

A TERRIFYING TRUTH

BY DAVE LINDORFF

It wasn't too long ago that the death of socialism, the triumph of capitalism and the end of history were widely hailed. What a difference a few years and a few fractions of a degree in world temperature change makes!

We may still be contemplating the end of history, but of a different sort. It is suddenly becoming painfully obvious that the pursuit of profit and the philosophy of growth for growth's sake and of dog eat dog is about to kill us all off.

Now that it has been proven beyond any reasonable doubt that the earth is headed for a global heat wave the likes of which hasn't been seen in hundreds of thousands and perhaps tens of millions of years — the kind of killing heat that in the past has led to mass extinctions — it is ludicrous to talk about things like carbon trading and raising vehicle mileage standards.

We need a revolution in the way we human beings live and the way we treat each other.

There is no way that the world's 6.5 billion people — and especially the 2 billion of them who live in wealthier societies — can continue to consume energy at even close to the level that we have been consuming it. There is no way we in the developed world can continue to live the way we have been living, in oversized houses, heated in winter and cooled in summer. There is no way in the northern hemisphere we can continue to have teakwood or mahogany-floored living rooms and eat strawberries in December.

There is no way we can continue to squander trillions of dollars on war and military spending every year.

No way, that is, if we plan on leaving a livable world for our children and grandchildren.

The so-called "green" politicians who talk about instituting carbon-trading schemes, about driving hybrid automobiles, about buying fluorescent light bulbs, and about turning down the thermostat and wearing sweaters, are deceiving us or themselves.

None of this is going to save us.

What will save us is recognizing the age of consumer-driven capitalism is over.

We either come up with a new way to organize society, in which production is based upon real needs, not upon manufactured needs, and in which scarce resources are made available to those who need them, not just to those who can afford them, or we will all be doomed — or at least our progeny.

The peoples of the world — especially of the developed world, but really everywhere — need to recognize that unless our expectations are changed, unless our selfish desire for more is curbed, unless wasteful production is ended, we are all likely to be on that extinction list.

So where are the leaders of boldness and vision in politics, media and academia who are ready to tell the truth? Where are the people who are willing to listen to, and reward that truth telling?

This is not an "inconvenient" truth we need to confront. It's a terrifying truth.

We need to change everything, and we need to do it quickly, too.

Here in America, that means an end to subsidies for suburban sprawl. There should be no more federal or state funds for road building and road repair. If people want to live miles away from where they work, let them pave their own roads. That's the only way to get people to realize they're going to have to start supporting funding for mass transit, and to start thinking about living near where they work. We need to end subsidies for agribusiness, which has virtually decimated local agriculture to the point that prime farm states like Pennsylvania and New Jersey now import all their food from the West Coast. Ridiculous!

We need to levy a massive tax on gasoline, so that no one will buy cars, and so that those who have them will drive only rarely. Large, heavy vehicles for personal use should be outright banned. Trucks too should be heavily taxed, so that products will reflect the true cost of the environmental damage that shipping them around costs.

Electricity and home heating fuels should also be heavily taxed, with some kind of a rebate program for low-income families, so that people will stop heating and cooling large homes.

As these things are done, there clearly will be massive dislocation. People who live in hot climates like Florida or Arizona will no doubt decide they can't afford to cool their homes, and will move north. People in cold regions may decide it's too expensive to heat their homes and will move to more temperate zones. Companies like the Detroit automakers will go bust or shrink enormously. Power plants will be shut down. Oil companies will go bankrupt.

That all has to happen, but it doesn't mean people have to starve. We as a society need to demand a government that will help those who are displaced by the crisis to relocate and to find new productive ways to earn a living. A huge government program of investment in alternative energy systems would be able to hire many of those whose jobs are lost by the shutdown of the carbon economy.

A new ethos needs to be developed. Conspicuous consumption, egoism and the so-called "American Dream" of having it all for one's self and one's family need to be replaced with a new — actually a very old — concept: communalism.



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Instead of thinking of ourselves as consumers and competitive free agents, we need to start thinking of ourselves as passengers on a boat that is sinking. If we all run for the lifeboats and life preservers and fight to see who can be saved, the life vests will be torn and ruined and the lifeboats will fall into the sea and sink. In the end, we'll all go down. If, on the other hand, we change tack, recognize that we're all in this together, and make orderly plans to save ourselves collectively, we may all be able to get away.

To succeed, we need to acknowledge that everyone is at risk, everyone is contributing to the common goal of survival, and everyone will be taken care of.

The same approach needs to be taken in the larger world. If the poorer nations believe that they are going to be abandoned to catastrophe and famine, they will do two things: continue to try and survive by the old strategies of wasteful energy use and environmental destruction, and of mass migration to safer havens. The first response — for example, the continued destruction and burning down of rainforests for wood and cropland and ethanol feedstocks — will threaten us all with ever worsening global warming. The second will lead to overcrowding of more fortunately situated nations, and a drain on their resources.

The only answer is again for all the wealthy nations, and those that are better situated by geography to survive climate change, to commit themselves to helping the more threatened nations and societies. This is not a matter of altruism; it is a simple logic of survival.

But before we can start making the huge changes that are called for — really the dismantling of the whole capitalist system and the free-market ethos — we need to start hearing, and demanding to hear, the truth — from scientists, from politicians, from business leaders, from the media, and ultimately from ourselves.

For starters, let's stop kidding ourselves that the latest United Nations report on climate change is the real story. That

report, ominous as it sounds, doesn't tell the half of it. The report was first watered down by the scientists who reviewed it, and then it was censored by the governments that feared its findings. For one thing, it didn't even mention that all the projections for warming during this century don't even take into consideration the role that hundreds of billions of tons of methane gas underlying the Arctic and Antarctic permafrost and trillions of tons of methane lying in the form of frozen hydrates deep under the ocean could play if that super global warming gas should start pouring out into the atmosphere.

We are in a situation where it is wholly inappropriate to act on optimistic assumptions. Rather, we need to consider worst-case scenarios, and start planning and acting with those in mind. That means, for example, that to keep the methane fiasco from occurring, we don't want the permafrost to go away in the polar regions, we don't want the oceans to warm precipitously and we don't want the ice caps to melt away. That means we have to act much more dramatically than just worrying about coastal erosion and lowered crop yields might lead us to do.

This is a crisis that isn't going away. It is a crisis that isn't going to be solved by band-aids. It is a crisis that isn't going to be solved by smooth talk. And it is a crisis that will get worse the longer we take to recognize its true gravity, and the longer we take to recognize its true gravity, and the longer we take to face up to the revolution that needs to take place if we are to prevent it.

And that is the truth.

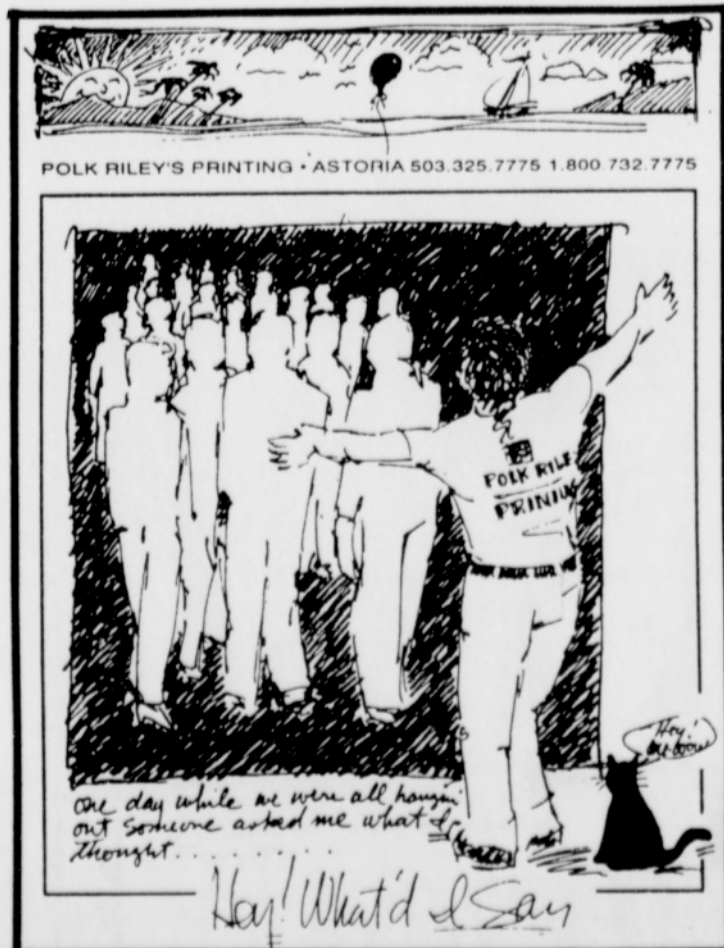
David Lindorff is a Philadelphia-based investigative journalist and columnist whose work is available at www.thiscan'tbehappening.net and www.counterpunch.org. His latest book, co-authored by Barbara Olshansky, is *The Case for Impeachment: The Legal Argument for Removing President George W. Bush from Office* (St.tin's Press, 2006). His home will be submerged when the Greenland icecap melts.

TIMES EAGLE WORD SEARCH

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SPREAD	SHALE	UNSTEADY	MOVEMENT
HILLSIDE	BOND	EMERGENCY	WATER



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