

WE SAY:

Just about every aspect of the [Labour] party's operation comes in for sharp criticism.

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Keep fossil fuels in the ground

MARK PRAIN, executive director of the Christchurch-headquartered Hillary Institute, announces the organisation's 2015 international Hillary Laureates, Atossa Soltani and Michael Brune, and explains their campaigning to keep fossil fuels in the ground.

Set against the backdrop of limiting global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, the primary goal of the United Nations COP 21 Climate Change Summit in Paris in December, is a universal climate agreement manifested in "a protocol, legal instrument or agreed outcome with legal force". This 'new instrument' must be adopted in 2015 and implemented by 2020.

For good reason hopes in many quarters are high but *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot recently called out a key "elephant in the room". Reiterating the old mantra that solving a problem requires naming it, he slammed the duality of governments pursuing directly contradictory policies.

His core contention is absent recognition of the causative role of fossil fuel production in climate change, capping global warming at 2 degrees C is an oxymoron – particularly while many states seek to "maximize economic recovery" of their reserves. "Then they cross their fingers, walk three times widdershins around the office and pray that no one burns it."

As we head toward Paris, all member countries (including New Zealand) are committed to providing INDCs (intended nationally-determined contributions). Essentially a tool for shared objectives, these benchmarks based on careful calculus of a domestic market's toleration, will be celebrated/debated in the context of ratcheting up what can be agreed on the international stage as a whole.

As yet on Monbiot's "supply side" challenge, no major national players have forgone new extractive opportunities around oil and gas, "keeping it in the ground".

While some smaller states have made gestures, they'll need financial support to apply alternative energy sources at scale, making equity another key objective of the COP21. The aim is to mobilize \$100 billion per year by developed countries, from public and private sources, from 2020.

Even Shell CEO Ben van Beurden last month publicly endorsed warnings that the world's fossil fuel reserves cannot be burned unless some way is found to capture their carbon emissions.

So why is he sending exploration rigs to the Alaskan Arctic? His answer was a lot of corporate and individual soul-searching went into the decision. There's no doubt new insights and products are coming from intelligent business but the easy response of "most of you drove here in a car" is a raw reminder of how pervasive "economy trumps environment" sentiment remains. Vested interests aside, world-leading economies unafraid to

HILLARY INSTITUTE

The Hillary Institute of International Leadership was launched by the late Sir Edmund Hillary in January 2007. Selected by an international board of governors chaired by Anake Goodall, the institute selects one Hillary Laureate each year for exceptional, mid-career Leadership, working with the awardee in their home nation and in New Zealand.

Former Hillary Laureates are Jeremy Leggett (United Kingdom, 2009), Peggy Liu (China, 2010), Aimee Christensen (United States, 2011), President Anote Tong (Kiribati, 2012), Amazon Watch Founder/Chair Atossa Soltani (2013), and Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune (2014).

Peggy Liu won the first NZ\$100,000 Hillary Step prize in 2012 for "China Dream" and Atossa Soltani and Mike Brune co-jointly in 2015, announced today, World Environment Day.

The Hillary Institute's 2012-15 leadership focus is Climate Equity. See www.hillaryinstitute.com

MICHAEL BRUNE

Michael Brune is executive director of the US environmental organisation the Sierra Club. Previously he was with the Rainforest Action Network and an organiser for Greenpeace. He is the author of the book *Coming Clean: Breaking America's Addiction to Oil and Coal*, published in 2008.

ATOSSA SOLTANI

Atossa Soltani is a founder and former executive director of Amazon Watch, which works with Indigenous communities in the Amazon region of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, to build local capacity and advance the long-term protection of their lands. She has been involved in leading international campaigns in defence of tropical rain forests and before founding Amazon Watch in 1996, directed campaigns at the Rainforest Action Network to end logging in endangered ecosystems.

introduce positive incentives; like Germany (ranked fourth) and California (eighth), closing fast on Brazil (seventh), have seen record renewables investment.

So too Mom and Pop take-up of de-centralised energy and, speaking of cars, hybrid and electric vehicles. The sexy top end of Elon Musk's Tesla, or former *Top Gear* presenter Jeremy Clarkson's excitement (about



Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune, fourth from left in the top row, and other activists tie themselves to the White House railings during a protest against the proposed Keystone XL pipeline from Alberta to Nebraska. Photo: REUTERS

BMW's all electric I-8) aside, the ubiquity of the Prius on LA's freeways is obvious.

Indeed on the demand side it's no accident Angela Merkel's Germany and Jerry Brown's California are actively transitioning their economies to the potentially enormous economic and socially-leveling opportunities of a low-carbon future. Hailing from opposite sides of the political divide, they're united by diverse and pragmatic creative smarts and determinedly future-focused politics.

Equally it's no coincidence Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping announced key INDCs for COP 21. Last November's historic US-China bilateral agreement commits the US to reducing its emissions to 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2025. China will peak its emissions by 2030, and thereafter not increase them, creating a huge driver for clean-tech innovation and jobs in both nations.

Van Beurden candidly predicts the global energy system will be "zero carbon" by 2100 with Shell gaining a "very, very large segment" of its revenues from renewables. The downside of course is if we get there – and for



Atossa Soltani

many on the front lines of climate impact already this isn't about niceties of choice around which car they drive, it's about survival. They understand the need for a

profound sense of urgency. As Paris this December looms larger, a wide array of "non-state actors", significant global media consortia (thankfully), city-state,

corporate and NGO strategies are rapidly gathering momentum – what the UN calls the "Agenda of Solutions".

In the United Kingdom, Monbiot's home plate *The Guardian*'s "Keep it in the Ground" campaign is focused on persuading some of the globe's largest philanthropies (including Wellcome Trust and the Gates Foundation) to divest their shareholdings in fossil fuel stocks.

And across the Atlantic, the Hillary Institute's 2013 and 2014 global Laureates Atossa Soltani and Michael Brune have crafted a consortium of 60 NGO and indigenous leaders from the top of Alaska, to the tar sands of Canada, to the forests of the South American Amazon, creating a co-ordinated, action strategy for "Keeping it in the Ground across the Americas". The outcome will impact Paris, but will importantly also go beyond it.

A 48-hour intensive gathering in San Francisco in April began by seeking a declarative statement of common ground. There was nothing ambiguous about the equity or urgency issues in the room.

Acknowledgement that major impacts of our fossil fuel economy

are frequently borne not by those who profit most, but by front-line and indigenous communities (with the least resources to adapt), kept participants and translators working very hard throughout, as no doubt they will again at COP 21.

Commonsense dictates playing Russian roulette with our climate system goes beyond being merely reckless and shortsighted. And as anyone in any truly "hard yards" space will attest, creativity, tenacity and implementation distinguish the exceptional.

In that spirit, Amazon Watch chair Soltani and Brune, boss of the Sierra Club environmental organisation, have co-jointly won the 2015 Hillary Step prize for Leadership in Climate Equity to kick-start this ambitious strategy.

It takes a special kind of heart, a very special kind of leadership, to tenaciously persevere "fighting the good fight", the "inconvenient truths", the unforgiving realities – particularly in this age of endless, distracting, seductive ephemera. And beyond that to remain militantly focused on finding and driving solutions!

Hillary Laureates Brune and Soltani have been doing both for over two decades again the odds. Long may they continue.

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"Now I know why those 86 workers are going to be made redundant." – Granddad