

The Simpler Way: A brief outline

(Prepared from material sourced from Dr. Ted Trainer, Senior Lecturer, University of New South Wales)

1. THE GLOBAL SITUATION

Global problems are rapidly getting worse. The environment is being severely damaged. Resources are being depleted. Third World poverty is increasing. Even in the richest societies the quality of life is falling, cohesion is eroding, and social problems are accelerating.

These problems cannot be solved without fundamental change, because they are directly caused by our present socio-economic system.

The basic faults built into our society, centre firstly on the demand for high material "living standards" in a world of limited resources. We cannot keep up the present levels of production and consumption and resource use for long, and there is no possibility of all of the world's people ever rising to these levels. People in rich countries have these high "living standards" only because we are taking much more than our fair share of the available resources and depriving the majority.

Even though present levels of production and consumption are unsustainable, this economic system must have a constant and endless increase in output, i.e., economic growth. A sustainable world order is not possible unless we move to much less affluent lifestyles within a steady-state economic system.

Our second major mistake is allowing the market to determine our fate. An economy which relies heavily on free market forces will inevitably allocate most of the world's wealth to the few, produce inappropriate development, destroy the environment, and ignore the needs of the majority. What is done must be determined by what humans and ecosystems need, not by what is most profitable in a market. Yet we are now racing to a globalized economy in which transnational corporations will be increasingly free to determine what is produced and developed, according to what will maximize their profits.

We need much more than change to an economic system that is not driven by market forces, profit and growth (although markets and private enterprise could have a role in a satisfactory society). Our values and culture put far too much emphasis on competition, success, individualism, acquisitiveness, wealth and luxury. There must be a value change to much more concern with cooperation, sharing, helping, caring, collective welfare and living more simply.

Technical advance alone cannot solve these problems. It cannot make a big enough difference to levels of resource use and ecological impact. It cannot eliminate the need for radical change in our "living standards", values, and economy.

2. THE SOLUTION

We cannot achieve a sustainable and just world order unless we change to:

- Simpler lifestyles, with much less production and consumption, much less concern with luxury, affluence, possessions and wealth.

- Small, highly self-sufficient local economies, largely independent of the global economy.

- More cooperative and participatory ways, enabling people in small communities to take control of their own development.

- A new economy, one not driven by profit or market forces, and a zero-growth or steady-state overall economy, that produces much less than we do now.

- Some very different values, especially cooperation, not competition, and frugality and self-sufficiency, not acquisitiveness and consuming.

The alternative is about ensuring a very high quality of life for all without anywhere near as much production, consumption, exporting, investment, resource use, environmental damage, work etc. as our present society involves. The important point is that there are many rich alternative sources of satisfaction other than material acquisition and consuming. Consider having much time for arts and crafts and personal growth, living in a rich and supportive community, having to go to work for money only two days a week, living in a diverse and productive leisure-rich landscape, having socially worthwhile and enjoyable work with no fear of unemployment ... and knowing you are not contributing to global problems.

Many people now accept this view of our situation and the solution, and are working for transition to the alternative way. There is now a Global Alternative Society Movement building new settlements and systems of the required kind. The fate of the planet depends on whether this Movement can provide many impressive examples of sustainable, just and pleasant ways showing people in consumer society that there is a better way.

For more information, go to: <http://simplicityinstitute.org/ted-trainer>

*(Prepared by USQ Community Environment Group, January 2006)
(Website link update, April 2018)*