
Decentred coalescence

Convergence divergence; centralized - dispersed; solutions explorations; autonomy totalitarianism; ...

These are some of the contradictions we are constantly facing' do battle with, in our work, in our daily lives as committed activists. We sometimes vacillate, sometimes take sides; but time and again we face these dilemmas, and time and again we succumb to the temptation to name the Grand Coalescence, to define the Alternative, to preach the Doctrine of Another World is Possible.

After the failure of Revolution, there have been many attempts to define Grand Coalitions, Global Convergence... Paul Hawken reminds us that these attempts are counter productive if they are sought to signify Arrival. Dissent, the counter paradigm, alternatives are alive and kicking, in many more places than we know or are able to relate to. These come together, converge, at times. At times.

We do not, as yet, need to name, define or articulate the Doctrine of the Alternative. We are not there yet.



To Remake the World by email from Paul Hawken, Orion Magazine, May 08, 2007.
<http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/05/07/1030/>
 [C.ELDOC1.0705/08may07email7.html]

The Burgeoning Global Movement: A Response To Kate Davies,
 Rachel's Democracy & Health News, June 14, 2007.
http://www.precaution.org/lib/07/prn_hawken_response.070614.htm
 [C.ELDOC1.0707/DD1_Burgeoning_Global_Movement.html]

To Remake the World

By Paul Hawken



I have given nearly 1000 talks about the environment in the past 15 years, and after every speech a smaller crowd gathered to talk, ask questions, and exchange business cards. The people offering their cards were working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights, and more. They were from the nonprofit and nongovernmental world, also known as civil society and were quite simply, trying to safeguard nature and ensure justice.

After being on the road for a week or two, I would return with a couple hundred cards stuffed into various pockets. I couldn't throw them away. Over the years the cards mounted into the thousands, and whenever I glanced in my closet, I kept coming back to one question: did anyone know how many groups there were? At first, this was a matter of curiosity, but it slowly grew into a hunch that something larger was afoot, a significant social movement that was eluding the radar of mainstream culture.

I began to count. I looked at government records for different countries and, using various methods to approximate the number of environmental and social justice groups from tax census data. The more I probed, the more I unearthed, and the numbers continued to climb. In trying to pick up a stone, I found the exposed tip of a geological formation. I discovered lists, indexes, and small databases specific to certain sectors or geographic areas, but no set

of data came close to describing the movement's breadth. Extrapolating from the records being accessed, I realized that the initial estimate of a hundred thousand organizations was off by at least a factor of ten. I now believe there are over one or two million organizations working toward ecological sustainability and social justice.

By conventional definition, this is not a movement. Movements have leaders and ideologies. You join movements, study tracts, and identify yourself with a group. You read the biography of the founder(s) or listen to them perorate on tape or in person. Movements have followers, but this movement doesn't work that way. It is dispersed, inchoate, and fiercely independent. There is no manifesto or doctrine, no authority to check with. I sought a name for it, but there isn't one.

Historically, social movements have arisen primarily because of injustice, inequalities, and corruption. Those woes remain legion, but a new condition exists that has no precedent: the planet has a life-threatening disease that is marked by massive ecological degradation and rapid climate change. It crossed my mind that perhaps I was seeing something organic, if not biologic. Rather than a movement in the conventional sense, is it a collective response to threat? Is it splintered for reasons that are innate to its purpose? Or is it simply disorganized? More questions followed. How does it function? How fast is it growing? How is it connected? Why is it largely ignored?

After spending years researching this phenomenon, including creating with my colleagues a global database of these organizations, I have come to these conclusions: this is the largest social movement in all of history, no one knows its scope, and how it functions is more mysterious than what meets the eye.

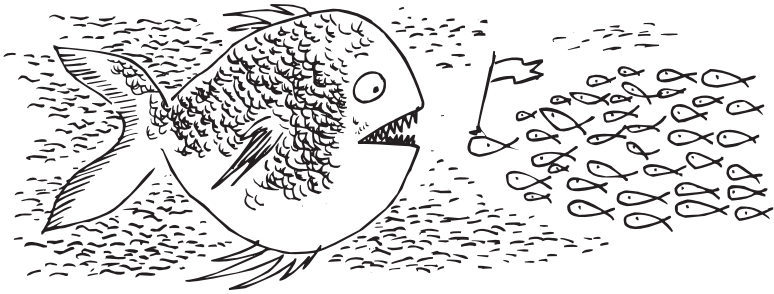


What does meet the eye is compelling: tens of millions of ordinary and not-so-ordinary people are willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world. They may never meet and know one another, yet are part of a coalescence comprising thousands of organizations with no center, codified beliefs, or charismatic leader. The movement grows and spreads in every city and country. Virtually every tribe, culture, language, and religion is part of it. Its leaders are farmers, zoologists, shoemakers, and poets.

The movement can't be divided because it is atomizedsmall pieces loosely joined. It forms, gathers, and dissipates quickly. Many inside and out dismiss it as powerless, but it has been known to bring down governments, companies, and leaders through witnessing, informing, and massing. It has three basic roots: the environmental and social justice movements, and indigenous cultures' resistance to globalizationall of which are intertwining. It arises spontaneously from different economic sectors, cultures, regions, and cohorts, resulting in a global, classless, diverse, and embedded movement, spreading worldwide without exception. In a world grown too complex for constrictive ideologies, the very word movement may be too small, for it is the largest coming together of citizens in history.

There are research institutes, community development agencies, village- and citizen-based organizations, corporations, networks, faith-based groups, trusts, and foundations. They defend against corrupt politics and climate change, corporate predation and the death of the oceans, governmental indifference and pandemic poverty, industrial forestry and farming, depletion of soil and water. Describing the breadth of the movement is like trying to hold the ocean in your hand. When the tip of the iceberg rises above the waterline, the part beneath is usually unseen.

What bind it together are ideas, not ideologies. This unnamed movement's big contribution is the absence of one big idea; it offers thousands of practical and useful ideas. In place of "isms" are processes, concerns, and compassion. The movement demonstrates a pliable, resonant, and generous side of humanity.



It is nonviolent, and grassroots; it has no bombs, armies, or helicopters. A charismatic male vertebrate is not in charge. The movement does not agree on everything but it shares a basic set of fundamental understandings about the Earth, how it functions, and the necessity of fairness and equity for all people partaking of the planet's life-giving systems. The promise of this unnamed movement is to offer solutions to what appear to be insoluble dilemmas: poverty, global climate change, terrorism, ecological degradation, polarization of income, loss of culture. It is not burdened with a syndrome of trying to save the world; it is trying to remake the world.

THERE IS FIERCENESS HERE. There is no other explanation for the raw courage and heart seen over and again in the people who march, speak, create, resist, and build. This movement is relentless and unafraid. It cannot be mollified, pacified, or suppressed.

The movement will continue to take myriad forms. It will not rest. There will be no Marx, Alexander, or Kennedy. No book can explain it, no person can represent it, and no words can encompass it, because it is the breathing, sentient testament of the living world. And I believe it will prevail.

I don't mean defeat, conquer, or cause harm to someone else. And I don't tender the claim in an oracular sense. I mean the thinking that informs the movement's goal to create a just society conducive to life on Earth will reign. Inspiration is not garnered from litanies of what is flawed; it resides in humanity's willingness to restore, redress, reform, recover, reimagine, and reconsider. Healing the wounds of the Earth and its people does not require

saintliness or a political party. It is not a liberal or conservative activity. It is a sacred act.

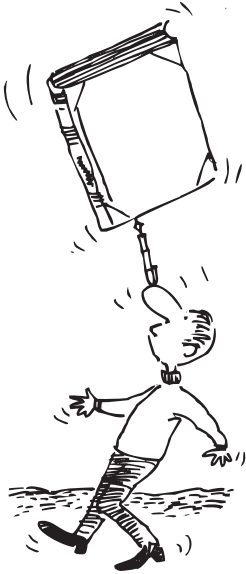
*Paul Hawken is an entrepreneur and social activist living in California. His article in this issue is adapted from *Blessed Unrest*, to be published by Viking Press and used by permission.*

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Email, 08 MAY 2007

The Burgeoning Global Movement

(Paul Hawken's Response to Activist and Author, Kate Davies)



I so appreciate Kate Davies' thoughtfulness and enthusiasm [in Rachel's Democracy and Health News #909, responding to an excerpt from "Blessed Unrest" published in the magazine Orion.]

I want to respond to her points, however, because I believe she simplifies a book (and a social movement) that is diverse and complex and then draws conclusions that may not be applicable to the breadth of it. The book is far more granular, not so generalizing, and more intricate than what was excerpted.

Name

I would not state, as does Davies, that a "new social movement" has been quietly gaining strength since the 1999 WTO protests. One of the reasons I wrote the book was to provide expanse, depth, and history to a movement that has a longer narrative than what is often reported.

Davies states that I shy away from giving it a name. I do because when someone names it, they limit and constrain it. She proposes that it is the "new progressive movement," homage to the U.S. Progressive Movement of yore. While that is true in some quarters, this unnamed movement also pays homage to many other prior movements in the world and none of these have origins in the U.S. Progressive Movement. One of my goals in writing the

book was to help readers, especially Americans, see this movement as global, not Euro-or North American-centric. We have to be careful not to place old frameworks on it.

Leaders

I did not say that it lacks leaders: I said that it did not have a leader. This is a pluralistic movement, no one can speak for it all, and that is its saving grace. We both agree that this movement demands a very different style and process of leadership; we are seeing it, and such true leadership couldn't come any too soon. What we see in politics and business is an ersatz leadership that serves concentrations of power, not people.

Ideology

We are in fierce agreement when it comes to the idea that this is a bottom-up movement that is reimagining and remaking the world. To call it an ideology, as she proposes, is not accurate. Ideologies are beliefs that frame economic and political activities, and this movement is collectively about ideas. I distinguish between an idea driven movement and an ideologically driven movement. When you try to impose your view of the world on others, it is no longer an idea but an ideology. All ideologies, right, left or center, dictate and constrain where as ideas expand possibility and liberate.

To say that the ideas that inform this movement are the same that give birth to this country is a hopeful statement, but not borne out in fact. This country was founded by privilege and was dominated from the outset by the privileged. I believe we are moving from a world created by privilege to one created by community. This is a fundamental and global shift, one much resisted.

Davies lists four goals or aspirations that are common to the movement:

- Creating an open, participatory and fully accountable democracy;
- Social and economic justice;
- Sustainability for people and the planet; and
- Health and wellbeing for all.

I agree, except these are not ideologies. These are values, and they are becoming universal, and are being expressed from the bottom-up. This is a critical point because every ideological movement in the world has caused suffering, violence, and loss. The world has paid a tremendous price for such ideologies and this movement has gone another direction. This is a fundamental distinction.

Internal Organization

To say that the movement needs some "internal organization," as Davies proposes, assumes that there is an internal. This is an old paradigm; there is a movement, let's get in front of it and organize it. Like Gideon Rosenblatt, author of "Movement as Network," I believe that the organizations that comprise it need to work more assiduously on cooperation and linkages. However, internal organization requires a hierarchy and that is different than cooperation. What is needed is happening: more coordination and collaboration. It is time to link and connect up in more powerful ways.

The movement is atomized because that is how it came into being. It now has the communication and technological tools to work for more closely and effectively. However, when Davies writes, "How can we build the new movement?" I get a little uncomfortable. I think the right question is how can we better serve this movement. What is new is that the largest movement in human history has built itself without being master minded from above. This is why I use the metaphor of this movement being humanity's immune response to political corruption, economic disease, and ecological degradation. The movement is not merely a network; it is a complex and self-organizing system.

I agree with Davies when she says that organizations need to deepen their "understanding of what it takes to achieve systemic social change. This will require a greater understanding of the culture it wants to transform and a more strategic approach to advance progressive change." My caution here is about speaking of the movement in general or even monolithic terms. To say the movement should do this, or should pay more attention to that, presumes that the writer knows what this movement is, and contains an underlying

assumption that the movement Davies knows is the same one as the movement in Kenya, Kerala, and Kobe.

What I came to believe in researching Blessed Unrest is that we can only see our own network. We tend to think of the movement through the lens of our initial experience. We are vastly mis-educated as children into thinking that problems are linear and can be solved by linear thinking. The awe I have about this movement is that it appears to me to be the first social movement that collectively expresses this non-linear understanding without ever stating it or necessarily realizing it.

Davies prescriptions are based on her experience with a fraction of the movement. It is not that her recommendations are incorrect, it is just that we have to be careful, especially as Americans, to presume we know what is right for other cultures, traditions, or peoples, or in this case, the whole of the movement. She makes generalizations and proposals that might well be looked askance by organizations in other parts of the world.

Finally, when Davies calls this a new movement, we have to be careful that we don't fall into a kind of narcissism. This movement goes back centuries, even millennia to the teachings of Buddha, Mencius, Lao-Tse, Rabbi Hillel, Jeremiah, and others. These teachers long ago started social movements by re-examining the very notion of what it means to be a human being. They were not starting religions but ways to address the suffering of others. We are progressive, yes, but we are also ancient. This movement is helped by the thousands of generations that preceded it, and serves the thousands that will follow. I am deeply appreciative of the core of Davies' message, which is, as I read it, that we have to come together in a more pro-active and vigorous way. The problems we face are like nothing humanity has ever confronted, and we must rise to this challenge in a way we have never done. That is what I hear from Kate Davies, and I am grateful for her insight.

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