

A user-pays climate: whatever happened to Article 3?

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<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/news/climate-change-hurts-china-s-p>

I almost cried as I watched Tim Flannery interviewed all the way from New York a few weeks on Lateline. He argued that Rudd deserved a break: the Govt's ETS was worth passing. Flannery also argued that more pressure should be put on the world's poor – especially the Chinese and Indians. Favouring the rich over the poor has become neo-liberal wall paper in our culture so Tony Jones let it pass.

But Flannery's comments were contrary to the spirit of Article 3 of the *UNFCCC*. What is Article 3? Only the moral heart of the UN's whole climate change undertaking:

The parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the developed country parties should take the lead in combating climate change and the adverse affects there of.

The rest of Article 3 extends this clause, identifying circumstances warranting differential treatment: poverty, ongoing development challenges, vulnerability to climate change and so on.

Flannery appears to have joined a growing crowd seeking to reverse or minimally interpret Article 3 in favour of a very unpleasant user-pays politics now threatening to derail global negotiations –and the globe he so dearly loves with it. And he does and there's the tragedy.

Flannery's remarks are not decisive in themselves, but they are part of a continual fretting, wearing the *UNFCCC* down because it speaks against the market and for justice and generosity. It's the old death by a thousand cuts trick – killing off human decency, and then the planet with it.

This point is important and I make again in different words. The two – sharing and the planet - go together as never before and herein lies the ultimate critique of capitalism. Now we have to hold hands to live. The corny is elevated to the status of ecological necessity. It is a equally critique of

classical socialism – a doctrine that understood the importance of hand-holding but not the reason for it: to better protect, not to better plunder the planet. The human future is contingent. Their no necessary triumph, not fort liberal democracy capital or the working class.

That said, the user-pays principle is often a misnomer. It's really only 'user-pays' for the poor. And while the poor do pay, the rich bully for concessions or cheat. In Australia, for example, they have driven carbon trading targets well below levels that satisfy the science. Not content with this, they have white-anted the surviving feeble structure by securing truckloads of free permits. The state is complicit and has started calling science unreasonable.

Australia's ETS is a disgrace, yet many eminent Australians, including Flannery, support its enactment for the sake of the symbolic message it sends: 'we pass laws, so we are serious'. But is that what it says? Has anyone done the social research to check? Or is it just the desperate hope you feel when you're about to betray important principles?

What, furthermore, would be wrong with a stronger state and the message that Australians won't put up with half-hearted abatement measures that favour the rich and exploit the poor. That's a message worth transmitting to the planets 5.5 or so billion poor people.

What are the facts about current Chinese and Indian income and poverty? Current GDP per capita for India, China and Australia respectively stand at \$7.50, \$17.50 and just short of \$100 daily. The 750 million Chinese citizens who still live rurally earn about \$10 on average while in India, 500 million people remain in absolute poverty – below \$1.25 daily now.

The emission data correspond. India remains close to the bottom of the world's league – at just 7% of Australia's emissions. China emits more but, still, average per capita levels are just 25% of our levels.

None of this is difficult to verify. Only by the most remarkable stretches of the statistical and moral imagination can these figures justify a global climate change policy beckoning for more user-pays. On contrary, it calls for more sharing and generosity. Some would say Palaeolithic rather postmodern impulses.

Neo-liberal journalism and commentary have reserved their vitriol not for the *UNFCCC* but for the *Kyoto Protocol*. The *Protocol* is the better-known instrument that gives half-hearted operational effect to Article 3 by offering a kind of temporary emissions holiday to the poor. It is a much easier target because it is due for retirement in 2012. Even though it is half-hearted, its generosity is too much for neo-liberals.

The Chinese, as well as making their own real mitigation efforts, have suggested that post-Kyoto arrangements incorporate a 1% GDP transfer from the developed to the developing world. That's \$400b pa or \$1.14 per day

from each struggling person in the rich world. That's two cups of coffee a week where I live.

To be sure, not everyone in the rich world is rich – I heard Julian Disney on the radio this week. So what about imposing charges just on the rich in the rich world? A 2% wealth tax on capital asset millionaires would raise the requested Chinese sum. Of course, there are millionaires in the developing world – just not as many. Taxing them 2% would yield a further \$200b. This is all low hanging fruit for determined states. Will the world end for want of the will to pick it? Will it, Tim? Or are the poor easier targets?

Flannery is with the morally easy-going majority here. His voice, joining with many other voices pitches the poor against the planet. Never was a more stupid contest organised. It will be unhappy endings for all: for the poor, for the planet and for the rich. Their ill-gotten gains will have only a short life. It's one of those rare lose-lose-lose propositions.

One can understand how corporate greed or an inept state might stumble into this idiot's thicket. But Flannery? He's too smart. And wasn't he one of the good guys? Like I said, I almost cried.