

THIS IS HOW I FEEL SOMETIMES

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“Power Down: Options and Actions for a Post Carbon World”

Imagine yourself in the following circumstance: You have just awakened from sleep to find yourself on a tarpaper raft floating away from shore. With you on the raft are a couple of hundred people, most of whom seem completely oblivious to their situation. They are drinking beer, barbecuing ribs, fishing, or sleeping. You look at the rickety vessel and say to yourself, "My God, this thing is going to sink any second!"

Miraculously, seconds go by and it is still afloat. You look around to see who's in charge. The only people you can find who appear to have any authority are some pompous-looking characters operating a gambling casino in the middle of the raft. In back of them stand heavily armed soldiers. You point out that the raft appears dangerous. They inform you that it is the safest and most wonderful vessel ever constructed, and that if you persist in suggesting otherwise the guards will exercise their brand of persuasion on you. You back away, smiling, and move to the edge of the raft. At this point, you're convinced (and even comment to a stranger next to you) that, with those idiots at the helm, the raft can't last more than another minute or so.

A minute goes by and still the damn thing is afloat. You turn your gaze out to the water. You notice now that the raft is surrounded by many sound-looking canoes, each carrying a family of indigenous fishers. Men on the raft are systematically forcing people out of the canoes and onto the raft at gunpoint, and shooting holes in the bottoms of the canoes. This is clearly insane behavior: the canoes are the only possible sources of escape or rescue if the raft goes down, and taking more people on board the already overcrowded raft is gradually bringing its deck even with the water line. You reckon that there must now be four hundred souls aboard. At this rate, the raft is sure to capsize in a matter of seconds.

A few seconds elapse. You can see and feel water lapping at your shoes, but amazingly enough the raft itself is still afloat, and nearly everyone is still busy eating, drinking, or gambling (indeed, the activity around the casino has heated up considerably). You hear someone in the distance shouting about how the raft is about to sink. You rush in the direction of the voice only to see its source being tossed unceremoniously overboard. You decide to keep quiet, but think silently to yourself,

"Jeez, this thing *can't* last more than another couple of minutes! What the hell should I do?"

You notice a group of a dozen or so people working to patch and reinforce one corner of the raft. This, at least, is constructive behavior, so you join in. But it's not long before you realize that the only materials available to do the patching with are ones cannibalized from elsewhere on the raft. Even though the people you're working with clearly have the best of intentions and are making some noticeable improvements to the few square feet on which they've worked, there is simply no way they can render the entire vessel "sustainable given its size, the amount of time required, and the limited availability of basic materials. You think to yourself that there must be some better solution, but can't quite focus on one.

As you stand there fretting, a couple of minutes pass. You realize that every one of your predictions about the fate of the raft has been disconfirmed. You feel useless and silly. You are about to make the only rational deductions -- that there must be some mystical power keeping the raft afloat, and that you might as well make the most of the situation and have some barbecue - when a thought comes to you: The "sustainability" crowd has the right idea ... except that, as they rebuild their corner of the raft, they should make it easily detachable, so that when the boat as a whole sinks they can simply disengage from it and paddle toward shore. But then, what about the hundreds of people who won't be able to fit onto this smaller, reconditioned raftlet?

You notice now that there is a group of rafters grappling with the soldiers who've been shooting holes in canoes. Maybe, if some of the canoes and their indigenous occupants survive, then the scope of the impending tragedy can be *reduced*. But direct confrontation *with the soldiers appears to be a dangerous business*, since *many* of the protesters are being shot or thrown into the water. You continue working with the sustainability group, since they seem to have the best understanding of the problem and the best chances of survival. At the same time, your sympathies are with the protesters and the fisher families. You hope and pray that this is all | some nightmare from which you will soon awaken, or that there is some means of escape -- for everyone -- that you haven't seen yet.

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