



Speak Out Now

APRIL 19, 2021

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Earth Day – Our Planet & Our Lives

The recognition of Earth Day in the U.S. began 51 years ago as people understood that we couldn't continue to treat our home – planet Earth – in such a disrespectful way. For many of the 20 million people in the U.S. who demonstrated on that day, the choice seemed simple – stop wasting, recycle, clean up after yourself, stop treating rivers like they are sewers for industrial waste, stop dumping toxic smoke into the air – respect the environment.

The U.S. government under Nixon established an agency supposedly to protect the environment. The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) was established and the next year OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) was set up supposedly to protect the health and safety of workers. Many people believed that we were on the path to treating our home with respect.

Last year Earth Day saw more than 100 million people demonstrating around the world. And where are we today? All the scientific evidence, and our human experience tells us that our home is gripped in a crisis - a crisis that extends around the world. Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history. We are in the midst of what scientists have labelled the sixth mass extinction, a disruption of the climate on this planet that threatens to eliminate thousands of species including our own.

The last mass extinction which occurred 66 million years ago was a natural event. A massive asteroid hit the earth, leaving a crater more than 93 miles wide and six to 18 ft deep. The matter cast into the atmosphere blocked the sun's rays and created a massive global winter for years. An estimated 75% or more of all species on Earth vanished. Over time, new life forms emerged, including the plants and the ancient ancestors of the living things we know today – including humans.

The threat we face today isn't from an asteroid hurtling toward Earth. It is the result of a system

based on the exploitation of the earth, its resources and life on this planet. And individual action cannot prevent the threat we are facing. Fifty-one years ago most didn't understand this. But as today's crises mount, more people see the problem much more clearly and also understand that the solution does not lie simply in changing our individual behavior.

The dumping of 34 billion tons of carbon into the atmosphere every year, through the burning of ancient carbon (coal, oil and gas) in the industrialized nations is not our choice. The choice to proceed on this suicidal course is made by those who control industrial production today.

The problem is capitalism. Every decision made by those who control industrial production around the planet is guided by one goal – to maximize profit. This is why they and their governments, whose purpose is to protect their interests of capital, cannot be trusted with the future of this planet.

Their business-as-usual approach has resulted in global temperatures increasing 1.2C (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) since 1880. And the change is accelerating. The past seven years have been the warmest seven years on record. This has led to massive droughts, flooding, hurricanes, fires and other climate-related disasters throughout the world.

The crisis we confront today is the most serious one that humans have ever faced. The billionaires can fantasize about colonizing Mars. But this is our home. It is not theirs to destroy. The challenge may seem overwhelming. But the reality is that those who benefit from this situation today are less than 1% of the population. Workers and poor farmers around the world are the majority. It is our work that makes the societies of the world run. If we decide to bring an end to this madness, we can find the ways to make it stop. And then we can use science to help us build a new society in harmony with nature and run in the interests of all.