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Climate change, Energy and Resilience

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“Hurry up”, said the white rabbit, “more coal!”

“But”, said Alice, “what about climate change?”

“Our target”, said the Red Queen, “is 50% by 2050. Of course we have a plan to get there – it’s called deep sea oil drilling!”

“But”, said Alice, “isn’t the climate changing *now*?”

“Fracking”, said the white rabbit. “That’s what we need! Bust open the shale and get the gas!”

“But”, said Alice, “isn’t the climate changing *fast*?”

“Economic Growth!” Said the Red Queen. “Everyone wants that. We need to dig up those lignites and be like Australia.”

“But”, said Alice, “isn’t...”

“Silence!” roared the Red Queen. “Off with her head! Surely you want to be like Australia? Another word and I’ll cut your benefit.”

“I don’t have a benefit”, said Alice.. “but I would like some resilience.”

“Why?” said the Red Queen. “Australia doesn’t have any.”

Trying to put NZ’s energy and climate policy in the same sentence as resilience led me inevitably to Alice in Wonderland. But we won’t be waking up from this dream any time soon.

NZ is on the brink of the most massive binge of fossil fuel extraction ever seen. Just some of what is going on now:

- Deep sea oil drilling, in very deep waters with no environmental rules; Petrobras off E Cape, others soon off Canterbury; several companies nosing around Golden Bay
- W Coast coking coal - now over \$300/tonne and very lucrative
 - Cypress mine (the gorgeous Happy Valley red tussocks and beech and kiwi and snails) all consents granted, bulldozers likely to begin any time,
 - Pike River – several companies bursting to buy the bankrupt mine, even before the royal commission has started its hearings to find out who was responsible for killing 29 men;

- Escarpment mine, Denniston Plateau (Australian Bathurst Resources, now bought by L&M, calling itself Buller Coal) initial application for 6.1MT in consent process, but presentation to industry conference shows 8 prospective mine locations along plateau, total inferred resource 125-167MT
- Solid Energy exploring coal seam gas Waikato-Hauraki
- Lignites in Southland (6.8BT in total – that's right, *billions*)
 - Solid Energy, L&M, Greywolf all have permits and very active.
 - SE has applied for pilot briquetting plant, Mataura, to remove water from lignite for domestic sales. Non-notified by councils.
 - Plans second plant ten times bigger, for export,
 - then lignite to urea,
 - then lignite to diesel. Collectively Se projects raise NZ greenhouse gas emissions 20%
- Now L&M have permit to explore 27m km² of Waiau basin for shale gas to be extracted by fracking

Resilience – how can one even talk about it in this context?

Resilience is 'in' word since the quake – assumed to mean ability to resist stresses and bounce back from disasters. Is this the new word for Sustainability?

Oceans, aquifers, climate, ecosystems are remarkably resilient – but there is no way they can withstand current assaults of rising GHG, acidification, ground water pollution, over consumption. We are heading for an environment that will no longer support the lives and livelihoods of communities.

Fossil fuel extraction is splitting those communities, sending them to war.

Mataura (lignite)

- on the one hand there is euphoria - growth, jobs, investment, infrastructure;
- on the other there is fear – noise, dust, pollution, respiratory illness, loss of good farmland, traffic, risk to water quality – and climate change.
- on all sides there is suspicion and ill will

A community that depends on jobs and income from unsustainable activity must eventually lose it all.

Last week at the regional council hearing on the application for the Denniston mine I argued the case of climate as a resource under the RMA; showed a video James Hansen had made in evidence; and called for a phase out of coal. The Commissioners asked, why would we be the first in world to stop mining and using coal?

So I thought it important to pass this on: the good news is that we aren't the first, not by a long way. Resistance to coal and extreme fossil fuels like deep

sea oil is growing fast since Hansen's 350 limit became known. I want to leave you with some encouraging stories.

A group fronted by 15 teenagers is suing US govt under the Constitution (equal rights for all people) for failing to protect the rights of future generations. You can read the impressive paper they cite as evidence if you google on Hansen et al "The Case for young people and nature."

A march on Washington is planned for August to stop the keystone pipeline, planned to bring oil from the Alberta tar sands to Texas for refining. The tar sands contain enough carbon, if it were all mined, to raise atmospheric carbon dioxide by 200 ppm. That's from the current 395ppm to 595ppm. Without anything the rest of the world might do as well. A letter has just gone out publicly from a group of luminaries including names you will recognize, like James Hansen, Wendell Berry, Wes Jackson, Naomi Klein, Bill McKibben, David Suzuki

I want to read you some excerpts from that very moving letter:

"We want you to consider doing something hard: coming to Washington in the hottest and stickiest weeks of the summer and engaging in civil disobedience that will likely get you arrested."

"The Keystone Pipeline would also be a fifteen hundred mile fuse to the biggest carbon bomb on the continent..."

"It's time to stop letting corporate power make the most important decisions our planet faces."

"We will, each day through Labor Day, march on the White House, risking arrest with our trespass. We will do it in dignified fashion, demonstrating that in this case we are the conservatives, and that our foes—who would change the composition of the atmosphere - are dangerous radicals. Come dressed as if for a business meeting—this is, in fact, serious business."

"We don't want college kids to be the only cannon fodder in this fight. They've led the way so far on climate change—10,000 came to DC for the Powershift gathering earlier this spring. Now it's time for people who've spent their lives pouring carbon into the atmosphere (and whose careers won't be as damaged by an arrest record) to step up too. Most of us signing this letter are veterans of this work, and we think it's past time for elders to behave like elders."

<http://www.commondreams.org/>

There is a lot we could learn from this letter on how to do good civil resistance.

There is even more good news in the US, reported by Lester Brown in **World**

on the Edge:

In a national poll that asked which electricity source people would prefer, only 3 percent chose coal. Since 2000, 152 plants in the United States have been defeated or abandoned.

In June 2007, Florida refused to license a huge coal plant because the utility proposing it could not prove that building the plant would be cheaper than investing in efficiency or renewable energy. This led to the quiet withdrawal of four other coal plant proposals in the state. □□

In 2008, 4 of the largest investment banks announced that any future lending for coal-fired power would be contingent on the utilities demonstrating that the plants would be economically viable with a future cost on carbon emissions. □□

In 2010, several leading U.S. investment banks ceased lending to companies involved in mountaintop removal coal mining.

A number of coal plants are being closed, and 80% of them could be if the energy efficiency level of the other 49 states were raised to that of New York.

Between 2007 and 2010, U.S. coal use dropped 8 percent. During the same period, and despite the recession, 300 new wind farms came online.

The phase out is making some progress in Denmark, Hungary, Canada, Scotland, and even China, while still building coal plants, is leading the world in renewables like wind and solar.

In Australia a large new lignite power plant was approved at only a third of its proposed size, because of climate change, and none of the four main banks will fund it.

Communities dependent for their jobs and incomes on renewables that will never run out and will protect the climate have taken a major step towards resilience.

In NZ the most notable development is the rising of young people to work seriously on the issue. I've been hugely impressed with the quality of the work of the NZ Youth Delegation, the 2050 alliance (zero by 2050), Regeneration, 350.org, and CANA. They seem to have overlapping membership and names that keep changing and somewhat anarchist organization but it is a serious, intelligent and committed movement.

If you want to keep up with what is happening on coal, the best way is to join the e-list of CAN – coalactionnetwork@gmail.com and regular news items will be sent to you.

Affiliated groups are forming locally: SACA (Southern Action on Coal); No More Oily Beaches (Golden Bay) Auckland Action Against Coal Extraction, forming in Auckland this afternoon.

We oldies can finally take a back seat, and I'm putting my retirement efforts into working with CAN, though not speaking on their behalf.

We plan to wake up from the dream, and the coal industry doesn't know what is waiting for it.