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Environment :

Megafires in Australia: in the image of capitalist excess

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As of 3 January, the forest “mega-fires” ravaged 60,000 km², the equivalent of twice the size of Belgium. 500 million animals were charred in the disaster, say scientists at the University of Sydney. New Zealand’s glaciers are covered in soot. Temperature records have been broken, January and February could exceed 50°C in the shade. Nothing is under control. These fires are out of the ordinary.

Five million people in the capital breathe air 11 times more polluted than the seasonal norm and Canberra has become the most unbreathable city in the world (with an air pollution rate 20 times the maximum allowed). This pollution will cause thousands of premature deaths. Meanwhile, the Australian government is camping in a delusional climate denial position, boldly promoting coal! No question of it losing 1st place in the world as a coal exporter (the 4th biggest producer)! And logically, Australia has done very well in terms of CO2 emissions: + 47% since 1990!

Global warming responsible

It's undeniable. As a result of global warming, Australia has had two very dry seasons. As overall humidity drops, vegetation dries. Its flammability increases. In addition, worldwide industrial exploitation of forests (clear cutting, replacement by fast-growing species and so on) makes them much more susceptible to disease, and ecosystems are then more vulnerable to fire. The “fire season” is getting longer. Summer won't end here until the end of March! The conditions for the disaster are then fulfilled: global warming is indeed at the origin of these mega-fires.

Fires reinforce warming

A hellish dialectic then begins. These mega-fires which amaze us, against which seaplanes, water cannons and all technological means are only negligible quantities, are new and “total” phenomena with many dimensions, releasing titanic amounts of CO2. The path is clear for global warming of + 4 °C or more! New Zealand glaciers covered with Australian ashes reflect less light and will melt faster.

Megafires in all latitudes

If Australia is an island/continent with very hot weather, mega-fires now cause devastation all around the globe. Including in the snowy regions of the Far North, in Siberia, in Sweden beyond the Arctic Circle... Uncontrollable - the “fire soldiers” are powerless to fight them - they generally end with the lulling of the winds (these mega-fires increase wind speed) and the arrival of rain. These apocalyptic fires are more and more frequent, more and more intense. Joëlle Zask¹ says that we are no longer only in the Anthropocene, but in the “Pyrocene” ... because we cannot fight these fires. A preventive policy is required which requires another conception of forest “management”, and first of all a very quick exit from an extractivist conception.

A highly political issue

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The spectacle provided by the COPs and UN summits is leading to mounting rage at the inaction of political and economic leaders: the taboo of profit is for them absolute. The bottom line was drawn very well by Greta Thunberg on December 15: "If the solutions within this system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself."

Yes, it is indeed an ecological and social revolution that is urgent. We give it contours, those of eco-socialism. With the mega-fires, we can see that the only correct dimension is planetary.

PS:

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