

## **From Earth Day 1970 to Earth Day 2010:**

**Everything forgotten; nothing learned, but yet...**

Kapiolani Community College. Kopiko 209 A/B

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The first Earth Day was April 22, 1970. It was in the early days of Environmental Awareness. One amazing thing is that it was the brain child of two US congressmen--Senator Gaylord Nelson (D, Wisconsin), Rep. Pete McCloskey (R, California)—and a Harvard political science graduate student, Denis Hayes who was the first organizer.

It was an immediate worldwide hit with meetings held in thousands of places in the US and elsewhere.

There had been early warnings that led up to Earth Day, primarily in the form of three widely-read books:

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1962

Paul Ehrlich, *Population Bomb*, 1968

Aurelio Peccei, *The chasm ahead*, 1969

I spoke at the first Earth Day in 1970 at a big gathering on Maui Community College.

One listener was Tom Sine, then dean of students at MCC. As a consequence of hearing so many expressions of concern about the future of the Earth, Tom quit his job, went to divinity school, got a doctor of divinity degree in the Mennonite/Anabaptist part of Christianity, and then wrote several very important books about the future of religion, and our responsibility for stewardship over the Earth. His first was called *Wild Hope* (1991), and his most recent is provocatively titled, *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time* (2008). Some of you will know that the "mustard seed" is one of the smallest of all grain seeds. Its smallness is used as an example of how important seemingly small and insignificant things can be. The significance of the tiny mustard seed is found in the teachings of the Buddha, The Prophet Mohammed, and Jesus. In the New Testament, Jesus urges you to have faith, as in a mustard seed--which is meant to imply that even the smallest and seemingly most powerless in fact have power where united by faith and purpose. Sine has done more than just write books. He has tirelessly traveled around the US

trying to convince various religious organizations that they ought to be more concerned about the future of the planet than about the comparatively trivial matters of personal morality such as abortion and same-sex marriage which seems to consume most Christian's time and attention now, and pale in comparison to the truly sinful behavior of most of us as mindless producers and buyers of wasteful consumer goods, and as perpetrators of senseless, brutal wars.

But as far as I know, in spite of my speaking in 1970 and at many Earth Days since, Tom Sine is the only person I have ever influenced to take direction action in their lives because of an Earth Day talk.

Let me see if I can do better this time, with each of you--or even just one of you. I want what I say to make a difference in how you live and act.

It was absolutely clear in the 1970s that serious environmental and energy issues were looming, and that we had about thirty years or so to address them, and to change the direction in which America, and the rest of the world, were then heading.

For a while it looked like we were going to do that. Major laws were passed in the 1970s cleaning up the environment, protecting endangered plants and animals, slowing population growth, and, for a while, seriously conserving oil while looking for alternative renewable energy sources. At the same time, our economy was increasingly becoming oriented more towards equity and fairness than towards sheer growth for growth's sake.

But then that all ended with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

No, it did not just simply end, it was actively killed.

Corporate and ideological forces spent millions of dollars fighting environmental regulations and conservation, and in encouraging greed as a positive good. I don't think anything shocked me more than changing our attitudes towards consumption from helping everyone have enough to making sure I have much more than anyone else. That was a huge ethical shift in American culture that happened over your life time.

As one small but symbolic act, upon taking office, Pres. Reagan forbade the distribution of a publication, called *the Global 2000 Report to the President*, that had been commissioned by President Jimmy Carter and actually printed by the US Government Printing Office, but had not been distributed before Reagan took office.

And with that, and all the policies and acts that followed, everything changed. Within the span of only two years, as a consequence of economic

policies that even future President George Bush (the elder) called, at the time, "Voodoo Economics", the US went from being the Number One Creditor Nation (that is the nation to whom all of the world owed money) to becoming the Number One Debtor Nation (the nation who owed money TO the rest of the world). In just two years--1980-82--our economic policies made that huge negative transformation, and we have been digging our grave deeper and deeper with every passing year, eating more and more of the future so that we could live wastefully today.

From 1980 until 2008--with many economic ups and downs along the way--the US has gone further and further into debt, mortgaging not only your futures, but the futures of generations of Americans to come.

And now, to have the Tea Party people ranting on about debt, while they sat silently and enjoyed the false prosperity of the past thirty years, is the height of hypocrisy! As though the debt were suddenly the fault of Obama and not the INTENDED consequence of thirty years of waste and extravagance! The Tea Partyers have every right to be frightened of the future, but they can only be condemned for only being concerned about it **now** when it is absolutely too late for anyone to do anything quick and easy about it.

Of course, Obama is still following the wasteful, unfair and environmentally- damaging policies of the past, just as Clinton did when he was President. There really is no important difference between Democrats and Republicans here. The Democrats talk a good line, but for the most part, they act like Republicans.

Even though some people may have voted for Obama hoping for change, he so far has brought no significant change at all.

Nor can he, even if he wants to!

The purpose of America's massive and growing national debt is to make it impossible for the national--or any--government to function on behalf of the people, so as to leave corporations and other big money interests free to rape and pillage, as they have done and continue to do.

So you cannot look to government for help. About that the Tea Party folks are correct. But if you and I don't organize on **our** behalf, then you can be sure the corporations will continue to govern us in **their** interest.

But there is much more to the story about how our follies in the past are creating a new and challenging future for you, and especially for all of us who live, and intend to continue to live, in Hawaii.

Recently, I have been going about town giving a talk called, "The Unholy Trinity, Plus One" and so I want to give a quick and dirty version of it to you today, on Earth Day 40.

I call my talk, "the unholy trinity", because, if people are concerned about any of the three issues at all, they tend to focus on only ONE of the three, and ignore the other two—in fact, they often think there are solutions **to their** one problem **in** the other two. But like God according to orthodox Christianity, they are actually three "persons" of the same phenomenon.

And the three are:

1. The end of oil, before a cheap and abundant alternative is brought on line.
2. Climate change, which means climate **CHANGE** and not only warming or sea-level rise, although those are very likely.
3. And economic collapse, by which I mean the current economic recession will linger and deepen, and that we will never recover the "good old times" of the past thirty years, here in Hawaii or anywhere.

While there may be a kind of brief recovery happening now and for a few months, it is not sustainable--nothing about our current economic system is sustainable--and so we will suffer another collapse, much worse and longer and deeper than the one we experienced from 2008 onward UNLESS we envision and invent a new economic system starting now, and stop wasting time and money trying to prop up the old one.

Now, it is my intention to make this good news. I do NOT want you to feel gloomy or despondent, or to fear the future. I certainly don't want you to give up. Absolutely to the contrary. I want you to see that there can be a very bright future ahead of you and all of us.

When oil runs out, climate changes, and the economy collapses, we in Hawaii will have a wonderful opportunity to take care of ourselves like our

ancestors did for thousands of years before Capt Cook showed up and Hawaii became part of the unsustainable global system.

What this means, among other things, is that we in Hawaii, here at KCC, at UHM, and certainly in our high schools, need to recover, learn, and engage in practices of self-sufficiency of food and materials—talents that most of us never had, and that most of us the rest of us have totally lost.

We must NOT allow short-run economic interests to continue to cover over agricultural land with buildings and concrete. We all need to learn how to farm and fish; how to obtain our own water and dispose of our own wastes safely; how to generate electricity without oil; how to make our own clothes and other materials; and, most importantly, how to govern ourselves peacefully and fairly.

So rather than going on and providing more details, let me ask what you think about what I have said. Do you take my warning seriously, or not? If not, why not? What makes you confident that the world of the past will return soon, and continue onward?

If you do agree with me, then what should we do to move towards a peaceful, bountiful, self-sufficient Hawaii?--what should YOU do.

This Earth Day, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what is still a worldwide event, must be unlike all of the others before it.

It is not just about celebrating and loving Mother Earth, though we should do that. It is about questioning the future of humanity itself on this Earth. Can we exist? Should we exist? And if we can and should, then how should we begin to prepare ourselves for a future where the Earth can sustain us, and we can nurture it properly.

Enough from me. I'd now like to hear from you.