

WHAT THERE IS IS ALL THERE IS

A world created on the assumption of always MORE is obviously unsustainable: Unending growth of an economy, unending riches. No, this is not about oil. It may well be that the supply of oil that is easy to get out of the ground, and therefore cheap, is running out, but sooner or later it becomes unsustainable to rely on oil, or coal, for energy. *Why moan about the price of oil when we should get ourselves ready to do without?*

Yes, there are undoubtedly other ways to get energy to run an immensely wasteful so-called civilization that is not sustainable regardless of what kind of energy we use, but wouldn't it be smarter if we took stock of the underpinnings of how we live, how we have created this world we live in? We use too much of everything, and throw away more than the earth can absorb. And, of course, throwing away what is not biodegradable is creating dumps that will choke our children's and grandchildren's world. No, we must learn again to do without.

Our scientists have told us for years that fast food -- junk food -- is bad for us; too much fat, too much sugar, and the wrong kinds of fat and sugar. Not only is manufactured food bad for us but it has the potential to be dangerous as well. It is not at all difficult to grow vegetables. Admittedly, that means we eat strawberries only when they are in season, and what's wrong with that? Doesn't that make them all the more delicious, even more special? And we'd savor oranges only if they grow in the next valley, not imported from half a world away.

Long distance transport requires picking the fruit long before it is ripe; profit requires "forcing" the plant with bad chemicals to produce more and "better" oranges: All the same size, perfectly round. In truth, nothing tastes as good as an orange (or any fruit) when picked ripe, in season, from a tree that has had no artificial aids to produce bigger fruit (which kills the tree earlier than its natural life span). For many years I survived without oranges. There is vitamin C in many other fruits, apples, pears, a variety of berries.

I've read that in the 1920s and '30s cities, even medium sized cities, had street cars, or other forms of mass transport, *public* transportation. American car manufacturers bought the street cars of Los Angeles, tore down the overhead lines and the tracks, so that the city would have to buy buses. Big corporations sold us on the idea that everybody should have their own car -- four door cars, with room for five, driven by one person to work.

The country made super highways for these cars; let trains languish in order to force huge trucks on us to transport the oranges from Israel all the way to Las Vegas. States and counties made roads so that we could live in the suburbs, because, after all, in America everyone has to have a car, right? We live where we prefer to live, even if it means a

three hour commute by private car. We bought the idea that we all needed to be free to go where we wanted at any time we wanted, live where we chose, do what we damn well please. That is Democracy, right?

Americans who travel to western Europe are often surprised to find countries as modern as we are where it is not necessary to own a car. Public transportation goes to the smallest hamlet. Bicycle paths are everywhere. There are wonderful trains that zoom quietly at 130 miles per hour. Free health care for everyone. Schools are free, even school lunches. Universities are free, even text books. Countries without the death sentence, where few, if any, are thrown away in prisons for the rest of their lives. And, most surprising, they too have elections, refrigerators, all the gadgets and gimmicks we have, but also six weeks paid vacation a year, and a thirty-five hour work week. Yes, they pay more taxes, but they get their money's worth in services. Of course they do not have the largest army and air force in the world because they see no need to control the rest of the world.

Most other countries have a multitude of political parties because a free world has a multitude of shades of gray -- even colors, from green to red.

We are stuck in a two party system although both parties contain groups of very different thinking, thoughtful people. Maybe a country of three hundred million people has outgrown two, and should have three hundred parties to reflect the thinking and the needs of many different population groups. Every decision Congress makes then would require a coalition of parties, rather than "advice" from high-paid lobbyists. But, I am told, democracy *means* a two party system. Really?

We were urged to believe, and we bought the idea, that it is good to reduce taxes for rich people because wealth "trickles down." Oh yeah? We accepted the idea that health services should never be centralized, that would be socialism, and socialism is bad, bad, bad -- although few of us know what socialism means. So, instead of having one payer, we accept that it is better to have many insurance companies. Many insurance companies are supposed to keep the price down because they compete with each other. But they have to make a profit; how can it be economical when it adds to the cost of health care?

We tacitly agree -- it is assumed we agree -- that capitalism, which in America is called Free Market, is not only good for us, but the only way to go. The market, we are told, will even things out. Competition takes care of scoundrels who charge too much, and see to it that everybody gets their share. Are you sure about that? How come then, these last years have seen stagnant income for everybody, but a very few who earn a billion or more bucks a year buying and selling imaginary value?

The movies taught us that man's future was to go where no man had any business going. Our leader, in the same vein, told us that we must control the world, by going across the world to get rid of a bad dictator (who, if the stories are true, we supported only a few years earlier). This evil dictator had something to do with 9/11, we were told (not true),

he was a great threat to the security of our country (very doubtful), it was hinted that he had nuclear weapons (he didn't). Most of us believed the words-- if you can't believe your leader who can you believe? Or, more likely, we did not know what or who to believe, so we stopped thinking about it.

"They," in Washington, do these things in our name. We toppled the bad dictator in a few days. Nobody questioned why we did not get out when we had accomplished that. Why *did* we stay? Okay, we had to find those "weapons of mass destruction" (were we told what that means? No, it was only hinted that they might be nuclear "devices" or "bio-terrorism" or...?) There weren't any WMD to be found. No great surprise because the people who should know these things, knew that they had long been destroyed by the bad dictator himself. But, we stayed, caught the bad dictator who had been hiding. He was tried and hung. We pushed the local people to have an election. They democratically elected a government. Then we bestowed sovereignty on the government (was it ours to give?). And still we stayed on. Because, then we were told, now there were all kinds of bad people, and we had to stay to secure the security for the government we had given sovereignty.

Now, five or more years later, we are still there. In fact, our presence has increased in number and power. At great cost we built enormous bases (did we ask the government we had given sovereignty for permission?). Our Air Force owns the air space and bombs when it deems it necessary to assist ground actions. We spent trillions for armies, planes and bombs, and bullets made with "depleted" uranium that probably is not totally depleted. We have a free hand in that free country.

We stuff *our* jails with locals, perhaps torture them, after all they are "enemy combatants," whatever that means other than we can hold them without charge for as long as it pleases us. And now, after all these years, there is a debate over how long we should stay. A hundred years, one candidate who wants to be the next leader, says. A few years, the other candidate says. And maybe we should also invade the next country over, because they now have gained a great deal of influence in the country we rescued from an evil dictator. Is it our job to get rid of bad dictators? I can name several more countries where that badly needs to be done. Is it really our job to police the world? We, the people, weren't asked; we are assumed to nod our heads. Yes - if the boss says so?

Why have we not asked these and a hundred other questions? How can it be that our government spends more than twice what all those "socialist" countries spend on health care, but the statistics are very clear that we are far down the statistics of "health" of the people (measured in the usual way: longevity, infant mortality, access to health care etc.). How can it be that most other countries have long made cars that get fifty, or even a hundred miles an hour? (Tell you a secret: because gas there costs twice what we pay).

What is going on?

We the people have been **tamed**. Kept occupied with a never ending stream of ever more clever gadgets that are now part of our very existence; kept busy buying an apparently unstoppable avalanche of cheap stuff made in China sold by the largest retail business in the world; kept entertained by the most powerful corporations in the world; fed junk food that makes us fat and sick and asking for more. Let's face it, we are being manipulated. Kept under a spell: Rest in Peace while the real world, under our feet, is being systematically raped, impoverished, destroyed.

Until one day -- not in the far future, but tomorrow -- this house of cards will collapse, and we must wake up. Rubbing our eyes, yawning, we look around and find ourselves in a garbage dump, storms shaking the levees, not enough water for our four baths, one of them a jacuzzi. Our enormous cars are made for gas priced below two dollars a gallon, but the price now is four, five, ten dollars and who could have foreseen... The car manufacturers, who once were our pride, sold us on the idea that everybody needs a seven passenger van or a truck with four doors as well as an eight foot bed; live it up; our slogan was always, in America gas is cheap. Now, we can no longer afford the three hour commute, if we even have the job that evaporated because the raw materials of the product we were promoting are no longer affordable.

The price of cat food has gone through the roof. Heating oil is not even available any more, the trucks do not run. The city does not pick up garbage any more -- what do we do with all the plastic? How to get to a doctor when all doctors are in the same building, nearer to the labs and the hospital, 20 miles away. Our insurance has been cancelled. Bread, the staff of life, now costs eight dollars a loaf. They made it super easy for us to buy a house we really could not afford. Now, we can't pay the mortgage that suddenly was raised to two digit percentages. They sold us on a war that has bankrupted us. They promised us a free market would take care of us. They...

Who are these they? They who look after themselves, again it is all men, women and children for themselves. Back to the way back beginning; back to nature.

Nature, another word for chaos, the womb of all possibilities.

Forget about promises, programs, planks. We must start over again. From the beginning. Me and my family. My family and our neighbors. How do we grow enough food without commercial fertilizer, without machines, without the world we lived in so comfortably?

We must learn again to share, rather than compete. Just us, around here. Countries? Countries are artificial lines drawn on a piece of paper. Get me a bicycle and I'll get around. We must learn to make footwear from what is in our neighborhood. How do we keep dry and warm without electricity, without trucks to bring building material made a thousand miles away? What do we do for roofs? How about clothes to keep us warm?

All that, of course, and more, much more, *after* the big boys have exhausted their

ambitions, their bombs and missiles. After the noise of the ultimate war has died down, the war that almost killed the planet itself.

Can we survive? Yes, we can. We did it before -- for the first hundred thousand years of our existence as humans. We can do it again when we are sane again, not tamed and lulled asleep with sugar, fat, and television. Living - reduced to finding food and drink, some shelter, and friends.

I've done it; more than once.

A very good way to be.

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