

## Climate note #7: “What is to be done?”

Thomas Lord February 18, 2019, Berkeley, CA

We are in a difficult and intimidating predicament:

- global emissions must fall quickly, this year and for several years to come
- there is no path by which we can delay action, and “catch up later” - delay causes irreversible harm
- we do not have the capacity to deploy technological fixes to achieve the needed reductions, fast enough

Those are mind-bending constraints but together they also tell us exactly what the solution must be - albeit only very abstractly:

- the only remaining way to reduce emissions now, fast enough, is to reduce economic output

This is not to say that lowering economic output is an aim in and of itself. It is simply that *steep emissions reductions in the short term - **which are existentially necessary** - require steep reductions in energy consumption. Sustaining current levels of economic output is simply impossible within that constraint.*

The drive to reduce energy consumption must be *direct*. This is because while sharp reductions in energy consumption are sufficient to reduce economic output, the converse is not true. Reducing economic output does not *necessarily* reduce emissions as much as needed.<sup>1</sup>

Focuses might include imposing a shortened work week<sup>2</sup>, rotating planned blackouts, sharp restrictions on commute-hour travel, limitations on air travel...

No jurisdiction, federal, state, regional, or municipal has the authority and political capacity to implement such plans. A whole-society mobilization is required, including business leaders and major employers, employees - unionized and otherwise, all levels of government, and the people.

It is perhaps worth noting that, this year, many tens of thousands of school children in Europe have mobilized under the flag of the School Strike for the Climate. Interestingly, some of them have learned and tried out militant tactics more commonly associated with anarchist movements, including blocking the Westminster Bridge in London, and surrounding and temporarily immobilizing the SUVs of parents who use them to drop off children at school.

---

<sup>1</sup>See for example “Don’t count on recessions to keep climate change in check”, Brad Plumer, Washington Post, October 8, 2012

<sup>2</sup>As in the United Kingdom in 1973 when a prolonged shortage of coal - a reduction of coal consumption forced by labor unions - led the government to impose a 3 day work week on non-essential industries, periodic deliberate blackouts, and even a 10:30PM curfew on television broadcasts. These are rightly remembered as harsh times in the U.K. and there is to this day resentment of the labor-government impasse that brought them about - yet that society weathered the predicament and adapted.

### *About this series*

*This is the first in a series of very short discussions of climate change, meant to be easily understood by a wide audience.*

*Please let me know if you spot errors, or have suggestions or questions. I will do my best to improve the notes and to issue corrections as necessary. I can be contacted at [lord@basiscraft.com](mailto:lord@basiscraft.com). Please put "climate:" at the beginning of the subject line.*

### *Planned topics*

- **Climate note #1: "The push for zero"**  
The *gravity* of the situation.
- **Climate note #2: "The carbon budget"**  
The *scarcity* of resources to solve the problem.
- **Climate note #3: "How soon until zero?"**  
The *urgency* of successful action.
- **Climate note #4: "Mass die-offs? Extinction? Really?!?"**  
The *importance* of acting.
- **Climate note #5: "Your lifestyle or your life - physical and economic limits"**  
The *sacrifice* required (no sugar-coating).
- **Climate note #6: "Can't we just make our infrastructure green?"**  
The *denialism* popularized by progressive politics.
- **Climate note #7: "What is to be done?"**  
How to act wisely, together, in *solidarity*.
- **Climate note #8: "The genocide problem."**  
Are we *monsters*?
- **Climate note #9: "Simple plans of action."**  
A little *courage* is all we need to act.
- **Climate note #10: "Rejoice."**  
A personal reflection.