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Essay
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Thomas the Tank Engine in:
Limits to Growth and the Environmental Movement.

Narrator¹: Thomas the Tank Engine rolled into the Station at Ffarquhar with a rather displeased look on his face.

Percy: What’s wrong Thomas mon? Hard day at the office?

Thomas: Oh, the last trip was absolute hell. I had to take a carriage full of feminists from Tidmouth station all the way to Ffarquhar. You should have heard all the crap they were talking about. Equal rights, burning bras, and some malarkey about being oppressed. Isn’t it enough that we let them vote... I tell you, give an inch and they take a mile. It was almost enough to make me burst a boiler.

Narrator: Annie and Clarabel² shook their heads in silent disgust as Thomas continued

Thomas: Yep, I can’t wait to get rid of these two tarts and go back to the yard to smoke some good quality coal and drink some oil.

Percy: Don’t yah know that smokin’ coal is bad for mother earth? Yah should be smokin’ tha holy erb³ mon!

Thomas: Ha! What’s mother earth ever done for me!? Besides, it’s the overpopulation of those damn third world countries like Africa that are causing the degradation of the environment (1 and 2).

¹ Parts of the narrator should be spoken in a thick English accent.

² Annie and Clarabel are two of Thomas’s coaches.

³ Holy erb- marijuana (17)

Percy: Hey mon tis not tha tird world that is ta blame, tis Babylon⁴. They just like ta blame tha tird world with their ism and skisms⁵..... Jah⁶ know who be ta blame (3).

Narrator: Thomas rolled his eyes as Percy continued

Percy: Besides, tha whole limits ta growth concept is just a ploy, part of the white mans polytricks⁷ to keep us in Babylon (4).... They tell me population and economic growth in tha tird world is the problem. Me see through tha lies. They just wanna stop tha tird world from reachin' tha level of life they be livin'(1).....

Thomas: You green trains are all the same! Always complaining about the destruction of the environment. Always saying that you're oppressed and living in.... what's that word you use?

Percy: Babylon?

Thomas: Yeah Babylon! You're always saying "Thomas mon, me be sick of livin' in Babylon"..... You green trains are all the same. It makes me sick. Why if I had my way there would only be blue trains in this yard! (5).

Percy's face went red with anger, and steam began to pour out of his funnel.

Percy: What tha hell are yah implying yah maga dog⁸?! You be a bigot mon! You and yah bald-head⁹ friends..... We all be tha same colour underneath don't yah know, haven't yah heard tha sayin' 'I and I'¹⁰ (3 and 4) Oh shit, here come the bufu-bufu¹¹ bakra¹².

The fat controller waddled towards Thomas and Percy with a glint of rage in his eyes and a doughnut in his hand.

Fat Controller: What's all this yelling about!? Is everything alright?

Percy: Cool runnings¹³ mon.

The fat controller looked at Percy with disapproval

⁴ Babylon- the oppression of the white world (3)

⁵ Isms and Skisms- negative term denoting Babylon's classificatory systems (17)

⁶ Jah- god (17)

⁷ Polytricks- politics (17)

⁸ maga dog- mongrel (17)

⁹ bald-head- one who works for Babylon (17)

¹⁰ I and I- all people are totally equal (3)

¹¹ bufu-bufu- fat, swollen blubbery (17)

¹² Bakra- white slave master, or member of the ruling class (17)

¹³ Cool runnings- a greeting; things are going smoothly (17)

Percy: I mean Cool runningssir.

Fat Controller: Good. Well, finish up here and get back to the yard.

Percy and Thomas left in a puff of steam. Later on that afternoon they met back in the yard, where Thomas was up to his usual antics of smoking coal and drinking too much oil.

Thomas: Hey Percy, how are the trees!

Thomas laughed out loud and blew a big puff of black smoke out of his funnel.

Percy: Thomas mon, I was once like yah. I used ta smoke coal and drink oil till I couldn't smoke or drink no more. Then in the summer of 1975 I be goin' from Ffarquhar to London, and who be hopin' on one of me carriages but the great Bob Marley¹⁴. He be jammin' and preachin' bout the great Haille Selassie I¹⁵, tellin' of how the white world had been oppressing black people, and that all black people need to be united back in the homeland of Africa (3 and 4)....

Thomas rolled his eyes and shook his head in disbelief.

Percy: Bob also be telling me of how we need to be one wit nature, because she be providin' us with shelta, food and water (3). Yah see Thomas, there be a movement happnin' whether yah like it or not.

Thomas: What? Are you talking about those hysterical greenies that are always protesting outside power plants and hugging trees?

Percy: It be more then that mon. They be fightin' for the rights of the low-income and minority communities too, so that they can enjoy a clean and healthy environment. Tis called environmental justice mon (6).

Thomas: Environmental Justice?

Percy: Yah mon, environmental justice!..... It started in 1982 in Warren County, North Carolina, where hundreds of people, both black and white, united togetha' ta try and stop the dumpin' of soil contaminated with toxic PCB's in a landfill near a low-income community (6 and 7).

Thomas: You gotta dump toxic waste somewhere!

¹⁴ Bob Marley- Famous reggae musician and Rasta (3)

¹⁵ Haille Selassie I- Emperor of Ethiopia between 1930 and 1974. He was viewed as the 20th century manifestation of god (3)

Percy: But why it gotta always be near low-income minority or ethnic communities? Did yah know that three outta five African Americans or Hispanics be livin' in communities borderin' unregulated toxic waste sites?! (6).

Thomas: Because they don't contribute as much to society! (5).

Percy: Nah mon, its cause Babylon don't care bout them n' think they will keep quite or that no one will listen!..... Same reason why they try n' blame tha tird world for tha limits ta growth problem. They think that they be poor and uneducated, and cause they poor and uneducated they don't have no voice (5).

Thomas: Money talks, and shit walks!..... Besides, there is no real limit to growth, that's just figment of the green medias imagination. Man will continue to find new ways to harness and create resources, technically making them infinite. It has happened in the past with the development of more efficient mining techniques that enable us to retrieve greater volumes of oil and minerals to facilitate both population and economic growth (8).

Percy: Yah, but even if this be so, the wealth is not shared equally in society. Tha rich be gettin' richa and tha poor be gettin' poora (1)..... Polytricks of tha west be sayin' that strong economic growth be essential so that they can help tha poor unindustrialized nations, yet tis tha rich countries which only have 20% of tha population that are usin' 80% of tha resources. Tis tha first world that be causin' tha problems and usin' tha resources (9)..... Yah know what, tha real concern of limits ta growth be not tha limited resources in tha world, it be tha threat of limitin' tha lifestyles of bald-heads in tha west (10)..... Besides, tha limits to growth model be racist. It only take into account lifestyles of those in tha west. It don't be concernin' itself with the life other races and cultures be choosin to live. Some cultchas need to be havin' more than 2.3 children.....it also be based on a computer model. How many people in Zion¹⁶ or tha rest of tha tird world have computers? None. How they refute limits ta growth arguments properly when they don't have access to tha technology (11).

Thomas: They're not smart enough to think for themselves! They don't know what's best for them! They need the guidance of the white world (5).....

Percy's face went red with rage.

¹⁶ Zion- Africa; more specifically Ethiopia. Rastafarian holy land (3)

Percy: What, to set them in chains!? And even when they outta tha chains they be held down by tha shackles of poverty, illiteracy, inequality n' tha trickery of tha white man (12)!

Silence fell over the yard as Percy and Thomas tried to compose themselves.

Percy: Now yah listen up mon....

Percy's voice quivered as he tried to stay calm.

Percy: I'll only be pushed so far ok. Me not afraid to stand up for me rights and what I believe in, just like those environmental activist yah hate so much.

Thomas: I much prefer the negotiators..... they're so much more rational and co-operative. They are at least willing to compromise some of what they believe in (6 and 13)..... And they are clean cut too. Not dirty and smelly like those damn hippy activists..... I had to take some of those activists to Tidmouth the other day, and I was almost sick..... I've never seen so many dread locks in my life.....and the birds didn't even shave their legs or underarms.....

Percy: There be nuttin' wrong with growin' dreads. They show strength cause they be symbolisin' the Lion of Judah¹⁷ (3).....Besides, activists be great cause they fight for what they think be right. They don't be compromisin' what they believe in, and they keep tha people informed bout environmental injustices (6).

Thomas: Yeah, but their protests often fall on deaf ears. Isn't it better to make some progress by negotiating with government or industry, than none at all?

Percy: I suppose, but yah still need activism to raise media attention and public awareness to put pressure on tha government and industry to change their ways, cause a lot of negotiation happen behind closed doors.....besides, negotiators just be environmental businessmen, who speak tha same language as tha government. Me be afraid that they be persuaded by tha government.....they may be compromisin' more than they should (6).

Thomas: Yeah, but activists wont listen to reason. Compromise is part of life, yet they wont have a bar of it..

Percy: That's because they believe that tha environment isn't something to be compromisin'. They want ta see complete economic social and political change. Merely

¹⁷ Lion of Judah- represents Haile Selassie I (3)

improvin' tha current system wont fix tha cause of tha problem, that's why they be hatin' on negotiation Yah see, they view protecting tha ecology of tha planet as bein' the only way ta ensure that development be sustainable..... They also think that tha economy should be restructured ta accommodate needs, not wants (14).

Thomas: But, their inability to compromise and their strong anti- development mind set is why the environmental movement is losing momentum. The anti- development attitude annoys a lot of people in society(15)..... Besides, technology can solve any environmental problems associated with sustainable development that we may face in the future, as it has in the past (1).

Percy: Yah, but what happen' when technology fails? Besides, tha technologies that are being used generally be pollutin' anyhow, just creatin' a new problem that needs to be fixed. It be like a revolvin' door. This is why activists be tryin' to shake up tha current system bein' used. They want complete change as opposed to tha quick fix that end of the pipe technologies provide (16)..... whetha yah like it or not Thomas, green is tha way of tha future and this movement wont be goin' anywhere until things be changin'.

Thomas: I guess, I just wish that those hippies would stop throwing eggs at me every time I bring uranium to the nuclear power plant..... Percy, why did your mum give you a girl's name?

Percy: Goodnight Thomas.

And with that, a drunk Thomas and high Percy parted ways to prepare for another day at work.....and Thomas did continued to get egged by activists and no one felt sorry for him because he's a bastard.

Written by Guy Incognito with the assistance of the following people:

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