

A Note on Corporations, Capitalism and the Environment

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Ever since the 1960's, people all around the world have expressed their fears and alarm at the devastating effect that toxic emissions from fossil fuels, industrial chemicals, mining, nuclear power, the military use of chemical agents and nuclear bombs such as at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are having on human life, animal species and on the planet.

You don't have to be a scientist to be worried that temperatures and sea levels are rising, droughts are common place and that species of animals, insects and nature are disappearing. However, good science has shown that people are right to be alarmed. Countless environmental studies testify to the result of this chemical cocktail of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen and methane etc. on the atmosphere, winds, rivers, seas and oceans, in fact on the whole ecosystem of the planet by acidified rain, fog, and snow.

In 1996 the World Watch Institute report, proclaimed scientists fears for the 70 to 95 percent of the earth species living in the

world's disappearing tropical forest and for the health of future generations to come. Their study showed that by 1996 25 million people had died from contaminated water. Furthermore, they predicted that by 2025 as many as 3 billion people could be living with chronic water scarcity and that by 2020 10 million species could become extinct. Yet world governance has chosen to systematically ignore this evidence. The Bush administration dismantled environmental protective legislation and increased the exploitation of oil and mining industries and even denied climate change.

At a time when global capitalism is fully aware of the harm to humankind now and the threat to future generations (IPCC 2007; World Bank 2012b; Hoeppe 2011; Busby 2007), oil and gas today account for 56% of total energy consumption and oil companies are predicting that the world demand for energy in the next 20 years is expected to grow by 30% (BP shareholder report 2016). Indeed western powers have chosen to go to war in the pursuit of oil and mining rights in Iran and Iraq with catastrophic effect on their civilisations. Now the Trump regime has removed all evidence of climate change from the American Environmental Protection website and withdrawn from the (limited and inadequate) Paris Climate Accords.

The following diagrams with explanations come from a study carried out by R. Heede, 'Exploring the historic emissions of fossil fuels from 1854 to 1910', in the journal *Climatic Change*.

They show the exponential increase in fossil fuel emission from 1854 to 2010. A total of 914 billion tonnes of CO_2 - equivalent has been traced to 90 international entities. These entities cumulatively produced 985 billion barrels (bbl) of crude oil and NGLs (79 billion were used for non-energy

products), 2,248 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), and 163 billion tonnes of various ranks of coal. The emissions traced to the carbon majors represent 63 % of global industrial CO_2 and methane from fossil fuel combustion, flaring, venting, fugitive or vented methane, own fuel use, and cement between 1751 and 2010

Table 1: Industrial CO_2 and CH_4 emissions: comparing this study to CDIAC data 1751–2010

Source	Carbon majors 1854–2010 Gt CO_2e	CDIAC 1751–2010 Gt CO_2e	Carbon majors % of global
Oil & NGLs	365.7	72.0	77.5%
Natural Gas	120.1	176.1	68.2%
Coal	329.6	642.5	51.3%
Flaring	6.0	12.6	47.9%
Cement	13.2	32.5	40.6%
Vented CO_2	4.8	na	na
Own fuel use	7.1	na	na
Fugitive methane	67.6	114.6	59.0%
Sum	914.3	1,450.3	63.0%

Global CO_2 combustion data is from CDIAC; methane is from Stern & Kaufmann and European Commission data

I have included this extract in full as it explains historic emissions and the diagrams.

Of total industrial CO_2 and CH_4 emissions from 1751 to 2010, one-half has been emitted since 1984 (Marland et al. 2011). Of the emissions traced to carbon major fossil fuel and cement production, half has been emitted since 1986 (Fig. 1). Cumulatively, emissions of 315 Gt CO_2e have been traced to investor-owned entities, 288 Gt CO_2e to state-owned companies, and 312 Gt CO_2e to nation-states (Fig. 2). The dip in relative production by nation-states in the late 1980s through early 2000s is due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of new state-owned oil and natural gas entities in Russia as well as the transformation of China’s petroleum sector into state-owned entities.

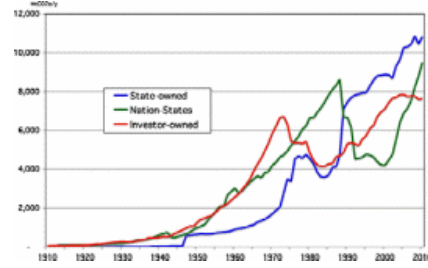


Fig. 2. Carbon Majors’ emissions by ownership category, 1910–2010. The total historic contributions of each ownership category are nearly equal: 34.4 % investor-owned (red), 34.1 % nation-states (green), and 31.5 % state-owned (blue), but the proportions vary over time. Cumulative emissions attributed to the twenty largest investor-owned and state-owned energy companies between 1854 and 2010 total 428 Gt CO_2e , or 29.5 % of global industrial emissions from 1751 to 2010 (Table 3). The ten largest investor-owned companies alone contributed 230 Gt CO_2e , or 15.8 % of global emissions through 2010.

It is common for people to think of these emissions in terms of nation states, however, while nation states enable the oil and mining industries to operate freely, Russia , China and India have also formed their own oil exploration companies, so the increase in global emissions since the mid 1980’s needs to be considered in terms of the cumulative effect of these three forces. The list below shows the top 10 oil producing companies also sourced from Heede (2014).

Entity	Mt CO_2e	Mt CO_2e 1751-2010	%
1. Chevron, USA	423	51,096	3.52%
2. ExxonMobil, USA	655	46,672	3.22%
3. Saudi Amco, Saudi Arabia	1,550	46,033	3.17%
4. BP, UK	554	35,837	2.47%
5. Gazprom, Russian Federation	1,371	32,136	2.22%
6. Royal Dutch/Shell, Neatherlands	478	30,751	2.12%
7. National Iranian Oil Company	876	29,084	2.01%
8. Pemex, Mexico	602	20,025	1.38%
9. ConocoPhillips, USA	359	16,866	1.16%
10. Petroleos de Venezuela	485	16,157	1.11%
11. Coal India	830	15,493	1.07%
12. Peabody Enegy, USA	519	12,432	0.86%
13. Total, France	398	11,911	0.82%
14. PetroChina, China	614	10,564	0.73%
15. Kuwait Petroleum Corp.	323	10,503	0.73%
16. Abu Dhabi NOC, UAE	387	9,672	0.67%
17. Sonatrach, Algeria	386	9,263	0.64%
18. Consol Energy, Inc, USA	160	9,096	0.63%
19. BHP-Billiton, Australia	320	7,606	0.52%
20. Anglo American, UK	242	7,242	0.50%
Top 20 IOCs & SOEs	11,523	428,439	29.54%
Top 40 IOCs & SOEs	•	546,767	37.70%
All 81 IOCs & SOEs	18,524	602,491	41.54%
Total 90 Carbon Majors	27,946	914,251	63.04%
Total Global Emissions	36,026	1,450,332	100%

Looking then at the assets of the top 5 oil companies for 2016 we can clearly see that the driving force has been profit and accumulation.

Company	Assets
Royal Dutch Shell	\$411.2 bn
Chevron	\$260.1 bn
ExxonMobil	\$330.3 bn
Saudi Aramco	\$2.25 tn
BP	\$195,503 m

Just looking at BP alone, we find from their 2016 annual report that their shareholders received \$7.5 billion in payments despite the oil company been responsible for oil accidents and spillages at Deepwater Horizon in 2010 and the Gulf of Mexico costing them \$1.63 Billion and \$6.9 Billion in fines ,litigation and repairing the environmental damage. The report also reveals that Tom Sawyer, previously employed by M16, sits as an advisor to BP management.

Looking at the top mining companies listed below we can also see that the pursuit of profit is the number on priority for global capitalism regardless of the ecosystem and human need.

Top Mining Companies

Glencoe Xstrata	\$209.2 Billion Assets
BHP Billiton	\$69.4 Billion Assets
Rio Tinto	\$45.1 Billion Assets
China Shenkua Energy	\$40 Billion Assets
Vale	\$33.2 Billion Assets

I take no pleasure in documenting what is happening to our planet and humankind as it is truly horrific, especially when you consider the future for the children of the world. Tribal groups of people used to consider that the natural environment as a heritage to be used and cared for by the present generation in a manner that would allow future generations to live. [Even western powers are aware of the tribal custom of living in harmony with nature and call it sustainable development.] And Marx wrote eloquently on the same theme: as early as 1844 in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* he stated:

Man lives on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.¹

And in his great work *Capital* he wrote:

From the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation, the private property of particular individuals in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men.

Even an entire society, a nation or all simultaneously existing societies taken together are not owners of the earth, they are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations, as *boni patres familias*[good heads of households].²

We need to protect our planet for future generations in a world that recognises that people come before profit.

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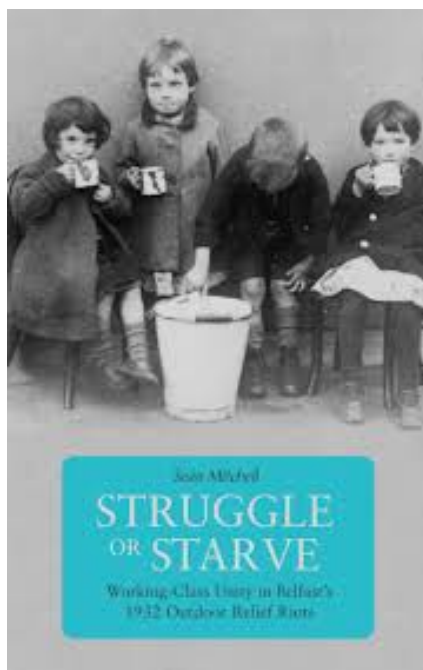
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¹marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm

²Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol.3, Moscow 1966, p776. marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch46.htm

Review: Seán Mitchell, *Struggle or Starve: Working Class Unity in Belfast's Outdoor Relief Riots*

Tommy McKearney



Seán Mitchell, *Struggle or Starve: Working Class Unity in Belfast's Outdoor Relief Riots*, Haymarket Books 2017 \$ 16.95

Struggle or Starve by Séan Mitchell is an important book that deserves the widest readership among those interested in promoting progressive politics in the North of Ireland. The author provides the reader with a detailed, and even inspirational, account of a rare period in Belfast's history when the working class was united around a campaign to address matters of immediate need. More than that, through, his analysis raises questions about events of that period which still have relevance today. How possible is it to overcome sectarianism through shared struggle and can this be done within the context of a political unit as fundamentally flawed as Northern Ireland?

While the central theme of Mitchell's book focuses on the Out Door Relief campaign of 1932, it puts this struggle in the context of a six county statelet that was little more than a decade old. The au-

thor makes no bones about the reactionary, authoritarian and sectarian nature of the Northern Ireland government of the time, supported ultimately by the imperial parliament in London. To his credit, he avoids the clichéd and misleading trap of ascribing the nature of the state and its failings to flawed personality or character defects among the indigenous population. The book examines the nature and composition of northern Irish society and its ruling elite at this time. Without excusing murderous anti-Catholic violence of the 1920s, the author points to the dire underlying economic conditions that not only drove many to commit such barbarity but allowed an unscrupulous ruling class to exploit the unhappy situation.

No matter how familiar we are with the history of the northern state, it is still sobering to read of just how deeply sectarian it was and how widespread was this poison throughout the six-counties. Virulent bigotry typified much of unionism. From its Prime Minister James Craig, who infamously said that Catholics ;...breed like bloody rabbits...' to the working class Ulster Protestant Association, which according to an RUC inspector had the sole aim of exterminating Catholics by any means, the problem was widespread.

These atavistic prejudices seem to defy logic until contextualised by a commentator such as the historian John Gray who is quoted by Mitchell as saying that for Belfast's capitalist ruling class, self interest and Unionist politics were inextricably linked. To protect and maintain their holdings and position of privilege, employers encouraged sectarian divisions in order to divide working class communities and thus weaken trade union activity. Keep in mind too that in the early years of the northern state, the ruling capitalist class (a group vir-