

Labor Day Reality for Humanity on the Gallows - or Shall We Imagine Differently?

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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The U.S. holiday Labor Day is a joke. Any day off is welcome, of course. However, again there will be no visible strikes and no muscle-flexing by the labor movement. Observance of Labor Day is as if having to be either over-worked or unemployed, putting up with extreme income disparity, tolerating insanely onerous student debt, forced to contribute to environmental degradation and unabated military madness, are non-existent issues in the "real world."

The non-labor orientation of our political reality has a lot to do with the loss of May Day (May 1st) in the U.S. as a workers' show of force and rallying tool. This is ironic when the world picked up on it big time, honoring it to this day, almost a century and a half after the U.S. anarchist labor movement created it.

Today it isn't clear that many workers in the U.S. are aware of that fact. They seem just as unaware of their power to make demands and carry them out. Understandably, this is hard when population increase is U.S. policy in order to weaken collective bargaining.

The public is nearing a consensus that wealth redistribution is critical. But by now, with the unraveling of our healthy biosphere, the need for redefining wealth and changing our cultural values is arguably the foremost challenge of our time. The Occupy movement had room for developing along these lines -- the ecological and the sustainable -- but the Occupy movement in the U.S. was quashed by the police state and the complicity of politicians who enjoyed trust from many liberal, progressive citizens. If the labor movement were to go back to its roots and act like Occupy, i.e., peacefully and quite vocally, such protests would be quashed by the police state; it would be nothing new in U.S. history.

In Europe the austerity enforced by central-bank friendly governments has sapped people's energy. But the end of economic growth and individual advancement on a mass scale has been noted -- except by those clinging to faith in better jobs and more credit available for the pursuit of material dreams. Fossil fuels -- the engine of growth past -- are commonly believed to be just a matter of technology rather than expensive dwindling resources, so cheaper energy is the cry. Pent up protests will return, limited as usual to demanding a piece of the pie. But what if, as Richard Register asks, it is an arsenic pie? If so acknowledged, imagine then what turn a protesting population might take.

Today's relevance of Labor Day, May Day and the related but disjointed protest movement of today -- social justice, climate concern, animal rights, and little else -- deserves thought and discussion. But thought and discussion are pitifully lacking. To focus on the Why and How they are lacking may be a fruitless exercise, when done just between the camp of optimistic, positive-thinking, semi-informed citizens and the camp of pessimists looking at signs of increased oppression, deprivation and collapse.

What indeed can be done

So the question arises, as it always does when actions don't match the reality of the threat: what can be done about rising to the historic occasion? If modern humans don't do so, and don't exercise their power to upset the apple cart of pesticide-laden corporate apples, what does this mean for our common future? Is there an answer that takes these questions into account honestly and allows us to take a meaningful step?

We could start with some necessary denial. The idea of our relatively imminent extinction is gaining traction and adherents and should be denied. Adherents generally drop out of efforts (if they had made any to begin with) to take action for changing their lives to change the world. We dealt with this question in "Global Warming Culture versus the Natural Future for Humanity, and the Real Denialism" which offered science-based hope (May 2014, on CultureChange.org).

Having dealt with the pessimism of extinctionists, moving right along now, looking at Labor Day as more than a chance to have a barbecue (as the Earth is barbequed), we come closer to the question of what to do. Do you have any suggestions, or perhaps even the answer? No? It is indeed daunting to get beyond hopelessness, resignation or magical thinking. Therefore, a new approach is called for. But it may be one that has been dismissed as impractical or extremely unlikely. For example, what can love do? Is it the unlimited resource that David Brower pointed out is unique for its attribute of growing the more it is utilized? Is it a concept as amorphous, useless or irresponsible as "terror" is, for defining or addressing today's conflicts and opportunities? Why should "terror" and "anti-terror" be easy currency, far greater than love & peace?

Love is where I will put my money, so to speak. Let me explain; love covers a whole lot.

Were John Lennon and the hippies right? Perhaps the fact that he and the revolutionary hippie movement (so oriented toward love and peace) were stamped out so deliberately, as the vice was tightened to offer the people only jobs and material gain, gives us reason to revisit love & peace as real power. This does not say much, so far, and is pooh-poohed by cynics, realists, militants, and grieving hippies in and out of the closet. So we hasten to add what is related to love and peace: the right to living amidst healthy nature and enjoying the beauty of life. This means rejecting gross artificialities such as the industrial environment, the market economy, and wage slavery.

Can people actually get along without bosses, employers, brilliant capitalists, corporation-bought politicians, the plethora of techno-whiz gadgets, the god of science, and the bliss of isolated consuming? Are the militarized police who are keeping us in line with fear -- aided by the national surveillance establishment -- securing long-term for us life's essentials of untainted food, clean water, clothing, shelter, and the rest?

Until we imagine a different way of thinking that we put into practice, we are further and further away from John Lennon's appeal to Imagine. Imagine there's no division between people. Imagine we can work together. Imagine we are all free, beautiful and creative. Imagine nature is not our enemy. Imagine music and art being truly important for everyone every day. Imagine that time is your own for spending it with family and friends, collaborating voluntarily in mutual aid.

Or, instead, we keep on being "realistic" and live as if it's every man for himself. That's the dead end of the culture of competition and its relentless expansion on our commodified, finite, dangerously stressed planet.

Note: this article appeared on Truthout.org's SpeakOut section as an op-ed, Sept. 2, 2014, with a comment added by the author.

John Lennon: Imagine

At Ferguson March, Call to Halt Traffic in Labor Day Highway Protest

By Many Fernandez and Campbell Robertson, New York Times

In the continuing protests over the killing of a black teenager by a white police officer, protesters were encouraged to tie up traffic on the Labor Day holiday.

U.S. crackdown on Occupy movement: documents prove what was once dismissed as paranoid fantasy -- totally integrated corporate-state repression of dissent. By Naomi Wolf, 29 December 2012
theguardian.com