

Omnicide, No Thanks!

Guest Post by George Payne, republished from The Deconstructed Globe

What has the U.S. done to respond to the “slow emergency” of global warming? The short answer is not much. Even though the United States has been the world’s largest polluter over the past hundred years, our nation has done almost nothing of significance on the political level to curb greenhouse gas emissions. In 1997 Clinton failed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and shamefully walked away from the problem. At the key moment when we were in a position to help curtail the worst impacts of global warming, we simply turned our backs on the responsibility. In 2003 the U.S. invaded Iraq, hijacked that nation’s oil supply, commandeered transportation and distribution routes for oil, and ensured American hegemony in the region for years to come. On the domestic front the U.S. increased natural gas extraction from Colorado to Pennsylvania, making it cheaper and more abundant than it has ever been in our nation’s history.

Adding salt to a festering wound, in 2009 the U.S. participated in a UN summit in Copenhagen in which the U.S. and China failed to reach any binding agreements. When Copenhagen failed, Congress doubled down on their climate change denial and neglected to pass legislation which would have reduced carbon emissions at home.

I hate to sound pessimistic about what is happening in Paris right now but I have little faith in the U.S. to help solve this crisis. There is just not enough willpower on the national level to do anything that will substantially alter the course we are on. I am writing this lamentation just a few days after the “Global Climate Action March” in Rochester which took place on Sunday, Nov 29. Now that the excitement of the march has toned down a bit, I am feeling compelled to

speaking more reflectively about my overall state of mind concerning the movement and its prospects for success. Without taking anything away from the utterly inspiring work of the organizers- and without diminishing or trivializing the passionate display of civil democracy which I experienced first hand as a marcher- I do think it is important to honestly acknowledge that the vast majority of our fellow citizens could care less about this issue. This may be an overly simplistic and harsh way to articulate my dissatisfaction, but that's how I feel. As impressive as it is to see nearly 500 concerned citizens show up at a demonstration on a holiday weekend, the fact remains that over 190,000 people chose to stay home. The overwhelming majority of these people had no intention of supporting the marchers or their cause. Truth be told, they do not believe that global warming is a serious threat to their lives; and they certainly do not believe that the government should be prioritizing this issue at the expense of others such as job creation, international trade, the rise of religious extremism in the Middle East, race relations in American cities, and so much more that is presumably unrelated to climate.

If I may continue to speak bluntly, the reason I am so discouraged (besides our nation's history of political inaction on climate change) is the failure of the populace to understand how these social problems are intimately connected. Economic growth can not be considered without thinking about a future based on renewable energy sources. War and deprivation cannot be considered apart from the terrible ecological impacts that climate change will have on volatile conflict zones. And racism generated against people is essentially no different than the violence perpetrated against other living organisms. To hate someone or even kill them because of their skin tone is no less damaging to our systemic health as a global community than clear cutting forests or strip mining mountaintops. In both cases living organisms with intrinsic worth are assaulted due to ignorance, malice and greed. That

being said, I was hoping to see more people of color at the march. Until we all understand that the causes listed above are all based on the same existential struggle for liberty, dignity and genuine happiness, we will continue to distract, divide and defuse our capacity to make meaningful and lasting change. Whether we like it or not, this change that we are seeking will only come when a majority of the 190,000 people in our city (and the majority in all cities) participate in the movement.

In order to take this climate justice movement to the level it needs to go, it will need conservatives to join the fight. That is, people who think liberals are incredibly naive and self-righteous. The movement will need people of color who have traditionally distrusted large scale environmental campaigns run by middle class whites. It will need youth who are not afraid to put down their laptop and iphone and get a little dirty in the field of grassroots organizing. It will need elders who have serious roles to play. It will need activists, artists, teachers, priests, rabbis, imams, and symbolic figureheads. It will need people who speak different languages and come from different parts of the world. It will need people who have no employment but have a plethora of skills to employ. Every step of the way it will need people who are in love with compromise and negotiation. And it will need to have hardcore dreamers and hardcore scientists alike. No one can be left out.

Furthermore, those who come out in force for the environment must also come out in force for young men and women who are killed unjustly in wars-whether for natural resources overseas or by undisciplined police in their neighborhood. Those who are willing to show up in costumes to a climate justice event on a Sunday afternoon, must also stand side by side with laborers who are fighting for a living wage on a Tuesday morning. And those who are willing to bring their children to a church for a peaceful walk around the City Center, must find

the courage to also bring them to a military drone base in Syracuse where they can bear witness to the murder of other children living in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.

My hope is that this march will be another milestone event that continues to build momentum over the next few weeks and months. For me and others, there is simply no turning back. Turning back is to walk off a ledge into the abyss of omnicide. No thanks.

George "Casey" Payne, M.A., M.T.S.

Justice and Peace Coordinator with Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes

Visiting Adjunct Professor at Finger Lakes Community College

Founder, Gandhi Earth Keepers International