

## **Building a Process Towards a New Paradigm World: *with some modest suggestions***

*By Ian Burton*

Here are a suggested three of the myriad steps that could help to bring about a New Paradigm World.

1. Substantially heighten the level of collective global responsibility for many issues. One example would be to make the prevention of natural disasters a common human responsibility under international law instead of the present agreement that disasters are a matter of “common concern”.
2. Significantly expand the concept of democracy from being mainly applied to and within nation states to the population of the whole earth. One step in this direction would be to create a bicameral legislature within the United Nations such that the present General Assembly becomes the Upper House and a new Lower House is established on the basis of one person one vote. Election would be by geographical constituencies and not on a nation state basis.
3. Attempt to strengthen the sense of global solidarity and collective consciousness. A small and easy step would be the creation of four global and universal holidays or festive days to celebrate the unity of humankind.

These thoughts occurred to me after having read a concept paper currently circulating in the World Academy of Art and Science community. (WAAS 2013). This paper proposes the formulation of a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of the multiple challenges facing humanity in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (p.1 Summary). At a time of widespread anxiety and pessimism it adopts a very positive position. Its central premise is “that viable, effective solutions can be found to meet the entire spectrum of economic, ecological, political and social challenges”. (P.1 Summary ) This is thought to require fresh thinking and the formulation of a new paradigm to replace the existing paradigm of global development which “is based on a set of spurious assumptions, premises and principles which may have had some utility in the past but now represent serious impediments to .....progress”. (p.3). A question raised in the agenda for a meeting on the New Paradigm Project to be held in Ottawa September 16-18 2013 asks “How can global food security, full employment and abolition of poverty be achieved within a decade?” Most would acknowledge that the task described is visionary and doubtless some would say naïve. A case is made that the implementation of a new paradigm “could quickly usher in a world far more stable, secure, prosperous and just than the world we live in today” (p.5).

### **Four characteristics of the new intellectual paradigm are stated as:**

-It fully comprehends the interrelationships and interdependence of all dimensions of global society and social development.

-Its goal is to optimize human welfare and well-being for all human beings.

-It recognises that universal human values are not merely inspiring ideals. These values are the only viable basis on which sustainable progress for humanity is achievable.

-It gives central importance to the full development and utilization of Human Capital as the driving force and social Capital as the most essential enabling technology for rapid social evolution.

The task of formulating a comprehensive strategy is clearly substantial and requires the specification of many specific policies and actions. The use of the word “paradigm” however, suggests a rather concise formulation as when one paradigm fails and is replaced by another. How the process occurs in science has been described in terms of the accumulation of more and more evidence that conflicts with the existing paradigm and thus leaves opportunity for the emergence of a new paradigm. As the Concept Paper shows there is now abundant evidence that the current paradigm is no longer supported by the evidence. Hence the need to formulate and implement a new paradigm. Such a paradigm shift would enable the new more desirable and more sustainable world to emerge. The pattern of inevitable change can occur either by “an enlightened evolutionary transition now or by more violent revolutionary upheavals in the future”. (p.5)

Two major changes are cited which took an undesirable form, namely in Revolutionary France and in Czarist Russia. Six examples are given of radical change ushered in by far sighted leaders “who recognized the urgent need for rapid social evolution”.

**The six examples are:**

-England sought to avoid a repetition of the bloodshed that wiped out the French aristocracy by opening up to the prospering middle class a greater share of political power and responsibility.

-The United Kingdom became the first of the imperial powers to systematically dismantle its global empire with the granting of independence to India in 1947, quickly followed by the independence of 50 other subject nations .

-The founding of the European Union after the end of World War II.

-The dissolution of the authoritarian power structure of the USSR from within by Mikhail Gorbachov.

-The pushing through of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment abolishing slavery at the end of the Civil War by Abraham Lincoln.

-The radical reform of the US banking system and the subsequent implementation of the New Deal by Franklin Roosevelt.

Each of these positive examples is somewhat different, but they all involve a change in circumstances such that the old paradigm is seen to be failing. They also involve a more or less gradual process leading to a major decision point. The avoidance of a French-style revolution in England involved many evolutionary social changes. The independence of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was preceded by many incremental moves in that direction over many decades. Similarly the development of the EU has been a steady process which still

continues. The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent actions by Mikhail Gorbachov took many by surprise but in hindsight they can be seen as salient or concluding events coming after a period of growing malfunctions. Abraham Lincoln was a key figure in the abolition of slavery but the glacially slow emancipation of African Americans had started earlier in a modest way and arguably still continues. And the New Deal did not happen all at once. What do these examples have to teach with respect to the major changes now needed?

There seem to be at least three ingredients. 1. A radical change in circumstances and understanding and the recognition of the need for change under the guidance of a new understanding or vision (the new paradigm). 2. The progressive introduction of change in incremental steps again guided by the new paradigm. 3. Major decisions made often under strong leadership. This suggests that in addition to the formulation and articulation of a New Paradigm it would be useful to identify and promote incremental changes that are now occurring and others that could be proposed and considered.

The global scale of the problematique is one key difference between these historical examples and present day circumstances. The six examples provided in the Concept Note were all limited in spatial extent, and hence could be compared with other similar circumstances in other countries. Now the need for a comprehensive strategy and a detailed policy framework has emerged in relation to a set of problems and circumstances that do not lend themselves to localized solutions. To find a New Paradigm and to implement it requires more than a national society or context, and more than the existing interrelationships and interdependence. Lacking in the present circumstances at the global level are an adequate sense of shared global responsibility; a sufficiently democratized system of global governance; and a strong sense of global solidarity and “one world” awareness. As stated in the Concept Note, “An international legal system predicated on a dated conception of national sovereignty is applied to sustain an undemocratic system of global governance”.

The present paradigm includes an understanding of natural disasters that attributes such events largely to natural causes. The human response is heavily weighted toward the scientific understanding of the “causal” (or more correctly “triggering”) event, and humanitarian response in the form of emergency relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. The underlying and common causes of disaster losses receive much less attention and in media reports are scarcely recognized at all. The more complete and accurate understanding (new paradigm) involves a recognition that disasters are not isolated unique events in time and space but are symptoms of a pattern of growth and development which facilitates and encourages increases in exposure and vulnerability. Thus despite greatly increased scientific understanding (and in some cases predictive capacity) of the triggering events, and much improved knowledge of the extent of hazardous localities, as well as improved materials for infrastructure and other construction, losses from “natural” hazards continue to grow at a rapid rate. A disproportionate amount of property and number of people are put into harms way by the expansion of human settlements into known areas of high risk, and standards of design and construction are too low and often not well enforced. At the last major international conference on disaster risk reduction held in Kobe, Japan in 1995, the draft of the final conference declaration included the phrase describing natural disasters as “a common global responsibility”. In the course of closed intergovernmental discussion this phrase was changed to “a common global concern”. The implications of a shared responsibility were a step too far some of the richer and more highly developed nations.

Perhaps one reason for an unwillingness to share responsibility more widely is the sense that the attendant actions and costs would fall more heavily upon the richer countries. Much of international governance is designed to safeguard the interests of the rich and powerful. More progress in the design and implementation of the new paradigm might be made if governance could be reformed gradually in the direction of greater democracy. In the New Paradigm paper an argument is made for the avoidance of a French Revolution or a Bolshevik Revolution in the United Kingdom “by opening up a greater share of political power and responsibility” (p2). The creation of a bicameral legislative body at the United Nations would be a bold step in this direction. As has happened in the constitutional arrangements of many nations this would not mean a sudden and dramatic change in governance. The powers of the Lower House might be quite limited at the outset but could be expected to grow with a growing sense of responsibility and the capacity to share it. In a new Lower House members would be elected on something closer to a one-person-one-vote basis. A set of constituencies or electoral districts would be created and elections held across the world on a regional and perhaps a language basis but not on a national basis. As in the evolution of democratic governance in the UK, universal franchise might be initially curtailed by some requirements or constraints.

It seems self-evident that a New Paradigm has to include a sense of the emergence of a global society. There are some rapid informal steps in this direction with the emergence of the new communications technologies. But progress is very slow in the formal institutions of governance. The world’s legislative body, The General Assembly of the United Nations, has very limited powers and such capacity as does exist is heavily circumscribed by the overriding authority of the Security Council which is limited in membership and where the five “permanent members”, (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) have veto power. The G7 has grown into the G8 and a G20 has also been formed. This is a slow expansion towards a wider sharing of power, but it has not been accompanied by a growing sense of collective responsibility or a growing global solidarity. A growing number of nation states subscribe to the ideals of democracy, but the idea of a global democracy is clearly a non-starter in today’s world of the continued dominance of national sovereignty.

One result of the lack of global solidarity and the domination of (relatively few) nation states is the rapidly expanding global flows in some sectors such as finance, the arms trade, trade in other goods and commodities, and especially the flow of communications, and the very restricted flow in others. It is ironic that while people across the world can see and learn about each other with relative ease, and exchange funds, goods and ideas, often in a competitive way, it is comparatively difficult to move from one part of the world to another except on business or as a tourist with strong visa constraints. The threat of migration whether for economic reasons or driven by environmental or security threats is an challenge to global governance which seems insurmountable with or without a new paradigm, given the continuing power of (a small number) of nation states.

Whatever the changes emerging from the New Paradigm it will more difficult to achieve relatively peaceful evolutionary change without a substantial growth in a global sense of community or solidarity. Any steps that might lead in this direction should be considered. I would like to suggest for example the creation of four global one day holidays or days of celebration. These would coincide with the dates of the two solstices and the two equinoxes. Many religions already have festivals or holy days the timing of which is derived from the apparent migration of the sun north and south during the course of the year, proceeding to a

vertical position over the Tropic of Cancer on June 20<sup>th</sup> and returning to a vertical position over the Tropic of Capricorn on December 21, and passing vertically over the equator on March 20<sup>th</sup> and September 22. The designation of these four dates as days of global significance and solidarity would not be based on any belief system, religion, or set of cultural values but simply on astronomical events shared by all inhabitants of Planet Earth.

These three modest suggestions of a collective responsibility for the management of natural disasters; a global bicameral legislative body and four global festive or holidays days are illustrative of the sorts of innovations that might help in both the formulation and implementation of the New Paradigm. One useful step in the paradigm discussions might be the creation of a long list of such innovations that could be grouped and classified and introduced into public debate as a way of preparing the ground for the major and evolutionary changes that the WAAS community hopes to help bring about.

Perhaps the most fundamental of the requirements for the achievement of a transformed world society is global solidarity and consciousness, and a willingness to share responsibility in the interests of the common good. Progress in such a direction at the national level has often come about in the face of external threats. Indeed national cohesion is often strengthened in times of war and in peacetime by international competition. What could play the role of such threats to the whole global community in order to promote solidarity? One tempting thought is that anthropogenic climate change could be seen as such an “enemy” or threat. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change signed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992) does recognize that the impacts of climate change are a “common responsibility”. The actual text states, “The Parties should protect the climate system for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” (Article 3.1) Such a statement of principles embodied in a UN Convention has not been sufficient to overcome this overwhelming “tragedy of the global commons”, or even to make significant progress in agreeing on how to address it. In the view of many atmospheric scientists and other experts unless collective action is taken the consequences promise to be severe and in the longer run catastrophic for all peoples and all nations.

There is another “softer” response to climate change that seems to be in the air although not frequently articulated. This is that nations, other levels of government; the private sector and civil society will each contribute to the needed response by each doing what is appropriate and feasible in its own circumstances and capacities. In other words the change will be achieved by voluntary actions in the absence of a globally binding agreement. The weakness of this argument is that it allows for “free rider” behaviour and hence is most unlikely to bring climate change under sufficient control at a fast enough pace. The tragedy of the global commons will persist. Such a diagnosis is leading to growing debate about another escape hatch, that of geoengineering. As the impacts of climate change are more and more strongly and widely experienced speculation is moving to ideas about how to control and/or modify the global atmospheric environment through scientific and technological interventions. These include the reduction of incoming solar radiation by the scattering of chemical particles in the stratosphere, and the seeding of the world’s oceans to promote more carbon dioxide absorption. Such prospects are alarming to many, not least because they offer scope for unregulated unilateral action which could have severe and unintended consequences, as well as unanticipated differential impacts across the earth affecting some places in extremely adverse fashion.

Can the management of the climate change issue help to increase global consciousness and solidarity, and bring in a new era of shared and common responsibility within a more democratic system of global governance? As the cartoon character Pogo said many years ago, “We have seen the enemy, and he is us”.