350-Day's Reflection: Gaia University Saves The Day

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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"I went down to the demonstration to get my fair share of abuse." (from the Stones' You Can't Always Get What You Want). It was as nice a day as Portland, Ore. could hope for for a rally, and there was no abuse. This movement threatens no one. One reason is that the size of the crowd coming out for the well-orchestrated "350" climate protection global day of protest was minimal, considering the scope of the threat we're addressing.
Estimates ranged from just 200-500 people in downtown Pioneer Square.

As the day progressed, the same square was taken over by around 3,000 zombies -- Halloween revelers trying to look freshly killed. The question is begged, what really are people's priorities here in Hipster Land? Judge not, I told myself, for Yea these zombies are less zombie-like in their daily lives than the rest of the normal population.

A more precise question of the hour: How many people in either event were really committed to the idea of bettering the climate-change agenda -- say, from that of the technofix, which some believe can get the planet down to 350 parts per million atmospheric CO2, to the more audacious and safer Luddite level of 280 ppm of pre-industrial civilization?

On the square, a Food Not Bombs activist advised me of a related event later on, a City Repair get-together at their new digs at St. Francis Church in SE Portland. She said Gaia University spokespersons were showing up. Their appearance cinched it for me, and off I pedaled. Once there in the park-like church grounds, after new friends put up the famous Tea Horse (a mobile living room) and enjoyed a pot luck dinner, a couple of dozen people filed into the Church's Che Guevara Room for a presentation around a circle of couches and chairs.

The purpose of Gaia University runs counter to the system that gave rise to today's university as we know it. When the founders of Gaia University were rebuffed several years ago at the gates of academia for trying to get Permaculture included in curricula, this revealed that Permaculture ideals of doing minimum work for maximum natural gain, and seeing problems as solutions, ran smack into the top-down regimentation that the ruling elite insists on. It seems clear that Permaculture (and common sense in general) has to be suppressed -- if just ignoring it first does not suffice.

As a somewhat jaded activist, I was truly excited to learn about Gaia University. The idea of setting up a global educational collective based on the principles of Permaculture and Ecovillages, for sustainability and regeneration, appeals to me greatly. Andrew Langford and Liora Adler are the dynamic duo in this endeavor, with cohorts in such places as the Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm, Tennessee. Andrew and Liora have not only got their "Small Is Beautiful"-like system figured out; they are solidly up and running. Turning upside down the prevailing notions of learning and education, in favor of learning what's truly useful for the better world we are trying to build, is the enlightened, practical purpose of Gaia University.

Just a few years old, accredited in the U.K., Gaia U. is moving forward with a new, flexible model beyond borders -- taking the advice of Buckminster Fuller who questioned whether fixing the old broken model is worthwhile. The circle-crowd in the Che room also could relate to Adler's and Langford's position of uncovering and teaching what has been subjugated for the sake of corporate profits and suppression of the mass psyche's hurts. "Fasting," I chimed in. At the end of the evening, it was icing on the cake for me to learn that Gaia University is keenly interested in a floating campus that fits right in with the concept of Sail Transport Network.

Short of the U.S. having a college as radical as the Earth University, in Chiapas -- Universidad de la Tierra, outside San Cristobal de las Casas, an autonomous zone in rebellion within Mexico -- Gaia University is one of the most promising models for organizing and moving forward. Please check out the program and community at Gaia U, and get your degree for the Earth while you keep up your good work.

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