

Climate change and acting like adults

Like many of you, as a child I was sold a bill of goods about surviving atomic war, maybe most memorably by the fire drills we were marched through at school with the implied promise that crouching under our desks with our hands clasped over our necks at the base of our skulls would save us from the horrors we only later learned about from pictures of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Very much that same kind of pretense and propaganda has characterized the media and mainstream politics depiction of climate change -- viz., Yes, it's horrible but don't despair, there's hope, there's still time, we can avert the worst of it by doing A, B, C.

That kind of sugar-coating of bad news is based on an outdated, elitist and counter-productive "Don't Panic the Public" notion. Especially in the Internet age, and the era of false news, it's imperative that the public be told the truth, that authorities tell it like it is.

And how it is, is not good. Rather, as the two articles linked here make clear, the catastrophic changes the hope-mongers keep promising we can avert -- with seawalls, switching to alternative energy, Green New Deals, becoming vegan, etc -- are in fact already happening and bound to get worse.

These articles were published ten years apart (the piece by Adam Sacks in 2009, and reissued recently in *Grist*, the one by Jonathon Franzen in today's *New Yorker*); they're written from different perspectives and call attention to different details, yet their main messages are almost identical: even if we stop all use of fossil fuels tomorrow, the oceans will continue to rise, the monster storms will become more frequent, more icecaps melt, more forests will burn -- largely because the extreme effects we're seeing now are the result of carbon we emitted decades ago.

This 10-30 year time-lag (recent studies suggest the shorter period) between dates of emission and rise in global temperature is seldom mentioned by mainstream media and decision-makers who seem think that the public isn't capable of understanding the causal relation between greenhouse gases, atmospheric and ocean warming, and rising seas, violent storms and the rest.

Our situation is grim, the outlook dire. The main virtue of these two articles is that they don't softsoap the facts, that while they acknowledge the need for immediate protective actions (eliminating the military-industrial fossil fuel economy the most important one), they insist that remedial and reconstructive actions are also needed and work must start at once. Effective action requires facing the facts.

It's more than just interesting that the vanguard in the movement to take effective action is being led by children who are saying it's past time that their parents' generation begin acting like adults, squarely face the fact that we have already crossed the line into a new climate regime, stop pretending and hoping that disaster can be averted, and start making the major changes at every level of society that will allow the next generations to live with happiness and dignity on the earth we are leaving them.

(Frankly, I'm not optimistic. Even given the facts, even if most people believe them, which as Franzen points out is unlikely, most people are not going to make the changes in their lives that are needed. Case in point: for many years I've asked myself how any meaningful change can happen when the main concern of most people in our society is their personal appearance - a question that I had to ask again this afternoon when a story several minutes long came on NPR about Sneaker Con and the ongoing importance of high heels.)

<https://grist.org/article/2009-08-23-the-fallacy-of-climate-activism/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/what-if-we-stopped-pretending?fbclid=IwAR2EhVluM013SDQmXo-M9RfcMKR9thWAbuw6yGIFRPbOKUHF3UpTrX4-Ilk>

It occurs to me that some of you may not yet have seen the Chris Hedges video on this topic that I forwarded in a recent email, so here is that link too.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_0RLqksilg

But on a lighter note, while I'm in a generational frame of mind thinking about the mess my generation is leaving to our children and grandchildren, I remember one of my favorite you Tube videos, "The Dirty Fucking Hippies Were Right," and include a link to that too, with a reminder that if we were going to stop the catastrophic effects of climate change now upon us it would have to have been back then when we were becoming aware of so many environmental desecrations our endless growth fossil fuel economy was committing.

<https://youtu.be/iKEZoY-TMG4>