

The World After Industrial Civilization Goes

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Author Keith Farnish has a problem with Western Civilization. So do I. I mean, Mozart is all well and good, but destroying the planet through industrialism and growth isn't quite worth civilization's accomplishments. Or is extinction a small price to pay for our glorious expansion? The downsides are hard-wired to the dominant culture.

Even if sustainability were not a critical issue, for anyone to have to pay to live on Earth is a ridiculous notion for a society to undertake. But this is our brilliant system, whereby people are conditioned to compete and buy into their own slavery. Abandoning nature in order to have to buy pieces of it as commodities is inefficiency and waste of the tallest order. Modern man is demonstrably stupid to rely on unnecessary slavery, whereas any animal smart enough to survive in the wild cannot be stupid and is no kind of slave.

One form of human enslavement is to tolerate massive pollution, such as the sum of greenhouse gas output from the technological giants China and the U.S. One can surmise that those of us who sit by and do not lift a finger lack a "survival gene" in our evolutionarily strange times.

Keith asked me, in the spirit of co-liberation for humanity and the species we have enslaved, to furnish a chapter to his upcoming book *Underminers: A Practical Guide for Radical Change*. Upon reading the introduction he wrote, I'm in support of the project. Here's what he got from me in early October of this year:

The World After Industrial Civilization Goes

Usher in the "new" economics of local self-sufficiency and community cooperation

Imagine no possessions

I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger

A brotherhood of man*

- Imagine, John Lennon

*Lest any feminists be offended by the quaintness of the last line, it is worth recalling that Lennon was soon to unleash "Woman is the Nigger of the World."

I like to think that critics of civilization are above all compassionate, nonviolent and realistic. So perhaps we can keep in mind that wishing for quick change to save the planet and throw off the shackles of capitalism and authoritarianism has to be weighed with today's vast dependence on industry. Yes, the economy will collapse and end most greenhouse gas emissions. But this is not to say everything will be just fine as soon as manufacturing and oil-powered transport stop. There will be severe repercussions to "lifelines" of energy, food and materials being cut or terminated.

As industrial civilization is built on exploiting nonrenewable "resources" (many of which should never have been tapped), and human population and consumption of manufactured materials are near peak, the unsustainability of unlimited industrialism should be obvious.

Whether the unsustainability is obvious or not, collapse can be sudden and rapid, as the house-of-cards economy built on cheap, ample petroleum can have the rug pulled out from under it by any break in the chain. Then the infrastructure fails once and for all, beginning the final rusting of the machinery of civilization on all levels.

One can say today, while we still enjoy vast quantities of food shipped great distances, "That's fine, the Earth needs a break." But population die-off has two versions: simple starvation that can be overcome after petrocollapse, or species extinction due to weakening of the gene pool and assaults from nuclear events, disease, and climate destabilization.

If we have simple starvation, and can survive the other assaults, then we can paint a picture of the world after industrial civilization that has a viable human presence. I am optimistic about it. A new culture borrowing heavily on traditional ways of various indigenous cultures, with some helpful influences from recent visionaries, will emerge from the rubble of petrocivilization. The breakdown of the previous global corporate culture and lack of cheap, fast travel will assure a larger world of innumerable autonomous bioregional nations and tribes.

Individually the end of industrial civilization and massive government means being free from jobs, i.e., working for others for their purposes to earn money to buy essentials that nature actually provides freely. This is unthinkable by many today, but they tend to distrust the masses' thinking for themselves and managing with self-rule and voluntary cooperation.

Along with rejecting the obvious failures and mistakes of the previous era of growth and "progress," the new culture will have to find harmony with nature. This cannot be done with the hierarchal, patriarchal, religious empire-building mindset that ravaged the planet starting with perhaps Sumer. Therefore the new culture will feature equality, justice, mutual aid, and will refrain from building surpluses for grandiose schemes of expansion or greed.

As to nuts & bolts, or the lack of them, I wrote in January of 2007 in Culture Change Letter #150, "one can visualize local crafts-people soon making due with scrap materials and some renewable resources. The individual's possessions will not be so voluminous and overbearing when the change comes. There will no longer be a great number of things used daily, because new stuff won't be available and cheaply shipped to everyone the way it once was. So, re-using finally becomes the rule of the day."

However, maximizing bicycles and bike-trailers may be a transition phenomenon that lasts only a century at best. This may not be so terrible: as we become less material oriented we become more spiritual. It can be argued that nature and spirit are really one. If a "primitive" and simple life for all sounds objectionable, tough shit. The question is "what is really ahead?", not what we feel we are entitled to as modern homo "sapiens." As part of the swing of the pendulum, spirituality identified with the Earth will return strongly, as people revere life in part by deploring the past era's trashing of the living world.

As certain regions will be damaged for centuries by past practices and the distortions of climate change, they cannot provide every essential food or material for sustaining the lives or happiness of the tribe or nation, if isolated. So trade will be perhaps essential. Without cheap oil, and in the absence of renewable fuels such as biofuels that still depend on mechanical systems involving high entropy, the low-tech, efficient mode of sailing will return to the fore. Already it is making itself attractive in a cost sense as the corporate global economy continues to pollute the atmosphere with disastrous bunker fuel and routine oil spills out of view of the news media and public consciousness.

People in temperate and arctic climes can live without coffee, chocolate, and other delicacies now shipped thousands of miles to addicts and bon vivants. But people prefer not to be deprived: if something can be done, it will be done. Additionally, a favorable environment here for producing olives, for example, can result in a reasonable surplus to trade for some grain from over there. Specialization is a questionable reliance, but sharing and assisting other communities will be carried out between peoples who, since the Great Collapse, will be evolving their bioregions into very diverse, unique cultures. The loss of languages and cultures will be remedied over time. Sailing will keep up the right level of communication, knowledge, and mutual aid, for the new reduced population size.

That's if we can survive the undoing of civilization and its toxic and radioactive consequences.

- Depaver Jan Lundberg, independent oil industry analyst

Monterey Bay, California, October 8, 2011

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Further reading:

Keith Farnish's forthcoming book, has begun online here: [Underminers: A Practical Guide for Radical Change](#). Some of his writings are on [Culture Change](#).

Jan Lundberg's January 2007 essay:

[Ending Industrialism: Will peak oil save the climate, or shall we first embrace a new culture?](#)