

## CAUX WORKSHOP ON MEETING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

*How will we meet the global challenges we face? Current development models focus on economic growth, while ignoring the longer-term impact on the Earth's ecosystem. Are there lessons that can be drawn from the past and the wisdom behind our belief systems to help us better promote universal human wellbeing?*

(This summer's conference will focus on the human factors which enable leaders and citizens to work for an inclusive, democratic approach. What inspires a person to work for human security for all? What sustains them in the struggle to overcome injustice? What does it take to build a strong team? What skills can help trust to grow in situations of mistrust? Can healing come to the wounded memories which undermine attempts to sustain peace? )

---

### **CAUX 2014 MEETING GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

**There seems little doubt that we are in a period of great global change. There might be some debate about the nature of developments since the end of the Cold War in 1989, but there would be little disagreement with the view that the promise held out for a more stable, less threatened world is yet to be realized. The facts suggest that the opposite might be more likely - at least for the shorter to medium term.**

**Despite the emergence of a global financial crisis in 2008 and a need to address the reasons behind this worldwide catastrophe, inequality between the rich and the poor has continued to grow at a significantly higher rate. One recent statistic receiving worldwide coverage was that the richest 83 people on Earth now had more wealth than the bottom 3.8 billion, or fifty percent. More recently, we have been told that there are now 50 million homeless people on Earth, a direct reflection of the number of refugees on the move in regions of growing conflict.**

**To the present time it has been the accepted case that most of this inequality lies within the boundaries and the province of poorly functioning nation states, which have provided the focus for the work of international financial institutions and the United Nations. But it has also been acknowledged for some time that there are broader historical and economic reasons why this inequality occurs. It is a fact, for example, that much of it is regional in the sense that the historic, cultural, environmental and population pressures of entire regions cause friction and conflict that destabilizes governance mechanisms and prevents the growth of healthy and non-exploitive economic activity.**

**We should not discount the fact that the source of instability might be global. It is a fact that, despite the active engagement of**

**both political and financial leaders in the international forums on related issues, these and other burgeoning statistics of inequality suggest that the contemporary world system is not working. Because that world system has also been in place for most of the modern era, any assurance that it is capable of addressing the emerging chaos could be illusory.**

**This is a suggestion that must deserve exploration for, if it is true, it then becomes necessary to explore avenues to and characteristics of an alternative world system. A key question in this regard is “can this be addressed from the top down, or must it be addressed from the bottom up?”**

**The exploration of these suggestion and these options were the subject of this series of workshops. Why is the current world system incapable of addressing the complexity of the emerging global realities and what are the alternatives available to the global family to mitigate the consequences of this change. The phases of this discussion were:**

- 1. What is the nature of the emerging global problems?**
- 2. What is the nature of the existing world system and what is wrong with the way it is addressing these problems?**
- 3. What are the characteristics of a more effective and enduring system required to address these and other unforeseen problems?**
- 4. How do we get from where we are now to an alternative system, including the**

**issues of how we engage people in this process and how we overcome the likely resistance to this change?**

**This was a three-stage workshop with one session at the end of each day for the first three days of the conference.**

- **we discussed the first two of these issues in the first session,**
- **the third issue in the second session, and**
- **then consolidated our views on the way forward on the third day.**

**The conversation went as follows:**

*1. CHALLENGES*

*a. Right to food: two-thirds do not have enough. 40% is wasted.*

*b. Conflict: Farmers cannot work.*

*c. Migration away from land to city (and the concentration of political power in the cities).*

*d. Rising salinity (through loss of vegetation).*

*e. Borrowing:*

*\* Not looking at how the system failed,*

*\* "Are we awaiting another crisis?"*

*\* Debt to fix debt - link to finite resources. (Focus on consumption as the economic driver)*

*f. Public is distracted / disengaged / too busy.*

*g. Democracy cannot work in certain situations.*

*\* Domestic focus.*

*\* Minority / majority (How do we listen?)*

*h. Erosion of professional ethics.*

*i. Loss of a sense of inter-generational responsibility.*

*j. Cannot adapt to rate of change, leading to stress, aggression.*

*k. Not one group / identity.*

*\* Loss of respect for parliamentary democracy,*

*\* Desire for more participatory systems.*

*l. Education for employment/market. Loss of a sense of historical context and belief system.*

*j. Suicide caused by loss of meaning/hope.*

*k. Need for meaning and purpose in life.*

## *2. CHALLENGES (Questions to be asked)*

*a. Technology is not the only answer?*

*b. Resources are not unlimited?*

*c. Emphasis on technology in education - lost from reality.*

*d. Climate change/causes and consequences?*

*e. 50 million refugees, and other migration issues demand an international response?.*

*f. Development of technology / science - Good and bad uses?*

*g. Erosion of will to solve the issues?*

*h. Fundamentalism – is it:*

*a. a response to complexity?*

*b. a business - way of life?*

*c. anger stemming from injustice?*

*i. Threats to cultural heritage?*

*j. Who benefits from trade agreements (FTAs not helpful to farmers)?*

- k. Who does a nation state really represent?*
- l. Power to civil society or control by elites?*
- m. Banking systems - National and transnational (eg Bitcoin).*

### *3. THE CURRENT SYSTEM*

- a. Nation states with different forms and legality of representation seeking international recognition and cooperation on a regional basis*
- b. Many are keen to see the status quo remain.*
- c. European Union (and African Union, Assn. of American States, etc).*
- d. Indian democracy emerged from a history of 500 kingdoms now merged in a federal system.*
- e. "Can't imagine anything else".*
- f. However, cannot trust current leadership structures:
  - \* Issues of truth, politics and law,*
  - \* Some are more trustworthy than others, e.g. Trust in the Swiss system emerging out of the cantons.**
- g. Loss of trust in other systems, eg global services.*
- h. A differing perspective - "There is actually "more peace" in Europe now than ever before - EU Peace Prize.  
(RJ: So why are there more refugees than ever before?)*
- i. Growth of corporate multinationals operating outside the nation state system with more power and resources than most nations.*
- j. Multinationalism of other systems, e.g. NGOs, WWW - Globalisation of information.*
- k. The neo-liberal economic model has not changed to reflect this.*

*1. International drug cartels / crime culture.*

#### *4. HOW CAN WE DEAL WITH THIS COMPLEXITY?*

*a. Communication (Reduction of time).*

*b. Trying to deal with it through other forms of organisation,  
eg IMF World Bank, G20, WTO, FTAs (which are now going less  
international and more bi-lateral)*

*c. Developing system of international law. (Compliance and regulation –  
complexity without flexibility is too time consuming?)*

*d. Bottom-up response (e.g. response of human rights of supply chain -  
fire in Bangladesh). A market forces response?*

*e. Sharing of information across the globe on an instantaneous basis.*

*f. Need for innovation -> international agencies.*

*g. Merit based (?)*

*h. Getting people on the same page.*

*i. Change of mind set.*

*j. Nations buy shares to use levers.*

*k. Transnational standards boards.*

#### *5. HOW DO WE BUILD POWER IN CIVIL SOCIETY?*

*a. Problem: Civil society currently works within nation states.*

*b. Civil Society: How are ordinary people organised to have a say in the  
future?*

*c. Shareholder activism – one option.*

- d. *The power of one - to bring issues to the fore.*
- e. *Example of Scandinavian pluralism as closer to civil society- more focused on nurturing the individual - dealing with gender issues - power of the individual.*
- f. *Counter view: In India: "Pluralism ruined the country".*
- g. *Swiss experience of federalism.*
- h. *Internet activism.*
  - i. *Local currencies.*

## *BUILDING AN ALTERNATE SYSTEM - CHARACTERISTICS*

### *PREMISE 1:*

*FUNDAMENTAL FOUNDATION. ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE SPIRITUAL BEINGS (NO EXCEPTIONS)*

*Holy -> Holistic -> Whole -> Connected*

*(Some are more connected than others. Our connections to Nature are diminishing. What is this doing to us?)*

*Ancient wisdom matters.*

### *PREMISE 2:*

*WE ARE NOT ALONE IN TIME AND SPACE: GOD WANTS US TO SUCCEED*

*FAITH - HOPE - LOVE*

*(We are already a forgiven people))*

### *PREMISE 3:*

*THERE IS A GREAT PARADIGM SHIFT UPON US*

*The first requirement is to recognize it. (See the attached commentary on the paradigm shift)*



*Can we tame it and control it?*

*(We need to build boats to ride this whirlpool!)*

*To do that, we need TRUST!*

*PREMISE 4:*

*ARE OUR NATION STATES POTENTIALLY BOATS FOR THIS PURPOSE?*

*\*\*\* **PROBABLY NOT!** \*\*\**

*Too cumbersome, too inflexible, run by elites, failing to build trust, growing irrelevance.*

*But, ... they exist, and we need to bring them closer to civil society to build trust.*

*PREMISE 5:*

*THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY (and build boats)*

*Unleash the creative genius of your people.*

*This requires service and leadership.*

*PREMISE 6:*

*LEADERSHIP REQUIRES*

*\* KNOWLEDGE,*

*\* WISDOM*

*\* COMPASSION (LOVE)*

*\* MORAL COURAGE*

*We are all in this together*

*\*\*\* Accept responsibility \*\*\**

Commentary No. 377, by Immanuel Wallerstein [Copyright by Immanuel Wallerstein, distributed by Agence Global. For rights and permissions, including translations and posting to non-commercial sites, and contact: [rights@agenceglobal.com](mailto:rights@agenceglobal.com), 1.336.686.9002 or 1.336.286.6606. Permission is granted to download, forward electronically, or e-mail to others, provided the essay remains intact and the copyright note is displayed. To contact author, write: [immanuel.wallerstein@yale.edu](mailto:immanuel.wallerstein@yale.edu). These commentaries, published twice monthly, are intended to be reflections on the contemporary world scene, as seen from the perspective not of the immediate headlines but of the long term.]

May 15, 2014

"The Center Isn't Holding Very Well"

The list of countries with enduring and worsening civil strife is growing. A short while ago, the world media were highlighting Syria. Now they are highlighting Ukraine. Will it be Thailand tomorrow? Who knows? The variety of explanations of the strife and the passion with which they are promoted is very striking.

Our modern world-system is supposed to permit the Establishment elites who hold the reins of power to debate with each other and then come to a "compromise" that they can

guarantee. Normally these elites situate themselves in two basic camps - center/right and center/left. There are indeed differences between them, but the result of the "compromises" has been that the amount of change over time is minimal.

This has operated as a top-down political structure, within each country and geopolitically between countries. The outcome has been an equilibrium slowly moving upward. Most analysts of the current strife tend to assume that the strings are still being pulled by Establishment elites. Each side asserts that the low-level actors of the other side are being manipulated by high-level elites. Everyone seems to assume that, if their side puts enough pressure on the elites of the other side, these other elites will agree to a "compromise" closer to what their side wants.

This seems to me a fantastic misreading of the realities of our current situation, which is one of extended chaos as a result of the structural crisis of our modern world-system. I do not think that the elites are any longer succeeding in manipulating their low-level followers. I think the low-level followers are defying the elites, doing their own thing, and trying to manipulate the elites. This is indeed something new. It is a bottom-up rather than a top-down politics.

Bottom-up politics is sometimes alluded to when the media speak of "extremists" becoming important actors, but the locution "extremists" misses the point too. When we are amidst bottom-up politics, there are versions of every complexion - from the far right to the far left, but including ones in the center. One can bemoan this, as did Yeats in one of his oft-quoted lines from *The Second Coming*:

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity."

But note that Yeats is attributing the category of "best" to the old elites. Are they really the best? What is indeed true, to cite one of Yeats's less quoted lines, is that "the falcon cannot hear the

falconer."

How then can we navigate politically in such an environment? It is very confusing analytically. I think however that step one is to cease attributing what is happening to the evil machinations of some Establishment elites. They are no longer in control. They can of course still do great physical harm by imprudent actions. They are by no means paragons of virtue. But those of us who wish to seek a better world to emerge from this chaotic situation have to depend on ourselves, on our own multiple ways of organizing the struggle. We need, in short, less denunciation and more constructive local action.

The wisest lines of Yeats are the last two in the poem:  
"And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

As our existing historical system is in the process of dying, there is a fierce struggle over what kind of new historical system will succeed it. Soon, we may indeed no longer live in a capitalist system, but we could come to live in an even worse system - a "rough beast" seeking to be born? To be sure, this is only one possible collective choice. The alternative choice is a relatively democratic, relatively egalitarian system, also seeking to be born. Which one we shall see at the end of the struggle is up to us, bottom-up.

---