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The End of Illusion

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The following is the Epilogue from Jeffrey St. Clair's and Joshua Frank's new book [The Big Heat: Earth on the Brink](#), available now from CounterPunch Books.

In the spring of 2017, the carbon dioxide readings at the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawai'i cracked 410 parts per million, an all-time record and a frightening one. On Earth Day, climate marches took place in cities across the world. Trump's policies didn't drive the spiking CO2 levels, but they did propel tens of thousands onto the streets for a few hours of fun. Where were those people during eight years of Barack Obama, an oil and gas man of some distinction? Where were they during eight years of Bill Clinton, one of the greatest environmental con men of our time?

Has Donald Trump finally shattered our illusions, so that we can see clearly the forces — economic, political and technological — that are plunging the planet toward a man-made heat death? Is he, in fact, a kind of clarifying agent for the real state of things?

One can hope so.

Except one mustn't hope.

As Kafka, the High Priest of Realism, admonished his readers, "There is hope. But not for us."

Hope is an illusion, an opiate, an Oxycontin for the masses. Instead of hope, we need a heavy dose



of realism. A realism as chilling as reality itself.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the Buddha instructed us that the world is suffering, and indeed it is. He also advised us that the cure for suffering is empathy, especially for those living beings among which we would include redwood trees, sea coral and saguaro cacti which have no defense against the forces that are inflicting that globalized torment.

That's where we come in. Defenders of the Earth need to abandon all hope before entering the fray. Hope is a paralytic agent. Hope is the enemy.

The antidote is action.

Action, however, is not marching in a parade a couple of times a year, featuring puppets, vagina hats and signs printed up by the Sierra Club. Action is not taking selfies with a celebrity in the back of a police wagon after a designer arrest. Action is not typing your name on a MoveOn petition or voting for a Jill Stein-like candidate in safe states like Oregon or California. Action is standing arm-in-arm before water cannons and government snipers on the frozen plains of North Dakota. Action is hanging from a fragile perch 150-feet up in Douglas fir tree in an ancient forest grove slated for clearcutting, through howling winter storms. Action is chaining yourself to a fracking rig in rural Pennsylvania or camping out in the blast zone at a Mountain Top Removal site in the hills of West Virginia. Action is intervening when police in stormtrooper gear are savagely beating a defenseless woman on the streets of Portland. Action is jumping into the Pacific Ocean with a knife in your teeth to cut the vast trawler nets ensnaring white-sided dolphins and humpback whales. Action is stopping bad shit from going down, or trying to.

The time for protests is over.

Protests will not prick the conscience of the unmasked beast called Donald Trump. Trump has no conscience to arouse, no shame to trigger, no remorse to cultivate. Trump is a full-frontal menace, that dangerous object in the mirror that is closer than it appears. It is the old threat, coming at us faster than before and from all directions at once. An unchained beast that will not be moderated by regulations, social conventions or appeals to common decency.

We are witnessing the wet-dream of Steve Bannon the Trump Whisperer made manifest: the dismantling of the regulatory state. This new reality compels us for those who are willing to look to confront the shedding of another illusion, an illusion that mainstream environmentalists have

been marinating in since the 1970s, when our most progressive president, Richard M. Nixon, cynically created the modern environmental regulatory state in order to split the anti-war movement, pacify the Left and smother a much more radical defense of the natural world.

The green regulatory state — as personified by the EPA, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service and the BLM (Bureau of Livestock and Mining), as well as thousands of laws, administrative rules and regulations, the meaning of which can only be divined by lawyers, lobbyists and professional environmentalists — has not slowed the decimation of native forests, the extirpation of wildlife or the poisoning of our air and water. It has simply codified and systematized the destruction, allocating the looting to a coterie of well-connected corporations large enough and shrewd enough to navigate the legal labyrinth for their own bloody profits.

At the same time, the creation of the regulatory state effectively neutered the once potent environmental movement as a real threat to the System. As their budgets swell, often fattened by the largess of grants from foundations linked to the fossil fuel industry, the big DC-oriented conservation groups become more and more complicit with the political fool's gold of neoliberalism. Try finding a lobbyist from NRDC with callouses on their hands and a trace of mud on their boots.

As Trump begins the demolition of the regulatory state, we start to see how hollow many of Gang Green's alleged environmental victories of the past — from coal mining and air quality regulations to endangered species protections and new national monuments — really are. They are being wiped out with a slash of the pen.

As the archdruid David Brower used to say: "When we win, it's only a stay of execution, when they win it's forever. Thus we must be eternally vigilant." These days the corporate environmental movement is vigilant about only one thing: claiming fake victories in their sustained barrage of fund-raising appeals.

But the days of the laptop environmentalism are numbered. Trump is creating a battlefield where professional conservationists will fear to tread, a direct, face-to-face confrontation with the machinery of ecocide.

And we know who will rise to the call. The ones who always have in the past: the indigenous, the altruists and the anarchists. Those are the ones who will fight as if their lives depend on the outcome, because, of course, they do.

If we are to believe the sociobiologists, such as E.O. Wilson, the altruistic gene may only be present in three percent of the human population — may their gene pool increase! But, hell, that's still three times as many people as the one-percenters who are running the show! If you want hope, there's a microdot to swallow.

Small, scruffy and unruly as it is, we've seen the power of our movement in the past. When our backs are — often literally — against the wall, when the battle lines are clear from the immobilizing fog of liberal rhetoric and free from the timid advice of professional compromisers. We've seen it emerge from the Lacandon jungle to say enough is enough and overtake the streets of Seattle to shut down the World Trade Organization. We've seen grandmothers and housewives expose the toxic crimes of Love Canal and corn farmers shut down nuclear power plants. We've taken the international timber industry to its knees on its home turf, blocked strip mines, pipelines and river-killing dams. We've thrown monkey-wrenches big and small into the gears of the System. It has been done and it will be done again and again. No grant applications or protest permits needed.

As Ed Abbey used to say: there's no battle more important, no fight more fun waging, no comrades more trustworthy than those in the trenches with us when we rise up together in defense of life on Earth. To crib a line from Leonard Cohen: "we may be ugly, but we've got the music."

So draw a line and take a stand ^{at} almost any place will do, since the whole shebang is under threat ^{at} and let loose an old battle cry so that others will know where to come join you: *Earth First!*

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