Celebrate the Stampede or Step out of It?

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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If being human and living have value, we ought to celebrate what we are and how we're doing. The only real celebration can be of the truth, based on joyous reality of an improved condition. Yet the truth today is that we are probably about to dangle from the noose that we ourselves stepped right into.

It's crazy to celebrate ecocide. Is there something else to celebrate that is also true? Sure, but it's not the whole truth: human dignity, beauty of life, love between two people -- wonderful and inspiring, but to celebrate them while closing off our senses to the bulldozing and poisoning going on around us is increasingly irrational.
Being honest would to admit of our celebrations today, "We are making ourselves feel better, numbing the pain or fooling ourselves."

For most of us, our personal world and its challenges are all we can deal with. So, little triumphs like selling more widgets than one's co-workers, losing ten pounds of body fat, or quitting alcohol become major accomplishments -- kind of in a vacuum, typical of individualism connected with "divide and conquer." It is rare that one celebrates getting rid of his or her car, for one's lack of a four wheeled machine is commonly equated with hardship.

There is organized and individual resistance to ecocide, climate catastrophe, species extinction, weakening of the human gene pool, erosion of human rights, and the coming trampling and starvation of the overpopulation. But the odds are that you're not part of resistance. It is tiny and does not deserve to celebrate much with a one-in-a-thousand chance for success or victory -- odds worsening each day. What are we doing about this trend? Hardly anything; we keep up our activities in the dominant culture, often soothing ourselves electronically or going out to eat some trucked-in food. Ignorance or denial of overarching trends is bliss (and deadly). We may march on as protesters or blog on into the void, hoping to call attention to crises in need of a collective response.

There are times when amusement and passion can flow among those who are quite aware, resulting in some laughter between the tears -- but we know we are losing the fight. Many believe we have already lost. Interestingly, those who hold to that most pessimistic view (in all certainty, they feel) are unlikely to be activists or eco-warriors. Optimists keep busy, trying to help the situation. This gives them purpose, a little comfort, and a little hope at times, but no reason to really celebrate the health and glory of an Earth that can house in her bosom future generations of Earth's children.

The only honest thing to celebrate, if we are to celebrate the real truth, is the impotence of the human race to cease the killing of the Earth. I for one cannot do it, for who can embrace such a perverse idea? Yet, there are valid celebrations, even when times are worse than these, if the big picture is part of our perspective. Otherwise, celebration may simply be to numb the mind: "Woo-hoo! we're drinking a lot of beer!" Everyone, from the aware activist to the downtrodden street survivor (sometimes the same person embodies that spectrum), needs to celebrate. That's like everyone needing to breathe and urinate. Celebration is involuntary and somehow necessary for our species, such as after a good hunt or harvest.

But if we can somehow see that celebration is blind and irrational when we can't celebrate the truth, we might see that it's as crazy as trying to breathe underwater or urinating on our food. Since we would not do those things unless totally insane, we might be able to face that the dominant culture -- that says endless material expansion, greed, isolation from one another, and the cancer epidemic are acceptable -- is insane and finally must be stopped for good.

The lateness of the hour is such that we cannot wait and say, "We will gradually stop trying to breathe under water. We will only piss a little more on our food. Those are jobs, so we cannot shift away quickly, and besides there are

alternatives around the corner if we change industrial investment." This indefensible and obsolete attitude can be found in the technofix camp, as in gradually reducing fossil fuels emissions only in one's mind or in legislation. Such a program of Hope wishes to rely on painlessly and miraculously bringing about a consumer economy of less-polluting technology while continuing ecocide, as growth, toxicity and the stampede over the ecological cliff are hardly discussed.

Some in the stampede yell "Faster! See how fast we can go! Our speed and unity brought us here, and standing still is to be left behind!" Such spokespersons own all the megaphones and all the other trappings of the herders of humanity, mainly electronic media, etc. Apparently the much vaunted medium of the internet is not altering the stampede significantly. What does that tell us? Hard to say. Even if through a mass awakening everyone wanted to stop the crazy stampede now, and tried to do so, we may not be able to stop it. This is because we are not the masters of the Earth; the Earth is our master and is on a course we largely set her on. We have barely begun to pay the price.

In this stampede we are somehow simultaneously trying to breathe under water (without scuba gear) and pissing on our food. This is absurd enough, but reality is worse than that: there are those holding our heads under water, while they themselves are under water, obliviously, forcing us to try to breathe. Similarly, there are those among us pissing on our food and aiming our own piss onto our own food. Mass acceptance of such a pickle indicates both the low level and unpopularity of resistance as well as the impotence of the many, who are mostly unaware of the tiny number who are resisting and laying the groundwork for a livable future.

It is apparently irrelevant that those of the elite, or "the few," are also killing themselves as they kill the Earth. It is apparently irrelevant whether the few are aware of it or not. For when the many are engaged in ecocide and suicide, wishing to remain ignorant and left in peace, closing their eyes to what is more painfully obvious by the day, the role of the few -- despite enforcing oppression and domination -- is not the prime factor in our lethal civilization's self destruction. Many social justice activists today, and all past crusaders for freedom and equality who took their stand prior to the ecological crisis, believe that the problem we face is merely the bad guys at the top, whether identified as politicians in the pocket of banksters, the Trilateralists, the Zionists, the Neocons, ad infinitum -- any bad guy or elite seen as blameworthy and threatening. For in a culture such as this, if one were to remove the head, ten aspiring Donald Trumps pop up to replace each of the few that could theoretically be taken down. At this point in history, focusing mainly on re-dividing the pie is not a solution of any kind, and in any case it is not happening.

The Earth First!ers point out there's no social justice on a dead planet. Actually, their bumper sticker is "There are no jobs on a dead planet," in argument against clear-cutting ancient forests, for example. Impeccable logic, but does it go far enough to acknowledge that the entire modern culture of industrialism, hard wired to the dwindling cheap petroleum, has no future? Does the well-meaning environmental activist acknowledge that industrialism needs to be rejected now, when it means switching wholesale from four wheels to two? As long as society has new cars made and sold when there are too many on today's roads, we are engaged in mass insanity. But Obama wants us to celebrate the so-called health of the U.S. automobile companies. This narrow impulse is propaganda for those who adhere to the nation's de facto slogan dating from post-WWII Imperial America: "What's good for General Motors is good for the country." When we go along with such leadership, whether of Obama or any other pillar of the status quo, we have gotten into a vehicle with a nut case at the wheel -- leading motorized lemmings over the ecological cliff. To growing mass disappointment, Obama wants consumers to celebrate now, urging them to honk and cheer and hope for a faster stampede, i.e., the "Recovery" that can't happen because the energy orgy is coming to an end -- most of the easily recovered, low-sulfur, light, cheap oil has been consumed.

Is it possible to piss on the whole stampede to good effect, or pull people's heads out of the water, making a social movement to save the herd and the planet? Not likely, unless the herd slows down. Unfortunately, the real slow-down will be due to lack of nourishment -- starvation due to the end of petroleum-based agriculture and transport. When this hits there will be revolt and chaos. The megaphones and signs will fall, with various stampedes surging in different directions. Which will be your stampede? It's nice to believe about oneself that he or she is outside the dominant stampede today, but it may be only possible to be on the periphery at best. One might survive in a form of eco-village or post-crash small town -- climate permitting. Being outside the U.S. offers more safety, such as in Bolivia where 80% of the population is non-dependent on fossil fuels. It's unfortunate that the stance of that nation's pro-development leadership is that climate change is just a problem of capitalism, and that domestic petroleum can and should be exploited.

The U.S. worker is increasingly pressured, especially in the Great Recession, to get with the program by associating with the vestiges of middle class living, and just saying no to homelessness. The poor are feared as bad news and bringing bad luck, even though for millions more of us poverty and homelessness are just one or two missed paychecks away. Hardly anyone is preparing for total global economic collapse, although some ponder it and there have been a couple of healthy adjustments to the Great Recession: less purchasing and more gardening. Unfortunately, without being able to read the writing on the wall, the average U.S. American tries to stay safe by being still, even when being swept over the cliff in the relentless (and to most of us invisible) stampede. A return to basic, traditional skills is wise before they are desperately needed again, but people feel they cannot do such a thing in advance without being paid for it.

One of the risks of letting change sweep over you is to perhaps meet unanticipated cruelty or bloodlust, such as happened in Republican Spain in the 1930s: insurgent fascists believing in the supremacy of the ruling class and of the church massacred workers just for being workers, for they might have been in militant anarchist and communist unions. Many victims were just undesirables wanting separation of church and state or standing up for women's rights. The Iberian workers and peasants did not fail to anticipate, nor were they very surprised by, the cruel reactionary force against them. The U.S. worker is in comparison out to lunch and far gone: part of a weakened, soft, drugged population without the perspective of the Spanish Republican and almost all peoples around the globe. U.S. Americans' perspective is of two kinds: on the right, the post-WWII myth of riding tall in the saddle (via cheap oil and expansion), and on "the left," believing the U.S. is a democracy that can be fixed by elections (instead of daring to get arrested in civil disobedience).

The goal of culture change is to have far more to celebrate about. Join us and step out of the stampede.

Don't Bring Me Down (eco/country rock song)
Click here to download

I just bought a ticket to succeed in society

Don't you ask no questions, better be nice to me

Don't bring me down

Don't you bring me down

Don't come around if you'd bring me down

I have always thought our flag was the best

I just close my eyes to nukes and all the rest

Don't bring me down

Please don't bring me down

I'd see you drown

Than let you bring me down

[guitar solo]

Put down your guitars, let's go buy some cars

Join the den of businessmen carving up the Earth

Don't bring us down

Keep your country sound

No money down

Stay on the merry-go-round

If you have no cash and cannot pay the rent

Prisons are for homeless too, justice is all spent

[guitar solo]

Down to the ground

I hear a shakin' sound.

- by Depaver Jan, recorded as a demo at home in 1994, is on CD "Redwood Dreams" (Volume One). It was performed at Blues Camp, Ft. Worden, Washington, 1995.

Jan

(in need of celebrating)