# End Power and Reduce Scale

Contributed by Chuck Burr
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During the agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago, a minority of people invented a way to give themselves power over the majority. We call this invention “civilization.” Others like Neil Kramer call it the “control system.”

For the first time large surpluses of food could be created, counted, and concentrated. Before that we had limited forms of agriculture and animal husbandry. But this time it was different.
Instead of supplementing the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, agriculture competed against all of nature in a novel form called “totalitarian agriculture.” Instead of working with the native polycultures, the inventors of our culture found they could create great surpluses if they replaced natural landscapes with human food. This also allowed for the first time denial of food to other species and even wholesale destruction of species that competed for our food.

There is only one catch. You have to work about twice as hard to earn a living under agriculture as you do living a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. You literally have to whip people to live an agricultural lifestyle. So, how do you get people to give up their life of leisure?

You lock up the food. This was the first means of control of the majority by a minority.

The eventual closure of the commons and privatizing of the land gave whoever controls the land an iron clad control over the majority -- if you don’t work, you do not eat. It is that simple. The Fall of man was caused by private property. Self-love arose when man started to quarrel over the earth -- he would shut all others out.

Control of the land also means control of water, timber, fiber, minerals, and energy. It has worked very well. In England .28 percent of the population owns 64 percent of the land. In the United States the top one percent of the population now owns more than the bottom 95 percent.

A code of rules was needed to enforce privatization of the commons. We call these rules laws. This ensured that society as a whole would enforce this system of privatization.

With the control of natural resources, came the need of an interchangeable system of wealth -- money was born. First we had commodity- and precious metals-backed money, then we had paper money, and now with our global financial markets and computers we have valueless virtual money. This has led to the speculative financial bubble that is now bursting. There is now three times as much money in the world as the total value of all goods and services. It has become not the control of money that yields the real power but the control of the “flow” of money.

Money has become the oxygen of our economy that is now the life support system of humanity. This financial system is the lungs of the economy. Whoever, controls the lungs controls the world. It is not the money, it’s the flow of the money that counts. This is why Wall Street got a $700 billion bailout and the auto industry got only a $15 billion bailout. Those in true power have set up private central banks in every major country. The U.S. Federal Reserve is not a government agency; it is a private bank with confidential owners.

Religion has also been a big factor is maintaining hierarchical control. Jesus said “choose,” Mohammed said “submit,” and Moses had the “ten commandments.” God and heaven were invented to rationalize the daily drudgery of our lives. Before modern salvationist religions, all people shared one belief, animism. They just respected the fire of life in all living things. This was a spirituality that has no book, is not a religion, and is not even capitalized.

Power can also come in small amounts. Those who have significant power over you and your family include the boss at work, teachers, admission officers, utilities, credit card companies, airlines, politicians, healthcare providers, the media, the church, and the landlord or condo association.

How do we get out? Who wants to work all day building pyramids for someone else with no guarantee that you will not lose your job tomorrow or your retirement in the future?

First, I am beginning to believe that we cannot actually change our culture -- its not salvageable. One of the stories we live by is that “civilization must continue.” Nothing lasts forever, and now at our current overpopulation level it is becoming apparent that our culture is actually destroying our true life support system. Our culture has made humanity a species of uncontrolled growth. It has also made us not only cancerous to our home, while the financial system has made us parasitic. We are now financially consuming our own young with the deficits we are creating today. Our children will have to pay our debts when we are gone tomorrow.

It is humanity’s nature to live in harmony with our home. Every cell in our body knows this. That is why we find no peace no matter how wealthy we become. We have lived in harmony with the earth for three or four million years. It is only in the last 10,000 years that our culture has made humanity toxic to its host.

The answer is new cultures; not one new culture, but many variations. The only way to get there is to become the change we want to see. We have to find communities of like-minded people that can give us the alternatives we seek. For example, a suburban automobile-based lifestyle offers little of the alternatives that a pedestrian permaculture community can.

But we have to do much more than become more interdependently independent. We have to give up power. We have to give up control of anything that can be concentrated including food, land, housing, water, timber, and money.

We also have to give up systems that enable a minority to control the majority. Democracy is a system of tyranny of the majority to placate the masses. It makes us feel as though we get to be in charge of our destiny a little bit. This could not be further from the truth, since our system of governance from the local to the national level grants a handful of people control of everything from spending, laws, and even going to war.

We are never asked on a ballot to decide how much of our taxes goes to each department. Our rulers are afraid we will eliminate the military -- the most profitable part of the military industrial complex. We give that power away to a handful people that often vote for what they believe is right and not want the voters want. Congress got telephone calls at about 100 to 1 opposing the $700 billion financial bailout, but they voted for it anyway because the believe they know what is best. Congress members were also threatened with martial law if the bailout was not immediately authorized.

When it comes time to vote, those who make it on the ballot give us relatively little choice -- they are still defenders of our culture, Democrat or Republican. Our system of governance is an iron-clad system to control the population from sea to shining sea. Modern nation states are concentrators and protectors of wealth and power.

One of the problems of our culture is its scale. Do we really need a transnational company to flip hamburgers? Do we really need a country a third the size of North America? Everything on a giant scale from corporations to governments are now being rendered failures as we begin to enter the grip of peak oil.

Why not let regional communities decide if they want to be part of the larger nation state or not? Ernest Callenbach's Ecotopia describes how northern California, Oregon, and Washington secede from the union to create a steady-state society.
I believe one of the first ways to reduce power is to reduce scale. The system of social organization that is evolutionarily proven to work for humanity for millions of years is not the global corporation, nor the nation state: it is the tribe. Our culture has had 10,000 years to create a just and sustainable society but has failed completely.

Here are some of the steps I envision. Make decisions in your community by consensus -- no town councils. Working committees should report to the tribal community as a whole. End private property -- put your land in a land trust for the benefit of the community. Work towards eventually replacing government, industry, and private ownership of the commons with local community ownership. Why should your local ecosystem be clear cut to benefit a few wealthy individuals thousands of miles away? Shouldn't the local community decide how local resources are sustainably used and who benefits from their use?

However, even in small scale, there will be individuals who desire to put themselves in positions of power. We all know these people. Again we must use consensus decision making on a local scale.

Early North American native tribal leaders were largely ceremonial positions. Colonist governments were frustrated because there was no one person "in charge" with whom to make treaties. Many tribal councils or governments were inventions of the white man to take away power from tribal consensus and give it to a few that could be dealt with. Native American tribes that still operate by consensus have the greatest control over their resources today.

So why end the nation state and global power? Don't they get things done? Well, that may precisely be the point, they get things we don't want done. Progress is another word for destruction of nature -- our only life support system.
Based on my experience working in congress and the Executive Office of the President, and inside industry from fortune 500 companies down to small entrepreneurial companies, participation in local government, and nonprofit work, I would estimate that at least half of every dollar spent is wasted and or concentrated. That means that half of your entire work week is spent on wasted effort.

That is why I believe we should replace large scale systems with local interdependent tribal scale communities. Don't walk away from our culture, walk toward something better. Maybe there is a blend for those who must be fed by our corporations and those who see that as a false culture and want our own cultures.
I want to emphasize that I am not advocating the overnight tear down of our civilization without first developing a replacement and transition communities.

Follow a permaculture principle and be ready to replace a weed before you pull it. Also, hierarchies have great defenses from attack from below, however, they have none for abandonment.

I have suggested in the past that all remaining native cultures should be protected, expanded, and studied as our greatest world heritage treasures. Study in our schools what is truly sustainable about tribal communities instead of studying dead presidents. The important part again is not how tribes live but what makes these communities evolutionarily sustainable.

The solutions to most of our problems lie where there is no concentration of power. We have to let power fade in all of its forms.

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Further Reading:

Neil Kramer, The Cleaver

Daniel Quinn(, The Story of B

Marshall Sahlins,( Stone Age Economics

Toby Hemenway(, Gaia's Garden: A Guide to Home-Scale Permaculture

Ernest Callenbach,( Ecotopia

Consensus (www.consensus.net( A Manual for Group Facilitators

Land Trusts( www.cltnetwork.org (www.osalt.org

State of Jefferson (www.jeffersonstate.com

Statistics on wealth disparity:

Mark Zepezauer, Take The Rich Off Welfare, 2004, page 6 (footnote reference)

Norman D. Livergood America, Awake!, 2003, page 114

Colin Ward, Resurgence magazine, 2002, page 66