

Talk to ARA TAHI Iwi Group, Wellington Regional Council

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Tena kotoa, tena kotoa, tena kotoa, ka toa.

I'm very pleased to be here today and I hope we can gain something of value from each other. I'm not going to mention the wonderful achievements of humankind, but rather try to look at the hellish mess we're in.

I'm sure you're all familiar with the story of the boiling frog. You know that if you drop a frog into a pot of boiling water it will frantically try to get out. However, if you put it into a pot of tepid water on low heat the frog will float there placidly, sink over time into a tranquil stupor and finally boil to death.

We've been in the pot on low heat since we began to be we, in the Middle East, shall we say about 10,000 years ago, to keep it tidy, at the end of the last Ice Age. We developed primarily an agricultural civilisation, (or civilisations), which was the main state of affairs until the start of the Industrial Revolution about 200 years ago. For the first 5000 years a fairly calm period prevailed until people wanted more resources or envied others their wherewithal. And all down through history when that happened people started fighting each other. It wasn't long before organised wars developed. First it was spear and bow and arrow then mechanical machinery - chariots, catapults, siege machines and so on. But wars are not waged without some political machinery - warlords, emperors, kings, princes, dictators, chancellors, prime ministers, presidents. With standing armies conquerors engrave their names in history. Ultimately, military needs became the chief stimulus of technological advancement in our journey. It is debatable whether today's totalitarian technology will ultimately kill us, witness the mushroom cloud. This all grew into the Military Industrial Complex - also called The Iron Triangle - the most powerful aggregate of forces on Earth.

The US Department of Defense is the single largest consumer of oil in the world. In 25 minutes a single seater F-15 can burn 625 gallons (2,840 litres) of fuel, more than the average US motorist uses in a year. An aircraft carrier will use that much in under seven minutes. The military consumed about 200 million barrels of oil in 1989, enough energy to run the entire US urban mass transit system for 14 years. [1]

The Iron Triangle's incestuous and insidious linkages are so deep and devious as to defy description. In 1985 the Pentagon paid \$US659 apiece for seven plastic ashtrays in one of its Navy planes. Then there was the \$US748 pair of Air Force pliers, the \$US640 Navy lavatory seat and the Air Force 10-cup coffee pot for \$US7,666. [2] As if that wasn't enough, there was the hardware store \$US160 aluminium ladder for \$US1,676... not to mention the hexagonal key again available from any hardware store for a few cents which, when it became part of the standard repair kit for the F-16 fighter aircraft, was priced by General Dynamics at \$US9,606. [3] Capping this cornucopia was the toothbrush holder at \$US200,000 on board the US space shuttle *Endeavour*. [4] What happens with an aircraft carrier, a Stealth bomber, a Trident submarine and so on? Of course the CEOs, and many others, of what has been called the "self-licking ice cream cone" [5], have to be paid. At Lockheed Martin the CEO pay went from \$US5.8 million in 2000 to \$US25.3 million in 2002; at General

Dynamics from \$US5.7 million in 2001 to \$US15.3 million in 2002; at Honeywell from \$US12.9 million in 2000 to \$US45 million in 2002. [6] These sums are paralleled outside the MIC.

But to return to our earlier period. Soldiers needed better swords, armour, chariots, scaling machines, artillery, guns, tanks, planes, bombs, rockets, nerve gas and other nasties such as depleted uranium - see what I mean. In the early stages and right up to the present time few saw technology in the service of warfare as a sign that something was wrong. They thought it was improvement. The fire burned on under the cauldron.

Then came the birth of Christianity - a shattering challenge to our culture. But there were very serious problems. Lynn White, professor of History at the University of California, in 1967 suggested what seems to me a rational reason for much of our increasingly dire situation.

Christianity in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions, has not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for its proper ends... Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for the human attitude that we are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim... We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man. [7]

Politicians, economists of traditional persuasion, and certainly most business executives who, in the main, continue to place growth and profit before people, subscribe to this view. Signs of distress continue. The water in the cauldron is getting hotter. Prior to the birth of Christ, during this time and up to the start of the Industrial Revolution, many civilisations had collapsed for various reasons - over population, starvation, loss of resources, environmental impact, cannibalism, waste production, pestilence, war... We'll briefly examine one - pyramid schemes.

A pyramid of stone or brick, which may also take the form of colossal statues, tombs, or office towers, is the outward and visible sign of a human social pyramid, one which is in turn carried by a less visible pyramid - the food chain and all other resources in Nature's ecology, often called "natural capital". Usually pyramid schemes gather wealth to their centres from an expanding periphery which may be the forefront of a trading or political empire or a conquest of nature through intensified use of resources, or both. Once nature starts to foreclose - with erosion, crop failure, famine, disease - we are in big trouble. One of the chief lessons to be learned from the collapses of past civilisations is that a society's steep decline usually begins only a decade or two after the society reaches its peak numbers, wealth and power, like the Mayan, Easter Islanders and the Soviet Union. Maximum population, wealth, resource consumption and waste production mean maximum environmental impact, approaching the limit where impact outstrips resources. [8] Unfortunately, humankind has failed dismally to appreciate the full significance of the failures of past societies.

Now let's jump quickly to our new millennium - the here and now. Population way back soon after we started was about 50 million. It grew slowly until at the birth of Christ it was about 200 million. By 1900 it was one and a half billion. Now it is somewhat over six and a half billion. Scientists proclaim that our Earth can support

adequately about two billion people. So a fundamental question arises - *“Does human society want ten to 15 billion people living in poverty and malnourishment or one to two billion living with abundant resources and a quality environment?”* [9]

Now very briefly let's look at what a mess we've made of things.

- The whole of society has become militarised. John Keegan, one of the finest and most conservative English military historians, gives the figure of 50 million people having died in war since August 1945. [10] Keegan's figures have been modified by *Time* magazine: *“The generally agreed statistics are that some 1,000 soldiers, and 5,000 civilians, die each day, every day, for a total of 75 million deaths over the past 35 years.”* [11] These figures, published in 1995, were eclipsed by those published five years later as *“the number of people killed or injured worldwide in various wars fought during 1999”* as 48 million. [12] As for the children, we must recognise that from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, as the direct result of war:

2 million were killed

4.5 million were disabled

1 million were orphaned or separated from their parents

10 million were psychologically traumatised. [13]

- We have allowed the wall that separates the poor world from the affluent world, a wall of universal apartheid, of intolerance, discrimination, racism, violence, extortion and alienation, together with the wall of ethnicity and nationalism, to grow higher. This grossly dysfunctional world, whose New World Order has greatly diminished our social capital, has led to the kind of global poverty described by Christopher Richards as *“characterised by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, shame, depression and despair as well as disillusionment and sometimes aggression and violence.”* This global hegemony is the greatest challenge to those seeking justice. *“Hegemony is the dominance and control exercised by a small section of global elites currently led by Washington.”* [14] This economic, military and cultural domination, abetted by the world's media, has impacted heavily on all the peoples of the world who are desperately struggling to express their independence.
- We have allowed money to become the primary source of value and meaning for many human beings, a substitute for the morality and spirituality that traditionally unified all life. Coupled with this is the pathological mania for perpetual growth – *“the ideology of the cancer cell”* [15] - and an absolute impossibility on a finite Earth. Our economic system is destitute. In 1979 British economist Wilfred Beckerman told us that economic growth has gone on *“since the time of Pericles”* and that there is *“no reason to suppose that it cannot continue for another 2,500 years.”* [16] This is not so, for it is only since the birth of the Industrial Revolution that growth as we know it has been a significant part of our world. Prior to that it was very gradual and limited. Yet some people still believe Beckerman's unmitigated nonsense. It is only a matter of time, if we go on in this manner, before growth will kill us.
- We have a population explosion, as already mentioned, well beyond the Earth's capacity to support with some degree of equity.

- We continue to drastically lower and poison our fresh water tables, while one billion people worldwide do not have drinking water within a 15-minute walk of the homes, and 25 million people die each year from contaminated water. [17]
- We have allowed our Ecological Footprint to exceed all rational proportions. The EF is possibly the most significant measure of man's degradation of his one and only home. Introduced in 1990 by population ecologist William Rees it is defined as "*the total amount of land and water ecosystems required to produce the resources consumed and to assimilate the wastes produced by a defined population wherever on Earth that land and water is located.*" [18] Earth has approximately 8.9 billion hectares of ecologically productive land, and a population now of over 6.5 billion. Simple mathematics gives everyone about 1.35 hectares of land. 1997 figures give the US an EF of over 10, Australia 9, Canada nearly 8, New Zealand nearly 4, and so on down to Ethiopia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all below one. [19] We have induced climate change and are going for our lives worsening it at every turn. This will inevitably ruin our prospects for equitable global weather patterns. You've all recently heard about the break-up of the Arctic ice and its consequences. Should we force climate change to its dreaded 'tipping point' - well, I leave it to you to imagine what will happen.
- And now we are approaching Peak Oil, if we haven't already reached or passed it. The peak oil theory has it that 40 years after peak *discovery* comes peak *production*. Global oil *discovery* peaked around 1962 and its *production* is predicted to peak around 2005-2007, with natural gas predicted to peak shortly after oil. [20] With oil came the birth of suburbia, which has been described recently "*as the greatest misallocation of resources in the history of the world.*" [21] Make sure you see *The End of Suburbia*. Oil has been the very life blood of our civilisation for the last 150 years. Just about everything we touch is inextricably dependent on non-renewable oil, gas and coal supplies, particularly oil, somewhere along the line. Now, we are not running out of oil. Its production is decreasing and will continue to do so. But our need for oil is not lessening - quite the reverse. We are now using four barrels for every one found. [22] We seem to fail to recognise that

THERE ARE NO COMBINATIONS OF ENERGY SOURCES WITHIN SIGHT THAT WILL SUPPORT A SMALL FRACTION OF THE LIFE STYLE THAT THE WESTERN AND WESTERNISED WORLDS HAVE GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO

We are confronted by an impending global change such as we have never experienced - one for which we are totally unprepared. As I'm sure you can feel, the water in the cauldron is now bloody hot. We have become so stupefied that we are a species in denial, *almost* unable to deal with reality. And if we can't deal with reality, reality will deal with us. [23]

I'd like to conclude by reading from the last piece of Ronald Wright's 2004 CBC Massey Lectures. While I do so think about our one interconnected global world. Whether you think globally or locally, it is vital to think - to think, and to act, outside the square.

Things are moving so fast that inaction itself is one of the biggest mistakes. The 10,000-year experiment of the settled life will stand or fall by what we do, and don't do, now. The reform that is needed is not anti-capitalist, anti-American, or even deep environmentalist; it is simply the transition from short-term to long-term thinking. From recklessness and excess to moderation and the precautionary principle.

The great advantage we have, our best chance for avoiding the fate of past societies, is that we know about those past societies. We can see how and why they went wrong. Homo sapiens has the information to know itself for what it is: an Ice Age hunter only half-evolved towards intelligence; clever but seldom wise.

We are now at the stage when the Easter Islanders could still have halted the senseless cutting and carving, could have gathered the last tree's seeds to plant out of reach of the rats. We have the tools and the means to share resources, clean up pollution, dispense basic health care and birth control, set economic limits in line with natural ones. If we don't do these things now, while we prosper, we will never be able to do them when times get hard. Our fate will twist out of our hands. And this new century will not grow very old before we enter an age of chaos and collapse that will dwarf all the dark ages in our past.

Now is our last chance to get the future right. [24]

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