

Funding the Future

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As [the Guardian](#) noted yesterday:

Many of Earth's "vital signs" have hit record extremes, indicating that "the future of humanity hangs in the balance", a group of the world's most senior climate experts have said.

More and more scientists are now looking into the possibility of societal collapse, says the report, which assessed 35 vital signs in 2023 and found that 25 were worse than ever recorded, including carbon dioxide levels and human population. This indicates a "critical and unpredictable new phase of the climate crisis", it says.

They added:

The temperature of Earth's surface and oceans hit an all-time high, driven by record burning of fossil fuels, the report found. Human population is increasing at a rate of approximately 200,000 people a day and the number of cattle and sheep by 170,000 a day, all adding to record greenhouse gas emissions.

I believe those scientists. All the available evidence is that they are right, given that everything that they have predicted so far, including extreme weather conditions and the threat to the survival of life on some parts of the planet, does seem to be happening.

I was eavesdropping on a conversation yesterday. I know I shouldn't, but the two people of about my age who were partaking in it in the coffee shop where I was working were doing nothing to stop me from doing so, and such was their volume that they gave me little option but to take note. They were discussing all the places that they had been in the world - and few tourist hotspots from Hawaii to every place you can think of closer to home - had seemingly been missed by them. Despite that, discussion was being had on where to go next, with the Himalayas seeming to be high on the agenda.

Why was I interested? I also listened to their discussion about their grandchildren, for whom they very obviously cared. I then wondered whether those grandchildren were really going to thank these two for having helped burn their planet for no good reason. A cocktail is a cocktail the world over - and they seemed to have a liking for them as

well. Their 'making memories' tours of the world are very clearly part of the problem of excess consumption that is driving our world to the brink of chaos, and beyond. But they either did not know, or did not care, or could not make the link between their own excesses and the crisis that we face.

I fear societal breakdown. It will come because of that thing that most people in this country claim to fear most - which is the movement of people. That is going to happen now. Hundreds of millions of people, or more, are going to have to move in the decades to come if they are to have a chance of survival. That is not an opinion; that's a fact. And you can be sure that those who will move will do so because they are not going to sit still and die where life has become impossible, through no fault of their own.

In that case, what can be done to manage this risk of societal breakdown through the mass movement of people? What follows are incredibly simplistic suggestions, but in the face of a crisis of epic proportions, which is where we are, simple solutions might be required.

First, we will have to accept the reality of migration. Our narratives have to change. We embrace what is going to happen, or the turmoil of conflict will end what we have, come what may.

Second, we have to accept that our consumption is going to change radically. We will not, for a start, be aimlessly globe-trotting the world, but that is only the tip of the required change in behaviour.

Third, we might have to overthrow the powers that seek to prevent change from happening - most of whom are represented by the current power elites who have, for example, now decided that when the choice is between short-term profits and human survival, profits win. Alternatively, they are those who have decided that balancing the books should win. In either case, those priorities have to go, and those seeking to uphold them will have to lose power - however uncomfortable that might be for them.

And for the record (and in case anyone in the security services might be looking in), I am not for a moment suggesting revolution or anything so absurd because that would itself represent societal breakdown. I am suggesting that democracy - real democracy - has to deliver this. In other words, the will of the people to survive will, eventually, have to prevail at the ballot box.

Let's not pretend we are going to be living comfortably for some time to come. What has already happened might well prevent that from happening. The only hope we have is for changed attitudes, changed priorities, and the will to live. With them, we might survive climate change. Without them, breakdown it is.