

How Long Do We Hammer Away at the Mountain?

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
07 February 2009

Culture Change Letter #235 - To remove a major obstacle, we need the right tools. Our larger goal is to stop industrial economy's threat to the global ecosystem. What changes and alternatives must be made to the dominant system?

Any reader of meaningful news stories or surfer of progressive websites knows that crises are mounting: In addition to the ecological, we can all see that social structures and ownership issues are a story of misery for the many through inequity. What's more, people are being killed by toxins, radiation, and deprivation of basic needs and rights. We can find more and more to worry about and rail against, but there's no relief in sight.

Or is there? Do some of us not want to recognize relief because it's controversial and cannot be gobbled down with gratification right this moment? But I got ahead of myself. So anyway:

We naturally gravitate toward "solutions" and "alternatives." This is where the rubber meets the road (to use an expression unfit for an anti-car activist). We can agree on the need for saner policies, for alleviating disasters, and be more fair and constructive with public funds. However, the kinds of "solutions" and reforms that can get circulation in a corporate-funded media environment mean that censorship suppresses a wealth of myriad approaches to dealing with problems we face.

For example, we are told by the news media, government and academia that we must deal with "problems" rather than removing the system that causes them. Those of us opposing the system and pointing the way to another way of living -- with more humane values with a biocentric basis -- may be many or few, but are seldom in the forums that the vast majority of the public gets to witness or join. Democracy means, among other things, shouting down minority views and funding the mainstream to eliminate robust dissent. We also have the democratic right of unlimited amounts of information, but action is another matter that is not favored compared to "studying the problem" or hand-wringing over more sad information.

For my offering of a Culture Change dispatch today I began reading some promising articles that clearly addressed major ecological and energy issues. However, I noticed a pattern that has plagued activist literature -- innocently up to a point in recent time -- and that is much more glaring and dangerous now. There are two reasons:

(1) The denial of the dominant system's evil traits, as we see the refusal of the vested interests to get out of the way so the Earth can live, has been convenient for keeping one's head down and maintaining the respect of the power structure. It has been permissible to be outraged and impassioned about problems such as global warming, but almost no one dares lay blame to what is behind the obvious offenders. To advocate the termination of the industrial economy and the dismantling of exploitative, oppressive society is "off the table." Some ideas are rightly off the table, if they advocate outmoded "solutions" that would only rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic, or if one simply wishes to destroy and fail to nurture a sustainable culture to take over.

(2) Now that collapse is underway, and all hopes for a "recovery" of (destructive and unsustainable) growth depend on another economic bubble to feed the expanding yeast culture in the petri dish, we ought to roll with it. But no, the progressive community -- including pseudo radical leaders and writers -- prefer to be distracted by what programs and statements are coming out of the Obama White House. While it's true the progressives are not letting up on demands for improved civil rights, environmental protection and economic fairness, they too are apparently hoping for a return to

economic growth. Some do not, because they know a steady-state economy and perhaps a lower population size (oh my!) are needed. Yet, the obstacle to the meaningful changes we need, on top of the "change we can believe in," remains a mountain. Its name is the system. We can no longer ignore it or attempt to sculpt it into a benign entity. For it is self destructing and pulling all life down with it.

But it is collapsing. The disappearance of almost 600,000 more jobs in January in the U.S. is not something that can be much alleviated by the federal government or the corporations, given the downward momentum, when the whole economic system is steadily losing its financial resiliency at a fast clip. Consuming more and more was the basis of the economy for decades. In recent years the consumption -- recognized as the most important aspect of today's economy -- became completely dependent on deepening debt. Now that the house of cards is collapsing, we need to question everything. Such as "job loss." To lose a job can be like losing a disease. To gain personal time and begin more productive activity for one's survival and that of the immediate community is not a loss.

I don't mean to minimize the pain of a wrenching transition that will not be successful for many petroleum-dependent inappropriately skilled consumers. But to cling to thin air, as the materialistic economy evaporates, does not serve. Nor is it compassionate to promote the status quo when it has already left the building. Whether one prefers communitarianism or survivalism, anticipating the end of petro-civilization does not mean one likes to picture violent upheaval. But the more society does not prepare for the future, and clings to the past century of expansion and hyper "development," the more casualties there will be from the system as it falls down upon more victims' heads.

Goodbye crass commercialism bringing you mindless entertainment and false values. I resonate with Dancing On the Ruins of Multinational Corporations by eco-troubador Casey Neill, who in that foot-stomping song sings "Hello stars!"

But massive job-disappearance entails a local-economics reality that has no place anywhere, according to the agenda of the corporate news media fed by automobile advertising dollars. So this cannot be allowed by the powers that be, if possible. The trend/reversal/revolution from employment to do-it-yourself and village/tribal activity to meet essential needs means the end of growth-oriented capitalism. As long as the dying beast can throw its weight around, the inevitable socioeconomic trend is "off the table" along with culture change. So the progressives, reformists and pseudo-radicals who don't advocate bringing down the system are silent -- even as total collapse is clearly ahead if we extrapolate and give up on the prospect of some new bubble.

What we replace the system with has been explored in this column for years, but I'll just refer to the immediately preceding Culture Change Letters, #233 and #234. I welcome your comments, and hope that you will circulate these ideas through forwarding these essays far and wide. Realizing that writing and outreach are essential, let's remind ourselves that more importantly it's raw energy and guts that are required to change the world. To wait until the food trucks stop rolling in to the cities and towns is pathetically weak and irresponsible, considering what we know and can anticipate by now. Let us appeal to solidarity and audacity to take action, instead of relying on hope.

[credit for top photo: Permafrost Young Researchers Network.