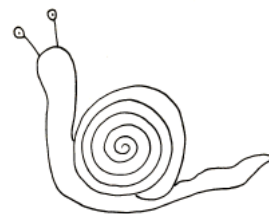
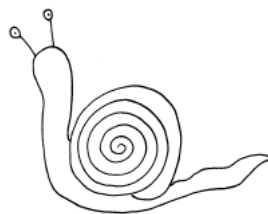
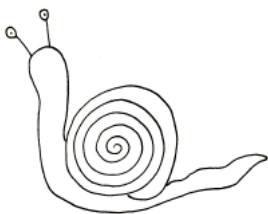


Stuff off!
Thoughts on Consumerism

Consumerism: Causes and Cures

a zine by
Melbourne Degrowth

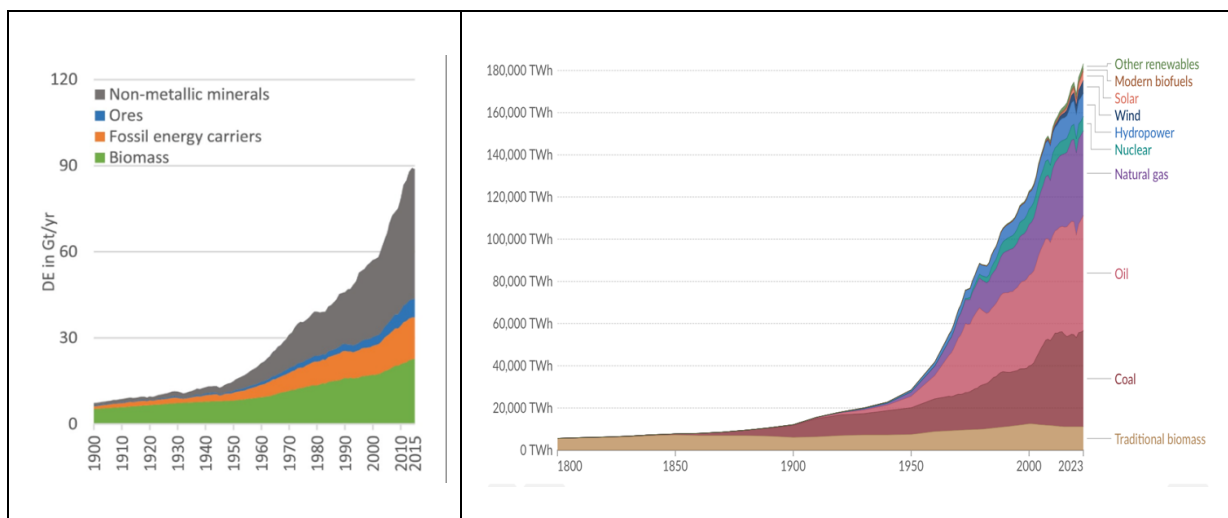


Stuff off! Thoughts on Consumerism

A zine by Melbourne Degrowth (degrowthnetwork@proton.me)

Capitalism and growth

In capitalism, managers require profits to maintain the economic viability of their businesses. Firms compete for markets or go out of business. The result is more and more stuff. There has been a huge acceleration since 1950. More and more minerals, fossil fuels, land, even sand and gravel are used. This has got to stop. We are running out of the minerals we need. We are destroying our farming land. We are poisoning the planet with toxic waste. From carbon dioxide to plastics, to ‘forever chemicals’ — chemicals that do not break down in the environment and are toxic for generations. Seas are rising, insect numbers plummet, wildlife is going extinct. The weather is an unpredictable horror show.



Material extraction.

Energy consumption

The stuff we buy every day is killing our planet. Yet we are in a bind. If growth stops, GDP falls. If GDP falls, businesses go broke. If businesses go broke, people lose their jobs.

Planned obsolescence

Planned obsolescence makes sense for the people running companies. You want people to buy now and, in a few years, buy again. There is no point in making things easy to repair. You will add new features and tempt people to discard the items that were precious when new. For people in the rich

countries, the price of labour means that repairing old things is either downright impossible or costs more than the replacement value.

Globalisation

Australia, like the rest of the richer countries, has embraced globalisation. The manufactured goods that we use are produced far away — with ultra cheap labour. As a rich country, we consume more per person. If everyone lived like us, we would need three earths.

While we may be pleased that manufactured goods are cheap, there are lots of downsides. We have no control over the way our stuff is produced. No control over labour conditions. No control over environmental impacts. Disaster at a distance. Transporting all this stuff from overseas uses fossil fuels. Cheap offshore manufacturing has destroyed the Australian union movement. You can always take your business overseas. Jobs are casualized. The costs of housing go through the roof. There is a growing sense of insecurity in every class of society. The government spends big on social welfare, mopping up the calamities caused by insecure work. Little is left for housing, medicine or education.

Why we feel poor but still buy more stuff

Why do we feel that we cannot make ends meet? Yet we keep doubling the amount of stuff we consume. One reason is the cost of essentials keeps going up while the cost of consumer goods plummets. We need a job to get money for rent, transport, education, power bills. When we have a bit left over it seems like a good idea to spend it on cheap manufactured goods. We have a difficult time at work and are always worrying about where our next job is coming from. We compensate by buying stuff. We want to feel successful and buy things that show that. Spending an arm and a leg on a gas guzzler, a boat, a new TV or fridge.

Consumerism as a success story

This is just the beginning. The explosion in material consumption is an effect of successful working-class struggle. The threat of revolution and the pressure from unions and left parties. The great bargain of capitalism in the rich countries. Give up the dream of socialism and get more and more consumer goodies — as the capacity to produce stuff expands. More recently this bargain extends to parts of the global South. With this, a built-

in motivation to spend. You have worked hard, and you have earned it. You deserve a share in the fruit of your labours. You spend to receive that share.

Denial and anger

It may be that denial drives some consumption too. Those greenies are always talking doom and gloom. Let's spend up big. Don't tell us what to do with *our* money. I have had a gutful of people telling me how to live. I am grown up now and will do whatever I like. The state of the environment is not *my* problem! Even if I wanted to, I could not do anything about it.

What might work better

We really need a different kind of economy. Where it is okay to have enough and live a comfortable life. Without growth. Taking the planet seriously. Where you can be sure you will have a house to live in. Where you have plenty of free time. Where you can be sure you will have enough to live well — with good medical care and free education. Where your work is fun and not a torment. Where we use less stuff, and it lasts a lot longer. Where we make most of what we use locally, using local materials. Avoiding environmental catastrophes.



This zine was produced by the Melbourne/Naarm branch of Degrowth Network Australia. Please share it widely!

Want to join our movement? Contact: degrowthnetwork@proton.me

To learn more about Degrowth Network Australia:
degrowth.info/en/blog/degrowth-network-australia