Progress is Heresy: Nukes and the Abandonment of Traditions

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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In traditional cultures that cared for the land, all people enjoyed generation after generation of living reasonably, if not perfectly or with fabulous wealth. Food was grown locally, as were plant medicines and materials for clothing and shelter. Some big trees were left standing, taken only occasionally for a long-lasting community purpose such as a dugout canoe -- not for one man's private patio.

This time-honored way of living did not see freeways or nuclear power stations take over the landscape and pollute the air and water, or change the way people related to each other or to the land. But as Western Civilization advanced, the notions of progress and growth took root and became major pursuits. This assured the spiral of greed and expansion that has culminated in vast projects beyond the human scale: shopping malls, port facilities for huge cargo ships, downtown skyscrapers, and industrial agriculture. And nukes. Clearly, our approach to Mother Nature is way out of control. It's too late to compromise and thus limit ourselves to partial rape.

"Heresy" is used in the title of this manifesto so as to dramatize that anti-community, land-destroying selfish practices did not used to be tolerated. They weren't even contemplated by those secure in their tribe that lived peacefully off pristine Nature and her bounty. (True, there was crime and murder from day one. But, for uncounted millennia, extinction was not the direction as it is today.) "Work" as we know it was a later invention accompanying the advent of mass slavery. Time was, meeting life's necessities and thriving were always part of daily living, sharing, and caring. This is in contrast with today's system that is rapidly proving to be just a crock; if in doubt, just read the increasingly insane news, while thinking critically. Primitive cultures did not have a word for "work" or "free." It took a mutation and invasion, such as of the Western Hemisphere, for the "Indians" to be shocked by the White Man's claim of ownership of land and water and the taking of too many animals.

Rather than endlessly recount the mistakes and crimes of those who have foisted nukes, petrochemical Superfund sites and the like on the people and our fellow species, and rather than just fight policies that allow harm to our environment or cheat citizens of their rights, some activists see the urgent need for a true culture change. They have come to view the road of industrial civilization as a tragic diversion and trap that must be questioned and terminated as soon as possible.

Today, with the worst-case-scenario "oops" at Fukushima and its multiple meltdowns, the task is to end now the terror of nuclear power and nuclear weapons, and stop the greenhouse gas assault on Earth's climate. Increasingly the issue is "by what means." A bloody civil war, such as in Libya's case, is a poor option when nonviolence such as with Egypt gets the goods. We must keep in mind that the whole industrial, overgrown system is destroying itself far more effectively and rapidly than any social movement could. What we are left with when the dust settles may depend on the best direction we could manage, starting now.

Those not discussing a complete, permanent break from wasting the Earth and end exploitation and oppression prefer a "safer" and "non-controversial" approach: keep up the technological progress and the global consumer economy, but make it all "greener." These adherents include "activists" who are paid, nonprofit professionals on good terms with government and large corporations. Overpopulation is off the table. This pleases those profiting from "endless" growth in part through an ever-increasing labor pool that cannot do collective bargaining to share in the spoils of materialism.

The movement to end nukes has to be based on understanding that we do not need the quantity of exosomatic energy [useful energy throughput outside human bodies] that we have been consuming for our conveniences, for aggressive wars, and the competition for unlimited material wealth. Understanding peak oil is also essential for a viable movement, for the days of cheap energy and petroleum's materials and chemicals are swiftly drawing to a close. The technofix-substitutes for petroleum are simply not present or "around the corner" in a scalable quantity or level of development,

when all modern infrastructure is totally oil dependent. Only decentralized, local energy use is sustainable, so we have to face petrocollapse and move onward.

To reach consensus on these principles, total community involvement is required. It isn't citizenship to merely vote every couple of years, pay one's taxes, and behave kindly to one and all. Jefferson and Lincoln advocated periodic revolution to assure a workable connection from government to the governed, such that the governed were really the governors.

Whatever style of self-rule -- tribal councils, elections of leaders accountable to the people -- there cannot be a somnolent mass of uninvolved workers serving bureaucratic elitists or capitalist bosses -- for long, anyhow.

The goal of a meaningful movement to save Earth's ecosystem from industrialism and overpopulation has to start with a demand: begin shutting down nuclear power plants now, and defusing and banning all nuclear weapons. We cannot rest until this is agreed upon and pursued relentlessly. Only civil disobedience will assure, with other methods as well, the victory we need for our common survival.

What are we up against? False friends, for starters. In the U.S., when Democrats or green Independents believe the task is mostly to thwart Republicans, the fact remains that "Obama defends use of nuclear energy despite calamity in Japan" (Associated Press). Obama's stance is so stubborn that he doesn't even feel an impulse to close the barn

door after the horse has run out.

Much of the rest of the world isn't so stupid or corrupt: "Beijing suspends nuclear plant approvals" (South China Morning Post); "EU mulls nuclear-free future, tests on reactors" (Reuters). In Europe the people know that only massive protests will get the job done. The U.S. must do its part and understand that only the risk of arrest on the streets and occupying the halls of power will bring about change, and that elections don't do the job.

A culture change is not just to stop nukes, when we likewise cannot allow coal-burning to continue, millions of cars needlessly moving people so inefficiently, or factory farming that destroys clean water supplies. On the life-style level, the personal and reckless use of disposable plastic has to be part of a successful eco-movement -- even when someone engaging in such harmful waste is a tireless anti-nuke agitator. The integrated approach depends on full awareness and a sense of belonging to both humanity and Mother Earth.

Are you ready to get arrested for nonviolently protesting pro-nuclear policies and our so-called leaders? I am. See you out there. Oh yeah, start with boycotting General Electric (maker/designer of boiling water nuclear power stations).

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Urgent question -

Regarding the Fukushima radiation plume hitting the U.S.: Chernobyl killed an estimated 10,000 in the U.S. So it is nonsensical that statements such as this, from the New York Times today, are on the rise: "Health and nuclear experts emphasize that radiation in the plume will be diluted as it travels and, at worst, would have extremely minor health consequences in the United States, even if hints of it are ultimately detectable. In a similar way, radiation from the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 spread around the globe and reached the West Coast of the United States in 10 days, its levels measurable but minuscule." Scientists Project Path of Radiation Plume. Could misinformation be the order of the day? To a high degree, yes.

Further Reading

Japanese govt. blacks out radiation readings near smoldering nuke plants

U.S. radiation experts try to decipher reports from Japan, by Steve Sternberg, USA TODAY

"The Japanese government's radiation report for the country's 47 prefectures Wednesday had a notable omission: Fukushima, ground zero in Japan's nuclear crisis. Measurements from Ibaraki, just south of Fukushima, were also blanked out.

"Radiation experts in the USA say that the lack of information about radioactivity released from the smoldering reactors makes it impossible to gauge the current danger, project how bad a potential meltdown might be or calculate how much fallout might reach the USA."

China halts nuke expansion, but Obama? No way! He belongs to Exelon!

A Bit More on Barack,
by Ken Silverstein, October 26, 2006:
"Exelon, a leading nuclear-plant operator based in Illinois, is a big donor to Obama..."

"Obama defends use of nuclear energy despite calamity in Japan", March 15, 2011 Associated Press

"Obama Hearts Nuke Giant Exelon"
by Taylor Marsh, February 4, 2008
huffingtonpost.com:
"Well isn't this a cozy little group: Obama, Exelon, and their consultant, Obama's main man David Axelrod. A partnership made in heaven for the nuclear giant Exelon, which has given 'at least $227,000' to Obama's campaign that eventually got them legislation from the Illinois Senator written with their best interests in mind."

"Beijing suspends nuclear plant approvals"

Checks of existing facilities, 2020 expansion plan under review as Japan crisis worsens
South China Morning Post

"EU mulls nuclear-free future, tests on reactors",
March 16, 2011,
Reuters

"Helicopters dump water on nuclear plant in Japan" (but have to turn back due to radiation): CNN.com,
March 16, 2011 9:17 p.m. EDT