

Laying the Groundwork

Dale Allen Pfeiffer

November 13th, 2005

As stated in the previous blog, we cannot rely on our so-called leaders to solve the problems of energy depletion. For those who are becoming aware of the great impact energy depletion will have upon our lives, this realization can lead to panic and despair. The vast majority of the public hasn't got a clue, and if you try to inform them too many don't want to know or place all of their faith in our leaders or in a technological breakthrough. How can we ever build a grassroots movement when most people can't even perceive the problem?

Such is the case with all social movements; they start with a small but active group of people who are the first to be aware of the problem and the necessity for change. This is how the Vietnam War protest began, also the civil rights movement, the environmental movement and every other major grassroots movement. All of these movements were started by a handful of people scattered through the general population. The first step was to network with those who were aware, to organize and begin to broadcast their message to any who might be listening. One important factor is to provide a visible position that will attract attention as time goes on and awareness spreads.

But energy depletion is different from all those other social problems. In none of those other social problems was there a critical point beyond which a solution was no longer possible. This might be the case, however, with energy depletion. The worry is that there is a point of no return, where energy depletion has wreaked too much havoc with our economic system, our agricultural and food distribution system, and our manufacturing base; a point of no return beyond which the total collapse of civilization can no longer be prevented or even mitigated. This is what lies at the crux of the panic and despair that strikes so many who become aware of the potential consequences of energy depletion. This is certainly the issue that worries me. Have we slipped too far down the road to Olduvai Gorge? Is Richard Duncan correct? Are we to witness the end of technological civilization within our lifetimes? (See *The Road to Olduvai Gorge*.)

If you believe we have passed the point of no return or soon will pass it then what are you doing here right now? You had best head for the hills and hope that the folks already in those hills will still welcome you. If you hold no hope for a transition to a sustainable society, then you had better learn to survive on your own, build your little hideaway, and prepare to fight off the starving masses once they do sniff you out.

The fact that you are reading these words suggests that you still hope there is a chance for transitioning into a sustainable civilization. And so long as we can entertain such a hope, there is still a chance. There is a lot of talk of genetic determinism, and the collapse of complex systems. These are interesting philosophical exercises, but in the end they are just an intellectual excuse for giving up on humanity. You close the door on a sustainable transition when you give up hope. Any person with survival experience can tell you this: you give up your chance when you give up hope and stop trying.

But it is questionable whether hope alone is enough. You have to become active; you have to put forth effort. Do not be dissuaded by negligible results, keep on trying. The secret to movements is that they grow exponentially. For a long time, it will seem that you are making hardly any progress at all, and then you suddenly find yourself swamped in the flood of community awareness.

This is what we have to plan for at present. We have to organize ourselves and prepare for the day when we are nearly overrun by all of the people who suddenly see the problem. And we must hold faith that this day will not arrive too late.

For now we need to organize. Start hosting energy depletion or sustainability awareness gatherings in your house. Talk to your family, your friends and your neighbors. Attend rallies and provide a visible presence. Carry signs, pass out fliers. Attend sustainability and alternative energy conventions, be critical but call attention to the need for low tech, grassroots solutions—even though they clearly are only partial solutions. Become a familiar face at your local farmer's market; join or start a community garden. Be involved. Prepare yourself for a transition

to self-sufficiency, and at the same time be ready for the flood of attention that will come when energy depletion can no longer be ignored.

Be involved and never give up hope.