

What Will Probably Happen

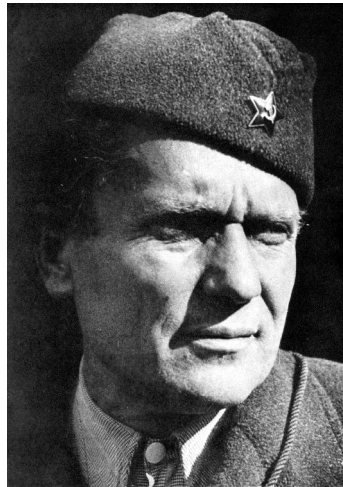
...When Things Fall Apart

By RICHARD PELTO

The question facing mankind now is what happens when cultural order begins disintegrating after consuming whatever remaining cheap energy exists? When industrial sustainability is no longer possible?

My answer is that people will return to whatever helped form their building blocks of identity in order to cope. Whatever formed that basis of identity will form the ability to cope.

Identity trumps even the modern nation state. Evidence is provided in what happened in Yugoslavia after the fall of Titoism. Under Tito, Yugoslavia had all the attributes of a nation state: a formidable national army, a national government that was representative of its many parts, and a national identity resulting from forms of opinion submission to national decision-making processes. But many extremely corrosive and overextended forces caused this national superstructure to dissolve in a remarkably short period of time. Out of that dissolution emerged Croat, Serb, and Bos-

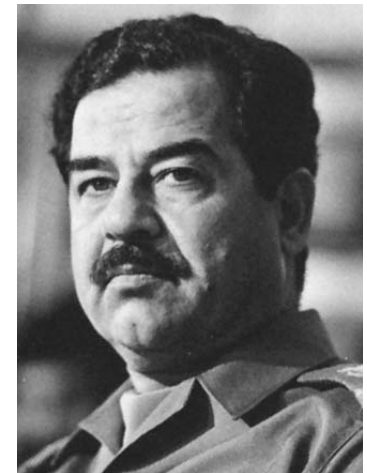


Josip Broz Tito
(1892-1980)

Richard Peltó, now in retirement, has worked as a journalist and Community-College English teacher. In the '90s he organized a discussion group in the Seattle-area called the Third Place Academy. A few of its past, present members are Dr. Richard S. Duncan, John Michael Greer, Marvin Gregory, and Dr. Ron Angel.

nian leaders who derived power more from ethnic traditions than from the suddenly-turned-ephemeral-under-duress Tito nationalism. The emergent ethnic power resulted from the natural process of learning that went into creating those separate human identities.

The same case can be made for Sudan's Darfur region. A U.N. Environmental Program report quoted in the *Seattle Times* (7/23/2007) says: "There is a very strong link between land degradation, desertification and conflict in Darfur." It noted the rainfall in northern Darfur has decreased by a third in the last 80



Saddam Hussein
(1937-2006)

years. "Exponential population growth and related environmental stress have created the conditions for conflicts to be triggered and sustained by political, tribal or ethnic differences," the report said, adding that Darfur "can be considered a tragic example of the social breakdown that can result from ecological collapse."

The passion for addressing "genocide" provided by many sources might be better re-directed toward understanding the survival mechanisms that happen as a consequence of population growth's impacts on strategic resource depletion and ecological degradation. The lesson that should be drawn from this is societies include others when they feel it serves some form of economic interest. But societies also invent excuses to kick minorities out when resources and survivability are threatened and/or economic growth is trumped by unsustainable population growth. Yugoslavia, Sudan and Rwanda may be good exam-

ples of what happens then.

Something similar could be said for what is presently happening in Iraq. Under Saddam Hussein, Islam modernization had manifested itself in a state similar to Tito's Yugoslavia. Women achieved a degree of independence unusual for an Arab state. Universal education was also more broadly developed, and modernization occurred at a rate unusual in an Islam-influenced state. Once Hussein was ousted and the U.S. introduced a mostly U.S.-trained, occupation government the result was essentially ongoing chaos, with Kurds, Sunnis, and Shia seeking some form of meaningful order within their own ranks.

What happened in Yugoslavia and Iraq are not anomalous. Often, in the past, societies overreached themselves. Whatever provided them cohesiveness is extended too far, making influence wider but also shallower. Rome provides an oft-repeated example. A hundred years ago the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire were among the major players in world politics. Only a few roots of their eminence remain today.

Countries with a strong, identity-providing, homogeneous tradition of national pride, like Japan, Germany and Korea would more resiliently resist dissolution similar to Yugoslavia's and Iraq's. A case can be made that Vietnam's heroic resistance to overwhelming force was due to its nationalism.

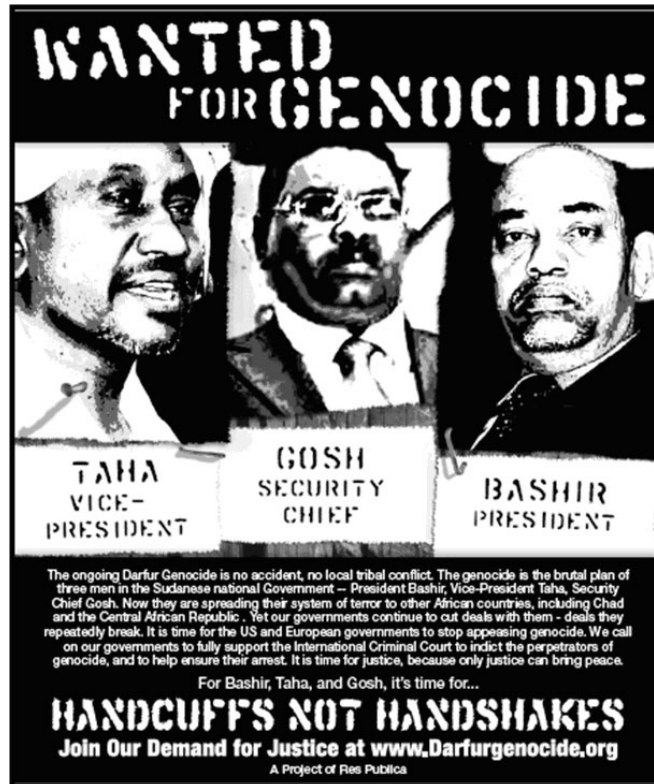
That is the kind of strength that will be appreciated and valued when globalization-caused fragmentation imminently arrives.

When considering how nationalism may influence events in the probable near future one must se-

riously consider two factors. 1. It may be safe to say that humanity responds to uncertainty by holding more tightly to its roots. 2. One cannot understand how nationalism is manifested without understanding the process of learning humans go through. Also, it must be understood that modern societies

are societies of strangers. Thus it is important to discover the kind of affection that combines such societies together across generations, without risking fragmentation along family, tribal, or even mafia lines. Hence the nation and the nation state needs especially careful nurturing along with particularly favorable economic circumstances. My thesis here is that all humans learn in a similar fashion, and that when the bonds of identity that result from first-hand experience are extended beyond certain limits, then dissolution occurs.

My earliest memories are linked to being Finnish. Of course, as with all humans, my upbringing involved many mythological influences. My Finnish identity was usually buttressed with coping tools. I learned early a Finnish word, *sisu*, that means Finns have a unique ability to find something deep within themselves in order to overcome whatever obstacles life presents. When, at the age of six, I had a wart on my finger, my father said the best way to get rid of it was to burn it off. After he told me "Finns don't feel pain," I held out my finger and he burned the wart off with a match. I only remember sweat forming on my forehead and no pain. I also learned that Finns "always pay off their debts," and "whether rich or poor, they take pride in being clean." Those were not just words, they influenced a major part of what I felt a need to live up to. I recognize that



those are the kind of factors that provide endurance to mythology.

American mythology also influenced my identity. I was exposed to and influenced by all the American exaggerations. Americans are individualistic and informal. Lessons were to be learned from George Washington's not lying, Daniel Boone and Davie Crockett's informal toughness. Of course, a Horatio Alger character thrived in the U.S. because



John Wayne starred as Davey Crockett in the 1960 movie *The Alamo*. Wayne financed and directed the film—a romanticized portrait of Crockett that stokes mythological exaggerations of the Texan statesman.

he represented the boundless opportunity available to even the poorest willing to work hard. And everyone was equal because America was composed of one large middle class. I remember wondering why anyone would have prejudice against Jews, or people of another race, because the word "justice" only had meaning when all were equal before the common-sense laws of orderly societal living. Of course there were differences. Texans, southerners, and Bostonians' speech and perspective differed from my northern Idaho and Washington-State one, and I was non-plused by the sexual habits of a person from Alabama. But Gary Cooper-type stories involving laconic but tough, brave and indefatigable defenders of "freedom" in war made me think that we were more similar in what we represented than what made us different, especially if we somehow came together in far-off places.

So when I found myself standing in front of a Saigon Government Administrators of the Bureau of Budget English class, and they politely stood and bowed when I entered the classroom, I

realized I had to override my American penchant for informality especially when standing there in shorts and t-shirt, and do my best to formally return the respect they gave me. But, I felt, standing before them was a person wrapped in all the cliché images of an American.

As the decades passed, though, questions began arising in my mind about the American mythology. Somehow, a new political-correctness arose that mandated that guilt had to be associated with the fact that all the American mythological figures were Caucasian. Rather than learn about what unites people in being human, it became imperative to "respect/accept" other cultures. My American identity became more abstract, and whatever it had been became even less tenable.

Those Finnish roots and that American upbringing provided the little I now have available in knowing my place in the world.

It should be obvious that all humans go through a similar learning process that is essential to the persona. And whatever results is not what is often implied when one is accused of seeing one's own culture as superior to others. That essential process of learning just makes clear that there are roots to identity. This happens to be identified in nationalism studies as primordialism. One identifier of this, Johann Gottfried Herder, wrote that language is synonymous with thought, and as each language was learned in divergent communities, then each community must think differently. This also suggests that the community would hold a resilient nature over time. The "difference" in thinking is tone, and varying cultural context connotation. For example, in the U.S. when someone is labeled "stupid" the word implies that the person equals the quality of stupidity. In Vietnamese, a person is named, a quality associated with



**Johann Gottfried Herder
(1744-1803)**

that person in a particular situation, and is identified without using a “to be” verb that implies the person “equals” the quality. Thus the quality is associated with the person in a particular context. That creates a fundamental difference in perspective, and attitude is too often generalized from literal language structure.



With apologies to Herder, I am not sure about how “fixed” this linkage I have to my Finnish background is but I do know it exerts a powerful influence.

Will this affinity some day become particularly crucial as a coping tool? When world economics and its influence on resource depletion,

ecological depletion and potential industrial unsustainability reaches its probable near-term future, I am now sure I will probably respond to it by experiencing a reflexive need to bond with the strongest identity-creating influences of my past.

When society is no long sustainable, and things get nasty, it may become particularly important to understand what role identity-seeking, “nationalism” will play then. Unsustainability is now clearly on the horizon as a literal population “explosion” has begetted rapid resource depletion and wide-spread ecological degradation. That plus trends indicating fewer and fewer people are now being properly integrated into whatever dynamic is presently forming “New World Order” social cohesiveness. This makes clear to me that people under duress will seek to express whatever expresses identity and strong coping mechanisms at the same time. At this moment in history, we are witnessing the convergence of three phenomena that will bring duress that is unprecedented in

human history: Peak Oil, rapid climate change, and probable, unprecedented-scale global economic meltdown. This convergence of factors changes all the rules and will force humankind to think and act outside any previously-known behavioral boxes, and the fundamental underpinning of all attempts to navigate this daunting convergence will be whatever is available as “local” solutions.

Extended-identity nationalism quickly achieved what it is now because mankind gained access to cheaply-available fossil fuels (Mid 1800s) and will probably experience demise because of its depletion. Nationalism’s meteoric rise can be paralleled with the cheap-energy infusion of an industrial age. Once cheap energy became available the expansion of industrialization was unprecedented. Very early in the process, Marx attempted to identify the economic/social changes of that earliest stage but only saw them in the context of individual bourgeois and nations. Today, capitalism’s need to maximize unlimited growth and access to cheap labor in order to gain high profits has taken on a much broader identifier: world-wide, New-World-Order Globalization.

Globalization—most scholars consider it inimical to a nation state—has become a powerful catalyst of underlying unrest because of its attempted breakdown of national borders in order to gain international markets that provide unlimited cheap labor, either through incentivizing the importation of many cheap-labor tens of millions, or exporting industry to them.

In a recently-published book called *The Expanding Circle*, the philosopher, Peter Singer, attempted to explain how globalization has brought moral progress to this planet. In it he makes clear that today in America it is necessary for its implementation for all people of all races, nationalities, and religions to be seen as equal and thus deserving of basic human rights. This expanding moral circle is necessary because it reflects simple interdependence of various kinds, with particular emphasis on the economic rewards that result. That is why to do mutually profitable business with the Japanese or Chinese, we have to accord them basic respect. That’s why intercultural tolerance is promoted more

commonly in advanced, globally interdependent economies than in less-developed nations. Thus moral progress is directly associated with technological progress. Technological advances, ever since the Stone Age, have correlated the fortunes of people to ever-greater distances. That is, people like Singer believe that technological progress has



put people in more long-distance “non-zero-sum” relationships. And he feels the result is a growing interdependence that translates enlightened self-interest into an expanding circle of moral consideration. That, in summary, provides the basis for the multicultural/diversity mythological cant that is widespread during our present efficacious globalization period.

So long as economic “progress” and “growth” are possible, Singer’s Circle expands. Globalization works in the same way that the shadow economies involving drugs, diamonds and weapons works. Institutionalism forms even out of illegal activity because entrepreneurs must trust middle people in the chain of distribution to not steal their cargos or turn them into whatever authority might hinder their money-making; they must and do forge allegiances across distinct language and identity groupings. Often these connections involve family ties, or ties of ethnicity, nationality or religion. It works so long as it facilitates gaining money and power. But when the gain is no longer sustainable it becomes illusionary, especially for so-called legitimate governments. In the book, *Are Our Descendents Doomed? Technological Change and Population Growth*, Harrison Brown and Edward

Hutchings, Jr., 1970, wrote on page 50: “With high rates of population growth it becomes more difficult for government to meet these demands (education, housing, agricultural and industrial development, transportation, and employment).” He adds that the U.S., as the major globalization example, is finding that it is beset with problems in transportation, education, housing and agriculture that are essentially unsolveable, and are now mainly only subject to some amount of political-appearance amelioration.

In *Spaceship Earth*, Barbara Ward may have been unusually prescient when, in 1966, she wrote on page 140 that “It (problems of a new industrial age) stems from our present national system which allows interests, investments, commerce, communication, propaganda to go all round the world but restricts obligation, loyalty, sustained policymaking, and responsibility to over a hundred centers of separate sovereignty. There is thus a fundamental disproportion between the worldwide web of interests and activities in which everyone is enmeshed and the narrow base of loyalty on which they build obligation, mediation, responsible citizenship, and mutual trust. Almost every major influence on a man’s life today is international. (But) ..his ultimate emotions and loyalties remain national. This is the gap through which our little world threatens to plunge to ruin.”



Thus, the growth economy, unfortunately, is one which presumes an affordable and increasing supply of energy. Without it, that there will be an entirely different world and what one identifies with

and one's identity will become more crucial because of the contractive chaos that will result.

The best case I have read for the curious and problematic nature of the current cultural transformation resulting from the advent of globalization is that of Robert Kaplan in an essay entitled "Was Democracy Just a Moment?" published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in December, 1997. Kaplan points out that a world government is now emerging, one of international corporations and markets, and that this is happening "quietly and organically, the way vast developments in history take place." Of the world's one hundred largest economies, he says, fifty-one are corporations rather than countries, and the five hundred largest corporations account for seventy percent of world trade. This dense "ganglion" is the real arbiter of power, worldwide. "Corporations," writes Kaplan, "are like the feudal domains that evolved into nation-states; they are nothing less than the vanguard of a new Darwinian organization of politics . . . and the edifice is globalization."

Globalization is fostering too many contradictory factors. Prosperity, under it, is moving more from middle-class imperatives to the strategic interests of the few. Thus, democracy's promises for the few in a state are becoming more the means to gaining international goals. As a consequence, in the globalized trade of today, supposedly "internationalized" companies exist with the kinds of money and power that used to be exclusive to governments. That doesn't mean states no longer exert influence; it does mean that what power states have is increasingly determined—and, at the least, manipulated—by corporate influence. Since the New World Order was first identified, corporate money and power have increasingly determined individual state priorities and actions.

One might describe globalization in the same way as one might describe the two political parties in the United States: a mile wide in influence, but an

inch-deep in what-can-be-called personal commitment. It is composed more from economic necessity for change and less from the traditional forms of identity. And, in creating a viable niche in the public consciousness, globalization has sold itself as "multiculturalism" while extolling the virtues of "diversity," resulting in a blurring of traditional means to identity. The glue that holds this together is cant and propagandistic conditioned-reflexes with little grounding in concrete experience. Globalization

also gains credence through the tendency to maximize the post World-War II reaction of seeing nationalism more defined as ethnocentrism, something connected with the worst fears about nationalism as a selfish public manifestation most likely built around a sense of superiority with Nazism as a prime example. The

rise of national socialism brought the awareness that nationalism can imply national superiority and the glorification of various national virtues. The conclusion drawn from that was that the love of nation may be overemphasized; concern with national self-interest to the exclusion of the rights of other nations could lead to international conflict, something less than desirable with the growth of "world" wars and the advent of nuclear arms.

But regardless of whatever emotionally buttresses the concept its 'inch depth' is essentially maintained by money, power, and the products of industrial growth, and that is the driving motivation behind the push to make the nation-state a thing of the past.

As a consequence of the rise of this New World Order, there is good reason for Henry Kissinger's recently-reported remarks about the demise of the nation state. He declared, "We're at a moment when the international system is in a period of change like we haven't seen for several hundred years. In some parts of the world, the nation state, on which the existing international system was based, is either giving up its traditional aspects, like in Europe, or,



as in the Middle East, where it was never really fully established, it is no longer the defining element. So in those two parts of the world, tremendous adjustment is occurring in traditional concepts.” Also, many international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization of American States, and the Organization for African Unity, represent attempts to curb extreme nationalism while stressing globalization-motivated, economic-driven cooperation among nations. Rather than just seek the 1940s hope for a globally harmonious “community,” these organizations now represent the means to primarily further corporate interests world-wide. But the demonstrations at all world-convergence meetings makes clear that allegiance to what the world-trade groups are achieving is meeting ever-growing resistance.

What is being changed by the social/economic forces of today may not be able to change that something that is fundamental to cognitive awareness in people today, and it is probably nurturing a surprising form of anarchy tomorrow. The catalyst will be the probable collapse of all forms of globalization once the realization of the unsustainable limits to growth becomes obvious. When this “New World Order” begins fragmenting under the weight of probable and necessary population diminishment, it is likely that within the surrounding chaos that results, individuals will have to turn to whatever has traditionally formed their identity, as manifested by personal affection, consanguinity, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation.

This assumes that fundamental to all people are the early-life stages of bonding that forms family. Those initial learning-experience years form a connection to the “familiar,” which becomes the basis of everything, including microcosmic individual dreams and macrocosmic nation states. The early learning involving concrete words like “father,” “mother,” “sister,” provide the cores of

identity and responsibility. Identity in a nation state is a collective state of mind or consciousness in which people believe their primary duty and loyalty is to those obligatory extensions of the self, which, as social organization grew more economically complex, became the nation-state. What the Industrial Revolution produced fed national socialism as much as ethnocentrism did. But now as unsustainability begins fragmenting those industrial expansion capabilities and those larger and more complex nation states, a deeper sense of identity will be needed in order to cope. That “affinity” toward

an identity involves whatever most meaningfully creates allegiance, loyalty, fidelity and fealty. These are abstract ideas that are reliant on early-experience concrete learning. Those early-learned concrete words form the foundation of will power, and that is what provides the essential coping factors in human life. When industrial collapse chaos comes the old assumptions of

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what creates “allegiance” will have to be re-thought. The same would apply to what creates the “duty” of being loyal and/or devotion to a cause involving fidelity, fealty (swearing faithfulness), homage (respect to reverence). All these things are necessary underpinnings for purposeful and sought-after-meaning living which facilitates coping. Family is the first focus of fealty. Experiential bonding slowly grows into gratefulness and obligation. The history of mankind illustrates the growth of fealty from family to tribe to the nation-state. Again, focuses of nationalism may change, but those elements of concrete learning that formed the loyalty do not. As philosopher Richard Rorty stated, “It is impossible to step outside our skins—the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism.” And as globalization-formed society gets more and more away from those roots and becomes more thinly-spread and complex, the 1950s sociology-identified factors of “anomie” and “alienation” gain more and more ubiquitousness

indicating a growing gap between the identity of the individual and of society.

Thus identity is integrally connected to experience. It results from learning going from specific to general, from concrete knowledge to abstract knowledge. It begins simply with identification with what becomes familiar at an early age and can mature into belief ‘systems’ involving such abstract things as religion and political ideologies. But if the mature aspects become less viable the return to fundamentals becomes more necessary.

This may be a factor behind the recent arrest of comparatively accomplished doctors from the Middle East in Great Britain. These doctors recently found it necessary to act against what provided them potential affluence by attempting acts of terrorism because they came to be seen in their adopted country as an enemy. In response they expressed their identity by choosing to be that enemy. Their acts may be seen as a reaction to their identity being fragmented.

Being part of a fragmented identity may be why so many Blacks in this country responded strongly to the identity-providing “Roots” story. Roots are crucial when there is anxiety about not belonging. One of the few Internet uses that seems able to compete with porn is genealogy. The television show that resulted from the Roots book spawned a wave of pride among African-Americans, and may be partly responsible for the politically-correct effort to drain the word “white” of its racist intimations by redefining it as “Irish American,” “Scottish American,” “Italian American,” and the like. For everyone—including Native Americans, who itchily remind the rest of us that they might also be called First Americans—there is a deep anxiety about rootedness and its claims. As Rorty, also put it: “We choose what to believe based on what is useful for us to believe.”

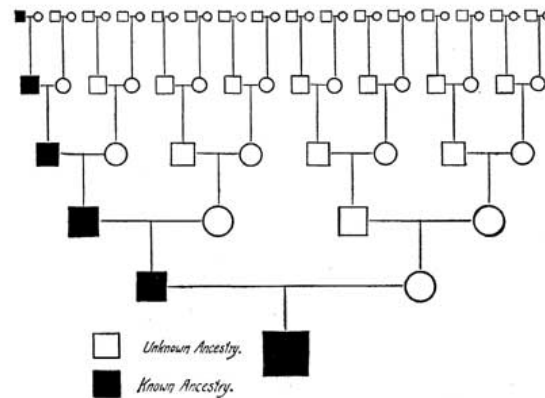
As long as the maturing of the industrial revolution allowed growing amounts of money and economic

“growth” to be available, it was able to produce some pride in country while making national interest recede. The momentum of that is illustrated in the now secret negotiations to integrate Mexico and Canada with the U.S., essentially making the borders separating them meaningless. The Bush Administration is doing this because Mexico provides cheap labor, and Canada provides oil. But news of the scheme—formally called the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP)—is only now leaking out of the secret chambers of the ruling elite and the federal government. Thus nationalism as a political or social philosophy in which the welfare of the nation-state as an entity is considered paramount becomes subordinate to economic considerations.

This globalization movement involving the breakdown of the nation-state for trade reasons, is probably now at the crest of its wave while at the same time resistance to it is growing rapidly.

Of course, it is ironic that the Bush Administration continues to use tried and true means to gain nationalistic ends while

promoting this New World Order. Maximizing a threat from an external force is one example. Bush made this “threat” as abstract as possible by identifying it as “terrorism.” And the boogeyman became Al Qaeda despite the fact that Al Qaeda is a small core group of people who share strategic and operational characteristics that set them apart from all other militants—Islamist or otherwise—the world over. All signs indicate this group is no longer functional and cannot be replicated. Whether or not Osama bin Laden is still alive, there is very little evidence Al Qaeda is now as influential or capable as it once might have been. Yet Bush, for strategic reasons, insists on painting it as an imminent threat here and throughout the world. Despite these cross-currents of purpose, globalization is also cresting because this New World Order ideology, which is unprecedentedly universal, injects



an illusion of purpose into every aspect of world-wide commerce. This is an ethic that is like bacteria expanding in a petrie dish because its most essential and myth-like element, “growth,” creates and feeds off of ever-increasing amounts of indebtedness, which itself is reliant on a rigorous maximization of unsustainable consumption. Always seeking additional justification, it promulgates the idea that *growth* means more of everything for everybody. More money in the pocket. More consumers. More “modernity.” And that requires believing that resources are unlimited and unsustainability isn’t worthy of consideration.

This ideology incentivizes investing billions of dollars in advertising, promotions, packaging and cultural warfare in order to sell products nobody can be said to “need.” All of this is directed toward removing anything that smacks remotely of consumer autonomy, let alone democratic liberty. Yet it is within the “democracies” of the world that the New World Order ideology flourishes while it has a decaying effect on that democracy. Kevin Phillips concludes his book *Wealth and Democracy* with a grim warning:

Either democracy must be renewed, with politics brought back to life, or wealth is likely to cement a new and less democratic regime—plutocracy by some other name. It’s a pretty extreme line, but we live in extreme times. Even if the forms of democracy remain, they may become meaningless. It’s all too easy to see how we may become a country in which the big rewards are reserved for people with the right connections; in which ordinary people see little hope of advancement; in which political involvement seems pointless, because in the end the interests of only those who have the right connections are served.

Thus an underlying fear of what may come tomorrow greases the wheels of this growth juggernaut, and that leads to a need to repress any dissent that might undermine the belief that *Universal Prosperity* will some day result for all.

The New World Order, then, becomes popular culture driven by expansionist commerce. The corporate good far outweighs the individual good. Its image is America, its form is fad, and its goods are images. Its images are appealing and contradictory. It can involve the romantic illusion of a laboring kinship between a Burger King cook and a sweatshop seamstress, and the conviviality of Enron and Worldcom executives exchanging fraternal smiles despite competing law suits on manicured golf courses. It is a seemingly innocuous market quest for fun, creativity and profits—but in its processes it undermines autonomy in individuals and nations alike. Its purpose is to sell a lifestyle, culture, and products and ideas. It involves global culture and information overpowering parochialism.

The New World Order is internationalized nationalism. It is an extension of the old form of nationalism that created formidable power. That power, born with the French Revolution, was extremely important in forming the bonds that held modern nations together, and now increasingly and more tenuously holds together money/power-oriented internationalism. It provided much of the cohesiveness and order necessary for the existence of the nation-state, and it was hoped by its ideologists that it could be extended into a soon-to-be-achieved, prosperous, economics-dependent New World Order.

Gaining that power is a product of the extended organization of many cultures into a world-wide market. But power’s meaning is embedded in cultural convictions and socio-political relationships that compel most interpersonal actions. In other words, all cultures use epistemological tools to construct its cohesiveness and to explain the individual’s place within it. When the organization and cultural cohesiveness collapse, as it surely will when the unsustainability of unlimited growth becomes apparent, then mankind will have to find purpose and meaning in simpler and more easily familiar frames of reference.

Familiarity and long-standing roots will become the key to survivability when the age of access to cheap energy experiences its soon-to-be end. ■