What Kind of a Society Is This, and What Do We Want?

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[In under 750 words, we identify the problem and perhaps the solution. - Publisher]

I cross yet another polluted river, on an Amtrak bus running late again. I look around the river and contemplate what empties into it, as the nearly full moon illuminates the degraded agribusiness landscape. The 101 Freeway through King City, California has the usual number of typical, inefficient vehicles spewing their exhaust, generating brake dust, tire dust, and dripping toxic crankcase oil and other fluids poisoning wildlife and human alike.

It is getting less and less credible to claim that technology can or will solve our out-of-control pollution, degradation and depletion. Our state of affairs is very far from any hoped-for turnaround in enlightened policy that recognizes both big industry and the market economy as rapidly undermining our ecological life-support systems. This can affect the mind and turn our guts.

To react to this open, willing failure by saying "This is a shit society" would be unconscious, cruel and foolish. Apart from the fact that the vast majority of people have simply inherited a rigged set-up, and are brainwashed to continue to enrich corporations in the business of destruction, the epithet "shit" refers to a substance actually natural and good. For human and animal manure have always benefited plants that in turn benefited humans.

If a fair description of society -- "$ociety" -- is to be arrived at, for whom is any lashing out intended? The prevailing ignorance and laziness of consumers not bothering to save their own environment -- when recycling, composting, tree-planting, wise purchasing, etc. are understandable and widely known -- eliminates the likely acceptance of a "harsh" assessment among many. A tongue lashing, however, at minimum, might be in order.

A litany of "mistakes" and crimes against people and nature could take volumes to list and analyze. The most brief grouping includes unjustifiable wars, reckless and corrupt "development" of land, plasticizing the oceans, overpopulating, destabilizing the climate, and creating nuclear waste and nuke "accidents."

It is easy to attack or dismiss such a society as illegitimate and deserving of the soonest collapse. This approach or simple observation shocks the ignorant consumer and fascist industrialist alike, or even establishes the commentator as a worse problem than the crimes being commented on. Such is the denial of the modern, distorted mind and the power structure's paranoid rigidity.

Curing the present system of its ills would be the obvious course. But as the severity of the crisis grows, and our plight intensifies as our own grave is dug deeper, the rational conclusion is that it is too late to cure $ociety of its ills and thus save life on Earth.

In place of an actual program or viable movement to address fundamental issues, we see endless "information" and complaining about symptoms afflicting us all. The Occupy movement shares that defect, but not necessarily to a mortal extent. Unless the Occupy movement refocusses on ecological reality and addresses the need to reorient consumers toward occupying productive, healthy land in a community fashion, the movement's obsession with the greed of the "1%" and redistributing its (false) wealth will continue to miss the most crucial issue: sustainability.

Oil dependence at a time of peak global petroleum extraction, and hopeless vulnerability to complex systems that turn nature into products for short-term human "needs" are so controlling that the consequences will be huge and inescapable. (Some needs are more real than others, and this must be discussed to help shopping addicts become more self-reliant.)

The consequences are not mentioned, let alone explored, in our "Big Brother" propaganda that twists meanings in order to prop up the status quo. So we find that the corporate news media, the politicians, and academia tainted by funding, and even the "progressive" "alternative" press, avoid and suppress simple truths. Some activists accentuate only the positive, and perhaps this is having a bigger effect than we realize. Yet:

In such times as these, it is as if everyone needs to suddenly put down their cellphones, get out of their cars, turn off their televisions and power tools, and go gather in the middle of streets to sing and play instruments. Depave the streets to plant rows of fruit and nut trees to lessen the urban heat island effect. Get rid of money and barter instead.

If this sounds like a general strike that terminates the global economy, I endorse that. If it sounds like fantastical dreaming, that is correct too. If it would imply a quick descent into mass deprivation, there is truth to that, but people do have amazing power in collaborating that draws upon the basic goodness of human beings. One thing we know: predicting the future and anticipating stability and security are doubtful, so we must be open to the unexpected more than ever.

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