The Challenge of Unity Amidst Economic Crisis and the End of Growth

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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An error of the Occupy movement might come back to haunt us all after possible short-term victories. Identifying and vilifying the extremely wealthy class is not a solution in itself. While it is important to realize the truth of income disparity and address its causes, no one seems to have a realistic program to take back almost all the wealth of "the 1%" and reorganize society to share it.

In my previous essay I showed how today's inflated, vast monetary wealth is false and will disappear, and that it cannot be redistributed under our form of economy when its entire foundation is sinking.
A political solution for eradicating gross inequity is too late for successful reform, without overhauling the culture, when collapse is in charge and "nature bats last."

Taking this further, the present lack of unity among the whole population will persist until society abandons capitalistic as well as bureaucratic control over people and nature. That may sound simplistic, and certainly there is more involved, but it is essential. It may only come about as part of an historic process of revolutionary cultural change. Most important for beneficial effect is that unity come about as soon as possible, as far as changing conditions allow.

What sort of "unity?" Non-authoritarian social structures are vital to the degree possible, so that forced unity -- false unity -- does not undermine the supreme effort needed to achieve a sustainable culture requiring justice. (The particulars of an evolved culture of sustainability have been explored in many articles at www.CultureChange.org)

The Occupy movement can get far by agitating for justice and fairness, and begin to win, but in the end it's all about unity -- of the 100%. It is inevitable that all people will learn, upon general economic collapse, that we are all in the same boat and need to eke out a subsistence living from what nature offers locally. What difference will it make then, if someone was or was not part of the 1% or even the .1%? (War crimes may be a different matter.) What will matter most will be our skills to share, community organizing, mutual aid, and restoring nature. Politics as we have known it will belong to the past.

The need for unity can no longer mean uniting ourselves around tolerance for greed and a resultant level of "acceptable" deprivation. That uneasy arrangement has been sold as the American Way, as if the film "It's a Wonderful Life" or electing a Black president portray a fair and secure nation under the Red, White and Blue. The reality is that millions of people in the U.S. are going hungry each day, and substandard housing and lack of health care are rife. The U.S. is a failure by such measures, deliberately so as it spends more on its military than all other nations combined, while under no threat to its shores. Worse, the climate and ecosystem are threatened with virtually permanent damage and unlivability solely for the profit of the few and the convenience of many.

I disagree that the rampant hunger and harm to the climate are simply about capitalism and greed, for these tendencies are basically symptoms of an expansionist, materialist culture that has grown to the point of die-off. An ecosystem cannot comfortably accommodate overcrowding of any species. When that happens, as shown with experiments on rats in a cage, viciousness, insanity, ill health, cannibalism and other deviant behavior reign supreme. This seems to describe the modern world of 7 billion humans, although we have been conditioned to think of our "sapiens cage" as amazingly wonderful for its technology and certain surpluses. It is tempting to imagine that there is no real shortage of essential resources or that "the U.S. is not really broke," as if redistribution, better technology and universal veganism will solve our principal global problems at the root.

The Occupy movement has a lot going for it, and its manifestations of peaceful, civil disobedience -- such as living in empty houses foreclosed upon -- are just. However, the extreme rich who have held sway with their power structure (e.g., police enforcing of evictions) are in danger of being threatened themselves. While this might accomplish something positive if it were temporary and were to lead to unity, it is not a reasonable goal. A blood bath as in the

French Revolution is an unhealthy way to build a society of compassion and cooperation. But as today's funny money -- digital and potentially useless overnight -- disappears in the fairly near future, our past differences will also disappear, as people work together on collective survival. Why should we and why will we? Because that is true human nature, as evidenced by our long existence of tribal band living.

Things are getting worse in much of the world economically, including in the U.S. The illusion perpetrated by the corporate media is that the economic situation is not really too terrible. But protests are proof that things are not at all hunky dory.

If many of us fail economically, we all will. Collapse has momentum. Where will the multitudes turn to for immediate food, but to the elite and any available places?

Besides occupying the land (as expressed in our Nov. 4 essay), we might stay in the homes we already inhabit, and if necessary blockade them from the inside at some point -- and get away with it if there were too much overall chaos for landlords to get the police to evict. And why would eviction be truly necessary, when the landlords and bankers already have houses of their own? Tenants or mortgagees could offer to perform services in exchange, for housing security, giving official owners everything from babysitting or gathering firewood as barter. Money may become useless if there is hyperinflation. Letting go of the money system may turn out to be easier than we thought.

It may be doubtful that anyone has a clear, accurate idea of where things are exactly going, but it's important to think and imagine. Rather than dwell on maximum unpleasantness, one prefers an orderly life and to do well as an advantaged world citizen. But that is less likely to be in the cards than ever, if based on widespread material security by today's standards. In my own case, good nonprofit work and a nicely reviewed book have not rewarded me much materially. So in the event of an aggravated crisis I could end up a scrabbler, in which case I might lament to be no longer 25 years old, although my knowledge makes up for a lot and I can still run several blocks.

On a positive note (pardon the pun), consider the poetry of "Get Together", a song from the mid 1960s by Quicksilver Messenger Service's co-founder Dino Valenti, made famous by the Youngbloods:

Come on people now

Smile on your brother

Everybody get together

Try and love one another right now

Singing this song to a fascist thug will probably not protect you. But "everybody get together" is the only sustainability.

There will be scarier times ahead for the many sapiens in the American cage. The petroleum mainlined fix will give way to upheaval, probably making the Occupy Wall Street police riot on Nov. 15 look like a picnic in certain locales in comparison. One doesn't want to see deadly, widespread strife, but as a society we are still not moving to minimize it. One "solution" is out: that a peaceful, upwardly mobile consumer economy will return, when oil is stuck at such high price levels (apart from the subsidies), and the alternatives to oil are not full substitutes.

Perhaps the ultimate question to be asked, seldom in our mass delusion as a coast-to-coast consumer society, is "Who, what and where is my tribe?"

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References

Erasing/Seizing Wealth of "The 1%" Cannot Create Viable Middle Class or Solve Sustainability Crisis

On Brink of Economic Catastrophe: Nearly Half in US Struggling
Many above poverty line struggle to make ends meet
"The survey, released on Tuesday by the advocacy group Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), found that 45 percent of U.S. residents live in households that struggle to make ends meet." - Reuters

Hunger in America, By the Numbers
"Last year, 17.2 million households in the United States were food insecure, the highest level on record, as the Great Recession continued to wreak havoc on families across the country. Of those 17.2 million households, 3.9 million included children. On Thanksgiving weekend, here's a look at hunger in America, as millions of Americans struggle to get enough to eat in the wake of the economic crisis." - ThinkProgress

Jan Lundberg's other articles on the Occupy movement:

Update from DC: Occupy, pepperspray, peak oil, sail power, Congress Nov. 23, 2011

How The Occupy Movement May Be Off-Base, and How It Can Evolve ("Occupy the Land") Nov. 4, 2011

The Occupiers' dream: an easy revolution? Also in this report on the global Occupy movement:

- Community-healing

- What is the goal of Occupy, given the root problems?

Oct. 16, 2011

What's up with the Occupy protests - for a sustainable culture?
Oct. 5, 2011

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