

Sudden mitigation or chaotic catastrophe

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
08 December 2005

Culture Change Letter #116

Positive developments are on the upswing, such as anti-Iraq-War stirrings and the demonstrations against greenhouse gases around the world on Dec. 3. The challenge is to bring many more people over to thinking in terms of peace and sustainability. We must take certain actions to ensure a safer world because life and nature as we know them are running out of time.

However, it's not so much a political struggle in terms of citizen lobbying, etc., as it's a matter of slashing petroleum use now -- individually, locally, and as a movement. From there we can visualize facing peak oil and petrocollapse in such a way that pursues alternatives in economics and social structures. Technology will primarily be valued for understanding how to mitigate the destructive technology we have allowed.

If the required change in consciousness is not quick enough, we are faced with chaos as well as catastrophe. If some planning gets going soon that can mitigate petrocollapse, for example, then we still have catastrophe but it will be lessened -- perhaps directed toward a resolution for maximum conservation; examples include human and pedal power according to their best potential.

What are our chances, you ask? Can we do something soon enough to turn around ominous trends? Well, it depends how long it takes to keep pondering this question instead of jumping right into the river of change. Get wet? Yep, sorry! When we face that the Gulf Stream has lost 30% of its power since 1992 (new study; read on), and our daily habits STILL don't change, we are in effect saying goodbye to the world, and we may as well toast the Earth's end.

Nevertheless there is hope

There's some doubt on the exact state of the ecosystem, and Mother Nature is too complex for us to really have complete knowledge, let alone control. So it is not useless or crazy that some people are actually taking action as if there is hope! Many have been at their disparate ways and experimentations for many years, although we don't see much about it in the profit-driven corporate media. Our educational system is not much more helpful than the mainstream news media. Here's what some people are doing to change their world and extricate themselves from a failing culture and unraveling society:

One of our Petrocollapse Conference speakers went to Oregon recently and reported back,

"A whole region is now planning for Peak Oil across multi-dimensional lines from sustainability to soil restoration; to needed skills and crafts; to organic, biointensive farming; to forming sister-city relationships with Willits California; even to regional ... government...

Soon these aspects of Peak must be brought into public discussion. If our objective is to save lives then this is where it is happening and we must both acknowledge and encourage it. People are ultimately going to have to solve all these problems by locality; by themselves. Lessons learned by the pioneers must be shared for the benefit of all who are listening."

Plan B Project is one approach to mitigation, involving city planning and quick adoption of sustainable living. (Listen to a speech on this at www.petrocollapse.org). The 17-year project that is Culture Change has certainly explored many of the needed strategies for sustainability, such as Pedal Power Produce and depaving to grow food in former driveways and parking lots.

A past Culture Change Letter containing references to what people are doing to achieve sustainability, whether as activists or just living lightly on the planet, covered "DIY" (Do It Yourself). It is discussed in detail in last year's essay that covered strategies in Cuba and Argentina as well. (CCL #80).

The Depletion Protocol, an initiative from the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas, seeks to forge a world agreement to wisely and fairly manage remaining oil reserves and oil consumption. While the original concept -- the Uppsala Oil Depletion Protocol -- is idealistic and can be laughed at by energy corporations and governments, the essential logic may well be adopted if the world continues on its present dangerous course:

"No country shall produce oil at above its current Depletion Rate, such being defined as annual production as a percentage of the estimated amount left to produce; Each importing country shall reduce its imports to match the current World Depletion Rate."

The big stumbling block might be time needed to create the accord and make it work. Richard Heinberg, peak oil author, equates the protocol's success as saving the world.

Impediments to mitigation

Either people are hip to the need to minimize car use now, as many are, or they are oblivious and may as well be cutting off pieces of our flesh. The die-hard drivers are harming us, themselves, and countless species. The whole problem certainly does not end with cars, although car dependence may be the critical place to start examining our disastrous way of life.

Most energy use and CO2 emissions in the industrial world have to do with buildings and not cars, but the car is the way we use and abuse the land. With buildings, non-oil alternatives for heating and cooling are possible, especially with intelligent design. Yet, this does not mean vast cities are sustainable if they can't provide their own energy locally and feed themselves, without making a huge "ecological footprint."

Some everyday sights and newfangled things are never questioned, adding to our woes and our ability to turn things around. In addition to the toxic plastics plague, there is our radiation dosage from our technological lifestyle which is harming us as surely as chemical exposures from petrochemicals such as pesticides and other poisons. According to international studies cited by the the Cellular Phone Task Force, a low-tech operation out of Mendocino, California,

"Using a cell phone or digital cordless phone for two minutes disrupts the blood-brain barrier. Longer use permanently destroys brain cells."

A host of physical illnesses can result from this kind of radiation, observed in the 3% of the nation's population that identifies the source of the ailments. Even 100 yards away from a radiating source the effects impact people and other living things. Cell towers are stealthily popping up almost everywhere in the developed world. Could there be a surprising price to pay for this energy-intensive, questionable technology? It may well far negate the convenience for business dependent on quick communication.

The big boys profit off the destruction of our health, and almost all of us -- including activists -- have just been muddling through as if there is a positive future no matter what. However, the disinclination to have children is growing among educated people, and it speaks of despair and cold analysis of our common plight. What percentage of the population is seriously depressed about the environmental mess and rising population on a resource-limited world? Maybe some institute should study that because it detracts from productivity and corporate profits! Just kidding.

The U.S.'s view is not the world's

World consciousness on environmental values is not so backward as we in the U.S. presume. Moreover, the rest of the world's divergent view makes the U.S. what it appears to be: an anti-environment thug fouling our collective planetary nest: A Gallup poll in 1992 found that over two-thirds of the world's population (based on a sample of thirty major countries) places the environment in the top three concerns. In the U.S. it is only 10% of Americans who normally agree with the statement that the environment is among the top, most important problems facing us today. In the twenty years since the first international Conference on the Environment (Stockholm),

"...environmental problems two decades ago (early 1970s) were viewed primarily as aesthetic issues, whereas these more recent results indicate clearly that they are now being viewed as real threats to health... 'generating increasing public concern around the globe.'" (Jonathan Deason)

Another myth busted by the same Gallup poll was that poorer nations were interested in catching up as polluters and thereby placed the economy as their top concern: "Citizens in poorer nations were as likely as those in richer nations to be concerned about global environmental problems." It was the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 that got civic society hoping for change. However, we at the Paving Moratorium Update called it Earth Plummet, even though we sent observers.

The corporate media spin, especially in the U.S., has betrayed us all, allowing for a decade and a half of bogus "debate" on climate change and global warming. Now it's at a point where we must throw the whole baby out with the bath water in order to head 180 degrees away from perpetuating the system of global consumption. Consuming the globe is not sustainable, but so many people, including professional environmentalists, are appallingly open to proceeding as if The Market will provide everything we need. Every day that this mindset continues takes away our options for mitigating petrocollapse and climate change.

What won't work

There's a big difference between (A) anticipating limited forms of energy use by a small population that taps the

particularly local advantages of high wind, warm sunlight, leftover biomass, etc. and (B) promoting with renewable energy technology the idea of a continued consumer society and an intact U.S. government that will continue to do its excellent, representative job (Ahem...). This latter vision (B) is the often well-meant notion of just switching fuels and heavier vehicles for less wasteful ones. While it is true that many fuel-economy reforms are way overdue, and there is much waste made in all sectors, it is totally misleading to promote a false promise: continuing the status quo as kinder and gentler. That is why it's time for the implementation of new cultural values for real sustainability.

"Climate Change, Economic Change" is a new editorial by Patrick Doherty of TomPaine.com. It's timing is the climate talks in Montreal. The world's future on the line, with the corporate energy giants dictating through George Bush what the deal is. At this time the wake-up call of the decade has sounded: The Gulf Stream has lost 30% of its power, promising a cold freeze for the British Isles region and nearby parts of Europe. Doherty starts out like he's a man of the people, painting a fair picture for all us common citizens. The climate-change rundown and political analysis are very good.

But it turns out Doherty's whole thrust comes down to cheer-leading for what we can call the Technofix Economy. Doherty is a Washington insider who's a bit on the fringes of the power structure, because he's either too progressive or he's in renewable-energy dreamland. The danger is that most readers think of him as providing the gospel of progressive thinking. TomPaine.com bills itself as Progressive. The reformist camp has too many funded organizations to list, but they all uphold the system and this comes down to painting a false picture of a future that will be marked by petrocollapse. The whole system is a delusion and will break, as there is no technofix possible to change the petroleum infrastructure overnight which is what would have to happen at this point if petrocollapse is to be prevented.

George Monbiot in the The Guardian (UK) this week has massively refuted the claims of biodiesel and biofuels, and he uncovered some nasty facts. He is sure to get bad reactions from those who believe cars can just keep going on some other fuel that's "green." Culture Change is familiar with disappointed readers who seem to cling to techno-worship (see Culture Change Letter #107 on Techno-worship).

Also in the category of "won't help" as far as realistic mitigation for petrocollapse, there's the Hydrogen Highway that we dealt with in our prior essay, CCL #115 (see Santa Barbara section of article).

Bad stuff – did we miss anything?

What else is wrong besides the technofixer delusion? We conclude this week's exploration of sustainability with a catalogue of ills compiled by Janet Kobren, an activist and healer who is a Culture Change editor:

"This is a list of all the various 'most important issues,' disgusting things in the world, and disasters to come that I see groups working on and passionate about. The following is not in any particular order, probably not complete, and most likely all connected in some way):"

The 15 Horsemen of the Apocalypse

1) Imperialism:

Invasions: Iraq "war," Afghanistan "war"

- Fascism: repression, death penalty, martial law, impeachment, fundamentalism
- Military recruiting, conscientious objectors
- Repression: torture
- Fascism: repression, death penalty, martial law, impeachment
- Human trafficking
- WTO, NAFTA, etc.
- Commodification: e.g., water

2) Democracy

Disregard for the "rule of law": Constitutional and International law

- Patriot Act
- Election fraud, electronic voting machines, corporate campaign financing
- Free speech, right to dissent, political prisoners
- Overthrowing democracies, e.g., Chile, Haiti and Venezuela
- Secrecy, covert actions

3) Cover-ups

9-11 truth

- Political assassination cover-ups

4) Media

Public relations, advertising and propaganda

- Media collusion
- Media consolidation
- Newspeak
- Left gatekeepers

5) Economics and class perspective

Class analysis, anti-capitalism

- Monetary collapse
- Consumerism, corporate personhood
- World Bank, IMF, etc.
- Attacks on the labor movement, wage slavery
- White collar crime
- Child labor
- Prison industry
- Prison labor
- Housing displacements, gentrification, misuse of eminent domain
- Poverty, racism
- Private property
- Regressive taxation

6) Middle East:

Zionism, Armageddon

7) Health issues

Plastics

- Buildup of toxins in the body
- Insecticides and herbicides
- Hunger, e.g., Darfur
- Chemtrails
- Cell phone technology
- Food: mad cow, soy products, GMO's, use of antibiotics in animal feed, genetic engineering, avian pandemic, AIDS
- Cloning, bio-engineering

8) Peak oil, petrocollapse

Technofix scam, feeding the delusion of consumerism

9) Climate change and environment

Natural disasters: earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, drought

- Destruction of rainforests and other ecosystems
- Inability of plant and animals to adapt
- Submersion of islands and coastal areas
- Destruction of sacred lands
- Heat strokes

10) Control

Attempts to control nature

- Propaganda and regimentation of and in public school
- Capital and corporal punishment
- Secret societies
- Mind-control
- HAARP

11) Nuclear dangers

Nuclear weapons and bombs

- Weaponizing space
- Depleted Uranium
- Nuclear power
- Nuclear waste, plutonium

12) Violence

Against women

- Domestic violence
- Rape
- Hate crimes
- Us versus Them
- War
- Torture
- Gun control issues
- Weapons industry

13) Animal rights

Experiments and testing by pharmaceutical and beauty industries

- How big farming raises and slaughters animals
- Hunting and killing animals for fur, ivory, etc.
- Road kill

14) Drug trade/Drug War

15) Overpopulation

Restrictions on birth control

Many people would have one particular issue at the very top if it were a prioritized list. Perhaps a diagram in a circle with interconnecting lines would best depict "The 15 Horsemen of the Apocalypse." The "painted ponies go round and round in the circle game."

About population: not only is there a huge overpopulation of people (especially the consumer variety), there are cars, cattle, cats, and our not so welcome critters such as rats and cockroaches. Nature does not care, so at the rate our ecocide is building, the next phase of evolution could feature the dominance of rats, cockroaches and other adaptable species.

We aren't there yet, but will responsible voices for humanity and nature's family prevail?

* * * * *

Announcement: Jan Lundberg will have a new interview broadcast with San Francisco's Harry O. Tune in or log on for live streaming at Kyouradio.com Sunday 10 a.m. Eastern Standard (U.S.) Time, 7 A.M. Pacific Time. If in the Bay Area tune in to Live 105 FM.

Jan Lundberg will do an hour radio show on Dec. 15, 3 p.m. Eastern Standard (U.S.) Time, live web streaming at kpoo.com - or listen in the San Francisco Bay area at 89.5 FM. The program is called Reality Sandwich, co-hosted by Julie and Martin Matthews with others such as Jan.

Further Reading:

[Collapse of the petroleum delusion / Rise of the DIY movement \(Culture Change Letter #80\)](http://www.culturechange.org/e-letter-80.html)

<http://www.culturechange.org/e-letter-80.html>

Techno-worship and plastic people, discussed in the Culture Change Letter #107:

http://www.culturechange.org/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=2

Gulf Stream slowing; big freeze for U.K.:

<http://news.independent.co.uk/environment/article330454.ece>

Listen to the Petrocollapse Conference speeches of Oct. 5 in New York:
<http://www.petrocollapse.org/>

Mark Robinowitz of Oilempire.us has, as he says, "a similar approach to understanding" as Culture Change:
<http://www.oilempire.us/propaganda.html>

Robinowitz also has similar analysis for the environmental movement
at: <http://www.permatopia.com/environmental.html>

Some of Robinowitz's solutions are at <http://www.permatopia.com/levels.html>

News and Commentary on Electromagnetic Frequencies:
<http://microwavenews.com/>

ENR Network: To reduce, mitigate, and where possible eliminate hazardous exposure to electromagnetic radiation:
<http://emrnetwork.org/>

EMR/REF Bioeffects and Public Policy, from Wave Guide: <http://wave-guide.org/>

Jonathan P. Deason's 1996 paper in Renewable Resources Journal (Winter 1996-1997): "Changing World Attitudes on Environmental Values and Sustainability: Implications for Educational Institutions"

TomPaine.com renewable energy boosterism:
http://www.tompaine.com/articles/20051207/climate_change_economic_change.php

Biodiesel/biofuel dismantling by George Monbiot:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/climatechange/story/0,,1659037,00.html>

The Depletion Protocol:

ASPO:

<http://www.peakoil.net/uhdsg/UppsalaProtocol.html>

Richard Heinberg's Depletion Protocol Project:

<http://museletter.com/projects.html>