2. The Threat to the Underclass

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Projecting the future is very uncertain business. Nothing is more certain than that there will be surprises. History never moves smoothly along expected lines.

What can be said with some certainty is that projection of present directions leads to catastrophe. Current rates of growth in population and in per capita consumption cannot be sustained. Great expansion of both is still possible in principle, especially assuming increased efficiency in the use of resources, continuing technological advances, reduced warfare and military expenditures, and major social adjustments. Surprising developments can extend this possibility even further than can now be imagined.

The cost of this continuation of present trends will be enormous. Remaining wilderness will disappear, with great reduction of biodiversity. Agricultural production will be more and more dependent on high-tech methods. Increasing dependence on chemicals and bioengineering will have now-unpredictable effects on human health. Nuclear energy will be relied on regardless of the dangers involved. Higher levels of pollution will have to be tolerated.

Although this scenario seems more optimistic than its alternative of earlier collapse of the system, it is, in some respects, more frightening. By postponing adjustments for a long time, indeed, until the surface of the earth and human relations have all been adapted to high tech and to full global integration, they lead to a situation in which the eventual failure of the system will affect everyone catastrophically. Even the knowledge of how to survive apart from the expertise of the technocrats...
will have been lost, and the sources for subsisting from nature will have been destroyed. Hence, although now-dominant forces will hold this course as long as possible, and most people are likely to support them, this may well be the most destructive of the possible scenarios.

The surprises in store for us may not be of this sort. They may instead be crises that strike us much sooner than we expect. Changes in weather may appear more abruptly than now anticipated, and they may prove more disruptive of agricultural production globally than now projected. These changes might lead to mass migrations to places where there is food, migrations that will be violently resisted. Bacteria and viruses may evolve faster than our devices for protecting ourselves from them, leading to population reduction through massive epidemics. People oppressed by the continual expansion of the present system may revolt in much larger numbers than in the past and may cause social chaos. The psychological stresses associated with the present system may overwhelm it as it continues to assault human community and demand the abandonment of all security. Fanatic political or religious movements may gain such power as fundamentally to disrupt the economic system.

I am making no such predictions. Surprises cannot be predicted. The likelihood is that what happens will not fit any pattern now imaginable to us. Perhaps some surprises will favor the continuation of growth and others will lead to major setbacks. The greatest surprise would be the emergence of a widespread recognition that the continuing pursuit of growth is a mistake. Such a surprise is not impossible, and to that possibility we will return.

Having acknowledged the likelihood that present trends will not simply continue into the future, I will nevertheless describe these as they now appear in the United States and point out some of the already emerging negative features that threaten to become steadily worse. These are the dark side of policies and procedures that are now almost universally accepted and affirmed. Basically these policies and procedures express the "economism" that is now the dominant spiritual force in the world, the belief that the economic sector is the one hope of salvation and that it affects this salvation through growth.¹

¹. My sources, other than general information and the article by Kaplan for which data are provided in the text, are not in regularly published documents. For my comments on Cuba I am indebted to a Food First Action Alert, spring 1994, entitled "The
Because of the victory of "economism" since World War II, national governments have relinquished power in favor of the Bretton Woods institutions and the transnational corporations. It is the decisions of these economic institutions that now determine the fate of the planet. Their primary goal is to facilitate the increase of gross world product through overcoming all remaining restrictions on the movement of capital and goods across national boundaries.

Because national boundaries still inhibit the movement of workers, the mobility of capital and goods puts the workers in each country into competition with those in others. This competitive situation exerts a downward pressure on wages in affluent countries. It also discourages standards of workplace safety and environmental safeguards, and it undercuts the bargaining position of labor unions. Unfortunately, because of the vast number of unemployed and underemployed persons in low-wage countries, it does not exert a comparable upward pressure on wages, standards, or empowerment of labor in the countries to which capital moves.

In sum, the globalization of the market restores the great advantage of capital over labor, which had been eroded during the later years of national markets. In those contexts, labor could organize and bargain with considerable success. Because corporations were competing with other corporations that had to make similar concessions to labor, their resistance to these concessions was limited. Governments were interested in the quality of life of their citizens and hence regulated business in its treatment of workers. The globalization of the market ended this relative equity. Labor unions cannot organize effectively across national boundaries, and no global governmental organizations enforce standards on transnational corporations.

The result is that the gap between those who live from capital and those who live from labor is growing steadily wider. Those who live from capital are not only the financiers themselves but also those dependent on lawyers, managers, technical experts, educators, and

Greening of Cuba" by Peter Rosset and Shea Cunningham. For my information on Kerala I am indebted to an unpublished essay by W. M. Alexander, 30 El Mirador Court, San Luis Obispo, Calif. 93401, entitled "Exceptional Kerala: Efficient and Sustainable Human Behavior." The statistics I cite are found on page 17. The data on the GPI are in a desktop publication of Redefining Progress, 116 New Montgomery, Room 209, San Francisco, Calif. 94105, dated September 1994. It is entitled "The Genuine Progress Indicator: Summary of Data and Methodology," and its authors are Clifford Cobb and Ted Halstead. The detailed statistics are provided on page 39.
specialists of many other kinds who are paid well for their services. In affluent nations perhaps 20 percent of the population enjoy the prosperity of capital.

The remainder of the population is divided between those whose labor is needed in the market and those who are not needed. The unneeded group exists because of surplus labor in general or because persons in the group lack the qualities or skills required to function effectively in the market. In the United States, as farming was displaced by agribusiness and unskilled factory work was sent overseas, this unneeded group grew. It has become a full-fledged underclass.

Such a class has always existed, but it has in the past been a minor element in society. As long as most people lived on farms, there was work for all. Small-scale production could employ persons of a wide range of education, skills, and personality types. Industrial society also provided innumerable unskilled jobs.

Now we have a society in which almost all persons are separated from all means of production. They have been removed from the land. Small-scale local production cannot compete with major industries. And major industries have found it more profitable to employ low-skilled and semiskilled labor in other countries. Because competition in the global market requires constant reduction of labor costs, and because technology can replace even highly skilled labor, the superfluous group grows, and competition for the remaining attractive opportunities intensifies. Reduced use of middle management threatens members of this class as well. Former members of the classes of skilled labor and management are forced to compete for fewer well-paying jobs. All of this makes an increasing segment of our society superfluous from the point of view of production for the market.

When the governments assumed some responsibility to feed, house, and clothe all citizens, programs were instituted to provide a minimum of income for all. As the underclass grows, it claims more from the government through these programs. The programs at the same time discourage the underclass from taking such unskilled, poorly paid positions as are still available. Because welfare pays as well as these jobs, and because these positions no longer lead to better ones, dependence on the government becomes the less unattractive choice for some.

The more enterprising members of the underclass turn to crime. The laws against drugs that are nevertheless in great demand make control of their distribution lucrative and the best chance to escape
permanent poverty. Competition in the underclass for control of distribution contributes to the mutual killing that is so widespread. The crime within the underclass leads to near war between it and the police. At any given time a high percentage of the young males is in prison.

Meanwhile, the declining standard of living and reduced prospects of the working class make its members anxious and angry. Their anger is directed not at the wealthy but at the underclass. The underclass is depicted as being supported by the taxes of workers despite the unwillingness of the underclass to work. Its criminal activity is highlighted, and the need to be protected from it is exaggerated. Little attention is given to the causes of the growth of this unproductive, sometimes violent, and often self-destructive segment of society.

The climate now exists in the United States for withdrawal of governmental support of the underclass. The money saved will be used to strengthen law enforcement and build more prisons. Meanwhile, the economic system increases the size of the underclass, and the withdrawal of public support and concern lead to fewer alternatives to criminal activity and self-destruction. Fewer alternatives intensify the fear and hostility of workers and allow those in power to increase the barriers between the underclass and the remainder of society. Their self-destruction is now accepted so long as they do not disturb the rest of society.

I am here depicting a rapidly emerging situation. The residual compassion for the suffering of the underclass still prevents "the final solution." Those who decrease support for its members are careful in their public rhetoric. But the trend in public opinion and public policy is to abandon this class to its own devices. And if this leads to its self-destruction, few mourn! That most of the members of this class are black and brown makes it easier for the white majority to ignore their suffering and to blame those who suffer for their misery.

Globally, the population that is superfluous in relation to the needs of the market is much larger. It includes a considerable part of Africa, Latin America, and south Asia as well as selected populations in the Middle East. The Palestinian Arabs constitute an especially clear case.

The Jews would have preferred that the Palestinians leave as they conquered Palestine. They have not resorted to extreme measures to eliminate them. They have not practiced genocide. But they have taken
most of the best land and, even more important, most of the water resources, thus drastically restricting the economic opportunities of the Palestinians. They have repressed resistance to these measures and generally allowed few political or civil rights. They have spread their settlements in such a way as to make a genuine Palestinian state unlikely. Although they do make use of some Palestinians as workers, they are reducing this dependence. Survival of Palestinians in the land left to them in the Gaza Strip, for example, will depend on an international largess that is very restricted. With few exceptions, Palestinian Arabs are being forced into underclass status.

This forced underclass status is happening on a much larger scale in Africa. R. D. Kaplan, in a shocking article, “The Coming Anarchy,” published in the February 1994 issue of The Atlantic Monthly, describes the situation in West Africa. In Sierra Leone supplying timber for the global market led to deforestation, which in turn has caused erosion of much of the agricultural land. Much of the rural population has moved to shantytowns around the capital, where the water supply is not differentiated from the sewers. Swamps have appeared where forests once grew, and these breed malarial mosquitoes. Now most persons have a type of malaria that does not respond to standard treatment. AIDS is spreading rapidly. Political order has broken down.

The resources of Sierra Leone are no longer important for the global market. With the end of the cold war, strategic considerations are no longer relevant. The threat of malaria keeps foreigners out. Hence aid depends on charitable concerns, concerns that are not important in global circles. We may thus consider almost all of the population of this country as relegated permanently to the underclass. The world will pay little attention as civil war, hunger, and disease take their course.

Kaplan describes the global increase in shantytowns surrounding the urban centers of “developing” countries. He notes that they vary greatly in their ability to generate livable communities. But the conclusion is that an increasing portion of the vast population that becomes superfluous in rural areas because of modernization of agriculture cannot be absorbed in the industrializing cities. This underclass constitutes a threat to political stability. We may doubt that governments defending themselves against this superfluous population will be particularly hesitant to use near-genocidal means.

Some of the people who are superfluous from the perspective of the market cling to their land in rural areas. Peasant resistance to
displacement by agribusiness occurs in many places. The major warfare that has developed in recent decades is low-intensity conflict by armies against peasant resistance. Because the labor of these peasants is not needed by the developing economy, and their presence hinders modernization, governments are rarely concerned with their political and human rights.

The threat to indigenous peoples is more extreme. In many situations their livelihood is bound up with the forests that are being destroyed in the name of the global market and economic progress. Their defense of these forests is often met with violence, and the destruction of the forests undercuts their way of life and their means of livelihood. The globalization of the market is accompanied by the decline of indigenous populations worldwide. They are not only superfluous but positively stand in the way of progress.

These comments are about the recent past and the present with limited projections into the future. The market creates an underclass, which has occurred nationally in the past as Joseph Tainter and Chris Lewis point out in subsequent chapters. As the market becomes more and more fully global, this underclass grows rapidly and comes to include whole peoples.

When we hear that a billion people in the world are hungry, we are usually told that we should promote economic development through the expansion of the global market to produce the food needed. We are less often told that it is the economic development and the expansion of the global market that has caused most of the hunger. Nor are we usually told that the increased agricultural production generated by modernization of agriculture does not provide food for these people because they have no means to pay for it. In short, we are rarely told that the policies supposedly justified by the needs of the poor are the policies that have made them poor and that add to their numbers year by year.

Because the policies do not tend to include these people in the productive economy but tend to increase the size of the underclass, and because members of this class are too poor to constitute a significant market for the increasing supply of goods, these people are, indeed, superfluous as far as the global economy is concerned. They are already suffering a none too benign neglect and sometimes active attack. When production can no longer keep up with demand because of resource shortages and pollution, we can be sure that it is they who
will suffer first and most acutely. We can be sure of this because it is already happening and because the policies that lead to these results are becoming more fully dominant.

The one restraint on brutal treatment of the underclass is the moral teaching of humanism and of the major religious traditions. This moral restraint is losing its hold on the masses of workers, who think they are asked to make sacrifices for the sake of the underclass. Should significant sacrifices really be asked of them, it is clear that they will refuse.

In our essays for this book we are asked to consider not only the threats to human well-being implicit in present practices as they are projected into a future of real scarcity but also how the foreseeable suffering may be mitigated. In the sections that follow, I will consider, briefly, directions the underclass itself may adopt to reduce threats to its survival. I will then consider, at greater length, the possibility that the working class may call for changes in basic policies that would eventually reincorporate the underclass into the economy. These possibilities also involve changes that could enable society to adapt to growing scarcity in ways that would not be self-destructive.

The one generalization that can be made about the future of the underclass is that it cannot count on help from the dominant society as long as present policies are in force. In the inner cities of the United States and in the slums surrounding Third World cities, this class will be increasingly neglected and contained, even sealed off, from the rest of society. West Africa will be ignored. Resistant peasants and indigenous people will be harassed, will have their leaders imprisoned or killed, and will be forced off their remaining land. Their survival will depend on their own resources under extremely adverse circumstances.

What is astonishing is the extent to which, under such circumstances, many do find ways of surviving, which requires that they establish solidarity among themselves and self-reliance. Kaplan describes the great differences in slums in which new communities are created and in those where such community is absent.

In the inner cities of the United States, the most hopeful developments are those of local self-organization into more self-reliant neighborhoods. When such communities develop, the small sums of money that enter them can circulate internally rather than quickly leaving to pay for external goods and services. The more goods and services the members of such communities can provide for one another, the less dependent they are on gaining external money.
Threat to the Underclass

There are severe limits to the economic independence possible for many inner city communities. Nevertheless, far more can be done than has generally been realized. Even the quantity of food that can be produced locally in urban areas is surprising. Pooling of financial resources can lead to support of local, very small-scale entrepreneurs. Housing repair and maintenance can often be done by local people. Those who have such skills can teach others. When cash is scarce, services can be provided within the neighborhood by barter and labor exchange. As the community meets more of its members’ needs, automobiles become less important.

This buildup of the local community contributes to survival not only by reducing reliance on unreliable external sources but also by improving the self-image of the members. Members of the underclass become self-destructive when they internalize the image held of them by the larger society. To whatever extent they become self-determining they also gain self-respect and respect for one another. Consumption of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco declines, while their costs in crime, money, and human ability become available for constructive use in the neighborhood.

These comments are vague, but they point in the only direction that offers hope. If the wider society involves itself at all, it is to tie the inner city more into the larger economy. This procedure does not work and will not last. The few who are benefited are likely to leave the community. Only if such resources that the larger society is prepared to offer are brought under the control of the community will they benefit the neighborhood in an inclusive way. And this benefit will occur only to the extent that the resources are used to make the community less dependent on the larger society.

These comments are also idealistic. The extent to which they can be implemented in any neighborhood composed largely of the underclass is likely to be limited. To picture any such neighborhood as able to survive without strong ties to the outside seems absurd. Nevertheless, in my projections, it is the only hope. As outside support and positive involvement declines, drastic changes will occur. Where a strong sense of community exists in a neighborhood, these changes may be toward greater mutual support even in desperate conditions. Where it does not, we must expect mutual destruction by persons who are seeking their own survival at the expense of their neighbors.

The survival of whole nations that are superfluous in the global economy depends on similar principles. They will survive to the extent that they
become self-sufficient economically. Their long-term survival will also depend on their sustainable use of their resources.

An interesting case study here is Cuba. Cuba never intended to become a self-sufficient economy. Its economy was long tied into that of the Soviet Union, and in typical market fashion it specialized in producing what it could export to Eastern Europe, chiefly sugar. It imported oil, fertilizer, insecticides, more than half of its food, and industrial equipment and supplies.

When the Soviet empire broke up, the problems with such “interdependence” became apparent. Because of Cuba’s interdependence with the Soviet Union, it could not meet its own basic needs without this trade. This situation would not have been serious if Cuba had been admitted on reasonable terms into the new global trading system. But the price of admission was to abandon its socialist experiment and return to the capitalism from which it had freed itself. Unwilling to do this, it has been forced to move toward a much more self-sufficient economy. Its continued political independence depends on its success in making this difficult move.

The transition is extremely painful. Because Cuba produced less than half of its food, and because even that depended on imported fertilizers and insecticides, the nation was in very poor condition to go it alone. Despite heroic efforts to shift production, food consumption per capita may have dropped by 30 percent! From being a well-fed nation, Cuba has dropped to the level of the poorest of Latin American countries. The only difference is that what food there is is distributed equitably by rationing.

The question is whether Cuba can learn quickly to produce food organically and with human and animal labor. Fortunately, Cuban agronomists had done a great deal of research on alternative farming methods before the crisis, which has enabled Cuba to make relatively rapid progress. If Cuba succeeds in making this transition and feeding its people organically and sustainably, it will mark a first case of successful transition from unsustainable monoculture to sustainable agriculture.

It is far too early to say whether Cuba will succeed. It is being forced to make this transition under enormous hostile pressure from the United States, which is doing all it can to make the transition difficult and to encourage opposition to the government within Cuba. The Cuban people may decide they prefer subservience to the United
States to hunger. On the other hand, there is no clear sign that the will to political independence has died. What has been learned unequivocally is that such political independence is possible only if there is basic economic independence as well.

Even if Cuba succeeds in feeding itself sustainably, there will be many continuing economic problems. Becoming industrially self-sustaining may prove even more difficult. Doing so with a sustainable use of resources may not be possible. The whole experiment may fail. Even if it fails, it will have come close enough to success to suggest that under more favorable circumstances and with more time to make the transition, many countries could still attain relatively sustainable economic self-sufficiency.

It may be unrealistic to think that any country will voluntarily adopt this course. At present most countries have acquiesced in the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund designed to move them further away from self-sufficiency and to bind them more firmly to the global market. They have done so despite the obvious suffering this imposes on their people. Once they have taken these steps, extricating themselves from the market becomes more and more difficult—as difficult as it is proving for Cuba. Nevertheless, it is important to see that political and economic independence may not yet be impossible. And as the price of dependence on the global market to nations at its periphery becomes ever clearer, some of those that are most expendable from the perspective of the global market may follow Cuba’s example.

A qualification is in order here. Cuba has been able to make its own decisions only because of the strength of an army that is loyal to the government. Invasion by the United States would be too costly in American lives to be supported by the American people, and the revolution has been too popular among the people for efforts at subversion to succeed.

These circumstances are unique. The Cuban is the only revolution in Latin America that the United States has allowed to continue for such a long time. Chile, Granada, Panama, and Nicaragua are more typical examples of revolutionary efforts and their destruction. Through direct intervention or through subversion, the United States may continue to prevent other nations from following the Cuban model, even if it continues to succeed. Probably this policy will continue for some time to be true in Latin America. But in Africa and in parts of Asia,
where less is at stake for the United States and the global market, countries unimportant to the global market may be allowed in time to follow Cuba’s examples.

For the underclass, I have argued, as long as the global market reigns supreme, the one hope is disengagement from it. Any neighborhoods or countries that have thus disengaged will have not only a better chance of surviving while the market reigns but also a better chance of surviving its ultimate collapse. Of course, they will not escape the global problems of pollution and weather change. And any resources they preserve for sustainable use may stir the envy of more prodigal neighbors when global shortages are acute. This is not an optimistic scenario.

The long-term hope of the underclass must be that the world’s workers will awaken to the consequences for them of the global market system. This awakening would mean that the anger now directed against the underclass would be redirected against the system that produces this class and works against their own well-being. If this redirection happens widely enough and soon enough, the direction of the economy can still be changed—an occurrence that would be a surprise. It would be the one truly favorable surprise that I can now imagine.

To consider how such a change could occur requires us to consider how matters now stand. Most workers recognize that massive redistribution of existing wealth will not occur. Further, they do not want what little wealth they themselves possess to be redistributed to the underclass. In any case the communist experiment in redistribution is viewed as a total failure. Hence, economic solutions must not require such redistribution.

The solution to economic problems must therefore be economic growth. Growth enables all to gain at the expense of none. The capitalist system best promotes growth. It requires specialization in production, the more the better. The amount of specialization possible is proportional to the size of the market within which capital and goods flow freely. Hence, expanding the market to the entire planet gives maximum opportunity for that growth to occur.

This general picture is so deeply rooted in the common sense of modern culture that even the occurrence of massive counterevidence does little to raise questions about it. For example, during the past twenty years, while economic growth in the United States has contin-
ued unabated, wages have fallen dramatically. The growth of the economy has not benefited workers.

The standard response is that this is a temporary situation to be corrected by further growth and that this further growth requires globalization of the market. This, in turn, requires that U.S. producers become more efficient, and that means that they should employ fewer workers. Thus the downsizing of U.S. companies that directly reduces the number of well-paying jobs available is affirmed as the means of benefiting U.S. workers. In support of this argument economists point out how many new jobs have been generated in the U.S. economy. They rarely point out at the same time that these are less well-paying, less secure jobs, with less prospect for advancement.

This counterfactual defense of globalization as the way of improving the situation of workers is buttressed by blaming other countries for being less open to U.S. goods than the United States is to theirs. Japan is the target of this criticism. Certainly, Japan is internally far less committed to the free market than is the United States. The Japanese government and financial leaders still strive to order the economy to the benefit of the Japanese people as a whole. In this they have been remarkably successful. Of course, their economy as a whole benefits immensely from the openness of U.S. markets to their goods. But even if they surrendered to U.S. pressure and removed all formal restraint on imports, the benefits to U.S. workers would be minimal.

The truth is that the gains made by U.S. labor in a basically national economy are being rapidly eroded in its globalization. There is no reason to suppose that continued globalization will reverse this trend. On the contrary, the only hope for improvement in the conditions of labor is the return to a national economy.

The objection is immediately made that such a return would be less productive, meaning that it would reduce the gross national product (GNP) or the gross domestic product (GDP), or at least slow their increase. Because it is assumed that rapid growth as measured by these indices is of near-ultimate importance for the economic well-being of the nation and its people, this argument is taken as decisive.

Because of the widespread assumption that growth, measured in this way, is desirable, a few efforts have been made to ascertain the relation between such growth and the economic well-being of the people. All economists agree that the correlation is not perfect. Some things are counted in GNP and GDP that do not contribute to economic welfare, and some things that do contribute to economic welfare are not counted.
An example of the former are expenditures on crime that rise with the rate of crime and do not indicate that people are better off. For example, household activities, such as cooking, cleaning, and child care, are essential to the economic well-being of the community. However, while acknowledging that the GNP and GDP are imperfect indications of economic well-being, economists generally continue to use them to measure economic progress. Recently they have come to favor the GDP.

More careful study, however, reveals that the gap between what is measured by the GDP and real, sustainable economic well-being is sometimes very large. The most thorough study now available is being conducted by Redefining Progress, a San Francisco organization. It has developed what it calls the genuine progress indicator (GPI). According to this indicator, from 1950 to 1992, while the per capita GDP more than doubled (from less than $8,000 to more than $16,000), per capita GPI declined from nearly $6,000 to just over $4,000, or about 25 percent.

There is no exact measure of economic well-being. But if the best available figures indicate that the policies leading to doubling the GDP also lead to a massive decline in sustainable economic well-being, surely questions should be raised about the wisdom of continuing those policies! Because this decline in economic well-being, both current and anticipated, corresponds to the experience of most workers, it may be possible to persuade them to detach themselves from commitment to this destructive form of growth.

Not all the factors considered in the genuine progress indicator are of interest to all workers. Some of them deal with environmental deterioration. Those concerned for the well-being of the environment and with intergenerational equity constitute another group, overlapping with labor, who may be persuaded that continuation of current growth-oriented policies, especially the globalization of the market, is a mistake. These policies certainly intensify the assault upon the natural world.

The environmental community currently is more vigorous in articulation of its concerns than is labor. Also, although many of its members are strong supporters of economic growth and globalization, others have already recognized the inherent problem with this direction. Environmentalists and labor joined forces in criticizing the North American Free Trade Agreement and gained some concessions. Having done so, some of each group accepted the agreement. Others,
especially among the environmentalists, opposed it on more fundamental grounds.

Unfortunately, the tenuous alliance that was then forged was fragmented by the outcome. Those who understand that growth and globalization are twin enemies of humanity remain a small element in society as a whole. Supporters of the present system are firmly in control of both political parties, the media, and the academy. They are currently recovering ground lost to environmentalists in the past two decades. At least in the United States and in the global power system, the sovereignty of the market has never seemed more secure.

On the other hand, pride might come before a fall. The arrogance with which everything is subordinated to a market that serves the rich at the expense of all others could elicit a reaction. Workers and environmentalists could once more join forces, and they could achieve greater persuasiveness among other citizens. I am not predicting this scenario; I am simply describing the only hopeful one I can imagine.

The question is what positive program could be proposed to prepare for the coming scarcities. The answer is that the program would have to be worked out by those who recognized its importance. Nevertheless, in this very speculative essay, my speculations about what should go into such a program can be included.

I have already made it clear that the first step would be the reversal of the move to the global economy. This step would be far from easy! Nevertheless, for the United States such a move would not entail the suffering that is now occurring in Cuba. For the United States to feed itself and meet its other basic needs would not be difficult. For it to shift massively to organic agriculture without serious disruptions would take time, but it is certainly possible. For it to shift toward more labor-intensive farming with more use of animals would also take time, but there are no fundamental obstacles once a popular decision to move in this direction was reached.

The goal would not be simply for the United States to feed itself but for most food for each region to be grown locally. Shortened supply lines are another part of the move toward reduced use of scarce resources and reduced pollution. There would be no need abruptly to cut off all imports or to stop trading with other parts of the country, but as shortages become more critical, the regions most able to feed their residents will be most secure.

Even this kind of farming is not ultimately sustainable, for it does not end the erosion of soils. Further experiments in preserving and
regenerating soils are urgent. The most interesting now are those of the Land Institute under the leadership of Wes Jackson. The institute is developing perennial plants that can be grown in combinations analogous to those of the prairie and attain yields comparable to today's annual grains. Success in this experiment could revolutionize farming and make it truly sustainable.

We now pay very little for our food, because the costs are passed on to society and to the future in other forms. This passing of costs is connected with the oil-intensive agriculture that has displaced so many farmers. Some of our payments to the unemployed are also part of the cost of food.

A society oriented to minimizing future crises resulting from shortages would pay the full cost of producing food sustainably. It would accept imperfections in vegetables and fruits. On the other hand, its produce would be fresher and more healthful.

Another change would be a shift from heavy emphasis on meat to more fruits, vegetables, and grains. Eating meat is an inefficient way to gain the calories and nutrients we need. Our current meat-oriented diet is, in any case, less healthful. Much of the increased cost in producing fruits, vegetables, and grains with fewer chemical fertilizers and insecticides and less oil-run machinery would be canceled by the reduced cost of eating grains directly in comparison with meat.

I have concentrated on food, because when we think of fundamental shortages and the risk of massive human suffering resulting from them, food comes first. A people who can feed themselves are likely to survive. "Food first" is the correct slogan.

The discussion of food also indicates how the society that can survive will involve more of its people in its economy. One major cause of the underclass is the displacement of farm labor by fossil fuels and the agribusiness these make possible. The development of a truly sustainable agriculture will require the reemployment of many people. Of course, the move from inner city to countryside will be just as difficult as the earlier move from countryside to inner city, but it can have a far more positive outcome. As necessary habits and skills are developed, society can again find means to help many become independent farmers with a secure and crucially important role in society.

Proposing a move in the United States from global dependency to national sufficiency as a means of readying itself for global shortages
appears to many to be hard-hearted in relation to our trading partners. It is true that it will be highly disruptive, just as the shift from national economies to a global one has been disruptive. It is not true that in what matters most, it will harm these partners. If they are to survive the coming shortages without immense suffering, they, too, need to live close to the soil and be able to meet their basic needs. Encouraging them to stop producing food for themselves in order to export the products of agribusiness to us has not been good for their people. To reverse this process will benefit far more people than it will harm.

There is, however, a serious problem with which I have not dealt, or needed to deal, in my scenarios for Cuba or the United States. In much of the world, population growth has made it impossible to return to earlier economic patterns. The shift to independent farmers would enable many to return to the land, but many others would find no place there. And in some countries the agricultural base probably cannot support the existing population, much less the larger populations projected in the next century.

My judgment is that there is no way of preventing massive suffering that does not involve curtailment of population growth, sometimes drastic. At present, it is true, overconsumption is a greater problem for the planet than overpopulation. The difference is that consumption can be greatly curtailed without terrible suffering by policies such as I have outlined. But where a population already presses the limits of carrying capacity, it simply cannot continue to grow. One solution is emigration to other regions that are not so crowded. If countries like the United States and Canada agreed to take surplus populations, absolute global limits would be postponed—but not much. Meanwhile, the price in social and ecological disruption would be enormous. I do not believe that easing barriers to emigration from overpopulated countries is truly helpful. It is important for people in each geographical area to face the finitude of their land and to determine what they want to do. If birthrates continue high, death rates will rise. If they choose that maxim, they must accept the consequences. Populations will not reach the projected highs.

Nevertheless, changing policies in the United States will help even in these countries, especially if the policies are followed in other affluent countries. Many of the resources of impoverished countries are now annually transferred to the affluent world. Repayment of debts and the policies required to make these payments are a major factor.
In a world no longer committed to globalization of the market, these debts could and should be promptly forgiven. Poorer countries would be left with their own resources to use for themselves.

Furthermore, the abandonment of the global economic system need not mean the end of aid. Ambiguous as aid has been in the past, some forms have helped people. Aid in family-planning programs and in community development should be greatly increased, while massive projects geared to what has been called development in the past should end. In any case, people must develop their own solutions. Ones imposed from without will not work.

Kerala provides a hopeful indication of what a less-industrialized people can do for itself. Kerala is a state in India with per capita income about average for that country. It has operated with democratic processes and has come through open discussion to the adoption of a number of interesting social policies. Its remarkable success can be judged by the following statistics comparing Kerala with India in general.

1. In India 31 percent of women of high school age are in school; in Kerala, 93 percent.
2. In India the number of deaths per thousand live births is 91; in Kerala, 16.
3. In India the average number of children per family is 3.9; in Kerala, 1.9.
4. In India the life expectancy of women born today is 59; in Kerala, 73.

Again, it is important to understand that these results were not achieved by economic growth. In this respect Kerala is not ahead of India as a whole. They were achieved by social policies that have ensured that the basic needs of all are met and that have targeted the improvement of the condition of women as of special importance. These policies have not involved compulsion by an authoritarian government but shared decisions. Kerala's success is one of the unforeseeable surprises that make hope possible.