

WN *Guest editorial*

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Health and well-being on earth

Time for the Global Spring

In this issue of *WN*, [*Amartya Sen emphasises*](#) the need for universal publicly funded basic health care, and its achievement in lower income countries, as shown by Paul Farmer and *Partners in Health* in countries such as Rwanda. Amartya Sen is a fount of wisdom. But there is more to be said, about the need not just to debate while tolerating the current dominant political and economic ideology, but to rise up, oppose and displace it, and stop its devastating impact on populations and the planet.

The abyss

Access to adequate food, and to basic health care, have long been declared universal human rights. But for a vast sector of humanity these rights are systematically denied. This deprivation of food, nutrition and health is not because of total scarcity – at least not yet – but because of gross maldistribution of resources, wealth, and decision-making power. Behind outrageous inequality, which impoverishes and cuts short the lives of billions, lies the dominant world disorder, a system committed to endless growth of money for the benefit of the already rich, whatever the consequences.

Unlimited growth is not possible. There are now many signs that the toxic so-called ‘free market’ ideology, fed by ever-escalating exploitation of the people and the planet, is beginning to devour itself. Even so, the wealthy ‘masters of the universe’ evidently cherish their power- and money-games more than the survival of the world’s people and the web of life that sustains us. They shut their eyes and ears to what is in sight on the horizon – tsunamis of climate change and unprecedented ecological demise.

Largely unregulated, extractive capitalism, tyrannical, inhumane and unsustainable, is hard to combat. It has functionally undermined democracy by turning dominant mass media and education systems into instruments of brainwashing, consumerism, and social control. Living in the shadow of corporate global disorder, it is tempting to despair. The power of the corporate and political dominant and ruling class is huge. Much of the world’s population has now been browbeaten into believing that there is no alternative, that fundamental change is impossible. It is easy to become fatalistic, and simply go with the flow towards the abyss.

As professionals and citizens we all face vast challenges. The entire prevailing greed-driven economic and political system, that involves agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and dependence on fossil fuel, is a perversion of Darwinism that takes the form of the survival and prosperity of the most savage and ruthless. It must be displaced.

This imbalanced extractive corporate global empire cannot bring either peace or well-being to the world's people or to the planet. Its implosion will cause vastly more people to be food- and nutrition-insecure, and constantly hungry. Then a great awakening and move to collective action will occur and gather momentum. Only then will humanity be able to live in respectful and lasting balance with the natural order of life that nourishes and sustains our species and the living world.

The awakening

The history of humankind consistently shows that far-reaching change is possible. In dire circumstances people can and do awaken and take transformative action. Such a 'Global Spring' will make populations throughout the world better informed about the underlying processes of cause and effect, and thus be empowered to take collective action for the common good. Crisis is the harbinger of change. In the struggle to face and heal the eco-catastrophes of our age, those most affected – which in time will be all of us – will venture on new paths. Some may be peaceful and creative, others more violent and destructive. Most of us will find out that working together as equals, and as friendly co-travellers on our endangered planet, leads to a higher quality of life for all.

The transformation will enable a humane and sustainable social order, where people elect to live in respectful harmony with one another and with the natural world. For such life-embracing roots to sprout and flowers to bloom, it is essential that people at every level of society, beginning with children and young people, reach out to one another, analyse their needs, look ahead, and engage in mutual action that benefits both the human community and the environment. This is what George Kent is advocating, in his inspiring commentary on [how to end hunger](#) in this issue of *WN*.

Too much is at stake for 'we the people' to give up hope. We must never despair. The prophetic writer Ursula Le Guin, in her recent speech in acceptance of the National Book Foundation medal for distinguished contribution to American letters, clarifies our collective potential to build a saner healthier, social order:

We live in capitalism; its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.

A Global Spring is possible. The challenge of the '99 percent' is to create the transformation now so urgently needed, as quickly and peacefully as possible.

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