

January 1, 1976. The item immediately below is from the pen of Harriet Van Horne, a veteran columnist for the *New York Post*, which appeared in *The Oakland Press* of Pontiac, Michigan. Through the efforts of a sister on our mailing list permission was granted to reproduce this item. Permission granted by Neil Munro, Associate Editor. No doubt all of our readers will be thrilled. This is fulfilled prophecy as expressed in plain English.)

THIS CRISIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

NEW YORK CITY—It's a curious one, this depression that shrouds our days. Economists are mystified because the old cause and effect theories aren't working any more. Prices soar while purchasing power shrinks. Some people prosper; others starve. Wealth accumulates; men decay.

“Things fall apart,” Yeates wrote, “the center cannot hold.”

It is the sudden vulnerability of the center—the good, thrifty middle class that keeps the engines turning—that makes this depression so fearful.

Ordinary people are growing mistrustful of the system. Hoarding is back in style. Out in the suburbs, one hears, garages and basement storerooms are assuming the look of well stocked air-raid shelters. City folk lack storage space, but items likely to continue rising in price—dog food, sweets, paper products—are bought in quantity. Visitors to Mexico bring home cheap sugar instead of tacky jewelry. Old ladies are selling their stocks and hanging on to their diamonds.

What we are living through, some economists warn, is not a simple recession. Not a stretch of hard times to be corrected eventually by the laws of the marketplace. This is a worldwide crisis in the system. And when this cold gray mist finally lifts, everything will be different. Our tax structure, our marketing system, our lifestyle, our public morality—everything.

It is wrong, economically and morally that three per cent of our citizens control the bulk of our national resources. Resentment against this situation is growing. A national convention of Democratic Socialists, meeting recently in New York, heard seven Nobel Prize laureates urge that “alternatives to capitalism” be found. A resolution, unanimously approved, noted that “our history is turning a corner.”

We are experiencing crises, the resolution went on, as profound as those which shattered the old order in the 1930s.

It is all too easy to blame our current setback on the oil crisis, the Vietnamese war, the corruption of the Nixon years and the effects of weather on the world's food supply. These factors took their toll, but the real trouble would seem to be a general failure of the capitalist system to fulfill human needs and steer a safe course into the future.

In circles where money has always been a primary topic, one now hears "scenarios" of the coming economic collapse. Some are reasonable and terrifying. Some are unreasonable but still terrifying.

Writing in the February *Esquire*, Alvin Toffler, author of "Future Shock," sets forth his depression scenarios in terms as vivid and blood-chilling as last night's horror movie. He imagines an inflation so severe that barter becomes part of everyday life. "Ordinary men and women trade a shirt for a box of cigars, a Chippendale chair for a Burberry raincoat." A passenger who gives a London cabby a chicken in payment for a ride receives two eggs as change. One egg returns to the driver—his tip.

Toffler gives us a wide choice of hard times. There's the Depression on the Installment Plan in which "various sectors of the economy collapse seriatim rather than simultaneously." This is equivalent to "the easiest room in hell." Toffler's other projections are far worse.

Should we have a Sleeper Depression, we'll see a gradually worsening decline of the entire economy, slow and stealthy.

Then there's the Supercrash, in which everything goes all to hell at once, with unemployment zooming to as high as 50 per cent. This could lead to riot and civil commotion. Get your air-raid shelter ready.

Finally, Toffler offers us the Armageddon Depression. That is, a short depression followed by a global war, also short.

There are some subheadings under these major listings, but they needn't detain us. We may take some comfort from Toffler's remark, "Scenarios, no matter how plausible sounding, are after all fiction."

The hard core of Toffler's thesis is in perfect accord with the plea of the Nobel Laureates. What we are enduring today is the birth agony of a new economic order. Capitalism is being "transformed." The coming years of trauma should be viewed as an opportunity to humanize technology, to right ancient wrongs, to replace outworn institutions. Perhaps it's high time.

Historians ought to be precise, faithful and unprejudiced; and neither interest nor fear, hatred nor affection, should make them swerve from the way of truth.—Cervantes.