

Letter to a Newspaper

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FE Note: This letter was not written specifically for the FE, but was shared with us by William Koethke, whose article, "Earth Diet, Earth Culture," appeared in FE #325, Spring, 1987. Our next issue will include a review and discussion of ecology and social critique, in particular the deep ecology perspective and movement.

I would like to applaud your valiant efforts toward reforming "civilization" into a more humane and sustainable culture. But, I would also like to raise the question as to what point in the historical continuum do these reformist efforts become a futile "absurdist" position and/ or simply an unwillingness to face the facts of the planetary apocalypse?

Is it possible that our efforts could more honorably and realistically be devoted toward organizing refugee columns and ecologically balanced and self-sufficient survival communities?

While we all have made efforts toward change for many years, the juggernaut of the world-wide industrial empire rolls on and threats to life grow more numerous each year.

Would we believe that any of the successive empires of "civilization" would be eternal; imperial cultures whose basic paradigm is explosive growth financed by a dwindling ecology? Apple trees do not bloom in winter and it is not reasonable to believe that societies grossly out-of-balance with the planetary life can endure.

Our planet lives by solar gain, through photosynthesis. Humans now absorb 40% of the photosynthetic gain of earth's vegetation. When pasture land is created by clearing forest, two-thirds of the net photosynthetic production (NPP) is lost. When cropland is created from previously forested land, one-half the NPP is lost in mid-latitudes. When we reflect on how much of the earth's surface is already deforested and desertified, the figure for NPP loss is enormous.

In 1950, the remnant forest of the earth was slightly more than one-quarter of its surface. By 1980 the earth's forest cover had shrunk to one-fifth. Now the technical experts say the rainforests will be gone by the year 2000 (13 years). By 1980, 6.7% of the Earth's surface (a collective area larger than Brazil) had become desertified because of human activities. As the trends of this century continue into the next, 80% of the vegetation of the planet will be gone by 2040.

The acceleration toward the apocalypse is such that in 1980 the planet was losing one species of organism per day.

By 1990 it will be one species per hour.

By 2000, one-quarter of the world's potable water supply will be contaminated with industrial toxics and many underground sources pumped dry.

We are not now functioning in your regular old human history; we are now functioning in cosmic time dimensions! With species extinction, with rain forest destruction, with old growth forest destruction, millions of years of differentiation and development on this planet are being wiped out.

It requires 300 to 1,000 years to accumulate each inch of topsoil on the surface of the planet and the Earth was eroded of 25.5 billion tons in 1985 (and increasing). Five bushels topsoil per one bushel corn, annually, in Iowa doesn't leave much for the grandchildren.

Human society is sustained by the living things of the earth. Human societies that cannot live in balance—that progressively kill off those living things—cannot endure on the earth.

An exponentially exploding world population with inflamed desires for material wealth based on dwindling resources and a dying planetary life—won't work! The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization calculates that by 2000, 65 countries—with 1.1 billion people—will not be able to provide even minimum levels of nutrition for their populations. The centers of industrial power themselves are completely dependent upon resources drawn from these areas which are progressively descending into social-ecological chaos.

So, what do we do in the midst of this planetary paroxysm? Do we rush out and spend years trying to reform mental health organizations when the whole world has gone mad with military armaments? Do we try to help the homeless while we watch much of the continent of Africa starve in the next twenty years? Do we exert maximum effort to save the whales while each hour we lose other species of organisms and indeed whole ecosystems?

Because of the dynamics of the non-sustainable industrial system, even the poor of the USA, Europe, Japan and the USSR contribute to the planetary destruction—as well as the transnationals and the rural peasants of the Third World. It is the requirements for the lifestyle—of the industrialist, the reformer and the environmentalist alike—that is destroying the life of the Earth.

A Morally Corrupt Empire

If the immediate future that we face is so profound that it has no precedent in prior, known human history, we must search for fundamental error, not just politics or industrialism.

We live inside of and are mentally conditioned by the mass institutions of a morally corrupt empire that in the past 250 years has invaded most of the earth. It has been popular since 1940 to point fingers at the Nazis, as the “bad boys” of civilization. They believed they were the super race; they believed in military violence; and they believed that because might made right for the superior race, they should invade the homeland of others, kill them and take what they have. Is that any different than the basic thrust of all of the history of civilization—“civilizing the savages”?

Tens of millions died while civilization invaded Africa, the Americas, Asia, Siberia, the South Seas and so forth. In a 20-year period, 10 million people were murdered in the colonies of the Congo Basin of Africa and sixty years later one needs be a graduate student in history to learn of it, because the mass institutions see it as morally trivial.

Our present dilemma did not suddenly spring upon us. Its tracks are seen in the formerly great forests of China, the former thriving semi-arid ecosystem of the Indus River valley, the still salinized soils of the Tigris-Euphrates valley of the irrigation supported Babylonians and the eroded lands of Greece and the Mediterranean region. North Africa, the “bread basket” of the Greek and Roman empires is now an eroded rock pile and the whole planet is headed in that direction. Empires are unrestrained growths, feeding on a dwindling ecological base.

So we exist at the cusp of the end of the Final Empire (sneaking along under its euphemism, “civilization”), with the massive dynamics of population, resource use, pollution, soil erosion, militarization, nuclear threat, etc., in motion. The trends of the ten thousand year history of imperial cultures will culminate!

It has been given to us, in this age, to occupy a pivotal point in the course of the human-planetary experience. The empire we live in will be the final empire. When it blows there will be few living things remaining upon which to revive another—computers cannot create topsoil. In the two million year development of the human family, we will have culminated in a brief 10,000 year aberration. Now, in this instant of time, this pivotal point, we can see across the centuries. We are presented with an unequaled challenge; a matter of cosmic importance.

The immediate future will not be like any thing in the past. The blind forces of history will continue their dynamics toward apocalypse, but we need not be carried along. By awareness and by acting in the now we can step out of the continuum.

We Can Create Culture

Any human social organization that endures on this planet will be in balance with the life of the earth. What presently is called human culture, is manipulated and controlled by technology, mass institutions and the exigencies of power politics. Now, we can create culture. Now, we can establish balanced survival communities.

Those humans and human groups that survive the apocalypse will be the future of the human family. By being conscious, by being aware of our position in space-time, we can funnel our social energies toward the future. Rather than contributing our social energies to the dying empire and trying to reform it—we can stand in survival communities of ecological stability and resist the final destruction of the best that remains.

Are you bored, despondent, depressed with the world; don't know what to do with your life? Here's a cosmic challenge for those who can see the picture, the challenge is for human consciousness to expand to a planetary dimension, perceive the situation in a planetary time context, create the institutions of survival and wend its way through the final dialectic of empire to a point in which the human family and its future is consciously created.

Intuitively, we all have created wholistic healing, wholistic health, wholistic diet, permaculture, tree crops, alternative architecture, balanced sexual roles, intentional communities and a framework of modalities for reaching psychological and emotional stability. Now, we can take these tools and create the future.

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Fifth Estate #326, Summer, 1987

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