

Excerpt from *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*

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Adapted by Fishtank Staff

- 1 Those of us who are privileged to be alive in these early decades of the 21st century are called upon to make decisions of great consequence. Indeed, it is not an overstatement to say that the entire future of humanity depends upon whether or not we rise to the challenge before us.
- 2 The climate crisis is the most serious and threatening manifestation of an underlying collision between human civilization as it is presently organized and the ecological system of the Earth—upon which the fortunes and future prospects of our civilization, and our species, depend.
- 3 Our population has quadrupled in less than a century and is predicted to continue growing in the present century from 7.4 billion in 2017 to 9.7 billion in the next 33 years, and to 11 billion or more by 2100. Population growth is slowly stabilizing as girls are educated, women are empowered, fertility management is made widely available and child mortality continues to decline. This aspect of our relationship to the Earth is, in spite of the great challenges growing populations will pose in some regions, a success story unfolding in slow motion.
- 4 But the impact we have on the natural systems of the Earth is magnified enormously by the awesome power of the technologies that have become available to us since the Industrial and Scientific Revolutions. In particular, any decision to continue relying on dirty and polluting carbon fuels threatens to massively disrupt the climate conditions that have given rise to the flourishing of civilization and have supported the rich and diverse web of life that is integral to our survival. Global warming is the most threatening part of our ecological crisis because the thin shell of atmosphere surrounding our planet is the most vulnerable part of the Earth's system.
- 5 But there is a third factor that has led to this crisis, one that is more consequential than either population or technology. It is our way of thinking and the values on which we base the decisions we make. In particular, short-term decision-making is now commonplace in politics, culture, business, and industry. And it is now abundantly clear that if we continue to ignore the long-range consequences of our present actions and behaviors, we will put our future at dire risk.

- 6 The good news—the exciting news—is that we already know that we can change the way we think. We know it with certainty because we have made historic changes in our ways of thinking before. Every great moral cause in human history was initially launched at a time when the overwhelming majority of men and women believed that the change called for was not only impractical but completely implausible. As the late Nelson Mandela said, "It is always impossible until it is done."
- 7 This aphorism is true for the abolition movement, the women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and more recently, the gay rights movement in the United States and in nations around the world. As each of these moral causes gained more supporters, the changes they called for were met with increasingly fierce opposition. Each renewed call to do the right thing was met with a resounding "No!"
- 8 And in every one of these historic struggles, those fighting for justice, faced with a seemingly endless and implacable resistance, came to doubt that victory would ever come. In the bleakest hours of the U.S. civil rights struggle, Martin Luther King Jr. answered some of his followers who plaintively asked how long it would be before they won.
- 9 "How long?" he replied, "Not long! Because no lie can live forever . . . How long? Not long! Because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice. How long? Not long!"
- 10 A mere five years ago, if someone had predicted that in the year 2017 gay marriage would be legal throughout the United States and would be not only supported but honored and celebrated by two-thirds of the American people, I would have responded by saying, "I hope so, but I'm afraid that is extremely wishful thinking."
- 11 The pattern is always the same: once the underbrush of obfuscation, straw men, and distractions are cleared away and the underlying issue is resolved into a binary choice between what is clearly right and what is clearly wrong, then the outcome becomes preordained—because of who we are as human beings. And then the change comes quickly. As the late economist Rudi Dornbusch once observed, "Things take longer to happen than you think they will, and then they happen faster than you thought they could."
- 12 We are close—very close—to a similar tipping point in the great moral cause that is the climate movement. Every day now, millions more are awakening to the realization that it is wrong to destroy the future of the human race, and it is right to give future generations the well-being, justice, prosperity, and hope to which they are rightfully entitled.

- 13 It is also important to note the relationship between solutions to the climate crisis and the current state of the global economy. There is, at present, a growing concern about the weakness of "secular demand" throughout the global economy. The recovery from the Great Recession, which began in early 2009, has not created enough new jobs to boost incomes—and spending—in the U.S. and in many other countries. As a result, many economists have expressed concern that the global economy is in danger of slipping into another recession. Moreover, the stagnation of wages since the mid-1970s is believed by most to be a principal underlying cause of the political unrest fueling the rise of populist authoritarianism.
- 14 Meanwhile, in addition to the impact of hyper-globalization, the accelerating impact of intelligent automation is continuing to exert downward pressure on wages and is continuing to eliminate jobs in a pattern that convinces many observers that conventional economic theory—which tells us that automation always creates more jobs than it eliminates—may no longer be valid. And the reason seems to be that the extension of cognitive capacities along with physical capacities is a game changer.
- 15 In these unusual and new economic circumstances, what is most needed to restore strength to the global economy and restore confidence in the efficacy of self-governance is a coordinated global initiative to create tens of millions of new jobs throughout the world—jobs that are not vulnerable to either outsourcing or intelligent automation.
- 16 As luck would have it, the steps necessary to solve the climate crisis are exactly the same steps that would save democracy and economic prosperity. They include: a coordinated effort to retrofit buildings in communities throughout the world; an acceleration of the transition to renewable sources of energy and higher levels of efficiency in industry and business; and a shift to sustainable transportation, agriculture, and forestry. An initiative including these steps would simultaneously heal the climate crisis and become the smartest global economic strategy we could follow.
- 17 The generation of young people who will fill these new jobs are even now joining this struggle and bringing fresh resolve—reminding us of the special role that young people have so often played in focusing the attention of their elders on the clear distinction between right and wrong.
- 18 I vividly remember when I was 13 years old, hearing President John F. Kennedy commit the United States to the inspiring goal of putting a man on the moon within 10 years. And I remember how many of my elders in 1961 felt that goal was unrealistic and perhaps even impossible. But eight years and two months later, Neil Armstrong put his foot on the surface of the moon. Two seconds later, when the news of that history-making step reached NASA's mission control center in Houston, Texas, a great cheer went up—and the average age of the systems engineers cheering in that room was 26—which means that when they heard President Kennedy's challenge, they were 18 years old.

- 19 They changed their lives to gain the skills to match their inspiration and become a part of history. And many of today's 18-year-olds are doing the same. Many years from now, when they reach the age of their parents today, they will inherit the Earth we bequeath to them. And depending on the circumstances in which they find themselves, they will ask one of two questions.
- 20 If they live in a world of stronger storms, worsening floods, deeper droughts, mega-fires, tropical diseases spreading throughout vulnerable populations in all parts of the Earth, melting ice caps flooding coastal cities, unsurvivable heat extremes in the tropics and subtropics, hundreds of millions of climate refugees generating political disruptions and threatening the collapse of governance—if they face these horrors and the others of which scientists are now warning, they would be justified in looking back at us and asking, "What were you thinking? How could you have done this to us?"
- 21 But if they live in a world filled with a sense of renewal, with hundreds of millions of new jobs created in the Sustainability Revolution, with cleaner air and water and the growing prospect of restoring the climate balance—if they have hope in their hearts and can experience the joy of telling their own children that their lives will be better still—then they will ask a different question of us: "How did you find the moral courage to change, boldly and quickly, and save our future?"
- 22 The time for us to answer that question is now—by seeking the truth about the reality we are confronting, by using the power we all have to bring about the necessary and urgent changes, and by never forgetting that the will to change is itself a renewable resource.