

Climate Corner

Are we the problem?!

by Ashley Ropp

Nith Valley EcoBoosters

How many times have you heard the phrase, 'it's human nature to be selfish'? Let me guess – too many times to count. With this narrative, we don't need to question who's to blame for the climate crisis. We've accepted that it's human nature to be selfish, and that we're all hurtling towards disaster because we all just *can't stop* being so selfish. What if I told you that this is untrue, and that the truth of who's to blame may be more complicated?

Claiming that all of humanity is equally selfish, and therefore equally responsible, is not only misplaced blame, but also just plain wrong. Look at the commitment that activists and advocates put into this cause - how can we claim that 'people just don't care enough'? Clearly, we care a lot! Many people care enough to sacrifice convenience, through actions such as participating in boycotts, or avoiding single use plastic. Many people care enough to invest valuable personal resources, such as spending money to make their home more energy efficient, or taking their time to go to a protest.

Many people even care enough to put their *lives* on the line! We saw this at the Standing Rock Protests. The Standing Rock Protests were started by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota to oppose and halt the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe protested on the grounds that the pipeline would threaten their water supply, threaten sacred lands (such as burial grounds), and, as all pipelines do, cause major environmental harm. The most notable aspect of the campaign was the Sacred Stone protest camp. Many people lived at this camp for months, with supporters from all over the U.S. joining. The activists' and supporters faced great plights- there were attempts by the state of North Dakota to remove their drinking water supply and sabotage other necessities. On multiple different occasions, they faced extreme police and military violence, simply for protecting the land. This violence included security dogs attacking, rubber bullets, pepper spray, and direct physical assault. The odds were not in these activists' favour – and the odds continue to be stacked against many other activists to this day. Obviously, we care very much; but when faced with so many threats, people often have to choose between standing up for the environment, or losing their jobs, their safety, and sometimes their lives. We also are left with very little -if any- time and energy to act. Due to the cost of living, we are made to either work outrageous hours or sacrifice financial stability and safety. When we are put in a situation where we *cannot* adequately act because of violent opposition and coercive means, lack of action is *not* due to selfishness.

Even more- we, everyday people, didn't cause this in the first place! While large percentages of emissions do come from the culmination of household energy use, transportation, and other sectors that we participate in, **we did not choose this system**. For example, I drive a gas car, which contributes emissions- but what other choice do I have? Like many people, I can't afford an EV (and as I've mentioned before, EV's come with their own issues). Infrastructure all around the world is built for driving; not for walking, not for biking, and not for accessible public transit. I vote, I make my voice heard, I walk when I can, and guess what? We still live in a car centric society. That is not the fault of average citizens; rather, it's the fault of our systems, our infrastructure, and the people that perpetuate it.

Not only are these emissions not our choice, but many are not even our actions! I have no say and no part in fracking, industrial projects, pipelines, and military violence. (That last one may seem out of place, but don't worry, a full article on that will be coming. In short, military violence is severely under looked as a contributor to climate change. Unsurprisingly, bombs and missiles create **tonnes** of emissions.)

To summarize, our governments and large corporations shape the societies and economies that lead us to be dependent on fossil fuels. We also have evidence, such as Standing Rock, that shows lack of adequate action is not from selfishness, but rather because we are put in positions where action is incredibly difficult, or potentially dangerous. So, no, people who drive to the grocery store instead of walking are *not* the ones to blame. It's our economic and societal systems that cause dependency on fossil fuels, and the people with the power to reinforce these systems. We need to challenge the belief that all humans are evil, or that any individual is to blame. In my next article, I'll talk about why –despite all this- individual actions still matter, and how to make these actions effective.

Climate Corner represents Nith Valley EcoBoosters, an environmental advocacy group in Wilmot and Wellesley Townships. To learn more about us, or read my previous articles, visit nvecoboosters.com. If you have any feedback, questions, or suggestions for future articles, feel free to email me at ashleyropp7@proton.me.