The Social and Natural Environment of Fossil Capitalism
Abstract

The 'westernization' of the world has led to a pattern of production and consumption which builds intensively on the nearly limitless availability of matter and energy, sophisticated technology, and the existence of natural 'sinks' in which solids, liquids and gas-emissions can be dumped. The effects on the local, national and global natural environment are mostly negative. Global transportation is responsible for the consumption of large quantities of fossil energy and thus for an increase of CO2-emissions, thus aggravating the climate crisis. Labour-intensive production processes are located where labour is cheap, and environmentally harmful processes where environmental laws and regulations are least exacting, and so least expensive.
This includes human and natural resources, as well as the productive infrastructure through which human labor is transformed into commodities for sale on global markets. And it means squeezing harder than your rivals. In the case of both Australia and the U.S., fossil fuels are central to the productive infrastructure on which the wealth and power of their respective capitalist classes is based. Trump isn’t alone among recent U.S. presidents in wanting to boost the U.S.’s global competitiveness by exploiting its untapped reserves of fossil fuels. Obama may have presented himself as an enlightened crusader for sustainability, but he presided over an unprecedented boom in U.S. oil and gas production—driven largely by the environmentally damaging technique of fracking. Capitalism or the environment, one will perish. Beyond its addiction to burning fossil fuels, capitalism’s predication on expansion is ruinous for the environment. Without the ability to expand, the internal logical of capitalism breaks down and structural disorder ensues. In the short-term, either capitalism or the natural environment must perish. Capitalist-imperialism is a system which fails to serve the immediate needs of the global proletariat and the long-term interests of humanity. This both creates ‘social peace’ in the First World and is part of the structural dynamic of imperialism itself. An ‘ecological unequal exchange’ also exists whereby natural resources are exported from the Third to First World and pollution and waste is transferred back in return.