

Fire storm in Victoria



The bushfires last week were a tragedy on a scale never before seen in the state of Victoria. Fires burnt out of control, moving at speeds of up to 120 km/h. Country Fire Authority fire fighters struggled in a losing fight against the forces of nature. In country towns and areas, many residents, who had faced fires before, stayed to protect their homes from incineration. Few could save their properties, and many more were consumed in the fire storm. They were surprised by the intensity of the fires. Newspapers had pictures of the burnt out cars of residents who were overcome by the incredible speed of the fires.

The bushfires are being blamed exclusively on arsonists and green laws preventing the clearing of trees. However, these 2 factors have been present in past bushfires that did not reach the scale of devastation these fires have seen.

The severity of the fires is a result of the extreme weather Victoria is experiencing. Saturday 7 February saw record temperatures that exceeded 46°C across the state. The wind was hot and brutal, blowing at 100km/h at times. This wind helped to spread the fires quicker than the Country Fire Authority (CFA) were able to respond to it. Facilitating the fire was the dryness of the bush. This summer has been one of the driest on record, with almost no rain at all. Even with the cool change after the worst of the fires, there has been no respite due to rain in more than a week, as fires continue to burn

and new fires break out.

These extreme conditions point to Climate Change. Andrew Bolt, columnist in the Herald Sun and Climate Change denier, blamed environmentalists for the fire deaths. He could not ignore the bushfires themselves, but rather showed cowardice by ignoring the conditions that created the fires.

Extreme weather is a more frequent and dramatic phenomenon. Queensland was recently flooded. Great Britain recently had one of their coldest winters ever, with unseasonably large snowfalls leading schools and businesses to close. The “drought” in Victoria may not be a “drought” after all. Climate Change may mean reduced rainfalls are the norm rather than the exception. Ten or more years ago, Melbourne winters were characterised by rain on most days, and ground that was soggy under foot. Changing bush fire protocols and building a desalination plant may address some of the symptoms of Climate Change, but they do nothing to address the spectre of catastrophic change in the future. In fact, building an energy intensive desalination plant will make matters worse as more CO₂ is emitted.

Catastrophic change becomes inevitable as governments of the industrialised world continue to hit the figurative “snooze button” on Climate Change with measures that are wholly ineffective.

Meetings and Forums

<p>"The heat is on... to change the world of war and economic crisis"</p> <p>Come along to our afternoon of talks and discussions about how capitalism works and the whens, whys and hows of change. 2pm Saturday 4 April</p>	<p>"Economic crisis: Do wage rises lead to job losses?" Speaker: Duncan Cassidy Tue 17 Feb @ New International Bookshop (Trades Hall)</p>
<p>Contact Solidarity Students @ Melbourne University Phone: 0418 347 374 (Judy) eMail: jmcvey52@optusnet.com.au</p>	<p>"Obama's new presidency: what will change look like?" Speakers: Professor Verity Burgmann and Shannon Price from Solidarity</p> <p>6pm, Tuesday 3 March Gryphon Gallery, 1888 Building Grattan St University of Melbourne.</p>