

Public Domain

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2020 Hindsight (Part 1)

"Mercy, mercy me. Things ain't what they used to be" – Marvin Gaye

FORT NAPANOCH, Rondout Cooperative Authority, 10 Spring 71 NE (May 31, 2020 CE) – It's hard to believe it's been only 13 years since I first wrote about peak oil and energy descent in the old Ellenville Journal; that life now seems as remote as, say, the Roman Empire. And, indeed, since the New Era kicked-off officially in the NE year "Zero" with the Nuclear Exchange in 2010, those of us still hanging in have been participants in (or at least witnesses to) the greatest and most concentrated global changes to human society in recorded history.

Gasoline prices in 2007 were inexorably rising past 3.00 Old Dollars through the spring, and never dropped below 4.00 OD after the fall. Of course, the governments and the media knew all about the coming crisis, and had for years, but didn't want to cause a panic that would trigger a loss of confidence in the "free market" system and their own privileged positions. Finger-pointing at the "evil and greedy" oil companies was just a way to deflect anger away from their own failures to have planned for this unspoken but inevitable reality (as later inquiries confirmed, global oil production peaked in 2007 and daily global demand exceeded daily production in mid-2008, exhausting buffer stockpiles by year's end).

As tough as 2008 was (when North American gas prices rapidly rose to 5.00 OD, 6.00 OD, and finally 7.00 OD), it was only prelude to the Big Crash of 2009, followed by a year so momentous as to have ushered in a new calendar. Like the first moon walk or 9/11, anyone who was watching TV as President Gore was addressing the Riyadh Summit, only to see him vanish, along with the rest of that Saudi city, in a flash of nuclear light, has that "Zero Day" moment seared in the memory.

Only Vice-President Obama's refusal to unleash an all-out reprisal against the assumed Iranian culprit and Chinese allies (still never proven; whether it was actually radical Saudi anti-monarchists or rogue CIA globalists who felt Gore was yielding American supremacy for voluntary "powerdown" and resource sharing, is still debated), kept the Nuclear Exchange limited to Pakistan, India, China, and Israel.

Even without this cataclysm, there were enough milestones to justify acknowledging things were never going to be the same: the Great Flu of that year wiped out 200 million worldwide; AIDS took another 20 million, mostly in Africa and Asia; commercial aviation, already decimated by high fuel prices, was mostly stopped to limit spread of those and other infectious diseases; simultaneous breakoffs of ice-shelves from Antarctica and Greenland raised sea-levels over a meter, flooding 50% of Bangladesh and over 300 Indian Ocean islands and coastal villages, while shifting the Gulf Stream enough to plunge the British Isles into a mini-Ice-Age. Drought, fires, power blackouts, and food shortages led to massive riots in Arizona and California; the impotence of the

Federal and state governments under these new circumstances was revealed, and led to even more riots and marauding on the one hand, and greater local autonomy and proactive initiatives on the other.

Fortunately, my 2008 recommendations for the town and county to follow Portland, Oregon's 2006 Peak Oil Briefing Book model were taken seriously enough that a variety of measures and infrastructures were in place when the spit hit the fan. Although events seemed to happen faster than anyone might have anticipated, at least the essentials – water, food, security – were covered enough to maintain a sense of some hopefulness, preventing total social collapse.

Re-instituting the Ulster Militia in 2009, with conscripted Town Brigades trained by former Army officers, was instrumental in preventing the breakdowns of order that convulsed the rest of the continent. After Wawarsing confiscated the prison complex in Napanoch under eminent domain (Albany was too distracted with more pressing downstate matters to respond), and bussed all the prisoners in the middle of the night to New York City, it established "Fort Napanoch"; all critical valuables were stored there (medicines, seeds, emergency rations, weapons, fuel, emergency vehicles, books and documents on survival agriculture and technology, etc.), along with a permanent militia presence and communication grid.

The Battle of Fort Napanoch in 0 NE (2010 CE) was the seminal event of our region. Angry and disillusioned hordes from the NYC suburbs, lacking food, fuel, and electricity, stormed up the Hudson Valley, seeking an outlet for their rage and frustration as much as to find immediate sources of food and water. After placing nearly 5,000 women/children/seniors from Ellenville and Wawarsing within the former prison's walls for safekeeping, the Wawarsing Brigade of the Ulster Militia, backed by support from neighboring town brigades, police departments, and state troopers, protected the populace and its critical resources until NYS National Guard units were able to rout the invaders. Mobile units kept the looting and burning of Ellenville to a minimum.

This wake-up call led to the creation of the Rondout Cooperative Authority, which assumed many of the critical tasks we could no longer count on the state or national governments to deal with, as well as to take responsibility for securing basic local needs for the contiguous Rondout Valley bio-region. Three super-PADs (Priorities & Allocations Departments) were created – for Resources, Land, and Labor – which became the new model for local and regional governments. Unless one wanted to tough it out as a "rugged individualist" hermit, one signed-on to a new community social contract, which guaranteed personal protection and basic necessities, while requiring allegiance, public service (militia, farm labor, landfill mining, etc.), and a new mode of thinking that realizes "We're all in this together" rather than focussing on individual aggrandizement and personal hoarding.

Although we truly stand guilty of using up much of our future generations' inheritance through the 1900s, and many lived in denial even as the world we knew was vanishing around us, life is simpler in so many ways now, and, dare I say, richer. That might be hard to accept for those who lived through the American Golden Age, and puzzling to those few born since, but, next column, I will elaborate, and compare the two lifestyles to prove my claim.