

Romancing Coal in Australia: The Adani Obsession

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The rain pours with torrential fury in north Queensland, opening up with ominous welcome as it slices through layers of stifling humidity. But the fury is also being registered in the rag like bleating sheet known to locals as the Bullie, that beacon of local sentimentality that noisily proclaims its voice.

Another creature in the vast enterprise known as the Murdoch empire, this paper does the bidding of fossil fuel interests in the state. Where there is a mine to exploit, an interest to advance, the *Townsville Bulletin* will be there, heavily armed, for the next mud wrestle with environmentalists.

This wrestling draws out some tit bits of political pornography, the sort specific to the advertising of poverty. The fossil fuel lobby, with its various backers, needs worthy victims and alibis. In the dirty business of producing coal, for instance, this is particularly pressing. "Dark Days," goes a headline in the paper issue on March 18. Ever grammatically challenged, the rest of the title in the paper features "the power poor who need our coal."

The poor in question are Indians who vanish into numerical vagueness, specimens of suffering who command the rhetorical stage as fodder for the newspaper.

"Mary and her two-year old son Mauli are among the hundreds of millions of Indians living a hard life without the convenience of electricity."

The picture of Mary is predictably taken at an appropriate angle, child positioned appropriately for maximum, moral effect. For Murdoch's slime coated papers, it is not merely bums on seats, but hands on hearts that count.

The level of banality and crudeness reaches the point where every alibi is sought by the correspondent to justify the digging of the good earth in order to power the living in a developing country. The environment can then go on its merry way to hell, where it is already finding itself.

All people in India, the Bullie correspondent goes on to suggest, need electricity as a Promethean sacred resource.

"Dhobi, or laundry, workers like 14-year old Abishek, rely on electricity to make a living and support his family."

The poking insinuation here is clear: people need electricity, whatever the nature of its source, whatever the consequence of its production. The environment only matters as luxury, as afterthought. India, insatiable, voracious, enormous, needs to be fed and

electrified; environmentalists are the enemy in this enterprise, to be regarded with suspicion.

The mission of such a giant mining company as Adani, an Indian entity being entertained by Australian business and government interests, lies at the intersection of this battle. Environmental records have been generously overlooked, while the company continues being feted by leading figures in the country, including federal government members and the Queensland state government. Corruption charges have also been leveled at a company known for feeding from the mammary glands of government finance, rewarding taxpayers with minimal returns.

Not that these things matter to Adani Australia chief, Jeyakumar Janakaraj. The proposed mining project in central Queensland would achieve a noble purpose, and one trumpeted by the *Townsville Bulletin*: supply electricity to the homes of millions of Indians.[1]

Ever shady, Adani Enterprises is caught in a network of dubious funding arrangements that reveal links to the World Bank itself. In December last year, it was suggested by US-based Inclusive Development International that a “covert” funding arrangement had been facilitated from the World Bank’s private sector link, the International Financial Corporation. The finance had been surreptitiously obtained via funding to India’s ICICI.

Admittedly, Adani Enterprises’ record is starting to get a muddled name for itself, a prohibitive one that is seeing banks and various financial institutions scatter at some speed. In Australia, such banks as the National Australia Bank and the Commonwealth Bank have expressed the view that the company is too hot to fund.

Internationally, the Adani brand name is not getting much mileage either, with the likes of Morgan Stanley, the Royal Bank of Scotland, Deutsche Bank or HSBC, bodies long known for their record in supplying loans for coal projects, afraid to commit funds.

Little wonder, then, that local environmental activism in Australia has spiked. Sporting figures such as former cricketers Ian and Greg Chappell, known in both India and Australia, are worried by the potential depredations of Adani. As are businessman turned environmentalist Geoffrey Cousins and tourism operator Lindsay Simpson.

As Ian Chappell would explain in justifying the contents of the note of protest,

“you don’t need to be Einstein when you see the frequency and the ferocity of some of the weather events that we’ve been having”.

Nor will such a vast project, entailing six open-cut pits and five underground mines, necessarily create the bevy of jobs alleged.

Verifying that he was distinctly not Einstein in either sentiment or thought, the response from one government MP to the claims against Adani, the ever ballooning George Christensen, was elementary: the Chappells and fellow signatories to a letter outlining their opposition to the mining project were those of “elitist wankers”.

[1] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-18/adani-mine-support-shown-by-qld-premier-mayors-in-india/8366126>

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