

The Only Hope Is Unity

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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with commentary by Dmitry Orlov

Culture Change Letter #148

As we share our worries about global warming, we are actually doing so separately by virtue of lifestyle and culture. We know this poor approach to be ineffective, and our despair mounts as we keep seeing the wrong kind of economics churn along. Clearly the Iraq disaster and other crises are symptoms of a system run amok.

It appears that all but the most fortunate people have to experience today's pain and frustration separately and in an alienated fashion, in a private, stressful quasi-hell. We each undergo unprecedeted pressure on our psyches and our bodies. Although we know we're in a collective pickle, we are curiously delaying acting like a collective intelligence. Could it be that we are now about to see the light?

When people unite to fight a great, imminent threat, as I predict we will, as events and developments accelerate, there will be rapid progress towards addressing problems. This may occur concurrently with desperate and antisocial behavior especially as fuel and food shortages strike. The climate's active distortion seems about to painfully kick many more people "upside the head like a two-by-four," as Julia Butterfly characterized the common stubbornness to overdue change.

Perhaps the most succinct example for humanity's getting to the root, and rejecting time-wasting "solutions" that are half-measures at best, is to now bypass the Kyoto Protocol and bring about an 80% reduction in greenhouse-gas emissions from fossil fuels since 1990 levels. This was advised by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in the early 1990s. Their recommended 60-80% range of immediate curtailment was advanced clearly enough, but has become part of our tragic inaction that now requires ratcheting up the appropriate response. So the 60% reduction is probably too little and too late. Is 90% the real goal, and will petrocollapse take us to 95% or higher?

Calling for the lowest possible reductions in emissions is not alarmist anymore, as climate models cannot seem to keep up with the unraveling of the climate system. 2006 was the hottest year recorded in the United States. This is the latest from the Bush Administration which seems to be unmuzzling climate scientists who have tried to point a finger at human-caused warming, according to the New York Times of January 10, 2007.

One may ask, who are the leaders for the unity we need, and what is the plan for implementing unity immediately?

The leaders are really all of us. For it is the attitude of "Let George do it" (an expression preceding the Bushes), or the misapprehension that we do not have much individual or collective power to change society drastically, that can and will be jettisoned when people see that their own Katrina disaster is hitting, and hitting all of us everywhere.

Climate change may be the only global threat to ever grab everyone's awareness, making humanity realize it is all in the same boat; there is no escape. The false unity of settling for the tiny improvement of an election of the pro-corporate business Democrats, for example, will soon -- thanks to climate events and science -- be seen for what it is. Instead of accepting the government/corporate party line, unity of the spirit and of honest action to protect the climate will take interesting forms as values quickly evolve. This period just ahead will make the 1960s' changes in awareness and lifestyle look like slow baby-steps.

I believe that the obvious on fossil fueled madness has been shunted aside so long that it is like the Emperor's clothes: we pretend we can and must continue to use private cars, just as we pretend it is alright to own our separate home appliances using electricity -- when we don't even try to share them with neighbors.

It could take too much valuable time for the false leadership of economic growth and exploitation, i.e., the dominant voices of capitalist society, to unwe the themselves from nonstop profit-taking, in order to "save us." This obstacle seems to be more and more transparent as fatal to the biosphere; at least in the minds of those paying attention and who aren't bought off by the status quo or the false alternative known as the technofix.

At some point very soon, maybe this year, we will all acknowledge that our future is so compromised by our economics and consumer lifestyle that we cannot keep hiding our heads in the sand. From righting these tragic errors, we can visualize many more steps that address the threat to our survival and the future of the world.

I hope discussion and action will flow from this fact-situation soon, and I welcome any comments and connections for

networking. Below I once again offer the webpage link to the Ten Steps of the Pledge for Climate Protection.

- JL

San Francisco, California

January 10, 2007

Response from Dmitry Orlov:

My feeling is that climate change cannot be stopped. Even if extractive industries, manufacturing, transportation, and industrial agriculture were completely shut down tomorrow, climate change would continue for centuries. Most of the change we have seen so far has resulted from carbon emissions which occurred decades ago. The positive feedbacks that have been unleashed may overwhelm the effect of anthropogenic emissions. Scientific efforts to characterize these effects and political efforts express them in policy are the modern-day example of fiddling while Rome burns.

Secondly, my feeling is that it will not be stopped, because nothing will be done. The reason is rather intricate, and involves the difference between committing physical suicide and committing professional and political suicide; strangely, most people prefer the former. This appears to be a fixed element in human psychology that transcends culture, but it needs some exploring. I don't think it's a cultural invariant, because it is so maladaptive, but it needs some careful investigation. I think it is a property of hierarchically structured societies, but "death before dishonor" may be characteristic of other groups as well. Perhaps all human societies are rigged to eventually self-destruct, because this is the only way they can evolve, but now they have evolved so far that the self-destruction will be global.

Lastly, I do feel that people need to work together, but not to try to develop or implement policies, because that's futile (see previous point). Instead, people need to work together to develop an autonomous sense of ethics in relation to nature and to each other, one that prioritizes the welfare of the natural world above all else, and that leads to collective inaction - not consuming, not driving, not procreating, not destroying - but ignoring and tuning out the human-made world, and concentrating on quietly enjoying and cherishing what still remains of the natural world.

-Dmitry

Biocentrism comment by JL to DO:

One reason to maintain my position or the hope for it, despite your points that I agree with, is that people need - as you say - to change their ethical relationship with each other and the natural world, and, also, not let the bastards laugh all the way to the bank (the global-warming greedy ones profiting off destruction of the Earth). I like your biocentric, non-anthropocentric view of our corrected human consciousness, and this dates back to Culture Change's early beginnings of 1988 onward (getting strong in 1990 onward).

For more writings by Dmitry Orlov in Culture Change, see his recent work at

<http://culturechange.org/cms/>: Despotism of the Image

and

<http://culturechange.org/cms/>: Sail Transport Network's presentation at Bioneers By The Bay

Our correspondent Bill LeBon recommends: "People can ride a bike, eat organic and set their (single) friends up with a date! Let's get together and feel alright!"

The "Pledge for Climate Protection" happens to be the same approach we recommend for looming petrocollapse and culture change:

culturechange.org/global_warming_pledge.html

Listen to The Depavers do "Have a Global Warming Day" as heard on NPR and seen on CNN-International from Kyoto

at the UN's 1997 Climate Conference:

culturechange.org/depavers.html

The Global Warming Crisis Council has a listserve with much news offered almost daily on climate and energy issues. To get on the email-list and take part in discussions, contact Wanda Ballentine at: wsb70 "at" comcast.net and request that your email address be added.

"Agency Affirms Human Influence on Climate", by Andrew Revkin:

nytimes.com

A local-based approach, featuring the controversial but women-produced Ecobabes Calendar, is that of the Climate Protection Campaign (Sonoma County, California):

climateprotectioncampaign.org

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