

How can the present World Crisis be resolved? by Alick Bartholomew

That's a very big question, which may be better put in terms of: "Has our civilisation lost its way?" To find some clarity, we need to take a very broad view, and draw on psychological, as well as historical, insights.

It's hard to be optimistic about the future. So much seems to be going wrong with society, and the domestic and world economies are clearly in trouble. One gets the feeling that those in charge really don't know what to do, so the status quo continues. It seems to be very hard for people to change their mindset, particularly those in authority.

When you talk to people, often you get the impression that there is more wisdom out there in the population, especially amongst older people who have learned from their own experience what works and what doesn't, than there is among the 'experts'. There is a serious shortfall in democracy.

The values of society have certainly changed in the last 60 years. We have become more self-centred and seem to believe the hype of advertising — that happiness comes from acquiring more of everything; are we really insatiable, or are we being programmed? We are told that there is nothing wrong with debt if it helps us get what we want. Credit and runaway worldwide debt are the main fuel for inflation and economic chaos.

The desire to make money and to become more prosperous have taken precedence over the values of personal integrity, concern for others, and preservation of the natural environment, especially among leaders in business, finance and government.

Our educational system does not teach us the imperative of a sustainable lifestyle — living within our means, which is about as basic as you can get. It does not teach us the principles of holism — that every action affects not only ourselves personally, but everything around us.

It is quite clear that the worldview or mindset of government, financial institutions and big business is founded on unsustainable principles. Is it not naive to believe that any institution should police its own code of conduct? Continual economic growth is clearly impossible. We allow banks to create theoretical money which is not the real wealth that is found in useful products and land.

Unfettered capitalism, with its laissez-faire world expansion of trade and economic globalisation, at the price of increasing inequalities and of damage to indigenous societies, is self-seeking and destructive. We also forget that the Earth's resources are limited. We have been exploiting them with increasing abandon for the last century, and they are now being exhausted — whether fresh water, fossil fuels, rare earths, precious metals, and above all, the forests. In the last hundred years, we have devastated the Earth more than at any time in human history. Tragically, world governments don't yet accept that the destruction of the forests is destroying the balance of world climates, which will exacerbate the effects of global warming and will make life on Earth for humanity extremely hazardous.

The other thing that we forget is that our society has become very materialistic. Our science and our worldview sees everything in material terms, whether the human body or the Earth as machines rather than organisms, or denying the essential role of subtle energies in life processes. It sees the small, the literal, as a two-dimensional image of reality, rather than acknowledging the whole, with its energetic cohesion, as well as its physical nature.

So, what is the alternative to our present worldview and lifestyle? Visionaries of a sustainable future, like EF Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful*) talk of the way ahead in terms

of downscaling and localising our activities, and adopting policies that really value people's potentiality and skills, and which treat the Earth with respect.

Most would-be reformers consider economics the most out of touch and dogma-ridden profession, and would like to see economic and financial institutions, as well as the boards of large companies democratised to bring in some commonsense and new ideas. A tax on financial transactions and on casino banking would be popular. The replacement of income tax and most benefits is well supported, to be replaced by a tax on energy use, particularly on fossil fuels, on unimproved land and empty homes. Some believe this revenue should support a basic level of individual income; that the introduction of 18 months' national community service for all school leavers would do much to reduce unemployment and train the young for useful work.

A good example of localisation is the Transition Town movement, which encourages communities to become cohesive, resilient and self-reliant, growing their own food, generating their own energy, caring for people and giving everyone a sense of engagement and purpose. Controlling personalities are discouraged and everyone is encouraged to play a part.

As a holistic movement it has grown rapidly in only five years, initiating 175 Transition Towns in the British Isles, 135 in the United States, and is spreading in Australasia, Canada and Europe. Some communities have barter schemes, like LETS, and others have their own currencies to stimulate local businesses and discourage national chains.

Will those in power see the error of their ways and give up their control to local democracy? This is most unlikely, because they have invested everything in centralising power, the structures of which will have to collapse before localising policies can be introduced. History tells us that an old order has to crumble before a new direction can be implemented.

This will undoubtedly cause disruption in society, but chaos or confusion normally precedes change. I see the present economic confusion as training us to live within our means. Businesses and individuals will have to become more flexible and creative, as they have done in previous economic depressions; the weak will suffer most and the stronger may survive.

Protests and rebellion won't themselves bring a more compassionate society, for what is required is a shift in consciousness to bring about a complete change in attitude. This is a spiritual rather than a political process.

[I go into these issues in greater depth from cultural, ecological and eco-psychological points of view, in my article "[Water & the role of Polarities in Nature](#)"]