Minimize violence: Prepare for collapse and "new" culture

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
18 January 2011

Staking out Culture Change's role: nonviolence and understanding collapse

In reflecting why a reader and supporter of Culture Change should contribute toward our urgent request for $1,500 (printing copies of my new book, paying February rent, phone service, train tickets, replacing old computer case, food), I thought to emphasize what has sprouted up lately. I believe we all share certain concerns relating to safety, survival and wrenching change. Our growing audience reflects this.

In the last two months Culture Change has received more recognition than usual from larger media organizations. The topics and themes we cover are about the same as they have been for two decades. But the issues of collapse and militant protest/violence toward humans have now come to the fore. Our message is extra timely, as indicated by the volume of reactions and comments. The discussion has resulted in a new piece for Culture Change by Adam Sacks, "Collapse is a Law of Nature" that you'll receive by week's end.

Minimize violence: Prepare for collapse and "new" culture

Militant revolutionary U.S. writers (Derrick Jensen and Ted Rall, the best known since Ward Churchill) call for an armed response to the corporate state and its oppression and ecocide. They may sound brave, but they and their followers will be disappointed, whether as prognosticators and agitators or shooters. Their angst, confusion and impatience can be traced to a failure to understand collapse and the role of petroleum in U.S. society's demise. The absurdity of a violent "solution" ("defense"), to "win" against the scary right wingers (or "new world order") has a fair number of adherents, due in part to the impassioned writings of authors such as Jensen and Rall (mainly cartoons in the latter's case).

To criticize their advocating violence against people as part of self-defense against a system might seem tantamount to condoning the violence of the state or of anyone else, or failing to understand that Western Civilization has been genocidal. This assumption would be wrong. My point is that we live in a time when social movements are mostly unable to compete with the huge forces of collapse and nature's "batting last." I should not have to add, "There is no way to peace; rather, peace is the way."

Ted Rall said in his new book Anti-American Manifesto:

"They will never get weaker. We have as good a chance at taking them on as ever.

"I want you to lead the revolution -- not by giving orders, but by choosing to revolt. Lead, in other words, by taking possession of yourself.

"What should you do? Mao said revolution isn't a dinner party, meaning that it's often ugly, violent, and even unjust."

After an eloquent series of books in praise of and defense of nature, Derrick Jensen started issuing thinly veiled calls for environmentalist or anarchistic youth to fight the police in the streets. (It was not merely “if attacked when you are peaceful, defend yourself.”) How this foolhardy, reprehensible approach fulfills his long-time, provocative call to take out the dams (for the sake of salmon) seems to only point to the Peter Principle: what do we do next when the dam is destroyed, if the inspired writer has ascended to his level of incompetence? His delusion is that there is a militant eco-movement that he wants truly green folk to join him in. But he is, admittedly, only a writer, as he laments in these (2003) statements:

"Hate is a fine and righteous thing... The Jews who participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising had a much higher rate of survival than those who did not. Keep that in mind over the next ten years."

"Is there anyone who thinks that if we all hold hands and sing 'Give Peace a Chance,' that those in power will stop killing brown people all over the world?"

"I sort of recognize that to be a writer is almost by definition is to be chicken shit and that is the only thing I don't like about my life."

At a time when more writers and cartoonists should care so much about our common plight that they take risks, Rall and Jensen deserve their many fans. But Rall's and Jensen's lack of understanding of collapse may be dangerous and even more ignorant than Washington's refusal to acknowledge the end of the petroleum-driven empire. One thing that Rall, Jensen, and the power structure have in common is that they disdain or discount mass lifestyle change as effective or meaningful as a major force and solution. Inside the Beltway no one can get anywhere in politics, even with the writing on the wall telling everyone that the days of cheap growth are over, by acknowledging collapse -- let alone pointing the way to a post-collapse future. Although the politicians and the whole apparatus of government and lobbyists act as if business-as-usual is the answer and must prevail, many of them know collapse has begun. What they know and say privately, and what they feel they can say publicly, can be 180 degrees apart.

One way to cling to business-as-usual is to imagine a green consumer economy that will save "our way of life" and somehow lessen -- although the proponents don't say how -- the pressing problems of homelessness, more foreclosures, and red-ink budgeting for military aggression. Some of us who are versed in peak-oil reality know that the "promise" of clean energy for a "new economy" is baloney; renewable energy generally offers only electricity and has to be decentralized to be efficient. But before we can calmly refute the technofix and the refusal to slash energy use now, along comes another weird weather event to scare us all over a changing climate. Some see all the connections, but most people don't think much about their culture or its imminent appointment with collapse.

Given the out-of-control state of our world and its downward spiral into unknown and unthinkable chaos, some believe in political solutions. There's a place for political action if it leads the way to a new, sustainable paradigm. Attaining peace and justice is ever more urgent, while the violence of the existing system and its precursors must be seen as obsolete if we are to have a livable future.

Nonviolence does not mean a dogmatic pacifism whereby anything can be allowed against the peaceful. Rather, nonviolence involves a code of compassionate teaching and leadership. Self-defense is included and encouraged, but not when stretched in meaning to bring on more bloodshed -- particularly when an open fight cannot be won. With enough popular support, huge crowds of peaceful protesters have shown us in history that despotic, failed rulers turn tail and run.

The immediate question should then be "what replaces the old guard?" A new guard for the same flawed culture may alleviate some injustices, but this hasn't ever changed the lethal relationship that modern humans have with nature. A new vision is therefore in order, making peace with nature as well as with all people. As innocent and benign as this sounds, the implications are threatening for the wealthy who are scared of sharing and descending to an equal footing.

As complex and weighty as these issues are, collapse simplifies the process. The "bad guy" and the "unfair policy" that is the focus of almost all "progressive" criticism will drop into the background and the dustbin of history. We are remaking a world, but the cleansing process of collapse -- an ugly, unfortunate and cruel process for a huge population that outgrew ecological carrying capacity -- will yield a new culture that draws heavily upon past traditions and skills of our great grandparents.

Help spread the word. As the old order crumbles, networks must step in to provide local food, clean water, cooperative labor, health care, and ecological restoration. Riding your bike and growing a garden might be the most revolutionary thing you can do today. Unless I'm wrong, there's another worthwhile thing to do: if you are able, please contribute to Culture Change now. We stand for peace, even as we recognize the unpeaceful collapse that has just begun.

It's not for me to say "get a gun to defend yourself and your family." It depends on your circumstances and whether any preparations have been made for petroleum-free living by a cohesive, defensible or mobile community. People cannot last without food for more than 50 days, and that length of time is only possible with rest and ample, clean water. So the two months of die-off for the petroleum-dependent world will yield a depopulated landscape, ultimately more peaceful -- one hopes -- than today, once "new" cultural norms take hold. It was this too-peaceful vision that Ted Rall attacked on AlterNet when he quoted me from a 2005 essay, "End-time for USA upon oil collapse: A scenario for a sustainable future." But I stand by it, with an understanding of nature and petrocollapse's brief part in it.
Thanks,

Jan

* * * * *

PLEASE SUPPORT CULTURE CHANGE NOW. Donate online at culturechange.org/donate.html Tax-deductible donations in the form of check or money order can be mailed to the address below, payable to "Culture Change/GVI".

Culture Change

Publisher and Editor: Jan Lundberg,

independent oil industry analyst

P.O. Box 4347, Arcata, CA 95518 USA

tel./fax: 1-215-243-3144

Send feedback to info "at" culturechange.org

Sign up for Culture Change Letters for free, using this link. All that's necessary to fill out is the email address field.

...._o

..._\ \>,

...(_)/(_)

Further reading:

Ted Rall's chapter one of his book Anti-American Manifesto, on AlterNet.org

The Other Side of Darkness CD, Disk Two and Disk Three, with Derrick Jensen.

Books: A Language Older Than Words, and The Culture of Make Believe among others.

Greeting the Fall of the Empire: a Message of Peace

Fighting violence in politics and one's life

End-time for USA upon oil collapse: A scenario for a sustainable future

The Gary Null Show with Jan Lundberg January 14, 2011 -- with discussion of the environmental movement, violence, collapse, and more.