

rather than grow into responsibility. Taking responsibility means a realistic assessment of causes, a compassionate search for cures, and the political will to act.

Will we be able to regroup on the island with our seashells and sand-dollars intact? Or will we drown in our sleep? The answer will not be known for decades. But the question imposes itself on our unwilling psyches now.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE PEAK--1/21/10

Until the last two hundred and some years humanity was confined to an island of limited economic opportunity inundated by an ocean of constraints that resulted from our incapacity to harness energy. Magically, that high tide gave way to a fossil-fueled technological ebb-tide of our own devising. Now, at the end of an extended period in which to enjoy the fruits of new shore-lands revealed by the enlarged territory of opportunity, the tide has begun to turn. Just as the outgoing tide took centuries to recede, the inevitable rise will not occur overnight—barring one of Mother Nature’s tsunamis.

Of late the grow-or-die capitalist economic system has sought to perpetuate itself through the growth of financial wealth so highly leveraged on real wealth that strained credulity creates instability. Those emotionally committed to the paradigmatic premise of endless growth refuse to recognize counterfactual signs as they arise: global warming, peak oil, suffocating debt, mountains of trash, starving peasants, myriad migrations, and more. As reality cuts the ground from beneath them, the pro-growth voices grow more shrill, and their strategies more predatory. Even if they wish, they have nothing with which to replace the rock of the endless-growth premise. This is something new: Marx did not predict it nor did Henry George nor did John Maynard Keynes. Those daring to notice the newly-engulfed tide-flats detect only a looming dystopia all too reminiscent of the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Revelations, minus the Rapture.

The recent lockstep intransigence around the “principles” of “defending freedom” and “attacking big government” translates, on the ground, to defending a monetary system that enshrines predation, and that positions the successful predators in a dominant position to that of elected governments. For conservatives to admit that the present-day corporate marketplace fails to meet all the legitimate needs of the citizenry, that only government can fill that gap, would invalidate their most beloved premises. Feeling uncomfortably—and mortally—threatened, they embattle themselves in an ideological pre-emptive war in order to somehow keep the sea at bay so that the illusion of an endless outgoing tide may be maintained.

What we’re looking at now is a kind of paralysis as the grownups in the room grapple with those at the helm of the economy who refuse to cast childish illusions aside. The children’s power stems from our convincing ourselves that our welfare is dependant on theirs. Thus we passively mortgage our collective future to bail out the banks. We put global warming on hold in deference to corporate profitability. We will allow ourselves to be convinced by the self-justifications of corporate media that it was our government—the one that the corporations bought and paid for—that allowed the sea to swallow our lands.

We are all spoiled children within Mother Nature’s recently enlarged (if two hundred years can be considered recent—as it is in the context of human history) permissive home. As her patience grows thin we are beginning to feel the sting of her tough love. The citizenry at large, conservatives and liberals alike, share in the mixed blessing of this upbringing. When our toys hurt us or vanish altogether, we seek to blame one another