

Citizen Action Monitor

Posted on January 20, 2015January 20, 2015 | [climate change](#), [climate change red flag warning](#), [evidence based counterpower](#), [scientist's counterpower](#)

Norwegian climate expert despairs over citizens' rejection of proposed 1 percent tax hike to fight climate change



(<https://citizenactionmonitor.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/redflag-2.jpg>) Most voters preferred to use the money for other causes, like yet another weekend shopping trip to L. Sweden

Capitalism makes it profitable to postpone action on climate change; it's profitable to let the world go to hell

No 1236 Posted by fw, January 20, 2015

In a newly published paper in the Swedish magazine Extrakt, Norwegian climate expert, Jørgen Randers, writes:

"It is cost-effective to postpone global climate action. It is profitable to let the world go to hell. I believe that the tyranny of the short term will prevail over the decades to come. As a result, a number of long-term problems will not be solved, even if they could have been, and even as they cause gradually increasing difficulties for all voters."

In this astonishing story — coming out of progressive Norway no less — Randers looks at a career of climate catastrophe warnings ignored even as the disaster looms before us. If Norwegians won't act on climate change, what hope is there for the rest of us?

Guardian reporter Jo Confino writes —

"Randers says the reason for inaction is that there will be little observable benefit during the first 20 years of any fiscal sacrifice, even though tougher regulations and taxes will guarantee a better climate for our children and grandchildren." — **Jo Confino**

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featuring added subheadings in bold italics, inserted as hanging indents, and added text highlighting.

'It is profitable to let the world go to hell' (<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/jan/19/davos-climate-action-democracy-failure-jorgen-randers>) by Jo Confino (<http://www.theguardian.com/profile/joconfino>), The Guardian, January 19, 2015

As politicians and business leaders gather in Davos, climate expert Jørgen Randers (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%B8rgen_Randers) argues that democracy will continue to hamper climate action

How depressed would you be if you had spent more than 40 years warning of an impending global catastrophe, only to be continually ignored even as you watch the disaster unfolding?

So spare a thought for Jørgen Randers, who back in 1972 co-authored the seminal work *Limits to Growth* (<http://www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Limits-to-Growth-digital-scan-version.pdf>) (pdf), which highlighted the devastating impacts of exponential economic and population growth on a planet with finite resources.

As politicians and business leaders gather in Davos (<http://www.theguardian.com/business/davos>) to look at ways to breathe new life into the global battle to address climate change, they would do well to listen to Randers' sobering perspective.

In 2004, Randers published an update to his 1972 report, showing the predictions are accurate

The professor of climate strategy at the Norwegian Business School (<http://www.bi.edu/>) has been pretty close to giving up his struggle to wake us up to our unsustainable ways, and in 2004 published a pessimistic update (<http://www.donellameadows.org/archives/a-synopsis-limits-to-growth-the-30-year-update/>) of his 1972 report showing the predictions made at the time are turning out to be largely accurate.

With politicians failing to act, Randers has lost faith in the democratic process

What he cannot bear is how politicians of all persuasions have failed to act even as the scientific evidence of climate change mounts up, and as a result he has largely lost faith in the democratic process to handle complex issues.

Moreover, it is cost-effective to do nothing; "it is profitable to let the world go to hell"

In a newly published paper (<http://www.extrakt.se/debatt-opinion/demokratin-oformogen-att-hantera-klimathotet/>) in the Swedish magazine Extrakt he writes:

It is cost-effective to postpone global climate action. It is profitable to let the world go to hell.

I believe that the tyranny of the short term will prevail over the decades to come. As a result, a number of long-term

problems will not be solved, even if they could have been, and even as they cause gradually increasing difficulties for all voters.

Citizens unwilling to make a fiscal sacrifice when observable benefits will be delayed for 20 years or more

Randers says the reason for inaction is that there will be little observable benefit during the first 20 years of any fiscal sacrifice, even though tougher regulations and taxes will guarantee a better climate for our children and grandchildren.

Rejection was a personal slap in the face for Randers who chaired the commission that prepared the climate plan

He has personal experience of this, having chaired a commission in Norway that in 2006 came up with a 15-point plan to solve the climate problem if every Norwegian was willing to pay €250 (£191) [\$289US] in extra taxes every year for the next generation or so.

If the plan had been given the green light, it would have allowed the country to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds by 2050 and provide a case study other rich countries could learn from.

He says:

In my mind, the cost was ridiculously low, equivalent to an increase in income taxes from 36% to 37%, given that this plan would eliminate the most serious threat to the rich world in this century.

In spite of this, a vast majority of Norwegians were against this sacrifice. To be frank, most voters preferred to use the money for other causes – like yet another weekend trip to London or Sweden for shopping.

When voters revolt, politicians refuse to act for fear of being voted out of office next election

When it comes to more regulation or higher taxes, Randers says voters tend to revolt and, as a result, politicians will continue to refuse to take courageous steps for fear of being thrown out of office at the next election.

And the capitalist system rewards profitable projects that grow the economy, exactly what we don't need

"The capitalist system does not help," says Randers. "Capitalism is carefully designed to allocate capital to the most profitable projects. And this is exactly what we don't need today.

"We need investments into more expensive wind and solar power, not into cheap coal and gas. The capitalistic market won't do this on its own. It needs different frame conditions – alternative prices or new regulation."

Despite progressive companies' willingness to tax carbon, voters are loath to pay more

An obvious solution is putting a price on carbon so that companies are forced to internalize the external costs of CO2 emissions, but despite many progressive companies calling for such a tax, Randers says voters will be loath to pay more.

Optimists who believe this stalemate will end once it becomes profitable to solve the climate problem have a very long time to wait, according to Randers.

Absent drastic action, global society will continue burning coal for a long time

"It will always cost more to produce clean power from coal, than to produce dirty coal power as we do today," he says. "It will always cost to collect the CO2 emitted from the burning of coal. And global society will be burning coal for a very long time unless something drastic is done.

Randers' proposed five solutions have also been rejected —

In the face of such intractable opposition, what can we do? Randers says the first step is to communicate effectively to citizens that short-termism represents a real threat to the sustainability of democratic society.

Second, we should argue for the use of low discount rates in public cost-benefit analyses and encourage the use of common sense rather than quantitative analyses when deciding whether to make long-term investments. One way would be to set aside a fraction of society's investment flow for long-term purposes, in similar fashion to the military budget.

Another sensible change, he argues, would be to lengthen the election period in order to give politicians time to implement unpopular measures before they lose the next election, and to guarantee all workers receive an adequate salary after their "dirty" jobs have been closed down until they get new "clean" jobs.

Installing an "enlightened dictatorship" is an unrealistic solution in a democracy

These five solutions have all been proposed, and sadly rejected by a democratic majority, as has the most obvious sixth solution, which is to reinstall enlightened dictatorship for a time limited period in critical policy areas, like the Romans did when the city was challenged and which is the solution currently pursued by the Chinese Communist party, with obvious success in the poverty/energy/climate area. But I agree that the obvious solution of strong government appears unrealistic in the democratic west.

Other possible options – offer long-term solutions for short-term benefits or subsidies

Given that Randers believes these proposals will fail, what does he suggest? Rather than being idealistic, he says we need to promote policies that offer long-term solutions and short-term benefits.

He gives the example of the **Tesla (http://www.teslamotors.com/en_GB/) electric car, which offers superior short-term advantages that compensate for the high price.** He also highlights the **introduction of huge subsidies in Germany for those who were willing to install solar panels on their rooftops or windmills in their fields, although Randers points to the system ending after many years because voters did not like the extra tax.**

Is the transition to a new era of global climate action already underway or will Randers' pessimistic outlook hold true?

For many decades, Randers has refused to sweeten the bitter pill of climate change and is not going to start now. Some dismiss his pessimism as belonging to the past and argue we are transitioning to a new era of global climate action. But they would be wrong to ignore the warnings of an elder who has borne his scars with honour and dignity, and who continues to devote his energy to solving the greatest challenges facing humanity.

SEE ALSO

- *Believing in reason is childish* by John Gray, BBC Radio 4, A Point of View, July 18, 2014 — posted on this blog July 27, 2014 under the title *Cruelty, hatred and irrational destructiveness are hard-wired in every one of us, says philosopher John Gray* (<https://citizenactionmonitor.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/cruelty-hatred-and-irrational-destructiveness-are-hard-wired-in-every-one-of-us-says-philosopher-john-gray/>) — “If human beings were potentially capable of applying reason in their lives they’d show some sign of learning what they’d done wrong in the past. But history, and everyday practice, show them committing the same follies over and over again. They would alter their beliefs in accordance with facts. But clinging to beliefs in the face of contrary evidence is one of the most powerful and enduring human traits.”

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