

Friends of the Trees Society
Michael Pilarski
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TOWARDS A POSITIVE WORLDVIEW

I have just finished sending out my December 5 email newsletter to approximately 2200 people. The feedback thus far has been largely favorable, but several good friends were upset and sent criticism. I do acknowledge that my predicting a severe economic collapse in 2009 is a distressing message. This is dire news for the current economic paradigm and if it happens it will translate into a lot of human suffering.

I would like to point out that I didn't invent the concept of "a severe, financial collapse in the US". I am one of many thousands of people and sources on the internet and at all levels of society who are sounding an alarm. Some of this is being done by the grassroots and some by the controlled media. The economic crisis has been whipped up deliberately into a mass hysteria. A psychic thought-form which is haunting many people's minds. Fear! is the message. So some of my readers react when I talk about the economic crisis, thinking that I am thus strengthening the negative thought-form and participating in something that is unwholesome. There is validity in this and I urge everyone not to get caught up in the psychic fear thought-form being woven around all this.

I also think it is irresponsible to stick one's head in the sand and to deny or ignore the 300-pound gorilla in the living room. We need to make some responsible decisions for the sake of ourselves, our children and our communities. And we need to do it in ways that are positive, fun, democratic, uplifting, fulfilling, etc, etc. Thousands of ways. Each one of us contributes in our own small way.

I am very optimistic in the long run. I do believe that a new world is being born and it will be a much more just and ecological society than our current civilization. This is not to say that we must discard everything from our old culture. Most of it is fine and good. Human cultures are full of good everywhere in the world, but the current systems of economy and governance are destructive in the extreme. It has created a system where the continued survival of our own species and many others are threatened; and a world where over two billion people have been condemned to live on less than \$2 a day and a billion live on less than \$1 a day. Millions of my fellow humans starve every year and billions go hungry. Wars of aggression and government repression murder additional millions. Yes, I am glad that the old paradigm is passing! And I believe that we can create a much greener and happier world.

It is possible to work with nature to restore the fertility of every part of the world. If everyone fixes up their backyard (including gardening), that would be a huge step towards food security for all. This would only be a part-time job for most people. Even in the best case scenario there will be lots of people who are unable or unwilling to garden and work with earth repair. Let's say 50% of the people end up gardening. Everyone who has seriously gardened for many years knows that there are times of garden abundance to share with others. There are few places in the world that could not produce an abundance of food to feed all the local people. But it will take a lot of work and social reconstruction to do this. There is a lot of earth repair and related work to do, particularly in the next 50 years. This will necessitate a sizable full-time workforce - professional earth healers. This workforce of course would be broken up into many categories (some of which I will enumerate later in this article) and be locally self-directed.

To emphasize a point. We have no lack of labor available! It would only take a small portion of the workforce to reforest the earth and make it a garden of Eden again. There is enough labor to do the job, and there are enough resources to do the job. Most earth healing work can be done with hand labor and simple tools. Most of the tools are actually biological material: seeds, cuttings, seedlings, trees, grasses, etc. These biological tools (a horrible metaphor) are co-created with the Earth. Plants grow. Plants grow even better with assistance from humans. Most of the budget for reforesting the earth and building soil fertility, etc is in feeding and supporting the workers. It can be done with local resources by the grassroots.

Restoration Communities. For many years I have been espousing the idea of restoration communities. Households and intentional communities of people living together and dedicated to earth healing work. All rural landscapes in the US have un-used housing. Some of it abandoned and deemed unfit to live in; plus all manners of normal houses currently un-rented; plus some rural areas feature gigantic, posh, 2nd or 3rd homes which are only occupied for a small part of the year, and some not at all. At this point in time it is conceivable to imagine earth healing teams getting access to abandoned or run-down housing, but it is hard to imagine many of the ultra-rich donating some of their extra houses to the earth restoration movement. But it doesn't hurt to ask. Some people of financial means already donate substantially to earth care movements.

But I am not advocating large-scale land reform in this article. What I am advocating is the establishment of small, restoration communities with humble community support. It is possible for a small group of people to start from scratch

on a piece of land and build their own houses out of locally gathered materials and grow their own food. It is not the average "American" lifestyle, but it is possible. I have seen thousands of people do it during my decades in the back-to-the-land movement. Many of these people also take action to improve their local environment. Some could be looked upon as nascent restoration communities. There are huge tracts of damaged land in the US. This includes rangeland, deforested land, clear-cuts, eroded land, and urban brownfields. Every county in the US should make a list of damaged land needing restoration in their county. Some counties have more than others. It won't be a politically easy process since vested interests will not want to admit malfeasance. But most counties will have areas that pretty much everyone would agree needs help. These restoration projects are offered up for restoration communities to be based on. There are many ways it could work. In some cases housing would be off property. But in many cases the restoration community would be sited on the property being restored. They would be permitted to build housing, raise food and raise their families in exchange for long-term restoration work on the property (and surrounding area). There would have to be some sort of rights and tenure, but usually not property ownership. The groups of people who apply for these project lands would have to be carefully screened and selected fairly out of all the applicants.

SOME EARTH-HEALING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Tree planting.

The reasons for tree planting are legion. In my "1986 Green Front Report" I wrote an article on what it would take to double the world's forest cover. It would be worth revisiting some of the figures here, as an example of the kinds of labor needs it takes to do ecosystem restoration work. To reforest 5 billion acres with 300 trees to the acre would take 1500 billion trees. (There are 33 billion acres in the world's land area, excluding Antarctica). At \$1 each average for each tree planted (and follow-up care) would cost \$1500 billion. For a ten-year plan this would only require 2 and ½ years of the world's military budget in 1986 figures. This would require 6.25 million tree planters working for 2 months a year if they planted 400 trees a day. This is a small drop in the bucket of world labor and finances.

Nursery. There already is a nursery industry, but local food security and earth healing both call for a large growth in the numbers and types of nurseries. Many earth healing projects will need their own nursery. Many, small, nurseries growing species, varieties and genotypes specially selected for their area is the way to go rather than large, centralized nurseries.

Seeding.

Seeding can be a more cost effective way to establish many plants, especially grasses and herbs, but also trees in some cases. Special farms will be needed to grow out rare or small amounts of seed to larger amounts.

Erosion control.

Human-accelerated erosion has many negative affects. Most water and wind erosion can be halted. There are a wide variety of techniques known.

Permaculture design.

At the household level, community level and on up.

We are seeing a huge rise in unemployment. This is presaging a shift in how society allocates its labor pool. Ecological imperatives will probably see to it that there will be a large-scale re-structuring of employment. More people involved in food production, earth healing, health etc and less people involved in finance, munitions, polluting industries, etc. Individuals, families and local communities will do more of their own work - take care of their own needs. Modern society has tended towards specialization and single-skill jobs and paying others to do everything else for them. This has gotten out of hand and now society needs to trend towards more self-reliance and a wider range of skill sets - knowing there will still be lots of interdependence.

In case of a dollar collapse what steps could a community take?

- 1) Establish local currencies and barter systems. How many ways can a local economy be encouraged?
- 2) Have weekly public markets where the public can barter and trade and use local currency. A combination of farmer's market, crafts fair and yard sales. These are a long-time part of human heritage and people instinctively like them. Besides weekly markets, there can be larger, monthly markets for a larger region and large, annual events such as barter fairs.
- 3) Hugely increase family food gardens. Assist people in getting the best advice possible.
- 4) Set up gardening assistance programs. Help design and install food gardens in schools, retirement projects, nursing homes, and to assist the infirm, single parents, etc to establish and maintain a food garden.

- 5) Subsidize permaculture design teams to help homeowners who can't afford consultation fees.
- 6) Hold local seed and plant exchanges in the spring and fall. Encourage seed growing, home nurseries and breeding of local plant varieties.
- 7) Set up tool "libraries" for gardening and other useful tools.
- 8) Plant food trees and food plants in public areas, parks, parking strips, etc. Increase the amount of wild food in the commons. In some areas only native species should be used, but in many human landscapes a mixture of native and non-native food plants can be planted and maintained. Choose species that can thrive with little care. There is no reason that we can't all live in neighborhoods with lots of food around us.
- 9) Do natural resources and human resources assessments. What are the resources available to meet local needs?
- 10) Encourage the development of neighborhood, mutual-help associations. Crime will be less of a problem in tight-knit communities where people are watching out for each other.
- 11) Hold town-hall meetings which brings the public together to discuss and plan what to do for the common good. Local democracy.
- 12) Have more community dances and parties to bring people together, share food and have fun. This will help break down the barriers between people, and reduce alienation and anti-social behavior.
- 13) Educational opportunities in practical skills should be encouraged such as master gardener courses, permaculture design courses, etc. Community colleges often offer practical skill classes for free or low fees. Expand whatever is already happening along these lines.
- 14) Local think-tanks and research teams would research solutions to local problems via the internet, books, correspondence, etc. There are innumerable efforts going on around the globe as people are responding to current crises. There is lots to learn from the past. Most of the work and decision making needs to be local, but everywhere can benefit by looking at how other people have solved (are solving) their problems. Work locally, learn globally. Examining how societies adapted to currency collapses in the past is a fruitful field of study. Particularly currency collapses which have happened in the last century; Argentina, USSR and Cuba for instance. There is already a body of work on this, but more should be done.

How can the local economy help support people who are working for the common good in the various ways outlined above? Local taxation would be spent locally.

As well as the Relocalization and Transition town movements mentioned it would be worthwhile at this point to revisit the planning which took place around the Y2K scare in 1999, Many communities made plans, some of them well thought and extensive, which would yield many useful ideas in case of a financial collapse.

There is a quote which sits on the homepage of the Global Disaster Watch webpage which states "When the time for action comes, the time for preparation has passed." While there is no denying that we will undoubtedly be making lots of seat-of-the-pants decisions once we are in a crisis, it is also true that pre-planning and preparation for a possible crisis will help us when/if a crisis hits.

Many people are looking for meaningful activity and community interaction. Building a better world can be rewarding, fulfilling and fun. Less toys but more joys.

We aren't going to get from here to there in one big jump. Our current civilization is built on the past and will evolve into something future. This will be an evolution - an unfolding process. It won't be centrally planned. It will be extraordinary responses to extraordinary times by local people everywhere. Permaculture can have an important role to play in this evolution. Permaculture is one of the most positive, life-affirming movements in the world today with practical solutions to growing food, earth healing, alternative economics, natural buildings, local energy systems, water catchments, etc. etc. Permaculture is playing a primary role in various movements for local sustainability such as the Relocalization movement developed in the US and the Transition Towns movement developed in the UK. Permaculture was also important in the development of Cuba's national gardening movement during their "Special Period".

I can't say that permaculture can fix all the world's problems but it offers a methodology which can be applied anywhere in the world and a huge grab-bag of techniques and strategies which people can freely self-select from.

After my December 5 newsletter links elaborating on the problems we face, here are three links to good news websites.

www.worldpeaceemerging.com

www.wiserearth.com

www.permacultureactivist.net

World Peace Emerging is dedicated to bringing news of positive projects from around the world. Wiser Earth is a website initiated by Paul Hawken which describes and links to thousands of progressive groups and projects all around the world. The Permaculture Activist is the main permaculture periodical for North America and a great portal to permaculture internationally.

Keep your eyes open.

Build a better world locally.

Keep a good attitude.

Stay centered in your heart.

Love is the answer.

Michael Pilarski - December 6, 2008