

Of Hostages and Trees **March 2023**

This piece comes as we learn beyond doubt that at president Biden's direction, the United States blew up the NordStream pipelines, thereby releasing clouds of climate-lacerating methane into the atmosphere. So much for his boasting about environmental progress.

Does its title look strange to you? Hang on. Maybe we can find a connection.

Between 1979 and 1981, we seethed with anger as Iran held 444 American citizens hostage. We have every reason to be outraged whenever a foreign power detains one of our fellow citizens without good reason. But as we shake our fists and lecture others about such things, we often forget that global warming and the nuclear arms race have made every human and other being on earth a hostage. And so we too are hostage takers. As we know, the nuclear weapons states and fossil fuel companies are major offenders. While it is not alone, the United States of America is at or near the top of the list in both categories. Lent is here, and it's time for amends.

Until a few years ago, critics of global warming predicted that it would lead to human extinction. Some still do, but there are now others who foresee continued human existence, albeit on a more difficult planet. And even if we ourselves die out, life on earth will continue, and the planet will regain its balance.

In his beautiful book on the world's boreal forests, *The Tree Line*, author Ben Rawlence teaches us that while forests are necessary to nourish the entire planet, they are now in danger and will inevitably change. And so the trees themselves are hostages, along with everything else in the forest, which is moving north. Along with that lesson, he also teaches us that change is constant in nature, that the indigenous peoples of the forest know how to adapt, and that if we learn what indigenous wisdom has to teach us, both we and the natural world shall endure.

Nuclear weapons are a different proposition. We spend far more on them and their delivery vehicles than to salvage the environment. Right now, our government plans to keep doing it for another seventy years, thereby laying our children and grandchildren on the table as a wager against brinksmanship. If we lose the bet and nuclear warfare breaks out—we've come close on a number of occasions, and we look quite close right now—and our hatreds and fears cut loose, our planet will be a dead rock within hours or days.

Either way, the trees have warned us, and even though life on earth is in a precarious state, they offer us a way out. Our military-industrial habits may have put us in terrible trouble, but as human beings, we can choose.

It's March, a bleak looking month around here. But the sap is running, and there's a fresh harvest of maple syrup. The trees are beckoning to us. It's time to give them an even break.

Speaking of even breaks, please consider this modest request. On several occasions, I've been able to get letters into the *Portland Press Herald* promoting peace and nuclear disarmament.

That's fine as far as it goes, but I could sure use some company, lest I be brushed aside as a lonely dreamer. There's no doubting the power of the military-industrial complex, its grip on the public mind, and the odds against the peace movement; but the more of us who make ourselves visible, the less daunting those odds will be, and the better the chances for a world which is currently living on the edge.

Many thanks for reading.

John Raby