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Uprooting "Growth" as Metaphor: 20th Century Reflections for the 21st

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Richard Grossman calls for a re-evaluation of the 20th Century's preoccupation with "Growth" as the equivalent of all that we should desire for the future. Basing his reflections on the rhetoric as well as the politics and economics of "development," he calls for a more ecologically responsible perspective which places quality above quantity in moving into the future together.

What do people want: General equilibrium? Increasing gross national product? Rational behavior at the margins? Perfect competition? Social and economic fluidity? Predictability? Export-led expansion? Accurate market signals? The competitive edge? Creative destruction? Sustainability? Rising productivity? A dynamic, humming economy? Free trade?

These are the promises and strategies of M-O-R-E. Their focus is simply producing more. Selling more. Buying more. Having more. They are what so many discussions of the nation's future are about.

The purveyors of M-O-R-E want us to believe that human wants and needs are self-evidently fulfilled by these goals and strategies. People are not encouraged to inquire into the nature of processes of M-O-R-E, to figure out what has brought the good, to question popular theories of cause and effect, to penetrate the rhetoric and illusions of growth.

For growth is IT. Growth has brought us our fantastic wealth. It will do the same again and again for us, and for anyone. It will eradicate undesirable isms, free the oppressed, restore the environment. It will stimulate the arts, save our cities, decrease human reproduction, save our farms.

The purpose of this essay is not to rail against growth, not to offer an alternative to growth, not to suggest growth reform. Rather, I urge the expunging of the language of growth and the system of growth from the hearts and minds of those seeking democracy, fairer sharing of the world's wealth, and the integration of ecological principles into our lives and works.

Quick and Dead

Obsession with quantity is nothing new. Fear of scarcity, and greed, have inspired people in different eras to produce, hoard, and rationalize. But quantity has not been Earthlings' only

preoccupation. People have been concerned with quality and equity. They have sought to institutionalize fair ways by which societies handle production and distribution.

Today, quantity and the language of quantity predominate. The imagery of quantity has driven out other models from our brains and guts. The power of metaphor, mustered by economic and political power, is not to be sneezed at. Whereas, according to philologist Willard Espey, similes are mostly decorative, metaphors are tools to convey the "otherwise inexpressible." Espey reminds us of two kinds of metaphors "the quick and the dead." The dead are those become so common and accepted that we no longer think about their original, literal meanings. We are not inclined to examine what biases they conceal, what values they imply. "Sifting the evidence" is one example. "Short shrift" is another.

Donald McCloskey noted in "The Rhetoric of Economics": "A good metaphor depends on the ability of its audience to suppress incredulities or to wish to ... on the ability of its audience to suppress imagination ... An unexamined metaphor is a substitute for thinking."

Growth as used by the purveyors is just such a good metaphor. It has become so dead as to be worshipped safely -- often elaborately -- by people with vastly different needs. It has become so big as to be empty, so inert as to have no real use except as a club for bashing people seeking specificity, quality and equity.

As C.S. Lewis noted in "Bluspels and Flalansferes" (1939), "when the metaphor becomes fossilized, our 'thinking' is not thinking at all, but mere sound or mere incipient movements in the larynx."

Growth as metaphor is a limp lump in the larynx to be aspired to, labored for, honored in principle by people with suppressed imaginations and incredulities out to lunch. The metaphor growth is a concealer of hands and a masker of the absence of quality.

Growth is our goal. Growth turns out also to be our idealized means. It is OK not to have as much growth as promised as long as we are in the state of having growth. Having growth proves that the right decisions are being made regarding how we use our resources and labor. Even negative growth affirms the growth framework and offers us hope as long as we stick to the tried and true. If what we are having is defined and measured as growth, we need not worry about people's lack of authority over investment, resource and labor decisions, about not having what we need, or about destruction caused by the arrangements for growth. For to have democracy, to get what we need, and to clean up any messes, all we have to do is redouble our efforts to get growth.

Pigs Is Pigs

The defining and accepting of growth as means and ends enable the salespeople of growth perpetually to sell and resell us pigs in pokes. Isn't it amazing how many times we have actually bought back our own resources and tools and sold our labor for a song and volunteered for clean-up without forcing the purveyors to specify what we were getting, without forcing them to make good on deliveries, to take back bad deliveries? And salespeople today are still at it. James Fallows, in the March 1985 *Atlantic*, taps confidently

into the self-evidence of metaphorical doornail: "Post-war growth in California did more for the people of Appalachia and the mid-west than had any targeted assistance program."

Particularly fascinating to me is that just as growth itself is both end and means, the basic means of growth turns out also to be an end ... to be aspired to, to have praises heaped upon, to be glorified. I refer to the free market. This is yet another good dead metaphor to which all kinds of qualities are attributed. Caught in its grip, people, social relations, communities and the Earth itself are invisible and irrelevant, if not actually in the way.

Growth, as metaphor and as politics, rationalizes that harm to individuals or communities or to the Earth pales in comparison with having growth and free markets. Just having growth and free markets absolves the purveyors of any responsibilities. The role of growth and free markets is to help controllers of quantity to suppress incredulous tendencies afoot in the land. A case of dead metaphor leading dead metaphor. As long as such metaphors smooth the way for the politics of growth, just existing and being measurable will continue to be bees' knees. Quantity is so easy to measure, given our elaborate counting machines and what Theodore Rozak calls "industrial man and his love affair with the terrible simplification of quantity." But quality has no measure in the language of growth and inequality has no column. Therefore, as long as quantity is linked with success, with justice, with peace, and as long as the purveyors of quantity control the investments, it is difficult for the extant incredulous to point out what is not being counted, i.e., what is not professionally seen or linguistically recorded.

What growth as metaphor and as politics conceals most are the social relations, the investments, technologies and production processes which the controllers of growth utilize to maintain their control and cause harm. As Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins note in *World Hunger: 10 Myths* (1979), referring to agricultural business growth: "We must come to understand that a strategy emphasizing increased production while ignoring who is in control of that production is not a neutral strategy. It does not 'buy time' -- that is, feed people while the more difficult social questions of control can be addressed. No. Such a strategy is taking us backward, itself creating even greater impoverishment and hunger." Andre Gorz, in *Ecology As Politics* (1975 in French, 1980 in English), suggests that "the mainstay of growth is [a] generalized forward flight, stimulated by a deliberately sustained system of inequalities, which Illich calls the 'modernization of poverty'." In a world of extreme inequalities, growth and the language of growth become a "smokescreen for usurpation of ... resources by a few for a few" (Lappé and Collins).

Stacked Deck

Karl Polanyi discussed this smokescreen and the way in which growth as goal and means enables decent people to squirm free from accountability in a 1947 essay (reprinted in *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies*, 1968): "Under the market system society as a whole remained invisible. Anyone could imagine himself free from responsibility for those acts of compulsion on the part of the state which he, personally, repudiated, or for unemployment and destitution from which he, personally, did not benefit. Personally, he remained unentangled in the evils of power and economic value. In good conscience, he could deny their reality in the name of his imaginary freedom." These realities of

closely-controlled investment, development and production -- no matter how gussied up as growth, camouflaged as growth -- cause and perpetuate inequities and ensure the introduction of technologies which are inappropriate and destructive.

Tapping into deep-seated yearnings for better lives and personal development, the metaphor growth helps people confuse the spectacle of M-O-R-E with powerful human aspirations. Generations are maturing, have matured, smokescreened. They seek the vast goals of dead symbolisms, the soothing hopes that thrive amidst unexamined inference. Many have learned how not to see the unseen hands; many are hopers who crave to believe that if the mysteries of finance and ownership, plus the wonders of technology, are left to their neutral natural unravellings in our behalf, then we will have the tangibles we need and crave. And, if quantity is vast enough, equity, social justice and self-realization as well.

Adjectival Growth

With few exceptions, reformers in left-liberal-progressive folds are no less locked into growth, possess no less secret hopes for growth. They expend so much energy and time arguing with the purveyors and salespeople of growth in the language of growth, trying to mobilize masses behind adjustments to growth, the fixing up of growth. They marshal indices and histories of this growth and that growth to make their cases.

The outpouring of books by people concerned with community and equity and justice (by Bluestone, Harrison, Faux, Alperovitz, Shearer, Carnoy, Bowles, Gordon, Weisskopf, Kuttner, etc.) are predominantly in the language of growth. There is little break from the politics of growth. We do not find last chapters which build upon the data and analysis so painstakingly produced to announce: and now, a whole new context, a new language, some live metaphors, wherein people and resources are not, as Polanyi said, "utilitarian atoms." We do not find people prepared to risk their credibilities with the institutions and constituencies of growth by declaring, with Polanyi's editor George Dalton, that "[we should view] our continuing departure from the model of laissez faire capitalism as an unremarkable occurrence. When contrasted with earlier and later economies, laissez faire can be seen to be a unique and transitory attempt to approximate an automatically functioning economy whose autonomous market rules required the fracturing of community, created material abundance at the expense of community integration."

We find major left players advocating more growth to repair communities in our country and to straighten out countries in the developing world. We see some left thinkers trying to mobilize subscribers to growth to lobby the purveyors into adjectival reform, just as we see some environmentalists calling for high-tech to be a preferred engine for a kind of growth which will spare this country the satanic ills of the smokestacks. Few advocates of equity and justice acknowledge that the political and social relationships comprising the great growth dynamic are what have created the very inequities and destruction they are seeking to lessen. And so for the most part, political and economic debate has been limited to putting cosmetics on a dead metaphor, like lipstick on a corpse: balanced growth orthodox growth renewed growth vigorous growth solid growth explosive growth natural growth continuous growth slow growth no growth jobless growth long-term growth sustainable growth equitable growth exceptional growth sluggish growth lopsided growth rapid growth overall

growth deliberate growth phenomenal growth substantial growth uneven growth rekindled growth negative growth restored growth robust growth limited growth expanded growth export-led growth productivity-led growth qualitative growth maximum growth.

Expunge, Expunge

In a 1957 essay, "Abundance for What?", David Reisman joined those who had decided that the problem of production had been solved. He took the occasion to call attention to what he labeled "the spectre of satiation." This spectre, he wrote, was being held off only temporarily by advertising and by "new, or seemingly new, products."

Reisman worried. He worried because he did not believe that the mechanisms existed by which our society could figure out what to do with our fantastic productive capacity: "We have no adequate plans for substitute goals [for our consumer goals] or the political channels for securing the understanding and support for the process of developing such a plan." Like many people before and since, Reisman underestimated the durability of advertising, of new products, and of the purveyors of growth themselves. But he was on the mark when he wrote that the USA "would not be prepared to make peace and disarm substantially unless we were simultaneously engaged in other tasks to which we could devote our abundant energies and even our manias."

I suggest that a principal cause of the problem he pinpointed is that politically, culturally, maybe even ontologically by now, we have embraced the language of growth. We have taken the metaphor growth to our hearts. When it comes to political discourse, we speak and think predominantly in the language of quantity, that is, the language of sameness and more. In groping to answer Friedman and Gilder and Reagan and the neoldies, in struggling for ideas and strategies and cross-issue connections, we never seem to get out of the growth lanes. What we need now is to expunge growth -- the metaphor, the language, the politics -- from our brains. We need to expunge it in ways which expose the hands behind growth, which enable people to see and feel the strength in their own hands. Then could we talk clearly and directly about what we want and need, about food and trees and schools, heat and transportation, money and homes and the land ... in the language not of the dead but of the quick.

Sic Semper Tyrannus

In "Standing By Words" (1979, in *Poetry & Politics*, 1985), Wendell Berry encourages me to believe that I am not indulging in semantic quibble. Berry writes: "When language is detached from its origins in communal experience, it becomes 'arbitrary and impersonal.' If one wishes to promote the life of language, one must promote the life of community." As Fallows shows in his *Atlantic* article, entitled "America's Changing Economic Landscape" (not a neutral mixed metaphor, given the irrelevance of both land and scape in quantitative thought and language), immersion in dead metaphors leads to extolling of destruction. For example: "An increasingly productive economy should be recognized as necessitating simultaneous painful growth and shrinkage, disinvestment and reinvestment ... Capitalism is one of the world's most disruptive forces ... the same constant churning of people from place

to place ... wrenching episodes in American life ... social and economic fluidity created by industries on the rise ..."

Standing next to steelworker Ed Sadlowski, Fallows dutifully records Ed's description of the South Side of Chicago: "This is the most highly industrial neighborhood in the world, the richest in terms of industry. But look at it. We've got all kinds of big factories. We should have some big libraries and hospitals too ... but where are they? That tells me they have taken from this community and never put back." But so embedded is Fallows in the dead metaphors of growth; so involved is he with removing himself from the wrenchéd of the Earth hitting the road for their own good and the good of the nation; so twisted in the tongue of growth is he that even standing next to Sadlowski and hearing him talk of people and community, Fallows does not listen, does not see.

The salespeople of the purveyors of growth appreciate Fallows' defense of dead and empty concepts. They like that he is not talking about people and community, that the pain he describes is "growth and shrinkage," not men, women and children in despair over destruction of life. To them, the wrenchéd are "episodes," not human beings. Indeed, Fallows' language is far removed from human beings, community, accountability. It is removed, in Berry's words, from "concern for quality. Motive is entirely liberated from method. Any way is good as long as it increases per unit of production."

Fallows would have us believe he is being empathetic. But his professional growth language mocks the concept of empathy. His standards are the standards of production and quantity. The language he uses and the actions he endorses are those which enable "industries and governments, while talking of the 'betterment of the human condition', [to] act to enrich and empower themselves," as Berry says. This is the smokescreen at work. Caught up in this language, in the metaphors, Fallows does not reflect for us what it means, for example, that those who are enriched and empowered by the "constant churning" -- namely the giant merchants and bankers -- happen not to be the ones who have to hit the road for their or our own good. And he certainly is not thinking about the wrenching of the air, water, land and neighborhoods.

Fallows' is the kind of language Berry calls tyrannical, because in addressing "quantity, exclusively, language is almost without the power of designation because it is used conscientiously to refer to nothing in particular. Attention rests upon percentages and abstract functions. It is not language that the user will likely be required to stand by or act on, for it does not define any personal ground for standing or acting. Its only practical utility is to support with 'expert opinion' a vast, impersonal technological action already begun ... It holds in contempt, not only all particular grounds of the private fidelity and action, but the common ground of human experience, memory, and understanding from which language rises and on which meaning is shaped."

Growth As Strategy

E.F. Schumacher, urging us to use our ingenuity with regard to our productive capacity, challenged the principal proposition of the metaphor of growth. Do you remember the opening lines of *Small Is Beautiful* (1975)? "One of the most fateful errors of our age is the

belief that the 'problem of production' has been solved."

Schumacher did not suppress his incredulities. "I am not part of the growth debate. To talk against growth or to talk in favor of growth is emptiness." Instead, he chose to talk of people. Of community. Of appropriateness. Of ownership. Of empowerment. Of choosing. Of peace.

He spoke the language of quality and accountability. The language of people.

So what was going on during those years between Reisman and Schumacher? Alan Wolfe, in *America's Impasse: The Rise and Fall of the Politics of Growth* (1981), brilliantly describes the mass mobilizations which occurred around M-O-R-E. He details how growth became the dominant political strategy for so many, the dominant metaphor for collective dream, the dominant tongue, the dominant measure, the master camouflager. Growth became more than consensus. Rather, a determined coalition became growth, a coalition of liberals, conservatives, isolationists, progressives, intellectuals, socialists, along with institutions and bureaucracies of workers, minorities, entrepreneurs, banks and investment houses, agribusinesses, corporations, the military industry, the Pentagon, Democratic urban mayors, and even the Western wing of the Republican Party.

What did not happen after WWII was the threshing out in community and national debate and experiment difficult, explosive issues which lingered from *In the Beginning*:

- should we have minority or majority rule?
- how do we perfect the ideal of "consent of the governed"?
- should government be coordinated and national, or local and de-centralized?

Instead, many different voices and political power bases gathered around growth and the language of growth to "pursue economic expansion at home through growth and overseas through empire," as Wolfe put it. And, "Once the rationale of the political system became the enhancement of growth, everything changed, including the role of political parties, the structure of political ideology, the nature of public policy and the meaning of dissent." Owners and reformers alike from across the political spectrum mobilized to legitimize the concealment of power and control, to set the stage for responding to every "new" problem -- from segregation to environmental destruction to third world poverty -- with the blinding language and destructive engines of the growth process.

Justice Via Abundance

Growth politics became a means for maximizing control over labor, resources and community by a few in the name of M-O-R-E for many. Growth politics became a way to launder people and resources into utilitarian atoms, to avoid developing what Reisman called the political channels in which people could realistically debate and consider what to do. Growth politics became the "safe" way to prevent large numbers of people from deciding where the money went, to avoid having the blame for disempowerment of people and

communities fall upon the purveyors of quantity. With growth banners flying, no one actually had to go on record against putting anything back into communities. It was hard to finger who should take the rap for rotten schools, inhuman health care, inefficient and destructive transportation and energy systems, destructive farming and financing, corporations which made products people did not need in ways which created mayhem in workplaces and beyond, and for unchanging inequalities. Since the purveyors of growth could apparently be for everything, they were able to get away with being responsible for nothing in particular.

In the context of growth politics, liberal-left-socialist aims (the social justice and participatory democracy threads sustained throughout our history) along with Robert Taft conservatism (isolationism and small town entrepreneurialism) faded with the quick metaphors. Surrounded by the dead and concealing language of growth, the empty shells of liberal and conservative goals became part of the political camouflage too as leaders and constituency groups settled for dependence upon absentee, impenetrable agglomerations -- financial institutions, corporations, the military-industrial complex. For liberals, says Wolfe, "Social justice would be pursued with all the vigor of profit maximization."

Equity and justice would be related directly to production. To quantity. The more America produced, and the more America helped the world to produce, sell and buy, the faster people across the world would be freed from drudgery and oppression. Shooting for justice via abundance, the nation could embrace righteousness without accountability. Goals became synonymous with means -- never mind that the means were facilitating greater and greater concentrations of wealth and power which in turn were choking possibilities of democracy and the peoples' possibility of protecting themselves.

But why worry? The post-WWII growth coalition was accompanied by fantastic leaps in industrial production. In a decade which was the apotheosis of growth -- the 1960s -- GNP just about doubled. In Wolfe's words, Kennedy unleashed "the twin forces of increasing [economic] concentration and greater public spending [which] were laying the ground work for further consolidation of the growth coalition." And yes, as Bayard Rustin and others pointed out, the number of people living in poverty began to decline. And unemployment went down. Civil rights laws were passed, nutrition and education and housing benefits were extended to more and more people. Even GNPs in developing countries were on the rise. To the growth coalition and to most of the nation, all this was the self-evident result of the arrangements and the processes of growth. It was incontrovertible testimony to the wisdom of the growth coalition's investment, production and foreign policies, affirmation of growth as goal and strategy.

And people asked: if so much had been achieved, why not M-O-R-E? After all, more we knew how to do. Besides, the ticket window to American politics would come crashing down upon the knuckles of any who asked: what's really growing? Just what is growth made of? Growth for whom? At what cost? Decided by whom? What are the language of growth and the images of growth and the deals of the growth coalition leaders doing to people's abilities to determine what we do with our hands and resources? What are the engines of growth doing to our neighborhoods and communities, to our ecosystems and habitats? To our fellow Earthlings overseas? To our technological imaginations? To ask these questions was to attack those who in exchange for promises of growth had pledged not to think such thoughts

-- us.

Left Out

Despite some efforts by some people, there has not been a locus among liberal-left-progressives where these questions have been raised. Even Wolfe, after his effective expose of the politics of growth, did not put behind him the language or system of growth. Chapter 11 of *America's Impasse* opens: "Growth, per se, is a worthwhile objective. Wealth, as Sophie Tucker says, is better than poverty, and the poor and disadvantaged do better when the economy is humming than when it is still."

Let us look again at Wolfe's main objections to the politics of growth:

"In the face of extraordinary growth at home, passion and controversy were held to be ungrateful. In the face of imperial growth abroad, they were held to be unconstitutional. In order to bring about economic and imperial expansion, America sacrificed vitality. The capacity of either major party or dominant set of ideas to establish goals or agendas for reaching them was undermined by the fixation on economic and imperial conquest."

What Wolfe -- and the liberal/left -- did not explain is that the perpetuation of skewered divisions of wealth, persistent un- and under-employment, the wasting of huge sums of money, the destruction of public health and the environment, the setting up of barriers to hinder people from changing the status quo, the playing off of people against each other, are the growth process.

In other words, far from being side effects, inequities and ecological messes are the societal arrangements for control and quantity. The difficulties people experience gaining access to decision-making and protecting themselves are deliberate because the purpose of growth politics is control, and the purpose of finances and technologies which serve growth politics is M-O-R-E. The purveyors get control by destroying people's ability to decide where the money goes; they get M-O-R-E by destroying the Earth. And they masquerade their purposes and their mayhem within the metaphors of growth.

And mayhem there began to be galore. As Schumacher, Bookchin, Carson, Henderson, Commoner and others had been pointing out, the great leap in production which began with WWII had introduced huge amounts of new substances into the world. These were unpredictable, cumulative, and, as was becoming increasingly apparent, lethal. These substances, along with massive construction and destruction planned by the arbiters of growth, were heavily subsidized by taxpayers and supported by our elected representatives. As Schumacher wrote: "both in quantity and quality of man's industrial processes [there was] an entirely new situation -- a situation resulting not from our failures but from what we thought were our greatest successes."

All this had come about relatively suddenly -- over 25 years or so. Nature's tolerance was being eroded. And so in Schumacher's mind, the problem of production was far from solved ... for the very reason that "current methods of production are already eating into the very substance," that is, eating into our land, air, water and people. The system growth had

become the destruction of life. What Schumacher and very few others have been trying to convey is that the destruction of our resource base cannot be tolerated by the Earth. Such destruction cannot be sliced off and put aside as a "social issue," a luxury we can deal with when we are rich enough. In fact, since the Earth provides the source of life and even production, it is just silly to talk about its destruction as a "social issue" or frill.

But how to express this? People across the political spectrum still do not appreciate that Schumacher's book was about achieving economic, production and societal relationships which value not control and M-O-R-E, but democracy and quality. The growth coalition had achieved such a grip on language and the public imagination that despite the attention Schumacher received in this country, his ideas entered a political debate dominated by growth metaphors and the language of growth only to be transformed into meek metaphors in the language of blight. Schumacher's book title was in the language of quantity, and his commercialization popularized him as an advocate of the opposite of big, not as an advocate of different relationships between individual and society, between people and nature. Schumacher himself sought to resist the growth debate. But *Small Is Beautiful* was sucked right into it.

Looking Backward

Schumacher and others who looked behind the smokescreens of the great growth '60s were trashing the affirmation of growth strategies. What they saw were chemical, auto, military, agribusiness and space corporations getting bigger and richer, using more resources, expanding their control over communities and political decision-making, tearing into the Earth's capital. They saw a construction industry lobbying for massive projects. They saw absentee ownership and corporate swallowings: from 1962-1968 alone, 110 of the Fortune 500 firms were absorbed. Research and development -- most of it taxpayer-financed -- were creating new capacities in automation, space and genetic engineering. The CIA industry was increasing its ability to interfere with people abroad. A bloody war in Asia had cost \$30 billion per year at its peak, with killing, killing, killing. Ambitious plans to harness elaborate, delicate, unnecessary, life-destroying technologies around the world were being made. Government and corporations were deliberately consolidating wealth and power via the military, manufacturing, financing and information processing realms.

Schumacher saw the purveyors of growth putting more heat on subscribers to growth in order to control more, produce more, sell more, get more, give less. To be sure, the purveyors were orchestrating this within the metaphors of growth, killing language for all the camouflage it could provide. And the various interest groups of the growth coalition had so swallowed the marbles of what Stanley Aronowitz has called "equity through expansion" that by the early 1970s they had become patsies for the purveyors.

Today, it is vital to look again at cause and effect. Democratic incursions into so many arenas -- civil rights, housing, employment, government at local, state and national levels; the increased access to education, to food, to social services; the reduction of poverty; the public health and environmental improvements -- all of which occurred from 1960 to 1980 -- came from the organizing which swept society beginning with the stirrings of the modern civil rights movement in the late 1950s. It was not "growth" which brought nutrition to the

malnourished, but political organizing. It was not "growth" which ended segregation, but planning, marching, demonstrating, politicking, dying, the scaring of legislators, editors and civic leaders into action. It was not "growth" which brought millions out of poverty, but intentional shifts of investments by industry and government coerced by people who had educated themselves and mobilized themselves. It was not "growth" which raised consciousness about health and environment, but educating and organizing. On issue after issue, people forced themselves into closed circles of decision-making with specific demands and backed by organized public pressure.

For a while, people were successful at changing values, changing criteria, changing investments. But their reforms did not go to the heart of the growth process. And as victories were being chalked up, the purveyors of growth were methodically building credit for whatever progress was occurring into the language and metaphor of growth. At the same time, they were shrinking the circles of decision-making, strengthening their control over the processes of growth to take it all back, and more.

The Fly

There was a problem during those years for the purveyors: environmentalists. These folks burst as if from the blue -- from the linguistic blue as much as from anyplace -- at the end of the great growth decade. They had been influenced some by the cultural and political upheavals of the day, by assembly line resistance at the Lordstown auto factory and other sites of production, by war and civil rights protests, by union democracy and student democracy struggles. But essentially the environmentalists strode alone -- without genuine roots in other movements and disciplines, with little historical sense of the struggles for political and economic power which had characterized our nation's past. They had little knowledge of or interest in "production", "distribution", and "work" issues, few personal or political ties to people who did. As the Conservation Foundation's Grant Thompson wrote, environmentalists were motivated by "widespread dissatisfaction with the costs that careless technology was imposing on the common good." ("Environment," May, 1985). Basically, they brought new information, the beginnings of new language, energy and creativity, and they hollered: there are too many side effects, too many people, we've got to start looking at the whole Earth.

Although grass roots environmentalists in general were not necessarily conscious in the late 1960's about challenging arrangements and decisions for production, they certainly were asking the nation to scrutinize particular technologies and development projects such as the Super Sonic Transport, nuclear power and weapons, the Alaska Pipeline, dams, highways, chemicals, etc. They were, in their own way, asking that purveyors consider specifics and quality, and be accountable. Of course, the purveyors rushed with their subscribers and enforcers to make environmentalists into one more special interest group. And that is how institutionalizing environmentalists began to be perceived by the constituencies of growth, by the press, by politicians ... and by the left.

But this is not how environmentalists saw themselves. Imagine their surprise and heartburn when they found they were being confronted not only by the purveyors of growth but also by righteous constituencies of consumers, wage-earners and the discriminated against. Imagine

the confusion of anti-pollutionists, people who believed they were alerting the world to real danger, when the growth coalition branded them anti-progress, anti-growth, anti-worker, anti-technology and Luddites to boot. Even though polls showed deep and consistent support for the environment by Americans from all walks of life, Environmentalists (as one union bumper sticker said) were polluting the E-C-O-N-O-M-Y.

No Help

People coming to the political arena motivated by health and environmental issues in the early 1970s thus found themselves put on the defensive by fellow victims of the growth system who had embraced the promises and strategies of growth. This was curious, as the environmental movement certainly was not calling for radical transformation of society. Indeed, as the movement institutionalized based on labor and civil rights models, it sought the credibility and respectability which came from being permitted past the growth ticket window. Environmental organizations were settling for curbs, for pollution control, for amelioration of side effects, for laws which were licenses to pollute, with government bureaucracies to define and enforce those laws. They were not challenging the structure and processes of growth. They did not set out to interfere with the relationship which the leaders of growth-oriented constituency groups had with the owners. Rather than harming the source of all success -- economic growth -- the environmentalists sought to encourage corporate and government investment in sustainable growth.

Gradually, the locus of environmentalism began to shift from cities and towns around the country to Washington DC. The taming of environmentalists, and the guiding of environmentalism into the growth framework, was assured.

The movement still has not broken through the language or the politics of growth. Even conscious and articulate no-growthers -- such as those at Zero Population Growth and Friends of the Earth -- locked themselves into the same dead end as Schumacher's book title. Most environmental group officials believed that effectiveness required focusing attention on specific acts of polluters, not on the investments and empires of polluters/employers. They were careful not to draw attention to threads running through scores of problems and political fights, or to the institutional arrangements which (predictably) led to destructive and inequitable societal decisions. "Pragmatic" senators and congresspeople achieved "the best they could," and helped make environmental lobbyists pragmatic as well.

For the environmental movement, credibility was not to be sought integrating health and environmental problems and solutions into the array of investment, production and foreign policy decisions which were shaping the nation's and the planet's future. Single, separate issues were the rule: consider the strenuous efforts made by nuclear power and nuclear weapons protesters to keep their distances from one another. There just did not seem to be much of a political sense that democratizing investment decision-making and breaking up concentrations of wealth and power would be efficient ways of protecting public health and the environment. The reality of growth politics, in concert with upper class traditions of the Theodore Roosevelt era conservation movement, encouraged institutionalizing environmentalists to believe they could do better by dealing with the purveyors of growth than by mobilizing great numbers of disparate victims of growth to help build political

power to have America's overdue debate to plot democracy.

Why Not

There were too many people, institutions, traditions and bad histories in the way. Take, for example, a labor connection. It is interesting that the most powerful, liberal union -- the United Auto Workers -- was the principal labor organization which reached out to befriend the fledgling environmental movement in the late 1960's. Consciously or not, the impact of the leading membership-based influence within the growth consensus was to help guide environmentalism within the growth fold. Although I am sure there were and are many within the UAW who would object that this was not the union's intention when it provided staff, money and other resources for conferences, campaigns and training, I believe that the impact of this relationship, given the limits which the UAW as an institution had itself embraced, was significant. It was true that under Walter Reuther efforts had been made to raise issues of shop floor democracy and alternative production; and it was true that until 1978 the UAW was a vital and reliable source of money, resources and encouragement to a range of people and groups struggling for social justice. Nevertheless, the union was so locked into the growth consensus, into the politics of growth and the language of growth and the contracts of growth (with wages pegged to productivity increases yet), that its own basic interests were not seen to be served by a truly radical environmental movement.

By a truly radical movement, I mean one which sought not permission from the purveyors of growth, but rather to unmask the growth system and to change it; which sought to explain health and environmental destruction in the same light as high and persistent unemployment, meaningless work, persistent poverty, interventionism abroad while showing the way to changes in values and relationships between citizens and producers; and which waged each campaign in ways that made these connections clearer and clearer, and concentrated on helping people and communities not currently part of the decision-making to achieve more and more self-governing authority.

Spoilsport

Some environmentalists did pursue these goals, and even struggled for allies among the deceived of the growth coalition. There was, however, little support for such efforts from the institutionalizing movement. The temptation to cut deals behind closed class doors, to slice off pieces of the ecology rather than fight out underlying questions of control, proved as great for them as similar temptations had been to labor and civil rights leaders. This meant that inherent in the framing of just about every "environmental" issue were built-in contradictions between quantity and quality ... between control and democracy ... between jobs and the environment. It meant that each struggle fomented by the environmental movement highlighted these contradictions, and that the movement's overall effect was perceived by many to be a wet blanket on the promises and strategies of growth.

This was reflected by the fallout accompanying the 1972 publication of *The Limits To Growth*. The Club of Rome's 198 page volume set out to ask; "How much growth will the physical system [the Earth] support? What will be needed to sustain economic growth?"

The book's big answer to these and related queries was that "growth will lead to the limits to growth."

Now what were people supposed to do with this? As Henry Wallich wrote in *Business and Society Review*: "It is hard to believe that people would put up with the inequities existing today if there was no prospect of growth. Without growth, inequality would lose its rationale." The purveyors knew this, and so they mobilized the enforcers of the growth coalition to reinvigorate hope by getting any possible live political metaphors safely back into the grave.

Trends, Trends, Trends

On one level, the *Limits* message was simple enough: trends in industrialization, population, malnutrition, depletion of non-renewable resources, and deteriorating environments indicated that without major changes the industrialized world was headed for serious trouble. And *Limits* dared to suggest that the answer to the world's needs was not, simply, M-O-R-E. But given that the book defined growth problems only as destructive side effects; given the absence of channels for debating what to do with our productive capacity; given the absence of discussion in this book (and in the political arena in general) on extending democratic processes to investment and work realms, *Limits* could offer only one alternative to save the planet: L-E-S-S.

L-E-S-S was not likely to be popular among people putting up with inequities and tyrannies because they harbored hope for M-O-R-E.

Not surprisingly, the million dollar wrath of the purveyors, along with their economists, scientists, politicians, academics and the press, rose to frame the vigorous debate that followed *The Limits To Growth's* publication as M-O-R-E vs. L-E-S-S. And they condemned the environmental rabble roaming wild since Earth Day 1970 as anti-worker, anti-poor, anti-developing nation, anti-technology, anti-capitalist, anti-progress.

But wait. Those responsible for *Limits* were not the rabble. Jay Forrester, whose World Dynamics Model was both inspiration and basis for the work, was professor of management at the MIT Sloan School of Management. He had been an inventor of servo-mechanisms, of digital information storage technologies and industrial controls. He and his staff, headed by Donella and Dennis Meadows, made their models and plugged in their data and concluded that existing trends pointed to severe problems. And many members of the Club of Rome were industrialists and future-oriented thinkers, apparently desiring to continue to be both.

Their book said in the language of growth that growth could not continue apace. And a great debate began. But it was not a debate inspired by radical ecologists seeking, in the words of Andre Gorz, "social, economic and cultural revolution that abolishes the constraints of capitalism and in so doing, establishes a new relationship between the individual and society, between people and nature." And it was not a debate abetted by a vigorous left helping the victims of the successes of growth to grasp the new ecological information *Limits* was presenting.

Because it was so locked into the language of growth, into the system of growth, the book did not help raise issues of authority and community, control and quality. As far as the book was concerned, human empowerment and changes in producer-worker-consumer relationships via political processes were not in the cards. Rather, the principal hope of the planet lay in science and technology, in experts world-wide getting together to lead the way to some kind of stable state world economy.

To give them their due, the authors of *Limits* were clearly groping for ways to call attention to the finiteness of resources and the planet's vulnerability. Obviously, other issues crossed their minds -- although apparently not that the process of growth and the impacts of growth were one and the same. Thus they did not seek to break free from the growth framework or the language of growth, and in fact used the "growth-no growth" formulation themselves ... allowing only that once growth had "stopped," some additional attention would have to be directed to distributional equity.

In addition, the book drew a number of assumptions from the very maw of the growth system, each of which set the stage for discussion only in the context of M-O-R-E vs. L-E-S-S. For example: "One of the best indications of the wealth of a human population is the amount of energy it consumes per person." If ever there was a definition which leads directly to a massive energy industry, unbridled by public hands, wreaking havoc in our names for jobs and, progress, this is one.

The Debate That Wasn't

The debate following publication of *The Limits To Growth* was long and passionate. And because we have had that debate on growth vs. no growth, many people today believe we have had the great debate on production and democracy. In addition, the purveyors of growth learned that before the whole pollution and inequity mess blew up in their faces, they needed to step up their economic and political controls over money, resources, technology, workers and consumers. And they saw that to the extent to which they could get the press and politicians, and even environmentalists and workers, to see "growth vs. no growth," the purveyors would hold the advantage. For in a contextless contest far from specifics and live metaphor, that is, in a debate between M-O-R-E and L-E-S-S, it is easy to isolate the advocates of L-E-S-S by manipulating the victims of M-O-R-E: labor, minorities, farmers, military industry workers, etc., -- all those with hopes tied to growth.

Limits, and the debate it stimulated and the memories it leaves, did their share to scare off many within the left and labor and other constituencies who might have been open to integrating ecological values into broader equity agendas beyond growth politics. Thus were young, emerging environmentalists even more on their own. And thus were environmental agendas through the 1970s gathered around "side effects" and "impacts." To be respectable, that is, to be accepted within the national political arena by philanthropists, politicians and the media, environmentalists found their own kind of adjectival growth -- the favorites being "sustainable", "qualitative", and "high-tech led". Struggles were not planned and conducted in ways which helped educate environmentally-interested people about the threads which wound through so many political issues, which linked the so-called "single issues." Paths were not opened to the heart of the growth system, and the hands of the growth purveyors

were not revealed.

In the late 1970s, for example, when anti-nuclear, safe energy and pro-solar movements were at their peak, many institutional advocates -- myself included -- tried to keep our critique and recommendations in the safe context of M-O-R-E. We said the nation could grow with solar and conservation investments. In addition, many solar advocates scurried to distance themselves from people seeking dismantling of the petroleum and nuclear corporations despite their understanding of the need to force the shift of hundreds of billions of dollars out of their pockets. Even though safe energy activists wanted to take money and power away from them that had, political strategies focused on reassuring the growth coalition and the purveyors of growth that no one was really after their control and profits. Let the purveyors bring us solar energy and provide all the appropriate technologies. Everyone should be warm and happy.

The acid rain debate follows a similar pattern, as do controversies around toxics and weapons of mass destruction. So much attention is paid to scrubbers and control and dispersal technology. But working and producing differently, by changing ways energy, toxics and national security decisions are made and changing our production goals, are not part of the debates. It is like all the talk on "industrial policy" which does not ask what products and services we need, and how we go about producing them in ways which dignify people and protect the Earth, not demean people and destroy our home.

Growth Rings

The 1984 elections affirmed the strength of the growth consensus among Democrats, Republicans, and within every organized constituency including the liberal/left. Amazing, isn't it, considering the extent to which so many have been taking it on the chin ... all those Republican "moderates" and Democratic "liberals", the environmentalists, women's movement, unions, minorities, farmers, who have been clawing their way into the politics of M-O-R-E. In 1984, as in earlier years, they demanded nothing from candidates in return for their money and support. Post-election reflection did not open the door for another look at ownership and control. Growth was still IT. Move to Growth, they advise one another. Go with Growth. The Americans For Democratic Action's annual conference explored how best to combine growth with equity. When Senator Kennedy delivered his March 29 speech to position himself for repositioning, he declared that he is "totally convinced that the indispensable condition of compassion is economic growth." Carnoy and Costello, writing in *World Policy Journal* (Spring 1984) advised us to figure out how to help the "losers of growth." They refrained from suggesting that the only "winners" are the few increasing their dominance over investments, resources, technologies, people, governments and the planet.

Much of the left still harkens back to the great growth 60s -- when so many "social" gains were achieved because GNP was measured through the roof. And irony of ironies, many environmentalists also look back to those same days. Worldwatch Institute's *State of the World 1985* details human tragedy around the globe due to destruction of air, water and soil in pursuit of growth. But Worldwatch is no less growth nostalgic than the left. There is no suggestion that the promises and strategies of M-O-R-E are not neutral, as Lappé and Collins said, but masquerades for maintenance of control and inequity. The book's final chapter is

titled "Getting Back on Track." What track did they have in mind? The 60s. And the book's recommendations? Like *Limits*, scientists and technologists must take the lead in stimulating new growth, better growth, sustainable growth. It is not for people to take charge of their own resources, labor and communities. Self governance is not an option.

As the US goes to high-tech and services, uncomely corporations are bringing old and new growth to other lands. But who's looking at the way international purveyors of growth, together with corporatized governments, are tightening their grip over everything and everybody? Who's redefining all the frilly environmental issues in those countries? After all, the planet needs M-O-R-E.

Weknowbetter

We know better. There have been many efforts to expose the insolent muddled language and controlling mechanisms of the few, to break through their anti-democratic flatulence and anti-life politics. Little in this essay is new. But each generation needs to examine these points again and again ... especially as the purveyors garnish M-O-R-E to appear even more essential, and ethical to boot.

We know enough to acknowledge that inequality and ecological destruction are not social side effects of a self-appointed minority's noblesse oblige, but what logically happens in the absence of democracy. This may be a scary thought, but you know it's true.

We know that creating democracy here and abroad is essential for undoing the arrangements and the practices of M-O-R-E. This won't be easy but so what?

People can take heart. Precedents exist. There are people who come to the political arena because of environmental destruction and human suffering, along with people energized because of inequity and human suffering, who understand that social justice and ecological sanity require control, accountability, community, democracy. They see the need to talk about what we make and how, about money, decision-making, about work and resources, about vegetables and trains, electricity and heat, day care and schools, poisons and health, income and jobs, neighborhoods, farms, recycling, conservation and direct democracy.

Alan Wolfe, for example, has gone beyond his Sophie Tuckerism. Writing in the *Nation*, September 22, 1984, he urged us to challenge the notion that "America does not produce enough," and that what we need do is "unleash growth and productivity." According to Wolfe, "the left must take the lead in asking what kind of values America should embody. Commitment to growth and imperial expansion make it impossible to raise such questions."

Stanley Aronowitz, in *Working Class Hero* (1983), understands that "growth has become a metaphor for progress and economic expansion; that no-growth positions inhibit the building of a new political bloc ... foreclosing the chance of a serious challenge to the macro prescription for solving" our problems.

Grass roots Greens are talking and assembling here and in other countries. They are trying to penetrate production and work issues, to find energizing and innovative organizing

strategies. The New England Committee of Correspondence, for example, is talking about "a decentralized world of self-governing but cooperatively interrelated communities and regions in which both political and economic democracy are joined, in which both social and ecological responsibility are practiced."

Deep Ecologists are trying to redefine human relationships with all living creatures and with the Earth. They are creating new language shaped by biology and characterized by quality. They are groping for cosmologies rooted in appreciation of and defense of the natural world ... with an eye on the political process. As Norwegian Arne Naess puts it: "Ecology as science does not ask what kind of society would be best for maintaining a particular ecosystem -- that is considered a question of values theory, of politics, of ethics." But implicit is that "certain outlooks or politics or public policy flow naturally from this consensus."

So

So let us talk about what we want. Let's have long overdue debates on history, production, equity, work, ecology and democracy -- not in the tongues of the purveyors but in the language of life and quality -- the language of free human beings.

Imagine we the people governing ourselves. Challenging global corporations and militarized governments. Choosing to leave people, places and species around the Earth alone. Crafting equitable financial and trading relationships with less powerful counties and countries. Figuring out resource, labor and production democratically. Subtly refurbishing people and the Earth. Traveling across issue, constituency and country borders talking not L-E-S-S, but D-I-F-F-E-R-E-N-T.

Such imaging can start with uprooting growth as metaphor. Expunging growth as politics.

About the Author

Richard Grossman first wrote this essay in 1985, and published it in his *Wrenching Debate Gazette*. Resisting the temptation to interpret the last 15 years, he made only minor changes for this edition of *Blueprint for Social Justice*. Grossman had just completed a decade as director of Environmentalists for Full Employment (EFFE), a small Washington DC-based group which nurtured a little comradery and solidarity between the labor and environmental movements. Over the next decade, he published occasional *Gazettes*, worked with people convening citizen hearings on the poisoning and destruction of their communities, helped set up STP (Stop the Poisoning) Schools at Highlander Center in Tennessee, departed Washington, and began looking into corporate, legal and constitutional histories. In 1993, he co-authored "Taking Care of Business: Citizenship And the Charter of Incorporation ." In 1995, he co-founded the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy (POCLAD) to provoke challenges to the corporate governing of our communities, our nation and the Earth. Grossman can be reached c/o POCLAD, PO Box 246, S. Yarmouth MA 02664; email:people@poclad.org.