

Part Four:

**Envisioning an
Appropriate Economy**

Chapter 15

Key Components of Economic Transformation

Creating vision is not the same as predicting. No one ever knows what the future will bring. The future has not yet been decided. The future can be very tragic or it can work out surprisingly well. Viable vision is an artistic creation capable of winning the hearts of an increasingly large group of people. Viable vision grows out of the interaction of our experiences of Essential Humanity and our factual knowledge of the concrete possibilities for the future of human society. Social vision in a Spirit-based ethics answers this question: What sort of options are preferred if we operate out of the depths of our Essential Humanity?

There are three overarching economic processes – Earth-use, production, and distribution. These are foundational for the functioning of every human society. Within these three arenas we might list a hundred economic shifts that need to take place in the next fifty years. I will consider the following six:

1. The Shift from All-out Use of the Earth to Human/Earth Balance
(from Human-centered Exploitation to Mutually Enhancing Support)
2. The Shift from a Fossil-fuel-driven Economy to a Renewable-energy-driven Economy
(from Spending our Savings Account to Living within our Means)
3. The Shift from Perpetual Economic Growth to a Steady-state Economy
(from Youthful Industrialism to a Mature Planetary Practice)
4. The Shift from Competitive Contest to the End of Poverty
(from the Glory of Winning to the Glory of Equity)
5. The Shift from Global Corporatism to Democratic Regional Economies
(from the Oppression of Transnational Capital to the Consensus of Local Stake Holders)
6. The Shift from Autocratic Corporations to Worker-Owned Cooperatives
(from Boss/Employee Hierarchies to Democratic Workplaces)

With regard to each of these economic arenas, a gulf has developed in the planet-wide human community. For example, in the politics of the United States, Republicans lean strongly toward the “from” side of each of these shifts. Democrats lean only slightly toward the “to” side. Greens lean more strongly toward this viable future, but some Greens also tend to be conservative on one or more of these fundamental shifts. These shifts, profoundly understood, are very deep transitions. They are all transformations of society, not just reforms or repairs.

Though partial, this list can help us define what we mean by “progressive” and “reactionary” economics. Those who acknowledge and support many or most of these shifts can be called “progressives.” Those who resist many or most of these shifts can be called “reactionaries.”

“Reactionary” may seem a harsh term, for there is such a thing as conserving important values established in the past. But such conservatism is usually called “centrist” in the current political spectrum of the United States. A creative centrist conservatism includes conserving the natural environment; conserving the victories won by labor unions, women, and racial minorities; conserving the protections articulated in the bill of rights; and conserving meaningful participation of all citizens in the decision-making process. But current U.S. “neoconservatives” do not conserve these basic national treasures. They are willing to risk all these treasures in order to “conserve” the power of an economic elite. And they also seek support among those who want to turn back the clock on the cultural shifts that I will discuss in Part Five. “Reactionary” is the correct term for this neoconservative attitude. One of the characteristics of “reactionaries” is that they do not think of themselves as “reactionaries.” They see themselves

as “reformers,” bringing the society back from whatever achievements the society has already made toward embodying these progressive shifts.

Progressives can appear fewer than they actually are because they are fragmented into many different groups, emphasizing different aspects of these and other shifts. The reactionaries, on the other hand, tend to be more united. The past almost always seems more orderly than the future; so reactionaries can sound more sure and aggressive. It is this moralistic and ideological sureness that offends progressives. Progressives are those who know that reactionary sureness is a delusion. Reactionaries commonly accuse progressives of being people who don’t know where they are going. When they are most clear, progressives realize that “not knowing where we are going” is a huge step forward. Progressives are those who know that the future must be different, so they are always experimenting with provisional innovations. Progressives, therefore, often struggle to match the enthusiasm and unity of the reactionaries. Progressives commonly fight among themselves about what the next right directions need to be. Progressives struggle, and need to struggle, for a more unifying vision.

The progressive transitions listed above (and others not listed or that will be listed later) are well established trends across the planet, and they are gaining ground every day. The reactionary responses are also very strong, and they may win many temporary victories. But every victory won by reactionary forces is a defeat for humanity. Even if such defeats are only postponements of the realization of these progressive transitions, such postponements are very dangerous. We are risking human survival on this planet. We are, at the very least, laying up for our grandchildren burdensome economic and ecological debts that they will have to pay in order to return to a progressive path.

In the next six chapters I will explore the “truth” indicated by each of these six shifts. In each chapter I will summarize: (1) the facts of scientific research on these topics, (2) the personal experience of Spirit in our inward being that recommends movement in these progressive directions, and (3) the possible constructive overviews that groups of consensus building activists might create on the basis of our scientific knowledge and our personal experience.