from the non-capitalist world. In his book, *Ecology against Capitalism*, he states "... in China under Mao, things were different... Mao's emphasis on local food self-sufficiency in each region helped to reinforce these practices and, together with the encouragement of local industry, slowed down urbanization at the same time as impressive advances were made in agricultural production..."

In Cuba, the economic crisis of the Special Period has been caused by the cancellation of favourable trade agreements with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lack of funds to purchase fertilisers and pesticides from abroad created an interest in reducing the use of such materials, and organic production techniques have become a mainstay of Cuban agriculture, with attention paid to nutrient cycling issues."

Scientists point out there is limited time to start to reverse the destructive effects of global warming. Climate change will occur, but it can be mitigated by effective regulatory action.

This requires a reversal of industrial production based on exchange value for the pursuit of profit. Instead, a planned economy needs to be established where renewable industries are built for the purpose of use value (to meet peoples' needs), therefore not exhausting the environment and destroying the planet's ecology.

Waiting for capitalism to do the job, through a Carbon Tax and or an Emission Trading Scheme, is a death sentence for the planet. Saving the Earth and humanity requires capitalism to be closed down and sustainable socialism to be implemented!