Economic growth and the global economy at Bali

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
08 December 2007

Culture Change Letter #175

Dec. 7, 2007 email to: executiveoffice@unep.org and Global Warming Crisis Council list

From: Jan Lundberg

To: Achim Steiner

UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UNEP

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Avenue, Gigiri

PO Box 30552, 00100

Nairobi, Kenya

Re energy limits and pollution: ending growth and globalization

Dear Mr. Steiner,

Let me offer you praise as well as a criticism while you represent Mother Earth in Bali for the UN. Your statement (in the ENN article dated Dec. 6, "Silver Lining to Climate Change - Green Jobs"): "Without a strong and decisive emission reductions regime, the transformational foundations being laid today could prove to be built on sand tomorrow. We need to change the subsidies, tax structures, and accounting methods that permit the "externalization" of severe environmental impacts so they are factored into the costs of doing business on this planet" is excellent.

However, when you say, "...the transition to a global economy that is not only resource efficient and without the huge emissions of greenhouse gases, but one that also restores environmental and social values," you undermine your other statement. This global economy is possible only through world trade predicated upon affordable, abundant petroleum fuels that are dwindling and subject to supply cut-off and market pandemonium. Also, the idea of a healthy local ecosystem populated by consumers needing goods from distant lands is a complete contradiction, and it goes against everything one should value for socially just production conditions. The refusal of hapless consumers to participate in their local communities for sustainable economic health is mainly a result of transnational corporations' hold on governments and academia.

The world has peaked in oil extraction, so if you understand the implications of no more of the growth that petroleum has permitted (population growth and urban sprawl), then you see that the days of expansionist growth and the global corporate economy itself are numbered. There will be no substitution of renewable energies for petroleum on a comparable scale, even if they were maximized to be in place already. On the bright side, there may be not a single "global economy" very soon; rather, local economies -- plural, with local, decentralized energy resources. Bioregional political entities will become responsible for their own survival, and sovereign, and this will start to restore cultural diversity.

When the International Labour Organisation's Peter Poschen refers to "sustainable economic growth and help lift people out of poverty", his rhetoric flies in the face of the law of ecological carrying capacity; growth cannot keep going forever. Growth has already assured the destruction of the climate as-we-know-it, don't you agree? Additionally, the idea of lifting people out of poverty may be code language for selling them entropy boxes such as plastic electric kitchen appliances, cars, computers, TVs, cell phones, and such, that serve to isolate people within families and isolate families from other families. "Impoverished" traditional populations often have closer family structure and cohesion, and more time for being together, telling stories, and educating the young via intergenerational housing. More money, more building and more people add to the unraveling of the social fabric.

In conclusion, petrocollapse is going to even the scales a bit so that First World consumers will learn about local production and relearn the importance of community. I would greatly appreciate hearing your thoughts on my points. I would like to know if localization is a priority when growth and corporate globalization have shown themselves to be yesterday's mistakes. This concept should be consistent with your policy goals of slashing greenhouse gas emissions

via yanking the externalizing of costs and other subsidies that help fry our planet. If I may be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Jan C. Lundberg

Oil industry analyst

Founder and Publisher,

Culture Change (formerly Sustainable Energy Institute)

past participant NGO in climate meetings

http://culturechange.org

San Francisco, California, USA

Tel. and fax 1-215-243-3144

email jan "at" culturechange.org

Cited:

enn.com

and syndicated:

truthout.org

* * * * *

"Peak Oil naysayers partying on for growth" by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #142:

culturechange.org

"Ancient innovations for present conventions toward extinction" by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #161 - June 10, 2007:

culturechange.org

"Can ecological economists stop the mainstreamers before it's too late?" by John Feeney:

culturechange.org

"Overextension: our American way of life is not sustainable" by Chris Clugston:

culturechange.org