

PLUNDER AND DECEIT

BIG GOVERNMENT'S EXPLOITATION
OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE FUTURE

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ON THE ENVIRONMENT

SO YOU THOUGHT THE environmental movement was about clean air, clean water, and polar bears? Such messages are especially seductive to younger people, albeit hugely deceptive and manipulative.

John Beale is a former top-ranking Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) official in the Obama administration who was sentenced to prison for fraud. But starting in mid-2009, he told congressional investigators he was working on a “green economics” project to “modify the DNA of the capitalist system.” As reported by Fox News, “he argued that environmental regulation was reaching its ‘limits’ because ‘the fundamental dynamic of the capitalistic system is for businesses and individuals to try to externalize costs.’”¹

Beale is among a growing number of self-appointed statists, mostly unknown to the public, who have insinuated themselves into positions of governance or hold themselves out as experts, and whose real ideology and agenda extend far beyond clean air and water. For example, in a recent interview, fanatical anticapitalist and “climate activist” Naomi Klein proclaimed that “Capitalism increasingly is a discredited system because it is seen as a system that venerated greed above all else. . . . There’s a benefit to climate discussion to name a system that lots of people already have problems with for other reasons.” She continued, “I don’t know why it is so important to save capitalism. It is a pretty battered brand. . . . Just focusing on climate is getting us nowhere. . . . Many, many more people recognize the need to change our economy. . . . If climate can be our lens to catalyze this economic transformation that so many people need for other even more pressing reasons then that may be a winning combination.” Klein added, “This economic system is failing the vast majority of people. . . . [Capitalism] is also waging a war on the planet’s life support system.”²

Much of the so-called environmental movement today has transmuted into an aggressively nefarious and primitive faction. In the last fifteen years, many of the tenets of utopian statism have coalesced around something called the “degrowth” movement. Originating in Europe but now taking a firm hold in the United States, the “degrowthers,” as I shall characterize them, include in their ranks none other than

President Barack Obama. On January 17, 2008, Obama made clear his hostility toward, of all things, electricity generated from coal and coal-powered plants. He told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, “You know, when I was asked earlier about the issue of coal . . . under my plan of a cap and trade system, electricity rates would necessarily skyrocket. . . .”³ Obama added, “. . . So if somebody wants to build a coal-powered plant, they can. It’s just that it will bankrupt them because they’re going to be charged a huge sum for all the greenhouse gas that’s being emitted.”⁴

Degrowthers define their agenda as follows: “Sustainable degrowth is a downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet. It calls for a future where societies live within their ecological means, with open localized economies and resources more equally distributed through new forms of democratic institutions.”⁵ It “is an essential economic strategy to pursue in overdeveloped countries like the United States—for the well-being of the planet, of underdeveloped populations, and yes, even of the sick, stressed, and overweight ‘consumer’ populations of overdeveloped countries.”⁶

For its proponents and adherents, degrowth has quickly developed into a pseudo-religion and public-policy obsession. In fact, the degrowthers insist their ideology reaches far beyond the environment or even its odium for capitalism and is an all-encompassing lifestyle and governing philosophy. Some of its leading advocates argue that “Degrowth is not just an eco-

nomic concept. We shall show that it is a frame constituted by a large array of concerns, goals, strategies and actions. As a result, degrowth has now become a confluence point where streams of critical ideas and political action converge.”⁷ Degrowth is “an interpretative frame for a social movement, understood as the mechanism through which actors engage in a collective action.”⁸

The degrowthers seek to eliminate carbon sources of energy and redistribute wealth according to terms they consider equitable. They reject the traditional economic reality that acknowledges growth as improving living conditions generally but especially for the impoverished. They embrace the notions of “less competition, large scale redistribution, sharing and reduction of excessive incomes and wealth.”⁹ Degrowthers want to engage in polices that will set “a maximum income, or maximum wealth, to weaken envy as a motor of consumerism, and opening borders (“no-border”) to reduce means to keep inequality between rich and poor countries.”¹⁰ And they demand reparations by supporting a “concept of ecological debt, or the demand that the Global North pays for past and present colonial exploitation in the Global South.”¹¹

French economist and leading degrowther Serge Latouche asserts that “We are currently witnessing the steady commercialization of everything in the world. Applied to every domain in this way, capitalism cannot help but destroy the planet much as it destroys society, since the very idea of the

market depends on unlimited excess and domination.”¹² He also abhors economic growth and wealth creation, the very attributes necessary to improve the human condition and societies: “A society based on economic contraction cannot exist under capitalism.”¹³ Indeed, on July 18, 2014, scores of extreme groups throughout the world endorsed a proclamation titled the *Margarita Declaration on Climate Change* (“changing the system not the climate”), which calls for, among other things, an end to the “capitalist hegemonic system.”¹⁴

Degrowth is “usually characterized by a strong utopian dimension.” Its foundations rely on a version of “economic relations based on sharing, gifts and reciprocity, where social relations and conviviality are central.”¹⁵

To implement this utopian vision of radical egalitarian outcomes, the degrowth movement employs strategies such as “alternative building, opposition and research, and in relation to capitalism, they can be ‘anti-capitalist,’ ‘post capitalist’ and ‘despite capitalism.’”¹⁶ The degrowthers insist that governments establish a living wage and reduce the workweek to twenty hours.¹⁷ Apparently discounting the fact that the population of the globe has increased by several billion human beings in the intervening years, they call for bringing “material production back down to the levels of the 1960s and 1970s” and “return[ing] to small-scale farming.”¹⁸ And degrowthers “[d]ecree a moratorium on technological innovation, pending an in-depth assessment of its achievements and a reori-

tation of scientific and technical research according to new aspirations.”¹⁹ Imagine the power and breadth of the police state necessary to enforce this form of antediluvian autocracy.

We need not look far. In 1848, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels declared, in part: “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. . . . Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind. The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.”²⁰

Over forty-years ago, philosopher and author Ayn Rand, in her book *Return of the Primitive—The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, wrote presciently that the statists had changed their line of attack. “Instead of their old promises that collectivism would create universal abundance and their denunciations of capitalism for creating poverty, they are now denouncing capitalism for creating abundance. Instead of promising comfort

and security for everyone, they are now denouncing people for being comfortable and secure.”²¹ She continued: “The demand to ‘restrict’ technology is the demand to *restrict* man’s mind. It is nature—i.e., reality—that makes both these goals impossible to achieve. Technology can be destroyed, and the mind can be paralyzed, but neither can be restricted. Whether and wherever such restrictions are attempted, it is the mind—not the state—that withers away.”²² “To restrict technology would require omniscience—a total knowledge of all the possible effects and consequences of a given development for all the potential innovators of the future. Short of such omniscience, restrictions mean the attempt to regulate the unknown, to limit the unborn, to set rules for the undiscovered.”²³ “A stagnant technology is the equivalent of a stagnant mind. A ‘restricted’ technology is the equivalent of a *censored* mind.”²⁴

The degrowthers would deindustrialize advanced economies, destroy modernity, and turn plenty into scarcity. As utopian statists, or what I have characterized in the past as enviro-statists, degrowthers reject experience, knowledge, and science, for a paradisiacal abstraction, while claiming to have mastered them all. Ultimately, for the more fanatical among them, the ultimate purpose is revolution and transformation; the environment is incidental if not extraneous to their central mission, except as a cunning strategem.

Most Americans do not wish to throw themselves into a regressive, primal lifestyle. They enjoy the abundance of untold human benefits and improvements resulting from entre-

preneurship, capitalism, and economic growth. Consequently, the degrowth movement has attempted to conceal its pagan-like militant opposition to fossil fuels and carbon dioxide by mainstreaming its agenda with politically generated and well-funded campaigns promoting what was once called “man-made global cooling,” then “man-made global warming,” and now “man-made climate change.” Nonetheless, like most dogmatists, the degrowthers are impatient. The revolution is now and change must be immediate. Thus, the degrowthers’ agenda is built around hysterical doomsday predictions of environmental armageddon, which can only be avoided by the imposition of their severe, ideologically driven agenda.

Dr. Mark J. Perry, a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and a professor of economics and finance at the University of Michigan, compiled a list of “18 spectacularly wrong apocalyptic predictions made around the time of the first Earth Day in 1970,” including the end of Western civilization in fifteen or thirty years; the end of the nation and the world as a suitable place for human habitation; and an increase in the death rate of at least 100 to 200 million people each year during the next ten years due to starvation. By 2000, most of the world will be in famine; by 1985, air pollution will reduce sunlight on earth, requiring city populations to wear gas masks; the rate of nitrogen in the atmosphere will be so significant that in time none of our land will be usable; two hundred thousand Americans will die in 1973 from smog disasters in New York and Los Angeles; before 1990, the world

will run out of lead, zinc, tin, gold, and silver; by 2000, there will be no more crude oil; after 2000, the world will run out of copper; in twenty-five years between 75 and 80 percent of all species of animals will be extinct; and so on.²⁵

In 2008, Dr. John Brignell, retired professor of industrial instrumentation at the University of Southampton in Britain, composed a list of more than five hundred alarmist claims made in news reports of damage supposedly caused by “man-made global warning,” which are so utterly preposterous I was compelled to publish them in my book *Liberty and Tyranny*, but are too numerous to list here.²⁶

In this milieu of statist-generated delirium, the degrowthers ensconced in the federal government are imposing on society infinite “ameliorative” rules, regulations, and coercive edicts, and the necessary fines, penalties, and even jail sentences to enforce them. And those who object to these governmental commands and challenge the “science” behind them are ridiculed and dismissed as, among other things, “climate-change deniers” or “flat-earthers.”

In the last several years, particularly during the Obama administration, the federal government has embraced key elements of the degrowth movement and issued a rash of “major” regulations. Major regulations are rules that are likely to result in “(1) An annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more; (2) A major increase in costs or prices for consumers, individual industries, Federal, State, or local government agencies, or geographic regions; or (3) Significant

adverse effects on competition, employment, investment, productivity, innovation, or on the ability of United States-based enterprises to compete with foreign-based enterprises in domestic or export markets.”²⁷

The EPA is the main federal governmental fortress for the degrowth agenda. Consistent with the ideological aims of the degrowth movement, the EPA has dedicated itself to gutting the production of carbon-based resources such as coal, oil, and natural gas as supplies of relatively cheap and abundant electricity and fuel. In recent years, the EPA has tenaciously ramped up its regulatory efforts to cripple the production of energy from these sources. Since 2010, the EPA has issued sixty-five major regulations affecting all manner of industries.²⁸ In 2014 alone, the EPA promulgated thirteen major regulations.²⁹ Affected industries include: energy companies (particularly coal companies); the auto industry; commercial and solid waste incinerators; portland cement manufacturing; oceangoing ships; petrochemical companies; the airline industry; the construction industry; and home builders and contractors.³⁰ In 2015, the EPA is completing twenty-five major regulations and plans on proposing twenty-six new major regulations.³¹ Affected industries include, again, energy companies, the auto industry, and construction, as well as farming.³² The Heritage Foundation concludes that by 2038, the carbon-dioxide rules alone, which phase out the use of coal, an abundant natural resource in the United States, will cost the nation nearly six

hundred thousand jobs and an aggregate gross domestic product decrease of \$2.23 trillion.³³

Lest we forget, before the Industrial Revolution, for many centuries mankind's condition experienced little improvement. As University of California historian and economics professor Dr. Gregory Clark explains, "Life expectancy was no higher in 1800 than for hunter-gathers; thirty to thirty-five years. Stature, a measure of both the quality of diet and children's exposure to disease, was higher in the Stone Age than in 1800."³⁴ Even for the relatively wealthy, as recently as the eighteenth century life was very difficult. Moreover, the "modest comforts" of society in 1800 "were purchased only through a life of unrelenting drudgery."³⁵

In America today, even poor families are much better off than is widely believed. This is not to say that they do not struggle or to downplay cases of significant hardship, but it is worth knowing the statistical facts, most of which are generated by the federal government. For example, a recent Heritage Foundation study found that despite media and other portrayals, including those of the degrowthers, acute and widespread hunger mostly does not exist in the United States. "The U.S. Department of Agriculture collects data on these topics in its household food security survey. For 2009, the survey showed: 96 percent of poor parents stated that their children were never hungry at any time during the year because they could not afford food; 83 percent of poor families

reported having enough food to eat; 82 percent of poor adults reported never being hungry at any time in the prior year due to lack of money for food. Other government surveys show that the average consumption of protein, vitamins, and minerals is virtually the same for poor and middle-class children and is well above recommended norms in most cases.”³⁶

In addition, “[o]ver the course of a year, 4 percent of poor persons become temporarily homeless. Only 9.5 percent of the poor live in mobile homes or trailers, 49.5 percent live in separate single-family houses or townhouses, and 40 percent live in apartments. Forty-two percent of poor households actually own their own homes. Only 6 percent of poor households are overcrowded. More than two-thirds have more than two rooms per person. The vast majority of the homes or apartments of the poor are in good repair.” It concluded that “[b]y their own reports, the average poor person had sufficient funds to meet all essential needs and to obtain medical care for family members throughout the year whenever needed.”³⁷

Infectious diseases and other illnesses have been rampant throughout human history. While many diseases still plague mankind, enormous advances have been made in treating or eliminating untold numbers of them. This progress did not magically occur from feel-good intentions and redistributionist policies. Although public health actions have contributed to this remarkable development, modern medicine owes its evolution, in significant part, to science made possible by abundant energy derived from carbon sources.

University of Chicago history professor Dr. Kenneth Pomeranz explains that the European technological breakthroughs of the Industrial Revolution are based appreciably on the abundance of coal as a viable natural resource. He states: “Thus it seems sensible, after all, to look at the mining and uses of coal as the most likely European technological advantage that was purely home-grown, crucial to its nineteenth-century breakthrough, and (unlike textiles) not dependent for its full flowering on European access to overseas resources.”³⁸ By the year 1800, economists believe, humanity had reached the limits of development without the technological marvels of the Industrial Revolution. “All societies before 1800 had to produce resources—food, energy, raw materials—on a renewable basis from a fixed land area. The ‘advanced organic technology’ of Europe and Asia was at its natural limits by 1800.”³⁹ The technological developments of the Industrial Revolution were not attainable without “plentiful coal and the easing of other resource constraints made possible by the New World.”⁴⁰ For example, “Britain’s coal output would increase fourteen times from 1815 to 1900, but its sugar imports increased roughly eleven-fold over the same period, and its cotton imports increased a stunning twenty-fold.”⁴¹ Therefore, economists conclude, “Europe made [the] leap because it had coal reserves readily accessible to its population centers.”⁴² Furthermore, it had “the massive largely empty land area of the Americas relatively close at hand, to lift for a time the ecological constraint with a continent-sized flood of food and raw materials.”⁴³

Coal, an abundant and efficient resource, in combination with the modern market-based capitalist system, clearly benefited poorer people more than other groups. Dr. Pomeranz continues: “[U]nskilled labor has reaped more gains than any other group. Marx and Engels, trumpeting their gloomy prognostications in *The Communist Manifesto* . . . could not have been more wrong about the fate of unskilled workers.”⁴⁴ Beginning in 1815, “real wages in England for both farm laborers and the urban unskilled had begun the inexorable rise that has created affluence for all.”⁴⁵

Dr. Clark also points out that women in particular benefited from the Industrial Revolution. “Rising incomes switched the emphasis of production away from sectors such as agriculture (which demanded strength) toward such sectors as manufacturing and service (in which dexterity was more important).”⁴⁶

The examples of capitalism generating human and societal improvement are infinite. As I explained in *Liberty and Tyranny*: “[S]cientific and technological advances, especially since the Industrial Revolution, have hugely benefited mankind. Running water and indoor plumbing enable fresh water to be brought into the home and dirty water to be removed through a system of aqueducts, wells, dams, and sewage treatment facilities; irrigating and fertilizing land creates more stable and plentiful food supplies; harnessing natural resources such as coal, oil, and gas make possible the delivery of power to homes, hospitals, schools, and businesses and fuel for automo-

biles, trucks, and airplanes; networks of paved roads promote mobility, commerce, and assimilation; and the invention of medical devices and discovery of chemical substances extend and improve the quality of life.”⁴⁷

Carbon dioxide is a naturally occurring by-product of photosynthesis. It is not and never has been a pollutant. Furthermore, it is not covered under the Clean Air Act. Indeed, carbon dioxide makes up a minuscule fraction of greenhouse gases (water vapor is the most significant element), and greenhouse gases make up no more than about 2 percent of the entire atmosphere.⁴⁸ Yet, without greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, temperatures would drop so low that the planet would freeze, oceans would turn into ice, and life would cease to exist. Dr. Patrick Moore, a top ecologist and cofounder of Greenpeace, is among many experts who have insisted that “There is no scientific proof that human emissions of carbon dioxide are the dominant cause of the minor warming of the Earth’s atmosphere over the past 100 years. If there were such proof it would be written down for all to see. No actual proof, as it is understood in science, exists.”⁴⁹ Dr. Moore is not alone. Some thirty thousand other experts agree with him.⁵⁰

No matter, the EPA zealously and relentlessly abuses and exceeds its regulatory authority, delegated by Congress under the Clean Air Act (enacted by Congress in the 1970s and amended in the 1990s), which was originally intended to limit the emissions of actual pollutants. It repeatedly usurps the law, having been provided cover by the U.S. Supreme Court for

unleashing numerous and onerous rules intended to wipe out entire industries that provide safe and reliable energy to millions of homes and businesses.⁵¹

Consequently, in 2013, 2014, and 2015, the EPA released (or is planning to release) a series of regulations designed to destroy the coal industry and diminish the oil and gas industries. The first of these rules, the “New Source Performance Rule” (NSPS), mandates that every newly constructed coal-burning power plant in the United States use a costly and unproven technology to reduce its carbon emissions.⁵² The cost of implementing this technology is so exorbitant it makes building most new, coal-burning power plants impracticable. There is currently only one coal-burning power plant under construction in the United States. Its erection has been stymied by exorbitant cost overruns and delays.⁵³

The second of these regulations, the “Existing Source Performance Rule” (ESPR), sets preposterously high emission standards for power plants, including those that burn coal.⁵⁴ The goal of this rule is to force current power plants that use carbon sources such as coal and natural gas to charge increasingly higher rates to consumers for power, eventually driving these energy companies out of business.

The harsh consequences of these sorts of regulations are evident in Canada, where the residents of Ontario have experienced huge increases in power costs. The *Financial Post* reports that “The cost of electricity for the average Ontario consumer went from \$780 [to] more than \$1,800, with more

increases to come.” This increase occurred because the controlling political party replaced “fossil-fuel generated electricity with renewable energy from wind, solar and biomass.”⁵⁵ Reliance on renewable energy, however, raised a new set of problems. “Billions more were needed for transmission lines to hook up the new wind and solar generators. At the same time, wind and solar generation—being unstable—needed back-up generation, which forced the construction of new gas plants.” The construction of new plants led to a government boondoggle. “The gas plants themselves became the target of further government intervention, leading to the \$1 billion gas plant scandal.”⁵⁶

And the third of these regulations, “the Green Power Plan,” targets oil and gas production, including hydraulic fracturing or “fracking,” which uses technological advances to extract natural gas from shale rock layers by imposing severe limits on methane emissions.⁵⁷ Methane is an even smaller greenhouse gas element than carbon dioxide. At a time when the United States is on the verge of realizing the half-century-old goal of energy independence, the EPA is actively suffocating the industries, innovations, and technologies responsible for the progress. And it is doing so despite the fact that its own recent study found “no evidence that these mechanisms have led to widespread, systemic impacts on drinking water resources in the United States.”⁵⁸

The EPA’s rules are only the latest steps in an endless staircase of planned governmental actions intended to phase out

carbon as an energy source, institute by coercion major parts of the degrowth agenda through deindustrialization, drive up the cost of energy production and use, and ultimately drive down the quality of life and living standards of Americans—who are supposedly fouling the earth with their capitalist extravagances. In fact, the degrowthers refer to this effort as “Energy Descent Action Plans.” These plans are part of a broader social-engineering project known as “Transition.”⁵⁹ And Transition is only one of many action plans for degrowth involving “pricing carbon out of the economy,” “shifting from an energy-obese to an energy-healthy society,” “establishing a ‘New Green Deal,’” and “rapidly relocalising the economy.”⁶⁰

Of course, if the plan is to unravel and remake the existing society and economy, the degrowthers must not limit their demands, plans, and interventions merely to energy production and use. And they are not. For example, through the EPA, the degrowthers are abusing and expanding its authority under another federal law, this time the Clean Water Act of 1972.⁶¹ Under the Constitution, Congress has the power to regulate only interstate commerce and only waterways that could be used as commercial channels of navigation across state boundaries. The act’s language specifically acknowledges that the states regulate bodies of water within their boundaries, insisting that Congress will continue to “recognize, preserve and protect the primary responsibilities of the states.”⁶² But the EPA brazenly issued a rule seizing the authority to

regulate virtually any body of water that—no matter how intermittently—flows into a stream or tributary, and in so doing inflated the definition of “navigable waterways.”⁶³ This regulation obligates any property owner, including farmers, ranchers, and homeowners, to expend untold sums of money obtaining permits from the federal government before taking any action that might conceivably—no matter how unlikely such a result is—affect ponds, lakes, or streams on their own property.

Clearly the degrowth movement is not about reasonable conservation efforts, minimizing pollution through practicable policies, or averting the gratuitous destruction of natural habitats and ecosystems. As Rand wrote, the truth is that the first targets and victims of the enviro-statists and their degrowth crusade are the “young, ambitious and poor.” “The young people who work their way through college; the young couples who plan their future, budgeting their money and their time; the young men and women who aim at a career; the struggling artists, writers, composers who have to earn a living, while developing their creative talents; any purposeful human-being—i.e., the best of mankind. To them, *time* is the one priceless commodity, most passionately needed. They are the main beneficiaries of electric percolators, frozen food, washing machines, and labor-saving devices. And if the production and, above all, the *invention* of such devices is retarded or diminished by the ecological crusade, it will be one of the

darkest crimes against humanity—particularly because the victims' agony will be private, their voices will not be heard, and their absence will not be noticed publicly until a generation or two later (by which time, the survivors will not be able to notice anything).”⁶⁴