

Nut Case at the Wheel

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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As the U.S. continues the incredibly wasteful misallocation of resources known as car production and everything that goes with it, the externalized costs in terms of global warming, oil spills, and human isolation as consumers, only mount.

Who is in charge of this mad policy of ecocide? We all are, but we did elect a president named Barack Obama. He was supposed to be the answer to the blatantly destructive and incompetent George W. Bush. But Lo and Behold, Obama's allegiance proved to be the status quo. Got recession? More cars! Oil spill a la Chernobyl in the U.S. Gulf? Keep on producing cars and using oil!

So, having fooled ourselves again with an election, ignoring the warning by The Who in their landmark song Won't Get Fooled Again (1970), we look to the driver of our vehicle to see that he is a nut case with his accelerator pedal pushed to the floor. Global peak in oil supply? Pedal to the metal! What's that above him? A helicopter gunship mowing down people on the other side of the world, in the name of democracy and freedom.

Obama's calm, intelligent face, our multiracial darling Obama, is on the whole a maniacal puppet. And he's wearing a mask, whether he knows it or not. Who or what is underneath?

Some who look beyond elections say the problem is essentially one of corporatism: that Obama is just another representative of the corporate elite, as were the Bushes, McCain and the Clintons. True, but is U.S. culture salvageable by targeting corporate rule?

The lateness of the hour tells us the answer is No. Although the modern large corporation is the most virulent form of exploitation of people and the Earth, and needs to be abolished, U.S. culture has gone way too far in its alienation, oppression and general distortion of human values to be cured or transformed by even a major reform.

What, then, are the implications for a nation and people who don't even have a hope today of getting out from under the car (that's pinning them down on the bloody, oily pavement)? Ideally, even Tea Party activists realize that significant change or relief from economic and social pressures does not come from another election or series of elections.

What, then -- revolution? Is that the real goal of anyone wishing for fundamental change? What would this revolution entail? Would it be political, cultural, or both?

A series of goals or wishes by enough people amounts to a social movement or a coup. It has happened before, and the threat of this feels real to those who find the U.S. to still be somewhat benign. To them, the possibility of a worse form of government and loss of our already diminished freedoms looms large enough that one's priority becomes that of somehow maintaining the status quo, while hoping for positive developments such as clean energy, an end to oil wars, and a roll-back of the Patriot Act.

However, the time for political change to re-chart the course of a nation is past. Collapse and disintegration have been assured, due in large part to dependence on cheap oil. When the dust settles there will be a proliferation of local cultures. Meanwhile, the extreme state of a society hard wired to consume its way to eco-hell is unchangeable.

This is a blind culture that cannot see its own true roots. Who came to North America to conquer and set up a foreign culture, and what was the prime objective? Sky-god fearing, private-property obsessed, master-slave opportunists: the antithesis of the indigenous nature-revering, communal, more egalitarian, diverse cultures that had found the key to surviving and thriving for a thousand generations.

This does not imply there was nothing good in the newcomers or in their exploits (Jefferson, Tom Paine, or their successors in great thought such as Thoreau and Muir). Indeed, the courageous new Americans loved their small farms, the amazing scenery, and the soul of the land that spawned perhaps the greatest new forms of music the world has ever seen.

How can the goodness of U.S. Americans and the land they inhabit (and have changed irrevocably) be safeguarded and turned into a force for positive change at a time of runaway destruction at the hands of ecocidal, greedy corporations and their tools in political power?

There is no political answer, but there is a cultural-change answer.

By abandoning a way of living that denies our true needs for healthy nature and human closeness, taking steps to conserve the land, air and water, we cannot help but find ourselves cutting the umbilical cord to the terminally ill host. What would we be losing? For one thing, car dependency: we can't afford it anyway, financially or ecologically. We would then be looking to our neighbors and family for solutions to daily living, losing the isolation of total reliance on shopping and technology.

Organizing household and neighborhood composting, gardening and home repairs are more first steps toward restoring real community and socioeconomic resilience.

Human potential is unlimited. Those who believe deep change is not possible in the foreseeable future, while it is our only choice if we are to turn back the worst of petrocollapse that has clearly been unleashed, will be shocked by the upheaval to come in their own lives and throughout the modern world.

Such a revolution, with eventual political outcomes of a more local-based and nature-respecting basis than the conventional top-down growth-maximizing sort, is within us now, waiting to spread and flower.

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Time to Take the Gloves off with Obama,
by Jan Lundberg and Jeff Gerritsen,
18 June 2009