Wealth at too great a cost

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An observation on modern society, from a Mayan village

Rich people can afford anything, or so it is assumed. But our rapidly changing world demands a new accounting of what goes on in the creation and distribution of material wealth amidst unprecedented global population size.

We've heard that the high mucky-mucks will eventually find they can't eat money, nor get into Heaven as well as a camel can get through the eye of a needle. We've heard that "You can't take it with you," from the Keef Hartley Band's song of that title. But now it's time to think in terms of the historic change facing humanity, as the excesses of the pinnacle of Western Civilization take our breath away.

The result of pursuing gain and privilege has been self-destruction for a large segment of modern humanity and life in general. The obliteration of countless species is seldom mentioned in mass-media commentaries or political speeches. Yet, even as we all -– rich and poor -– notice the unraveling of nature's intricate structure that wealth has been built upon, we see the blind continuation of massive exploitation by the few for the few.

There are two time frames being considered separately: (1) the present and short-term, and (2) the long-term that stretches beyond our own lives. The second time-frame is moving into the first one, when we see long-term effects (e.g., climate) showing up sooner than scientists thought possible a few years ago. In the present we see profit maximizers and foolhardy consumers closing their eyes to the future. They knowingly compromise the survival of their own progeny.

Those who either do not want to participate in predatory behavior, or who see the future's unfolding mega-crisis, are the rare element in the dominant culture -– when caring for fellow beings is a passport to self-imposed poverty.

Yet, living now the future -- what must become our sustainable culture -– is an experience of greater wealth of a different and sometimes intangible sort! The rewards include learning to live in the way that maintains and builds real wealth, like composted soil is created and spread for greater food production and erosion-prevention.

Petroleum-based products are pervasive planet-wide, and can be had by anyone regardless of race, class, gender or creed. Yet, the purchase of and reliance on petroleum actually costs a great deal, both financially and socially/ecologically. And, once the adoption of a petroleum oriented life-style is accomplished, going back to nature and social cooperation is difficult. According to the mass illusion, it is impossible.