

The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter:
Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter

Robert MacNeil Christie, PhD

Here we explore the latest facts, actions, and perspectives on the New Great Transformation of the Earth System, as it unfolds before our eyes. We apply the Hopeful Realism we all need to work through the greatest predicament in human history.

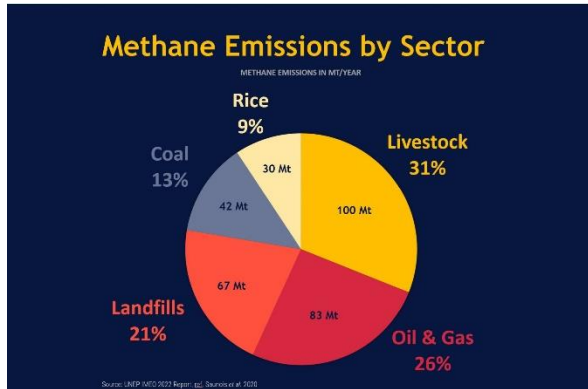
Latest News from the Hopeful Realist

Plastic Proliferation and Political Pandemonium...

Just as the anniversary of the January 6 seditious insurrection portends imminent indictments, possibly including some for the previous president, the political pandemonium surrounding the obsessively ambitious pretender to the speakership of the House of Representatives continued. At the same time, any sign of ‘progress’ on the ecological/climate emergency is very hard to identify; narcissism rules.

Of course, the political stalemate in the fight to control the House of Representatives was finally over after fifteen ballots and a bizarre collection of concessions to the extreme MAGA insurrection supporting GOP representatives. The entirely anti-democratic exercise in the struggle for power for power’s sake, not only has laid bare the raw workings of Republican intra-party conflict. It has also exposed the process by which a small extremist MAGA faction can hold the entire Republican caucus hostage with ransom demands that would usurp democracy in the interests of forcing the domination of the legislature by the fascist few. McCarthy may become the weakest Speaker of the House ever, and he may be the shortest lived in the position if he cannot get more moderate Republicans to accept the corrupt ‘rules package’ (and its secret appendix with the worst of the deals) the extremists forced him to include. Where will it all go? Who knows? But passing meaningful legislation does not seem to be in the cards for the next two years—a tragedy for the planet given the pace of growing climate chaos and the intransigence of politicians to even recognize scientific facts.

Well, of course, this all occurs within an ecological vacuum of sorts. The proceedings had no visible relationship to the real world outside the House chambers, except for adjournments for dinner before returning for next-day reconvening at a leisurely noon hour. Then McCarthy finally extended his bargain with the devil until there was nothing more to give, and he finally got enough votes because Matt Gaetz and some others responded “present,” which reduced the number of votes needed to secure a majority of those actually voting. Certainly, much of the off-time was consumed by ‘deal-making’ in the interests of the contending factions, though certainly not in the interests of the public. Yet, political indifference has not and will not make the emergency of Earth-System disintegration go away.



Meanwhile, life goes on in the real world, sort of... The Earth System degradation continues at an accelerating pace. Great Britain fades as a major international power under the pressure of soaring cost of living, deepening poverty, and the associated political-economic failures of Brexit. The family pathology in the Royal household presents as a sad sideshow—I never knew how obsessed they all were with their image in the British tabloids until Harry spilled the beans.

Carbon emissions continue to reach record new highs around the world. Industrial livestock production and fossil fuels together cause 57% of methane emissions (which are 80 times more damaging than plain old CO₂) while continuing the devastation of ecosystems to accelerate extraction of economic value from the habitat from which all of us must ultimately make a living. And what is being done to stave off global disaster? Not much, beyond the same old self-righteous promises, targets, and deadlines that no nation or corporation is legally obligated to meet. Oh, and of course there is the proliferation of greenwashed business-as-usual. That brings us to the proliferation of **plastics**, of which no more than six percent are recycled.

Here in Santa Fe, we notice the national tendency to target the wide-open spaces of New Mexico for various forms of dumping or reprocessing the toxic wastes of the nation's industrial-consumerist economy. Most recently, a new chemical 'recycling' facility for processing plastics is proposed for siting in New Mexico. Some companies are starting to advertise chemical/advanced recycling as a clean, non-polluting way to "recycle" plastic. And you know where that goes: everywhere.

Moms Clean Air Force, Beyond Plastics, Break Free from Plastics, and other groups are opposing this toxic incursion on our habitat and are petitioning Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to prevent the move. It is actually plastics incineration, hardly a clean process. This industrial 'profit center' would further pollute the air with toxic emissions, damaging our health and adding to the overheating of the planet. (Thanks to Laurie Zunner, Co-founder of Plastic Action Team of New Mexico, for the heads up on this.)

The plastic pollution predicament really has only one ultimate twofold solution. We must clean up the mess that it has already produced, of course. But that will never work until we stop allowing the mass production and distribution of plastic packaging for every product made. I am old enough to remember that in the early 1950s, only a very few products were made from plastic and almost nothing packaged in plastic. Life was good. The milkman exchanged our empty glass milk bottles for fresh milk and the butcher wrapped our meat in 'butcher paper.' It all worked fine.

Oh, but no! We must eliminate 'labor costs' at all cost, by automating everything and sealing everything in plastic. Well, that is a cultural perversion of the notion of increasing efficiency, which just happens to damage if not destroy the lives of consumers and workers in the process. What, exactly, is an economy for? Well, as presently configured, it is for the accumulation of more capital by extremely wealthy corporations and investors, not the wellbeing of people. Frankly, that calls for economic regime change.

Change in Publishing Plans. As I mentioned in the previous issue, because of its density and length, I have decided to recast my book, *At the Edge of Illusion: Facing the New Great Transformation*, in a new form by breaking it up into more manageable works, which I will publish as a three part series. As I was finishing the writing, it became increasingly evident that each of the three core topics need to be understood more completely, not just in how they relate to the climate emergency. They may be expressed more effectively in relation to how we must revise our concept of what it means to be humans on a planet that can no longer support our industrial-consumer economy and way of living. When taken in sequence they lead from how we arrived at our unsustainable global political economy, to the social illusions that constrain us, then to how we can make the changes we need for humanity to survive and thrive on the planet. The first volume, *Holding It Together: Social Control in a New Era of Great Transformation*, will be ready in mid-January and will be published as soon after that as the publishing process allows.

My eBook **HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto** is still available for free download from [Kindle Unlimited](#). The price will soon go to normal. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](#). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on Amazon. On Amazon, do so by clicking the button on the lower left of the book's Amazon page below "Customer Reviews," and say a few words about what you think about the issues and how I frame them.

Note: Past issues of The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

Information flies in from all directions at an accelerating pace. So do misinformation and disinformation. The world as we know it (or thought we knew it) is changing rapidly and the changes we see do not conform to the illusions of progress we held for so long. Because we live in an already complex adaptive living system, which some of us call the Earth System and some call Gaia, the creation and indiscriminate deployment of all sorts of new chemical compounds found nowhere on the living planet, is causing far more damage than even many environmentalists are yet willing to admit.

The bottom line is this: Either we must clean up our mess and stop creating more mess, or all the catastrophic damage we have already begun to feel will just proliferate with terminal consequences. Most of the chemical products created in labs, made into products and expendables, and released into our world, are not fully assessed for their possible dangers to living systems. That is a crime against Gaia and against ourselves.

Over eons of evolution, humans and others gradually adapted to many natural threats, from predators to the toxins in some plants we learned over generations not to eat. Over tens of thousands of years, we learned to live in our habitats in relation to what was there; little changed except our ability to alter our environment in ways that improved our survival and comfort, until the industrial revolution and the science of chemistry allowed alteration and creation of molecules never before experienced by living organisms.

First, it was coal dust emanating from the chimneys of London when it became to primary fuel to fend off the cold of winter. The sky sometimes turned very dark. Eventually, the skies over Los Angeles obscured the sun with yellow-brown smog as more and more freeways wended their way between parking lots, office complexes, malls, and suburbs. The connection between smog and asthma and lung disease was relatively obvious in the lives of urban dwellers. But a more insidious threat proliferated mostly unseen. Chemical pollution of waterways, soils, and the very food we eat.

Plastic pollution, on the other hand, was visible but mostly considered unsightly rather than physically or biochemically dangerous. Now we know that micro-plastic particles have invaded the bodies of fish, animals, and are now even found in the blood streams of humans, disrupting natural processes that never before knew such threats.

Chemicals in air, water, and food are mostly invisible. As they proliferate, multiple new diseases and genetic defects appear increasingly in humans, but the connections are not in plain sight. The increases in asthma, birth defects, a wide spectrum of auto-immune diseases, low sperm counts, autism, cancers, and many formerly rare diseases offer tell-tale signs of living systems disrupted. The causal sequences are hard to measure, except in the lab, but corporate polluters have not been held to account for the havoc they reap.

The acceleration of increases in the rates of many diseases and defects in living beings, including humans, and mysterious breakdowns in populations of otherwise stable species have occurred across a broad spectrum of ecosystems. Dysfunction is expressed in many aberrations in living organisms that have appeared over the past several decades.

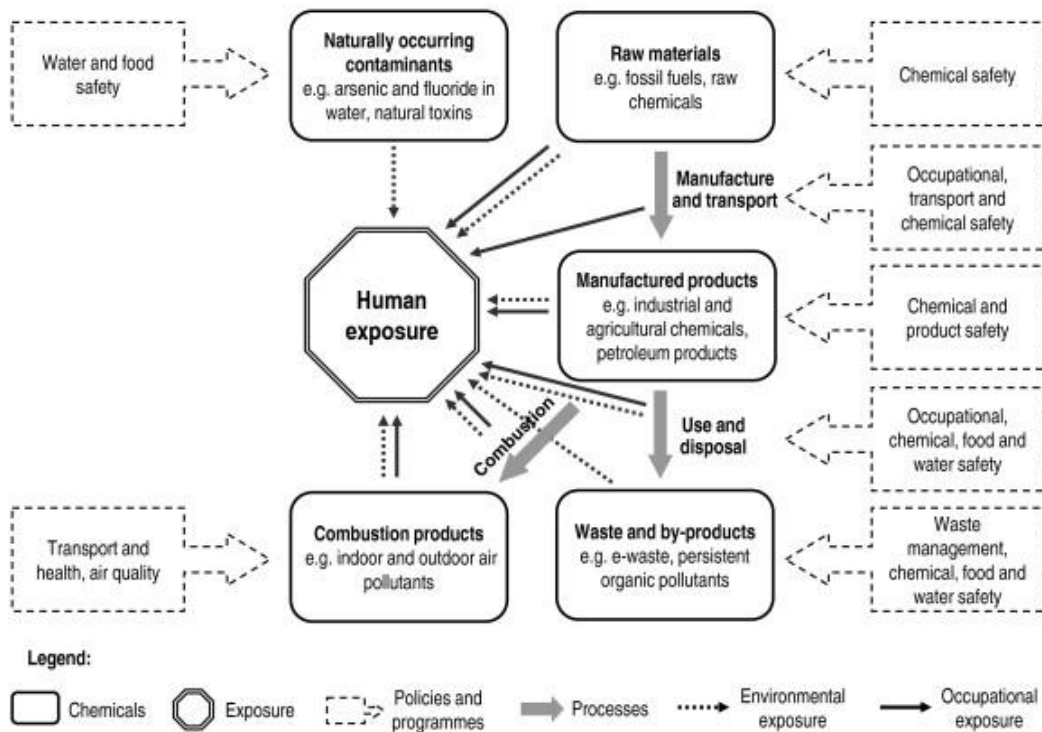
Various forms of the disruption of our very biological being are all part of the emerging breakdown of industrial civilization. Without intervention, the industrial-consumer juggernaut will continue until so much of the economies of nations must be devoted to healthcare operations caused by what industry calls progress that they finally collapse in biochemical chaos.

For more discussions of this and related matters, go to:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/the-hopeful-realist-blog/>

Today's Featured Image:

***Can the Pathology of Pollution be Controlled?
When Normal is No Longer Tolerable.***



<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3037292/>

***We Live in a Toxic World.
Only a New Great Transformation of Societies will Change That.***

The news and commentary section of this issue reflect social pathology, in both political and chemical contexts. The problem is that toxic politics is now accepted as normal. The chemical pollution of our entire Earth System is still treated by industry as a normal cost of doing business, an “external” cost to be borne by customers, ecosystems, and every living thing except for corrupt corporations that caused the damage. As ‘corporate persons’ they cannot fit in any jail.

Most industrial chemicals, regardless of their application, have never been tested for the dangers to life that they may pose. When some safety regulations went into effect, previously untested but prolific chemicals were exempted from safety tests. Many such tests were insufficiently rigorous anyway. We need far more stringent regulation of chemicals in industry and commerce, but the toxic pollution of politics prevents the very kinds of legislation that would protect the people from the polluters. After all, the climate emergency is not even on the agenda...an obvious indicator of the state of the nation.

We are saddled with the health and safety consequences of an industrial-consumer political economy that always prioritizes production and consumption over the control of waste and potential threats to the living Earth and all its inhabitants. The only viable solutions will come when we overcome the *collective addiction* to the consumption of meaningless ‘stuff’ that fills the storage lockers of suburbia because there is no more room in the two-car garage with the cars parked on the driveway and street. Recognizing that there is far more meaning in living life than in the next ‘consumer product’ will require some sort of ‘cultural revolution.’

Books and other Sources on the New Great Transformation

I have just finished reading a book on the decline and fall of the reforms begun by Roosevelt in the New Deal during the Great Depression in the 1930s. I was struck by how remarkably similar the situation then was to our situation in the U.S. today. Many people assume that the New Deal failed to reinvigorate the economy and that it was only our entry into World War II after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor that stimulated the economy enough to avoid a slide back into full depression. Well, of course, it was much more complicated than that. But what struck me most was the uncanny parallels between the politics of the late 1930s and today, which become clear in reading this book:

Alan Brinkley. 1995. ***The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War***. New York: Vintage Books.

The New Deal had its roots in the 1890s populism that has ever since been the target of disinformation and denigration by the corporate-media establishment, which Thomas Frank demonstrated in his book, *The People NO*, which was featured in issue no. 1-11 of this newsletter. The populists opposed monopoly capital, supported family farmers and labor rights, and favored liberal economic policies, all of which entered into the development of New Deal strategies to climb out of the Great Depression. However, strong mostly corporate forces fought the New Deal policies and programs from the start. In her book, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal*, Kim Phillips-Fein chronicled that decades-long campaign to destroy New Deal reforms, which continued right through the Reagan's support for free corporate markets, opposition to labor unions, and his assault on the welfare system, followed by Clinton's elimination of New Deal protections from financial market excesses.

Today's extreme radical right MAGA faction of the Republican Party is busy attempting to extend the corporate takeover to the extent of insurrection and instituting a new American fascism, which is incorrectly labeled as a form of populism. In fact, it exploits populist yearning for an end to elite domination while enabling the formation of a fully corporate takeover of the nation-state against the interests of the people.

As shown in independent surveys, the people generally favor the various policies that taken together are denigrated as 'wasteful spending,' and 'socialist' threats to traditional American freedoms. American democracy is at risk; we must remember, democracy is not a spectator sport. Real populists understand that; populism is the effort to expand democracy in opposition to rigid autocratic hierarchy. To counter the growing fascist threat, which is arising in every troubled modern nation today, the people must mobilize to defend democracy. That will require nothing less than transforming our worldview from a focus on personal rights to focus on social responsibility.

Quotable Quote

*Great minds discuss ideas.
Average minds discuss events.
Small minds discuss people.*

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

Okay, we all discuss in different proportions each of the topics Eleanor Roosevelt refers to in the above quote. However, one of the core strategies of every demagogue and political grifter is to talk mostly about everything in terms of the people they want you to hate. If they can get you to hate the strawmen and scapegoats they offer, then it will be a lot easier to control you. Eleanor Roosevelt understood that well. Her husband was subjected to all manner of denigration, from being an agent of the devil to being an agent of evil foreign powers bent on destroying America.

As a result, FDR tried to hold on to power while attempting to respond to his critics and allies in ways that weakened his authority. When recession hit in 1937 because of political restrictions on the New Deal programs, his indecisiveness did not help. I had always marveled at the way the government converted civilian industrial capacity to powerful war production of new fighter planes, tanks, etc., in anticipation of entering World War II. The power of American access to resources had a great deal to do with the ramping up of capacity for war. But the politics were at best chaotic.

Yet, only when I read Brinkley's *The End of Reform*, did I realize how deep the disorganization of war preparation really was. The infighting of administration liberals of different stripes, and with conservatives in Congress, as well as the struggles for power among various agencies tasked with supplying the military with weapons and equipment—so often embroiled in interpersonal fights and resentments—reminded me of Eleanor's statement quoted above.

It also reminded me of the public infighting of 'moderate' Republicans with the MAGA extremists in the recent efforts to elect a Speaker of the House of Representatives. It was all about power within the caucus. There was no issue of a legislative agenda (ideas and events); it all revolved around personal power and the desire to tear down any existing legislation that may have a whiff of liberalism associated with it. The desire to cut budgets, dismantle governance itself, and leave the field open for corporate domination with further corporate tax cuts even beyond those attained by Trump, etc., were driven by the nihilism of political sociopaths devoid of any sense of human value or compassion. It is a replay of Mitch McDonald's racist 'party of no' on steroids. Their legislative agenda: move fast and break things, substance be damned.

See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe and read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto](#).