

Why it's best that people lose their jobs in this unsustainable economy

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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People need to lose their jobs. It sounds crazy, but what if it's true?

In this time of mounting tensions and rude awakenings, it is fortunate we can stress compassion and positive ideas. Yet, foremost we must be warned about our present course as an unsustainable society. Sudden, disruptive change is generally good to avoid, but sometimes we need to make an abrupt and wrenching move to save ourselves.

Not being able to eat money is perhaps the best reason to prepare for the future hardening of economic and ecological reality. Whether we call our fate petrocollapse or financial collapse, we are about to find out that a closer relationship to our land and our neighbors is all that matters. Looking at what a typical job today really does for us or our community -- besides generating cash for others to profit off of -- helps open the mind to an alternative way of living without spinning our wheels.

If we cannot head off the worst of a crisis with intelligent action, at least we can anticipate changes openly among ourselves. In so doing we counter the prevailing stupidity which is where the big money is. Bailing out the automobile industry is the next waste of money on a colossal scale. Recessions and depressions are just part of the economy's old-school "business cycle" as well as common sense: what goes up must come down. It is prudent to say it is better to deal with reality sooner rather than put it off.

In today's world, what really has to change is our lifestyle. But as long as people can cling to a paycheck (or stock dividend), change is retarded and the lethal system of waste and exploitation lumbers on until it takes us down over the cliff. A slightly milder way of introducing the need to give up suicide and ecocide is to suggest exploring, "Why losing your job can be a good thing today." If we consider essential needs being met, most jobs are seldom directly applicable anymore to community resiliency. So, whether it is through employment or unemployment, we need to resurrect techniques of self-sufficiency.

Here are additional reasons we need to lose jobs that prop up the climate-changing industrial system (the first three are like saying "Location, location, location" when one comes up with the three most important factors for lucrative property values):

- The ecosystem is deteriorating rapidly.
- The environment's going to hell in a hand-basket.
- It's not nice to fool Mother Nature! (from a margarine commercial, 1970s)
- Local economics that liberate people are being instituted and have great promise.
- Entropy happens. "Everything made gets destroyed" (Bronwyn Lundberg).
- Monotonous work is unhealthy, dispiriting, and such employment is slavery.

- Employment takes time away from important survival tasks such as seed saving and seed sharing.
- U.S. society and its government have earned disdain by behaving as if they are fundamentally bad. We have a system of friendly fascism that white-washes issues of deadly pollution and toxicity. Supporting the system as a worker paying taxes is one thing, but being unable to bring about a better world is a killer.

Culture Change has covered these points at length and for years. Here is all the reason we need for the first three bullet-points:

(Bonn, 17 November 2008) - Two weeks ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland, the UN Climate Change Secretariat in Bonn has reported that greenhouse gas emissions in industrialized countries continue to rise. [UNFCCC Press Release]

On the same island as the UN headquarters is a player that's like a wolf in sheep's clothing. We are reminded of corporate news media's real allegiances when we see an outrageous column in the New York Times on trying to preserve inappropriate, doomed car manufacturing jobs. Published Saturday, the column "'Drop Dead' Is Not an Option" tries to justify corporate socialism by saying auto manufacturer bailouts are just as right to do as it was to rescue insolvent New York City in 1975. To make the argument sound progressive and liberal, the "free market" ideology was attacked by the columnist. I for one was not fooled, and jumped on it with my letter below:

Dear Editor,

Bob Herbert's column in support of bailing out General Motors shows he knows nothing about and cares little for ecological health. There are no jobs on a dead planet. And, any jobs based on unsustainable depletion of resources are soon going to be lost. Oil has reached its global peak of extraction.

While the automobile companies are still intact they should be forced to retool their factories to make bicycles. Losing our car fleet (imports too) will save 100,000 people a year in this country from crash deaths and fatal diseases from exhaust fumes. Approximately one million animals are killed by vehicles daily on U.S. roads. Millions of acres of good farmland are destroyed by car-oriented urban sprawl. But those facts are not news or the basis of advertising revenue for corporations. A free press supports life and justice instead of ecocide, mayhem on the roads and dead-end jobs.

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Only once have I gotten a letter published criticizing car-ad revenue, and it was last year in the San Francisco Examiner; I was floored. We shall see if the Times runs this.

In the Wall Street Journal's Environmental Capital blog on Nov. 14, none other than the status quo itself was handed a kind sacrifice, or a suggested gesture of same, by peak oilist Robert Hirsch. It is his report we have quoted so many times about the impossibility of mitigating peak oil (which I believe is upon us).

TO THE PEAK OIL COMMUNITY:

The world is in the midst of the most severe financial crisis in most of our lifetimes. The economic damage that has already been wrought is considerable, and we have yet to see the bottom or the turnaround. Against this background, I suggest that the peak oil community minimize its efforts to awaken the world to the near-term dangers of world oil supply. The motivation is simple: By minimizing our efforts in the near term, we may not add fuel to the economic fires that are already burning so fiercely.

Bob Hirsch didn't bother including me on the recipient list; he knows where I stand. How does he think "the turnaround" can happen when cheap energy is gone, gone, gone? Remember folks, the cheaply produced petroleum is all depleted, and any low prices for recent fields' oil are subsidized prices. Economic growth can no longer be supported. Growth has stopped so we have lower nominal oil prices (without subsidies showing). The price of oil collapsed, to a degree, reflecting financial collapse and job losses. Peak is here, so economic fires have barely begun.

The present economy and its unimaginative defenders are just running on hope. The addict hoping for a fix around the street-corner is running on hope. Continuing our overpopulation's burning of fuels and forests while imagining we are "greening" jobs in a consumer economy is running on hope. To unplug the global warming machinery is productive hope we can run with. Just as important is to start planting trees collectively, billions per day -- Albert Bates (author of Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook) calculates that excess atmospheric CO2 can be removed in under a year. What are we waiting for, a GM paycheck?

Retooling car factories for more than bicycles

A Michigan peak oil meeting was just concluded, where Albert Bates spoke. He reported the following after he saw my letter to the Times:

Lots of talk at this conference (Heinberg, me, others) about ideas for retooling GM: streetcars, light rail, wind turbines, HPVs. GM is crashing the economy of Michigan and the Governor here is pulling stings with Obama to make sure they can get back on Plan A as soon as possible, using funny money.

Hard truth: They need to skip the whole GM rebuild scene and let China and India make cars for the world now. It is a dead industry. Want to assemble something? Assemble biochar kilns, wave power devices, solar powered tractors, algae oil presses. Fuck cars. If the USA has made its last car it is none too soon. We have more than we need. As they die, let them be recycled into parts and planters.

Tackling anti-environment, liberal Democratic Party doctrine

A new report in wide circulation, "A Pro-Growth, Progressive Economic Agenda", should sound a warning to truly progressive people. This was my reaction, sent to the authors and to Truthout.org that circulated the report:

Growth is the problem. The Center for American Progress and other Democrats appear to have more reasonable policy ideas than the Bushies, but ecological reality and peak oil require that we abandon the idea of economic growth. Understandably, job losses seem like they need to be remedied by more jobs. But this leads nowhere if the cheap energy that created those jobs is gone. The Center for American Progress and other progressives including the Democrats stand for a national and global economy; that is in opposition to the wonderful alternative known as local economics which offers true sustainability.

The article said, "the new administration has the opportunity to implement pro-growth, progressive economic policies to get the economy back on track." On track means more of the same: more manufacturing, toxic exposures, greenhouse

gas emissions, and buying unneeded stuff.

The notion of green jobs is highly questionable when it hinges on more consumer spending and creating energy systems for unnecessary, destructive machines. It's too late to preserve the status quo with a technofix even if peak oil were ten years into the future, as shown by the Hirsch Report on peak-oil mitigation submitted to the U.S. Dept. of Energy in 2005.

"(G)rowing middle-class incomes" are touted to be the "solution" but are really nothing more than the same old illusion of the bankrupt American Dream based on nuclear family over-consumption.

The Center for American Progress decries "ineffective military spending" but this does not mean they want to slash military spending. (Objecting to the "conduct of the war" does not get our invading forces out of other countries that were not going to invade us.)

It's the old order jiving us when the Center for American Progress says the nation ""must focus on policies that both raise the economic tide and lift all boats - boosting productivity and our gross national product while fostering the shared prosperity that defines our nation's values." To justify trickle-down economics with the call for "green-collar jobs" is green-washing and not true progress. But it sure fits in with the goal of corporate profits at the expense of people and other species.

For more on the above, see www.culturechange.org

Conclusion

What is it like to walk away from bad employment? Answer: always better than to wait for the axe to fall and finding oneself unprepared and lacking useful skills. When is it best to leave a job that only accommodates our overbuilt society? As soon as you can think of something more productive to do that you enjoy: now.

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Further Reading:

"I community, do you? - Anti-work, pro-community" Culture Change Magazine issue 20 (never printed), by Jan Lundberg, Miguel Valencia, Susan Meeker-Lowry, 2002:

culturechange.org

"The right to be poor - and to thrive: Toward a Constitutional Amendment", Culture Change e-Letter #57, by Jan Lundberg, March 30, 2004:

culturechange.org

References:

The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Poznań, 1-12 December 2008:

unfccc.int

"'Drop Dead' Is Not an Option" by Bob Herbert, New York Times, Nov. 15, 2008:

nytimes.com

"Peak Oil: Prominent Peaker Tells Allies to (Temporarily) Pipe Down", Wall Street Journal Online, by Neil King Jr.:

blogs.wsj.com

The Conference on Michigan's Future: Energy, Economy & Environment, Thompsonville, Michigan, Nov. 14 - Nov. 16, 2008:

futuremichigan.org

Albert Bates' blog:

The Great Change

"A Pro-Growth, Progressive Economic Agenda" (third in a three-part series on "Change for America: A Progressive Blueprint for the 44th President."):

pr.thinkprogress.org

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Employment is a crime so let me barter my own way

Helping out each other every day and every way

I'm all for culture change

Police cars can fade away

from Dream in D, album "Best of Redwood Dreams" by Depaver Jan