

The old world is crashing down, welcome back the older

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Culture Change Letter #236 - This is the time we have been waiting for. Some of us, anyway. We wanted a better world, and we might just get it. The old one had to fall and get out of the way, and this must be finished for the sake of our faltering climate and for our own sakes.

Meanwhile the old guard is floundering around and is as useless as tits on a bull, as my father used to say. People are still mesmerized by power and imagery, but the luster and facade are fading. While some government spending can be along healthy lines, it is certainly not "the answer."

We have entered the time of the most rapid, sweeping change in culture. Great changes are in the works for the way people live and think. We are just beginning to see the failure of not just easy credit and overspending, but the failure of living for money and material things. Granted, most participants in the growth economy thought that's how things were supposed to work, and now they feel at a loss. These are people who have had little use for traditions of their ancestors.

They thought nature was something to dominate into submission and rape for pleasure and profit. They thought technology placed us above all life forms as well as primitive peoples, and that we could cast any number of them into the extinction bin. For we could continue to extract resources forever and solve any problem.

Now the humbling has begun, on several levels. By now only an idiot isn't worried about climate change. Now that we know full well what we're doing to the ecosystem, how can any sane person put the economy first instead of integrating it with ecology? How can defending our systemic destruction be tolerated?

There's been progress from a rude awakening: now only an idiot trusts the big bankers and government regulators. Only a fool is comfortable with the oil companies and car companies. All these forces are seen to have brought us low, and no one can deny the joblessness caused by letting the big shots call the shots. And most people sense things will get worse before they get better. Printing money and throwing it at lenders and government programs is obviously just more of the same -- the definition of insanity.

So far so good, in terms of better awareness. But real leadership would tell the people about the energy and oil reality and the consequences of overbuilding an economy based on a now depleted resource -- the easily produced oil is bye-bye. Alternative fuels cannot pick up the slack meaningfully for hundreds of millions of consumers of petroleum-fed crops and animal foods.

Going further, real leadership admits the shortcomings of "our" system: the reward of greed and the acceptance of other antisocial values, and the unsustainable wrecking of nature for a higher overpopulation to ride out into oblivion. As the politicians and the sell-out columnists and commentators hold their tongues and pretend everything is still more or less in control -- while nervously wondering what the free fall is going to do to their own security -- the masses of people turn to whatever is at hand to survive. The answer for us in North America is not in Afghanistan or Iraq.

But let's talk about goodness from the collapse of the established order. Keeping in mind that sudden decline is not pretty, and indeed is painful and tragic with many casualties on the way, there is reason for great optimism in the ending of big-money corporatism and the closing of the history book on unlimited growth. It had to be thus; any schoolkid knows that there can't be an infinite supply of anything in a finite sphere. How can the abandonment of such stupidity usher in anything worse than the tyranny of denialists we've had to put up with?

Necessity is the mother of re-invention. We don't need gadgetry invention; we need adaptations and skills to cope with a lower-energy world. We are increasingly forced to deal with a pissed off Mother Nature -- she is overshadowing mere concerns about the growth economy, more and more each day. So our approach to meeting basic human needs has got to use common sense and -- are you ready for this -- mutual cooperation. Now that the economy is collapsing -- I believe it will be final, total, and for good -- essential needs have to be met locally. With food being shipped on average 1,500

miles from farm to the U.S plate, such extravagance and idiocy must give way to what is grown locally. And we're stuck with our own local fresh water than can no longer be polluted by an employer, privatized by greedballs, or depleted for an animal-based diet.

The older world we threw out -- when our parents and grandparents embraced techno-conveniences and slacked off on the responsibility of educating their own children to learn what the great-grandparents knew -- is going to return shortly. Preserving food, repairing things, sitting down to all meals together, amusing ourselves with creativity and conviviality (instead of with machines in isolation), knowing our relatives well, respecting the land and waters that give us life -- such traditions are not choices but requirements for survival. And it's fun to survive, or more fun than the alternative. The individual will again feel pride that what one does matters to the community while not harming the planet. This does not mean that there won't be opportunists and mistaken people obstructing positive change. But with the end of the old order and its narrow mindset of paving over the farmland for "progress" -- largely because it will no longer be possible -- we can't help but restore our village ways and tribal ways of mutual aid, once again serving the common interest over personal gain. For we have just seen the era of personal gain start its free fall to the trash heap. Stimulus? Too bad there's not any discussion on what might be stimulated for the needed fundamental change.

A common error is to promote sustainable systems in a vacuum as if their logical superiority over idiotic and subsidized capitalist anachronisms need only to be made available. It's great to promote them, provided they are not pie-in-the-sky technofixes. The problem is that good models are suppressed as long as the dominant system is intact or while petroleum is available. Therefore, the right course of action is to pursue the kinds of alternative models that both starve the beast and educate people to reject the present system. Then people can start to glimpse a better culture of sustainability and all that goes with it: sensible economics, co-leadership, compassion for the rest of the Earth's species, and the realization that we will never get another chance like now.

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