

Until post-July-Fourth rains brought a bit of relief, Wyoming skies were obscured by wildfire smoke. Sometimes, when the wind shifted at an opportune moment, we could glimpse a blood-red sunrise or sunset, the vivid colors caused by dust particles trapped in the atmosphere.

Such a sunset is the background of Edvard Munch's 1893 painting that shows a horrified and strangely sexless figure cradling its head. The artist originally titled his work "Der Schrei der Natur," which is commonly translated as "The Scream of Nature," or simply "The Scream." It's perhaps better rendered as "The Shriek of Nature," for the Norwegian word *skrik* is cognate with the English shriek. The painting may have arisen from the artist's memories of blood-red sunsets in Oslo, occasioned, we now know, by the eruption of Krakatoa thousands of miles away. Over a period of months, the volcano tore apart the Indonesian island of Krakatau.

"Red sky at morning" ("sailor take warning") is the traditional forecast of stormy weather ahead, and James Gustave Speth used the phrase as title for his reflections on the global environment. If nature had voice, it would shriek, it would scream. It would howl at American political inaction. "If there is one country that bears most responsibility for the lack of progress on international environmental issues, it is the United States," writes Speth. Climate denial in the U.S. has huge implications around the world, not the least for the two million people in Assam, India, currently flooded out of house and home. Russia, too, just experienced torrential rains along the Black Sea Coast, where an extreme flashflood swept sleeping residents to their deaths.

The global economy is barreling down a path of decline-and-collapse, asserts a recent email from Earth Policy Institute. To change course we must work to realize four goals: stabilizing climate, stabilizing population, eradicating poverty, and restoring the economy's natural support systems. These goals, comprising what the Institute's Lester Brown calls "Plan B," are interdependent. All are essential to feeding the world's people. It's unlikely that we can reach any one goal without reaching the others.

Yet the United States "remains dead last among OECD countries in development assistance as a percentage of GDP," writes Speth. Even taking into account trade, foreign investment, and peacekeeping, "the United States is still at the bottom in the effort it makes to help poor countries." He sees a "persistent American exceptionalism . . . tinged with arrogance."

Stabilizing population growth has attracted many international conferences and plans of action, yet "Congress withheld support for the U.N.'s excellent population work in 2002, claiming that the U.N. funding went to groups that support abortion." Repeatedly, U.S. abortion politics have been injected into international family-planning efforts. In June 2012, when women's groups expressed outrage over the Vatican and its allies removing crucial language on reproductive rights from the final document, President Obama shunned the venue altogether: Rio+20 U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development. The conference declaration has become a statement that supports extractive industries and legitimates the commodification of nature, the women contend.

Peth cites a long list of international agreements that most countries have ratified but the U.S. has dodged. For example, U.S. "company in opposing the Land Mine Convention includes Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Libya. We join Libya again in being among the few

that have not ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity . . . [and] the Law of the Sea.”

With “trade, not aid” as our motto, U. S. policy makers have substituted a globalized market paradigm for the sustainable-development partnership paradigm, writes Peth, reminding us that the market is driven by energy production. “The ascendant market ideology claims to free us,” he says, “but it actually robs us . . . of our private choices.” We must “rethink the utopian materialism that puts a premium only on economic expansion.” If we are to provide a livable world to our children, the challenges of widespread poverty and environmental destruction must be tackled now.

The key to restructuring the economy, emails Lester Brown, is to “get the market to tell the truth through full-cost pricing.” If the world is to move onto a sustainable path, economists must be willing to calculate indirect costs and political leaders must incorporate them into market prices by restructuring taxes. He cites Harvard economics professor (former chairman of George W. Bush’s Council of Economic Advisors) N. Gregory Mankiw: “Cutting income taxes while increasing gasoline taxes would lead to more rapid economic growth, less traffic congestion, safer roads, and reduced risk of global warming—all without jeopardizing long-term fiscal solvency. This may be the closest thing to a free lunch that economics has to offer.”

If we can implement market prices that reflect the full cost of burning gasoline or coal, of deforestation, of overpumping aquifers, and of overfishing, then, says Brown, we can create a rational economy. Then market forces will restructure the global energy economy. Phasing in full-cost pricing will reduce oil and coal use. Suddenly wind, solar, and geothermal will become cheaper than climate-disrupting fossil fuels.

Brown cites the International Center for Technology Assessment’s analysis of gasoline’s indirect costs. When added together, the many indirect costs (of climate change, oil industry tax breaks, military protection of the oil supply, oil industry subsidies, oil spills, and treatment of auto exhaust-related respiratory illnesses) total roughly \$12 per gallon. That’s on top of the price paid at the pump, Brown explains. “These are real costs. Someone bears them. If not us, our children.”

If first attempts at global environmental governance aimed at symptoms, future efforts must “attack the disease itself,” advises “Red Sky at Morning.” Similar warnings appear in “Plan B.” The world finds itself in the eye of the storm, but U. S. politicians, cocooned in the legalized bribery known as campaign distributions, are too lethargic to even mobilize mitigation responses. Droughts worsen, wildfires become more intense, floods inundate fragile coastal regions. Think of them as the environment’s shrieks and screams.