

Say no to the coal killers. By: *Gary Johns*, From: *The Australian*, 21 October 2014.

CONVICTED killer, now Anglican priest, Evan Pederick is the perfect poster boy for the fossil fuel divestment campaign. The convicted and self-confessed terrorist has been taken into the bosom of the Anglican Church and joined forces with other churches to divest their institutions of investments in fossil fuels (and some minerals).

That other church of green ideology, the Australian National University, has done the same.

Pederick willingly and knowingly set out to destroy a life, that of the Indian prime minister, by planting a bomb in Sydney in 1978. He missed and killed three others instead. Divestment activists, perhaps unwittingly, also will harm innocent people.

Instead of Killers against Coal, why not Christians for Coal?

The moral calculation is simple. An effective divestment campaign would increase the cost of power and harm the poor.

It would substitute the possible risk of some harm to life from climate change decades into the future with the certain harm to life from denial of access to cheap energy now. An ineffective campaign, which is more likely, would waste the opportunity to put funds to better use.

Had the ANU, for example, announced that it would devote more of its (taxpayer supported) trust's investments to low carbon energy research, building on its actual contribution to society, education, few outsiders would have quibbled. Except, of course, the trustees, who bypassed the opportunity because the investment would have been high risk and harmed its own income.

Instead, ANU trustees took a moral preening stance with low risk to its own income and high risk of harm to the poor. While accepting taxpayers' money to train engineers, the ANU trustees and its vice-chancellor treat the work of those engineers with a likely future in fossil fuel and minerals mining with disdain. In the spirit of undergraduate activism that now infects the ANU at the highest levels, I urge all engineering aspirants to boycott the ANU.

The mystery is why the disease of divestment has spread so far and wide. Partly, it is because the climate change research pool has been tainted by a culture of silencing dissent in pursuit of public funds. Partly, it is a consequence of the growth of green non-government organisations, most with taxpayer privileges, and partly because industry has given up arguing the case for science in the service of progress.

Industry, especially companies with head offices in Europe, allowed itself to be demonised. It got sucked into the social licence to operate gibberish. It ceded legitimacy to a bunch of moralists who would keep the poor poor.

“Beyond Petroleum” was the tag adopted by a BP too embarrassed to face the public about the fact the public, indeed, the poor, needed hydrocarbons. BP chief executive John Browne's - famous 1997 speech signalled that “We in BP ... must now focus on what can and what should be done, not because we can be certain climate change is happening but because the possibility can't be ignored. If we are all to take responsibility for the future of our planet, then it falls to us to begin to take precautionary action now.”

At that time of climate change hyperbole BP (and many others) failed to defend its role in society. Of course, the greens never accepted the ploy, renouncing it as Beyond Belief. Indeed, from its 2000 announcements of investments in bio fuels, wind and solar, by 2011 BP had sold the solar business and by 2013 had attempted to sell the wind business. Bio-fuels remain beholden to huge taxpayer subsidies, harming the poor.

As Browne wrote in his 2013 book *Seven Elements That Have Changed the World*, one of which is carbon, “the prospects for meaningful international agreement on climate changed (sic) have diminished with each passing year”. He also concedes that political leaders “need to prepare us to adapt to a different set of climatic conditions”. Adaptation is the new reality, not the fantasy of abatement, which is at the heart of the divestment strategy.

Shell, on the other hand, has decided to fight back. Last week, Shell’s chairman in Australia, Andrew Smith, said rising activism was “fast becoming one of the greatest challenges facing Australian growth”.

Many more must join the fight, the first task of which is to name the enemy within — the killer priest, the ANU vice-chancellor and trustees, and scores of green NGOs. These should be made to feel the cold steel of rationality, which by the way, cannot be made without coking coal.

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