

Peter Gelderloos

Before the Big Change

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It is a testament to the horror, the boundless horror of capitalism, that after decades of its triumph, of changelessness, of the end of history, of a famine of other possible futures even in the minds of children, that those of us alive today who will see this world change forever cannot count ourselves lucky. We stand at the brink, and all the petty squabbles, all political programs and narrow affinities fall into insignificance.

The estimates vary as to exactly when we reach the point of no return, it could be 2015, it could be 2020, but climate scientists have reached a consensus that since the Industrial Revolution humans (I would be more direct and say capitalists) have caused global surface temperatures to raise 0.7 degrees Celsius, and that at a certain point not so far off, additional global warming will trigger a number of feedback loops that will cause the global temperatures to rise even more.

Tested climate models suggest that within six to ten years, we will have released enough greenhouse gases into the atmosphere to cause 2 C of warming, and at that point the melting of the polar ice caps (which currently reflect large amounts of solar radiation), the release of methane currently stored beneath the Siberian permafrost (methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than CO₂), the increase in atmospheric water vapor (which also acts to trap heat from the sun), and the additional release of CO₂ currently stored in the oceans as their absorption rate decreases with warming, all will have a cumulative effect to raise global temperatures by 5 to 6 degrees by the end of the century. Few species alive today have survived such a hot world in the past, and we will all have to adapt or go extinct, as the oceans acidify, desert regions expand, and coastal areas flood.

This is not an environmental issue in any traditional, narrow sense of the word. This will affect everything we do.

There are a number of possibilities: the very best is that within the next six to ten years, waves of revolt overthrow the State, which is the chief defender and administrator of the structures of fossil fuel-based capitalism; all coal power plants are shut down; all cars are taken off the road excepting perhaps a small number that can run on vegetable oil; airline travel is abolished; electricity is abandoned or produced locally with small scale renewables; agriculture transitions from the current industrial petroleum-driven variety to traditional methods or permaculture, meaning a huge portion of the human population will have to concern themselves once again with growing their community's food; and a massive amount of carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere through the reforestation of abandoned highways, commercial areas, golf courses, and other spaces, and through the rewilding of the planet's extensive commercial tree plantations (the greatest amount of carbon stored by a forest is in the layer of leaves and other organic debris on the ground, which is part and parcel with a biodiversity that does not exist in tree plantations).

This is also what needs to happen if we pass the point of no return, but in that case it will be much less pleasant for all of us.

We are not faced with a collapse, but with a deepening of the misery beyond what any of us can imagine.

The climate crisis will not destroy capitalism. As blind and insanely idiotic as the powerful are, they are also looking towards the future. At the recent NATO summit in Strasbourg, the world government discussed its solution to the impending disaster: militarized borders and stricter internal security measures

like biometric IDs and surveillance. I don't see these as naively unrealistic non sequiters so much as codewords for the full realization of the New World Order. The powerful are well informed that a sharp decrease in agricultural productivity caused by global warming will coincide with a projected peaking of the human population at 9 billion, resulting in mass starvation that is predicted to claim between 3 and 6 billion lives. Already 300,000 people die every year, nearly all of them in the Global South, due to the results of climate change: desertification, droughts, more violent storms, greater spread of tropical diseases, crop failure. Human populations are already beginning to migrate on an enormous scale in search of survival.

The NATO solution is to close the border, to seal the door of the gas chamber that now encompasses the greater part of three continents. This is the new jewel in their crown — they are planning the greatest mass murder in human history. There are already confirmed reports of killings in the desert between the US and Mexico and eerie rumours of naval boats sinking rafts full of Africans in the Mediterranean when the press aren't there to get some humanitarian photos of dramatic rescues at sea — in fact just the reported deaths on the borders of Fortress Europe between 1988 and 2006 total to 14,000. This will become policy. This will become open war. Of course, the border will not be hermetically sealed. NATO will probably maintain military colonies in key fuel- and food-producing regions, especially in areas of low population density like Saudi Arabia where control will be easier.

Domestically too their answer is already becoming visible: totalitarianism. Unintegrated immigrant populations and youth who have not yet consented to the murder of our futures present a constant internal threat to this order that has manifested in numerous revolts and insurrections, as well as countless quieter negotiations and the creation and diffusion of new social models — I mean our protests, our social centers, our permaculture farms, hacklabs, counterinformation groups, diy health collectives, bicycle workshops, and other self-organized projects. When coupled with a will to destroy the existing system and an attempt to overcome the separations imposed by government and media to create real solidarity, these movements evidence a superhuman optimism that may be the only hope for the future.

And it is apparent that the State feels threatened. Under the rubric of anti-terrorism, the constellation of leading governments have begun instituting systems of total control. Infiltration and provocation in anarchist groups and Muslim communities throughout the US, as well as the curtailing of gun rights and the imprisonment for up to 22 years of activists trying conscientiously to save the planet; biometric IDs across Europe; in France mandatory DNA sampling as a consequence for over a hundred criminal offenses including graffiti and illegal protest, and psychological tracking and databasing of delinquent, potentially criminal characteristics of all children from as young as three; in the UK thousands of surveillance cameras with facial recognition and automatic license plate-scanning technology deployed across the whole of public space as well as most bars; in Germany the criminalization of self-defense from surveillance by wearing masks in demonstrations, and the government prerogative to declare any radical political group a criminal organization and imprison anyone said to be associated with it; in Spain the extension of the torture and high security isolation prisons long used against the Basques to anarchists and squatters; in the Netherlands the installation of a new system requiring one to use a personal

ID/bank card to get on or off the bus, rendering one's movements through the city trackable; and everywhere the use of cellphones to listen to people's conversations and log people's movements.

The world governments may also try to mitigate the disaster by proliferating nuclear power plants and deploying particles in the atmosphere or orbital shields to reflect some of the sun's energy, with unknown consequences for the future, as usual.

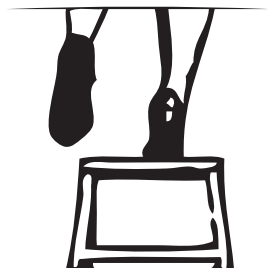
Capital and the white supremacist states are preparing to manage the apocalypse they have brought down on all of us. We need to develop our ability to survive, undermine, and destroy them. We cannot do this alone; in fact we must overcome the isolation they impose on those who resist. Non-integrated immigrant communities and anti-authoritarians who have been privileged with citizenship must increase communication and build networks of solidarity that overcome racism, national boundaries, and otherification, and all active people must engage in a Herculean campaign of communication with everyone outside the movement to challenge the legitimacy of the State. There is a need to remind people that the politicians and capitalists created this problem, for years they worked hard to silence it, and they have been repressing those of us trying to do something about it. The problems of the future will be much easier if everyone feels as we do — that as the lifeboat starts to sink, those responsible should be the first to go overboard. A vital task is to intervene publicly in the discourse on terrorism, to show that we are the people being persecuted as terrorists and the war on terror is actually a war of social control, that the state is crying wolf and none of its security measures make us feel safe. People need to be comfortable with resistance, not with surveillance. If we can achieve this, we will have deprived the State of a tool it desperately needs to survive the coming storm.

The end result of this communication must be a consciousness that the State and capitalism are suicidally insane and a complementary desire to organize our own lives free of their management; an acknowledgement of the central role racism and colonialism and their attendant genocides have long played in this insanity; and an understanding that the earth is not a mechanical, dead agglomeration of materials and processes that exist for us to exploit but rather a living, sacred thing that gives us life and meaning, of which we are a small and dependent part. No future with the mentality of control and exploitation is possible: this mentality is responsible for enslavement, genocide, and the destruction of the planet. No peace with the State and capitalism is desirable: we are reclaiming our power to create the world we want to live in.

This is the change we face: total revolution or a new totalitarianism installed to preside over mass extinction, the murder of billions of people, and the deepening enslavement of those who by citizenship or skin color are marked for survival.

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