

IPAN No War With China Rally - Earthworker Cooperative speech – Dave Kerin

(The parts of the speech dealing with Superannuation are taken from an article written for Jacobin Magazine by Dan Musil, Secretary Earthworker Cooperative and Dave Kerin).

As you will know Earthworker was created in order to address:

- Climate Change
- Species extinction
- The threat of global militarism, driven by what is the largest industry in the world, the military industry.

In addressing this three-pronged crisis, Earthworker has been clear for many years that it is not enough to only say "No!" to the climate emergency, species extinction and war. Not when the industries causing the crisis make up the bulk of the global economy. We have to have a "Yes!" in the form of solutions which replace the crisis-causing jobs with jobs which first establish least harm and which ultimately move us towards a democratic economics that can, with careful planning, one day work with the life support systems of the planet.

There is increasing urgency now to address the threat of war with China. Especially given that the war risks going nuclear. Alignments which assume that diplomacy is dead are already seeing more vulnerable nations being forced to take sides. Threats are made around aid and trade. Militarists in the US and their satellites like Australia continue to destroy diplomacy and the UN Conventions which diplomacy rests upon, while they imply that we can rebuild economies based upon permanent war.

How has such a strategy worked in the war torn countries of the world over the last 20 years?

The previous Administration in North America caused Australia to enter into new forms of contention with China: Pointedly bringing into question China's motives in everything, from their role in the development, spread and responses to the Covid pandemic, to consciously spreading mistrust of China's efforts to build the Belt and Road initiative.

The current American Government still wishes to use us as the tail of the whip, to destabilise China, but we have to remember, we have the right to determine our own affairs and for the sake of future generations we must cut our own peaceful path. A peaceful path requires a new economics. Economics which satisfies the needs of our communities and not the needs of war profiteers, climate change perpetrators or those destroying other species that we share mutual survivability with.

Australia is witness to a campaign involving elements in the Federal Government, sections of the Public Service gone rogue and parts of the media, pushing us towards a war footing. Right now there is not total unity in either sphere and that is why we must raise our voices to equal, then surpass, the clamour for militarism. Earthworker Cooperative wants to not only build the economics of Peace within the great traditions of the Peace Movement, but to *let people know that we are doing this work*. Our role can engender hope in the hearts of anyone attempting to build alternatives to the three- way crisis!

There has been a breakdown in diplomacy since 9/11, which saw an organised move away from UN Conventions that arose out of the struggle against fascism from the 1920's

onwards, and the Second World War. Hard won clarity around "*Non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries*" and the "*Right of nations to self-determination*" have been replaced by intervention and regime change. This has seen the failure of a 17 year long war in Afghanistan, an illegal invasion of Iraq and an attempt at total destabilisation in countries like Syria.

The three-way crisis facing humankind will never be resolved militarily. Only global cooperation can create the conditions for such a resolution. To run the risk of entering a space where there is no return from conflict, risks that conflict becoming inevitable.

When we speak of global cooperation then it becomes obvious that cooperation is the foundation for all forms of production, in every sort of social system. What cooperatives do, and can do better within a strong social sector, is to develop the cooperation contained within the productive process into ownership of the productive process.

This is important because when we observe the elements of the three-way crisis we soon realise that there is not a climate crisis nor a crisis involving species' survival, nor indeed a military crisis which are independent of the economics which underpins them. The way in which humankind is meeting our needs currently neither meets the needs of the millions nor the needs of the planet of which we are a part.

To that extent, 2020 - 2030 is the United Nation's Decade of Ecological Restoration. Without the desire and capacity to build the economic options for ecological restoration, then we can already see in the first of these ten years that it proves to be a pretty grim decade.

Earthworker Cooperative chooses distributed ownership based upon cooperatives and mutuals, which places the dignity of free individuals at the very heart of collective, cooperative practice. A democratic economics based upon the satisfaction of the needs of people and planet. Building such a social sector of the Australian and global economy is one of the many tasks ahead of humankind if we and our fellow-species are to survive. However we should note that contained within the crisis is great opportunity: To develop a new economics framed by a new relationship to nature as part of human nature and human nature as part of our natural surround.

Part of any economic alternative is the search for capital to make the changes real and on a scale big enough to halt then reverse the three-way crisis. That is why the question of Superannuation, what it is, how it is controlled and the use to which it is put is such an urgent one.

Though they are often mis-named 'employer contributions', these payments are not a gift from employers. Neither is superannuation a 'tax' on wages. For those of us lucky to be in formal employment, superannuation payments represent part of our wage, paid into collective superannuation funds, to be managed in our collective interest. As 'deferred wages', superannuation is workers' capital. It's *our* capital.

When superannuation payments are treated as 'employer contributions', our collective superannuation wealth is easily disguised in national accounting as 'private capital'. And by treating super like *someone else's* 'private capital' that can be invested traditionally into unsustainable activities, the system fails to provide for a liveable planet to retire into. A financialised retirement savings system fails to adequately serve retirees or the society they rely on.

But if Australia's superannuation funds, now worth trillions of dollars, really are workers' capital, why can't we democratically control how these collective funds are used? What might be possible if we could decide how our super is invested? And, perhaps a more worrying question: What is at risk if we lose further control over what are some of the largest investment funds in history?

Australia's combined superannuation funds are enormous, today holding assets of around \$3 trillion. This represents enormous potential power, nationally and internationally – superannuation funds already regularly invest in overseas assets, unable to find sufficient opportunities in Australia alone. As major investors in Australian company shares, super funds are on track to dominate 60 percent of shares in the Australian Securities Exchange over the next 20 years. Nominally at least, Australian capitalism will be collectively owned by workers!

We need to democratically own and control our Superannuation. It is socialised capital.

It results from our collective labour. Yet, for most of its life it sits in a number of funds that are heavily restricted and divorced from effective workers' control. But we must move beyond simply identifying the sectors to 'divest' super from. Given the climate emergency and economic collapse triggered by COVID-19, the almost \$3 trillion dollars of workers' capital could be used to kickstart a Green Recovery – creating dignified livelihoods in worker-run enterprises, raising living standards and reforming industry to mitigate environmental damage and inequality.

Just look at the recent fervor over Australia's 'business opportunities' in defence industries – in profiting from, and in turn becoming dependent on, the global war machine. From Malcolm Turnbull's 2018 launch of the 'defence export strategy', to the Morrison Government's shameless enthusiasm for military technology 'as part of his new \$1.5 Billion 'manufacturing plan' (an industry the Liberal party apparently cared little for in the past), it seems that co-investment by the public and 'private sectors' in weapons is being loudly thumped on the table. This is occurring at a time when the risk of global conflict continues to escalate.

There is a danger that right when the climate crisis demands action, our superannuation will instead be appropriated to invest in the war economy. For years, campaigners fought to have super funds to divest from fossil fuels. Just as we begin to see change there, a new danger is emerging – that instead of funding indirect violence to the environment, our superannuation will fund direct destruction.

There is a tremendous sense not only of urgency around the three way crisis facing humankind, but also feelings verging on hopelessness and despair at the scale and complexity of such an existential crisis.

Cooperatives are all about hope, a characteristic which has drawn many of us to commit to their growth and development. The combination of crisis and cooperatives is certainly one of the most creative and powerful spaces. Nobody paints the house they are renting. Relations with corporations are transactional at best, with large sections of humankind without unions, themselves being transacted, bought and sold around the world as commodities. When ownership is distributed and decisions are democratically arrived at there is that sense that even though we may not eliminate problems at least we own them and can finally begin to do something effective about them.

Hope is the first duty.