

‘Greens’ plans to return to the Stone Age

By Nick Cater, The Australian, 31 March 2015

It is testimony to the human spirit that Tasmania has an economy at all, let alone one that is growing. If the Greens had their way, Tasmanians would be reduced to trading possum pelts and sharpened flint, scavenging thick forests for seeds, sap and berries to keep the hunger at bay.

Yet the latest National Australia Bank quarterly business survey shows business confidence is higher in Tasmania than any other state. About 7000 jobs have been created since the last state election. Retail trade is at a high and building approvals are up.

“Stop progress before it stops you!”

Since 1972, when poet Judith Wright camped at the edge of Lake Pedder and told Hobart’s *The Mercury*: “Stop progress before it stops you!” The forces of regression have been doing their best to return the island state to the Stone Age. Industry by industry, the militant ecologists have slapped down anybody who has tried to make a serious buck in Tasmania and they have become fiendishly good at it.

The trashing of the Triabunna pulp mill and its associated port on Tasmania’s east coast offers an insight into their tactics. The mill was purchased from Gunns in 2011 by the Wilderness Society, bankrolled to the tune of billions by Kathmandu co-founder Jan Cameron and Wotif founder Graeme Wood.

A Tasmanian parliamentary inquiry that reported earlier this year found the mill to be a viable business and notes the purchasers had a contractual obligation to keep it running.

Ayn Rand’s 1970 prophecy of the anti-industrial revolution

Yet Wilderness Society boss Alec Marr set about fulfilling Ayn Rand’s 1970 prophecy of the forthcoming anti-industrial revolution. The old Left merely wanted to take over the factories; the new Left wants to destroy them.

In September 2013, a fortnight after Tony Abbott became Prime Minister, Marr recruited three marine welders and an electrician, locked the mill gates, stocked up with food and set about wrecking the logging plant.

Journalist John van Tiggelen, who was invited to join in the vandalism, wrote a riveting account in *The Monthly*. “There was something wild-eyed about Marr, as if he were living a monkey-wrencher’s dream,” he wrote.

“Marr had laid out a trove of new hardware: sledgehammers, axes large and small, angle grinders, spanners, pliers, bolt cutters and gloves. ‘For me, the sound of those grinders tomorrow will be the singing of angels,’ said Marr, grinning broadly.”

Van Tiggelen decided to lend a hand, sawing through a rubber belt with a hacksaw. “With an almighty clatter the rubber flew down the rollers, top and bottom, the violence of it shaking the scaffolding like a truck had hit it ... One down, 11 to go.”

This black-hearted act of sabotage

The denouement of this black-hearted act of sabotage was the toppling of the giant gantry, “the equivalent of downing the dictator’s statue”. So much for workers’ jobs and their families’ prosperity. The little people have never mattered much to the Greens in their single-minded pursuit of a “sustainable” economy, whatever that may mean.

The state election in March last year was a blow to the Greens. A swing of nearly 8 per cent against them meant the loss of two seats. Worse still, a 12.2 per cent swing to the Liberals meant Premier Will Hodgman could govern without being held to ransom by the fruitcakes on the fringe.

The combination of the first avowedly pro-business state government in years, plus the election of the Abbott government, has Tasmania in a sweet spot.

Local business leaders say Andrew Robb’s free trade deals with Japan, South Korea and China could have been written for Tasmania.

Recent economic progress

Earlier this month, the federal government agreed to extend the \$700-a-container Freight Equalisation Scheme so that it applies to exports as well as domestic trade. Local agricultural producers can sell internationally without the added cost of the journey across Bass Strait, giving Tasmania a chance to compete globally. The dairy and salmon industries are cock-a-hoop. China’s demand for imported milk is driving a lucrative international trade that New Zealand has been happy to supply. The farmed salmon industry is one of Tasmania’s success stories, having grown from virtually nothing to be worth an estimated \$500 million a year. Australian consumers have been enjoying the benefits of competitively priced, high-quality fish, and now the international market beckons.

Naturally, our Greens friends are not happy

As federal Greens senator Peter Whish-Wilson told Leon Compton on ABC 936 Hobart last week: “It’s actually my role as a senator to provide checks and balances to such rapid economic expansion. Unchecked growth in a number of different industries has actually led to the demise of those industries. It’s not just about the environment. It’s actually about getting it right.”

Last week Whish-Wilson instigated a federal Senate inquiry into the regulation of the finfish aquaculture industry, claiming an increase in dissolved oxygen levels of water in Macquarie Harbour was a risk to threatened species. As usual, the Greens’ claim is weak on detail but, as Whish-Wilson says, this is not just about the environment.

Federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten is backing Whish-Wilson’s inquiry. The Tasmanian Labor Party is not. State Opposition Leader Bryan Green says rigorous testing is already in place and a politicised Senate inquiry will undermine confidence in the industry.

“I was most upset because I think that we should have been included in that discussion as it is such an important industry for our state, and yes — I did bang the table,” says Green.

There was a similar split between the federal and Tasmanian Labor parties in the early 1980s when the then Labor opposition in Canberra backed Bob Brown's campaign to block the Franklin dam. The Tasmanian Labor Party supported it. In the 1983 election, Labor lost four seats to the Liberals on the island where jobs mattered more than sermons.

Greens cementing their reputation as the anti-development party

In the NSW election on Saturday, the Greens won the inner urban seats of Newtown and Balmain in Labor's former heartland and two seats in northern NSW from the Nationals in a strong vote against coal-seam gas. With the Greens cementing their reputation as the anti-development party, Shorten needs to pick his friends carefully.

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