

A New Mobilization Book for the Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement

Book Review: "Unprecedented: Can Civilization Survive the CO2 Crisis?" by Dr. David Ray Griffin

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Theme: [Environment](#)

In-depth Report: [Climate Change](#)

If there is a single book that could inspire and inform a global mobilization movement to divest from fossil fuels, it is Unprecedented.

In 2014, a CNN host described what's missing from our national conversation about climate change: "An emotional charge that hits you in the gut - we need in-your-face cause and effect."

Unprecedented provides that emotional charge and urgency, amassing a decade of extreme changes to the planet that, taken together, are hair-raising.

First, consider the oceans. Occupying 71% of the earth's surface, and providing essential food to billions of people, the oceans have fallen prey to "CO2's evil twin," ocean acidification. [Griffin explains](#) how coral and shellfish are in trouble:

"When carbon dioxide is combined with water, it produces carbonic acid - which is the ingredient that, besides giving soft drinks their fizz, also eats out limestone caves. Its relevance here is that it does this to animals with chalky skeletons - that is, ones that calcify - 'which make up more than a third of the planet's marine life.'"

Additionally, microscopic phytoplankton, the very foundation of the ocean's food chain, are sensitive to increasingly warmer water, and have declined 40% since the 1950's.

The climate too is broken: Wildly irregular rains, floods, hurricanes, droughts, and sea-level rises are crucifying agriculture and food production around the world in a story seldom told.

The glaciers that deliver fresh water to Europe and Asia from the Alps and Himalayas are fast receding. Greatly diminished snowpack in the United States is threatening water and irrigation.

Why these stories have not made glaring headlines is a story in itself. Griffin asks how, given that:

"even with tremendous resources, a small group of climate contrarians, with only a few scientists of stature, could have won the battle against the consensus of the climate scientists. According to this consensus view, global

warming is real; it is due to greenhouse gases; and a continuation of business as usual will lead to terrible, even catastrophic, climate disruption. This view is truly a consensus, being shared by at least 97 percent of climate scientists, including 99.8 percent of climate scientists [who have written peer-reviewed articles](#) on the subject.”

The core of the phenomenon has been a fabricated debate about the reality of global warming and climate change. Tens of millions of dollars have flowed from fossil-fuel companies, especially ExxonMobil and Koch Industries, to front organizations inventing junk science against the scientific consensus.

And although the finger of blame is often pointed at China’s industrial pollution, 58% of historic emissions have come from – and benefitted – high-living Western societies. Thus CO2’s disproportionate harm to developing countries and unborn generations represents a massive abdication of moral responsibility by the developed world – which, of course, drives much of China’s industry.

This failure of responsibility shared by all of our institutions, and rooted in short-term convenience and profit, has delayed a meaningful survival response until now, the eleventh hour.

The Immediate Challenge: To Live Within the “Carbon Budget”

Two degrees centigrade of warming above pre-industrial levels is a [widely accepted](#) danger threshold for global warming – a threshold that is arguably too high. To keep within or below two degrees, action is required to regulate an allowable budget of carbon emissions.

Scientists’ calculation of the “carbon budget” shows that to avoid terrible disruption and even collapse, we can put no more than roughly 565 additional gigatons of CO2 into the atmosphere before 2050.

We must move fast, for at the present rate, we will “blow through” this carbon budget in 16 years.

What is to be Done?

The longest chapter in the book shows that, although the mass media have not helped us to understand this, dirty (fossil-fuel) energy could be completely replaced by clean energy. If the various types of clean energy – solar, wind, geothermal, wave, tidal, and hydro – were employed, the world could have many times more energy than it would ever need.

Unfortunately, in spite of the climate crisis, governments have continued to subsidize dirty energy much more than clean energy – for the United States, it is 12 times more.

The subsidies – which include passing the social and environmental costs of coal, oil, and gas onto the public – have made fossil-fuel energy seem less expensive than clean energy.

Yet in spite of this very uneven playing field, clean energy has become cheap enough to reduce the demand for fossil fuels, and already investors are substantially divesting from them..

Investors are also becoming aware that fossil fuel companies have been over-valued

because the market has not taken into account the true costs of carbon dioxide in intensifying global warming – so the “carbon bubble” will at some point burst. Divestment is picking up speed as investors seek to avoid the [“Wasted Capital and Stranded Assets”](#) that will result once governments impose a carbon tax and remove carbon subsidies.

Griffin produces persuasive evidence that we are facing an unprecedented climate emergency “that requires a radical change,” and then lays out a full-scale mobilization plan to enable the transition to clean energy. Based on proven approaches from World War II, his book contains a long chapter of specific strategies tailored to governments, NGO’s, institutions, and individuals to promote demonstrated and effective clean energy advances.

Conclusion

Unprecedented is a definitive, over-arching, and highly readable book. It could serve equally as a course textbook, or to be placed on delegates’ desks at the Paris climate summit this December to inform discussion.

More importantly, it equips people everywhere with the tools to move beyond business as usual and to set out on a new and hopeful pilgrimage to heal an ailing planet.

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