Voluntary Refugee Movement for a Prosperous Way Down

Eric Lee

The proposed 'movement' is for a bottom up transformation of the global socioeconomic system from a nation-state/corporate control system to perhaps twenty thousand watershed management units worldwide organized into a United Federation of Watersheds.

The 'movement' will be one of voting-with-your-feet and not a political, popular, nor mass movement. Initially refugees from industrial society will be widely dispersed. They may, however, communicate and self-organize into couples, family units, and micro-communities within current nation-states, as some are doing now.

The first example of a voluntary refugee known to history was Laozi leaving 'civilization' on his water buffalo, and in the West, Henry David Thoreau was an early individual refugee from industrial society who chose not to live the Dickensian life. Ted Trainer's *The Simpler Way* communities are examples of contemporary refugee communities that are self-organizing in Australia.

My extraordinary claim is that the number of voluntary refugees from technoindustrial society will increase as the perfect storm of multiple system failures, of environment, power, and society, becomes increasingly obvious. It may be possible, in the near future, that as many as one one thousandth of a percent of humans (perhaps a hundred thousand individuals) will be willing to vote-with-their-feet, liquidate financial assets, and relocate to somewhere else on this pale blue dot. Refugees may be few today, but when the teachable moment arises many will remember that we told them so, and embrace the prosperous life of enough.

Or not. But no known biophysical laws of the universe would be violated if one or more watershed management units self-organize, or if a United Federation of Watersheds arises and becomes global over time because humans living within watershed management units will have learned to understand the planet and to live with it properly.

Individuals, couples, families, and even small communities can vote with their feet and sever their dependence on the global growth economy to form watershed management units managed to operate per known energy principles (H.T. Odum, C.A. Hall, K. Klitgaard *et al*.) and limits defined by Nature per those who listen to Nature (for example, systems scientists).

If enough watershed management units form in a region and support a citizen's militia, and agree to defend any watershed management unit that is attacked, then it may be possible for *pockets of sustainability* to avoid the scarcity/conflict induced downward death-spiral-as-usual and preserve information and functioning, cooperative society.

I've been promoting a book, "Demystifying Sustainability: Towards Real Solutions" 2015 by Australian professor Haydn Washington, and I think the best part of the book is the subtitle as we humans need to iterate towards real solutions as distinct from pretend solutions, also known as political solutions. That a voluntary refugee movement could work, could develop into a real solution that enables humans to live properly on the planet, is the big idea.

Who is likely to become a voluntary refugee from industrial society? Well, you are if:

1. You understand that the success and prosperity of the current global socio-politico-economic SYSTEM is analogous to the exuberant growth of a cancer that destroys its life-support system and ultimately leads to the death of the host.
2. You develop foresight intelligence even though the current SYSTEM does not select for it, which allows for doubts about what seems self-evidently true to all other cancer cells.
3. You realize that there is no life sustainable without ecolate [systems science literate] thought.

Those driven to leave their homes due to immediate existential threats are involuntary refugees. If wants or needs are not being met by the local SYSTEM one was born into, then relocating to another part of the SYSTEM that is richer in opportunities to acquire what is wanted/needed is *not to be* a refugee *from* industrial society. For our purpose the term

refugee, will refer only to those seeking to abandon technoindustrial society secondary to their recognition that:

• Our global economic system is NOT REMOTELY CLOSE TO SUSTAINABLE.
• We are captured and being dragged along by a complex, powerful and remorseless dynamic that automatically thwarts all attempts to stop it. [the "dynamic" references Lotka's Maximum Power Principle and Odum's clarification, the Maximum Empower Principle that complex systems select for.]
• If we don't put time and energy into understanding the downward spiral, we are doomed to go with it, right to the final curtain.
• So...don't go with it. Become a voluntary refugee before you and/or your offspring are forced to become involuntary refugees.

You cannot be a voluntary refugee if:

1. You believe in and hope to reform the current 'sustainable development' hegemon.
2. Lack foresight intelligence or would rather believe than know.

What if enough voluntary refugees from around the world pick an area, vote with their feet, self-organize, form watershed management units, and there are enough watershed management units in a region to prevent conquest?

A Federation of Watersheds could preserve information packages, the flower and fruit of prior unsustainable complex societies. We are at risk of loosing 90 to 100 percent of our memes even if a remnant population of humans, survivalist types, preserve human genes and, when environmental restoration occurs (in perhaps 500 years), repeat the pattern of empire-building, overshoot and collapse secondary to having learned nothing from prior failures (as usual). Without a planetary larder of fossil fuels, the information generated, especial in the last 300 years, will never be regained.

During global collapse, the previously established watershed management units, if any, would have foreseen the problem of too many end-game refugees and stockpiled food and other resources to allow up to ten times more humans to be taken into their watershed than could be sustainably supported by local agricultural productivity provided the refugees understand and agree that they could not reproduce at will and otherwise agree to limit consumption. They could pass on their memes, however, and avoid dying a Malthusian death. Their numbers may be essential to help the watershed survive the chaotic collapse and involuntary depopulation of non-Federation regions.

So what can one person or couple do? Turn off the TV, disconnect from misinformation and disinformation sources: listen to Nature as well as those who endeavor to listen to Nature (for example natural scientists, naturalists, and other non-humanocentrists whether artists, scholars, poets, or autodidacts from all societies who have passed on their memes about what works over the prior millennia), but above all, we must leave room for and listen to Nature, to the nature of things.

Don't be distracted by all the primate prattle, including that which reverberates in your own head or the echo chambers of media or tavern talk. Listen to the heart-mind instead, which is not a private possession that you created after your birth, nor will it cease to exist when "your" light goes out. Iterate towards waking up, learn what works, and pass it on.

Become a Voluntary Refugee

Living in a prosperous enough, cooperative, complex society based on interconnected trust, one that could actually persist as the centuries pass, will matter to posterity who will inherit patterns that work as, if they don't, human extinction is the alternative. We are tasked to pioneer new patterns that work by listening to Nature. This involves being naturcentric ecolate humans rather than humancentric Anthropocene enthusiasts.

The unmanaged commons selects for empire building. Competing empire builders select for larger principalities, nation-states, corporations and other complex systems that fail to manage their environment, power, and society to persist as the millennia pass (see past 7,000 years of history). The only real solution is to 'change the rules of the game', the contingencies of selection.

Those who would rather know than believe, those who can actually think more than a decade ahead, have the potential to opt out of the current SYSTEM. To abandon the Empire, its unsustainable economy and social system, will seem increasingly imperative as the onset of multiple system failures becomes obvious.

The fork in the road: (1) Continue to serve the SYSTEM. (2) Consider alternatives, perhaps 20,000 watershed management units, managed within limits as determined by Nature, i.e. the nature of things as evidenced by best-guess systems ecology.

The big idea (again): It may be possible to manage a complex society, well above the tribal level, without empire building, elite consumption, or collapsing the life-support system. Each watershed management unit is to live sustainably on local resources and some interwatershed trade based on emdollar evaluation. Accomplishing this feat may already have been done by the Tairona of Columbia. The Kogi, our elder brothers, suggest that it may be possible to manage a complex society without empire building, elite consumption, or collapsing the life-support system. We may have something to learn from the Tairona of Columbia, but we know too little of them.

References:

1. Voluntary Refugee Movement: Abandoning Technoindustrial Society's Spaceship of Fools, https://tinyurl.com/yagpuoqw
2. The Kogi Project: Can we learn about real solutions from these people?, https://goo.gl/7vZzxB

3. Sustainability Demystified: Towards Real Solutions, Haydn Washington, 2015, http://www.sustainable.soltechdesigns.com/demystifying-sustainability.html

4. Environment, Power, and Society, Howard T. Odum, 1971, 2007, http://www.sustainable.soltechdesigns.com/environment-power-society.html
    http://www.sustainable.soltechdesigns.com/environment-power-society-review.html

5. A Prosperous Way Down, H.T. and E. Odum, 2001, http://prosperouswaydown.com/
    http://www.sustainable.soltechdesigns.com/prosperous-way-up-and-down.html

6. Environmental Accounting: Emergy and Environmental Decision Making. Howard T. Odum, 1996, emdollar evaluation.

7. The Collapse of Complex Societies, Joseph Tainter, 1988, https://wtf.tw/ref/tainter.pdf

8. Energy and the Wealth of Nations: An Introduction to Biophysical Economics, C.A. Hall, K. Klitgaard, 2018, https://tinyurl.com/energy-wealth-of-nations

9. MAHB: The Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere, https://mahb.stanford.edu/

10. Ted Trainer, http://simplicityinstitute.org/ted-trainer, http://thesimplerway.info/

11. Waking up, https://tinyurl.com/hu-mans-awake