

GLOBAL WARMING, CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTING TO IT MUST BE LOCAL...

We are a globalized planet. Our big banks and the monstrously big insurance company that insures their fake "instruments," cannot fail because that might collapse the global market. I never quite understood the logic. But we rewarded the big banks for making a mess, and now the banks are doing just fine, but one in five Americans are without sufficient income to pay the bills. And when we have no money to buy, our own market is not doing well. But fear not, the money market is doing great, the score of investments goes up every other day — and down every other day.

So, if I get this right, by bailing out our banks we saved the world? When I look at how other parts of the world are doing, Asia seems to be doing particularly well, Europe is doing not too badly, South America is kind of doing well, except Mexico, poor Mexico is getting poorer. We married Mexico with NAFTA in the late nineties, two administrations ago. If 10-18% of Americans is jobless, it's double that in Mexico. Their neighbors to the south are doing better.

We here are actually not doing well at all. We spend an enormous amount of money, almost half of it on two wars we cannot seem to get out of, or perhaps don't want to get out of. After all, the military/industrial complex, as President/General Eisenhower called it, runs this country. We just print more money to keep being the greatest Force the planet has ever known. And yet all that might does not seem to be able to fight ordinary people we try to force to have a democracy. We must have forgotten that we formed our own democracy after we threw out an occupying army.

Meanwhile, our government is busy trying to... I don't really know how to describe what our government is doing other than screaming insults and lies at the other party. Since we have only two parties, and both of them are broken in many fractions, it is already obvious that whatever "reform" they are going to end up with is going to be worse than the worst we already have in the way of "health" care.

My children lived the first part of their adult lives in a world floating on loans. Banks flooded the market with credit cards that charged 0% interest for the first six months, and after the six months there was always another credit card that charged 0% for the first nine months. Then, it seemed from one day to the next, we woke up to a day when the same credit card now sends us a notice that if you did not pay up the 17th of last month the interest rate is now 40%. In my time that was thought usury, but now the banks make the law. And we are experiencing the rapid slide from modest, educated, reasonably housed, intelligent middle class, to unemployed no class at all.

The statistics say that the “average” income of the American family is \$50,000 a year, but this average must be skewed by the few percent who have incomes over a million a year. The official statistics are that 10.2% of Americans are unemployed, but that does not count the people who have given up even trying, and the people who have part time work although they badly need full time employment. There really are not many jobs any more because in our haste to globalize we outsourced almost all manufacturing to countries where labor costs less. My computer (a brand I have faithfully bought for the last 25 years, from my first computer) is now made in China, then sent by FedEx (I assume everybody in the world is familiar with that name) from China to Alaska to Memphis Tennessee, in the Eastern part of this country, from there to an airport on the West Coast, and from there to here. Even by air that took almost a week, because, of course, FedEx does not fly on weekends. I tried to add up the miles: at least halfway around the world, probably more.

It must be abundantly clear that I don't understand the first thing about our modern economy. It used to be understandable, as banks used to be understandable. No more. Automobile factories are sort of on hold; who makes steel nowadays? Where is all the plastic made we use for and around everything? Perhaps everything is made by machines, untouched by human hands. The only people involved are at the top. And the billionaires at the very very top make their billions not by manufacturing anything, or serving anybody, but by selling imaginary somethings. Globally.

We are said to be a “service” economy. I know what that means. The providers of service make more and more money without much if any concern for we who are served. And with all that money they make (we gave them for the services we need) they buy our representatives.

What is global, however, is not only an economy, but “warming,” manifesting in climate change. But that global is not doing well. In a few weeks heads of state and important scientists were supposed to be meeting in Copenhagen, Kjøbenhavn in Danish, to figure out how to slow down or stop, reverse?, climate change. Globally, no doubt.

Again well known statistics — 25% of the CO₂ that makes global warming comes from this country, and another little more than 25% from China. That means that half of all the CO₂ comes from $1.3 + 0.3 = 1.6$ billion people, that is 23% of the world's population. More than half of the CO₂ that warms the planet, melts the ice on the poles and of all the earth's glaciers, and so perhaps threatens the survival of our species, is caused by less than a quarter of humans.

Is it any wonder that the other three quarters of us yell and scream for us rich and polluting people to mend our ways and help them reduce spewing more CO₂ into our common atmosphere. I don't know about China, other than

that they open a new coal burning energy factory every week, but I do know that our dysfunctional Congress will be unable to put in place any kind of real control of our savage destruction of the globe's atmosphere — which, after all we share with all LIFE.

Then, this morning's first headline in the New York Times (15 nov '09) Leaders Agree to Delay a Deal on Climate Change



Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

President Obama in Singapore on Saturday for the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting.

By HELENE COOPER

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SINGAPORE — [President Obama](#) and other world leaders have decided to put off the difficult task of reaching a [climate change](#) agreement at a global climate conference scheduled for next month, agreeing instead to make it the mission of the Copenhagen conference to reach a less specific “politically binding” agreement that would put the most difficult issues into the future.

At a hastily arranged breakfast on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting on Sunday morning, the leaders, including Lars Lokke Rasmussen, the prime minister of Denmark and the chairman of the climate conference, agreed that in order to salvage Copenhagen they would have to push a fully binding legal agreement down the road, possibly to a second summit meeting in Mexico City later on.

“There was an assessment by the leaders that it is unrealistic to expect a full internationally, legally binding agreement could be negotiated between now and Copenhagen, which starts in 22 days,” said [Michael Froman](#), the deputy national security adviser for international economic affairs. “I don’t think the negotiations have proceeded in such a way that any of the leaders thought it was likely that we were going to achieve a final agreement in Copenhagen, and yet thought that it was important that Copenhagen be an important step forward, including with operational impact.”

And, we also have known for years that forests are immensely important in absorbing CO₂. Part of the reason for global warming is that we destroyed half of the tropical rain forests that modified our climate for

many thousands of years. And although we know what the role of forests has been, and is, we continue our destruction of what forests are left. Consider this article, also in today's New York Times of today, 15 November 2009:

[Forest People May Lose Home in Kenyan Plan](#)

Since time immemorial, the [Ogiek](#) have been Kenya's traditional forest dwellers. They have stalked antelope with homemade bows, made medicine from leaves and trapped [bees](#) to produce honey, the golden elixir of the woods. They have struggled to survive the press of modernity, and many times they have been persecuted, driven from their forests and belittled as "dorobo," a word meaning roughly people with no cattle. Somehow, they have always managed to survive. Now, though, the little-known [Ogiek](#), among East Africa's last bona fide hunters and gatherers, face their gravest test yet. The Kenyan government is gearing up to evict tens of thousands of settlers, illegal or not, from the Mau Forest, the Ogiek's ancestral home and a critical water source for this entire country. The question is: Will the few thousand remaining Ogiek be given a reprieve or given the boot?

All of that means that for the near future our globe will continue to warm. The big polluters still consider their global economies more important than a global change in the environments we, ordinary people, will have to live in. That means that we, humans, as all other life forms, will have to ADAPT to a warming globe, maybe wetter in some areas, dryer in others. The level of the world ocean will rise, which means some islands will disappear. Scientists also tell us that the weather will be more extreme, storms will be fiercer, droughts dryer, floods wetter.

Adapting is something we have done from the beginning. Adaptation was what we, homo sapiens, used to be very good at. We learned to protect ourselves from Arctic cold dressed in woolly animal skins in efficient, round dwellings made from blocks of snow (which turned out to be a great insulator). And we survived in deserts, and at 20,000 ft altitude where oxygen is less than it is down here. We survived on tiny islands, no more than 6 ft (2 meters) above sea level where the only plants growing are coconut palms and perhaps sweet potato, but there was then a wealth of fish in the lagoon. Those islands are going to disappear when the oceans rise two feet or more as scientists tell us they will. We do not know yet what these changes will be, but one thing is known: *climate will change, wherever you are.*

We must accept that for now, and evidently not for a while, there will be no serious global solutions for changing the worldwide problems of climate change. It is happening and will continue to happen, and the longer we wait the faster the climate will change.

To survive we must adapt, and adaptation is always local. *Global warming is forcing us to adapt locally.* "Local" almost certainly means village by village, not even country by country.

Current projections are that by the middle of this century the global population will be nine billion (now almost seven). I studied demography (dynamics of populations), and I know that all such projections are "other things being equal." We should have learned by now that other things are *never* equal, certainly not on a planet that is rapidly warming, whose climate is changing more than the scientists thought even yesterday.

The survival of homo whatever-we-will-be-after-sapient must be LOCAL. The other side of global.

Someone once coined the cute phrase "global village." A global something with economies so interdependent that five banks are "too big to fail," because they are globally connected. But all that global is on paper, it is what we are told to believe. The global is America's armed forces, America's 600 (or more? nobody seems to know) bases all over the world. Our global is economical, one market, which is more and more asymmetrical, very few people of extreme wealth and an ever growing mass of people suffering extreme poverty. An America trying to be the world empire but from here it looks as if we may well be spending ourselves into bankruptcy. Sometimes I cannot escape the notion that we are rushing headlong to our own demise.

All communities, societies, cultures of a hundred years ago were basically sustainable. What we call the modern world, civilization, the world of capitalist technology, is completely **unsustainable**.

People tell me that we can't turn back. Why not?

They say, change is always forward, better, greater, more.

But that is what makes this world ever more *unsustainable*. To get back to sustainable we *must* go back. And hey, life 100 years ago was not bad at all. True, I cannot know that, but I do know that life 85 years ago was a lot simpler, probably sustainable, and a lot easier to understand, easier to live in. We did not have planes then, we traveled from continent to continent by boat. Three weeks from Southeast Asia to a harbor in the Mediterranean and from there by train to wherever in Western Europe. I did that six times before I was 18, never boring, but easy and comfort-

able. Later I did that by plane, many more than six times, and it was more and more stressful, albeit compressed into hours. Eighty years ago we ate what grew around us; now we eat what has been produced in factories from stuff from all over the world, some stuff taken out, other stuff added. We did not have TV even 65 years ago, we had movies in black and white. We entertained ourselves and each other. Now we sit in front of a screen that shows us the world in moving color — but that is not the real world. The real world smells, hurts our eyes, is freezing cold or unbearably hot, it rains all day (as today), or it does not quite rain enough for weeks (as before today). The real world has real people who look us in the eyes, who touch us, shake hands, kiss. In the real world people have pimples, or a tummy, receding hair lines, flat feet. But they are real, when they are different from us that is interesting, beautiful. They eat other kinds of food, they sit on the floor not on chairs, they wear turbans, or other head gear. They drink tea instead of coffee, they burp loudly to express their delight in the dinner and their guests. Real people pray to a God with another name, in holy buildings with different rituals. Real people make war, kill each other, hurt each other, torture; real people bleed red blood. We who know the world from TV, from the National Geographic and Hollywood, only know a flat picture that is not the real world.

Here, and I suspect in many other countries, the men and women who are supposed to “represent” us are not representing us, but the six lobbyists attached to each of them with dollars. How else could they vote *against* what all the polls say we the people want?

The world we live in is not real any more. It is like a play, written and directed from somewhere in the upper stratosphere of corporate money/power, acted by actors paid by those in the above sphere. We are no longer “we the people,” but a mesmerized dumb audience. We watch them on our flat screen making decisions for us but almost always against us.

I don’t understand this world any more. In my life time I have seen it shift, a world becoming more and more bizarre, fast, artificial, plastic. I have lost a sense of reality. What used to be real, the earth, trees, distances, smells and the feel of people, the taste of food, has become flat, tasteless, unreal. I have never liked sitting in a large space with a few hundred other people, in the dark, watching a movie screen. Now I feel I have moved into that screen, and am without will manipulated to do this, don’t do that.

Yet I am incredibly lucky to live in this little house, on real land, earth on top of lava, real trees, real animals, real rain all day today and maybe real heat from the sun another day. I sweat and I shiver from the climate around me. But I adapt to this land, to this weather, to the people around me. If it rains as much as today every day I may have trouble adapting to that, but what choice would I have? Each of us must adapt to the reality right next to us.

There is no global solution to my problems, or yours. I've traveled a million miles across this globe. I have some wonderful memories of people and places, and some not so wonderful memories of getting there, although in the 70s and 80s traveling was an adventure; now it is breathing recycled air mixed from the breath of all 230 passengers for 9 hours between here and Washington, DC — and that is just air time, not the time it takes to get to and from airports and the time to go through "security." I have gone around the world a few times, but have no sense that the globe is round. Yes, I know horizons are never the straight lines we see in paintings. The Hawaiians knew all along that the horizon is part of a circle, their word for horizon is pō'ailani: pō'ai is circle, and lani is sky. When you live on an island, and you stand on a mountain looking at the ocean all around, you see the roundness of the earth. But we, humans, are living on a tiny part of our earth. Our life is lived on land, not a globe.

The idea of a global economy is an artifact, a man-made global market. It is not real, as the earth under my feet is real. I know from experience that I can board an airplane and tomorrow I am standing on another piece of land. But my reality is that piece of land, not the distance between here and there.

In my dreams at night I live in another reality, with people I don't know, but they are warm-blooded people, we laugh and play together, we have discussions. I don't dream of making wars, or trying to conquer the minds and hearts of people — how can we even imagine changing hearts and minds in uniform, with seventy pounds of weapons and ammunition on our back? How would I feel, or you, if people who don't speak my language, who know nothing of my customs or beliefs, break in the front door to search my house and then say they want to be friends? I lived for five years in a country occupied by a neighboring country, much bigger and immensely more powerfully armed. They bombed one of our cities from the air; that ended a five day war when we tried to resist them coming in. They too said we were neighbors, we were brothers (they did not mention sisters). But very few of us believed

them when they got more and more oppressive as time went on. Our people disappeared in their prisons and in their eradication camps. Our country was destroyed, emptied of what wealth we had. I soon found others who resisted, long before there was an organized "resistance movement." I was 18 when the war started, 23 when it ended, having lost 40 pounds: the last winter we had nothing to eat but sugar beets and tulip bulbs, not a good diet.

Now I relive "my" war when I read about the prisons we, Americans, fill with suspects. We sanction what the rest of the world considers torture. When a hundred thousand troops are not successful, we send in more. I barely survived five years of occupation. How can people survive six, seven, ten years of occupation?

I survived. I eventually recovered even from my PTSD (then unknown and unnamed), although the scars remain. I had a career, made enough money for a life style, have wonderful children, grandchildren, a few great grandchildren, but I suffer the pain of others occupied by foreign or even their own troops. How is it possible that our government spends endless time and heaps of money with other people's affairs, and forgets our own unemployed, our own sick who have no insurance? How can I understand a world raped and destroyed by corporations whose only concern seems to be making a profit. Enormous profits. How can we be so stupid to destroy cultures that could have shown us how to live sustainable lives. Not backward primitives either, but cultures with rich art and true wisdom, but "different" and probably sitting on land that we coveted for the oil under their feet, or some minerals that we could not do without.

People, humans, have always known how to get along with their neighbors. How else could we have survived for one or two hundred thousand years? What we think of as "civilization" has nothing to do any more with being civil, being human.

I hardly recognize this country any more, a country founded on the idea of being governed by and for the people. Although, the more I learn about our history, the more I realize that we never quite lived up to that idea, did we. From the first we made a distinction between people and other people who were not quite people because they had a darker colored skin. The first settlers and many of their offspring pretended to have found an empty land that was theirs for the taking. But there were people here. They had customs, beliefs, communities, wisdom. We fought them, pushed them off the land they thought was part of them —

to us land is just property, to be owned, bought and sold. Did we ever believe the wise words some of the founders of this country spoke?

In this century we learned that what we considered almost a holy document, our Constitution, could be set aside with the greatest of ease. We could and did capture perhaps thousands of people, inside and outside the borders of this country, tortured them, never accused them of anything, held them without recourse to law or justice. And evidently, it is impossible to rectify that lawlessness even with a new president, supposedly a new administration.

What have we become? To me, an old man, today's humans are often not recognizably human any more. I am close to the end of a rich life time, but I worry about my children and grandchildren.

I mourn for Man, once thought to be the pinnacle of evolution on this planet — now revealing himself as the ruthless, thoughtless, selfish destroyer of a beautiful planet.

How do we get back to being human again?

One at a time, if there is time. And always locally.

robert wolff, 15 november 2009

Hawai'i

Geologists say more than 70 percent of Kauai's beaches are eroding while Oahu has lost a quarter of its sandy shoreline. They warn the problem is only likely to get significantly worse in coming decades as global warming causes sea levels to rise more rapidly.

Reuter News Service