



CLIMATE CHANGE ON FOR YOUNG & OLD

Published in *Climate Change On for Young & Old* in 2009 by Future Leaders (www.futureleaders.com.au)

The Revolution

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The oceans will rise and hurricanes will rage while millions perish, unable to find sustenance on the dry, parched earth; the apocalypse approaches. This cry is no longer the domain of heretics. Climate change is the single greatest threat facing mankind and an apocalypse indeed. The ecology of the world will be transformed irreparably and the quality of life we take for granted will be destroyed unless a solution is immediately found. Individual efforts, however, are not enough. We need a dramatic reversal of our beliefs, a social revolution, if we are to create an effective, global, climate- change policy and preserve the environment that sustains us.

There can be no doubt any more that climate change is caused by human activities. Analysis of ice core samples has allowed the temperature and atmospheric carbon-dioxide levels to be plotted for the past 450,000 years. The correlation is so perfect it is frightening. Sceptics argue that this is a cyclical phenomenon and therefore nothing to worry about. However, since the industrial revolution we have shattered the all-time records and greenhouse-gas levels, and thus the temperature, continue to rise. The accepted scientific consensus is that if we take no preventative measures, carbon-dioxide levels will reach a point of no return by 2035, propelling us along a trajectory to destruction. This is not an issue that we can leave for future generations; this is the issue of our time.

The impacts of climate change will be devastating. Sea levels will rise by at least four metres, flooding some of the biggest cities in the world and decimating many low-lying nations. London, Tokyo and

New York will be underwater. Large portions of Asia and South America, even parts of Australia, will be submerged. Millions of people live in these areas. The displacement of such a mass of people would place an insurmountable cost on governments. In fact, the Stern review, the most authoritative report on climate change, predicts the global economy, and the economies of most nations, would enter an irretrievable freefall, with the economic impact predicted to be equal to that of both world wars and the Great Depression combined. Entire ecosystems will collapse and poverty in the poorest regions of the world will increase exponentially as crops fail and water becomes increasingly scarce. The cost of not acting is too great for us to sit by and do nothing.

There exists a public belief that individual sacrifices are all that is needed; however, this is only a miniscule part of the solution. Energy-efficient light globes may seem a panacea, but in reality all they do is facilitate a feel-good factor in individuals; creating the delusion that we are doing our bit in the fight against climate change. The problem lies in our industrial culture, which views the environment as a communal resource. Capitalist, free-market beliefs collide directly with the viability of the environment as such a resource. Everyone in our society is encouraged to follow their own self-interests and it is cost effective for the individual to pollute as inefficient technology is cheaper and its immediate impact goes unnoticed in the enormity of the resource. Consequently, while it is in the communal interest for no-one to pollute, it is in the individual's interest to pollute unsustainably.

A profound change in humanity is needed; however, economic rationalists contend that the free market will present the solution. This stems from their inherent belief that free market capitalism is the desired economic structure. This faith in the market, however, is itself an ideology. Such conservatives believe that the free market is omniscient and, left alone, will resolve all of our problems. This thinking is guided more by a fanatical commitment to economic gain than any facts, or any acknowledgement of the nightmare that is global warming. It was this desire for economic growth that manifested in the industrial revolutions and created global warming. That same aspiration is now driving the industries of China and India. How can anyone logically argue that it will therefore present the solution? Here is how the market really works. Last year Nissan and Renault

announced that they would produce \$3000 cars for the Indian market. Currently in India, more than 99% of the population do not drive cars because they cannot afford them. The free market is now going to make cheap, energy-inefficient vehicles available to a billion Indians. Consider the environmental impact this will have as India's emissions skyrocket. What happens when the same thing occurs in China? The free market is destroying any chance we have of overcoming climate change and we cannot underestimate the power of this ideology. It constrains the responses of all governments around the world, including our own. The Rudd Government's refusal to heed the warnings of the Garnaut Report and place adequate quotas on carbon emissions can be explained by its fear of the impact of these changes on economic growth. It is clear that the solution lies not in the market, but in the people.

It may seem like we have a choice to make; take action and save the planet, or ignore the warnings and sacrifice our civilisation. In reality, we have no option. If we do nothing there will be no world for our grandchildren to live in. History can end with us. So much depends upon the actions of today, but individual efforts by themselves are not enough and environmental policy is useless if the will does not exist to implement it successfully. We need a social, political, and economic revolution. Unless we begin the transformation of our society, and pressure our governments to take action, we will lose the only home we will ever have. Ursula K. Le Guin wrote that 'You cannot buy the Revolution. You cannot make the Revolution. You can only be the Revolution. It is in your spirit or it is nowhere'. Man the barricades: the revolution starts with us.



Shaun Knowles wrote this in 2008 when he was in Year 12 at Gippsland Grammar School in Victoria.