

Renewable energy, the biggest policy hoax in the modern era

By Janet Albrechtsen, The Australian, 15 February 2017

There's one thing worse than a bunch of deluded commentators who treat green energy as a religion and *Insiders* as the church where they get down on their knees and pray. And that's the South Australian Labor government, writes Janet Albrechtsen.

History is littered with failed experiments. The hippie experiment of the 1960s and 70s never turned into anything more than a fashion statement. While the outfits survived, it turns out most people would rather shower daily, live in their own houses and not take recreational drugs.

The kibbutz experiment in Israel was a sweet utopian dream of communal living that tanked too. It turns out that people expect to be rewarded for effort, rather than carry freeloaders who refuse to share the load.

Even that "progressive" stalwart at the ABC, former 7.30 host Kerry O'Brien, was forced to report on the end of a "remarkable experiment" back in 2015 when the misguided ideology of Israel's oldest kibbutz, Degania, was dismantled.

After almost 100 years, 85 per cent of Degania members voted to abandon its collectivist dream in favour of a simple principle: individuals should be paid according to effort.

Let's hope it doesn't take 100 years to wake up to the utopian renewables energy experiment undertaken by state Labor governments and wholly supported by the federal Labor Party. Sadly, there are few signs that the green dreamers at the national broadcaster understand the harsh reality of these renewable energy policies. After a 10-week taxpayer funded break, commentators on ABC's *Insiders* were back at it, trying to dream their way out of facts, basic reason and common sense.

When asked by Barrie Cassidy to what extent was the blackout in South Australia due to renewables, *The Australian Financial Review's* Laura Tingle said, "well, none". *The Guardian's* Lenore Taylor propagated the same dream, saying "renewables aren't causing the blackouts".

Like a modern-day version of the Mamas and Papas, Tingle and Taylor are so busy reworking the hippie lyrics of *California Dreamin'* into South Australia Dreamin' they refuse to see an experiment crashing down around them.

There's one thing worse than a bunch of deluded commentators who treat green energy as a religion and *Insiders* as the church where they get down on their knees and pray. And that's the South Australian Labor government. Prior to leaving on a trade mission to the US last year, SA Labor Premier Jay Weatherill said South Australia risked becoming like a "rust-belt" industrial state in the US if it didn't change its economy. Weatherill's changed economy is one powered by 40 per cent of renewable energy and the results are in.

[Weatherill's renewable energy policy](#) has turned out to be the biggest policy hoax in the modern era. It is not transforming the economy: South Australia sits at the bottom of the economic performance table in this country. It is not creating jobs: South Australia has the highest unemployment rate in the country. It is not driving investment: companies big and small are rethinking their commitments to the state and others have already pulled back from expansion. And that says nothing about the businesses who will not consider opening up in the state.

SA Water Minister Ian Hunter crowed last year that “South Australia is proud of its role as a living laboratory, leading the way to a low-carbon economy”. That leaves the people of South Australia bumping around in the dark like laboratory rats while men in white coats express pride in a failed experiment.

What are they proud of? That the lights keep going off in homes across the state? Proud that they cannot guarantee cheap, reliable and secure energy to businesses, small and large? South Australia is turning into a rust-belt state because of Weatherill’s changed economy. In December, the lights went out again; the response from the SA Treasurer to business was blunt: build your own back-up, baseload power station.

After the latest blackout last week, the state Labor government was quick to blame energy market structures. No doubt, the market needs to be finessed. But why would a government leap headlong into what it describes as a renewable energy experiment before the right market structures are in place?

It beggars further belief that a government genuinely concerned about its people would rush into an experiment, without considering that intermittent wind energy creates serious engineering risks for managing the stability and reliability of the power grid. When the ABC’s Chris Uhlmann raised these engineering questions last year, he was harangued and mocked as the new face of the anti-wind lobby. The national broadcaster took delight in leaking to *The Guardian* that complaints had been received about Uhlmann’s reporting.

Talk about post-truth. The further blackouts last month and this month expose the hoax of a prosperous green energy driven economy. The stark difference between feeling good and doing good is now irrefutable. It doesn’t feel good to be unemployed, or out of business, as the myth of green prosperity explodes. It doesn’t feel so good to have your electricity turned off in the summer heat or the winter cold. It doesn’t feel so good to be subjected to the Left’s utopian dreams that end up hurting the poor the most.

As *The Australian* revealed on Monday, electricity prices have spiked 106 per cent over the past decade, outstripping the rate of inflation, making power bills the biggest slug to the household budget. And South Australia ranks as one of the states with the highest power bills.

Last week, opposition climate change and energy spokesman Mark Butler accused the Turnbull government of playing politics over energy. That’s a bit rich coming from a bloke whose party, state and federal, is playing ideological games with the future of the Australian people to satiate its left flank and secure Green preferences. In any case, SA Labor and federal Labor, with its own 50 per cent renewable energy target by 2030, have gifted the Turnbull government one heck of a political weapon. And they know it.

That’s why there are small signs of Labor panicking, even admitting that its ideological experiment, like Israel’s kibbutz movement, is being trumped by reality. After the SA blackouts last week, the West Australian Labor Opposition Leader Mark McGowan ran for the hills in the middle of WA’s election campaign, refusing to outline its own renewable target despite signalling at a conference in October last year that it supports a 50 per cent target by 2030.

Meanwhile, Weatherill last week admitted his state needed more baseload energy. That’s a no-brainer given the blackout during Adelaide’s sweltering heat occurred when wind dropped to 2.5 per cent of supply.

Even Butler said there needed to be a proper balance of energy sources, an admission that SA's current energy source balance is entirely out of kilter. On SA's leap into the renewables unknown, Butler said, there was always going to be a jurisdiction that led the way. That policy rush hasn't worked well for the people of South Australia. And it's not working for Labor. The only question is how much more evidence will it take for Labor's hasty and ill-conceived green energy experiment to be deemed a policy and political disaster.

janeta@bigpond.net.au