

Building a Sustainable Economy Before Capitalism Kills Us All

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Capitalism is quite literally killing the planet.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports that if greenhouse gas emissions continue at the current rate, the atmosphere will warm by as much as 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit above preindustrial levels by 2040, inundating coastlines and intensifying droughts and poverty. The Paris Agreement calls for limiting warming to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, but it is now clear that even if the bosses succeed in this effort (and there's little evidence that they're trying) the results of this "success" would be catastrophic.

The world is already more than halfway to the 2.7-degree mark. At current rates of warming, we will cross this threshold sometime between 2030 and 2052. Arctic regions are warming at twice the global average, melting sea ice, enabling toxic algae blooms and sparking extreme weather events across the planet. To avoid ecological catastrophe, greenhouse pollution must be reduced by 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, and virtually eliminated by 2050. Otherwise, the IPCC forecasts a world of worsening food shortages, wildfires, massive flooding and environmental collapse. If temperatures rise to the 3.6 degree target politicians are failing to meet, the results will be far more devastating.

Animal and insect populations are already plummeting. Since 1970, the numbers of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles have dropped by an average of 60 percent, according to the World Wildlife Federation. The world's largest king penguin colony shrunk by 88 percent, more than 97 percent of the bluefin tuna that once lived in the ocean are gone. Habitat destruction, overfishing and hunting, and plundering of resources are combining with climate change to destroy the web of life upon which human society depends for clean air, water and everything else.

Insect populations are plummeting, as are the territories where they live, in what the *New York Times Magazine* refers to an "insect apocalypse." The number of monarch butterflies has fallen by 90 percent in the last 20 years. A German study found that, measured by weight, the presence of flying insects in nature reserves is down by 75 percent over the last 27 years. Ornithologists report that birds that rely on insects for food are in deep trouble: eight in 10 partridges are gone from French farmlands, and half of all farmland birds in Europe disappeared over the last three decades. Earthworm populations are also collapsing, as our manufactured ecosystem loses the capacity to sustain life.

Famine and misery are everywhere on the rise. The United Nations refugee agency reports that there are more than 68.5 million refugees and displaced persons – many directly forced from their homes by climate change; others fleeing conflicts sparked by environmental devastation (and of course there are the countless victims of nationalism and repression and the routine workings of a system that values only power and profit). The World Bank predicts another 140 million climate refugees if global warming continues at its current rate.

These are not natural events. Just 100 companies have been the source of more than 70% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 1988, according to the Carbon Majors Report. Scientists have been warning of the dangers for 40 years, but the capitalists and the states they control have continued their reckless despoliation of our planet. In December, several pension funds, insurers and investment firms called on governments to take action, recognizing that ecocide will, over the long term, be bad for profits.

The IPCC says avoiding this catastrophe requires transforming the world economy at a speed that has “no documented historic precedent.” It is still technically possible to slow the pace of global warming, but they acknowledge that it is politically unlikely. Why? Everyone knows that urgent action is needed, but capitalism is an economic system built on pillage and short-term thinking; as long as they are left in charge there will always be plenty of bosses eager to score a quick million no matter the long-term cost.

This ecological crisis is coupled with a social crisis that is equally urgent, if only because it is preventing us from stopping those who are murdering our planet. Outright fascists are now in government in several countries, and governments now openly flaunt their crimes. Full-scale genocide is underway in Myanmar, U.S. authorities continue caging child refugees, and several governments openly deploy death squads in the streets. Militaries are expanding as the plutocrats pursue their futile dreams of holding the desperate hordes at bay. While the wealthy have never been more prosperous, workers endure economic stagnation and decline. In 2017, United States life expectancy fell for the third straight year – relentlessly driven down by diseases of despair.

And so the bosses are looking for new ways to live with (and profit from) a ruined planet. One researcher published an entire book (the misnamed *Atmosphere of Hope*) calling on governments to ameliorate climate change through geo-engineering, such as polluting the atmosphere with billions of tiny metallic particles to block the sun's rays from reaching the earth. Physicist/futurist Michio Kaku proposes massive investments in space exploration so we (more likely a handful of the rich and a cadre of servants) can escape a dying earth. In Holland, researchers are trying to create robotic bees to take over pollination once capitalism's relentless war on the environment forces bees into extinction. In China, shortages of insect pollinators have led farmers to hire human workers to replace bees, pollinating apple blossoms by hand. Buildings and roadways are being elevated, giant seawalls proposed.

Even as the ice melts at the North and South poles, business looks to profit off the destruction. Cruise ships take advantage of open waters to bring tourists ever closer to what remains of the ice shelf. Cargo firms are running giant ships through waters once covered in ice, speeding the melting of what remains.

The bosses would have us believe that there is no alternative to barbarism – that our very survival requires that we cage our dreams and fight our fellow workers for the crumbs that remain.

In a way they're right. If we leave the bosses and politicians in charge, we can be sure that they will continue their reign of plunder. We cannot resolve the ecological and social crisis that

confronts us without ridding ourselves of those who created these conditions – and who will continue to sacrifice our future to their avarice if left in a position to do so.

What is needed is organization in our communities and in our workplaces to demand a different economy – one based not on plunder and destruction, but on sustaining us and the world we live in. We need direct action to shut down polluters, whether through blockades or strike action (including refusals to deliver supplies). We need to mobilize and campaign for a sustainable economy – renewable energy, mass transit, shorter working hours, reforestation, environmental remediation and the like. We urgently need conversations with our fellow workers in the fossil fuel industries about the need for a very rapid transition, and to invite them to develop plans to make that a reality. In short, we need to dump the bosses off our backs before they kill us all, and organize a new, sustainable society that works to meet the needs of all.

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