

Time to sign up for the climate change war



Randall Truman got his 15 minutes of fame in early 1980. A long-term resident on Mount St. Helens in [Washington](#) State, Truman (83) scoffed when authorities began evacuating the region.

“Nobody knows more about this mountain than me,” he told reporters. “This goddamned mountain won’t blow. Scientists don’t know s**t from apple butter.” His folksy defiance made him an unlikely media star.

When, as predicted, Mount St. Helens blew up on May 18, 1980, Truman was buried under 46 metres of volcanic debris.

It’s easy to dismiss the tragic folly of one old man’s stubbornness in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence. Yet, when it comes to climate change, we are today a society of Randall Trumans, sitting defiantly on our collective front porch, watching the distant smoke plumes rising, feeling the tremors, while all the time decrying those scientific know-alls who keep trying to scare us or tax us with all their waffle about carbon dioxide, melting icebergs, deforestation, biodiversity loss and assorted other eco bugaboos.

We instinctively know better than the actual experts. So do our politicians, economists and media commentators. Are we worried? Hell, no. Just like old Randall, we’ve seen it all before. Assuming that the future will be much the same as the past was a fatal error for Truman, yet this mistaken view is widely held, despite copious evidence to the contrary.

“We climatologists, like other scientists, are not given to theatrical rantings about falling skies”, said Prof Lonnie Thompson of [Ohio State University](#). “Why then are climatologists speaking out about the dangers of global warming? The answer is that virtually all of us are now convinced that it poses a clear

and present danger to civilisation”.

This apocalyptic prescription is rapidly going mainstream. The [World Bank](#) described the projected 4C+ of global warming this century as “a doomsday scenario”. The US military now believes climate change “will cripple the security environment, probably more likely than the other scenarios we talk about”, as US Admiral Samuel Locklear put it.

Geophysicist Brad Werner produced a recent paper entitled “Is Earth F**ked”? Despite the provocative heading, it was a sober analysis, with a chilling conclusion: the looming collision of infinite and expanding human demands with a finite and declining biosphere sees the arc of human history bending towards catastrophe.

Nor does Dr Werner believe this crisis is amenable to “top-down” solutions, as transnational corporations and their billionaire chiefs are the prime drivers of this process, and they either directly own, dominate or finance the bulk of the world’s political and media systems.

You might imagine our ruling elites would be too wise, or at least too self-interested to preside over a complete unraveling of human progress. You would be wrong. In 1938, on the eve of another great crisis, US president [Franklin D Roosevelt](#) issued this blunt warning: “the liberty of democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, at its essence, is fascism - ownership of government by an individual, by a group”.

Seven decades later, transnational corporatism, turbocharged by neoliberal economic theory, has reached its global apotheosis and, freed at last from the constraints of either human moral agency or state oversight, is in the process of destroying the very civilisation it purports to serve.

This theme was taken up forcefully recently by [Pope Francis](#), who experienced at first hand the disaster visited on his native Argentina by financial speculators.

He lambasted trickle-down economics as a sham that heightens injustice and inequality.

Support of neoliberal economics “expresses a crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system”, he wrote.

“The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market.” All that remains is resistance. “Environmental direct action, resistance taken from outside the dominant culture, as in protests, blockades and sabotage by indigenous peoples, workers and other activist groups”, Dr Werner suggests, is the last hope of at least arresting the runaway growth machine before it destroys us and our children’s future. Politicians may respond to, but will never initiate, this resistance.

Slowly, more and more scientists are doffing their white coats and taking to the streets to demand that society acts on the overwhelming evidence to mitigate the worst of the coming climate calamity. Prof Gus Speth, retired dean of Yale University's environmental school, described his jail cell following his arrest at a climate protest as the most important position he had ever held in Washington.

Financier [Jermy Grantham](#) published an unusual open letter to scientists in the journal *Nature* urging them to get off the fence and join the fight. "This is not only the crisis of your lives – it is also the crisis of our species' existence. I implore you to be brave".

Resistance is not for the faint-hearted, as it will be met by fierce coercion. The Arctic 30, comprising jailed environmental activists and journalists, have felt the vicious backlash of the Russian petro-state. As resistance intensifies, so too will suppression and counter-propaganda. Climate change may not feel like your fight today, but that too will change.

Make no mistake, this is, quite literally, the fight of our lives. Success is far from certain, but when you consider the stakes, it is surely morally indefensible to countenance not even trying.

Should we fail, author and satirist [Kurt Vonnegut](#) suggested this wry message to posterity: "Dear future generations: please accept our apologies. We were rolling drunk on petroleum."

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