

False leadership, false security, false hope

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
19 September 2006

Understanding climate change, solutions, and unity

Culture Change Letter #140 - September 17, 2006

The big pinnacle of Western Civilization, the U.S.A., is arguably replete with false everything: convenience, glamour, equality, justice, environmental protection, and wrestling. Well, the last is entertainment, mainly another chance to sit on our behinds and avoid thinking creatively.

Despite the many contributions to better living that this nation has given the world, not just quantitatively but qualitatively on so many levels, the U.S.A. has nevertheless invented modern falseness: plastic flowers, Disneyland, McMansions, and defense. Warfare and the U.S. have lost much of their previous association with defense and honor, instead relying heavily on killing indiscriminately from high distances with technowizardry. Nuclear global annihilation-capability is offered as "security." The fact that all these falsities persist point towards false education and the utter lack of leadership. Both academia and elected leaders are out to lunch, as mounting threats take aim at our lives.

Lest anyone think this column is some leftist anti-Bush rag, perhaps it is time we all looked deeper and abandon labels: for the feisty Hugo Chavez is another global warmer with an image that makes intelligent people look the other way and give him a free pass. With his not only maximizing oil, but doing mountaintop removal for coal mining a la West Virginia, all humanity is treated to unacceptable fossil foolery for the sake of a progressive social-justice political agenda.

I don't think Chavez, Bush or other parties interested in oil supply, such as the Rev. Jesse Jackson, would be offended by the epithet anthropocentric. But nowadays anyone should. "Development" (i.e., extracting and selling fossil fuels) for making Venezuela a "First World country" is Chavez's original and stated goal. So it may be merely incidental that he's good at improving the lot of poor people if he's helping to turn our Earth into "a different planet," as scientist James Hansen warns. Then the descendants of the poor may not thank Chavez.

The worst falseness in this new era of peaking global oil extraction is "leadership" from those who purport to understand and take action on the energy crisis. We will all have to wait until the energy crisis starts to peak to see ameliorative action, but we have to expect official leaders' actions substituting for intelligent solutions. Even worse than not planning for the end of abundant petroleum -- which will cause the infrastructure of modern society and commerce to seize up and crumble -- is the total lack of serious action to slash greenhouse emissions.

On either of these scores, it is painfully evident that our official leaders have forfeited all credibility and respect. Climate destruction is as bad a form of oppression as has ever existed, and then some. And petrocollapse will have more casualties than necessary because we will be walking into it blindly. Such a state of affairs is supposedly when the people are to get rid of such a government, if we listen to Thomas Jefferson who was looking at stable climate and less strife from population growth:

"...Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it...(W)hen a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security." - Declaration of Independence

There was a time when abolishing or replacing a government would have been very effective for changing society's course. However, whether or not an additional past revolution would have done wonders for our security today, we must look deeper and question our culture and what we have become. Rather than address our problems today, it is far easier to dream on -- that a way will be found to continue the orgy of materialistic consumption and not have to radically alter our lifestyle of turning on switches and melting Earth's protective ice caps.

Even if you don't want to believe we are all faced with our Titanic hitting the iceberg -- with the added wrinkle that there are no life boats for ecological salvation -- consider that there is little security under our vaunted system of "democracy," "progress," and "wealth." If there's a growing army of have-nots, a consequence of the dwindling middle class -- just about everyone will be a have-not when oil crash or financial meltdown hits -- then people with property and family to protect have no real security. It's still out of fashion and mocked as idealistic, but sharing and cooperation will have to come back universally, and soon.

As it stands politically in the manufactured climate of fear, we have more false security and false freedom than ever. If you keep your nose clean

by never demonstrating in the streets or sending a letter objecting to our nation's policy of torture, there's still the possibility of being falsely accused of being a fundamentalist Muslim, for example. Or an "eco-terrorist:" this year activists have been known to be fingered by one or more indicted Earth First!ers for being a fellow eco-saboteur (so as to get a lesser sentence). Under fascism, achieved decades ago if we accept the U.S. government's published definition of fascism in World War II (corporate industry united with the state) -- you might pay someday with your freedom if you think out loud that, say, "New Orleans after Katrina was the last straw for our leaders of the Free World." Eyes dropping, surveillance of peaceful Americans, DNA tracking, corporate growth and dominance, fewer and fewer civil liberties -- where will it end?

"In Germany first they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me-and by that time no one was left to speak up." -- Pastor Martin Niemoller

Privilege is an illusion, or it will soon be seen to be so. The sense of false freedom is on the rise, as people cherish their ability to shop for unlimited products, and national elections, if without a connected movement in the streets, provide the illusion of real choice.

Social movements to fix the political system are probably too late. There's no justice on a dead planet. Planning for the switch to a post-petroleum society amidst climatic distortion is the only reasonable approach to life now. Active resistance to global warming and war-making, for example, are vital and instructive, but there will have to be more imagination and support for such activity for them to matter. Most activist-minded people are clinging to bringing about change through some kind of (elusive) massive unity. However, it will be the other way around: unity will come after petrocollapse and die-off, whereby we must cooperate as never before in order to survive in new conditions. This will create unity of a different kind than people still seek today.

More ecological bombshells

The world has now received two deafeningly loud warnings from the scientific community: (1) the Arctic Ocean will be ice free even in winter by the time babies today are into adulthood. "Oops! Sorry kid, we carted you around in a car instead of using our feet or bikes." The news was the front page story of the San Francisco Chronicle on Sept. 14, so we have no excuses for ignorance; (2) The aforementioned James Hansen -- the dean of climate scientists who announced global warming was upon us back in 1988 in front of Al Gore's Senate committee -- says we have up to a decade perhaps to rein in carbon emissions by switching technology. If not, it's curtains.

We had to sort of bash Gore and his movie "An Inconvenient Truth" in this column last month. If ever there was an example of false leadership, it has been Al Gore; dangerous falseness precisely because he is indeed significantly better than the Bushies and perhaps the Clintons. The point here is that settling for something inadequate when we have no more time to waste can be fatal. When Gore's economic agenda is to continue the global corporate trade system, and advocate the mildest of energy-efficient forms of conservation to reduce carbon emissions, he ought to be disqualified as the right leader.

However, Gore lately seems to see the real direction to go in, even if he will stop short in order to appease "conservatives" who might not support him in 2008. His recent speech at New York University featured "solutions" to the climate crisis. A reasonable idea came from him, that of "immediately freezing [carbon dioxide] emissions and then beginning sharp reductions." It's a beginning, but let's realize that a freeze would mean the status quo for emissions.

If we have only one chance to get it right and save our planet's climate, it's time for real solutions -- even when they don't meet the immediate approval of the powers-that-be and their meek followers known as today's masses. Without a vision for a new world without millions of widgets manufactured and sent to the landfill daily, we are lost enough to soon join the species we drive to extinction every day.

I wish Hansen had said, in explaining why we're out of time, that it's time to actually pull the plug on global warming in our daily lives: no more TV; no more dryers when we can use a clothes line, no more coal mining. Feel helpless? Nearly anyone can start a garden instead of buying trucked food. The list of positive changes and activist steps is endless, but 10 of them can be seen in Culture Change's Pledge for Climate Protection. Oddly enough, the same steps happen to apply to mitigating or softening peak oil's petrocollapse effect. No major newspaper or news program has ever linked the peaking of petroleum guzzling that signals the imminent end of the cheap-energy orgy with climate change.

The tipping point for the world's climate may have already been reached. "Ten years left to fix it? I increasingly believe we have minus-10 years. In my opinion, the tipping point has already passed," according to Alder Fuller, of Euglena Education, Eugene, Oregon, and the Global Warming Crisis Council. He is not alone, if we read the recent work of respected scientist James Lovelock.

It is time to mourn, but to take action as well, when we read about the accelerated destruction of the Amazon forest and the loss of its water. Although news only gets worse for our fair globe, and it's still convenient and palliative to gaze at sexy celebrities via the media drug, for example, it may not be too late to start some positive "craziness." People wouldn't dream of doing anything illegal, like disabling machines such as cars, TVs, and the like. Just don't mess with our computers, right? We need to surf the web and check out the latest reports on species unable to migrate, or the poaching of ancient redwoods in Humboldt, California. Regardless of what degree of helplessness or resignation we may feel about polluters and their government handmaidens, consider this: don't let them laugh all the way to the bank. Could that be the last, rational reason remaining to be an activist?

"(S)evere drought is returning to the Amazon for a second successive year... new research suggests that just one further dry year... could tip the whole vast forest into a cycle of destruction... Patriarch Bartholomew of the Greek Orthodox Church, dubbed the 'green Pope' for his environmental activism, (said) that global warming and deforestation were rapidly pushing the entire enormous area towards a 'tipping point', where it would irreversibly start to die... The wet Amazon, the planet's greatest celebration of life, would turn to dry savannah at best, desert at worst. This would cause much of the world - including Europe - to become hotter and drier... it could make global warming spiral out of control, eventually making the world uninhabitable." - The Independent, July 24, 2006

On that note, it must be clear that it's now time to empower ourselves. Consider saving money, getting exercise, knowing one's neighbors, and cheating the oil companies of their huge profits: go car free. The car lifestyle is bogus anyway, when the vaunted convenience and speed of the car is false. The average speed of the U.S. motorist, when adjusted for idle hours earning money to buy the car, paying for repairs and insurance, etc., is only about five (5) miles per hour. As for convenience: deadly crashes, breathing toxic fumes, and sitting on one's ass do take an inconvenient toll. This is true even when we think we're "getting ahead" by consuming some convenience-food snack and talking on our cell phones while driving. According to the new book by Chris Balish, *How to Live Well Without Owning a Car* (Ten Speed Press), a guy like him saves \$800 per month by doing without his SUV global warmer. And it improved his social life to go car free.

Hello, more sex? Look and feel better? "I dunno, people would think I'm weird and a loser for not having a car." That's correct. But liberation and survival often come down to not caring about what everybody else thinks.

On a broader scale, it is time to turn our assumptions upside down -- if we haven't done so lately. There are no leaders or technology coming to save us; it's up to us to save our own asses and help our loved ones. In the U.S. it can be assumed we don't know our neighbors. But we oughta get to know them if there's to be a local crop of food grown and some common defense from any roving gangs of desperados. Pshaw, says the skeptic, doom and gloom, a dark vision. Unfortunately, nature's laws are not subject to our whims or hopes. With carrying capacity already well over-exceeded, this overpopulation will soon run out of gas and petro-powered food. Will this slashing of carbon-generating hyperactivity be in time to give the climate the break the biosphere needs, even if we are past "the tipping point?"

So we need hope. This essay has dealt with false hope. Real hope lies in Permaculture. In the free human spirit. And in the Oil Depletion Protocol, as promoted by author Richard Heinberg.

Lastly, let's all reject the false convenience of plastic, which is toxic to us and kills countless marine animals every day. However, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California has recently signed a law barring any city from enacting an ordinance to place a fee on shopping bags handed out at check out counters. He has made headlines with his State's "bold" attempt to put a cap on greenhouse gas emissions, although, like Kyoto, it is too little according to climate science. But we must see through reformism and grandstanding -- false leadership -- and attack the plastic plague on every level: it is petroleum, rarely recyclable, and not biodegradable.

* * * * *

San Francisco, California

- Hear Jan discuss petrocollapse and more on KPOO San Francisco radio this Thursday, noon, Sept. 21. Listen in at 89.5 FM, or tune in on the web at kpoo.com. Founded in 1971, KPOO is African-American owned and operated, noncommercial.

* * * * *

Further reading and links:

Climate action group from the Earth First! movement:

risingtidenorthamerica.org

- Rising Tide's UK Climate Action Camp:

risingtidenorthamerica.org/ukclimatecamp.html

Arctic ice disappearance:

sfgate.com

Hansen: WARMING EXPERT: ONLY DECADE LEFT TO ACT IN TIME
MSNBC News Services (September 14, 2006)

msnbc.msn.com/id/14834318

"Dying Forest: One year to save the Amazon" by Geoffrey Lean - The Independent July 24, 2006

www.sandersresearch.com

Environment in crisis: "We are past the point of no return" – James Lovelock's outlook:

www.heatisonline.org

The Oil Depletion Protocol: A Plan to Avert Oil Wars, Terrorism and Economic Collapse –

richardheinberg.com

Pledge for Climate Protection, from Culture Change:

culturechange.org/global_warming_pledge.htm

Global Warming Crisis Council listserve sign-up via emailing "Raging Grannie (Wanda B)": [wsb70 "at" comcast.net](mailto:wsb70@comcast.net)

Auto-Free Times magazine/Culture Change Magazine back issues:

culturechange.org/auto_free_times.html

– on the old website of the Alliance for a Paving Moratorium (now Culture Change)