

Epilogue 12/16/04:

Very few of the foregoing ideas are mine. My take on things stems from many sources. I wish that three books were more widely read. Thomas Greco, in "Money: Understanding and Creating Alternatives to Legal Tender", provides a basis for creating a pathway out of the capitalist growth- imperative trap. "Progress and Poverty" by Henry George should be the basis of all thinking on the relation of the land to economics. Richard Heinberg, in his recent book, "Powerdown", has the most succinct and cogent analysis of our current predicament that I'm aware of.

defended as a response to their nuclear capability. The public is already being prepared to accept this with the active participation of the corporate media. The market determinism ideology of the neo-cons will require them to make the viability of our financial institutions and corporations their first concern—bail-outs, and the like. The American worker/consumer will be asked to pay the bill. As a result, the “American way of life” will be affordable by fewer and fewer as more and more American youth are sent to die on foreign soil. The exact nature of this meltdown will be determined by the response of the Bush administration and the Federal Reserve, so it will be very difficult for the individual citizen to plan a survival strategy. The needed information will be kept secret by the government; only corporate insiders will have a clue. In the neo-con’s experience, war is the best way to jump-start the economy, beside which, they are heavily invested in the energy and munitions industries that profit most from a war. Wars add a heavy drain on petro-energy at a time when world oil production is beginning to peak out. As oil supply starts to fall behind world demand, the resulting oil price rise will have a global inflationary consequence coupled with widespread unemployment due to the growth limitation put on economies by the lack of energy and the increasing impoverishment of consumers—in other words, stagflation, like in the 70s, only much worse, with no end in sight. With the necessities of life being more and more provided by global foreign trade, any disruption in shipping caused by wars or petroleum shortages render Americans dangerously vulnerable. This is to say nothing of the effect on the world food supply that is already feeling the strain of greater demand in China and India. This is not just a “scenario”. This is the inevitable consequence of the path this country has been seduced into embarking upon. Only the timelines are open to question—that is, barring some kind of ecological catastrophe that renders *all* human plans moot.

What has become of the “non-negotiable” American way of life in these circumstances? I would say it’s better to start negotiating, and to start soon. The climate change and species extinction due to global warming, pollution, and habitat destruction may have already proceeded too far. We have no way of knowing. Meanwhile, these considerations are not allowed to enter the political dialog. The government and the corporations are determined that we keep our eyes unblinkingly focussed on the wrong mouse-hole. The corporate media serves up fear of terrorism and unorthodox sexuality on the one hand, and glorifies militarism and sexual prurience on the other.

If our society’s doomed current direction cannot be democratically reversed, then—to weather the coming storm—each individual or family will be left to construct a lifeboat of their own devising. Unfortunately, those already in politics are unlikely to have the will (or the vision) to respond to the challenge of the human population/resource depletion passage now facing us. An attempt must be made to either persuade or replace current politicians as a part of our life-boat strategy. A more sure approach is a firm reconnection with our own local communities. But as events progress, more and more people will become aware that things will never work out as advertised. We will be lucky if that tipping point comes soon enough. In the meantime working toward sustainability, community, and equality at the local level is the best solution to personal and global survival.

technological warfare first-hand. Those with colonies to police and defend lost them in the aftermath of WW II. Furthermore, looking forward as well as backward, many of them have taken the lead in adopting the long view regarding sustainability. In any serious program to achieve sustainability, technological warfare is not an option.

In my view, the new political leadership I have called for must go to the American public with an entirely new set of propositions and proposals entirely distinct from the New Deal/Cold War agenda of the Democratic Party, as well as the militarily-enforced, religiously-justified, primacy-of- profit-from-property agenda of the Republican Party.

At the present moment, such an agenda has no political viability. Neither did Martin Luther King's at the start. Neither did Barry Goldwater's in the early 70s. Ten years later their visions were in place. The American people must be called upon to make a very clear choice. *Either "the American way of life is non-negotiable" (even if that means resort to endless war on other's soil to gain the means to support it), or America must renounce foreign wars, concentrate on continental defense, and embark on a government-run crash program to revamp our energy production, transportation modalities, consumer habits, and land-use/construction practices.* In other words—we must make sustainability the ruling priority. To accomplish these tasks we Americans must swallow our false pride in a system that leaves the provision of the basic necessities of life to the whims of the market. We must embrace and adapt the pro-active governmental role that enables the social, political, and economic practices of the more advanced industrialized countries. We once had the resources to lead the way—now we must catch up before we can assert the true world leadership role our size demands of us.

The enactment of a sustainability-first agenda would, indeed, result in severe economic dislocation. Programs would have to be devised to put a floor under those temporarily unemployed by industries and services being revamped or no longer existing. Ways would have to be found to distribute these benefits and to promote the general understanding of the ongoing changes at the local level. That is where the changes that impact the day-to-day welfare of the people must take place, and that is where democratic control of the actual changes must be centered. I have proposed the elementary school district as the most practical geographic/demographic entity for the institution of such an entirely new effort with far-reaching effects on the population. I have also proposed the watershed as the basic geographic entity for dealing with the biospheric aspects of sustainability.

An unrealizable utopian dream, even if desirable, doomed to be too little, too late, you say? Consider the inevitable result of the alternate path down which the neo-con agenda is leading us. We are already a debtor nation who imports more than we export by paying for the difference with bonds sold to other nations. At some point, probably sooner rather than later, confidence in the value of the dollar will slip to such an extent that these bonds will become unsalable. If a run on the dollar begins, world markets will be thrown into chaos. To prevent such a run, a threat of military action would be trumped up if a threat of even minimal credibility could be found. The threat of Iran pushing OPEC to change from dollar to euro denomination could produce a pre-emptive strike on Iran publicly

And then, in the 1930s, their world collapsed. The New Deal saved them from socialist oblivion, but a new public dialog replaced pure capitalist self-congratulation. Liberals shaped the terms of the new dialog that was to become the lingua franca of the Democratic Party, and the foundation of the conventional wisdom. That ended with the Reagan presidency for which Nixon and Goldwater paved the way.

The Democratic Party never was a party of the left in the European sense. Roosevelt cobbled together a majority out of urban machine politics, unemployed workers, minorities, a few socialist intellectuals, and Jim Crow southerners that would have scared the Eastern old-money establishment into rash reaction were it not for the fact that Roosevelt was one of them. Something had to be done and they sensed—grudgingly—that he was saving their asses. Some have said that Eisenhower (the first Republican president after the Great Depression) normalized the New Deal by not attempting to dismantle its social programs. Nevertheless, with black demands for equality, the Democratic coalition's political fragility became apparent in the post-war era. In addition to being divided on racial issues, the Democratic party under Truman lined up solidly behind what was basically a Republican issue—the hysterical fear of the privileged corporate elite that Soviet communism might in any way become a serious challenge to “the American Way”. Stalin's sadistic paranoia, soon to be armed with nuclear missiles, doomed the political viability of any other option than the Cold War. As a consequence, Democrats became equally culpable with Republicans for alliance with (and creation of) rightist regimes, the ballooning of the Pentagon, the Viet Nam war, and the creation of a de-facto global military/corporate empire.

In spite of both Party's unwillingness to raise taxes to pay for wars (beginning under Truman with the Korean war) the corporate constituency of the Republican Party grew restive at having a graduated income tax financing social benefits going to largely Democratic voters. They paid but got no benefits—more taxation without representation, the issue on which the country was founded. At the same time the southern Democrats grew restive about de-segregation and started bolting to the Republican Party. Thus was born the Reagan majority. And with that, the political dialog reverted to the pre-New Deal norm. The Clinton presidency—in any case somewhat of a fluke due to the strong Perot third-party candidacy in 1992—was merely an interlude that in many ways validated the Conservative grip on the political dialog; Eisenhower in reverse.

In the meantime, in Europe and Japan, mixed capitalist/socialist welfare states have been providing the highest quality of life on the planet to their citizens for decades. They have been able to do this, not only because they have put in place progressive policies and institutions, but also because they have enjoyed a half-century of peaceful coexistence with their neighbors. The militarists counter this argument with the assertion that this happy state of affairs was bought and paid for by American taxpayers who provided for foreign countries' military security. Since the 1950s there has been little evidence to support this claim. In truth, the primary agenda of global American military deployment has always been to secure access to markets for American corporations. European countries, on the other hand, either had long-standing policies of neutrality (such as Sweden and Switzerland) or had experienced the catastrophic devastation of

virtuous—individual. Those who *own* gain respectful deference, while those who *make* are nothing until someone profits from their exertions.

But this is not the whole story. The market requires coercive muscle to prevent looting and preserve its inner integrity. So much for “free” markets—except for the drug trade. The reign of market determinism depends on the police and military—the institutionalized threat of violent coercion. In theory, democratically elected governments control the military and the police. In practice, wealth buys or seduces the votes it needs to insure that governments serve its interests.

This is not yet the whole story. The rule of market determinism tends toward ever-increasing wealth-concentration, widespread poverty, and police-state government. This sorry outcome is all too evident in many countries. But such a society appears morally bankrupt even to some of those who benefit from it. Therefore, the final pillar of the market determinist ideology is the resort to organized religion to introduce into society the other moral values—such as charity for the poor—that the market, left to itself, tends to undermine.

If this analysis is correct, we see that market determinism’s promise of economic democracy results in a society in which immense power over society’s destiny concentrates in the hands of a tiny minority who focus exclusively on gaining maximum profit from the enterprises they control. Not only does market determinism fail to lead to economic democracy in the long run, the corporate market system must be propped up by a government run by politicians it pays in order to gain access to policy, tax-funded grants, and the provision of physical security. The democratic ideal is thereby nullified at the political level as well as the economic.

Finally, the need of recourse to organized religions that justify the winners, while controlling and consoling the losers, distorts the moral and spiritual purpose of religion. Religion has become the haven for the smug, the bigoted, the hypocritical, and those in flight from personal responsibility.

From my point of view, civic virtue demands a full, free, and widespread public discussion of three general subjects in all their many guises. One, the nature of the true path to sustainability, two, a full examination of the myth of market determinism, and three, the rejuvenation of the political process.

11/28/04

In the long view of American history (by which I mean the white man’s presence in North America), commercial entrepreneurs have always shaped the major operating agendas of this country. They dominated the shipping essential to the colonies’ survival. They sparked the Revolution. They wrote the Constitution. They profited from slavery. They spread the Industrial Revolution across the continent. They ruled with little serious threat from the Marxist challenge that engaged Europe.

the champions of sustainability with justice can do. The corporate Republicans fear the truth. The people need to be reminded of this at every opportunity.

But of what good is aroused public opinion if the political process is hamstrung by archaic, frozen, and corrupt electoral practices? Constitutional amendments abolishing the Electoral College, removing barriers to third parties, and facilitating some form of proportional representation need to be vigorously pursued.

Even such an up-grading of the democratic process as capsulized here would fail to give the biosphere a voice in human affairs. We must find a way to mobilize the best science and eco-wisdom, and then find a way to give that knowledge and wisdom appropriate priority. When the white man arrived on these shores, he found a thinly populated continent blessed with incomparable natural resources. After five centuries of aggressive exploitation, those resources are severely depleted. We take for granted the way of life those resources have enabled. At the same time the production of our unparalleled wealth has impacted the biosphere on a global scale. From now on, human aspirations and agendas must be balanced with the Earth's carrying capacity. We must take this imperative seriously or suffer grave consequences.

The greatest impediment to the cause of balancing human desires with the Earth's carrying capacity in a just and sustainable fashion is the belief that the operation of markets must be the ultimate arbiter of all human endeavor. Those who argue the virtue of the doctrine of market determinism lean heavily on the notion that—since transactions are made voluntarily—the free market constitutes the ultimate embodiment of the democratic ideal in the economic sphere.

The doctrine of market determinism rests on certain other assumptions as well: that seeking personal advantage is universal to human nature, that human productivity depends on fear of destitution on the one hand and greed for riches on the other, and that the quest for market dominance stimulates technological innovation. The doctrine also holds that the “free” market provides the greatest possible efficiency in distribution of labor and resources.

In practice, those who espouse this doctrine tend to neglect the market's need for perfect information by all parties in order to actually function like the theory, the advantage of the seller over those in absolute need, the distortions of monopolies, and the natural advantage of the wealthier bargainer. He who comes to the marketplace with advantages dominates transactions and prospers further. He who doesn't has an uphill battle. Also, other values than greed—quality, beauty, livability, sustainability—get short shrift in the market determinist's world-view. Finally, the promise of efficiency in the distribution of labor and resources fails when measured against the criterion of the general welfare enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution.

If market determinism has become the ruling global ideology, then those who dominate markets rule the world. Not only do they dominate the organs of political power, but they also provide the populace with a model for the most successful—and therefore most

be put on the spot about where their real loyalties lay. If this radical change in direction were to be rejected, a really serious third party effort should be initiated that draws together as many highly visible standard-bearers—from all fields of endeavor—as possible.

In January the Democratic progressives would, in my view, be well served to draw a line in the sand over these issues:

- 1. War/Peace: rejecting militarism and military solutions, embracing diplomacy.
- 2. Re-institute the welfare state as opposed to the warfare state—government through nurture rather than violence.
- 3. Returning free and informed democratic process through media and electoral reform.
- 4. Giving environmental concerns an equal footing with human concerns in governmental and corporate planning.
- 5. Corporate re-regulation and de-monopolization. Either government charters and regulates government, or corporations (rather than the public as a whole) rule government.

To sell such an agenda to a public that is not on the same page at all—in fact, is unaware of the page's existence—several sacred cows must be very visibly slaughtered in the media. To begin with, the idea of pre-emptive war as a “defense” against terrorism or nuclear attack is absurd and criminal. In Korea, the Bay of Pigs, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and now Iraq, our major foreign wars since WW II have fallen woefully short of achieving their stated objectives. Only against Grenada and Panama have we achieved unqualified victories. Our military involvements in Latin America, and elsewhere in the Third World, have been in the interests of US corporations, and antagonistic to the indigenous people. The militarized response to the criminal 9/11 attack have been effective only in the service of the pre-existing neo-con agendas and the entrenchment of the Bush regime. The central point in need of passionate and unrelenting emphasis is *that technological warfare waged on foreign soil is a lose-lose proposition*; the US should lead the way in abandoning it as the foundation of national security. Secure borders, air-lanes, and shipping lanes should be the fundamental preoccupation of our military. Total global nuclear disarmament together with the scaling back of other military technology, all verified by inspection, should be the primary goal of our diplomacy.

In order to bring the general public to so much as the first glimmerings of perception of the crisis we are headed into, the mass media content-providers must somehow be persuaded that their responsibility to their audience requires them to air the well-founded dire warnings coming from all sides that presently get little play or are pooh-poohed. Already there is a public outcry over media consolidation, so there is hope. Also hopeful is the fact that the Internet now carries more information of the sort that people really need than most people have the time to absorb. The electromagnetic spectrum, satellite transmission, and cable/phone lines are all common property; the commercial media should have to pay rent into the public coffers for their use. In the absence of reform legislation, which remains a non-starter under Republican stewardship, there is still much

9/11 Commission proceedings which the Bush administration had stonewalled, and from which the only non-hawk Democratic participant, then-Senator Max Clelland of Georgia, quit in disgust.

Come the election campaign, John Kerry was in no position to challenge Bush's leadership on the basis of allowing the 9/11 attacks. The idea that we should feel more secure in Bush's leadership in preventing further terrorist attacks because of Bush's rhetorical and propaganda responses to the attacks he *allowed* on 9/11, is absurd on its face. If Kerry had been at least a visible critic of the Bush response in the immediate aftermath, he would have had a handle on following that line in the election. In fact, he was nowhere near the ballpark, and as a result, ceded leadership credentials to Bush. Roughly a fifth of the electorate rated leadership in the "war on terror" as paramount, and of those, eighty to ninety percent went to Bush.

This is not to discount the phony, bigoted, sex-based issues of the religious right. There is little that a reason-based candidate can do to counter these. But put these together with the apparent willingness of the Republicans to look the other way at ballot fraud and electronic voting devised by their contributors that is opaque to review, and what we see is an election process dominated by deceptive propaganda, irrational irrelevancies, and outright fraud. As these practices become institutionalized, democracy dies. The unwillingness of the Democratic Party to engage the true issues of our time out of fear of losing their offices at the hands of a complacently ignorant electorate has rendered national politics a game not worth the time. The Democratic Party is itself split between the progressives and the hawk/blue-dog conservatives, and the progressives are not unanimous in proclaiming an anti-war stance.

Is there any hope of creating a politically effective dissenting voice to the neo-con strategy of military violence as the enforcer of corporate goals, buttressed with propaganda from a closed media, and justified by a religion of convenient ignorance? In January, the Democratic National Committee will meet to select its new leadership. It's a pretty safe bet that "Topic A" will remain the winning of elections. The question of why it's important to replace the Republicans will almost certainly boil down to keeping the last shreds of the New Deal social safety nets in place. This is just more politics-as-usual that both fails to meet the radical challenge of the neo-cons and address the fundamental issue of achieving a just and sustainable society.

If it is to credibly challenge the Republicans on the real issues of our time, the Democratic Party must abandon the excuse of patriotism for embracing militarism, the blind promotion of economic growth, and the rejection of the European government-provided social safety net model. Otherwise it must content itself with ineffectively chipping away at the edges of an increasingly dominant, proto-fascist neo-con model of corporate/government plutocracy until that project collapses in economic chaos, social instability, or ecological disaster.

The progressive caucus in Congress ought to agree among themselves to a policy of absolute non-collaboration with the neo-cons. The old-line Democrat pols would thereby

POST-ELECTION REFLECTIONS--11/25/2004

This was written in the aftermath of the 2004 elections.

November 25, 2004

Why has the political process in the United States been so slow in facing new challenges and advancing the cause of equality? After all, the Constitution's framers made sure to enable the accomplishment of these goals. Unfortunately for us, the Constitution incorporated answers to political problems unique to its historical situation. The issue of slavery surpassed all others in being immune to solution by Constitutional means; certainly by dint of blood shed in its resolution. Why are abortion, the Electoral College, gerrymandering, firearm anarchy, gay marriage prohibition, regressive tax policies—to name just a few intractable contemporary problems—so immune to Constitution-based solutions? Several answers seem apparent. One, the Constitution facilitates the orderly running of government, but places impediments in the way of radical changes in the rules. Two, over the years, those with the power and wealth to do so have had the means and patience to manipulate and enshrine government policies and to entrench political fiefdoms. Three, a perennially anxious public's need for stability. This public lives in luxury (by historical standards), yet every life is a high-wire act with the safety-nets disappearing. Four, professional politicians have redistricted the choice out of voting. Five, the two-party system requires minorities (and minority opinions) to belong to one party or the other. Neither may be responsive to their concerns. Six is a corollary of five—this country has never had an effective, independent Socialist Party.

In spite of all the rot and ossification of the political process, the national Presidential elections are not necessarily a foregone conclusion. But they are becoming more so. Outside of campaign rhetoric itself, the main handle on voter choice is the ruling corporate interest's domination of the media. Media access is fundamental for new political information and ideas to penetrate the public's worldview.

The crucial determinant in this year's close Presidential election now appears to have been the skillful handling of the public relations aspect of the 9/11 attacks by the Bush administration, and the Democrat's unwillingness to challenge the administration's demonstrable culpability in these attacks. After all, on 9/11 the United States experienced the first attack on continental American soil since the war of 1812. Less than a score of men armed only with box-cutters destroyed thousands of lives and billions of dollars worth of property with no attempt at interdiction by any of the government forces charged with our defense. Troubling holes in (and spin of) the evidence surfaced immediately. Had it been Clinton's watch, you may be sure the Republican attack dogs would have been all over him. Further, evidence has accumulated that suggests the administration's passive complicity in the events. There are even enough reasonable questions about exactly what Dick Cheney was doing that morning to justify a public inquiry. Instead the Democrats discreetly held their tongues in the name of national unity and coherent government. They even collaborated in legitimizing a whitewash by the