



# AN OPEN LETTER TO FELLOW ENVIRONMENTALISTS

**Alex Budd**

The earth isn't dying; it is being killed. And "clean energy" will only make things worse.

I should probably begin by introducing myself; my name is Alex, and I'm a recovering renewable energy advocate. For years, I was a victim of desperation and hope; I petitioned and parlayed, chanted and canvassed; I brimmed with excitement at the prospect of "green jobs" and a "renewable energy economy." I still see much of myself in many of you.

I know what it's like. I know exactly how it feels to look around and see a world not just dying but being suffocated, being tortured and maimed, sacrificed on the twin altars of profit and production. As a young person today, I know what it's like to fear the future, to fear for my future. I—like many of you—have read all the studies and reports I need to see to know what's coming, what disaster is now screaming, all but unchallenged, down the track upon us.

I know what it's like to want a way out, a path from this desert of despair to something, anything that will shift us from the deadly course our society is on, some simple solution, the kind of sane idea that even a politician could support.

Like many of you, for years I thought "clean energy" was the answer to the despair that weighs heavier on our collective shoulders and conscience every day. It seemed realistic. It seemed achievable. It seemed aesthetic. And most importantly, I thought it would save the planet.

And I was dedicated whole-heartedly. When I was 14, I volunteered with The Climate Project, a grassroots climate-education initiative created by Al Gore to "awake the masses" to the threat of global warming. I went to classrooms, churches and community centers for years, preaching the good gospel of "green" energy, that we just needed to elect some compassionate democrats. I wrote letters to the editor, hoping to inspire people to be climate voters. I went to city council to beg, and organized protests to demand that the authorities swap the local coal plant for some 21st century renewable energy.

I could see it in my dreams and the artistic renderings of would-be developers; big white windmills peppered across the rolling plains and prairie, slowly making their dutiful rotations & smooth revolutions, a clean and green revolution themselves. All buildings could be fitted with solar panels and to a biker passing by, the deep blues of the PV's would roll by like the bottoms of the oceans no longer choking in oil. It was beautiful.

Unfortunately, none of it was—nor is—true. Those visions and daydreams were—and are—entirely out of touch with reality, for nothing is made in a vacuum.

## Notes

(1) Canada Free Press. "Spanish wind farms kill 6 to 18 million birds & bats a year." Canada Free Press: Conservative, News, Politics, Editorials, Newspaper. <http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/43904> (accessed March 5, 2012).

(2) Leith, Lierre, Aric McBay, and Derrick Jensen. "Other Plans." In *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet, 201-204*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011.

(3) Parry, Simon, and Ed Douglas. "In China, the true cost of Britain's clean, green wind power experiment: Pollution on a disastrous scale | Mail Online." MailOnline. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1350811/In-China-true-cost-Britains-clean-green-wind-power-experiment-Pollution-disastrous-scale.html> (accessed March 5, 2012).

(4) Kingsnorth, Paul. "Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist | Orion Magazine." Orion Magazine. <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6599> (accessed March 5, 2012).

(5) American Daily Herald. "Two-year Study in UK Finds Wind Power Unreliable and Inefficient." American Daily Herald. [http://www.americandailyherald.com/world-news/europe/item/two-year-study-in-uk-finds-wind-power-unreliable-and-inefficient?category\\_id=140](http://www.americandailyherald.com/world-news/europe/item/two-year-study-in-uk-finds-wind-power-unreliable-and-inefficient?category_id=140) (accessed March 5, 2012).

(6) Leslie, Zorba, Jody Sarich, and Karen Stauss. "The Congo Report: Slavery in Conflict Minerals." Free the Slaves. [www.freetheslaves.net/Document.Doc?id=243](http://www.freetheslaves.net/Document.Doc?id=243) (accessed March 4, 2012).

(7) American Cancer Society, Inc.. "Lifetime Risk of Developing or Dying From Cancer." American Cancer Society :: Information and Resources for Cancer: Breast, Colon, Prostate, Lung and Other Forms. <http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/CancerBasics/lifetime-probability-of-developing-or-dying-from-cancer> (accessed March 7, 2012).

(8) Keith, Lierre, Aric McBay, and Derrick Jensen. "The Problem." In *Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet, 25*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011.

that has wild trout and bison. I choose a world with mountains. I choose a world where I can breathe the air and drink the water and see the stars at night. I choose a world with more monarch butterflies each year than the year before. I choose a world where no one dies or is killed so I can play fantasy football—and if that means a world without fantasy football (SPOILER ALERT: it does), then so be it.

Our collective fantasy of renewable energy as a savior come to forgive us of our sins is just that; a fantasy, and whether we want to acknowledge it or not, this way of life is over, and “clean energy” is totally and entirely incapable of saving it.

Industrialism, with its imperatives of growth & production, must be abandoned. Those systems which are destroying the planet—industrial agriculture, the extractive industries (industrial mining, fishing, logging, etc), the fossil fuel infrastructure, and exploitative systems of power—must be strategically dismantled and replaced by independent cultures of direct democracy that are fully integrated with their land bases and local ecosystems. The Earth cannot afford any alternative, for the alternative is to let the dominant culture consume what little remains of the natural world.

Preserving life—in any meaningful sense of the word—will require bringing an end to the perceived entitlement to live in a way that destroys the living systems of the earth. As Lierre Kieth says,

“For ‘sustainable’ to mean anything, we must embrace and then defend the bare truth: the planet is primary. The life-producing work of a million species is literally the earth, air, and water that we depend on...If we use the word ‘sustainable’ and don’t mean that, then we are liars of the worst sort: the kind who let atrocities happen while we stand by and do nothing.”<sup>8</sup>

What do you want? Because we can’t have it all.

Where do you draw the line? Because ultimately there can be no justice—for humans or the earth—in an industrial society.

Where does your loyalty lie? These aren’t theoretical questions; they are some of the most important things we need to be asking ourselves right now. What is sacred to you—a living world, or central heating? Hold that question close, and whisper it to your heart; it’s time for an answer.

And it’s time to act on that answer, to carve out our purpose and forge resilience, to plant our feet firmly on the earth and defend our only home with our lives; for nothing else will do.

My dreams didn’t include the tens of millions of migratory birds and bats massacred each year by windmills<sup>1</sup>, whose deaths are not justified by my being able to watch ‘Jersey Shore.’

My dreams didn’t include the reality that sun and wind conditions are ever changing and “renewable” generation systems must be run in synch with fossil fuel systems in case the wind stops or it gets cloudy<sup>2</sup>.

They didn’t include the mining of the minerals necessary to build these magic energy machines, which permanently destroys mountains and landscapes, leaching mercury and lead into watersheds.

They didn’t include the radioactive and carcinogenic waste produced by the manufacture of wind turbines, nor the Chinese farmers who’ve seen their land, animals, and families drop like too many flies from the pollution<sup>3</sup>.

They didn’t include the inevitable dilemma of an economic system that requires constant and endless growth with the reality of a finite planet (and thus finite amounts of gallium, indium, and silicone).

My perfect world was anything but; nevertheless, for some reason, I didn’t want to acknowledge the fact that a world run by solar and wind power (or hydro or geothermal or biofuels or every other potential source I’ve ever heard of) would of necessity be a world with a global industrial mining infrastructure, along with all the horrible pollution and problems it encompasses. It would also, of necessity, be a world with a global industrial manufacturing industry. It would, again of necessity, be a world with a global transportation infrastructure.

Now step back for a moment; these are all things that we’re already protesting, destructive agendas which we’re already fighting—and losing—battles. Mining, manufacturing, and global transportation—these are all inherently destructive and polluting.

For the past 5 years, I believed in the “inspiring audacity” of renewable energy with a passion to rival Al Gore or Bill MicKibben.

Yet if we preach a holy trinity of “wind, sun and hydro” because we believe they provide relief from an already collapsing biosphere, where does this leave us?

We call ourselves environmentalists; we call ourselves guardians and protectors, defending against the likes of Exxon-Mobil. But what is it you’re defending? Is it civilization? Is it the economy? Is it the sterile and plastic world you now call home?

Or are you defending—with your words, actions, and body—life? Maybe, like some of us, you're fighting for a world where children can breathe the air and drink the water; a world where their bodies aren't bombarded with chemicals and carcinogens from the day they're born. Maybe, what you want is a world without deforestation, a world where forests are recognized for the living communities that they are. Maybe you want a world that isn't being destroyed, but is more alive each year than the year before.

In the words of a recovering environmentalist, “destruction minus carbon does not equal sustainability.” Destruction minus carbon is still destruction, and it is destruction upon which industrial civilization is based.

Erecting wind turbines won't stop the systematic deforestation of the Pacific Northwest or desertification of the Amazon; it won't stop fresh-water wells from drying up in India; it won't stop trawlers from vacuuming up ocean life and replacing it with plastic; it won't stop Monsanto from “Monsanto-ing.”

Building wind turbines will, however, force us to destroy whole mountain ranges with explosives and bulldozers to get the needed minerals and metals; it will create 5 mile-wide lakes of carcinogenic and radioactive sludge that will seep into the land, poisoning animals and people, and it will kill hundreds of millions of birds each year.

Coincidentally, it will also require us to build and maintain coal or natural gas plants, because wind output isn't reliably consistent<sup>5</sup>; hence I find it difficult to see ANY good coming from wind power.

Solar is the same way. Paving the American southwest or the Sahara with photovoltaics and wiring the world won't stop cotton growers in Arizona from draining the Colorado River dry; it won't stop vivisectionists from torturing dogs, cats, rabbits, monkeys and countless others in the name of “progress”; it won't stop the ceaseless march of cities and development across what little wild remains in this world.

However those same solar panels will expand slave labor in the Congo<sup>6</sup>. They (I say “they” as if solar panels were somehow more alive and sentient than the very real and very living beings whose homes are destroyed to make room for them) will require a global industrial transportation and manufacturing infrastructure. They will foster more economic imperialism.

And just like those messianic wind turbines, solar PV output is unpredictable and inconsistent, meaning that we'll have to keep our fossil fuels anyway!

It's time to stop the lies. It is time to see support for “renewable energy” for what it is—the continuation of a dominating and oppressive economic and social system

that murders and enslaves people around the world, and that is systematically destroying and dismantling life on earth.

As much as it may hurt, it needs to be said; renewable energy will destroy the natural world as surely as Chevron. There are no industrial or technologic solutions to the death machine of industrial society that is swallowing whole what remains of this planet's—our planet's—most vital and fundamental life support systems.

Before the arrival of industrial civilization on this continent, you could breathe the air and drink the water. A short 500 years later, every single mother in the world has dioxin (a chemical commonly called “the most toxic in the world”) in her breast milk, 98% of forests have been destroyed, half of all men and one third of all women now get cancer<sup>7</sup>, and the Colorado River no longer reaches the ocean. Neither wind farms nor a “Solartopia”<sup>8</sup> will fix any of these things.

We cannot afford to waste any more time or energy. We must confront the reality of our situation, that industrial civilization is predicated on the death of the natural, living world.

For us, the question now becomes; do we want hairdryers, or do we want safe water? Do we want HD televisions, or do we want migratory songbirds? Do we want ten episodes of “The Simpsons” at the click of a mouse, or do we want mountains? Do we want “e-readers,” or do we want a world without lakes of radioactive waste? Do we want our lifestyles of privilege and consumption, or do we want a living planet? Because in spite of our daydreams and delusions, we can't kill this planet and live on it too.

I write this as an open letter to environmentalists, but to be honest, it isn't truly an open letter. Many of you (probably most) will continue to call for these unsustainable forms of energy, despite knowing that to do so is to beg murder upon the migratory birds, the (very few remaining) unpolluted streams, rural Chinese farmers, and ultimately upon what remains of the living world. Many of you don't want a truly sustainable way of life, but to sustain a functionally unsustainable civilization. Many of your salaries and personal identities depend on “clean energy,” and you won't dare challenge it. And for me, this is incredibly saddening and disheartening, as I know many such people. So this letter is not written to you.

This letter is addressed with the utmost intimacy to those of you who are like I am; who yearn for a just world, a world without cancer, and lakes of toxic sludge, imperialism, or murdered birds. This letter is addressed to those of you who want a living world, to those who know in the most profound places of your heart that the needs of the natural world MUST come before the needs of an economic system.

In the end, I can only speak for myself. I know what I choose; I choose a world