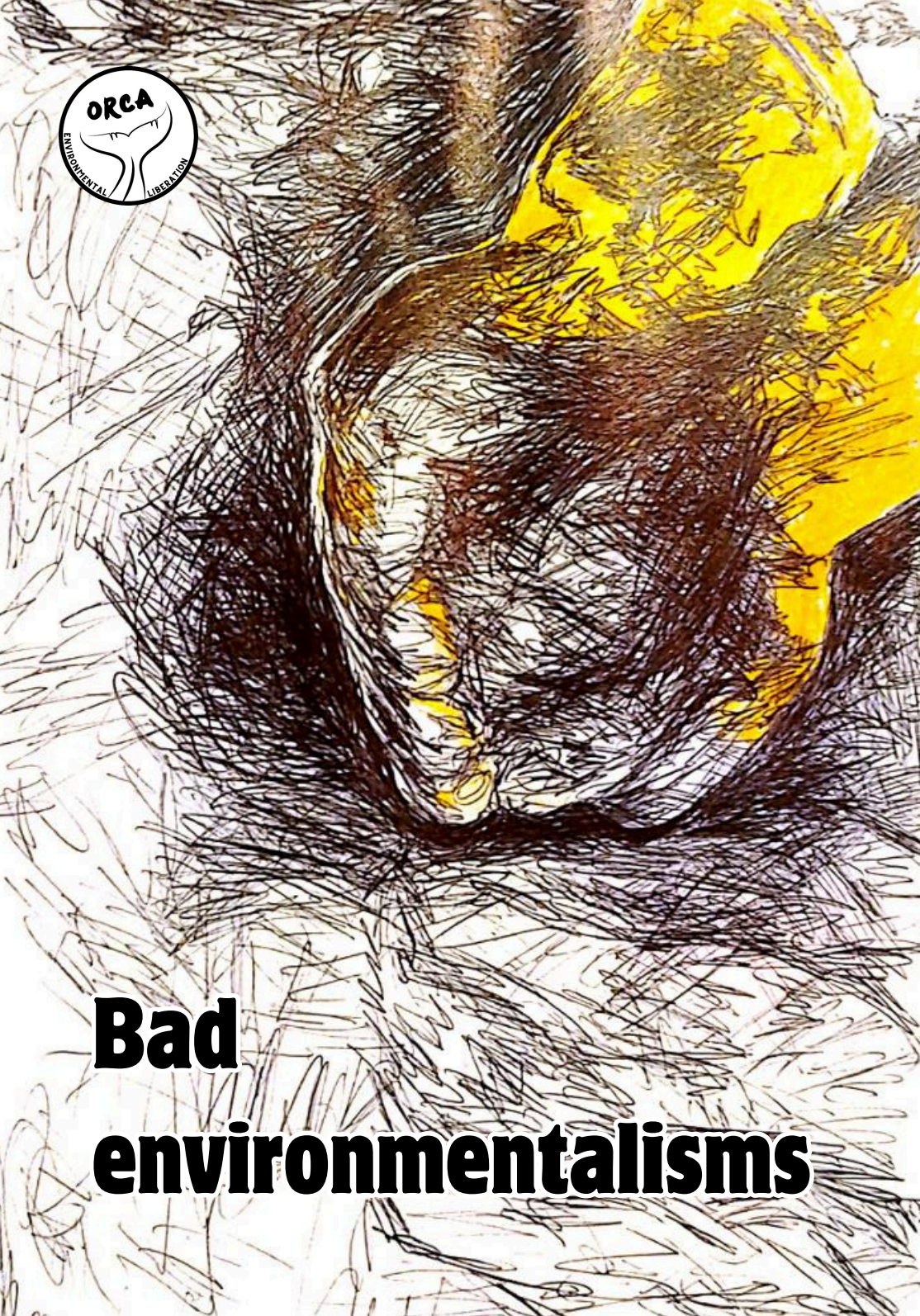

Bad environmentalisms

By now, most of us are on the same page: the climate is changing in bad and chaotic ways, the seas are rising, the rivers are full of sewage and it's down to us to do something about it. The people who are opposed to taking action on environmental problems are somewhere between scary and dangerous. Environmentalism: seems like a fairly good idea.

This zine has been written by environmentalists. Some of us are even the chained-to-the-oil-refinery, living-in-a-treehouse, shouting-at-the-Shell-AGM, vegan-community-kitchen kind of environmentalists.

But we - the Organisation of Radical Cambridge Activists (ORCA) - spend a lot of our time fighting things with "sustainable" and "green" and "climate" in their titles. Why? Read on to find out.

Greenwashing

Most people care about the environment. We do. You probably do. We have so much in common already! Who doesnt want a healthier safer world? Well, corporations. But they do want our money, so sometimes they're willing to pretend to care about environmentalism.

"Greenwashing" is that flimsy deception. Its an eco-friendly disguise. The moment the pressure is off they'll backtrack. Lets see some relevant examples...

In February, **BP entirely got rid of their (already vague) carbon reduction targets**, proving once again that they aren't on our side. This is despite ad campaigns emphasising renewable power expensive "green" rebranding.

Another company famous for greenwashing with vague and deceptive advertising is **the world's biggest plastic polluter, Coca-Cola**. Their bottles proclaim: *"I am a bottle made from 100% recycled plastic"*. The European Commission found that false, and in the EU they're being forced to change their advertising.

Greenwashing can also be inadequate and distracting environmentalism, like Cambridge uni's climate initiative **Cambridge Zero**. They promote technological "solutions" like geoengineering, while colluding with oil companies and using their clout to shout down student and community resistance to polluters.

Every example here has links to the **Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL),** a Cambridge institute which deals in greenwashing and reputation laundering. Remember the name - we'll come back to them.

Hack mindset

One good example of Bad Environmentalism is something we like to call the "Hack-Mindset" or "Silver Bullet" approach. It suggests that one big project, or one big technological breakthrough, will allow us to fix the climate catastrophe without any costly systemic change. The tech techs, the climate gets fixed, and BP continues to profit. This idea tends to manifest in two main ways: an excessive focus on either Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) or on Geoengineering. The people selling you these ideas are misguided at best, or crooks at worst.

Geonegineering is the idea that we can use large-scale engineering projects to change the climate in beneficial ways. These are ideas like **Solar Radiation Management**, filling the upper atmosphere with reflective particles to try and reflect the sun's heat before it's trapped in our atmosphere. These ideas show promise in small-scale tests, but the recurring issue is that the people suggesting them have not considered the impact of these projects at the scale we'd need to actually see notable effects.

CCUS has similar issues; it's a useful tool as we continue to decarbonise, but it's only a tool. **Those who want to avoid decarbonising, like fossil fuel companies, hold up CCUS as a shield**, claiming that sucking up some carbon grants them free rein to emit more. They don't want to stop profiting, and so they pretend that this single tool is the perfect solution to the climate crisis, allowing them to emit as much as they want with no consequences.

In Cambridge, the Hack Mindset is most visible in centres like the Cambridge Centre for Climate Repair. Their ongoing research into several fields of geoengineering has been repeatedly criticised for the reasons we mentioned above. It can also be seen in the University's ties to oil and gas companies through sponsored research, and through partnerships with the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL). They justify this by saying that the partnerships could lead to emissions reductions from these companies.

The core problem with the Hack Mindset is that these ideas sound attractive: they sound like solutions without any scary global change attached. They distract from the systemic causes of environmental harm, and the violence of fossil fuel use and extraction. The real solutions have been known for decades: **an end to the exploitation of people, land and natural resources; an end not only to fossil fuels but to the systems which enable and depend on them.** If we only treat the symptoms of the larger problem, things are never going to get better, and too often these "hacks" take attention and resources away from solutions to the real problem.

~~Green~~ Extractivism

“Extractivism” refers to systems that take (extract) resources for profit. In its broadest sense, the term can mean any economy based on taking without replenishing. We can talk about extractive food systems, extractive care systems - even extractive relationships. Usually, though, the term refers to the extraction of resources from the ground - oil, gas, coal, minerals. Extractivism causes lasting harm: the pollution of land and water, exploitation of workers, violent displacement of those who live near extraction sites.

A lot of the Hack solutions to climate crisis are based not on ending extractivism but on changing what is extracted: moving from oil, gas and coal to “transition” minerals like cobalt and copper. This would solve some environmental problems, but ignore or worsen others. Here are some examples:

The **Democratic Republic of Congo is the largest producer of cobalt**, a mineral central to the development of “green” tech like electric vehicles and solar panels. Cobalt demand has tripled in the last 15 years. To expand mines, companies violently evict people, pollute water and land, and cut down trees. This devastation and displace-ment is a major contributor to ongoing conflict in the area.

AngloAmerican is a major partner of CISL - there’s that name again! In 2024, they announced that they were going to end their coal extraction projects - they pitched this as a huge, green win. Affected communities, however, dismiss this as greenwash. AngloAmerican have abandoned their cleanup responsi-bilities in mines like Cerrejón, Colombia. Meanwhile, they are continuing the same violent practices of eviction and pollution in their rapidly expanding platinum interests, driven by Europe’s policy-driven rising demand for green hydrogen.

Energy colonialism

Green extractivism goes hand-in-hand with another Bad Environmentalism: energy colonialism. The transition from oil, gas and coal to renewable energy sources doesn't just require minerals - it requires land. Companies and governments that once depended on the theft of land for coal mines and gas plants are in many places using exactly the same tactics to construct the "renewable" economy.

Anglo American aren't just responsible for mining: their green hydrogen projects in South Africa involve the construction of large solar plants, too. People are once again violently displaced for these projects, and even once they are constructed local people lack access to stable energy sources - the energy produced by Anglo American is diverted to Europe.

Solar projects in North Africa depend on layers of colonial power. The solar megaproject at Ouarzazate is funded by international powers and exports energy to Europe, while disposessing local pastoralist communities like the Sidi Ayad, and extracting water in a drought-ridden area. Meanwhile, solar and wind projects are being used to entrench Moroccan occupation in Western Sahara. **Companies profiting from these projects include CISL partners EDF and Siemens.**

EDF, a French “green” energy company are involved in violent displacements in Oaxaca, Mexico. There, indigenous communities like the Union Hidalgo are resisting violent seizures of their lands for EDF wind farms. Despite French laws requiring companies to seek "free, prior and informed" consent from affected communities, in practice people report being subjected to coercion and violence for opposing projects.

Sustainability?

This is a big buzzword in academic and corporate spaces. To the hopeful environmentalist, it conjures up images of reforestation, thrifting and keep-cups. However, the term is often used to cover up violent practices. Here are some examples:

Suzano is a Brazilian pulp and paper company that claims to be a "global resource in the sustainable use of natural resources". They are in part responsible for the destruction of the Atlantic Forests - one of the world's most biodiverse biomes, where over one million hectares of eucalyptus plantations are now used to produce pulp. Their claims of sustainability are based on "conservation areas" interspersed between their plantations. However, these pockets of land are surrounded by monocultures, and leave the forest susceptible to wildfires further damaging the already fragile ecosystem.

Suzano is facing many legal proceedings, including over the use of pesticides, pollution of waterways, and land grabbing from Indigenous populations. Despite this, Suzano has high ESG ratings and has attracted billions in "green" investment, showing the flaws in these rating systems. Suzano has also recently agreed a long term collaboration with Jesus College Cambridge and the University of Cambridge. This is an example of research institutions greenwashing the reputation of companies with sketchy business practices.

Drax receives millions in subsidies from the UK government to burn wood pellets to produce "renewable" energy. The use of biofuels claims to be sustainable - trees can grow back, right? In reality, new trees take decades to grow and absorb the carbon emitted by burning biomass. In the meantime the clear-felling of biodiverse, rare and old-growth forests by Drax has enormous impacts on local wildlife, communities and the climate.

Drax is the single largest carbon emitter in the UK, and according to scientists the burning of wood is just as harmful to the climate as burning fossil fuels. **The production of wood pellets in predominantly poor and black areas of the Louisiana in the Southern US amounts to environmental racism**, as these marginalised communities are subjected to illegal levels of pollutants in their air.

CISL

It's time for the big reveal. Who are CISL, and why are we so mad at them? The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership claims to develop a "sustainable economy". In reality, they work with companies to launder their reputations, and perpetuate the capitalist lie that we can have a liveable future with endless economic growth.

Some of its most **egregious partnerships** include:

- Coca Cola (the world's biggest plastic polluter)
- AXA (an insurer with ties to Drax, Israeli arms, and fossil fuels)
- AngloAmerican (mega "green" mining company)

They also have partnerships across the fossil fuel and arms sectors. They claim that their work is to encourage these companies to do better and to make commitments to change. However, their partnerships with BP and Coca-Cola coincided with both companies walking back their climate "goals".

As these examples show, many sustainable initiatives only aim to sustain our current status quo - where the future of the Western, white and rich is built from the exploitation and harm of marginalised communities. They exist as a way to distract us from the real problem - our capitalist system that puts profit ahead of people, animals and the planet.

Colonial Conservation

When you think of conservation, you probably envision cute animals. They're probably fluffy. They're in danger and someone - perhaps you, if you sponsor a Polar Bear - needs to save them.

By this point in the zine, you won't be shocked to learn that conservation has a darker side. Large, reputable conservation NGOs like WWF practice forms of "fortress conservation": evicting the Indigenous and rural communities who live in a particular area in order to create "Protected Areas". This is part of the neocolonial system, through which the Global North continues to control land and power in the Global South.

It is based on the idea that Indigenous peoples aren't able to steward their own land - it's paternalistic and violent. Indigenous people around the world are resisting this - from the Maasai and Baka to the Guarani and the Bunong.

What does this look like in Cambridge?

In Cambridge, a lot of conservation organisations share a same building, the David Attenborough building. There, you can find the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which Survival International has criticised for its approach to Protected Areas.

Elsewhere in Cambridge is the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre. They build huge datasets about biodiversity: sounds good, but they also run a consultancy selling this data to fossil fuel companies like Shell and ENI.

~~Green~~ Zionism

In 1969 an Israeli Prime Minister described the colonisation of Palestine: **“we made the desert bloom”.** This idea is closely linked to that of colonial conservation - it suggests that the people of Palestine were not properly caring for the land, and so the zionist project was justified.

Nature has played other roles in the colonisation of Palestine, too. Israeli settlers burn and destroy Palestinian olive groves, while using their own **tree-planting projects as propaganda**. These tree-planting projects, ironically, have contributed to wildfires and harm to local ecosystems. Some of the plantations, like the Birya forest, have been strategically used to cover the remains of Palestinian villages following the 1948 Nakba.

Another thread of Israeli greenwash is their **relationship to veganism**. They base tourism campaigns on this, positioning violent settlements like Tel Aviv as ethical because of the availability of vegan food. They even use veganism as propaganda for the occupying forces, advertising their vegan army boots and meals.

CISL is complicit in this greenwashing of the occupation and genocide of Palestine. They collaborate with companies that profit from the genocide: Coca-Cola, AXA and Siemens. They have failed repeatedly to respond to our calls to cut ties with the genocide - even when they engage on other issues, they ignore this one. This is part of a wider pattern of complicity in the University of Cambridge.

We have to be completely clear: there is no such thing as a green genocide. There is no environmental justice without a Free Palestine.

Ecofascism

Despite increased pushback from certain fringe groups and sections of the right wing, concern for the environment is on the rise. This is great news, but it comes with its own issues. Not all far-right groups downplay the climate emergency; many are opportunistic and know that when people are afraid, their totalitarian bullshit becomes more appealing.

Enter the ecofascist. They're not racist, they say, they're just very concerned about India's population growth. They don't hate immigrants, they claim, they just worry about the threat to our native land. Ecofascism has the same end goal as other fascist movement but with a green coat of paint.

Beware of people keen to talk to you about how migrants don't respect our natural spaces and how we'll need to destroy what nature we have left to make room for them. These people will never talk about the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the Global South, or the housing shortages brought on by private equity groups, or the excessive land use of sheep farms. They just point fingers at the scary foreigners

Another common talking point is overpopulation. Instead of focusing on overconsumption and extractive economic systems, ecofascists point to population growth as the root of climate problems. Through this lens, people - particularly women - of the global majority take the blame for a problem created by global systems from which they do not benefit.

These movements don't have a real solution in mind; they're weaponising the fear of those who care to encourage isolation, more government control, and a "got mine fuck you" attitude to collaboration on the climate crisis. They want what all fascist movements want: for us to fear and hate others and never look at the real cause of this crisis.

~~Green~~ militarism

“Green” militarism is the idea that war can be made eco-friendly. While it’s true that the military industrial complex has a massive carbon footprint, the answer isn’t electric fighter jets: there is nothing eco about mass murder.

In the defence sector, NATO enshrined ‘climate change’ as a pillar of the alliance, and its Secretary General made history in 2021 by attending a UNFCCC COP[2]. Further environmental and climate change strategies by defence forces have been published by the European Union, the USA, Canada[3], Australia, Sweden, and the UK[4].

RAF's first use of sustainable aviation fuel in Typhoon and Hercules aircraft

The Royal Air Force has used sustainable aviation fuel blended with regular jet fuel to achieve the first sustainable aviation fuel blend air-to-air refuelling of a Typhoon and C-130 Hercules aircraft.

A RAF Voyager delivered the fuel to the Typhoon and Hercules. The Voyager was previously used in successful initial trials in November 2022 where it flew on 100% sustainable aviation fuel. The leftover fuel from the Voyager trial was mixed with regular fuel at around 46-48%. The RAF worked with Air BP to re-certify the fuel and achieve the required standards needed for a safe and effective mission.

The IDF on Monday installed an innovative system at the Glilot base in Central Israel designed to break down kitchen waste and convert it into biogas, a renewable form of energy derived from organic waste.

"This marks the initial step towards bringing sustainable and circular economy practices to the IDF," said the head of the IDF's Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Division, Eitan Aram. "We plan to expand this project and additional similar endeavors in the near future."

In Cambridge, **CISL works to launder the British Army, Rolls-Royce (which produces war planes, not cars!) and Boeing**. Numerous “sustainable aviation” projects like CISL’s Aviation Impact Accelerator involve university collusion with the manufacturers of war planes and drones. CISL are also linked with companies like Coca-Cola and BNP Paribas, who profit from paramilitary violence against workers and resistance movements. Terms like “efficiency” and “sustainability” become threats when applied to the military.

The Alternatives

We've talked a lot about bad environmentalisms, but what are some good environmentalisms?

Moving away from capitalism and "growth"
We cannot build a sustainable future without ending capitalism and endless growth. The prioritisation of profit over all else has led to soaring emissions of greenhouse gases, depletion of the world's natural resources, and untold harm to living creatures.

Social justice
We believe that environmental justice and social justice are inextricably linked. It's no accident that the people being harmed the most by climate collapse are poor, brown and Black people in the global South. Through colonialism, we have built a system where the resources and labour of the global majority are exploited to fuel capitalist growth in the West, and these groups are again left to take the brunt of the consequences of the resulting climate collapse. Racial justice and workers rights must therefore be priorities for the environmental movement.

Land justice
We need to end land hoarding, occupation, colonisation and enclosure, restoring power to the communities who live on and with the land. We should not allow states or corporations to steal and harm the land, to put up borders, to evict people or imprison them. We will not have environmental justice until people around the world are free to live, move and care for one another without the threat of violence.

Learn more

Forensic Architecture

Forensic Architecture is a research agency, part of Goldsmiths, University of London. They investigate state and corporate violence.

We really liked their work with the frontline community Rise St. James, where they investigated the environmental racism in Death Alley, Louisiana. They showed how the pollution of chemical plants affected the mainly black communities. They also provided crucial help in protecting the area against the implantation of new petro-chemical facilities. Read that at louisiana.forensic-architecture.org/

The **Zapatistas** (EZLN) are a liberation group in Abya Yala (specifically in southern Mexico). They fought the application of the NAFTA free-trade treaty that really impoverished the indigenous farming communities.

Look up for example “The Zapatista Model for Sustainability”

Contrary to what you could think from their name, the **London Mining Network** is a coalition of groups from around the globe *against* mining. Their work links the mining companies headquartered in London with the environmental destruction they inflict on Indigenous communities around the world. They have published very recently an analysis of the consequences the UK’s Critical Minerals Strategy from the point of view of frontline communities in Chile.

Energy Embargo for Palestine is a London group fighting against the facilitation of the genocide in Palestine by oil&gas companies. They have a campaign against BP’s white-washing at the British Museum. Their work with Shado Mag “Pipeline to Genocide, BP’s oil route to Israel” has been very helpful to link genocidal colonization and environmental degradation.

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ENVIRONMENTAL LIBERATION

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