

Rebellion to Save the Earth

Dr. Alan K. Betts

This has been a winter of extremes across the planet. Saturated soils from late snowmelt and heavy spring rains have delayed planting crops here in the northeast. For Vermont, this was the fourth wettest April on record and we have had another seven to eight inches of rain in May. While it was exceptionally cold in the northern US in February, temperatures set new records in Europe. In England temperatures peaked at 70 degrees in February, and fires started on the moorlands. At the same time, visionaries in England were planning the first rebellion to save the Earth: The Extinction Rebellion. This is fitting because the industrial revolution powered by fossil fuels took off in Britain in the late 1700s with the development of efficient steam engines.

No-one anticipated then that as the burning of fossil fuels accelerated, and increasing greenhouse gases trapped more heat in the oceans, climate change would also accelerate. This April and May, the Arctic ice shrank to a new minimum, and the mid-latitudes are frequently seeing nearly stationary global weather patterns that are increasing climate extremes. Unfortunately, poorer tropical countries are seeing far worse. In southeast Africa, where tropical cyclones used to be very rare, two powerful storms developed over the warmer ocean and hit Mozambique. First came cyclone Idai in March with massive flooding which left about 1000 dead. Then Kenneth, an even stronger category 4 storm struck in April with five feet of rain in less than a week. Try to imagine the flooding and destruction in a poor nation.

In early May, a new UN report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services reported that soon a million species will go extinct from loss of habitat and climate change. Nature is in an unprecedented global decline and species extinction rates are accelerating. The report chair, Sir Robert Watson, comments "The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide. We need transformative change."

It is the rich nations that are responsible for the tragedy that is devastating the Earth and the future of humanity. For 27 years, we have not kept the promises we made in 1992 to stop dangerous climate change, and now we are deep into a climate emergency. But rather than acknowledge this and act, we listen to the soothing propaganda from the fossil fuel industry and their many affiliates that say: "Buy bigger cars and trucks and buy more consumer stuff. Use your freedom to exploit the Earth: the future is not our responsibility."

So, it was heartening to see that this new global group, the Extinction Rebellion, has grasped that the destruction of the Earth is now a civil rights issue, which can only be checked by civil disobedience. This rebellion to save the Earth is not to defend individual rights, but to defend the rights of our children and the rights of life on Earth that faces extinction. They will not accept that while our corporations have the 'right' to exploit the Earth, so far the Earth has been given no rights.

This group is trying to force the rich countries responsible for destroying the planet to take action on the global climate and ecological emergency. They shut down London for 3 days, April 15-17, with a huge street party, until they were successful in getting their first demand: that the British and Scottish governments tell the truth and declare a 'climate emergency.' The second demand is that government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025. This is very demanding goal requiring tight coordination across all levels of government and industry. The third demand by this non-political group is that the government must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice. You can read their honest commentary on the challenges ahead on their web-site: rebellion.earth.

In contrast, the collapse of ethical standards and honesty in Washington, and the attacks on climate science mean we cannot expect leadership here. So, follow and support these global movements to hold governments accountable. Recognize we have no right to sacrifice our children and much of life on Earth. Take a deep breath, keep talking to your neighbors and politicians, and accelerate the transition to an energy efficient renewable future.

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