The Depression Has Come - Let's Finish the Job, Right

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
05 January 2009

Critical Comment - Culture Change Letter #227 -
The New York Times made my day when it reported on the state of the economy and world trade on January 3, after the first business day of the new year. We won't see a corporate media headline of "Depression Cuts Greenhouse Gases Drastically" or "This is What Petrocollapse Looks Like" very soon because not enough people see the interconnections of history's trends on energy and limits. But I'll take what I can get for some winter good cheer.

With the Earth's climate at the tipping point to spin the planet into overheated mass extinction, some of us are thankful for the economy's collapse. "The worst slowdown since the Great Depression," said the New York Times (Business Day, Jan. 3). While it's true some kinds of environmental protection slacken when times are rougher for certain industries, on the whole there's a direct relationship between consumption and ecological destruction. Another relationship is between increased consumption (and work and debt) to unhappiness, mental illness and diminished social cohesion.

In addition to climate concerns and society's pathologies, we need to terminate our dangerous reliance on petroleum, coal, natural gas, uranium other metals and poisons that have built up our toxic house of cards. There are positive trends, such as dam removal and the radicalization of America's top climate scientist, James Hansen.

Although overpopulation has already been achieved thanks to petroleum's former rising abundance, and petrocollapse began last year with sustained skyrocketing prices, we can cushion the blows from the collapsing house of cards by cutting our losses. This means retreating into our local communities' economies and their inherent social structures for mutual aid. With every step we start to undo some of the momentum to kill off the climate as we've known it.

Essential economic activity goes on in a Depression, but there's less wealth generated. The problem is when the rich try to get richer off the poor's inability to pay for housing. As tough as the housing crisis may become if landlords and banks try to create mass homelessness -- that is, if people don't resist effectively -- our collective problem will not be shelter. For there's plenty of unused living space: churches, office buildings, second homes of the rich, etc.

What there's not going to be enough of is food, when nine energy inputs from fossil fuels go into food production for every one unit of calories yielded by the food in question (in the U.S.). As for transporting the food, we have gotten used to the average morsel traveling 1,500 miles before reaching the plate. So we have a painful rebalancing of energy ahead. Indications are that it has started, although some changes at this point are publicized as lifestyle news stories for leisurely readers of green lore. Examples are the "Loving the 100 Mile Diet" and "Sail Transport Network Hauls Food Across the Sea."

Clearly, "alternatives" such as those as well as urban food gardens, pedal power produce-hauling, and more veganism need to begin in ernest.

These methods for local self-sufficiency and sustainable food and freight were laughed at by most of the "mainstream" until now. Now they make more sense to anyone questioning buying a car or shelling out scarce dollars for expensive, long-distance hauled food.

To pursue these strategies now, to strip the car and oil industries of "earnings," will accelerate the fall of the corporate petroleum state. Its days are numbered, prompting a call for the proactive dissolution of the U.S. (Culture Change Letter #221). There's more to be done to finish the job of this oil-shock induced Depression, for more positive outcomes than we'll get if we cling to yesterday's economic system. It's too fantastic this week anyway, but what about ceasing 90% of

the "Defense" budget to help bring an end to the deadly economic system heating the climate? We cannot foresee how soon collapse will be able to run its course to put the self-serving weapons industry mostly out of business.

But we can rejoice in the fact that

"The U.S. economy was on even weaker footing than commonly believed as 2008 came to a close. Moreover, the signal from the export orders index is that the rest of the world is right there with us. Hardly a signal for economic recovery anytime soon. New orders... are at the lowest level on record going back to January 1948." (New York Times, Jan. 3)

Who would have thought just six months ago that widgets and other pollution boxes would start to dry up so soon, with much fewer freighters from China now coming to the U.S.? "Maybe there's a god after all," said a street person priding herself on consuming less and less new stuff [overheard at a climate change activist meeting].

We are bombarded with corporate hope and sympathy for the polluting giants of industry: the phrase "economic recovery" is propagandistic mantra that all of us are supposed to join in -- even though the present economy is based on theft, fraud, exploitation and destruction. Is there another way? This is answered in the affirmative by Culture Change columnist Chuck Burr ("A Better Way of Making a Living for Humanity", link below) and in many other essays in Culture Change's two decades.

More propaganda: "Grim readings come from the Asia-Pacific region, including China and India." (New York Times, Jan. 3) Let's keep in mind that China has been putting up one new coal-fired power station per week while economic growth was about 10% annually -- a disaster for the planet's ecosystem and our health. Hallelujah that things are finally changing, even faster than we could have dreamed. This means hope for life on Earth to flourish in its diversity, instead of being snuffed out by the great evil of history: economic growth and its inextricable sins.

Celebrate! "The manufacturing sector (of China) had contracted for a fifth consecutive month... the steepest decline in its history." Thank you gods and goddesses!

These developments occurred because of peak oil and peak money. Praise be to petrocollapse.

More wonderful news from the same edition of the Times: "November Chip Sales Slipped 10%" (from Reuters). Shucks, the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition must be in tears. Of joy.

"Desperate Retailers Try Frantic Discounts and Giveaways." Remember folks, do your duty to your local economy by never buying any corporate or far-away-made product -- get it used or local-made.

"Manufacturing is Suffering Globally" -- this undue pessimism about contraction is part of the imbalanced so-called journalism practiced by the nation's "newspaper of record." The Earth gets a break at long last, but this is "grim"? And "Worsening data..." -- this is objectivity?

What a gift from Santa Claus to start a year of more peace and less war on nature and, if trends continue, between the oil-greedy U.S. against other nations. If concerns such as militarism and generating positive feedback loops for the climate don't matter much today to Joe Sixpack, he can at least raise his Bud to this other news item in the same New York Times Business Day: "What's the use in endless collections calls? Creditors take what they can get." (from a story headlined as "Lenders Race to Settle While the Borrowers Still Have a Few Cents.") Happy new year, happy new age.

* * * * *

Further reading:

"Data Show Manufacturing Is Suffering In All Corners" by Bettina Wassener, New York Times, Jan. 3, 2009:

nytimes.com

"Sail Transport Network Hauls Food Across the Sea." by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #225:

culturechange.org

"A Better Way of Making a Living for Humanity" by Chuck Burr, January 2, 2009:

culturechange.org

"Dissolve the U.S.: an Option for Proactive Change before Collapse - Will Obama be a Greater Gorbachev?" by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #221:

culturechange.org

"Why it's best that people lose their jobs in this unsustainable economy" by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #214:

culturechange.org

"Peak Money: The Shambles of Peak Oil" by Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Letter #220:

culturechange.org

Cimate news and discussion that we initiated, ongoing since 2003: Global Warming Crisis Council

culturechange.org