

NOTE: When writing this manifesto I tried to place myself in the position of young people who have become fully disillusioned with the ecocidal inaction of their leaders and elders. My hope is that it accurately reflects their profound concerns about ecological collapse, their burning anger at the IPCC-based deceptions, and their militant defiance as they seek a sustainable world.

- Frank Rotering

Youth Ecological Manifesto

PREAMBLE

We, the young, reject the lies we have been told about the ecological crisis. We know that the problems have been massively distorted and that promising solutions have been callously dismissed. We know we will suffer intensely and in many cases perish well before our time. We are also convinced that, under current political conditions, nothing will be done before the crisis spins out of human control. In brief, we understand that we have been abandoned to a grim ecological fate.

Based on this understanding, we have lost faith in our social leaders. Instead of wisely and ethically guiding society through this existential challenge they have selfishly protected their power and privileges. We therefore demand that they be replaced by leaders who will decisively tackle the escalating crisis. *To give us a chance at ecological survival, we demand revolutionary change.*

We refuse to be passively slaughtered. We refuse to follow our morally corrupt leaders and their compliant supporters down the path of ecological destruction. We will fight for our future, for humankind's future, and for the future of life on Earth. We plead with all people of good conscience to stand with us in this life-and-death struggle.

THEIR LIES AND OUR TRUTHS

Today's monstrous inaction on the ecological crisis is possible only because social leaders and their supporters have spun a web of lies to disorient and misdirect the environmentally concerned. The door to rational action will remain closed until these falsehoods have been exposed and refuted. We therefore begin by replacing their lies with our truths.

LIE #1: The ecological crisis is climate change, which was caused by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

TRUTH #1: The crisis is ecological overshoot, which was caused by the over-expansion of the global capitalist economy. This resulted in the violation of multiple environmental limits starting around 1950. Climate change, properly defined, is only one aspect of this much broader and deeper environmental disaster.

LIE #2: "Global warming" and "climate change" are synonymous, hence interchangeable.

TRUTH #2: These terms denote causally related but distinct phenomena. "Global warming" refers to the rising temperature of the Earth's surface as a result of increased GHG concentrations. "Climate change" refers to changes in the world's climates as a result of this warming. Global warming is thus the cause, and climate change is its effect. This also means that the common practice of using "climate change" to refer to the full range of harmful GHG effects is incorrect. We therefore use "GHG crisis" for this purpose.

As young people who are desperately trying to escape the calamity we face, we are appalled that these and other terms have been compromised. We are reminded of George Orwell's *Newspeak*, which shaped and simplified the language so as to make non-compliant thought impossible. The modified strategy here is to muddle the core vocabulary in order to prevent rational discussion and analysis, thereby averting fundamental change.

LIE #3: The rational aim for the GHG crisis is net-zero GHG emissions.

TRUTH #3: The rational aim is safe GHG concentrations. International action on the GHG crisis is based on [this 1992 agreement](#), which aimed to "protect the climate system for present and future generations" by stabilizing GHG concentrations at their safe levels. Given today's severe climate

and ocean degradation, these levels must drastically decline. However, the goal of net-zero emissions doesn't achieve this - instead it stabilizes concentrations at even higher future levels.

*This seminal agreement has therefore been effectively repudiated, and the protection we thought it provided has been torn to shreds. **Our inescapable conclusion is that the international community has cynically betrayed us.***

LIE #4: Solar radiation management (SRM) is an irrational techno-fix.

TRUTH #4: Implemented with due caution, SRM is a rational techno-shield. Because there is insufficient time to reduce GHG concentrations to safe levels before runaway global warming occurs, SRM is required to temporarily reduce solar radiation. It is therefore a stopgap measure to buy humankind the time it needs to implement GGR (below), aggressively reduce emissions, and transform our economies.

LIE #5: GHG removal (GGR) can be postponed until emission reductions prove inadequate.

TRUTH #5: GGR must be implemented immediately, and at massive scales. This is the only way to achieve the necessary reductions in GHG concentrations. In its [1.5°C report](#) the IPCC states that GGR will be needed if GHG emissions go beyond a cumulative limit or if the 1.5°C target is exceeded. In both cases its implementation is postponed, which is a disaster for our generation. Delaying this measure by imposing various conditions is yet another evasion of rational action and thus another attack on our fragile prospects.

LIE #6: Consumption and population decreases can be ignored for the reduction of environmental impacts.

TRUTH #6: These measures must be implemented quickly and equitably. Any environmental impact, including GHG emissions, is driven by three factors: consumption, population, and efficiencies. To significantly reduce these impacts, efficiencies must rise as rapidly as is technically feasible, and in the rich world both consumption and population levels must decline as rapidly as is socially feasible.

LIE #7: The IPCC is a scientific organization.

TRUTH #7: The IPCC is a political organization with a scientific facade. No scientific organization would shift its attention from the problem of unsafe GHG concentrations to the problem's emission increments. No scientific organization would change its solution target from well-defined concentration levels to wildly uncertain temperature limits. (The word “uncertain” and its variants appear **334 times** in the 1.5°C report.) And no such organization would downplay or suppress four of the five possible measures for tackling the GHG crisis: SRM, GGR, and reductions in consumption and population.

If the IPCC were a scientific organization it would propose emergency measures for the Arctic meltdown rather than ignoring Arctic measures altogether - as it did in its [Fifth Assessment Report](#). Most importantly, as a scientific body it would urgently reassess its strategic approach if its results were unsatisfactory. The IPCC's results have in fact been abysmal: over its 30-year tenure the CO2 level has risen by 60 ppm, at an accelerating pace. Despite this, the organization has never questioned its energy and efficiency fixations.

Based on this illogical and dishonest behavior we have concluded that, although we respect the research of its associated scientists, the IPCC itself is a political body. Its designated roles are to attract the environmentally concerned by acknowledging the GHG crisis and opposing denialism, and then to divert them from any solutions that might threaten capitalism or growth. The organization flaunts its virtue on the problem side in order to mask its villainy on the solution side. It is a honeypot of political deception, not a beacon of scientific light.

LIE #8: The ecological crisis can be resolved though government policies and political will.

TRUTH #8: The hardest lesson we have learned is that social leadership is exercised not by the people, their politicians, or their governments, but by those who control the economy. This group cannot be voted out of office, and it imposes strict limits on government action. Having overcome the [propaganda](#) we have absorbed all our lives, we now understand that the people are not sovereign, and that any workable strategy must explicitly recognize this fact.

The crucial requirement for a liveable world is not political will within the prevailing social order, but the political power to create a new and sustainable social order.

OUR DEMANDS

Based on the above truths, we make the following core demands. We will strike, march, boycott, shame, and disrupt until these are met.

DEMAND #1: Replace social leaders.

The current social leadership must be quickly replaced by a group that is fully committed to a sustainable future. This is particularly true for the rich capitalist countries that dominate the global economy, but it applies to China, Russia, and other countries as well.

After examining the political structure of capitalist societies we have determined that *the military is the only social force that can achieve this end in the time available*. We are dismayed that military intervention is necessary, but there is no feasible alternative at this late and precarious stage.

Military intervention could be either indirect or direct. Indirect intervention would apply if a politically mature civilian group is available. In that case the military could support this group while keeping itself on the sidelines. If such a group has not appeared, the military would have to assume political power itself. It should then relinquish power as soon as a qualified civilian group is prepared to assume control.

We are acutely aware that revolutionary change will cause profound social disruption. However, we are convinced that this is our only road to survival, and that the disruption will be less painful than the social chaos and civilizational collapse that will inevitably result from today's heinous passivity.

DEMAND #2: Implement SRM (solar geoengineering).

The first responsibility of the new social leadership will be to implement SRM until the danger of runaway global warming has passed. This should be done on a multilateral basis if possible, but unilateral action may well be necessary.

Although the risks associated with SRM are real and serious, they must be assessed in the context of the present existential threat. Conventional discussions ignore this context and thus falsify the assessment. Consider an analogy. If a bus is headed towards a cliff and the driver is unconscious, the rational approach for an intervening passenger would be to quickly grab the wheel and then steer away from danger. In doing so the risk to bus occupants should be minimized - it would be better to steer into a field than a concrete wall. This is the template for an emergency response: do what is necessary, as quickly as possible, at minimum risk.

Applying this template to the GHG crisis, ***SRM must be implemented as quickly as is technically feasible while minimizing the potential damage to humankind and nature.***

One of the main reasons being cited for avoiding SRM is the lack of international governance. This is transparently a pretext for inaction because governance is largely irrelevant in an existential crisis. In the bus analogy it would be absurd to seek passenger agreement about the best solution before grabbing the wheel. For a planet careening towards ecological disaster the absurdity is infinitely greater.

DEMAND #3: Transform economies.

Once new social leaders are in place and SRM has been initiated, work must immediately begin on the transition from expansionary to sustainable economies. Our discussion is restricted to the capitalist world because of its global significance.

Aside from political opposition, the main impediment to such transitions is that our minds and societies have been profoundly shaped by the capitalist worldview. This is why, "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." We therefore propose the principle of *minimum effective change*. This retains as much of the system as is consistent with sustainable well-being, thereby limiting the resistance to this unsettling shift. For example, properly regulated markets and private economic ownership are not necessarily damaging to the environment, and should therefore be retained in suitable forms.

The main conceptual requirement for these transitions is a sustainable economic theory. Standard economics reflects capitalism's expansionary logic and is thereby disqualified. Its only real alternative, ecological economics, has made its peace with capitalism and has a disastrous conceptual foundation, so it must be rejected as well. We therefore propose [The Economics of Needs and Limits](#) as a starting point for the required theory. (A free PDF is available [here](#).)

The exact nature of a sustainable economy cannot be foreseen. Because ecological overshoot is unprecedented, humankind is facing a sharp historical discontinuity. Under these conditions our species cannot move towards a predefined economic system. Instead it must move away from capitalism under the guidance of sustainable economic principles. ***A post-capitalist economy will therefore be the unknowable outcome of a rapid, organic, and theory-driven process.***

DEMAND #4: Restore environmental health.

Our fourth core demand is to restore environmental health insofar as this is feasible. This will entail three broad initiatives: restoring the Earth's energy balance, rationalizing land use, and rehabilitating damaged ecosystems. This demand is last because these projects are incompatible with capitalist logic. It is therefore necessary to begin the economic transition and to supersede this logic before they can be seriously undertaken.

Restoring the energy balance will involve the aggressive implementation of GGR through existing removal technologies and methods, plus the well-funded development of new technologies and methods. It will also require emissions reductions that significantly exceed today's restricted efforts. These will entail efficiency increases that are unconstrained by the profit motive as well as sharp decreases in consumption and population levels in the rich countries.

Rationalizing land use means abandoning industrial agriculture, forestry, fishing, and livestock production, and tightly restricting mining activities. Humankind must shift to far less destructive methods to reverse the current habitat destruction and chemical toxification. We are particularly horrified by the [steep decline in insect populations](#). This development, which is due largely to industrial agriculture, is an unmistakable sign of a broad and perhaps global ecological collapse.

Rehabilitating damaged ecosystems refers to the clean-up of pollutants and other wastes. This includes the removal of plastics from the ocean, poisons from lakes and rivers, and industrial chemicals from landfills and dumps.

As a broad statement, *our species must quickly establish its optimum level of planetary impact*. Some impact is necessary for our survival and life enjoyment, but too much - as we now see to our rising horror - is ecologically fatal. Humankind has clearly overshoot the mark and must soon locate the delicate balance between the sufficient and the sustainable.

POSTSCRIPT

The ecological crisis is ultimately an ethical issue. This assertion goes well beyond the standard recognition that the global rich are its primary cause and the global poor its primary victims.

Past revolutions have succeeded when material interests were effectively directed towards revolutionary ends. For the ecological crisis, in the rich world, this visceral motivation is largely absent: material interests lead us away from rather than towards ecological salvation. The main impetus to fundamental change must therefore lie in the ethical realm. A critical mass of people, in positions of sufficient influence and power, must override their personal comforts for the sake of the young, the poor, and life on Earth. Can they rise to this challenge?

For today's social leaders this question has already been answered. Not only have they failed to respond rationally to ecological overshoot, they have cruelly blocked effective action. Whatever their individual merits, they are an amoral group.

For the compliant supporters of these leaders and their economic system, the answer will soon be evident. To date they have slavishly disseminated the lies and refused to develop the intellectual infrastructure for a sustainable society. But some pangs of conscience are perhaps being felt, and an ethical reassessment may be under way. If so, they should understand that time is short and the crisis won't wait.

For the military the question has yet to be posed. Its professional duty is to safeguard the people, but it mistakenly believes that this can be achieved under the current social leadership. We must therefore awaken this critical force to today's environmental and political realities. The military must then decide if will honor its fundamental commitments, or if its loyalties will remain with the destructive masters it presently serves.

Our generation too faces immense challenges. In the rich world we have a strong material interest in capitalist affluence and thus the expansionary status quo. This must be courageously overcome. Related to this is the siren call of progressivism, a movement with strong values that tragically restricts itself to system reforms when system replacement is clearly required. We must either radicalize this movement or abandon it. We must also learn to distinguish between friend and foe among our elders. Many are complicit in the cataclysm we face, but others are eager to help us influence the military and to share their knowledge and experience as we seek a sustainable world.

Our final challenge, should it come, will be the most daunting. If the military fails to respond constructively in a timeframe that is consistent with our ecological survival, we will seek political power ourselves. Facing a gruesome future and left with no other choice, we will shift from persuasion and agitation to outright insurrection.

We will not be passively slaughtered!