

The World of Our Children

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

The front cover of the May edition of National Geographic has an intriguing headline. Just over a large photo of a baby of several months are the words: "THIS BABY WILL LIVE TO BE 120." Wow. In smaller type an asterisk points out: "It's not just hype. New science could lead to very long lives."

The article inspires additional respect for the advances of science, genetics, nutrition and other research and opens new possibilities for human development. But in contemplating this new breakthrough in the quest for longer life it is useful to examine the world into which our new babies are entering.

I'm not just writing about the nuclear weapons, drone warfare, torture memos, global hunger, or the plethora of needless inequality and injustice that exists through the world. There's also the impending catastrophe of global warming — something few of us worried about a generation ago, but now the very health and welfare of new generations is at stake.

A day after finishing the National Geographic article, I picked up the New York Times and on page one under a two-column headline was an example of the other half of the contradiction of increased longevity:

"Heat-Trapping Gas Passes Milestone, Raising Fears."

The article was chilling:

"The level of the most important heat-trapping gas in the atmosphere, carbon dioxide, has passed a long-feared milestone, scientists reported Friday, reaching a concentration not seen on the earth for millions of years. Scientific instruments showed that the gas had reached an average daily level above 400 parts per million [ppm]."

Commenting on the event, former Vice President Al Gore wrote: "We are reaping the consequences of our recklessness."

"We've known for a long time that we'd pass the 400ppm mark; the trouble is, we're passing it without any real national or international effort to slow down the production of CO2. So it's an entirely grim landmark. Before we can get back to 350ppm [the goal of the activist movement against climate change] we actually have to stop increasing carbon concentrations. That's a political task; it's why we're trying to build a movement strong enough to stand up to the fossil fuel industry. Their current business plans... take us to 600 or 700ppm, and they're spending \$675 billion a year looking for yet more coal and gas and

oil.”

I can't help but think about the children who are coming into the world today with a climate spinning out of control to the extent that the great majority of all life on earth is jeopardized. As far as those who may live 120 years are concerned, greenhouse gas concentration is projected to reach about 650ppm by the end of their lifespan.

A certain amount of deleterious climate change has already begun and will be with us for thousands of years. This toxic process will continue to become much worse until the key carbon producing industrialized nations implement an extensive worldwide emergency campaign to replace the use of fossil fuel (oil, coal, natural gas) with renewable energy resources (solar, wind, geothermal, etc.).

This is not so much a scientific problem. It is mainly a political problem. Science understands climate change, recognizes what must be done to prevent an impending catastrophe, and is ready to act. The political system of industrialized societies also understands climate change by now, recognizes what must be done, and refuses to act. Why is this?

The political system dominating today's world — from progressive social democratic to reactionary dictatorial — is intimately bound to the capitalist economic system. This system is based on profit, competition and the marketplace, with little long-term planning. These days our financialized capitalist structure is focused on short-term gain — calculated quarterly, monthly and even daily.

Halting climate change is an urgent, expensive and long-term venture that may, in the end, require reductions in consumption within the rich countries — an anathema to capital. Higher profits may not be guaranteed in the beginning years (unless subsidized by government, which goes against today's prevailing conservative ideology). Worldwide competition and the marketplace are extremely unpredictable and risky in an endeavor of this kind. This means the capitalist class is holding back until its profits can be assured. Thus, the political system is dragging its feet, and the ppm rises higher and higher.

Over the last 150 years the United States has pumped more greenhouse producing gases into the atmosphere than any other country — by far. In the last couple of years China (with four times the population) has exceeded the U.S. annual total but cannot come near to America's aggregate amount. As such — and because Washington insists on being recognized as the leading global nation-state — the U.S. has an important responsibility in regard to fighting climate change.

In reality, the U.S. has not only ignored that responsibility but in effect has thumbed its nose at the rest of the world and its peoples in the process. Until the American government begins to fulfill its obligations there cannot be the extensive worldwide emergency campaign required to save the Earth.

Democratic President Barack Obama has a fairly good understanding of the dangers of climate change. He mentioned the subject in his political campaigns of 2008 and 2012 and in his 2013 State of the Union message — usually by advocating “market-based” initiatives (i.e., what's good for business is good for America). But in his five years in office he has done nothing of real significance to halt global warming. Congress, of course, is a prime

delinquent as well. The fossil fuel industry has many representatives and senators on its campaign contribution payroll.

For every presidential gesture in opposition to fossil fuel consumption, such as increasing gas mileage standards or a recommendation to cut a small portion of outdated federal subsidies for oil and gas companies, there are many more moves in the opposite direction. Obama has ordered greatly increased oil drilling on land and offshore, championing hydrofracking to expand production of natural gas, and promoting illusions about “clean” coal and nuclear power.

Internationally, the White House has been an obstruction, not a leader, in terms of curbing fossil fuels. Its representatives to the annual UN meetings on climate change have invariably stalled progress. The White House simply refuses to engage in a confrontation with the go-it-slow American corporate and financial oligarchy.

The Obama Administration has been so derelict that it appears to be embarrassed about it in international circles. On an official trip to climate conscious Sweden May 14, Secretary of State Kerry referred to climate change as a “life and death” challenge. At a joint press conference with Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, he confessed: “I have to say that I regret that my own country — and President Obama knows this and is committed to changing it — needs to do more and we are committed to doing more.” Who’s been in charge for the last five years?

Obama is lucky because the only viable “alternative” the American people have in their two-party right and center right system is a Republican Party composed of hypocrites, ignoramuses and lackeys to big business. Many Republican politicians are well aware of the greenhouse danger, but would rather shut their mouths than buck the big boys. Actually, neither party will even consider taking appropriate action until the corporations, banks and Wall St. give the go-ahead.

This is not acceptable. There’s too much at stake. There’s so little time. We need a determined mass movement, as we had in America in the 1960s and early ‘70s, to break through this roadblock by every means at our disposal.

In the long run — if there is to be a long run — we must build a society where people come before profits, and where the masses of people come before the 1% who possess enormous wealth at the expense of all others. That’s the only way to avoid the global catastrophe that awaits future generations of children.

I do not entertain the slightest illusion that capitalism can pull this off. Sooner or later the system must be changed.

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