

COMMUNITY DEMOCRACY

**THE CHALLENGES
OF OUR TIME & PLACE**

TO BE PEOPLE OF OUR PLACE

TANGATA WHENUA

TO BE WELL NOURISHED

MAURI ORA



AN HISTORICAL & HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Gary and his partner Emily live on a small farm where there is a wide diversity of farming and forestry activities, from home gardens and orchards to staple crops, animal grazing, firewood and plantation forests, and wilderness. Their stewardship of this land is guided by the principles of permaculture and the practices and methods of organic and biodynamic agriculture. They have a bio-filtered swimming pool and an eco-building farm stay for short-term rental.

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“Community Democracy – A Study in Alternative Economics”
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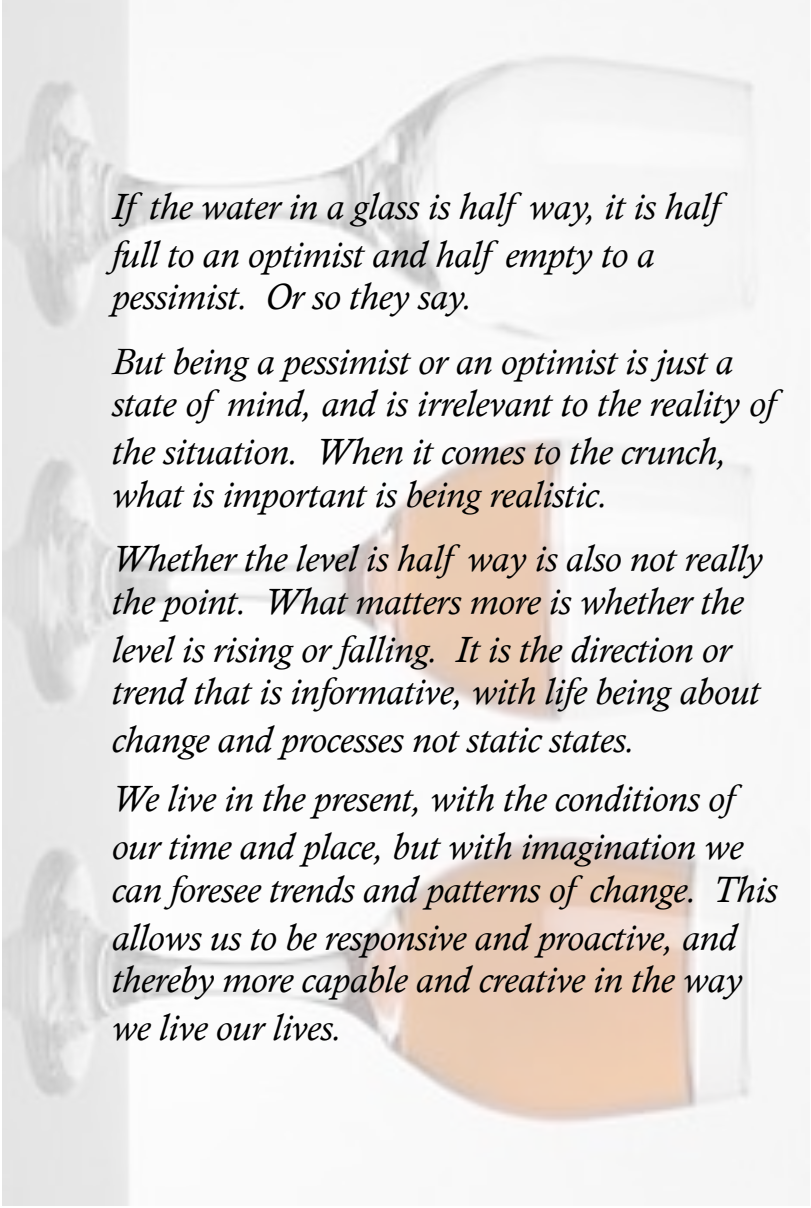
“Patterns of Exchange – A Study in Human Understanding” 1988,
401 pages.

“Out of the Helix – Essays on Cultural Transformation” 2006,
275 pages.

This pamphlet is the first of three, and sets the scene about our time and place, and its social conditions, trends and influences.

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If the water in a glass is half way, it is half full to an optimist and half empty to a pessimist. Or so they say.

But being a pessimist or an optimist is just a state of mind, and is irrelevant to the reality of the situation. When it comes to the crunch, what is important is being realistic.

Whether the level is half way is also not really the point. What matters more is whether the level is rising or falling. It is the direction or trend that is informative, with life being about change and processes not static states.

We live in the present, with the conditions of our time and place, but with imagination we can foresee trends and patterns of change. This allows us to be responsive and proactive, and thereby more capable and creative in the way we live our lives.

If we look at the 'glasses' of our time and place, many are reaching empty, while some are overflowing. There are severe imbalances, which have a very destructive potential. Life is all about exchange, and the continual cycling of energy and nutrients through all parts of the whole integrated system. Excessive accumulations and over consumption by some parts at the expense of others is distorting, and brings forth countervailing forces of destructive cleansing and re-balancing.

We respond to our excesses, or we are destroyed.

The present human population and its consumption is clearly an excessive burden on the world and life on planet Earth.

Where are the responses to this excess? Will people respond sufficiently, and say, "Enough." Or will we suffer a destructive cleansing by the forces of the Earth, with a withdrawal of support from the ecosystems of life?

THEY STOLE OUR DREAMS and MADE US FAT & LAZY *

A LIFE OF AFFLUENCE & FREEDOM

A huge number of people in the world today enjoy an affluent lifestyle, of high material well-being, physical comfort and security – billions of people. There is a lucky generation now living in complex societies, where an extraordinarily sophisticated and complex technology has freed people from the hard labour and manual work that once was required to obtain the necessities of life.

We have an incredible range of foodstuffs on supermarket shelves, and a similarly vast array of clothing and footwear to choose from. We live in well constructed homes and buildings, with air conditioning and temperature control. If we are sick, we have every type of pill and medicine you could think of, and more, and when our body parts no longer function too well we can get them replaced – knee, hip, heart, kidney or whatever, there is a mechanical substitute or donor organ available.

Plentiful supplies of oil and other fossil fuels provide the cheap energy to run all this technology and the machines to make, distribute, use and dispose of all the goods and services of our lifestyle. We have mobility undreamt of, even by our grandparents, with fleets of airplanes spanning the globe, networks of highways, roads and streets covering the landscape

* OR “WE GAVE UP ON OUR DREAMS and
BECAME FAT & LAZY”

for private car access, and boats, skis, hand-gliders and much more for our recreational use and enjoyment. We have instantaneous news feeds and communication systems that link all people throughout the world, through cell phones, internet, emails and websites.

The world is awash with information and images, and there are now many more entertainment choices. There is still song and dance, theatre and drama, but now interactive digital games compete with television and films, and you can have your own home movies or documentary viewing.

The even luckier people who live in the most developed 'western' world of democratic countries, have freedom of speech and assembly, can vote for their political representatives in free and fair elections, and be subject only to the fair and even-handed rule of law and justice that is unhindered by fear or partisan favours.

More and more people are achieving this lifestyle of affluence and freedom, while science and engineering continues to expand our knowledge and expertise, developing even faster and more capable machines, control systems and communication facilities. Huge cities of millions of people are supported by infrastructure – of roads, power and water supply, sewage and waste disposal, telecommunications etc – which allows the myriad of exchanges and transactions of city life to take place every day, in the same way, without significant failures or disruption. Life and business can take place as usual, in accordance with routines and timetables, to provide everyone with the essentials of life and our favourite luxuries and indulgences.

It is a life to be envied, and as close as humanity has ever achieved to paradise on Earth.

A DARKER SIDE

Or is it? How comfortable, healthy and free is this lifestyle of the early 21st century? And at what cost: to ourselves, our societies and the natural world? Despite the affluence of so many, never before has there been such extreme concentrations of ownership and wealth, and such unequal access to resources and services. There are also huge numbers of people who are malnourished, chronically unwell and with meagre basic possessions – billions of people. There is grinding poverty, of long hours of hard work for very little, and constant fear of too little and the impacts of ill health and loss.

The science and technology that allows industrial agriculture and the distribution of processed foodstuffs to and throughout huge cities, feeds billions. There is also a mind-numbing array of foods, brand selections and multiple choices. But of what nutritional quality? How healthy are our industrial foods, and the pills we pop for ‘supplements’? For all our science and technology, the nutritional quality of our staple foods has continually declined over the 20th century. Human food has never been so processed and refined, so heated and beaten, and zapped by high frequency energy.

We have replaced the illnesses and death from microbial-borne diseases with chronic conditions of ill-ease and dysfunction (physical and mental), and death through bodily disorders, such as the many forms of cancer people die of. Our medical science and technology supports a sickness industry of drug intervention and surgical cures, not the maintenance of health through good diet, appropriate exercise and the management of stress and distress.

We can fly around the world and stay in the same hotels, with the same food and the same synthetic entertainment, and view the same landscape degradation from the same buses. And then do it again, for another travel fix. We can use our cars to travel the same congested highways and streets to work and back, each

work day following the same timetable and routines, to stare at a square screen on a square table, in a square room of a square building. We can escape by boat or ski to the same places as other people, and together destroy the very environment we went to enjoy. Or we can lose ourselves in a virtual world of virtual friends and play virtual games.

Our cities suck in resources and spit out wastes, destroying the world around them with both inputs and outputs. It is all take and no give, with no reciprocity for all the life-giving support provided by the natural world. And it all depends on the cheap energy and organic raw material of oil, stored deposits of ancient sunlight, that are being drawn down faster and faster.

We can access more and more knowledge, but maybe less and less wisdom and understanding of the real nature of the world we live in, outside of the bubble of oil and the fabricated living provided by the urban-industrial complex.

We have become disenfranchised from our own world, disconnected from the natural world in highly artificial urban landscapes and manicured countrysides. Our freedoms are illusions of choice and power, restricted to trivialities and the inconsequential. Our political representatives are self-selecting of people seeking personal power and control over others, and selected by the power of money and social connections. They are neither representatives of the people nor fairly elected in any of the so-called democracies.

We imprison ourselves through rigid routines and the boxed-in confinement of work stations and urban living, with its very high dependence on continual repetition of all functions and services every day of the year, without fail. It is all so different to the variable and dynamic rhythms of nature.

It is a life to despair of, and as close to hell on Earth humanity has ever achieved.

THE FIGHT FOR RIGHTS

How can it be both? Do we live in the best of all possible worlds, or the worst? It may well depend on the place we inhabit and our social status, or for the not so well off, who or what we believe in. It all depends on your perspective and values.

Ever since humanity has lived in large groups with labour and skill specialisation, there have been elites that give themselves special privileges and rewards. Civilisation (settled urban living and agricultural cropping of the environment) has provided a social order and laws about personal and property rights, greater productivity for human consumption, increasing knowledge, technical aids and creative artistry, and some protection of individuals and the family unit from outside interference.

But power, over others or for resource allocation, corrupts, and the continuing exercise of power corrupts completely. History has shown time and again how civilisations rise and fall as power is gained and then excessively concentrated, until the social fabric and/or the environmental base of a society is torn apart. Civilisation has, as well, given rise to arbitrary distinctions of class and caste, with inherited privileges, and the degradation and enslavement of a large proportion of the population. Indifference and exploitation by the powerful and wealthy has undermined social values and the family unit, while privilege depends on various forms of social violence and punishment, and ultimately on the destruction and killing of warfare.

For millennia, humanity has been bedeviled by violence and warfare, with one group after another taking over land and resources and killing off the vanquished. Over time, though, knowledge has accumulated and been passed on, and techniques improved: of building, food and fibre production, and punishment or warfare. This has both increased the need for cooperative action and the destructiveness of competition.

The exercise of power in large groups remains a real challenge for humanity. Collective action at the large scale is made difficult by individual or family self-interests, with the common benefit or public interest being diffuse and spread out, while personal gain is direct and tangible. Enforceable laws or lore is required to manage commons and ensure the public interest. Collective decision-making is also a fraught exercise for large groups of people. A dumbing down to a 'strong leader' who will decide for everyone, or impersonal market exchanges beyond anyone's control, is too often the default option. The rights to resources and services become concentrated, along with the powers of decision-making, and laws are corrupted to favour the privileged few.

There is, though, a long history of struggle for collective rights and a rule of law that is fair and equitable. Many civilisations have fallen because there has been a tacit withdrawal of support or acceptance by the hard working majority who actually provide the social goods and services. Only so much work can be forced out of people by overt or threatened violence. When the personal stake or rewards for this majority becomes too small, the collective action and specialised work required for the society to function, with its inbuilt privileges, becomes inadequate, and the society unravels. Some extreme environmental conditions, of drought, flood or earthquake, can then become the death knell.

Democracy, or rule by the people for the people, has had a hard row to hoe, and it is still to flower. The first seeds sprouted in small city states, which could be independent through a trading economy, but with this trading activity requiring a high level of commitment from the working majority. An acceptance of the rules and relative shares or rewards by a large proportion of the population was required, and thus the involvement of these people in the social decision-making. A relative advantage in relevant activities, like seafaring, was very useful, if not a prerequisite, as with the early city states around the Mediterranean Sea.

The recent push for democracy that arose in Europe was stimulated by city-based merchants opening up and developing profitable trading routes. A countervailing power to that of the land-based aristocracy could develop, and this was assisted by the reliance of the hereditary land barons and kings on the merchant's profits to fund their in-fighting and warfare. At the same time, this was the start of an unholy alliance between moneyed merchants and the governing powerful, to fund wars without burdening the rural peasants and industrial workers with unacceptable tax increases.

Extracting sufficient surplus from the producing masses to provide the wealth of the elite has always been an exercise in unbalanced compromise. Periodically, a general resistance would break out into open revolt. The superior weaponry the lords kept to themselves and their hired hands, normally meant such revolts could be easily crushed and the ringleaders dealt to, usually by the cruelest means of torture and execution, as examples to others. However, resistance was endemic in these societies, arising directly from their inequities.

The working majority has often been enlisted in 'society sanctioned' campaigns of conquest and expropriation, but there have also been many people's campaigns against privilege and for more universal rights. Wars can also heighten the sense of injustice and exploitation of working people, as they are used as cannon-fodder in the strategies of accumulation and aggrandisement of the elites.

After the Enlightenment in Europe, the ideas of democracy became more deeply embedded in these societies (and their colonial outposts), and powerful struggles of vision and action took place to bring about a more equal and fairer society. A coming together of a number of profound social changes and influences stimulated these struggles. The enclosure of the commons, by the ruling elite, which annulled long-standing rights of occupation and livelihood, impoverished and further

disempowered great numbers of people, who were forced into the newly arising industrial factories and their associated slums, or had to take their chances in overseas colonies.

The rapid expansion of trade and industry of the European world gave rise to sudden riches, while just as quickly pushing many people into grinding poverty in very unhealthy cities. Wealth is as corrupting as power itself, and some riches make people greedy for more. Any social control or oversight of the radical social changes taking place was mostly to further benefit those already benefitting the most. Excesses of wealth and the conspicuous consumption of a few existed side-by-side with long working hours for very little, and in very unhealthy and undignified conditions, at work and in their slum dwellings, for the many.

This cauldron of inequality, ill-health and indifference breed much discontent and social unrest. The gross inequities of the very rapid economic growth, and the social and environmental degradation it engendered, gave birth to many people's movements, for liberation, fairness and cooperation. The struggle for a better life for the majority, a fairer distribution of wealth, power and decision-making, engaged many people, who sacrificed their time, meagre savings, reputations, livelihoods and even their lives, to further the cause. There were on-going protest demonstrations and strikes for better conditions and a more just share, many forms of rebellion and revolt, and ultimately revolutions.

Over time there was an increasing political enfranchisement of people. Slavery was outlawed, then all men got the right to vote for governing bodies, and finally universal suffrage, with women achieving the right to vote as well.

The horror, pain, agony and wanton destruction of two world wars in the 20th century and a long depression of the world economy in between, fuelled the struggle for democracy and the challenging of the powers of elites. The increasing dependence of

the economy on an educated workforce and highly specialised labour further undermined the power of hereditary elites. Cities were now the centres of political and economic power, and the union power of labour could be much more organised and effective in its actions.

In the European-based 'western' world, including some of the states that had been European colonies, various forms of representative democracy have been achieved. In these states, political power is exercised by people who are voted for on a one vote per person basis. Elected representatives are the ultimate decision-makers. Human rights are enshrined in laws and in world-wide treaties. The protection of people and property is guaranteed by laws upheld through the power of the state.

Today, we do not see the struggles of the past for liberation, fairness and cooperation, or certainly not at the same level and intensity. There is not the commitment and effort being put into radical changes at a social or societal level for the benefit of people as a whole, or for the public interest. Is this because we have achieved an equitable and fair society, that promotes healthy and creative living and in an environmentally sustainable way?

Do we have government of the people by the people and for the people? People en mass do elect governments and can throw out governments that are unpopular or abuse their political mandate. So do we get the governments we deserve?

What has happened to the dreams of democracy, and a life of freedom and affluence for all?

FROM POLITICS TO ECONOMICS

Let's go back to those trading merchants and their money making, because they started a shift from power based on land ownership and sovereign rights to power based on money. The rise of financial and corporate power, where money itself makes

money, has come about because of changes in the way money is issued into circulation and in what money can buy.

An economy is about the production and distribution of material goods and services, and basically consists of a system of ownership, or rights of access to resources and productive assets, and a means of exchange, to allow multiple transactions every day between everyone within the sphere of the economy. A means of exchange is anything people within that economy agree has value and can facilitate trades, and money is simply an agreement about a standard of value.

Money has to be issued by someone or some authority, which people trust sufficiently for them to accept the money as payment for a trade, because they will be able to on use it themselves in future exchanges. As an economy grows, through increasing production and expanding trade, the amount of money available to make the increasing number of exchanges has to grow. To undertake a new trading expedition, money can be created and issued to the people involved, who then obtain extra goods or services from their trading, and this gives effect in the real economy to the money issued. While there is a reasonable match between increases in the money supply and increases in real goods and services, everything works out.

Economic booms and busts, monetary inflation and economic depressions happen because of mis-matches between the money supply and the transaction requirements of the real economy. The more important the monetary economy (that dependent on money exchanges) the greater the impact of these monetary imbalances. Since the mercantile and industrial expansion of Europe, following the European Renaissance, money has mostly been issued privately, by goldsmiths, finance houses and banks. The moneylenders and entrepreneurs of the city-based merchant classes made the money, which they lent at interest to make even more money. From this money making came power and influence.

The monetary economy has also expanded greatly, through a privatisation of resources and productive assets. The enclosure of common land privatised land, while financial investors in everything from factories and trading companies to new innovations or inventions, could claim full ownership of these productive assets, through registered shares or patents, which could then be bought and sold. Companies that were originally chartered to undertake a particular service or economic activity, were able to undertake any activity, and then obtained the legal rights and privileges of people, to borrow and have their 'personal' interests protected, but without the social duties and responsibilities of people. All of these changes enlarged the monetary economy, and increased the dependence of people on the goods and services provided by businesses and corporations.

In the 'western' world with its capitalist economy, money can be made directly from money and from ownership, without undertaking any useful work or providing any real service. Private banks issue money into circulation, through loans to individuals, companies (as legal persons) and governments, and on this money (created by the banks) they charge interest. It is a simple scam to obtain unearned income. Banks and organisations that hold large amounts of money on trust (for a specific purpose such as insurance and retirement pensions), as well as people or legal persons, can buy ownership through shares and then obtain an unearned income from the surplus squeezed out of economic activity as a profit. Further, they can now speculate on these shares through stock market trading.

Money can be made from money, and in a private ownership economy this money can buy nearly everything. What is important is having money, and then you can buy whatever you want. It is all for sale in the market place.

Political power becomes a facade, an illusion of power. Political favours can be bought, and laws changed through the influence of money, with the real power being in the economy and

economic institutions. Politics becomes subservient to the economy, with the role of governments being to maintain economic growth and the private rights of money creation and ownership, and the markets that allow money to buy virtually everything. Public resources and services must be sold off – to pay off debts to private banks – while even the commons of language and knowledge is opened up to copyright privatisation.

As the struggles for political power have achieved some success, with electoral democracies providing some accountability for those exercising this power, it has become less and less relevant. People are much more concerned about making money and how much (monetary) income they have, than who is in government and what may be the relative merits of political parties. It is the economy, stupid.

For all the gains from the efforts and struggles of so many people over many generations, the real power has slipped away. By the sleight of hand of legal devices and arcane changes in laws, politics has become a farce – something intuitively recognised by many people, who become understandably disenchanted and disengaged. The economy is the only game in the city, and its all about self-interest, competition and greed. Money has bought the rights for the moneymakers to make more and more money through the speculative trading of ‘monetary instruments’ and the invention of even more unreal ‘instruments’ of their money world to further that speculation.

The end result is the greatest extremes of wealth and poverty that humanity has ever developed. The kings and queens of bygone eras were never so wealthy compared to their subject peasants. And never has the natural world been so abused or so devastated by humanity, through the sheer scale of human consumption and the rawness and intensity of our exploitation of natural resources.

MONEY RULES

Money makes the rules now. The wealthy are the powerful, and they use their extraordinary wealth to buy what they want, and further increase their moneymaking capabilities. Private banks provide the loan money to governments, through treasury bonds, to fund public services or to roll over past debts. They create money out of thin air with these loans, as with all loans, and charge technically sovereign governments interest for the privilege of obtaining newly created money from these private banks.

Governments authorise these banks, though, so they can obtain this easy money, and in the short term at least, reduce the tax revenue they require. If debts can be rolled over with more and more easy money issued by banks to governments, then the day of reckoning for the tax payer can be continually put off. The banks have well secured loans, essentially guaranteed by the power of governments to raise taxes, and the governments have access to easy money to fund their services, or their wars.

Politicians constantly beat the drum of economic growth, as the ever-expanding money supply, of this loan issuing, has to be represented by something in the real economy of goods and services – by anything that people can be duped into buying. It is economic growth or money will devalue through inflation, while the expanding money supply means that the value of land and fixed assets like buildings goes up and up.

We live in a world ruled by money, and we are trapped by it. We need it to buy the necessities of life as well as luxuries, and we are bound into a form of wage slavery. Most people do not own their means of production, or the facilities that allow them to produce sale-able goods or services. They are employed as staff, with minimal rights of continual employment or pay that keeps up with monetary inflation.

There may be some forms of democracy in political arenas, but the economy is a dictatorship. The boss is king, and there is a strict hierarchy of command downwards and information upwards. Maximising the monetary return to shareholders is a legal requirement of all companies and corporations, and company directors are there to see that it happens. The generation of a surplus or profit is the overriding aim. Everything else is a commodity purchased through a market, including the people as labour units or 'human resources'.

The 'western' capitalist world is a financial empire, where extreme privilege is obtained through the simplest of scams, of creating money from nothing through loans and then having the cheek to add a surcharge to its repayment. At the same time, ownership is obtained by monetary purchase, or 'financial investment', and all rights about how that ownership is exercised and for whose benefits, resides with these owners. Money buys ownership and power, which provides further monetary income in a spiraling concentration of ownership, power and income.

Everything is subservient to the \$ and moneymaking. Science and technology is directed to the invention of consumable goods and services, and natural resources are exploited at faster and faster rates to grow the economy. Obsolescence is built into everything to increase consumption, and the best thing for obsolescence is armaments and warfare. An arms competition fuelled by the innovations of science and technology is just the very best.

More people also means more consumption and more opportunities for moneymaking. Population growth stimulates economic growth and more consumption. And it all works out. The empire grows and the moneyed elite become even more obscenely wealthy, beyond any conceivable usefulness. The many are literally bought off with the enlarged 'crumbs' provided by the power of technology and the voracious exploitation of resources it allows.

Even societies with very different cultures, and long histories with traditions quite different from those of the 'western' world, have joined the mad rush of money-driven exploitation and consumerism. India and China have now joined the 'money club', of the global financial world with its funny money controlled by big banks and speculators.

The only sticking point is the natural world. Just a small point about a finite world that actual only supports life through the myriad of species and functioning ecosystems that make it all happen. Compounding growth (of human consumption), with its ever greater demands and faster use of energy and resources just does not equate with a single finite world.

Like all empires before it, the present financial empire of capitalism and money driven economic growth will crash and destroy itself. It is just a matter of how and when, but it will most probably involve the same social discord, alienation and revolt of past collapses, and the resource failures and energy squeeze that comes from an over-exploited world.

A FAILURE OF WILL

We just don't know when to say enough: that our level of material well-being is sufficient, and let's now focus on our quality of life, of creativity and community.

The basis of political and social decision-making could be the well-being of people and the natural world around us, where technology is applied in a way appropriate to these aims. To live as people of the place we inhabit, supporting and being supported by the landscapes, eco-systems and resources of our place – people of the land, nourished by our greater environment and nourishing in return. Living based on respect for all, a responsiveness to others and our surroundings, and hence a sense of responsibility, a life grounded in reciprocity.

Given the exploitation of our places, our communities and our world, the extraordinary destruction caused by our technology and the potential for mass annihilation of our weapons, you would think there would be constant protests and a ferment of discussion about alternatives, with organised resistance. There were many active organisations and peoples movements, with international links and actions, in the 1960s and 1970s, including movements on banning nuclear weapons, controlling our population, feminism and equality of rights and opportunities, replacing consumerism with an emphasis on quality of life and the use of intermediate or appropriate technologies. There were strong labour unions and collective action to maintain or enhance working conditions, improve safety and the health of people and our environment. What has happened to them?

Over the last half century, while there has been on-going economic growth and rising consumption levels in most countries of the world, the inequalities and destruction of our environment has got worse and worse. Humanity has become bloated by consumption, and its exponential increase in everything from population to energy use and the power of weaponry has become an uncontrolled cancer on the body of the Earth.

As individuals and societies we have become addicts, addicted to consumption and the fix of the new. We are oil addicts, drugged on the cheap energy, plastic goods and the many comforts and pleasures of oil products. As with all addicts, we do not appreciate or understand this addiction and its condition, or what we are doing to others – people or all the other species on Earth. In the bubble of the urban-industrial world we have manufactured from the cheap energy of fossil fuels, especially oil, people are insulated and comforted, and remain unaffected by the destructive raping of resources and ecosystems.

The privileged elites are addicted to their money games and the power and control money buys, while cheap bread and an

endless stream of games and circuses keeps the masses consuming and 'otherwise occupied'.

Humanity has drilled into these fantastic reserves, of old life, boiled down to its most basic components of hydrocarbons. We are having a field day with these storages, madly using them up, and bloating ourselves with a booming population addicted to booming consumption. But the storages are finite, and the oil becomes harder and harder to recover from the earth. The 'glasses' of fossil fuel and mineral deposits are becoming less than half full, and going down fast. A panic of destruction is setting in, as more powerful machines and techniques furiously drill or dig for more, to satisfy our lusts. The environment must be looked after and protected, but you can't stand in the way of progress, and we must continue to have economic growth. That is the overriding imperative.

Awash in a world of gadgets and goodies, have people become so fat and lazy that they don't care any longer? Are we so poorly nourished that we have no willpower, no fire in the belly to right what is wrong? To be dignified, honourable and responsible human beings, we need to be well nourished, and in all aspects of our being: in body, mind and soul. Maybe, most fundamentally there is a failure of spirit, from a lack of connection and a loss of that grounding into the real essence of the world that makes us truly human.

Both people in poverty and in affluence suffer from a lack of material, psychological and spiritual nourishment. Good water and food, supportive communities and cooperative work places, a sense of identity, belonging and purpose, and the social tools of celebration and ceremony to express it, provides the necessities for well-rounded and capable people. Today, many people are deprived and suffer on all counts, and most on some aspects of a full and abundant life!

There is a vicious cycle of malnourishment, distraction and disempowerment, which progressively weakens the will to

action, to right wrongs and take care of others and our world. The more the imperative for change, the less the capacity to undertake effective change.

FALSE PROPHETS

Where to start?

There is no lack of people calling for change, writing opinion pieces, articles and books on the problems we face and the need for change. There are lots of suggestions about what to do about this or that, but there is very little actual change. Very little action.

Some people do understand, intellectually, the seriousness of our present predicament, and they warn about the loss of social values, or social alienation and rootlessness, and the severity of environmental destruction, the loss of species and habitats, and ecosystem damage. They get it in their heads. But not that many of them appear to do much about it in their own lives and with their own communities. It would seem that there is a much smaller number of people who feel it in their hearts, and are thus motivated to do something about it. They have the passion to make changes, but without necessarily knowing what to do and how to be effective.

An even smaller number of people have the will to action, the courage to do something, and start from where they are and what is in front of them. Effective action requires an appropriate intellectual understanding, an emotional motivation and the will to act. But to be sound of mind, spirit and body requires good all-round nourishment, and that is sorely lacking in the present artificial and sanitised world of humanity.

Book after book (and DVDs now) says we are in dire straits, and there is very little time left for us to remedy the situation. But somehow there is always just enough time, if we will only make the changes the authors propose. There is hope, and if we just act

now we can save our civilisation, or at least maintain the main features of our present way of life.

Really? False hope is very debilitating.

When do we stop trying to repair or reform a broken system, and start afresh? What has given rise to the present extreme of exploitation and inequity will not be able to undo its excesses, and re-direct society and people toward a fundamentally different way of living. Reforming one aspect or another of our economy or society, without a fundamental transformation, just prolongs the essential injustice, inequity and ill-health of humanity's present global system, and may even increase the destructive potential of the inevitable 'adjustment'.

There is no Plan B, as a back up when things start to go seriously wrong, or a Plan C. Changes in the fiscal or monetary policies of national governments is like fiddling while Rome burns. Changes in taxes away from incomes and commodities toward capital and resource use, anti-speculation financial transaction taxes, incentives for renewable energy and 'green' jobs, and redirection of the military budgets of the world to social and environmental repair, are all laudable. However, these plans or policies overlook the essential character of the present economic system and its fundamental drivers, as well as the seriousness of the social and environmental deterioration and loss that has occurred.

First, we must say "**No**", and turn our backs on this constructed world of the economic elite — and the easy material comforts it provides — and rebuild alternatives, from the grassroots out. We have to do this again and again, regardless of all the blocks and regulations of the system, and apparent lack of 'success'. We have to reclaim our dignity and our spirit, and take action simply because we must. To re-occupy our collective commons; of land, resources, knowledge, money supply and the human spirit.

Not individually, but collectively we can occupy our common places again, regaining our souls and rejecting the demands of the money elite. We can issue our own money that is adequate for our economic purposes, empower ourselves with collective decision-making and governance, and change the rules of ownership and access to goods and services.

The financial empire of modern-day capitalism is destroying itself by its own exponentially expanding greed, flying apart through its own expansionary momentum. At the same time, it does not have the political power. The money-making elite must continually buy its influence. It does not command the guns. We do not need the private banks, and they can not force us to borrow from them. The real money, which guarantees exchange, is government backed legal tender. There is very little of that in any bank!

We will have to build a different economy, with different rules of ownership and control of the money supply, so we might as well start now. But, fundamentally it needs collective action, and that needs the nourishment of good food, supportive communities and a healthy environment.

Knowing the right questions to ask is a beginning. Being prepared to go in a different direction, accepting uncertainty and trying out alternatives, starts the journey. Acknowledging the need for a fundamental transformation in the way we live, collectively as a society, makes possible a rebuilding and regeneration of communities and the natural world.

We can act in ways that nourish ourselves and our communities, and regain a way of living that is mutually supportive and nourishing of all life on Earth. Then we will regain our health and our strength, and over time build a healthy, just and sustainable way of living.

COMMUNITY DEMOCRACY

It starts at home and spirals out from there – and back again!

The first step sets the new direction, and as nature shows us, transformation starts with small steps and goes slowly, accepting feedback, modifying and adapting until it works well and the time is right, and then the rapid changes takes place.

Just planting trees is a good beginning, or liberate yourself and your lawn by growing some vegetables, one square metre at a time. Talk to your neighbours, exchange food with them, share your tools, celebrate together.

Reach out to those around you, and work together collectively for some common good. Just give without counting and ask when you need help, and see what happens.

Be an advocate for your community and its local economy and environment.

In 1972, the political party called the New Zealand Values Party was formed. It was the precursor to Green parties, and its basic philosophy was one of quality of life, saying enough consumption, let's stabilised our population and economy. The transition proposed was one of decentralisation, with appropriate technology and consensus governance.

It was community focused, with a catch-phrase of: "Neither 'left wing' or 'right wing', but out in front!" The basic unit of society was taken to be local communities, where people know and trust each other. Not the 'individual' of the competitive free market of the 'right', or the nation 'state' and public ownership and control of the 'left'.

We saw the potential for a 'community democracy', based around that grouping of extended families and neighbours that has always been the foundation of human living. We dreamed of a participatory community-based democracy; about our

potential. Not about life as we live it now, or have lived it, but how we might live.

Since then, the on-going explosive expansion of the human population and global economy has pushed us to much higher peaks from which to fall. Whether overflowing or near empty, we have pushed too many of the 'glasses' of our world to severe imbalances.

The world will respond, eco-systems will respond, the climate will respond. How will we respond? We can not choose our time and place, but we can make choices about our own responses.

Gary Williams

Spring 2011

Otaki, Aotearoa/New Zealand

www.waterscape.co.nz

Reconnect with nature.

Think holistically, act collectively.

With thanks to the Occupiers.

First Steps:

- Plant trees,
- Grow some vegetables,
- Add some berries and fruit trees,
- Drink good water & eat nutritious food,
- Exchange food & tools with your neighbours,
- Celebrate with family, friends & neighbours,
- Listen to your beach, river and mountain,
- Take notice of all creatures, small & large,
- Give without counting or expectation,
- Ask for help when you need it,
- Barter your services and surpluses,
- Buy local, durable and repairable,
- Live more simply, with enough,
- Smaller house & larger garden,
- Support your local community,
- Ask why as well as how,
- Use your imagination,
- Discuss alternatives,
- Show gratitude,
- Say, I can.



**DREAMS
&
NIGHTMARES**

TIMES OF

**GLOBAL FINANCIAL EMPIRE
WEALTH, INDIFFERENCE & REPRESSION
GREED & COMPETITION**

OR

HEALTHY PEOPLE & HEALTHY LANDSCAPES

FAIR SHARING & SUSTAINING LIVING

CARE & COOPERATION

OUR JOURNEY OF IMAGINATION & ACTION