

Contributory Victimhood

An Unfortunate Corollary to
Steffen's *Predatory Delay*

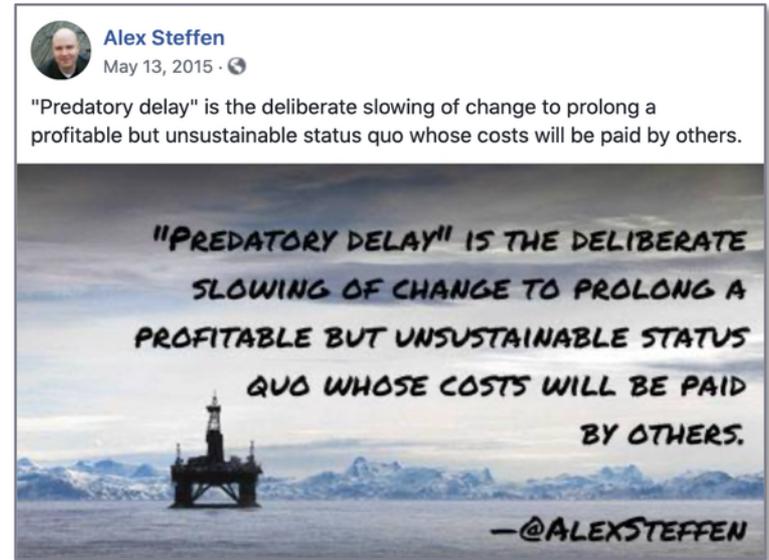
Mark W. McElroy, PhD
Executive Director
Center for Sustainable Organizations

April 2, 2020

“Predatory Delay” and Sustainability

- A term coined by Alex Steffen and explained as follows:

“Many wealthy people [and fossil fuel companies] understand that their profits are extracted through destructively unsustainable practices, and they’ve known it for decades ... they no longer deny the need for change, they simply argue for delay, on the basis that to change too quickly would be unfair to them ... they fight like hell to delay change of any real magnitude, attacking not only the prospects of our kids and kin in the future, but increasingly of our society in the present. Their delay has real, serious human consequences, across generations.”



Alex Steffen, 2016

“Contributory Victimhood” Also Involved

- To “argue” and “fight like hell” for delay is not to ensure it
 - Others who may be affected by its imposition – and who will bear the cost of it – must also consent to accept it, if only tacitly by choosing not to oppose it
- Think of this as *contributory victimhood*:
 - The willingness of a population to accept the imposition of an unjust, unsustainable and dysfunctional system of some kind, despite the surplus costs involved and the diminishment of their own well-being, and ...
 - To thereby contribute to their own victimhood
- Predatory delay can only have its deleterious effects if it is accompanied by contributory victimhood!



“Contributory Victimhood” in Action

- Organizations and other actors in the world actively *contribute to* their own victimhood in many ways, including most notably:
 - By failing to measure and report the effects of their own behaviors in ways that would fully reveal them
- In a grand display of *See no evil, Hear no evil, and Speak no evil*, modern society effectively suppresses and deprives itself of information about the full effects of its own behaviors ...
 - Due to the pervasive use of single-bottom-line-only accounting in organizations – businesses in particular, the primary instigators of environmental damage in the world, and also
 - Because of the ubiquitous use of macroeconomic metrics like GDP, the content of which tell us nothing about the social or environmental well-being of society, much less the sustainability of commerce ... indeed, we are flying blind, willingly so!



“Contributory Victimhood” (cont.)

- Yet another vivid display of contributory victimhood can be found in the kind of climate-related strategies cities and states in the world have embraced
 - While some have undertaken efforts to align their emissions with science-based reduction targets, most have not
 - Instead, they frame their plans in terms of energy efficiency, an incrementalist approach that panders to the status quo and legitimizes the current “mold”, when the goal should be to break it!
- Importantly, the energy efficiency – or more broadly, eco-efficiency – agenda is rarely, if ever, context-based
 - i.e., setting targets relative to social, ecological or economic limits or thresholds in the world is the exception, not the rule ...
 - Everything instead is geared towards preservation of the status quo – the growth/consumer economy and shareholder primacy
 - *No need to change anything, the logic goes, only fine-tune it*



Summing Up the Discussion

- Whereas predatory delays are imposed by selfish or bad actors in the world, their effects are neither inevitable nor inescapable
 - Rather, they are either accepted or rejected by those who must bear the consequences
 - For predatory delay to have its intended effects, there must also be a degree of contributory victimhood in play, a willing audience
 - Organizations and societies too often facilitate their own victimhood by allowing themselves to be drawn into, and co-opted by, the false narratives put forward by practitioners of predatory delay
 - A very good place to start in the fight against the pernicious effects of predatory delay and contributory victimhood would therefore be to enact systemic reform in performance accounting
 - Deprive predatory delay of the obfuscation it relies on by institutionalizing cutting-edge, context-based triple bottom line performance accounting systems in the public and private sectors everywhere – make it mandatory, no more biased reporting!



Thank you!

For more information,
contact Mark W. McElroy at:
mmcelroy@vermontel.net

Or visit us at:
www.sustainableorganizations.org

