

DON MILLIGAN'S
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Surviving the Apocalypse

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES last week addressed the BBC's *Food and Farming Awards*. This year's shindig at Broadcasting House was the tenth anniversary of the Awards first held in 2000 at St James's Palace. The Prince, with Camilla at his side, spoke knowledgeably about the need to respect traditional methods of agriculture and food production and roundly denounced what he called "agri-industry". The Prince, who knows a lot about tradition, trumpeted the virtues of doing everything in the fine old manner; otherwise, he warned, nature's bounty would elude us and we would all suffer the consequences.

So, farmers' markets, artisan cheeses, very good pies, and lots and lots of things packed into well steamed and sterilised jars are just what we need. The message seems to be that if the English middle classes concentrate on eating really, really, well, it will, to use that crassly materialistic expression, be "a win, win" situation for farmers, small food producers, the consumers, the animals consumed, and old Mother Nature herself. All will benefit from being small, local, and above all traditional. The planet and the other 6.8 billion people will benefit from our consumption of seriously scrumptious nosh.

It's a comforting thought isn't it? All we have to do is eat well and, above all, *sustainably*, and all will be well. I thought, listening to His Royal Highness, that's all very well, but what about Planet X which is apparently heading our way and is scheduled to hit us on December 21, 2012, just in time to coincide with the end of the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar (known to *hoi polloi* as the "Mayan calendar")?

Nancy Lieder, the emissary of the Zetans from the Zeta Reticular Star System, is convinced that the

planet Nibiru, *aka* Planet X, will collide with Earth and initiate the End of Days. The Zetans first contacted Nancy many years ago when she was a young girl. They met her in a wood close to her home in Wisconsin and talked of the peril to end all perils. She has since been provided with an alien brain implant to facilitate better communication between extra terrestrials and human beings. The dispiriting message from the Zetans seems to be that nothing can be done, which is why the aptly named *Troubled Times* organization has launched a not-for-profit volunteer network to help you prepare a “safe location” for “you and your loved ones” during the period when the earth’s rotation grinds to a halt, the continents are cataclysmically rearranged in a veritable fire storm of brimstone, and the North and South Poles are reversed.

This eagerly anticipated event seems to have stimulated a great deal of doom saying. His Royal Highness is only one voice in a mounting crescendo of voices predicting the end of the World, as we’ve known it. Brought about by our greed and our profligate ways we are now about to get our comeuppance. This is not, of course, exactly the same message that Nancy has been receiving from the Zeta Reticular Star System, but it does seem to be congruent with the idea that as a consequence of our self-centred vanity and hubris we, the human race, are in for a sea of troubles, and maybe even a terminal encounter with God or Nature.

Climate change doomsayers seem to have imbibed something of the “end of days” spirit from the Zetans, the numerologists, and those trained in the dark arts of Biblical prophecy. While they talk sensible science and observe serious facts, many climate change enthusiasts appear to subscribe to the idea that human profligacy is, like the love of money, the root of all evil. Green enthusiasts seem to think that frugality is the answer: we should all consume less and live simply in simple human-scale local communities employing appropriate sustainable technology in order

to, as far as possible, vitiate the harmful effects of the international division of labour.

What appears to have entirely escaped the notice of so many climate change activists is that human beings have not only survived, but have positively flourished, precisely because of our vanity and hubris. It is only our capacity to take providence by the scruff of the neck and make the world, and remake the world, according to our own needs and desires that has enabled us to be human at all. It is our technology that has made us human; it is our connivance in the theft of fire from the Gods, our insistence on eating forbidden fruit, and our determination to open Pandora's Box, that has, despite many occult signs and warnings, enabled us to determine our own course in defiance of jealous deities, and of fickle, often treacherous, and certainly unruly Mother Nature.

Opting for a simple life in local communities, which consume less, presents us with a sea of practical and political difficulties. Billions of people from China to Brazil and from Indonesia to North Africa have been living the simple life in local communities and they are heartily fed up with it. They want electric power; clean piped water, cars, solid weatherproof houses, schools, good paved roads, hospitals and health insurance. In fact they want what most of us in the rich countries have had for some considerable time. Consequently, there is absolutely no possibility of persuading the wretched of the earth to go on living mean and narrow lives in order to save the planet. They will not be attracted by the ideas of appropriate technology or simple lifestyles advocated by people from comparatively rich countries who have little or no experience of living without the conveniences of modern urban life.

Incidentally, the mass of ordinary people in the rich countries are not going to opt for less consumption – they too have extensive historical experience of the well-to-do telling them that they need less. Working people throughout the world, from both rich and poor countries, are united in rejecting the view that lower

growth and a lower material standard of living is needed in order to protect our environment.

Unfortunately, those advocating 'carbon trading' and various forms of juggling with the consequences of wholesale industrial growth and vast urbanization, are essentially dithering between popular hostility towards consuming less, and *gung ho* capitalists who want to go on making profits without regard for the future of soil quality, the viability of the forests or the stability of rainfall, ocean currents, and polar ice. While world leaders dither right wing politicians will attempt to popularise the idea that nothing needs to be done.

Last week Lord Lawson launched his Global Warming Policy Foundation to do just that. Republicans in the US and climate change deniers from Britain to Australia are gearing up to challenge the view that there is any problem at all with the environment. They will popularise the idea that the scientific evidence is trumped up; they will insist that there is nothing amiss with the climate; they will maintain that any changes that are occurring are not the result of human activity and are in fact entirely *au naturel*. Consequently, they will latch on to the extremely powerful and popular view that economic growth, industrialisation, and urbanisation are thoroughly good things.

There is only one way to defeat this dangerous trend and that is to reject the neo-Malthusian analysis of Green enthusiasts. Instead of attacking growth and material development we should be campaigning for more and more research into new materials, and new methods of agriculture, new methods of energy production and distribution, and new manufacturing techniques. The politics of those who advocate no growth or low growth, and the politics of those who deny that we have a problem, must both be rejected in favour of the promotion of multiple and extensive technological innovation to secure the growth that the world's people need without irretrievably damaging the planet.