

EDITORIAL

At a Time of Greenwashing

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This issue is being prepared for publication and this editorial being written as the UN COP 26 Conference meets in Glasgow. Consequently, this is a time in which we are bombarded on every side with messages, promises, pledges, proposals, and general propaganda about climate change. You could be forgiven for imagining that a serious attempt was being made to tackle the problem.

The Irish Times' magazine section for 23 October contains no less than sixteen articles on the subject, dealing with everything from "A Guide to Cop 26" to "Can beauty ever be truly sustainable?" Now the Pope has got in on the act:

In a message recorded exclusively for the BBC, Pope Francis has called on world leaders meeting next week at the UN Climate conference in Glasgow to provide "effective responses" to the environment emergency and offer "concrete hope" to future generations. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59075041>

He joins the British Queen, Prince William, and David Attenborough in urging action now. But if we really want to get a handle on what is going on, we should check the websites and mission statements of the giant fossil-fuel corporations. ExxonMobil says:

ExxonMobil is committed to producing the energy and chemical products that are essential to modern

life and economic development, in a way that helps protect people, the environment and the communities where we operate. This includes mitigating the risks of climate change.

<https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/Sustainability/Sustainability-Report>

BP waxes lyrical:

Our purpose is reimagining energy for people and our planet. Our sustainability frame, together with our strategy, puts our purpose into action and together they show how we believe that profits and purpose can work together in service of delivering long-term sustainable value for all our stakeholders—investors, employees and society. The sustainability frame builds on our foundations: values, safety, ethics & compliance and value creation. It takes an integrated approach to addressing carbon and wider environmental and societal issues, while focusing on the areas where we believe we can make the most difference. The three focus areas are "net zero," "care for our planet" and "improve people's lives." It also includes working to embed sustainability in our DNA—to make sustainability more integral to our thinking, decision-making and actions—and engaging with stakeholders to help us achieve our sustainability goals.

<https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/sustainability/bp-environmental-policy-2021.pdf>

So does Shell:

We operate in a way that respects nature, and we work to protect ecosystems. Minimising our environmental impact and setting goals to improve helps us find better ways to operate. We have had guiding principles and standards in place for many years. Now we are stepping up our environmental ambitions and shaping them to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Our new environmental framework

In recent years we have increased our activities to tackle our greenhouse gas emissions—we have set a target to be a net-zero emissions business by 2050 or sooner, in step with society and our customers.

There is also growing urgency around protecting biodiversity, preserving water quality and availability, improving air quality and using resources more efficiently. Tackling these and other environmental concerns requires a holistic approach, as they are interconnected.

<https://www.shell.com/sustainability/environment/respecting-nature.html#iframe=L3dIYmFwcHMvUG93ZXJpbmdQcm9ncmVzc19FbnZpcm9ubWVudEZyYW1ld29yay8>

Cars may be a problem, but don't worry, Volkswagen is on to it:

We develop, produce and distribute motor vehicles and mobility services. In this role, we have made ourselves committed to shaping mobility for us and future generations and become a role model for the protection of our environment.

Our leaders, at every level of the organization in all brands and majority shareholdings of the Volkswagen Group, are aware of the environmental risks of their business activities and will demonstrate, in words and in actions, their commitment to compliance and to environmental leadership.

<https://www.volkswagenag.com/en/sustainability/environment/environmental-compliance.html#>

Of course, these eco-friendly companies have nothing to do with the ExxonMobil who spent decades funding pseudo-scientific climate change denial, or the BP Corporation who were responsible for the Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, the worst oil spill in history, and who were described by Greenpeace as having “paid millions in civil and criminal penalties for violating major federal environmental laws such as the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and other laws designed to protect the environment and public health” and as having “one of the worst environmental records in the industry.”

[\[https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/wp-content/uploads/legacy/Global/usa/planet3/publications/gwe/2010/BP%20bad%20behavior.pdf\]](https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/wp-content/uploads/legacy/Global/usa/planet3/publications/gwe/2010/BP%20bad%20behavior.pdf)

Nor is it the same Shell Oil who devastated Ogoniland in the Niger Delta (leading to the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa) or who road roughshod over the people of Mayo to force through their pipeline, nor is this the same Volkswagen who were convicted of intentionally programming their diesel engines to fake their emissions levels for seven years.

A particular favourite of mine is Irish Cement. Cement production is known to be particularly environmentally harmful because of the high greenhouse gas emissions it generates. But this doesn't stop Irish Cement, who with a straight face proclaim:

As the leading Irish producer and supplier of cement products, Irish Cement is fully committed to the sustainable development of our business.

Irish Cement Limited recognises the environmental responsibilities associated with all the aspects of its operations and as a matter of policy seeks to avoid, reduce and mitigate any potentially adverse effects on the environment.

Environmental Policy

The Company is committed to the integration of environmental considerations into decisions making at all levels of the organisation.

<https://www.irishcement.ie/sustainability/environment/>

In reality, one single fact gives the lie to all this relentless barrage of concern and fake promises. It is the fact, reported by the World Meteorological Organisation, that the build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere rose to record levels in 2020, even despite the pandemic. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-59016075>

This is the decisive statistic that cuts through the greenwashing, because it is the total level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere which will

determine the extent and pace of global heating and which is continuing to rise and about which nothing serious has been done to reduce it. One further point that should be made about deluge of greenwashing is that at no point in all the current talk of “positive stories,” of “wake-up calls,” “code reds” for humanity, and of what we as individuals can do about it has there been any mention of struggle from below or of people power. In the *Irish Times Magazine* referred to earlier, not one of its sixteen articles mentioned the COP 26 Coalition’s mobilisations for 6 November.

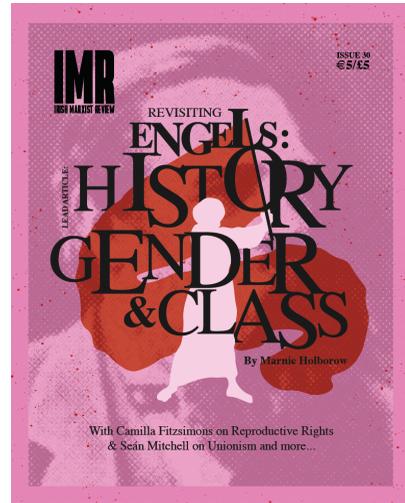
In this context, it is particularly gratifying to be able to lead this issue with a major interview on “the planetary emergency” with John Bellamy Foster, one of the world’s leading Marxist ecologists and advocates of ecosocialism.

Also very topical are Kieran Allen’s article on US imperialism’s defeat in Afghanistan and its implications, Alex Day’s and Marnie Holborow’s analysis of “cancel culture,” and Dave Zirin’s interview about his book *The Kaepernick Effect* and the transformation of US sport. Seán Mitchell continues his important extended analysis of the decline of Unionism, John Molyneux writes on the relevance of the theory of state capitalism today, Leah Speight on how the housing crisis hits women, and Darryl Horan on how the Comintern developed the tactic of the united front. This bumper issue also has a tranche of useful book reviews.

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Irish Marxist Review

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