

The Day After Tomorrow
Terence Jeyaretnam

I had been waiting for a chance to catch the movie 'The Day After Tomorrow' for a number of weeks and finally managed to see it last weekend on the big screen. The movie, to me, represents a milestone. The last, and probably the only other box office movie covering environmental issues was Erin Brokovich. The day after tomorrow is a global catastrophe movie, along the lines of Armageddon, Independence Day and Deep Impact. However, the cataclysmic event this time is not from a stray meteor or aliens invading the planet, but rather from humanity's own actions, or indeed inaction, in terms of the devastating impacts on our global environment. Whilst other movies such as Gorillas in the Mist have covered the effects of anthropogenic activity on biodiversity, this is the first to address the mounting global issues surrounding the greenhouse effect from continuing to burn fossil fuel for our energy and transportation needs. The potential effects of greenhouse are widely referred in present day press as 'climate change' – and that's exactly the central theme and event highlighted. Whilst scientifically not impossible, the climatic shift in the movie occurs due to imbalances in oceanic temperature and resulting currents increasing tidal waves and dropping temperature, all as a result of global warming causing the polar ice caps to melt.

The interesting issue was how quickly the climatic shift occurs – within a period of days. I sat wondering, how close, if at all likely, to such an event the world was. It's not about whether such an event is likely or whether it will happen in our lifetime, but it's about what, if any, are the climatic changes possible from our activities. Interestingly, leading insurance groups, which represent one of the 'at risk' industry sectors from inclement weather, have started conducting research into emerging trends, and their relationships to such facts as increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels.

Examining some of the issues surrounding climate change is cause for alarm. Atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are being linked to increasing temperature. It is well established that the frequency and severity of extreme climatic conditions are increasing globally. Southern France and Switzerland have endured record high temperatures, the United States recently recorded more tornadoes a month than ever before and phenomenal heatwaves have tragically killed thousands in India and France. We in Australia have had record droughts, three one-in-one hundred year storms events within the space of ten years and hailstorms causing damage seen never-before. Amidst these issues, the world oil price continues to rise, hitting record levels, suggesting that demand is outstripping supply, as we grow our thirst for fossil fuel.

While the day after tomorrow will always be the day after, let's hope the forces with the power and the capacity to reverse these trends can heed the warning signals earlier than that day when the shift becomes irreversible.

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