# The Ameliorators: a possible coalition of progressives on (e.g.) NAFTA

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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These are confusing times, for many. We know of very intelligent, well-informed activists who choose to see an aspect of the disturbing reality afflicting us, while ignoring other parts of the big picture. This may be because of stress and fear.

Is this scary picture of a multi-crisis an affliction Western Civilization suffers from, or is Western Civilization the affliction? The question should lead people to improve their perspective, in case they needed to. Meanwhile, we can't sit back smugly by concluding, "I understand what's going on, and what needs to be done, but people don't get it." Other common attitudes: "The banksters are too powerful. The elite will always have what it wants." Or, "Hmm, is the presidential election what most deserves my attention as a solid activist?"

So, in the spirit of offering timely, relevant ideas, maybe we can "all" agree" on a different approach, one that gets to the root. How might we dial back industrialism's onslaught against nature (and that's our health)? To ameliorate the effects of the industrial economy is a sensible approach to dealing with a matter on the order of leaving or dismantling NAFTA. The priority should actually be to reach consensus on the toxic, menacing, deteriorating industrial economy. But that awareness is still taking time.

Meanwhile, perhaps for blind believers in civilization, another way of framing the approach could be to rally people around an aspect of modern life that is readily agreed upon. I'm not sure what that is, because it's too easy to be vague. The "unraveling of the fabric of society" is commonly felt, but, unbelievably, people have absurd scapegoats, such as "all the Syrian refugees coming into the U.S."

The culprits are easily defined as all of us, as consumers. The matter of consumption has to be addressed as comprising two components: life-giving, essential cargo, and the purely materialistic and toxic products. The distinction could be useful to thinking people.

The issue of mass consumption is to be handled gingerly, by promoting alternatives to globalized buying practices, and even appealing to consumers' victimhood (that they haven't failed to notice). After all, only "primitive" people are totally exempt from severe dependence on complex, global systems.

When the New York Times said on Oct. 4, 2016 that Donald Trump is full of prunes over leaving NAFTA, this does not tie his hands or even Bernie Sanders' hands. For ameliorating the bad effects of NAFTA, and offering alternatives to NAFTA, would be a reasonable approach. (Now I can get a job as a campaign advisor?!) This could accomplish some of the goals as leaving NAFTA does, but in a more orderly fashion.

Whether one believes economic and ecological collapse is nigh, or that some kind of familiar continuity must instead ensue automatically, our ameliorating the situation while preparing for absolute fundamental change would seem to me to be a matter of possible consensus.

To sweep away minor differences — if amelioration and preparing for deep change is the agreed-upon agenda — would unite vast numbers of people who agree on cleaning up the mess and improving conditions for life.

I don’t want to talk about Third Parties here and now; what a huge subject. But maybe somehow an Amelioration or Ameliorating movement could get going and do some good.

A platform could feature the strengthening of climate agreements, by specifically adding areas of strong interest. Such as, scaling way back on maritime shipping’s oil dependence. Sixty thousand people a year die from cargo vessels' air pollution. Sail transport happens to be leading the pack regarding sustainability of (in this case, time-honored) alternatives to conventional shipping technology. Sail power is truly clean and renewable, unlike almost all other technologies for transportation.

Another basic area of potential agreement: babysit the decomissioned nukes -- this should be the best paid job for anyone in tomorrow’s sustainable culture.

The most obvious form of amelioration for urban areas is depaving or "unpaving" (removing tarmac and concrete). Roads and parking lots dominate almost every city on the planet as they accommodate the polluting and space-hogging car. Depaving followed by replanting is also cooling, serving to ratchet down the urban heat island effect.

What about a rock band called the Urban Heat Islanders? The world has already marvelled at and boogied to Pavement as well as the Depavers. Then there's the possible formation of -- snare drum roll please -- the Ameliorators. It's okay if the band name is the same name as a global movement, isn't it?

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Further reading:

Sweden Wants To Fight Our Disposable Culture With Tax Breaks For Repairing Old Stuff. A proposed new law takes aim at wasteful consumerism.

Turn21 asks, in it's Oct. 21 newsletter, "Mitigating Oligarchy"

Most global citizens are not revolutionaries, so how can we take power from the wealthy without spilling blood in the streets?

Culture Change recommends this newsletter and the entire Turn21 campaign.

From the newsletter:
"More striking still, it appeared that, if the process of concentration goes on at the same rate, at the end of another century we shall have all American industry controlled by a dozen corporations and run by perhaps a hundred men. Put plainly, we are steering a steady course toward economic oligarchy, if we are not there already."

~ Franklin D. Roosevelt

The New York Times Oct. 4, 2016 edition Donald Trump Trashes Nafta. But Unwinding It Would Come at a Huge Cost. (Far be it for the Times to look at the bigger picture.- ed)

Sail Transport Network works to sharply reduce conventional shipping's little-regulated pollution, and has offered the clean alternative of sail power since 1999.