

TOWARDS A POSITIVE WORLDVIEW

Michael Pilarski
Friends of the Trees Society
PO Box 826
Tonasket, Wa 98855
Michael@friendsofthetrees.net
www.friendsofthetrees.net

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On December 5, I sent an email newsletter to approximately 2200 people. The newsletter included an article on "The Economy in 2009" in which I expressed the opinion that the current economic crisis will deepen, the value of the dollar will diminish greatly or collapse, and the US federal government may declare bankruptcy. I do acknowledge that this 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. Some people congratulated me on the article, but several good friends were upset and sent criticism.

I would like to point out that I didn't invent the concept of "a severe, financial collapse in the US". I am just one of many thousands of people and sources on the internet, at all levels of society, all around the world 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 this 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 deny, or ignore, the 300-pound gorilla in the living room. If an economic collapse is about to happen then people need to make some responsible decisions for the sake of themselves, their children and their communities. I could be wrong and would hate for anyone to base their actions on my writings alone, as they are certain to contain flaws. I encourage people to be informed and aware as well as to listen to their intuition.

If this is the end of the old way, then this opens the door for people to create new ways. There are thousands of ways to contribute to building a sustainable, happier, greener world. Each one of us contributes in our own small way. Building sustainable, local economies is what we need to do whether we think the sky is falling or not. We will personally be happier if we have a positive attitude and take actions in ways that are positive, fun, democratic, uplifting, fulfilling, cooperative, etcetera.

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 cultures. 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 world where the continued survival of our own species and many others are threatened and a world where over three billion people live on less than \$2 a day and a billion live on less than \$1 a day. Millions of my fellow humans die of starvation every year and wars of aggression and government repression murder additional millions. Yes, I believe 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 to do in the next 50 years. This will necessitate a sizable workforce of professional earth healers. This workforce would be divided 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 extra houses to the earth restoration movement. It doesn't hurt to ask though, as 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. Some of the intentional communities I have seen could be looked upon as nascent restoration communities. There are huge tracts of damaged land in the US. This includes overgrazed 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 many 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 not property ownership. The groups of people who apply for these project lands would have to be carefully screened and selected fairly. There are many thousands of idealistic and capable, young people in their 20s and 30s who would jump at the chance.

SOME EARTH-CARE JOBS

Tree planters. 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. There are 33 billion acres in the world's land mass, excluding Antarctica. To reforest 5 billion acres with 300 trees to the acre would take 1500 billion trees. It would cost \$1500 billion at \$1 average for each tree planted and follow-up care (1986 dollar values). For a ten-year plan this would require 2 and a half years of the world's military budget in 1986 figures. It would require 6.25 million tree planters working for two months a year if they planted an average of 400 trees per day each. During the non tree planting periods of the year the workforce can do the follow up care to insure good survival and establishment. This is a small drop in the bucket of world labor and finances.

Nursery workers. 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, decentralized nurseries growing species, varieties and genotypes specially selected for their area is the way to go rather than large, centralized nurseries. Many more food plant nurseries are needed to supply a hugely expanded home-gardening movement. Also many more native plant nurseries

Seeding workers. Seeding can be a more cost effective way to establish many plants, especially grasses and herbs, but also trees in some cases. There are mechanical tree seeders developed in Australia that can be pulled behind tractors where the terrain will allow. One person can seed many acres a day with hand-held and operated cyclone seeders, including in rough terrain. Seed requires raking in on some sites. Special farms will be needed to grow out small amounts of selected seed to larger amounts.

Erosion control workers. Human-accelerated erosion has many negative affects. Most water and wind erosion can be halted. There are a wide variety of techniques known. Of particular importance here is the well-developed science of "bio-engineering" which combines earthworks and plants. This would require a large work force of full-time and part-time volunteers. The Land Care Movement in Australia is a good example.

Permaculture designers. Trained permaculture designers working at the household level, community level and on up. Public funds could be allocated to enable anyone who wants to have a permaculture design done for their property. This would save a lot of resources and labor in the short run and enable more productive systems. Permaculture design is very cost-effective.

Gardening assistance corps. Garden implementers and enablers to help design and install food gardens in schools, retirement projects, nursing homes, assisting the infirm, single parents, etc. Some people are already making businesses of this. One great example is “Your Backyard Farmer” In Portland, Oregon. www.yourbackyardfarmer.net

Wild Food Planters. 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 food-rich neighborhoods. There are no technical barriers.

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 is a large-scale re-structuring of employment. More people will be involved in food production, earth healing, etc and less people involved in finance, munitions, biocides, polluting industries, etc. Individuals, families and local communities will do more of their own work to 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, cash-economies and global shipping. 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 a local currency(s) and barter systems. How many ways can the local economy be encouraged?
- 2) Have weekly public markets where the public can barter, trade and use local currency. Sort of like a combined farmer's market, crafts fair and yard sale. Public markets are a long-time part of human heritage and people instinctively like them. Besides weekly markets, there can be larger, monthly markets for a wider region and big, annual harvest-time events such as barter fairs.
- 3) Hugely increase home food gardens. Assist people in getting the best advice possible. [see my website for my recent article “The Potential of Home Gardens to Feed the World”].
- 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 food gardens.
- 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 community tool “libraries” for gardening and other useful tools.
- 8) Do natural resources and human resources assessments to determine what resources are available to meet local needs.
- 9) 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.
- 10) Hold town-hall meetings which bring large amounts of the public to discuss and plan what to do for the common good. Local, participatory democracy.
- 11) 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.
- 12) Increase educational opportunities in practical skills such as master gardener courses, permaculture design courses, carpentry, etc. Community colleges often offer practical skill classes for free or low fees. Expand whatever is already happening along these lines.
- 13) Establish local think-tanks and research teams to research solutions to local problems. There are innumerable efforts going on around the globe as people respond 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 (or 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.

14) Embark on a policy of home maintenance and upkeep. Aim for full occupancy and work in lieu of rent. Renovate all run-down houses and buildings. Use locally available materials for repair. Carefully dismantle and recycle materials from buildings which are retired.

15 to 100) This list could be expanded greatly. The few ideas listed here are largely from my food production bias.

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. Taxation could also be in the form of goods, labor and services.

As well as close examination of the Relocalization and Transition Town movements 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 out and extensive, which would yield useful ideas in case of a financial collapse.

There is a quote which sits on the homepage of the Natural Disaster webpage which states “When the time for action comes, the time for preparation is over.” 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 our current world to a golden age in one 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. 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 as well as a huge grab-bag of techniques and strategies which people can freely self-select from.

Keep your eyes open.
Build a better world locally.
Keep a good attitude.
Stay centered in your heart.
Love is the answer.

Michael Pilarski - Friends of the Trees Society

GOOD NEWS WEBSITES.

www.worldpeaceemerging.com World Peace Emerging is dedicated to bringing news of positive projects from around the world.

www.wiserearth.com Wiser Earth is a website initiated by Paul Hawken which describes and links to thousands of progressive groups and projects all around the world.

www.permacultureactivist.com The Permaculture Activist is the main permaculture periodical for North America and a great portal to permaculture internationally.

www.relocalize.net a network of local groups relocalizing their economies.

www.transitiontowns.org Started in the UK. A network of groups transitioning their communities away from fossil-fuel dependency. Kicking the habit.