

Celebrating Culture Change's 23rd Birthday

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Let's take stock of Culture Change on the 23rd anniversary of its founding. It was during the first "global warming summer," August 1988, when we announced with some fanfare, at the International Club in Washington, D.C., the formation of a nonprofit group that sprang out of my 16-year career as a reluctant oil industry analyst.

Before we take stock and give reason to celebrate, can you send us a birthday present?
Please know:

We can't bring you a 24th year without your participation and support.

The Internet's astounding information is virtually free, but when an organization offers cutting edge analysis and timely projects, in promoting a movement for fundamental change, one needs to make a choice whether to support this or let it die. In our case, a few small donations can determine whether we serve you next month. If you cannot donate, please spread the word on supporting Culture Change. You can visit our donation page and resume this report, which includes the new essay Meeting the Real Planetary Crisis that we segue into. Now, back to our birthday:

Since our beginnings over two decades ago, the struggle to rid the world of the menace of petroleum pollution has gotten both easier and harder. One thing we have "all" learned is that the world's petroleum-pollution problem is not in isolation. Indeed, the connections are everywhere, such that one can see that our way of life is the problem. A subset of that problem is that it's unclear how many people have questioned our way of life, and if so, how many are willing to change. This uncertainty is grave enough to suggest that historic collapse is unavoidable.

To quantify our progress in terms of milestones and small triumphs would miss the whole purpose of Culture Change, when the idea 23 years ago was to join and contribute to the environmental movement. We did influence the movement and brought people into it. Yet, the larger forces of population growth and accumulation of pollutants has negated much of our contribution to the cause. At the same time, we're constantly looking ahead to the end result of all our ongoing efforts to create a better world. So humanity's failings and doubts today do mean something in terms of learning what to avoid in future, and what we need to build and nurture.

As Fossil Fuels Policy Action, our original name, we set out to fight the monster from my Los Angeles youth, smog, and slash its nebulous "new" relative, greenhouse gas emissions. Today we hear much more about the latter, while smog is seldom spoken of -- unless you happen to be in a city that has little air pollution control. In terms of energy policy and popular understanding of petroleum, techno-fixes and issues of oil crash, an assessment was made in 2008 for our twenty years of operation: What Culture Change Learned after 20 Years.

What to celebrate about culture change today as a development in human history:

- Modern people have seen the shortcomings and instability of the system that promised material wealth for anyone willing to work hard. The economy has failed millions of people who expected security.
- They don't quite connect their changed circumstances to peak oil, nor do many seem to suspect that the ecological clock is striking midnight. But they know nature has taken some hits and the hits are coming faster. They increasingly know oil is bad news, and they'd like something cleaner (and cheaper) for what they believe are energy needs.
- The bald-faced greed of the corporate elite and ruling class has exposed society for what it is especially in the U.S.: a tool for the super rich and the biggest welfare case in history: the military industrial complex. The excesses and atrocities promote healthy rejection of a system incapable of righting itself. In the absence of a territory independent from the empire, do-it-yourself lifestyle change and sharing practical skills are spreading.

It's not clear if a rebellion in the streets will have much ecological consciousness, but the results of overcrowding and antisocial behavior by predators up and down society are certainly ecological. Whether this phenomenon is promising for its Gandhian or Lennonist potential remains to be seen, but we can encourage this rather than violence that would at this point only backfire and never set an example for peace.

Nature has recently turned into a tormentor and destroyer, such is the change in the global climate from human activity. Species extinction of untold fellow life forms is not yet close to many people's minds and hearts; one's struggling to survive comes first. In the case of most of the comfortable modern folk today, the priority is to hold on to their wealth and seek continued pleasure while surrounded by a collapsing economy and ecosystem. My analysis is that a post collapse oil-based infrastructure will not endure for supporting an elite, so they'll have to "join the human race." We'll realize we are all one.

Meeting the Real Planetary Crisis - by Jan Lundberg

Anyone paying attention to the world today encounters shocking, saddening alerts. But these don't bring on a strong enough sense of alarm to all humanity. The sense is getting stronger, but it seems that revolts are not rising fast enough to steer events. Particularly in the U.S., we let events overtake us. Perhaps the alarms and outrages are most easily appreciated by traditional peoples close to the land and seas.

A new report estimates that a least twenty percent of all known mammals are nearing extinction, with large species at greatest risk. By many indicators, our life-support system is short-circuiting or burning out, and it makes the news often enough to alert everyone who's not sleepwalking. Somehow this news pales for the average person compared to stresses over job-search or overworking. But when not working or looking for work, somehow it's the shortsighted shopping -- instead of gardening or bartering -- and inverted consumerist entertainment, via isolating techno-toys, that represent prevailing "success" or "security." "Experts" and scam artists freely mislead, or they get away with trying to.

Not enough hearts and minds understand that the world is undergoing a massive ecological crisis. But whenever they do, they prefer to count it as only one of many symptomatic crises, such as tough economic times. Then their "solutions" may lack an ecological foundation and are thus doomed to fail. When we stop our worrying and scurrying through today's problems for a moment, we see that the problems all fall into either human misery and confusion, or "the environment."

But the environment, or the ecosystem, is everything -- a scientific fact. Everything about our lives flows from the ecosystem. Putting "the economy" ahead of it is impossible, or if it's attempted, the only way out of it is to ultimately shoot oneself in the foot. But when we put ecology first we secure our future, allowing a chance for related and "unrelated" problems to be sorted out.

Having one's finger on the pulse of all humanity may be hit and miss, but it is safe to say that most of the world understands that there are mounting problems causing visible harm to many people. The trouble is that certain challenges that a threatened population face may seem limited to crimes or schemes by a certain group of people, or traced to modern ways that undermine traditions. That can be a healthy analysis, but it must translate to concerted action for any positive outcome.

While it is true that crises such as war, corporatism, population/migration pressures and lack of education can each be accurately identified separately as many peoples' main problem -- and they feel it is true as they fight their particular problem -- the basic breakdown of society proceeds most deeply at the web-of-life level. If each problem is given its equal due, and the ecological issue is seen as just one, then our future is lost. So we must imagine how all problems will be dealt with successfully if only people put honoring the web of life first. Let us see how:

- Connect daily with the Earth, her land and waters and air, in a healing way for your body, mind and spirit. In this way you will help heal the Earth, for we are the Earth and the Earth is us. When either the Earth or a person needs healing, there is balancing at work and there can be successful, symbiotic change or great loss.
- See all threats as ecological, even if seemingly unrelated. Look for the connections: is someone acting out of

desperation or a sense of material insecurity when oppressing someone else? Could it be that overcrowding and dwindling resources are influencing and exacerbating behavior?

- Don't spend all your energy coping with problems that may be symptoms, while failing to work at all on the ecological imbalance spawning manifestations of system breakdown.

- If children are brought up and instructed that problems in the world have to do with not honoring nature and her creatures, and if they also honor the diversity of humanity, they will grow up differently as an improvement over their parents and teachers.

The problem that threatens the ecosystem? It's the economy. The present global corporate economy is all wrong. Even the small market economy is wrong, because it led to this distortion of humanity and destruction of the Earth. For people to create a "separate" economy from our private lives, to charge for food and materials we all need for shelter and clothing, is the biggest mistake humanity may have ever made.

Solutions and improvements are many, but our hands are probably tied as long as there is ample petroleum and a market economy. Collapse may be our best friend, although it would be heartless to wish for chaotic, painful breakdown. All we can do is our best, and remember that solidarity and cooperation are more productive than competition -- a scientific fact that happens to be our species' real history over hundreds of thousands of years.

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Twenty Percent of All Mammals at Risk of Extinction

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At least twenty percent of all known mammals are nearing extinction, with large species at greatest risk, according to a recent assessment of the conservation status of 5,487 mammals.