

# Stolen Land, Stolen Labor, Stolen Sunshine

## A New Theory of Modern Evil

*being me ain't easy, it's a difficult task  
if you looked through my eyes you would rip 'em out your head*

*now I'm trapped on a planet of pain and perpetrators  
that you call Earth but I call Hell's equator*

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They told us magic wasn't real, those scoundrels, even as they plundered the hoards of sleeping black dragons. The ancient one slumbered peacefully for 300,000,000 years, but not content to loot her wealth in their own backyard, they sailed around the planet despoiling her children. In 250 short years, they have cursed us all with dragon treasure. And now the dragons are waking up.

Worm, do you think you can wriggle away from the coming fire? Friendless wretch, who shall keep your neighbors from throwing you first to the winged jaws? Blind fool with green-glazed eyes, do you believe that your share of the *dragon treasure* will keep you safe?

No, no, no, no. There's only one way to break this curse—to admit the truth to ourselves, to build the truth together, to speak the truth to anyone who will listen. For the truth to break out across the Earth like a gentle whisper, a murmuring dragon lullaby. For the newly awakened humankind to replace the dragons as guardians of planet Earth.

Else— woe, woe, unspeakable woe.

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Why is it so hard to tell people the truth about climate change? Because of the evidence of their own senses, most people do believe in it now, even in the United States. But many of them keep driving two-ton personal automobiles, eating excessive amounts of factory-farmed meat, buying excessive amounts of cheap plastic shit, contributing to lengthy gasoline-powered supply chains, etc. Of course, altering personal consumption patterns is not enough to stop climate change. However, it's at least a *start*. It helps you educate your neighbors without seeming like a hypocrite. These personal awakenings regarding atmospheric carbonization must be the starting place for any political actions against climate change.

There are, of course, people who don't give a shit about other people. These are the people who will trample human beings to get toilet paper every time there's a crisis but pretend to be rugged individuals the rest of the time. They're proud of their pickup trucks, even though they live sheltered lives in the suburbs of occupied Turtle Island and never actually put them to their intended use. Or maybe they're worse— fossil fuel barons who know full well that they are orchestrating the long-term genocide of tens, if not hundreds, of millions for short-term profits. Any anti-carbonization action that doesn't actively interfere with these people's lives is doomed to failure.

For this reason, we believe that the cornerstone of climate policy must be the *carbon tax*. To make sure that poorer people are not priced out of essentials, all funds raised must be returned to the people as an universal base income. Because poor people use less carbon, this would result in income redistribution. Pair this with wealth redistribution through the wealth tax + universal base income, which transforms the purpose of the stock market, and you get a framework for moving towards libertarian, carbon-conscious communism without abolishing either markets or constitutional democracy or even increasing the control of the government over the economy.

The carbon tax + universal base income is a mechanism through which we can coerce people who don't give a shit about atmospheric carbonization to, in the short-term, start making decisions that will help avert genocide. Even though they are yet to recognize the curse of the dragon treasure, by making atmospheric carbonization expensive we can incentivize them to consume less, design shorter supply chains, better insulate their homes, and understand the need for denser neighborhoods, public transportation, bike lanes, renewable energy, and tightly-knit local communities.

Obviously, we will need to do more to really fight this thing. We need investments in high-speed rail to drastically reduce continental air travel. We need more ambitious community gardens that try to meet the full nutritional needs of their communities. We need more people who understand how to forage responsibly for plants, fungi, and animals. We might need to plant hundreds of billions of trees; we might need to invest billions in carbon capture. Because ice, permafrost, and other natural phenomena contain feedback loops relative to global warming, we might need to radically open our borders to climate refugees. We may need nuclear power; we may need degrowth. But to break the back of globalized, carbonized capitalism, we also need the carbon tax.

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The truth about climate change is that current climate change is just the symptom of atmospheric carbonization. If you imagine Earth's biosphere as one giant photosynthesizing and respirating organism, asymmetric atmospheric carbonization is an indication that the (not-so-delicate) balance has been ruptured. Because of homo carbonensis' ignorance and wastefulness, the entire planet is now breathing out more than it is breathing in.

The truth about atmospheric carbonization is that it is deeply connected with settler colonialism, the Atlantic slave trade, and the industrial revolution. Diseases from the Eastern Hemisphere opened the way for settler colonialism on Turtle Island, occupied fertile footholds were worked by enslaved people who grew cotton that was spun into textiles by exploited workers and coal-powered machines. The resulting economic power allowed for Western European kingdoms, populated by humans once ashamed to be living in the former backwaters of a long-fallen but more technologically advanced Roman Empire, to colonize the world.

The truth about atmospheric carbonization is that the roots of the crisis are found over 300,000,000 years ago in the aptly named Carboniferous Period. On land, giant amphibians and giant insects inhabited swampy rainforests. Scientists often refer to these rainforests as “coal forests” because, though the reasons behind this remain hotly debated, we know that Carboniferous Period forests produced a huge portion of the world’s coal, which in turn, has accounted for the vast majority of energy that humanity has used historically. Part of the reason might be that the “trees” in these forests, “scale trees” and “tree ferns” unrelated to modern trees, were exceptionally efficient at turning themselves into peat which geological pressure turns into coal. Due to climate change (rapid cooling followed by rapid warming), these rainforests died off in what is referred to as the Carboniferous Rainforest Collapse.

Why did the climate change during the Carboniferous? Partly because this was the first time the Earth was covered by tall plants. Vascular plants started to appear during the Silurian, but the tallest living thing on land during much of the preceding Devonian was the giant fungus *Prototaxites*. So when the “scale trees” and “tree ferns” formed the Carboniferous coal forests, they raised the atmospheric oxygen levels from 20% at the beginning (comparable to modern times) to a whopping 35% by the end. Scientists once thought this allowed for insects like *Meganeura* to reach freakishly giant sizes, but new fossil finds from a lower oxygen period have cast doubt upon this.

Other factors were at play, namely volcanoes and plate tectonics. The continents of Laurasia and Gondwana collided, forming the supercontinent of Pangaea and a towering mountain range, as tall as our Himalayas, called the Central Pangean Mountains. This likely contributed to the aridification of Earth’s land surface, which led to the extinction of many amphibians and the increased success of the amniotes, the clade of animals including birds, reptiles, and mammals that can give birth on land.

All this may seem distant to modern problems, until you look up what happened to the Central Pangean mountains. They became the Scottish Highlands. They became the Appalachian Mountains. The peat from Carboniferous forests was compressed into coal by the violent formation of Pangaea. Over 300,000,000 years, the Carboniferous Himalayas were broken down by water and wind-blown specks of dust so that the underlying coal became more and more accessible. 250 years ago, geological time was warped as homo “sapiens” burned Carboniferous coal to spin slave-grown cotton into the cursedly convenient textiles which colonized the world. And now Joe Manchin and Mitch McConnell, senators from Appalachia, hold humanity hostage.

Capitalism did not arise out of some eternal history of class struggle, nor are markets inherently evil. No, this evil arose from an unique confluence of stolen land, stolen labor, and stolen sunshine. First it was the land of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, then it was the commonly held lands of European peasants, then it was the lands of even non-European monarchs, and now the industrialized mind has forgotten what it was like to live in harmony with other human beings on non-parcelled land. First it was the labor of chattel slaves from West Africa, then it was the labor of European factory workers, and now basically all of humanity is wage slaves to a handful of billionaires. First it was Carboniferous coal, then it was oil and hydraulically fractured natural gas. And now every major river is polluted by industrial waste; every corner of the planet is polluted by microplastics. This process of ongoing theft has denied us all our birthrights as human beings— community, free time, harmony with nature.

Call the problem whatever you want— capitalism, industrialism, colonialism, atmospheric carbonization, human greed— so long as you redefine the terminology in your head to mean whatever dark constellation of delusions permitted the proliferation of a process built around stealing ever more land, ever more labor, ever more sunshine— a process that even dared to call itself scientific progress.

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We think there is a need for an anti-colonial geological mapping project. Corporations and imperial governments fund surveys scoping out natural resources on Indigenous lands and in the global south for the purpose of exploiting them. To counter this, we should educate people on the geological significance of each resource. Sometimes, the people will decide to harvest resources while honoring the significance. Sometimes, as with fossil fuels, the people should decide to leave them be. Such a project could help young engineers imagine non-industrial supply chains for new technologies. Such a project could help people build solidarity and shared myths in their fight against capitalist exploitation. Such a project should build greater awareness of local soil science, which might be enough to avoid genocide in the global south even if the global north continues carbon imperialism. Such a project could even educate on how the production of consumer products is dependent on the continued exploitation of the global south— for example, how the production of all consumer electronics is dependent on robbing the Democratic Republic of the Congo of its cobalt.

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*gracias for joining us on this special celebration  
we know there's a lot going through everyone's minds  
with the world coming to an end  
and massive extinction, mass incarceration  
shit's hit the fan and there ain't no reverso*

*but hey, hey, hey*

*we're not here about that right now!  
we're here about this fiesta  
so let's get the drinks flowing  
the smoke rings blowing  
and have ourselves a reventón!!!*

*I say you know it ain't over till it's over  
you know it ain't over till it's...*

***Written in January of 2022, before the gas price increases coinciding with the war in Ukraine***